

The Support Networks of Medieval Female Religious in England and Wales: An Analysis

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Abstract

The support given to female religious communities in the Medieval period is an area that has often been overlooked. This study examines the role of patrons, both lay and ecclesiastical and discusses the level and type of support received. Comparison between sites in England and Wales is made, and the possible reason for the difference in the number of communities founded is discussed.

The level of support given by royal and lay patrons is analysed, with consideration given to differences caused by geographical location, types of patronage, and the motivation for providing support.

Attention is given to the level of support received from ecclesiastic patrons, how the different monastic orders attitude towards female religious effected how that support was given, and what bearing this had on their success or failure of the communities.

A detailed analysis is then given regarding the role that testamentary bequests played in supporting these communities, again looking at both what support was received, and the motivation for providing this support.

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Introduction

A large amount of research has been undertaken in the field of Medieval religious communities. However, the role of support networks in assisting women to pursue a religious life has often been overlooked. This is not a new issue, it has been argued that it is difficult to even say with certainty how many nunneries there were in Western Europe because most medieval chronicles only mention them in passing, and some of them omit women from the histories altogether.¹ This issue has started to be rectified, and in the last twenty years historians have increasingly included female religious experience in their research. There have been many studies in England and Wales by historians such as Janet Burton, Karen Stöber, Sally Thompson and Roberta Gilchrist.² In Wales this focus has been led by the Monastic Wales project and, in particular, with the work of Jane Cartwright who is leading the field in research into female monastic experiences in Wales.³

There is need for a thorough study into the experiences of female religious in the medieval period, looking at their support networks both pastoral and financial, how they were received by their wider communities in terms of monastic communities and their position in their geographical community, and how their experience of religious life compared to that of male religious in the same period and location. This research would be vast and therefore

¹ B. L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society. Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) pp. 6-7.

² J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval Wales*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015) available at <https://www-vlebooks-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/Vleweb/Product/Index/552074?page=0> (accessed 30/6/2020); S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

³ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008).

prohibitive for a study of this size. Therefore, this study will focus on a number of key areas that provide an insight into this field, and the differences between England and Wales.

Before the Norman conquest of England in 1066 there were estimated to be around 48 houses for monks and 12 houses for nuns in England and Wales. However, with the Norman conquest came an explosion in the foundation of religious communities and by 1350 it is estimated that those figures had risen to 348 houses for monks and 150 houses for nuns. Of these houses Wales accounted for sixty religious houses, with only three of them being founded for women.⁴ This means that only five per cent of the houses in Wales accommodated female religious. Confirming these figures in itself is a difficult task as the primary evidence for female religious houses can be inaccurate or misleading. For example, In 'The journey through Wales and the description of Wales' Gerald of Wales describes a church in Caerleon that was 'graced by a choir of nuns dedicated to the service of God.'⁵ There is no other evidence of a nunnery in Caerleon so it must be questioned whether he is confusing this with another house, or whether the nunnery he is referring to is an earlier medieval house, or a community that was short lived. Not all religious communities were successful, and therefore, evidence for short lived communities may not have survived. Similarly, he mentions a Cistercian nunnery at Llansantffraed-in-Elwell⁶ but again there is no record of this nunnery existing which may again suggest an unsuccessful community or one that moved to a different site after their foundation. Therefore, it is difficult to identify reliable contemporary descriptions of the religious communities to enable a full evaluation to be made. This study will look at some the possible reasons for fewer houses being

⁴ D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*. (London: Longmans, 1953)

⁵ Gerald of Wales *The journey through Wales and the description of Wales*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978) p. 115.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 118

founded for women in Wales compared to England, giving attention to differences in patronage and foundations, and levels of support received.

Recent research into religious foundations have demonstrated that there is a difference between who was making foundations in England and Wales, and by what means this support was given. It has been suggested that the Welsh Law Codes restricted testamentary bequests, and restrictions on land ownership also affected whether land could be made available for the foundation of religious houses.⁷ It has also been suggested that there was a difference in why patrons were founding religious houses in England and Wales, and this may in turn explain why there were so few female religious houses founded in Wales. The Welsh law codes, or the Laws of Hywel Dda as they are often referred to, are a collection of law books that date back to the thirteenth century⁸. These law books are a compilation of several different primary sources and were probably of twelfth and thirteenth century origin. As such they provide detail on how the law affected society and, in turn, religious communities. During this period religious communities would have been subject to canon law, that is church law, but the civil law codes would have affected patronage and support of these communities, and therefore will be used to examine factors that would affect lay support of religious houses.

Further examination will be made of the Welsh law codes, with particular attention given to the Welsh laws of women. It will be questioned whether the laws of women restricted, or discouraged, women from following a religious life. Jane Cartwright has suggested that the payment of amobr, payable to the women's Lord on the loss of virginity could make lords

⁷ *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. D. Jenkins and M.E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980) p. 100.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 69.

less likely to support the foundation of monastic houses which would support women to remain virgins.⁹ This argument will be explored further, along with the role of women in Medieval Wales, whether their status was different to that of their counterparts in England, and whether this affected their ability to pursue a religious life.

This study will then focus on the role of ecclesiastical support for religious houses. Of the three communities for women founded in Wales, two were Cistercian and one was Benedictine. It will be questioned whether support from bishops, mother houses, or in the case of the Cistercian houses, the Order itself affected the foundation and continuation of these houses, or whether lack of support was a cause of the lack of foundation during this period.

Attention will then be given to the role of testamentary bequests. Whilst the number of wills that survive for this period are small, with very few early wills (pre thirteenth century) surviving, they can provide a valuable insight into who was leaving money for the foundation or support of monastic houses, what they are leaving and why. These wills are an invaluable source as they provide an insight into the mindset of the medieval patron.

Caution must be given with these sources: due to their nature they may not show a complete view of medieval society, an issue that will be discussed in more detail later.

However, they remain invaluable in capturing a glimpse of how people were supporting those who chose to follow a religious life. This study will also examine factors that affected how testamentary bequests were made, and how these requests may have been restricted by laws and customs.

⁹ J. Cartwright, 'The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales', in D. Watt, (ed) *Medieval Women in their Communities*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p. 36.

At this point it is worth noting that some religious orders did raise their own income as a means of financial support. Some Benedictine houses received income in the form of rents for land or manors they owned, and houses of the Cistercian Order were successful sheep farmers and traded in wool with the continent.¹⁰ However, female involvement in trade was limited, and any land or granges they received income from would have initially been gifted to them so, for the purposes of this study, this income will be considered in terms of the original patronage or bequest to the house rather than its subsequent use to generate income.

As will be demonstrated, there were several factors affecting the support given to Medieval female religious in England and Wales, and several differences in support between the two regions. As stated above, this study will not provide a comprehensive explanation, or analysis of all the factors and experiences but will provide an insight into how some of the factors affected their experience.

¹⁰ J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval Wales*. p. 31-32.

Chapter 1

Support from Royal and Lay Patrons

The pattern of monastic foundation changed throughout the medieval period. The changing trends can be seen throughout Europe and England, but these patterns are not always replicated in Wales, especially with regards to female religious. To understand why the provision for female religious was limited in Wales compared with England it is necessary to look at how these communities were founded and supported, in comparison to communities for male religious, and consider what factors may have affected the foundation of female religious houses.

To fully understand what the differences were, and furthermore, why the pattern of monastic foundation was different in Wales a number of areas have been considered. These include the identity of the patrons of the communities in Wales, and how this compares to England; where these communities were founded; and whether there is a reason that some monastic communities were more successful in Wales, or found Wales a more attractive option for their communities. Consideration has been given to these factors by examining the details of the foundation of Welsh houses and comparing these with examples of foundations in England. The requirements of different religious orders have been examined to consider any reasons why some orders may have found different geographical locations more appealing, and an examination of the Welsh law codes, especially those relating to women has been made to ascertain whether the difference in law in Wales and England had any effect on the foundation, or lack of, communities for women.

The first area to consider is who the patrons of these communities were. Patronage of religious houses usually falls into one of three categories: Royal patrons, those houses

founded or supported by the Crown, patronage by lay patrons and monastic and clerical patrons. This chapter will focus on royal and lay patronage, with clerical patronage being discussed in chapter two. The patronage of monastic houses by royalty was common during this period. In England the Crown was the largest and most powerful patron of religious houses. Throughout the medieval period the Crown not only founded communities they also gained patronage of communities where the original founding family had died out. Once under royal control most houses remained under royal patronage until the dissolution.¹¹ These communities received support and protection from the Crown. In Wales although there were a smaller number of Royal foundations there is evidence that the Welsh rulers did see patronage of religious houses as important, especially in relation to the Cistercian order. Unlike England, which had a strong central monarchy, Wales had a number of ruling princes. The country was fragmented and the areas ruled by each prince changed frequently. This lack of stability may have been a contributing factor in the smaller number of foundations by the Welsh rulers as they may not have had access to the same wealth as the English monarchy to enable them to found communities. However, the Welsh rulers often gave gifts of land, as well as other items, to the religious orders for them to found a house. The reason for their support is not always clear. There are examples of gifts of land being left on condition they would be buried in the abbey, for example Elise ap Madog, Lord of Penllyn, granted pastures in Penllyn to Abbot Gruffudd of Strata Marcella, in return for his body to be buried there.¹² However, Madeleine Gray suggests that the support of these

¹¹ K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007) p. 25.

¹² M. Gray, 'Preface to Cistercians in Wales and the West', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. Vol. 154 (2005) pp. 17-26. Available at <https://doi.org/10.5284/1059215> (accessed 26/7/2020) p. 17.

houses was also politically motivated as Welsh rulers would receive the support of the order in return for their patronage, for example in during the Glyndwr uprising.¹³

This keenness to support the establishment of Cistercian houses may be one of the reasons that they were the dominant order in Wales. Madeleine Gray states that the 'founding, refounding and endowing of Cistercian religious houses was virtually one of the attributes of Welsh kingship.'¹⁴ Cistercian communities enjoyed gifts of land from donors as well as other forms of patronage. Historians have suggested that the Cistercians were against female religious, a matter that will be discussed in more detail in chapter two; however, it is clear that the two female Cistercian houses in Wales enjoyed the benefit of patronage by Welsh rulers. This patronage extended beyond Wales and by the mid fifteenth century there is evidence that Llanllugan had received further patronage from Richard, Duke of York, who was lord of Cydwain when he gifted stained glass windows to the abbey.¹⁵

The issue of geographical location for monastic houses may have been a contributing factor in the popularity of Wales for the foundation of Cistercian houses because the Cistercian order would have found the uncultivated mountainous regions a popular choice to pursue their secluded and restricted life. However, there are still comparatively few female houses. This imbalance of female to male houses is an area that has been much debated by historians, and some of the possible reasons will be discussed in chapter two.

It is interesting to note that whilst the Cistercian order supported the development of new houses and the expansion of the order, neither of the female Cistercian houses in Wales received monastic patronage. However, it is difficult to say with certainty how much support

¹³ *ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 23.

these houses received from the Cistercian community. The nunnery at Llanllŷr was founded by Rhys ap Gruffydd who was also a patron of the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida. There are questions regarding what support they received from the male house. Burton has analysed Gerald of Wales's description in the *Speculum Ecclesiae* and states that there is no doubt that the two houses, in Gerald's perception had 'a constitutional relationship'.¹⁶ Therefore, while they were not founded by Strata Florida it is clear that the nunnery at Llanllŷr certainly received a degree of support from them.

This brings us on to another area of patronage – the nobility. There is evidence that the nobility provided support to communities both in terms of financial support, gifting money or land, and also by joining these communities, or their families joining them. There are several reasons why they supported these communities. Firstly, there is the obvious religious reasons for their support. As stated above, many founders intended for a member of their family to enter the convent. Numerous examples can be found where members of the patrons family have subsequently entered the nunnery, for example in the foundation of Nun Monkton where the founders child, Matilda de Arches, entered the convent and became the first prioress.¹⁷ Therefore, by providing patronage they would be assured of a place in the community for their family member.

However, the religious benefits were two fold. In addition to entry into the community for family members, anyone who provided support for the Church or a religious community in this period they would have believed that it served as a way of guaranteeing their place in

¹⁶ J. Burton, 'Moniales and Ordo Cisterciensis in medieval England and Wales', in *Female vita religiosa between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: structures, developments and spatial contexts*, ed. Gert Melville and Anne Müller, Vita Regularis, 47, pp. 375–89, p. 380.

¹⁷ S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. p. 178.

heaven and avoiding, or reducing, the time they spent in purgatory. However, this was not the only benefit the nobility gained in supporting monastic communities. It has been argued that it may also have served as a way of showing their position in society to the community they ruled over. This argument is supported by the pattern of foundations following the Norman conquest. As can be seen there is an influx of foundations in the areas occupied by the Norman lords in the Welsh marches. It has been suggested that these foundations may have served as a way of asserting their authority and, therefore, cementing their position in these community. Evans suggests that the foundation of monasteries was 'one of the ways in which the Normans established their domination over the newly-conquered territories'.¹⁸ This argument is supported by the establishment of Benedictine houses which Evans describes as 'an exotic import of the Norman invaders in the south'. During the post conquest period there were fourteen Benedictine houses in the Diocese of St. David's and a further nine in the diocese of Llandaff, including the only Benedictine nunnery in Usk.¹⁹ This proliferation of Benedictine houses in the areas conquered by the Normans supports the argument that their purpose may have been a means of asserting Norman dominance in the areas they had conquered.

When examining the roles of founders and patrons consideration needs to be given to how they were supporting these communities. The foundation of a monastic community was not a cheap undertaking, and therefore, was no small matter. As has been shown above only the wealthier members of society could afford to be a patron of a monastic house. Other groups in society did provide financial support, as will be discussed in chapter three. The

¹⁸ E. Evans, 'Continuity and Renewal of Monastic Landholding in Wales Before and After the Anglo-Norman Conquest' in: N. Edwards, (ed.) *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches*. (Lees: Maney Publishing, 2009).pp. 85-103. p. 91.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 91.

support in founding a monastic house varied greatly and depended both on the status of the patron, and the needs of the order. Patrons often provided land for monastic houses to be established on, sometimes they would provide farmland to be cultivated by the order or land with existing buildings which could be used, or in other cases patrons would refound existing communities under a new religious order. This may be the case for the nuns at Llanllugan. The foundation charter of Maredudd ap Robert's gift refers to 'the holy nuns of Llanllugan'. Gray and Morgan-Guy have suggested that this wording may indicate that there was already any existing community on the site and that Maredudd ap Robert's gift and charter 'may have been simply the enforcement of Cistercian discipline on an already existing community.'²⁰ In other cases the patron would gift the advowson of a church to a monastic order. An example of this can be seen in the foundation of the abbey of Lacock in 1229. In a 1229 charter, Ela, Countess of Salisbury grants her manor and the advowson of the church of Lacock for the founding of a nunnery there.²¹ This would not only provide the order with a foothold within the community, but also a means of income as they would be able to claim the tithes associated with the church. There are also examples of patrons gifting land to orders, and whilst these may not necessarily be used by the order the rent from this land may have provided a valuable source of income. This is shown in the case of Clerkenwell which received an original endowment to found the house, but later grants by the founders and others led to the house holding land in eleven different counties, leading to valuable income for the nunnery.²² Similarly, Isabella, countess of Arundel, granted land

²⁰ M. Gray, and J. Morgan-Guy, 'A better and frugal life': Llanllugan and the Cistercians women's houses in Wales. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. Vol.154 (2005) pp. 97-114. Available at <https://doi.org/10.5284/1059145> (accessed 26/7/2020) p. 99.

²¹ S. Thompson, *Women Religious, The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, p. 170.

²² *ibid.* p. 190.

for the foundation of the abbey of Marham in 1252.²³ When founding the priory of Nuneaton in Warwickshire, Robert, Earl of Leicester and the countess Amicia granted an endowment which included a manor at Eton and land in Kintbury which paid £25 in rent.²⁴ Other patrons and founders may have provided financial patronage, that is, support in the form of income. In 1327 patronage of the priory at Usk was in the hands of Elizabeth de Clare. When she died she left a bequest to the priory of £6 13s 4d²⁵, not a small amount for a house that had a relatively small annual income.

It has been suggested that the financial cost of monastic patronage may have been too great for many founders and that some communities may have more than one founder. As will be shown in chapter two, bishops and the clergy would have a role to play in the foundation of the nunnery but Thompson suggests that houses that have no clear founder may be the product of 'corporate foundations, with several families contributing to their initial endowment.'²⁶ This is supported by the fact that more than seventy nunneries founded after the Conquest had founders who 'held neither title nor high office'²⁷ and therefore would not have been able to make a substantial enough endowment individually to maintain a community. This joint foundation may explain why, unlike many monasteries, the female communities 'were founded in order to interact closely with the local community.'²⁸ Their involvement with more than one family may have been rooted in their foundation by a number of community members.

²³ J. Burton, 'Moniales and Ordo Cisterciensis in medieval England and Wales', p. 2.

²⁴ S. Thompson, *Women Religious, The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, p. 165.

²⁵ J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval Wales*. p. 276.

²⁶ S. Thompson, *Women Religious, The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, p. 162.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 163.

²⁸ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*. p. 191.

The issue of financial cost may also have been a contributing factor in deciding which order a patron would support. When looking at the income of Cistercian houses in Wales it is clear that houses for women were maintained with considerably less income than their male counterparts. Of the thirteen abbeys in Wales in 1535, eight had an income of between £100 and £200, and only two had an income of less than £50. In contrast the two female Cistercian houses had annual incomes of £22 (Llanllugan) and £57 (Llanllŷr).²⁹ This disparity in income for female houses was not restricted to Cistercian communities. In her study 'Gender and Material Culture' Roberta Gilchrist highlights the same issue with Benedictine houses where female houses had a much smaller income per person than the male houses. Gilchrist illustrates this by using the example of the nunnery at Thetford in Norfolk. Originally established as a house for men it was decided that the endowment was not adequate to support the three monks there so it was made into a nunnery which supported twenty-six nuns.³⁰ This example clearly shows that, at least in this case, the expected living costs for a community of religious women was considerably lower than that for a community of men.

When looking at the type of foundation being supported it is worth mentioning that some monastic orders would have been more appealing to certain groups of founders. The Cistercians, following the rule of St. Benedict, looked for rural, uncultivated sites. This may have made them a more appealing option in areas where the landscape was harsh and underdeveloped, and it can be suggested could be a reason for the popularity of the order with Welsh patrons as there was ample uncultivated land on which they could establish their community. Equally patrons may have been drawn to the Cistercian rhetoric of leading

²⁹ D. Knowles, and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales*. pp. 22, 112-115, 225.

³⁰ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*, p. 44.

a more religious life, free of worldly possessions. Patrons may have identified with this desire to live a more simplistic life with the focus on religion.

Therefore, when looking at the options for founders and patrons it must be questioned why there were fewer female religious houses in Wales than in other areas. Thompson discusses the differences in the legal rights of women and notes that it is interesting that 'in Wales where the legal status of women was possibly higher than in England, there was less provision in terms of nunneries.'³¹ This is an interesting point as it could be assumed that women with higher legal status would exercise their rights more, but this does not seem to be the case. The legal status of women may also explain why a high proportion of foundations made by women in England were made by widows who would have received a better legal status than married women. Widows would have had access to their marriage dowry which was gifted to the nunnery.³² If they were not a widow their husband would have control over this gift. This lack of legal status does not preclude women being founders but does cause issues when identifying what role they had. Gilchrist suggests that this may lead to some foundations which were considered a joint venture between husband and wife actually 'masking the primary role of the woman as founder.'³³ If this is the case, it would suggest that more women played a greater role in the patronage of monastic houses than previously thought.

Another factor that may have affected the ability to be a patron of a monastic house was the Welsh laws. Wales had its own law codes during this period that restricted inheritance and property rights. Therefore, people may not have had land available to gift for the

³¹ S. Thompson, *Women Religious, The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, p. 212, fn. 8.

³² *ibid.* p. 177.

³³ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women.* p. 50.

foundation of monasteries. In Wales during this period women did not have equal rights with men with regards to property ownership and inheritance. Upon the death of a husband the wife would not be able to inherit any land. In Wales the practice of partible inheritance was favoured. Therefore any land he owned would be split equally between his sons, or male heirs.³⁴ Therefore, it was possible that women were not in the same position to found monastic houses as their counterparts in other countries, as they would not have owned land to use to support a community. Similarly, it can be argued that the practice of splitting a husband's estate between his sons, instead of the more common practice of primogeniture, that is leaving the entire property to the eldest son, meant that estates and wealth were split and reduced in value, resulting in a situation where by none of the heirs would be in a financial position to support a religious community.

One interesting point with regards the impact of the law codes on women's ability to found communities is that whilst women were unable to own land, and purchasing and selling was controlled by her husband, she was able to give gifts without reference to him.³⁵ Therefore, whilst women were not able to give land for founding religious communities, they may still have been supporting them by giving gifts during their lifetime.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that cultural practice in Wales was different and people had other forms of devotion. As will be shown in chapter three members of society were leaving money to churches in this period, and there is evidence of women founding churches in Wales, for examples Gwleder mother of Heodlyw, who founded a church at

³⁴ *The Welsh law of Women*, ed. D. Jenkins and M.E. Owen, p. 85.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 75.

Llanfihangel-y-traethau.³⁶ Therefore it may be that women in Wales chose a more personal form of religious devotion within their own homes and communities rather than taking holy orders.

As has been shown above, there are a number of reasons that there may have been fewer houses for women established in Wales than in England, and other parts of Europe. One of the main factors for this discrepancy must be due to the differences in societal norms in Wales which allowed more for private religious devotion than for a monastic life. As has been shown in the law books women's position in the family and community in Wales was viewed differently than in England. As women were not able to hold land or property themselves it would be difficult for them to found a monastic house, and as women were a source of income to the lords, in terms of payment of amobr it is possible that they were encouraged to pursue a married life that would ensure the lord would receive his payment rather than choose a monastic life. Equally, due to the economic differences between Wales and England it may simply have been that women needed to stay within their family and community to support their family, and that a monastic life was not seen as an option.

However, one final issue may have been simply that as there were only three female religious communities established in Wales, women may not have seen the opportunity to pursue a religious life and instead chose to follow the options for private devotion that were readily available to them.

³⁶ R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest : Wales, 1063-1415*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Available at <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198208785.001.0001/acprof-9780198208785>. (accessed 31/8/2020) p. 128.

Chapter 2

Support from the Church and Monastic Orders

When examining the support networks for female religious it is imperative to consider the support that they received both from the Church, and from their respective monastic communities. This chapter will examine the role the Church played in supporting these communities, and what effect it had on their success, or failure to thrive. We will also examine the attitudes of different religious communities towards female religious, and consider whether their success was affected by the attitude to female monastic by different orders. The final area to be considered is whether support for female religious focused more on other forms of devotion, for example anchoresses.

To consider the relationship between female houses and other religious institutions a number of sources have been used. First, there have been a number of studies into the history of the monastic houses which, as will be shown below, have provided a wealth of information about the patronage and support received by these houses from other religious groups. For example, in her work 'Women Religious' Sally Thompson discusses the relationship episcopal founders had with the religious communities.³⁷ Sharon Elkins has also discussed the links between male and female houses, and the role that male religious performed in supporting the female communities.³⁸ Karen Stöber has also investigated the role of patrons in supporting religious groups, looking at both the level of support given and the benefit to the patron.³⁹ Evidence has also been found in the surviving wills from this

³⁷ S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*.

³⁸ S. K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Available at <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/2027/heb.04166> (accessed 11 May 2020).

³⁹ K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540*.

period which has given valuable information about how members of religious communities, and the wider church community, supported monastic houses in their bequests. The use of wills is also a valuable source of information for bequests from lay people, as will be discussed in chapter three. What is clear from the evidence examined, and will be demonstrated below, is that the level of support varies between communities and locations, and that the reasons for the variation is the subject of much discussion by historians.

The first area to be explored is what support female communities received from the Church and monastic community. Female religious received support both from the Church, ranging from the parish churches and priests to bishops and even the papacy. However, they also received support from their male counterparts. As will be demonstrated below the type of support received, and the level of involvement in the nun's affairs varied greatly depending on who was providing the support and the type of support received, for example whether that support was financial or pastoral.

To analyse the type of support given it is important to consider whether religious communities were founded by existing houses; a form of expansion of an order. This is especially the case with the Cistercian order which aimed to send monks to establish new communities, supported by existing houses. A large proportion of religious communities in Wales were Cistercian. During this period there were fourteen monasteries as well as two houses for women at Llanllŷr and Llanllugan. These houses were distributed over a large geographical area, and very few of them have indicators of early medieval foundations. Llanllugan, Llanllŷr, Margam and Strata Florida can be considered to have early foundations,

which only accounts for twenty-five percent of the Cistercian houses in Wales.⁴⁰ There are a number of reasons why Wales may have attracted Cistercian communities when it failed to attract other orders. Cistercian communities actively sought to establish themselves in areas that were remote and inhospitable. It has been argued that the geographical landscape of Wales was, therefore, ideal for these communities due to its harsh landscape and small population. Therefore, there were numerous choices of area to establish communities. This argument is supported by the location of communities which are often in steep valleys or other areas that would be difficult to settle and cultivate.

During this period a number of female houses were found by, or with the support of, bishops and abbots. In 1922 Eileen Power completed the first large scale project bringing together all known information about English nunneries founded between 1275 and 1535.⁴¹ Her pioneering work brought together a wealth of information, although her analysis is now outdated. This research led the way for more recent works by Knowles and Hadcock, whose work 'Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales' is still classed as the most comprehensive list of monastic foundations in the medieval period.⁴² Similarly Sally Thompson provides an extensive list of monastic houses and their patrons in her work about English nunneries.⁴³ A number of houses have been identified as having episcopal founders. A few examples are Farewell in Staffordshire, founded by Bishop Roger de Clinton, Haverholme in Lincolnshire, founded by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln and Malling in Kent which was founded by Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester.⁴⁴ None of the houses in Wales had

⁴⁰ E. Evans, 'Continuity and Renewal of Monastic Landholding in Wales Before and After the Anglo-Norman Conquest' p. 96.

⁴¹ E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) Available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39537/39537-h/39537-h.htm> (accessed 28/8/2020).

⁴² D. Knowles, and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales*.

⁴³ S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 221-225.

episcopal patrons. There may be reasons for the lack of episcopal patrons in Wales, for example the predominant monastic orders, which will be discussed later. The role of bishops as patrons and founders is not always as obvious as it first appears. Unless they had private wealth bishops would not always have had the means to make grants which were substantial enough to found a religious house.⁴⁵ However, there are a number of nunneries that claim to have an episcopal founder when there is a lack of evidence to support this. Thompson suggests that this may be due to a difficulty in distinguishing between the bishop's role as founder or patron in the financial sense, and his role in providing pastoral and spiritual care for the nuns. Bishops may have been involved in the process of setting up the nunnery, for example the consecration of a new church, and these roles may have led to claims of the bishop being the founder when they actually had a different role in their foundation.⁴⁶ The amount of support from patrons varied greatly but Stöber suggests that houses established by bishops, or heads of existing monasteries, usually enjoyed a greater stability of their patronage because the patronage was usually passed on to their successor rather than being passed through families.⁴⁷ This stability may have been due to the fact that an ecclesiastic patron may have placed greater importance on providing for a religious house than a lay person who had inherited the patronage. Or, it could be argued, it may have been that ecclesiastic patrons were simply more financially secure and, therefore, in a better position to provide ongoing financial support. Stöber suggests that it was often the case that wealthier nunneries tended to be under the patronage of kings and bishops.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 209.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 191.

⁴⁷ K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540.* p. 26.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 62.

There is an argument that some nunneries were given sites that were previously monasteries as the Church wanted to ensure continued use of sites for religious purposes.⁴⁹

The Church's laws, Canon Law, supported the idea that if a location had been used for monastic purposes, this should continue if possible and they should not be abandoned or used for secular purposes. This can be seen in the decision taken to replace some failed male houses with nunneries rather than letting the sites lapse altogether.⁵⁰ This may have been the case for the nunnery at Thetford, discussed in chapter one, where a failing monastic cell was replaced with a nunnery. This can be seen as a sign of the Church supporting female religious by providing them with sites to establish communities.

However, it can also be argued that this demonstrated that the needs of female religious were viewed less favourably because they were given sites where male communities had failed to succeed, although it may have been felt that female communities, which often had less expenditure than their male counterparts, would be more likely to make a success of these sites. As was demonstrated in chapter one female houses often had much lower expenditure and were able to make a success of sites with considerably smaller endowments.⁵¹

There is evidence which suggests that individual priests supported monastic communities. Evidence of this support can be found in wills from this period. For example, in the will of Richard de Totinham, a chaplain, dated 1277. Totinham leaves a bequest to the church of St John the Baptist of Haliwell and the nuns there, which shows that he is supporting this

⁴⁹ M.R.V.Heale, 'Dependent Priors and the Closure of Monasteries in Late Medieval England, 1400-1535', *The English Historical Review*. vol. 119, no. 480, (2004), pp. 1–26. Available at www.jstor.org/stable/3489997 (accessed 23/4/2020) p. 2.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵¹ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women.* p. 44.

female house. However, it is stated in his will that this bequest is done in return for the prioress and nuns not claiming money due from Simon de Arcubus.⁵² Therefore, in this case, the chaplain's intentions should be questioned as it is unclear whether the support for the nuns is for pious reasons, or whether this is a means for settling a financial dispute.

Some monastic houses received financial support by way of church endowments and, therefore, entitlement to claim tithes. For example, Benedictine and Cluniac houses would hold churches and take a larger proportion of the tithes. The Book of Llandaff lists a church in the deanery of Usk as being assigned to the prioress of Usk.⁵³ The priory at Usk was in receipt of income from a total of seven appropriated churches. This would provide a source of income that was profitable to the house. However, not all religious communities would have benefited from church endowment and tithes. Coppack suggests that Cistercian houses refused gifts of parish churches as this would lead to too much contact with the outside world, something that was contrary to the teachings of the *Exordium Parvum*.⁵⁴ Therefore, while some monastic communities benefited financially from tithes it can be seen that this was not universal.

The next area we will consider is whether support was provided by other monastic communities for female religious. Research has been conducted in this area and has identified that the relationship between women who wanted to lead a religious life, and the religious men who would need to support them has been problematic, with this leading to

⁵² *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358*. Ed. R. R. Sharpe. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889). Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/court-husting-wills/vol1>. (accessed 29 January 2019), pp. 27-29.

⁵³ J.R. Davies, *The Book of Llandaf and the Norman Church in Wales*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 1998) p. 95.

nuns being marginalised in religious orders.⁵⁵ Research into convents in Europe show that communities were sometimes not recognised by the leaders of the orders they affiliated to, and often chose instead to remain under the care of their bishop. They also define themselves in other ways, for example, by following a particular saint or by papal privileges. This can be seen in the case of Santa Maria del Monte and San Mattia, in Bologna, which gained papal protection which meant that Dominican officials had no direct authority over them.⁵⁶ These cases demonstrate that women's houses did not always affiliate to a particular order, although over the course of time more female houses did. During the twelfth century sixty-four percent of all new female foundations had no official tie to a male community. However, these relationships changed and by the beginning of the fourteenth century two-thirds of women's houses were affiliated with male orders.⁵⁷

The amount of support male communities gave to their female counterparts is an area of debate among historians. Sharon Elkins argues that in England more than half of the houses founded for women received support from the male religious which, Elkins states, suggested that the male monastic communities did support the inclusion of female religious, at least in England.⁵⁸ Diane Watt opposes this argument by saying that female religious were not necessarily supported by the monastic communities and suggests that as there was a separate code for women they can be seen as 'marginal to their community'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ S.F. Johnson, 'Convents and Change: Autonomy, Marginalization, and Religious Affiliation in Late-Medieval Bologna', *Catholic Historical Review*. Vol.97, No. 2, (2011) pp. 250–275. Available at <https://web-a-ebsscohost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=32464168-d4a5-4063-be20-c6c3ac1255ee%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=59533045&db=rh> (accessed 25/11/2019) p. 250.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 251.

⁵⁷ B. L. Venarde, *Women's monasticism and medieval society. Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215*. pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸ S. Elkins, S.K. *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*. p. xix

⁵⁹ D. Watt (ed), *Medieval Women in their Communities*. p. 3.

When looking at the level of support received from monastic communities the Benedictine priory at Usk is an unusual case because, unlike the two Cistercian nunneries in Wales, the house at Usk was not dependent on a larger religious community, either in England or France.⁶⁰ Therefore, the support this house could expect to receive may have differed greatly to its Cistercian counterparts, or to other houses that were dependant on a mother house. As stated above the priory at Usk had the advowson of seven churches. These churches provided the vast majority of their income. In 1291 the priory received an income of £40 from these churches.⁶¹ However, it can be suggested that the support received from these churches was two fold. Firstly it was to provide pastoral care for the nuns; In 1284 the Archbishop of Canterbury arranged for the appointment of a priest to oversee the priory.⁶² Secondly, as shown above they provided the majority of the priory's income. It can be argued that the Archbishop's concerns with the priory was more for their pastoral needs, as one of the reasons for appointing the priest was the 'regulation of nuns leaving the house', a matter that had caused concern with a number of communities.⁶³ However, the financial benefits received from these churches must have been welcomed by the priory which was, as discussed previously, relatively poor.

What is clear from the evidence is that the amount of support female houses received often depended on the order that they were affiliated to. An example of this can be found in the Gilbertine order. In 1139 Gilbert of Sempringham, a Lincolnshire priest, founded the first Gilbertine priory of St Mary in Sempringham for a group of women who wanted to pursue a

⁶⁰ K. Stöber and D. Austin, 'Culdees to Canons: the Augustinian Houses of North Wales'. In: J. Burton, and K. Stöber, eds. *Monastic Wales: New Approaches*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013). Available at www-dawsonera-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/readonline/9780708325834 (accessed 7/1/2019), p. 58.

⁶¹ J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval Wales*.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

religious life.⁶⁴ Gilbert did not set out to found a religious order but instead his initial intention was to found a Cistercian house for women. However, the Cistercian Order would not allow the house to affiliate to the order which led to the foundation of the Gilbertines, who followed a form of Cistercian rule.⁶⁵ Following the initial foundation at Sempringham, Bishop Alexander of Lincoln began the process to establish a second female community at Haverholme. This foundation is interesting as the initial intention was to use the site to found a Cistercian monastery but was deemed unsuitable. The land was therefore passed to Gilbert for the foundation of a female house, and in the foundation charter it is described as being 'sufficient for their needs'.⁶⁶ Although another example of how male religious supported the foundation of female houses, this example also serves to demonstrate how the needs of female houses were viewed to be lower than their male counterparts, with a site deemed to be unsuitable for a male house being granted for a female foundation. Many of the Gilbertine houses were double monasteries accommodating male and female religious. However, what made this order unusual was the priority given to the nuns. The most comprehensive study of this order is by Brian Golding. In his work he highlights the priority given to the nuns and states that, at least in the early years of the order, the nuns 'were clearly still regarded as the most important element in the double houses.'⁶⁷ It is clear that the Gilbertines were an order that from the start not only accepted but fully embraced female religious. However, the suggestion that the Cistercians would not allow the houses

⁶⁴ K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540*. p. 10.

⁶⁵ G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. p. 57.

⁶⁶ B. Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c.1130-c.1300*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) pp. 202-203.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 133.

to affiliate to their order raises the question of whether all monastic orders were accepting of female religious.

The Cistercians attitude to women is an area that has caused much debate among historians, as will be discussed later. As the Cistercians were the predominant order in Wales, it is imperative to understand this relationship, and any impact it had on foundations for women. It can be argued that one of the reasons there were so few nunneries in Wales was due to the fact that the Welsh patrons and population predominantly chose to support the Cistercian order. This order has often been reported by historians to have rejected female religious. This negativity towards women by the Cistercians is argued by both Glyn Coppack in his work on the Cistercians in Britain⁶⁸ and by L.J. Lekai in his study of the Cistercian ideals,⁶⁹ both of which will be discussed in more detail below. Similarly, Madeleine Gray suggests that 'One of the weaknesses of the Cistercian ethos was its attitude to women and women's vocations' and this, coupled with the predominance of Cistercian houses in Wales may have been a contributory factor for the small number of houses founded for women.⁷⁰ It can be suggested therefore, that the Cistercian order was in fact against the inclusion of women, which may explain the reason for their low numbers. As will be shown, however, this is an area that has attracted much debate among historians, and the impact of Cistercian attitudes, for or against female religious, may not be as clear as sometimes argued.

⁶⁸ G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. p. 57.

⁶⁹ L. J. Lekai, *The Cistercians : Ideals and Reality*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977) Available at: <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=27942&site=ehost-live> (accessed 1/9/2020).

⁷⁰ M. Gray, Preface to *Cistercians in Wales and the West*, p. 22.

When looking at the issue of whether the Cistercian order accepted, or was hostile, towards female religious it is worth considering who founded the Cistercian houses. The Cistercian order often sent monks from an established house to found a new abbey. However, it is interesting that of the sixteen houses in England and Wales that had monastic or ecclesiastic patrons, only one foundation was Cistercian; the Priory at Whiston, founded by Walter de Cantilupe, Bishop of Worcester.⁷¹ This may not be due to lack of support by the Cistercian order, as will be discussed below, but it is worth highlighting that the male Cistercian houses were not actively founding female houses.

Glyn Coppack supports this idea that there were no Cistercian nuns by stating that during the twelfth century women were 'totally excluded from Cistercian monasteries and their granges.'⁷² Coppack supports this claim by citing the example of Gilbert of Sempringham as evidence that the Cistercian order 'would have nothing to do with them.'⁷³ This statement refers to Gilbert's attempt to have his houses for women incorporated as part of the Cistercian Order. However, caution must be used with this example. Golding states that 'the nature and scope of the assistance given to Gilbert at Cîteaux is hard to determine.'⁷⁴ Therefore, this may not be evidence that the Cistercians refused to support female religious but may simply be that they would not incorporate these houses. Coppack further supports this argument that the Cistercians would not support female religious by discussing eight nunneries that had been established in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire before 1150. He states that while these nunneries claimed to be Cistercian they, at best, followed Cistercian

⁷¹ E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*. pp. 685-692.

⁷² G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. p57

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 57.

⁷⁴ B. Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c.1130-c.1300*. p. 86.

reforms that differentiated them from other groups but this 'did not make them the female equivalent of Cistercian monks.'⁷⁵

Other historians have more recently examined the issue of female Cistercian houses, and have shown that whilst there may have been issues with the orders attitude towards women, it may not have been as clear cut as previously suggested. Anne Lester argues that it was not the case that the Cistercians were against female religious, stating that they had always had a close relationship with women and that during the twelfth century the monks and lay brothers had a 'significant role in the spiritual care of nuns.'⁷⁶

Lester explains that the start of the thirteenth century saw changes in how the Cistercian order saw the position of nuns within the movement, and their view changed to a more formal incorporation of houses into the order, with an emphasis on female claustration.⁷⁷ However, while these new, stricter conditions may have led to a decrease in the number of female houses being admitted to the order, Lester argues that 'the statute was not prohibitive', although those communities that were admitted to the order had usually existed for some time in an informal capacity, so their admittance served more as a method of regulating them.⁷⁸

An historian who has advocated the need to re-evaluate the relationship between the Cistercian order and female religious is Constance Berman. In her early research Berman suggested that the Cistercian order was not accepting of female religious. This interpretation was due to a number of reasons, including the argument that female religious

⁷⁵ G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. p. 60.

⁷⁶ A. E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns. The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011) p. 85.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p. 87.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 96.

were not included in the earliest histories of the order. It was argued that their absence demonstrated that they were not included in the order. However, Berman now suggests that this absence in the histories may simply have been due to the authors being male, so they controlled what was included in the history, thus marginalising the role of women.⁷⁹ Berman suggests that lack of legislation or procedure for the incorporation of female houses into the Cistercian order in the twelfth century, a factor that led historians to argue that they were not Cistercian houses, may have been misread. These procedures emerged as the order developed, and therefore, can be seen as an 'entirely normal result of how the Cistercian movement grew' and not as an indication of a change in attitude towards women within the order.⁸⁰

Therefore, Berman has amended her opinion with regards the inclusion of female religious in the Cistercian order. She states that the 'conventional view, then, that nuns were "not admitted" to the Cistercian Order during the twelfth century is obviously in error' and were 'based on false premises about how the sources should be read',⁸¹ and argues that they were an integral part of the order.

Another historian who has debated the question of the inclusion and acceptance of women into the Cistercian order is L.J. Lekai. Lekai describes the attitude of the Cistercians towards female religious as 'negative' and argues that the General Chapter maintained a 'policy of aloofness'.⁸² Lekai argues that the cause of this negativity stems from the rules on the strict enclosure of nuns that were enforced by the General Chapter in the thirteenth century.⁸³

⁷⁹ C. H. Berman, 'Were there twelfth century Cistercian nuns'. *Church History*, vol. 68, No. 4, 1999, pp. 824-864. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3170206> (accessed 8/6/2020) p. 832.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 389.

⁸¹ *ibid.* pp. 856 & 863

⁸² L. J. Lekai, *The Cistercians : Ideals and Reality*. p. 347.

⁸³ *ibid.* p. 351.

These rules meant that female houses were now dependent on an abbot and the order also needed to provide chaplains and lay-brothers to serve the nuns houses. Lekai argues that this became unmanageable for some father abbots, who were responsible for a number of convents.⁸⁴ This may have been the reason that the General Chapter, in 1220, prohibited any further incorporation of female houses; not because the order was against female religious but because they were trying to keep the number of houses to a manageable level for the father abbots who were responsible for them. However, as Lekai states, these instructions were not followed and, despite being instructed twice more on the matter, more female houses were still being incorporated, with some houses obtaining a papal brief to support them.⁸⁵ Therefore, as the evidence suggests, it may not have been the case that the Cistercians were against female houses, it may have been more that their restriction on the incorporation of female houses was to enable them to control their numbers to ensure they could support them in following the Cistercian rule, whilst allowing the father abbots to ensure the financial stability of their own houses.

As has been shown above, the question of support by the Cistercians is a complicated issue. However, what must be questioned is what effect, if any, this had on foundations of female houses in Wales, an area that generally favoured the Cistercian order. Of the three documented female houses in Wales, two, Llanllŷr and Llanllugan, were Cistercian houses. Jane Cartwright has investigated these houses and suggests that they both had strong links with male houses. Llanllŷr was founded as a daughter house to Strata Florida and Llanllugan was placed under the jurisdiction of Strata Marcella.⁸⁶ This status, as daughter houses,

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p. 351.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p. 352.

⁸⁶ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 178.

shows that they were accepted by the Cistercian order, and did receive a level of support; for example in the Ecclesiastical Valuation in 1535, the nuns at Llanllŷr were still in receipt of the tithes of the parish of Cenarth.⁸⁷ This evidence suggests that the Cistercian order did allow the admittance of these houses even if as an order they may not have fully supported their inclusion. Cartwright supports this view by suggesting that the Cistercian hostility may have been a factor in the small number of female foundations in Wales, an area which, as stated above, favoured the Cistercian order.⁸⁸ However, Karen Stöber and David Austin argue that the small number of foundations was not a response to Cistercian attitudes but a response to general attitudes towards monastic life in Wales. Stöber and Austin argue that many of the religious houses in Wales were small, both in terms of physical size and number of brethren. They state that this is the case for male and female houses alike.⁸⁹ Therefore, it could be argued that the relatively small number of monastic houses in Wales is not indicative of an issue with attitudes towards female religious, but possibly an indication of attitudes towards monastic life more generally.

The final area to consider is what support monastic orders, and the Church, provided to women who followed other forms of religious devotion. Cartwright has suggested that in Wales women preferred to follow private devotion rather than join a religious community.⁹⁰ There is limited evidence available with regards to what support was provided to women who chose this route. There is only evidence of one religious text being translated from Latin to Welsh for a Welsh woman. This text is *Quicunque Vult (Credo Athanasius Sant)* which was translated by Brother Gruffudd Bola for Efa ferch Maredudd 'so that she may

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 342.

⁸⁸ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 205.

⁸⁹ K. Stöber and D. Austin, 'Culdees to Canons: the Augustinian Houses of North Wales', p. 39.

⁹⁰ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 177.

read and understand it and that it may be spiritually beneficial to her.’⁹¹ Unfortunately, as Cartwright notes, we do not know the status of Eva, so we are unable to say whether this text was intended for use in a monastic setting. What the rarity of this text does demonstrate is that monastic orders were not routinely producing material in the vernacular for women who wanted to follow religious devotion.

An example that shows how male communities did support women in their pursuit of a religious life was the production of the Book of Hours. These books were made by monks and were produced almost exclusively for lay women rather than nuns. They were intended to be used by the women as a guide for private devotion.⁹² Therefore, it can be argued that the production of these books demonstrates that monks were supporting female devotion within the women’s homes but providing texts to guide them through the prayers needed, rather than supporting them within a monastic community. However, caution must be used with this argument as whilst it could be suggested that the production of these books showed a level of support for female piety it may also have been the case that these books were a valuable source of income for the monastery, and therefore, may have been more of a commercial venture to support their own religious life.

Another method women used to pursue a religious life that was more flexible than joining a monastic community was to work in a hospital. Hospitals were developed in urban areas and provided support to the sick, elderly and poor in the community. These institutions provided an opportunity for women who wanted to pursue a religious life that was more charitable and less formal than entering a nunnery, thus making this vocation more

⁹¹ J. Cartwright, ‘The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales.’ p. 27.

⁹² H. Leyser, *Medieval Women*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995) p. 234.

available to a wider section of society. The link between hospitals and religious communities is clearly demonstrated by the fact that they often evolved from a hospital into more formal religious communities, as shown by the nunneries at Ilchester in Somerset and Thanington in Kent which both started as hospitals.⁹³ However, there is no evidence of hospitals in Wales being run 'specifically by religious women.'⁹⁴ Again, caution must be given to this as religious women may have been helping with the healing of the sick in Wales, but it may not have been recorded in the same way.⁹⁵

There is also a lack of evidence of women in Wales following other forms of devotion, for example beguine, hermit or anchorite. During the twelfth century there is evidence that large numbers of women lived religious lives attached to churches.⁹⁶ These women would have received support from the episcopal community, although several of them were regulated and developed over time into nunneries.⁹⁷ Thompson suggests that this development from a reclusive life into a nunnery may explain why it is sometimes difficult to identify the early history of some religious houses.⁹⁸ However, there is no evidence of women in Wales following these forms of religious life. Therefore, as Cartwright has argued, it seems women in Wales were not given the same support to follow a religious life as they were in other countries.⁹⁹

As has been shown above the issue regarding monastic support for female religious is complicated, and has been the source of much debate among historians. It is clear from the

⁹³ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*. pp. 172-174.

⁹⁴ J. Cartwright, 'The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales,' p. 35.

⁹⁵ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*. p. 200.

⁹⁶ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*. p. 16.

⁹⁷ S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. p. 16.

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 27.

⁹⁹ J. Cartwright, 'The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales', p. 39.

evidence that the level of support female houses received varied greatly, and was affected by many factors including the ability, or willingness, of their order to support them. Some female houses received a great deal of support from their order and male counterparts but as has been shown, for example in the case of Llanllŷr, this support was not always consistent over a period of time. What is clear from the evidence is that female houses were often very reliant on their male counterparts, a relationship that was not always harmonious, and often led to houses struggling to survive and find the religious support they needed. Whilst the question regarding the attitude of the Cistercian order is complex, as discussed above, it is clear that there were issues in this order with regards to support of female houses within the order. It can be argued that this may have impacted on the number of female foundations in Wales during this period as the Cistercian order was predominant within this area. However, consideration must be given to other factors affecting foundations in Wales, for example lack of support from other patrons, as discussed in chapter one, or a lack of interest in female religious in general, which may also impacted on the reduced number of foundations. As will be shown later, the lack of support from the general population in Wales may have been a significant factor in the small number of foundations, and this, coupled with issues of support from the monastic communities, may explain why there were so few female houses established in Wales.

Chapter 3

Support Provided by Testamentary Bequests

During the medieval period monastic houses received financial support in the form of testamentary bequests. These bequests came in the form of money, goods and property, and were a valuable source of income for the religious house. The evidence of these bequests can be found in surviving wills from the period. As sources, these wills provide a wealth of knowledge about both the amount of support given to these communities and about the type of people providing the support.¹⁰⁰ However, caution must be exercised when citing these examples as evidence of standard practice. At the start of this period it was unusual for people to make formal written wills, and as such the surviving examples tend to represent a small section of society which had the means to make these arrangements. It is also worth noting that the content of wills was often influenced by the legal or customary practices of the country and, therefore, may vary from country to country in what they include.¹⁰¹ Therefore, while they provide evidence of how that community supported monastic houses, we are lacking evidence from other areas of society that may have also made bequests but were not formally recorded. Similarly, there are fewer examples of wills written by women surviving. It can be suggested that this may have been caused by the difference in status between men and women. As has been discussed previously women did not have the rights to hold land unless they were widowed. Therefore, unless they were a widow they have not have been able to play a role in the

¹⁰⁰ K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540*. p. 20, fn. 48.

¹⁰¹ S. K. Wray and R. Cossar, 'Wills as primary sources' in J. T. Rosenthal, ed. *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources: Using Historical Sources to Discover Medieval Europe* (Routledge, 2014) available at <https://books.google.co.uk> (accessed 13/9/2020) pp. 59-71. p. 61.

foundation of a religious house independent of their husband.¹⁰² The lack of evidence for female testators therefore raises the question of whether women were more likely to support a female house than men, but without further evidence any comment on this would be conjecture.

For the purposes of this study a number of sets of recorded wills have been used for comparison. The first set of wills come from the diocese of Llandaff in South Wales. They are selected wills dating from 1470-1778, which are contained in volume three of Cardiff Records, published by the Cardiff Records Committee in 1901.¹⁰³ The second set of wills are those proved at the Court of Hustings in London. These wills come from the 'Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Hustings, London', edited by R.R. Sharpe and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1889.¹⁰⁴ Digitised copies of both sets of wills have been provided by British History Online, a digital library based at the Institute of Historical Research. Finally, a number of wills have been used from other areas, for example from Herefordshire, York and Hampshire. These wills have been used from a number of sources and are all digitised transcripts of the original works.¹⁰⁵ Whilst some of the collections contain wills covering a number of centuries, for the purposes of this study all of

¹⁰² S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. p. 177.

¹⁰³ *Cardiff Records: Volume 3*. Ed. John Hobson Matthews. (Cardiff: Cardiff Records Committee, 1901). Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cardiff-records/vol3>. (accessed 3/1/2019)

¹⁰⁴ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Hustings, London: Part 1, 1258-1358*. Ed. R. R. Sharpe.

¹⁰⁵ *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454*, copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, (Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1964). Available at <http://name.umd.umich.edu/EEWills> (accessed 3/3/2019); *Lincoln Wills: Volume 1, 1271-1526*. Ed. C W Foster. (London: British Record Society, 1914). Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lincoln-wills/vol1>. (accessed 30 July 2020); *Testamenta vetusta: being illustrations from wills, of manners, customs, &c. as well as of the descents and possessions of many distinguished families. From the reign of Henry the Second to the accession of Queen Elizabeth*, Nicholas Harris Nicolas, (London: Nicholas and Sons, 1826). Available at <https://archive.org/details/testamentavetust01nico/page/70/mode/2up?q=71> (accessed 31/8/2020); *The Medieval Records of A London City Church St Mary At Hill, 1420-1559*. Ed. Henry Littlehales. (London: Trübner, 1905). Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/early-eng-text-soc/vol128> (accessed 31/8/2020).

the wills used predate the dissolution of the monasteries. It is worth noting at this point that as all the wills used are transcripts from the original documents caution must be given as regards any errors or omissions in them. However, they still provide a wealth of information both about the person making the will and the community benefiting. The wills used are from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. As stated wills have been studied from a number of different geographical locations to aid comparison. However, it is worth noting that there is a scarcity of early wills available for Wales and, therefore, the majority studied are from England. The lack of surviving wills in Wales may be due to a number of factors. There may be differences in procedure when recording wills that had been proved in court, or there may be a lower survival rate of the original documents. Therefore, it is difficult to say with any certainty whether this disparity is due to differences in legal practices between England and Wales or whether the evidence was simply better preserved in England.

The first thing to note is that nearly all medieval wills follow the same format. They start with confirmation of who the person is and that they are of sound mind and able to make the will. Most medieval wills then include a section that provides for their soul by committing it to God. Whilst the specific wording may change the general intention is similar in most of the wills examined. An example of this can be found in the will of Sir David William, Rector of the Parish Church of Saint John Baptist, of Newton Nottage, in 1504. In his will the provision for his soul is worded as follows: 'I bequeath my soul unto God the Father Almighty, to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to all the Saints of God'. Later in his will he reaffirms this provision by giving financial support as well. He states 'The residue of my goods ... order and dispose for the good of my soul'.¹⁰⁶ Again, charitable giving by testators

¹⁰⁶ *Cardiff Records: Volume 3*. Ed. John Hobson Matthews. pp. 102-118.

is a common practice. This provision for their soul may have been included as a sign of religious devotion, or, it can be argued, may simply be a standard format used in all wills. Another example of the wording for the provision of the testator's soul can be found in the will of Ioh'n Weston of 1407, which states 'I bequethe my Soule to all' myghty god, my Creatour, & to our blessed lady the virgin, his moder, & to all' seyntes'.¹⁰⁷ Most wills would have been written by a member of the clergy as few other people would have had the skill to write, so it can be argued that they would have automatically followed the same format for all wills and included a provision for the salvation of the deceased's soul as standard. That being said, the majority of medieval people would have concern for their soul and would want to reduce time spent in purgatory. This is evidenced in a number of wills where provision is made to pay any outstanding tithes due to the church or for any debts owed to be paid. In his will of 1415, Thomas Walwayn, esq, of Much Marcle, Herefordshire, leaves 'Restitution to be made for wrong-doing'. This can be seen as an indication that he wants to ensure that he does not leave any money unpaid upon his death as debt would have been considered a sin and may have resulted in more time spent in purgatory. A more direct bequest to cover money owed can be found in the will of Robert Sketyll of Tathwell in 1504. In his will he states 'To the high alter of Tathewell [sic.] aforesaid xxd. For tithes forgotten.' Sketyll ensures that his debts are paid as he instructs that the vicar of Tathwell is to be his executor, and that all his lands 'be sold to pay all my debts' and that the executor will 'order and dispose for the health of my soul.'¹⁰⁸ All of this is to be done before any payment is made to his family, therefore demonstrating how much importance he placed on ensuring that he did not leave any debt. Again, whilst this can be seen as a sign of religious devotion,

¹⁰⁷ *The Medieval Records of A London City Church St Mary At Hill, 1420-1559*. Ed. Henry Littlehales.

¹⁰⁸ *Lincoln Wills: Volume 1, 1271-1526*. Ed. C W Foster.

it must be remembered that the parish priest may have written the will for him and, therefore, may have automatically included this payment or encouraged him to include provision to pay any money due to the Church and debts to protect his soul.

The provision for the soul is a theme found in the majority of wills. Many wills leave money to pay for prayers to be said for the deceased. An example of this is shown in the will of John Plot from 1408. Plot, a childless widower, leaves provisions for a priest to pray for him.¹⁰⁹ John Chelmyswyk in 1418 goes further by leaving a provision for masses to be sung for his soul and those of his wife and grandmother.¹¹⁰ Similarly John Olney in 1420 gives a specific bequest of £3 each to the four orders of Friars in Northampton and Bedford, to say thirty Trentals of Masses, and gifts to the Friars, priests and a Northampton anchoress, to pray for the testator.¹¹¹ These examples show that the majority of testators felt the need to make a provision for the protection of their soul. Whilst there may have been an element of parish priests trying to ensure that debts were paid, it can be assumed that the majority of payment made to religious institutions was done so with the intention of providing for the person's soul after death. The majority of medieval people would have wanted to prepare for a good death, that is, a death that ensured they spent the shortest amount of time in purgatory as possible and secured their place in heaven. Their bequests and support of religious communities would, therefore, have been seen as a way of guaranteeing that they would be treated favourably in the afterlife.

The focus of many bequests in wills was to secure a particular burial place within the churchyard or church. It was believed that the closer you were buried to the altar, the

¹⁰⁹ *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454*, copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 30.

¹¹¹ *ibid.* p. 47.

better for your soul. The position of your final resting place would also be seen as a sign of your importance, and wealth, resulting in those giving the most support to the church usually securing the best burial spaces. It has been suggested that burial within the church was seen as a 'significant and powerful gesture by which lay supporters could link themselves in death with the religious in both a devotional and physical sense.'¹¹² In her will of 1275 Johanna Heileghe leaves a house to the church of St Giles without Cripplegate in return for permission to be buried within the church.¹¹³ Similarly, in the will of the Countess of Warwick in 1439 she leaves gifts to Tewkesbury Abbey where she stipulates she wants to be buried.¹¹⁴ Similar bequests and arrangements can be found in the English wills. John Solas, of Southwark, Surry, in 1418 leaves gifts to the church, priests and clerk where he will be buried.¹¹⁵ In 1413 Richard Yonge, Brewer of London, leaves gifts to the church of St Dunstan's with the intention of being buried there.¹¹⁶ This practice also appears in Wales. In the will of Agnes de Hastings, Countess of Pembroke, she states a bequest 'to the Priory of Bergavenny, where my Lord lieth buried,'¹¹⁷ This bequest refers to the priory church in Abergavenny, where the Herbert Chapel stills houses the tombs of the members of the lords of Abergavenny.¹¹⁸ There are three patrons from the Hastings family buried in the church,

¹¹² A. Abram, 'Monastic Burial in Medieval Wales' in J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priors of Medieval Wales*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015) pp. 103-116. Available at <https://www.vlebooks-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/Vleweb/Product/Index/552074?page=0> (accessed 30/6/2020) p. 103.

¹¹³ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358*. Ed. R. R. Sharpe, pp. 14-19.

¹¹⁴ *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454*, copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, p. 116.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 28.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 21.

¹¹⁷ *Testamenta vetusta: being illustrations from wills, of manners, customs, &c. as well as of the descents and possessions of many distinguished families. From the reign of Henry the Second to the accession of Queen Elizabeth*, Nicholas Harris Nicolas, p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Monastic Wales Project. *Remnants of Abergavenny Priory*. (2020) available at <https://www.monasticwales.org/showarticle.php?func=showarticle&articleID=9> (accessed 30/07/2020)

which Andrew Abram suggests, demonstrates the close link between the patrons and the priory.¹¹⁹

One religious group that appear regularly as benefactors in the wills examined are the orders of Friars. There are many examples of gifts being left to these orders in the wills from Wales and England, for example, in 1504 David Mathewe of Totworth, county Gloucestershire, leaves legacies to the church of the Friars Preachers and to the Grey Friars, both in Cardiff.¹²⁰ In 1410, Robert Aueray leaves money to the White Friars¹²¹ and in 1418 John Chelmyswyk from Shropshire leaves gifts of money to orders of Friars of Bridgnorth, Woodhouse, Shrewsbury, Ludlow, and London.¹²² These types of bequest occur frequently. However, it could be argued that the reasons for the popularity of supporting these houses over other monastic communities may have been due to their accessibility to the lay population. The orders of Friars were committed to a life of absolute poverty and relied on donations. Therefore they were more likely to be found in towns as they needed an audience to preach to, and gain support from.¹²³ Therefore, their urban location may have made them more visible than other orders, for example, the Cistercians, who led a more reclusive life, avoiding contact with the lay community.

As has been shown above, testators in England and Wales were both concerned with the provision of their soul after death and making arrangements for their burial. However, the other bequests they make and support for religious houses is where this differs.

¹¹⁹ A. Abram, 'Monastic Burial in Medieval Wales' pp. 105-106.

¹²⁰ *Cardiff Records: Volume 3*. Ed. John Hobson Matthews. pp. 119-138.

¹²¹ *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454*, copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, p. 16.

¹²² *ibid.* p. 30.

¹²³ J. Burton, and K. Stöber, *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval Wales*. p. 17.

In the wills that were proved in Wales there is evidence of money being left to churches. As well as the examples given above, this can be seen in a number of other wills. For example, in 1470 Thomas Mathewe of Radyr leaves bequests to St Mark's, and the cathedral churches of Worcester and Llandaff.¹²⁴ There is some evidence of bequests made to monastic communities in Wales, but this evidence is limited. One example can be found in the will of David Mathew, as discussed above. In addition to his bequests for the Friars, Mathew made bequests to the churches of Radyr, St Fagin's and Totworth, and the cathedral church of Worcester.¹²⁵ It is interesting, however, that Mathew chose to support the abbey churches and not the abbeys themselves.

Whilst the evidence is limited for Wales, there are examples that religious houses for women also benefited from support in the form of testamentary bequests. For example, in 1438, Richard Dixton of Siscetre, Glostershire (Cirencester) left money to the Prioress and Convent at Usk, as well as to the Friars of Gloster [sic] and Hereford and the Abbots of Tewkesbury.¹²⁶ It could be argued that the support for the convent at Usk by an English patron may be due to its proximity to England and the other monastic houses he was supporting in Gloucester and Hereford.

In the English wills examined there is evidence of support for monastic communities, both male and female. In 1454 Nicholas Sturgeon, a priest, leaves items for the monasteries of Christchurch and Canterbury, St Austin and St Albans.¹²⁷ Sir Ralph Rocheford, in 1439, leaves

¹²⁴ *Cardiff Records: Volume 3*. Ed. John Hobson Matthews, pp. 102-118.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454*, copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, p. 109.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p. 131.

money to a convent and two churches.¹²⁸ Martin de Amyas leaves 'To the monks of Statford the reversion of his houses in the parish of S. Mary de Welnoth' in 1275.¹²⁹

There are a number of examples in the wills examined that explain why money was bequeathed to houses for women. One example is the will of Odo Faber, in which he leaves to the 'Prioress and nuns of Haliwelle rents in the said parish and also in the parish of S. Benedict Sarhogg, so that the said prioress clothe and maintain Peter his son as becomes one of the brethren of that house.' Therefore, this shows that the intention of his support is that the Prioress will look after his son with the view of him entering the religious community in some way. Knowles and Hadcock list Haliwell in Shoreditch, London as being a priory of Augustinian canonesses, possibly previously being assigned to the Benedictine order.¹³⁰ It is therefore unclear whether the testators intention was for his son to join the house as part of the lay brethren or whether he would intend for him to later join a monastic community. This is further supported as the will continues by saying 'Also to the same six shillings annual rent in the parish of S. Mary de Wolcherche to the use of Matilda de la Cornere, his daughter, a nun of the same house.'¹³¹ These bequests clearly show that in supporting this monastic community the testator was making provision for the upkeep of his family. Another example that shows the reason for the support of female monastic can be found in the will of Sir Roger Salwayn, from York, in 1420. In his will he bequests money to a nun who nursed him in sickness.¹³² Unfortunately the will does not state who the nun is, or

¹²⁸ *ibid.* p. 121.

¹²⁹ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358.* Ed. R. R. Sharpe, pp. 19-26.

¹³⁰ D. Knowles, and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales.* p. 229.

¹³¹ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358.* Ed. R. R. Sharpe, pp. 19-26.

¹³² *Fifty earliest English wills in the Court of Probate, London: A.D. 1387-1439: with a priest's of 1454,* copied and edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, p. 52

which convent she is a member of, but clearly shows that support was given in return for services.

A number of the wills examined show how testamentary bequests were made to support a family member who had joined a religious community. In 1278, John le Ferroun leaves the annual rent of a shop opposite Colecherche to his daughter Margery, who he states is a nun. The same year John de Evere leaves rents to his daughter Juliana, who he states is a nun of Stratford.¹³³ Similarly, in 1293 Walter Hauteyn leaves 'To Alice his wife, a nun of S. Sepulchre's, Canterbury, his dwelling-house and rents upon Cornhull for life.'¹³⁴ During this period it was not impossible for a married women to take holy orders. As has been stated previously many women chose to follow a more flexible religious life through working in hospitals. It has been suggested by Thompson that the nunnery of St. Sepulchre may have developed from or had links with a hospital¹³⁵ so she may have become a nun through that route. Alternatively, patronage was sometimes offered to a house with the option that the women would join the order at a later date, Golding suggests that it was typical for benefactors to have the option to enter the priory when they chose so may have entered later in life.¹³⁶ Again this may be the case in the example above, and Hauteyn may have been referring to his wife as a nun as the intention is that she enter the convent upon widowhood. Once women had joined a monastic order they would not have been permitted any personal possessions. Therefore, it can be assumed that these bequests would have been given to the convent in which they lived. As such they would have been a considerable

¹³³ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358*. Ed. R. R. Sharpe, pp. 29-36.

¹³⁴ *ibid.* pp. 108-110.

¹³⁵ S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest.*, p. 37.

¹³⁶ B. Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c.1130-c.1300*. p. 139.

source of income to these houses. This would support the theory that religious orders were more keen to admit wealthy women to their communities as they would benefit from any inheritances they were entitled to.

There is evidence, however, that a number of benefactors left money to female religious without an obvious link to the community. Examples of these bequests can be seen in the will of Milo de Wynton in 1274 who left twelve shillings a year left to the nuns of Clerkenewell¹³⁷, and a bequest to the nuns of Clerkenewelle 'in perpetual alms' by Henry de Ennefeud in 1291.¹³⁸

These bequests demonstrate that houses for women did receive financial support from testators during this period. Therefore, it must be questioned whether lack of testamentary bequests was a contributory factor to the lack of monastic houses for women in Wales. To consider this point a number of factors will be examined. Firstly, were people in Wales supporting religious communities in this way, and if so, how does this support differ to that found in England. Secondly, we will examine how the Welsh laws affected and restricted how bequests were made, and finally we will examine whether the lack of bequests was caused by a shortage of communities to give the support to.

Looking at the first point it is clear that people in Wales did make contributions in their wills to support religious communities. What is notable in the wills examined is that in Wales these bequests are more commonly made to parish churches and orders of Friars, where as in the English wills this support seems to be split between monastic orders, churches, hospitals and other religious groups.

¹³⁷ *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London: Part 1, 1258-1358*. Ed. R. R. Sharpe, pp. 14-19.

¹³⁸ *ibid.* pp. 108-110.

The next area to be discussed is the extent to which the Welsh laws, and tradition around inheritance affected the way bequests were made in Wales compared to England. In England the normal practice for inheritance was that land was left to the eldest legitimate son or male heir. Therefore, any estate lands were usually kept intact and would enable a family to acquire a large amount of land. In Wales, the practice was that upon the death of the father, land was split equally between the sons. To further complicate the splitting of property, Welsh law did not state that this would only include legitimate children.¹³⁹ Therefore, this could result in land being split into smaller and smaller estates. It can be argued that this division of wealth may have resulted in a situation whereby people did not have enough land to gift to monastic communities for the establishment of houses, and that upon death, the law did not allow for such gifts to be made.

A further restriction of the Welsh laws was that they did not allow women to own property. A married woman was able to share goods with her husband but not land; any land owned belonged exclusively to the husband, except in very unusual circumstances.¹⁴⁰ Therefore women were not in a position to gift land to establish monastic communities, although they would have shared goods owned as a married woman.¹⁴¹ Therefore, it may have been possible that they were able to make other gifts to religious communities. It may also be argued that the lack of bequests in the wills examined may not be evidence that women were not supporting female religious but may simply be that they either didn't leave written wills stating their bequests, or that they made their gifts during their lifetime.

¹³⁹ D. Jenkins, and M.E. Owen, eds. *The Welsh law of Women*. pp. 85-86.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 75.

One final area to consider is whether the lack of evidence in the wills studies shows that there was a lack of bequests to monastic communities, or whether there simply were not the communities to leave support to. As has been discussed previously there were only three foundations of houses for women in Wales during this period, compared with one hundred and fifty houses in England. In addition to this there were only fifty-seven religious houses for men in Wales. Therefore, it can be argued that people in Wales had less opportunity to support religious communities than people in England. This argument would further support the lack of bequests for women's houses in Wales as only one of the women's foundations, Usk, is in the area covered by the wills examined. However, what is interesting in that the only evidence for support of this house in the wills studied came from an English will.

Therefore, when analysing the evidence, it can be suggested that monastic communities in Wales may not have received testamentary bequests as frequently as in England for a number of reasons. Less people were able to afford to leave these bequests, Welsh laws affected how land and wealth was dealt with after death, and there may have been a lack of visible communities to support. However, in England the evidence suggests that testamentary bequests were a major source of income, with religious houses for women receiving income from the wills of both men and women. Again, caution must be used as the surviving wills only represent a small percentage of the population and will not be reflective of the whole of society but it is clear that those who were wealthy enough to support a religious community certainly supported female religious as well as male.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the support networks of female religious in England and Wales during the Medieval period. As stated from the outset a study of the experiences of female religious would be too vast for the size of this study and, therefore, focus was given to the support they received in terms of founders and patrons.

The first area that was examined was the support they received from the lay community. As was shown, lay patrons played a major part in the foundation of religious communities, especially in the years following the Norman conquest. It must be stated that the largest patron of religious communities was the Crown, which not only founded communities but also took over patronage when other founders and patrons were no longer able to support them. As stated previously, it is interesting that whilst a number of female religious in England received royal support this support was less forthcoming in Wales. This may have been due to a number of reasons but the contributing factor that is most prevalent is the division of land in Wales between a number of royal rulers compared with the stability of one ruler in England. It can be argued that this fluidity of rule in Wales may have led to the royal families being less able to offer security to a religious foundation.

When looking at other lay patrons it was clear that supporting female religious was a popular choice with the lower nobility and other lay patrons, especially women. It is clear from the evidence that many of the female founders and patrons were widows, which reinforces the opinion that married women were restricted on the support they offered in their own right, and that once widowed they were able to offer a greater level of support as they had control over their own land and finances.¹⁴² However, evidence suggests that there

¹⁴² S. Thompson, *Women Religious. The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. p. 177.

were more female patrons than initially thought as the role women played in these foundations is often not explicit in the evidence. As stated by Gilchrist foundations previously assumed to have been a joint foundation between husband and wife may have received more support from the female founder than originally understood.¹⁴³ This is an area that would warrant further study, looking at joint foundations and what role women played in the ongoing support of the community. The differences in the role of female patrons was also highlighted when comparing foundations in Wales and England. In Wales women had a significantly reduced role in supporting these communities. However, as there were only three known houses of female religious in Wales it supports the argument that women did not shun support from these communities, but there simply was not the opportunity to give the support. Equally, as has been suggested the difference in legal status for women in Wales may have led to them choosing different paths rather than following a religious life. Female religious adapted well to surviving on limited endowment which may have increased their chances of establishing a successful community. What is clear from the evidence is that female religious received a great deal of support from the lay community. This may have been for a number of reasons, whether for religious devotion, or to secure entry for a member of their family, but the level of foundation and support was sufficient to maintain a number of houses. The level of this support is emphasised in the testamentary bequests that have been examined. The examples shown in chapter three, and many others that have been studied, show that people were willing to bequest gifts to support monastic communities, often generously. As has been discussed these bequests were often made to

¹⁴³ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women*. p. 50.

support a community into which a family member had entered, however, they still demonstrate the level of support given to communities for both men and women.

The support female religious received from the Church and the respective monastic orders is more difficult to quantify. As has been shown there are a number of cases of bishops and other religious leaders giving patronage to female communities. The most obvious example is that of Gilbert of Sempringham who founded a number of female communities, as discussed in chapter two. However, whilst it is clear that there was a great deal of support for female religious within the monastic community it has been debated whether this support was universal across all of the religious orders. The main argument is the question of whether the Cistercian Order was against supporting female religious. As has been shown this issue has been much debated by historians. It has been suggested by some historians that women were not readily accepted into the order¹⁴⁴, however, other historians have argued that female houses often had strong links and support networks with the male houses which would suggest that the Cistercian Order was accepting of female religious.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, whilst it is difficult to ascertain what the individual orders' attitudes were towards women, it is clear that in England and Wales female religious communities did receive support from male religious both in terms of patronage and pastoral care.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that female religious in Wales and England enjoyed a wide support network during the medieval period. They enjoyed a large amount of support from the lay community, which provided adequate, if sometimes sparse, financial support to maintain their communities. The support they received from religious patrons

¹⁴⁴G. Coppack, *The White Monks. The Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540*. p. 57; L.J. Lekai, *The Cistercians : Ideals and Reality*. pp. 347 & 351.

¹⁴⁵ J. Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales*, p. 178.

was variable, and the relationship they had with other religious communities and the Church is an area that would warrant further investigation. The differences in support for female religious in England and Wales is difficult to compare. Whilst there seems to be more support for communities in England it is difficult to state with any certainty whether there was less support for female religious in Wales or whether, due to their being significantly less female communities, there simply was not the opportunity for people to provide that support.

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