

Rewriting the History of Cistercians and Twelfth-Century Religious Reform

In 1241 the Cistercian General Chapter instructed the abbots of Calers and Boulbonne to inspect the site of an existing religious community at Valle de Nutibus in the diocese of Elne for its possible admission into the Order.¹ There in 1242 the abbey of Valbonne was “founded” as a daughter of Fontfroide under the aegis of the king of Majorca and with the authority of the General Chapter. In many respects this creation of a daughter-abbey by Fontfroide in the middle of the thirteenth century appears to have been done in absolute accordance with a long tradition about the expansion of the early Cistercians and their Order. The foundation charter for Valbonne is found published in the *Gallia Christiana* and comes from the collection of documents made by the Doat Commission sent to the Midi by Colbert; it offers us a view of a Cistercian foundation typical of monastic history as written since the twelfth century. The text tells us that six monks were sent from Fontfroide with the equipment needed: that is, with eighteen sets of clothing, six mattresses, six blankets, four table-covers, six hand-towels, three cauldrons, two cooking pots, a hundred cheeses, three measures of oil, fifty *émines* of wheat, a hundred sheep, a mule, 300 solidi in gold, two silver chalices, a censer and everything necessary for the altar, sixty codices (many of them listed individually), and a piece of the True Cross.² Presumably these material goods had been provided by the largess of the founder, the king of Majorca, rather than wholly reflecting Fontfroide’s generous treatment of a daughter community. As has been seen, Fontfroide was more apt to have swallowed up whole an existing priory than to have created a new monastic community. In fact, the king of Majorca, by applying directly to the General Chapter of Cistercian abbots to have them inspect the site, had prevented Fontfroide from simply absorbing another religious community, as was its usual practice and possibly its reputation as well.³

Valbonne was the foundation of a new and additional abbey for monks made by a large and wealthy house nearby after careful deliberation by the Order’s General Chapter. Those abbots in the General Chapter had probably

been pressured into insisting on such a foundation by the king of Majorca, but they were accustomed to such pressure from Europe's rulers at this time, having responded to numerous petitions from the royal family of Castile and the kings of England for prayers for family members or for the safe delivery of heirs, or from the countesses of Flanders for everything from sponsorship of new women's foundations to providing lay-brothers to act as estate managers and administrators for the countesses.⁴

As queen of France, Blanche of Castile had just persuaded the Order's General Chapter to found a house for Cistercian monks at Royaumont in northern France for the soul of her late husband Louis VIII. She had also begun building a monastery for Cistercian nuns at Maubuisson near Pontoise, whose community would be visited by the abbot of Cîteaux himself; she retired to this monastery, but only at her death, and was buried there. She was also involved in founding a second house for Cistercian nuns at le Lys near Melun; to it she would leave her heart.⁵ Valbonne's foundation by application to the Cistercian General Chapter thus fits a model of how a properly managed religious order should attach or found daughter-houses. That ideal coincided with a notion of apostolic gestation and colonization from Burgundy that had begun to be promulgated in the *Instituta* of 1165 or thereabouts found with the Order's "primitive documents." These materials were widely diffused in the Order by edict of the General Chapter after 1202, and such notions were certainly part of the administrative organization praised by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.⁶

This is not how the Cistercian Order began. Early twelfth-century Cistercians were at first simply the monks of a single house called Cîteaux. Later they became a small congregation in Burgundy. Later traditions would date an enormous expansion of the Order to the 1130s and 1140s, but many of the houses counted for those decades were still pre-Cistercian or proto-Cistercian until after mid-century. In 1165 Cîteaux itself had only sixteen daughter-houses, although the expansion of Clairvaux had perhaps been somewhat greater.⁷ Monastic reformers beyond Burgundy in the first half of the twelfth century began to have contact with Cistercian practices only late in the 1140s.⁸ Expansion of the Cistercian reform into southern France and elsewhere, when it did come, was not an outpouring of monastic personnel from Burgundy, although occasionally an abbot or an abbot and a few brothers were sent. Instead the greater part of Cistercian expansion began to be initiated in the late 1140s and 1150s, when groups of reformers from outside Burgundy started to borrow regulations and practices from Cîteaux. Only circa 1150 do documents begin to speak of customs associated with the *ordo* or practices of Cîteaux: at

mid-twelfth century that word still means a way of life and not a group to which one belongs. Such independently founded, indigenous reform houses were attracted to the *ordo cisterciensis* not because they sought a group to which they could belong but because they sought customs for organizing reformed monastic lives. These reformers, like those in Burgundy, espoused a return to apostolic poverty and simplicity, the necessity of manual labor for all members of communities, and the incorporation of adult converts as both monks and lay-brothers. But the phrase *secundum consuetudinem cisterciensis ordinis* often found in thirteenth-century documents appears only occasionally in the late twelfth century; the identification of abbeys as part of an *ordo cisterciensis*, in the sense of an administrative group, also became widespread only in the thirteenth century.⁹

We have no evidence of a Cistercian Order as an administrative institution that attempted to enforce specific practices on member abbeys until after the death of Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153. Indeed, only gradually in the 1150s and 1160s were the first steps taken to create such an institution after pre-Cistercian reform communities began to adopt the Cistercian *ordo* as a way of life. At this early moment when the Order had not yet been created, what such communities sought were useful monastic practices associated with charismatic leaders like Robert of Arbrissel, Gerald of Salles, Stephen of Obazine, or Bernard of Clairvaux. Whatever the dates given on filiation trees, when such independent abbeys adopted such customs they must have had no sense of having joined an order or having signed on to a whole package of regulations. These local reform communities sought only to solve internal problems specific to their own monasteries — problems about lay-brothers, granges, and liturgy. If they sought any affiliation at all, it was to local congregations with whom they pooled certain resources, for instance, Mazan and its daughter-houses sharing pasture rights. Only later did their adoption of the *ordines* of the Cistercians lead to their attachment to a Cistercian Order as an administrative institution, to General Chapter meetings, regular internal visitation, filiation trees, and efforts to enforce statutes. When the *ordo cisterciensis* first began to be adopted by independent reform houses, the Cistercian Order had not yet been invented.

One of the frustrations of a study such as this is that it seems nearly impossible to provide specific details on precisely how the Cistercian Order as an administrative institution first appeared. In part this is because it is necessary to peel away so many layers of accumulated interpretation, but it is also because the Cistercian Order's invention was piecemeal and a matter of fits and starts, making it difficult to date. Only gradually did such an umbrella group of

abbeys or heads of those houses emerge. That group was still itself being transformed over much of the late twelfth century from being practitioners of a specific *ordo monasticus* practiced in emulation of the brothers of Cîteaux or Clairvaux into a group to which one belonged, a Cistercian Order. The Cistercian Order, like the very notion of a religious order itself, was a gradually emerging result of the twelfth century's inchoate religious reform movement. It was nonetheless probably a Cistercian invention.

We can say that the invention or creation of that Order occurred circa 1165 because we know that in that year a constitution was approved, but the authors of that new institution are remarkably elusive. They tried to make their creation stand by attributing its creation to predecessors like Stephen Harding.¹⁰ Such archaizing tendencies in the writing of the histories of the Order's individual communities would be reinforced by several of its institutions. Both the filiation charts or trees used to organize internal visitation and the systems of precedence (by date of foundation) at the annual assembly of all abbots, the General Chapter, tended to encourage monastic communities to seek earliest dates to which to attribute their own foundation, rather than to enumerate the various stages of their development. The ideology of the Order, which after 1170 was heavily invested in "apostolic gestation" as the model for growth, must have also contributed to convenient lapses of memory about origins.

Ultimately, many individual houses were attached to an Order, and this new international Order reaped the benefits of the many reform efforts sown by its predecessors, the earlier local reformers. Incorporation brought already accumulated productive lands, personnel, and other assets, including well-established relationships with patrons and promises to them of specific religious benefits, such as burial or entrance at a future date. Incorporation, whether in creating new daughter-houses or in reducing indigenous communities to granges, was the greatest factor in the huge Cistercian success of the twelfth century. But incorporation brought issues not apparent in the model of apostolic gestation; in particular, such incorporated houses included a wide variety of internal monastic practices as well as a great diversity in notions about the rights and responsibilities of monastic communities related to one another.¹¹

This new religious Order as it emerged in the third quarter of the twelfth century encompassed many different styles of monastic life and management of monastic resources. Many individual abbeys came only late to what would otherwise be assumed to be a very early practice of charity and equality, particularly in concern for the financial well-being of neighboring houses, the equitable treatment of other abbeys, and a policy of noninterference by abbot

visitors in the affairs of daughter-houses. These ideals are all enunciated in the "primitive documents," but those so-called documents, like the Charter of Charity, were not in fact expounded until the third quarter of the twelfth century. At that moment so much growth was occurring that ideals could not be immediately communicated with any ease to abbeys beginning to be affiliated to the emerging Order. Local communities in the proto-Cistercian movement often grew wealthy in these years by annexing additional granges or properties rather than by founding new houses, but this is hard to discern because there was so much growth — most of it, by incorporation. During the third and fourth quarters of the twelfth century particularly aggressive abbeys often swallowed up existing houses. As a consequence, affiliation did not always, or even in the majority of cases, create new Cistercian abbeys.

Thus, while the language of *caritas* may have been available in the letters and sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux and his confrères, putting principles about equality into practice throughout the emerging Order came only slowly, and often only after the diffusion of the Cistercian constitution in the early thirteenth century. Many tiny priories and hermitages, having gained Cistercian customs, disappeared from the historian's view to become mere granges. Their properties and efforts contributed to what has been called the miraculous Cistercian expansion in wealth and power of the later twelfth century, but there is little recognition of their existence after they were engulfed by the Cistercians and their predecessors. Records of these independent communities, and of the donors who had founded them, have often been almost totally eradicated.

That the Order and its legislation were only beginning to emerge toward the end of the twelfth century and that both *una caritas* and *unanimitas* still were not widely enforced is not the usual interpretation, which sees an early and rapid expansion of the Cistercian Order in the first decades of the twelfth century, widespread adherence to all its most charitable practices in the second quarter of the century, and an inexorable decline after 1153. Nonetheless, the interpretation presented here of the course of Cistercian development in the twelfth century accords more with the documents. It may, for instance, explain better the less charitable aspects of a second incorporation account also found among the Fontfroide documents, copied by the Doat Commission, and printed in the *Gallia Christiana*. This is the account of the annexation by Fontfroide in 1189 of the nearby house of monks and nuns, lay-brothers and lay-sisters, at Sainte-Eugénie. It is a document written in the style of a charter in which William of Lac, prior, and five other monks gave their priory at Sainte-Eugénie, with three churches (one of which had nuns attached) and their possessions at two other places to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Fontfroide,

and to Bernard, abbot there. It tells us that they did so because they had realized that their priory had become overburdened by debt and harassed by lenders, and that affairs had reached such a crisis that they were in danger of dying of hunger. They confessed to being able to respond to their creditors only by selling the monastery, its lands, and all their goods to Fontfroide:

Ego Guillelmus de Lacu prior domus S. Eugeniae et nos fratres ejusdem loci, scilicet ego Johannes de Vitrac, et ego Guillelmus de S. Marcello, et ego Guillelmus Cornellii et ego Martinus de Mata, et ego Arnaldus Pastor, non inducti metu, vel dolo, sed bono fide, et firmo et laudabili proposito, divini numinis aspiratione, eligentes arctioris vitae viam, considerantes domui nostrae S. Eugeniae imminere graves aeris alieni molestias et importunas instare creditorum exactiones attendentes etiam predicta onera elevari non posse, vel praetaxata debita solvi, nisi praedictae domus mobilia et immobilia venderentur, ut sic in fine distractis possessionibus, alia non restaret vita, nisi nos fame perire, donamus et offerimus ac tradimus nosmetipsos per fratres Domino Deo et beatae Mariae monasterii Fontisfrigidi et tibi Bernardo, ipsius loci abbati. . . . Nos sorores domus S. Eugeniae scilicet ego Maria, que fui uxor Viduani de Bagis, et ego Garsendis de Mata, et ego Arsendis de Gatpadenis, sorores domus S. Eugeniae, et ego Arnaldus filius quondam Viduani de Bagis et ego Pontius de S. Marcello, et ego Remundus de Rabedolz, et Johannes Caragauli confratres ejusdem domus S. Eugeniae, laudamus et confirmamus.

I, William de Lac, prior of the house of Saint Eugénie and we the brothers of that place, that is, I, John of Vitrac, and I, William of Saint Marcellus, and I, William Cornellii, and I, Martin of Mata, and I, Arnold Pastor, not induced by fear but acting in good faith, firmly and laudably, inspired by the divine and having elected the more austere course in life, given the fact that our house of Saint Eugénie weighed down by debt is in imminent danger of falling prey to the exactions of our creditors, indeed, realizing that we are not able to lift that weight or to pay our debts without selling all our moveable and immobile goods, and, if we sold our possessions, we would have no way to avoid perishing from hunger, give and offer and transfer ourselves as brothers to the Lord God, to the blessed Mary of the monastery of Fontfroide and to you Bernard, abbot of that place. . . . [This act was] praised and confirmed by all the sisters of the house of Saint Eugénie as well; that is, I, Mary, widow of Viduanus of Bagis, and I, Garsendis of Mata, and I, Arsendis of Gatpendis, sisters of the house of Saint Eugénie, and I, Arnold, son of the late Viduanus of Bagis, and I, Pons of Saint Marcellus, and I, Raymond of Rabedolz, and [I], John Caragauli, *confratres* of said house of Saint Eugénie.¹²

Here at Sainte-Eugénie incorporation is not for the creation of a new community of monks or an independent community of nuns with their own assets, but for the dismantling of an existing house of monks and nuns, lay-sisters, and lay-brothers. The nuns would be set up in a dependent priory at les Olieux; it would first be independent but then rapidly impoverished. It probably had disappeared by the end of the Middle Ages. The monks and lay-

brothers were absorbed directly into Fontfroide itself. Sainte-Eugénie's properties and religious obligations were taken over, including any outstanding promises for admission of patrons, who would probably have been received by Fontfroide itself. In the language of "donation" typical of Cistercian charters, this community of religious men and women is rescued from starvation by Fontfroide by becoming a gift to the abbot of Fontfroide. The entire religious community, lock, stock, and barrel, with its members and their obligations, would be taken over, and nearly all record of an independent community of monks and nuns would disappear into obscurity.

What is significant is both the date and the abbey of Cistercian monks involved in this takeover. Fontfroide appears to have been part of the earliest wave of Clarevallian houses to emerge as part of a more international movement of religious houses in the 1150s. Attached to Grandselve in 1143 just before Bernard's preaching mission to the Midi, and itself an incorporated house, Fontfroide might have been expected to have absorbed much of the Cistercian message of *caritas* in the relationships between monastic houses that Bernard was preaching at the time. Fontfroide would at mid-century attach one community of hermits in Catalonia at Poblet, which became Fontfroide's daughter-abbey in 1155.¹³ But its absorption of Sainte-Eugénie epitomizes the trends toward the aggrandizement of certain Cistercian communities that I have attempted to describe in earlier chapters. Moreover, in September 1189 there is no sign that the abbot of Fontfroide is about to go off to the General Chapter meeting to get permission for such an annexation, no sign of any hesitation to take on the religious care of women, no sign of sharing resources or undertaking to set Sainte-Eugénie on its feet, but instead a forthright "take-over" by Fontfroide. In this charter, preserved because it was found by the Doat commissioners in the Fontfroide archives, Fontfroide's self-depiction is that of passive recipient of a "gift" from the prior and monks of Sainte-Eugénie. William of Lac and his associates confess that their incompetence in management has led to their near starvation, but it is likely that Fontfroide's competition with its neighbor contributed to Sainte-Eugénie's demise. Its unhesitating annexation of Sainte-Eugénie in 1189 and other examples of its appropriation of desirable nearby communities discussed in Chapter 3 suggest how much the takeover was the *modus operandi* for Fontfroide in the late twelfth century and after. Only a powerful individual like the king of Majorca could have forced Fontfroide to make a new settlement of monks as it did at Valbonne in 1242.

In reading accounts such as that of the abbey of Valbonne in light of assumptions about miraculous growth in the Cistercian Order during the previous century, historians of the Cistercians have tried to explain the Order's

success as the inadvertent result of its austere practices and of foundations made whenever communities became too large or too rich, by “apostolic gestation,” in which heroic monks in bands of six or twelve and an abbot went out with lay-brothers to make monastic settlements at new sites, which were inevitably located in uncleared and uncultivated wilderness. There those new foundations disrupted no existing communities and had no effect on existing arrangements for the support of parishes. They could demand tithe exemptions with impunity, for their abbeys were in places where they competed for the produce of the land only with the wild beasts. Their only encroachments were on the hunting grounds of the rich and powerful.¹⁴

In depicting the organization of the Order in terms of vast filiation trees and its growth as that of an organism expanding to give birth to new generations, thirteenth-century Cistercians perpetuated this image. They did so as well when they repeatedly described their sites in terms recalling the Old Testament or the sayings of the Desert Fathers.¹⁵ As I have shown at length elsewhere, we have too closely identified the Cistercians with pioneering activities in “old Europe.” Considerable rural economic growth had occurred from the year 1000 on, but Cistercians and pre-Cistercians were the beneficiaries of such growth, not its authors. In fact, those pioneering activities were already over in most places before even pre-Cistercian houses had been founded.¹⁶ If the early Cistercians knew how many of the houses that were becoming Cistercian had origins as double-communities, a term that could certainly be applied to Molesme, this was not discussed in their later reformulating of their own past to fit the model of how things should be in the present.

In fact, Cistercian descriptions of sites, economic circumstances, and existence on noval lands and tithes may have fit the circumstances of the thirteenth century better than the twelfth. After the year 1200, expansion of Cistercian men’s houses and additions to their lands were limited to the fringes of Europe, to what might be called “new Europe,” or to areas of major reclamation with high capitalization costs such as the polders of Flanders.¹⁷ Women’s houses attached to the Order in the early and middle thirteenth century were more likely than were men’s houses of the twelfth century to have received marginal lands on the so-called “internal frontiers” of “old Europe.” What those nuns got were some of the last and least productive lands available, often because donors founding houses in the thirteenth-century had little else to give.¹⁸

There is thus a certain displacement of what was happening in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries back onto the Cistercians’ descriptions of what they saw as their origins in the early twelfth century. This is nowhere more clear than with regard to their exemption from tithes. When tithe priv-

ileges were granted to new reform communities in the twelfth century, these privileges stressed the typical ideology of monastic reformers of that era, a discussion about the monastic return to manual labor. Twelfth-century tithe exemptions were grants of exemption on land labored on or managed by the monks and nuns themselves, described in the typical formula *Sane laborum*. But in the early thirteenth century the Fourth Lateran Council limited Cistercian tithe privileges to a different type of criterion, exemption on *novalia*, by which were meant apparently noval lands and noval tithes alike, as well as exemption on the Order's animal husbandry, viticulture, and gardening. The 1215 exception made for all lands already in Cistercian hands meant that for most men's houses, at least, not much had changed, for most had already gained nearly all their endowment. What is interesting is how much the emphasis on noval lands as those receiving tithe exemption paralleled Cistercian circumstances in the thirteenth century, when most of the Order's new communities were being founded on the fringes of Europe, and in lands on which tithes had never before been collected.¹⁹ Not only did the emphasis on noval lands fit Cistercian circumstances in the thirteenth century better than it would have in the twelfth, but such land-holdings and exemption from noval tithes may have reflected and been reflected in the self-depiction as frontiersmen and colonists found in Cistercian narratives of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁰ Only the nuns of the Order would continue to expand in "old Europe" in the thirteenth century, and, as has been mentioned, they tended to receive extremely marginal lands, which were those most likely to become wholly unproductive.

A concern for a sufficiency of internal endowment explains discussion about how new foundations should be made and regulations about the distance between abbeys and granges; it is found in the initial collections of ideas about how the Order should operate, the Cistercian *Instituta*, as well as in the Charter of Peace with the Praemonstratensians; the two come from roughly the same period — the 1150s and 1160s.²¹ But concern about whether to found houses is not usually how Cistercian expansion is discussed. Not incorporation, not annexing hermitages and reducing them to granges, but "apostolic gestation" has been the standard story of the miraculous twelfth-century Cistercian expansion.

But founding new daughters versus annexation was a critical question for every house that would become associated with the Cistercians. From the mid-twelfth century fewer independent priories became new men's communities. In fact, in southern France we see Berdoues, Fontfroide, Boulbonne, and Valmagne all involved in reducing neighboring priories to granges; chances are that this was very widespread practice even when we cannot document it. The

advantages of Cistercian longevity in acquisition of land for granges and in accumulated privileges, such as passage rights for herds and flocks, for marketing of produce without tolls, and for tithe-free grange agriculture would help houses like Fontfroide gradually undercut other monastic competition, including the competition of newer houses adopting Cistercian practices.²² Moreover, in the late twelfth century the promises discussed in the previous chapter of exclusive religious rights in certain territories, like that made by Bernard-Aton VI of Nîmes and Agde, were beginning.²³

Thirteenth-century and later Cistercian historians would ignore the important contribution of houses like Sainte-Eugénie to the Order's growth, while viewing a foundation like that at Valbonne or Royaumont as reflecting the typical way houses were founded. They describe such foundations as explaining the success of the Order that had grown from its origins in 1098 by such colonization from Burgundy. Ironically enough, this creation of an abbey for monks at Valbonne would be one of the last foundations of a house for Cistercian men in France, and one of only a very small number of such monasteries for Cistercian monks to be founded in "old Europe" after 1215. In fact, the thirteenth century in "old Europe" saw instead the extraordinary flowering of new women's religious communities in the Cistercian Order.

In southern France the history of the thirteenth-century foundation of houses for Cistercian women, or of the denial that there were earlier women's houses, is inextricably tied up with assumptions about the spread of religious heresy in that region. Any discussion of southern France and the Cathars includes glimpses of Cistercians as preachers against such dualist heretics, because the Order was among the first to be involved in preaching missions against the Cathars and the Order's northern leaders were particularly involved in the Crusade against the "Albigensian" heretics.²⁴ A famous Cistercian career is that of Arnold Amalric, a monk of Catalonian Poblet who moved circa 1200 from southern France, where he had been abbot of Grandselve, to election as abbot of Cîteaux. He was sent back to the south as papal legate and leader of the Albigensian Crusade and soon became archbishop of Narbonne.²⁵ After the first phase of the Albigensian Crusade, it would be the abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Grandselve, Elie Guarin, who negotiated the Peace of Paris of 1229 between Louis IX's regent Blanche of Castile and the defeated count Raymond of Toulouse. That peace treaty included huge indemnities to be paid by Raymond both to Cistercian houses in the south and to the abbey of Cîteaux itself.²⁶ As has been discussed with regard to Fontfroide, there is no doubt that Cistercian abbeys profited from the confiscated goods of Cathar heretics. Reform houses in the region also received gifts made by

secular leaders in that region attempting to avoid accusations of heresy by their support of the new and clearly orthodox monastic groups.²⁷

In the thirteenth century, moreover, foundation of communities of Cistercian women was viewed as a significant prophylactic against the spread of heresy.²⁸ Such houses of Cistercian nuns in the Rhône Valley are especially noticeable in this trend. Le Thoronet's abbot at the turn of the thirteenth century, the reformed troubadour Fulk of Marseilles, gave significant support to houses of religious women. A number of such foundations in some way dependent on le Thoronet flourished with the support of the Porcelet family of Arles. Fulk went on to rule as bishop of Toulouse (1205–1231) and was closely associated with the foundation of the first Dominican house for friars in Toulouse as well as that for Dominican nuns at Prouille.²⁹ Houses of such Cistercian nuns in the Rhône valley included a community founded at Saint-Pons of Géménos in 1205. Its site on land near a sacred well above the city of Marseilles was given by the bishop and chapter of Marseilles to a woman named Garsenda and her four daughters for an abbey of Cistercian women. Between 1209 and 1213, the nuns of Saint-Pons then founded an abbey at Mollèges between 1209 or 1213 on land given by Sacristana, daughter of Raymond Sacristan, a member of the Porcelet family. In 1218 Sacristana also gave her rights in the burg of Arles and in the Camargue to Mollèges and its nuns, who by 1238 had created Notre-Dame-de-Beaulieu in Arles.³⁰ See Figure 48.

Other new women's houses added to the Order at this time included Saint-Pierre-du-Puy at Orange, which had originally been founded in the Gard near Uzès in 1217, and Saint-Pierre-d'Almanarre, which was founded in 1221 in the village of Hyères, apparently at the request of Honorius III.³¹ The monks of Cistercian Aiguebelle were associated with an abbey for nuns at le Bouchet founded circa 1150, and tradition has it that circa 1200 another community of nuns was founded as well at nearby Bonlieu by Veronica, countess of Marsanne. It was these last nuns who were suppressed in about 1400 so that their properties could be given to the impoverished monks of Valcroissant.³² Another church for nuns at a second site, also named Bonlieu, and a church for nuns at la Vernaison seem also to have been associated with the monks of Aiguebelle.³³

But while the threat of heresy may have played a role in founding what became the Dominican women's house at Prouille or in founding houses of Cistercian nuns with the assistance of le Thoronet in Provence, that is not the whole story. In fact, women actively sought to become Cistercian nuns and actively chose the life of orthodox reform monasticism; the *ordo cisterciensis* was not for women just a safe alternative to Catharism. Yet almost everything

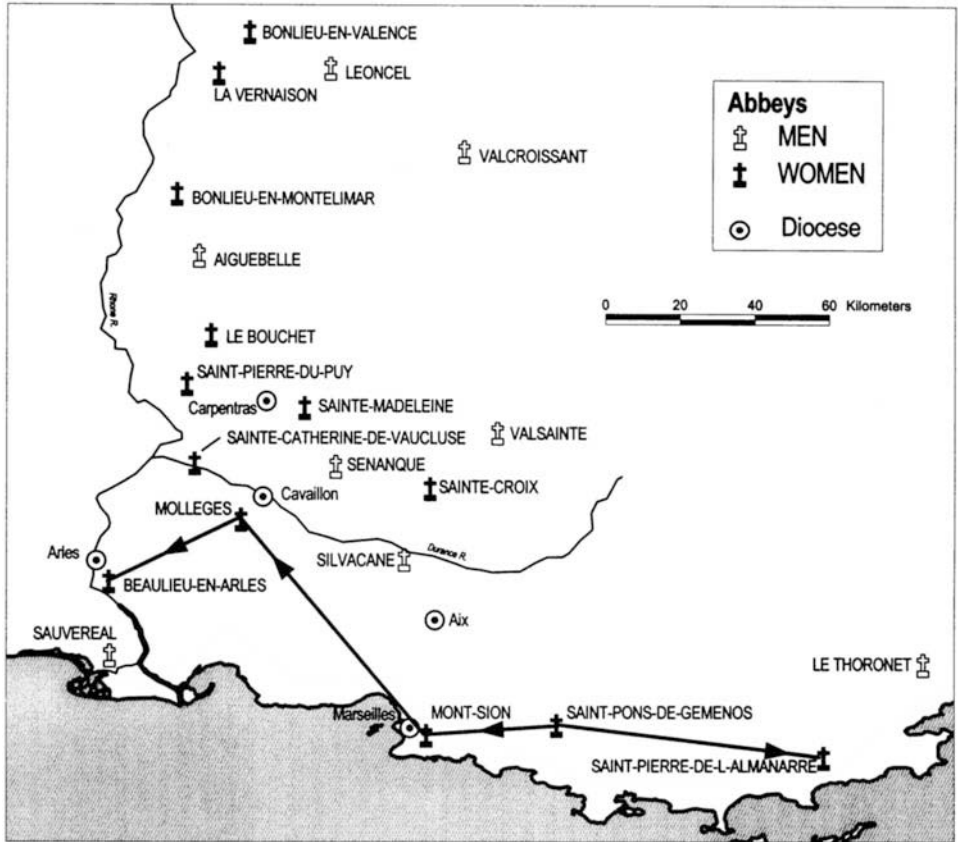


Figure 48. Houses of Cistercian nuns in Provence added in the thirteenth century.

written on southern French heresy has stressed the attractions of the Cathar heresy for women and minimized women's support for orthodox monastic reform in this region. In fact, many houses of nuns or early double communities had already been established during earlier stages of pre- and proto-Cistercian reform. Not only did they provide women with communities to enter, but they stayed well within the boundaries of orthodoxy and provided a very visible witness to the monastic *caritas* that was of such concern to religious reformers.³⁴ Many Cistercian nuns were already in place before Fulk of Marseilles began his foundation; women had acted as patrons of the Cistercians, requesting for themselves the prayers of Cistercian monks and nuns, and had sought entrance into those communities. The charters for Valmagne, Grandselve, and other abbeys as well show that many reform communities for

women that eventually became Cistercian took an active role in the care of the sick and poor. Such women's houses as part of a nearly invisible "hospital movement" in the twelfth century may have continued the same caring roles that many women had played in earlier times as priests' wives.³⁵

What is often missed in considerations of the growth of heresy in twelfth-century southern France is the extent to which orthodox religious reform was present there in the twelfth century. Preaching about the apostolic life and the growth of new groups within the nobility brought many new converts to the monastic life in the twelfth century.³⁶ While the search for a life of poverty in imitation of the apostles sometimes lapsed into anti-clerical and dualist heresy like that of the Cathars, it more often led to the foundation of indigenous houses of religious men and women, many of which would eventually be affiliated with the Cistercians. My reassessment shows, moreover, that the independent "ladies" of the Midi who ruled castles and handled property on their own played a large role in support of reform communities that became Cistercian. The role of women like Guillelma of Montpellier and Marie of Escornabou in promoting new monasteries has been downplayed in the history of the Cistercians. This is perhaps because sometime in the third quarter of the twelfth century association with women began to be a hallmark of heretical activity.³⁷ As fear of accusations of heresy grew, monastic leaders began to act as if associating with women might cause them to be seen as heretics. It was perhaps as a consequence of the increased concern over heresy that distancing oneself from women and from the care of nuns' souls, began to be seen as a necessary aspect of monastic purity; interestingly enough, this seems to have led to a reinterpretation by later Cistercians of Bernard of Clairvaux's early activities in support of women's monasticism, and to a certain amount of reinterpretation of some of his remarks.³⁸

There was considerable ambivalence about women's houses among Cistercians after the 1170s and 1180s, yet this was the period of greatest expansion of women's houses within the Order. This may explain how the first half of the thirteenth century could also be a period of administrative articulation of that ambivalence.³⁹ As the General Chapter became stronger, so did its concern to keep women under strict control. But the concern went beyond that, to the denial of the presence of women there in the first place—as in the Silvanès chronicle, which masks Nonenque's origins, or in the denial of ties between Bernard of Clairvaux and Jully in the Order's *exordia*.

This new concern about association with women was not unique to the Cistercians; it was played out in the thirteenth century in the increased regulation of all religious women, including Cistercian nuns. Thus, at the same time that many new houses of Cistercian women were founded throughout Europe

in the thirteenth century, regulation of women's communities within the Order increased dramatically. Women's communities that had initially been treated as unproblematic were subjected to limitations. In the years between 1200 and 1250 important backers of Cistercian women like Blanche of Castile and Innocent IV seem to have insisted that Cistercians continue to allow women an official part of the Order, but the Order initiated legislation that was more and more "controlling," such as that about how new foundations were to be made. Thirteenth-century popes, worried about the impoverished state of many houses of nuns, attempted to force the various orders to take more responsibility for the *cura monialium*, the care of nuns' souls that religious men seem to have been trying to avoid. Such papal concern expressed itself in papal requests that orders establish maximum sizes of women's houses; admonitions that abbesses not admit any nuns above the maxima unless property increased were paired with warnings about avoiding simony.⁴⁰ All priories of nuns in the Cistercian Order were made into abbeys from the mid-thirteenth century, and all prioresses elevated into abbesses. While this may suggest a new independence, in fact those abbeys of women were also attached directly to neighboring houses of monks, whose abbots were assigned visitation duties of such *filiae*. Few houses of nuns would profit from the mid-thirteenth-century appointment of neighboring abbots as father visitors. Such abbots were often "wolves in sheep's clothing," annexing the nuns' properties for their own abbey's uses, or crowding the nuns' animals by over-pasturing with their own.⁴¹ The women's houses may have been more viable economically as dependent priories in the twelfth century, with more claim on the resources of the men's houses, than after they were detached in the thirteenth century. From the thirteenth century, these newly independent women's abbeys began to be treated as satellites of neighboring men's houses, and ties among women's houses began to disappear; at the same time the women lost any claim on the resources belonging to the abbeys for men — occasionally resources that had been given at first for the support of a double-house.⁴²

Several other things are clear about these changes with regard to women's houses. First, the formal rules for the affiliation of Cistercian nuns developed in General Chapter meetings of the thirteenth century should not be understood to apply to twelfth-century affiliation of such women's (or men's) houses. Second, regularization of Cistercian women's houses in the thirteenth century into filia of neighboring houses of Cistercian monks meant that by circa 1300 the Order's abbots were visitors for nearly as many houses of nuns as of monks. That some abbots, particularly in Flanders, were indeed overburdened with the care of nuns, however, cannot be generalized to the entire Order. Frequently, moreover, such complaints of the burdens of caring for

nuns were probably in response to complaints by the nuns about neglect. Third, all Cistercian women's houses had a more perilous future after 1250 than did men's. In what became the Order of Cîteaux, most men's houses created sufficient endowment to survive up to the French Revolution.⁴³ All the men's houses in the region except les Feuillants, which split off to form its own congregation, and Valbonne, Sauvelade, and Le Jau, which were Pyrenean abbeys treated at that date as not part of France, were counted in the report of the commission inspecting monasteries in 1790; as far as I can tell from Lekai's extracts, the commission did not count the houses of nuns.⁴⁴ Moreover, it was not necessarily the poorest houses of nuns that perished. The financial condition of women's houses is often cited as a reason for their suppression in this period, but there are indications that such suppressions provided houses of monks with coveted properties. Thus, at the end of the fifteenth century, for instance, a wealthier but vulnerable community of women might be more likely to be suppressed than a poorer one.⁴⁵

Moreover, only powerful lay patrons seem to have protected these women — women might resist their own suppression, but there was no outcry among men's houses when women's houses were suppressed. Thus, protection for a men's house absorbed by a rival was given to Locdieu by a mother-abbey in the early thirteenth century, as discussed above.⁴⁶ Although in 1453 Boulbonne would suppress the monks at Calers, resistance to this move by Calers's mother-abbey, Grandselve, led to the reversal of this suppression.⁴⁷ Rather than being suppressed, the monks at Valcroissant were rescued by the addition to their lands of the confiscated properties of a nearby community of nuns whose inhabitants were sent elsewhere.⁴⁸ No such protection was accorded communities of nuns. By the late fifteenth century many houses of Cistercian women in France had been suppressed, as is well demonstrated by a recent study by Anne Bondéelle-Souchier.⁴⁹ In England, all would disappear with the first suppressions of the English Reformation.⁵⁰

While nuns had been there from the start, the increasing organization of the Order into an international body would inevitably handicap the women's communities, whose abbesses were not allowed to participate in the deliberations of the General Chapter. Women were given, but only for a short while, a General Chapter of their own, held at le Tart, at which the abbot of Cîteaux could announce to the assembled abbesses the decisions of the abbots. Although neither charity nor equality is suggested for these Cistercian women who had no voice in either chapter, the foundation of Cistercian houses for women continued to be popular long after the men's houses were reduced in size, found it increasingly difficult to recruit lay-brothers, and began to "farm out" granges or convert them into bastides. It is not surprising that commu-

nities of nuns attempted to secede, and sometimes did successfully leave the Order.⁵¹

Although the documentation for Cistercian women in southern France is sparse, it is abundant for other regions, and the inclusion of the history of Cistercian women in this study has significantly shaped its conclusions. Although there is still further clarification to be done with regard to the second half of the twelfth century, the major outlines of a new picture are now clear. Understanding that a Cistercian Order was a new invention of the twelfth century, but only of the third quarter of the twelfth century, has been the major consequence of the attempt to tell the story of the early Cistercians with women in it. In seeking to verify why arguments that there were no twelfth-century Cistercian nuns could be made by recourse to the published statutes, I began to investigate carefully the contents of the first volume of published statutes by Canivez and to look at the manuscripts that lay behind them. What that revealed was that the Order would be built up gradually out of many independently founded reform houses that eventually looked to Cistercian customs for managing their internal affairs. From adopting customs for internal affairs to membership in an Order was a gradual process that occurred in the years after Bernard of Clairvaux's death. Only by 1165 was there a first Cistercian Charter of Charity, the *Summa Cartae Caritatis*, and some of its most charitable aspects were lost in the revisions of the next several years.

My conclusions about how the religious order was invented by Cistercians in the second part of the twelfth century will have considerable repercussions for the history of twelfth-century monastic reform more generally. As we look again, with the newly established dating for Cistercian documents firmly in mind, at the accumulated body of evidence for all monastic groups in the twelfth century, we may find that Cistercians can no longer be given credit for all the innovations that led to the creation of a new twelfth-century institution, the religious order. Only considerable further examination of the documents of the third quarter of the twelfth century, both those produced within the Cistercian Order and those in the archives of its competitors, will provide the documentation allowing the picture presented here to come totally into focus. What can be said definitively here is that not only was the Cistercian Order not founded in 1098, it was not even founded before the death of Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153.