

I

Twelfth-Century Narratives and Cistercian Mythology

A traditional picture of the twelfth-century Cistercians and their early expansion is found in *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality*, published in 1977 by Father Louis J. Lekai:

The amazing fact that the Cistercian Order virtually exploded and by the middle of the twelfth century possessed nearly 350 houses in every country in Europe, can be explained, however, only by the dynamic character of the “man of the century,” Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.¹

After an entire chapter entitled “Saint Bernard and the Cistercian Expansion,” Lekai concludes:

The astounding rise of the Cistercian Order, within the lifespan of Saint Bernard, from a small community of humble hermit-monks to an international network of hundreds of abbeys can scarcely be explained by the consideration of natural, historical factors alone. Not even the genius of the abbot of Clairvaux can give adequate account for this unique and specifically religious phenomenon. The secret must lie in the loud and spontaneous echo Cîteaux’s spirituality evoked among the congenial members of that devout generation, a spirituality exemplified to rich and poor, erudite and illiterate alike, by the austere and prayerful life of the White Monks.²

Although Lekai suggests that Cistercian growth was not the accomplishment solely of Bernard of Clairvaux, his description of the Order’s miraculous expansion is still based on the spiritual appeal of Cîteaux. Such analyses as Lekai’s have downplayed the role of incorporation in spreading Cistercian religiosity. Such studies instead see the success of the Cistercians as almost entirely a result of colonization from Burgundy, and mysterious only insofar as how it would have been possible to recruit and train so many monks in that region.³

This is the traditional tale, told since the end of the twelfth century, of a growing “network of hundreds of abbeys” in an Order established during Bernard’s lifetime. It is one in which growth derived almost entirely from

Burgundy. It turns out to be inaccurate.⁴ Cistercian growth in fact occurred through incorporating dozens of existing reform houses, rather than through founding new abbeys by colonization. Incorporation explains almost entirely the rapid Cistercian success — a point to which I return in Chapter 3. Bernard's contribution to Cistercian success was important, but it consisted much more of his publicizing early Cistercian notions of *caritas* than of any contribution to creating permanent institutions within an order. Such Cistercian notions as charity within monastic communities, manual labor shared among all members, regulations about management of lay-brothers, and reducing the liturgy inspired many independent monastic reformers of the twelfth century to adopt them. This adoption of Cistercian customs was often locally generated, coming at the initiative of independent reformers who looked to regulations from Cîteaux to solve problems specific to their own monasteries.

Investigation of early Cistercian mythology about that Order's inception and growth begins in this chapter with an analysis of the origins of such descriptions as Lekaï's, which derive ultimately from the narrative accounts of early Cistercian history written by members of the Order in the twelfth century. These narratives, the Cistercian *exordia*, present a series of Cistercian myths so pervasive in our descriptions of twelfth-century monasticism that we often no longer recognize their source. Here I examine the two earliest versions of the Cistercian *exordia* as well as their influence on other Cistercian myths: one about the isolation and austerity of the Order's sites and the other about a "Golden Age" in the early Order wholly without women — a notion obviated by the many examples of twelfth-century Cistercian women's houses discussed in this study and elsewhere. Chapter 2 will present the arguments for why such *exordia* are given the sequence and new dating employed here.

The Cistercian *exordia* comprise three main texts. The earliest is the very short *Exordium Cistercii*, which was only rediscovered in the twentieth century; it was written between 1160 and 1165. A second version was written ten to fifteen years later — the often-cited "Little Exordium," or *Exordium Parvum*. Despite its name, it is a longer text than the *Exordium Cistercii*. Combining narration and documents, the *Exordium Parvum* supports a pro-Cîteaux, anti-Molesme stance, but like the earlier document it does not mention Bernard or Clairvaux. Finally there is the *Exordium Magnum*, the "Great Exordium," which covers every aspect of Cistercian history up to its own day. It includes much detail about Clairvaux, being written circa 1200 by a former monk of that abbey, Conrad, who became abbot of Eberbach.⁵

The *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium Parvum* are anonymous accounts, although clearly written from within the Order. The *Exordium Parvum* was incorporated by Conrad into the first of his six books of the *Exordium*

Magnum. He uses the entire text of the *Exordium Parvum* in an account of monasticism, mostly in Gaul, from early Christian times. The other five books of the *Exordium Magnum* are about Clairvaux, incorporating many passages from twelfth-century Clarevallian authors. To the extent that later descriptions of the Cistercians incorporate Bernard into their account and contrast the white monks of Cîteaux with the decadence of Cluny and Molesme, they were most often derived from the *Exordium Magnum*. This fact gives much later Cistercian history its distinctly Clarevallian flavor.

The *Exordium Cistercii*

The earliest of the three accounts of the exodus from Molesme, the *Exordium Cistercii*, had disappeared by the time Cistercian accounts were printed. Since its rediscovery it has sometimes been treated as an abridged version of the *Exordium Parvum*. In fact, it never appears on its own, but forms a two-paragraph preface to the earliest version of the Cistercian Charter of Charity, the *Summa Cartae Caritatis*. Examination of its contents reveals clearly that this is not simply a summary of the *Exordium Parvum* but a carefully crafted account in its own right, with its own stylistic elegance. As discussed in Chapter 2, the manuscript evidence, in particular the evidence from sequencing the liturgical *ordines* manuscripts, for which marginal glosses added to earlier manuscripts are incorporated into the body of the texts of subsequent ones, shows that the *Exordium Cistercii* is the earlier text.

Certain texts are always found together and are copied into the manuscripts in the same order; Figure 1 shows that the *Exordium Cistercii* and *Summa Cartae Caritatis* are accompanied, in the one complete twelfth-century manuscript of the “primitive documents” containing them, by additional chapters on such issues as “How new abbeys should be founded,” then by the liturgical *ordines*, and finally by a treatise on the handling of lay-brothers. The series of questions and answers that follow the *exordium* and Charter of Charity in all the various manuscripts of “primitive documents” are called the *Capitula* or *Instituta* and are often treated as statutes attributed to 1134 and published under that date.⁶

This early textual grouping, *Exordium Cistercii*, *Summa Cartae Caritatis*, and *Instituta*, provides basic regulations for a Cistercian administration that at the time of its composition was still relatively unarticulated. Its description of Cistercian origins, found in the opening text, the *Exordium Cistercii*, is a limited one. The language, of mother-abbeys and daughter-houses, father-abbots and sons who are abbots of daughter-houses, reflects a component of the early

“Primitive documents” in intact twelfth-century manuscripts are always found grouped in one of three ways:¹

a: *Exordium Cistercii* + *Summa Cartae Caritatis*² + *Instituta*³ + *E. Officia*⁴ + Lay-Br. Treatise.

or

b: + *Carta Caritatis Prior*

or *Exordium Parvum* or + Calixtus II Bull + *Instituta* + *E. Officia* + Lay-Br. Treatise.

c: + *C. Caritatis Posterior*

¹ The sequence given here (with top version earliest) is derived from analysis of the liturgical order-book; see Table 1.

² These two texts always come together; the *Exordium Cistercii* comprises the first two paragraphs.

³ Statutes.

⁴ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, the Cistercian liturgical order-book.

Figure 1. “Primitive Cistercian document” texts in context.

Cistercian sense of community.⁷ Its poetic evocation of family is done with such stylistic balance, and even elegance, that it is very hard to understand how such a text could ever have been dismissed as a summary of later ones. The *Exordium Cistercii* presents a straightforward account of Robert's return to Molesme and is considerably less antagonistic toward Molesme and other monastic communities than the later, more rhetorical *Exordium Parvum* or the earliest versions of the *Exordium Magnum*.

Chapter 1 of the *Exordium Cistercii* describes the departure from Molesme and the founding of Cîteaux. In this version of the Cistercian foundation myth, Molesme, the mother-house from which the monks of Cîteaux had fled, is described as a monastery that had become so famous that it had many riches and had fallen away from the strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Molesme's dilemma was that of all reform monastic houses; it was caught in a crisis of accumulated wealth derived from its reputation as a house of great austerity and saintliness:

In episcopatu Lingonensi situm noscitur esse coenobium nomine Molismus, fama celeberrimum, religione conspicuum. Hoc a sui exordio magnis sub brevi tempore divina clementia suae gratiae muneribus illustravit, viris illustribus nobilitavit, nec minus amplum possessionibus quam clarum virtutibus reddidit.

In the diocese of Langres there was located a monastery called Molesme of the most outstanding reputation, known for its religious practices. From only a short time after its foundation, it was shown to be protected by the grace of divine clemency, ennobled by illustrious men, and granted not only a sufficiency of possessions, but distinguished for its virtues.⁸

As a result of Molesme's growing wealth, some of its members found themselves too involved in mundane affairs and wished instead to pursue heavenly goals. These "lovers of poverty," a group of twenty-one monks, with their abbot Robert (described as of blessed memory, which is suggestive of the date of the *Exordium Cistercii*'s composition), departed from Molesme to go to a new site at Cîteaux. That place is then described in biblical terms as *locu[s] tunc scilicet horroris et vastae solitudinis*. But for these *milites Christi* such a harsh place was exactly what they sought.⁹

Chapter 2 of the *Exordium Cistercii* begins by telling us that this foundation by Robert at the *heremus* of Cîteaux had been approved in 1098 (the text's only date) by Hugh, papal legate and archbishop of Lyons, by bishop Walter of Châlons, and by duke Eudes of Burgundy, who provided much of its material support.¹⁰ The text makes very little of the return of Robert to Molesme and his replacement by Alberic:

At vero post non multum temporis factum est ut idem abbas Robertus requirentibus eum monachis Molismensibus, Papae Urbani secundi jussu, Walterii cabilonensis episcopi licentia et assensu, Molismum reduceretur, et Albericus, vir religiosus et sanctus, in ipsius loco sustitueretur.

But after a short while, abbot Robert was needed by the monks of Molesme. At the order of pope Urban II and with the agreement of Walter, bishop of Châlons, Robert returned to Molesme. Alberic, a religious and holy man, replaced him at that place.¹¹

Alberic is then described as the new father of this new monastery. In the earliest surviving version of the *Exordium Cistercii*, however, the repeated word “new” in the phrase *novum monasterium novi patris* is used only once, to modify “father,” not “monastery.” This may be no more than a scribal error in not copying a repeated adjective that is itself a stylistic detail in the text. But this detail in turn has probably been overinterpreted by scholars who place too much emphasis on the presence of the words “new monastery” as a means to argue for this text’s very early date.¹² The *Exordium Cistercii* is earlier than the *Exordium Parvum*, but the manuscript evidence dates both to after the mid-twelfth century, as I argue in Chapter 2.

Alberic ruled for nine years and then was succeeded by Stephen Harding. Stephen is described as

homo natione anglicus, religionis paupertatis disciplinaeque regularis ardentissimus amator, fidelissimus aemulator.

An Englishman, a most ardent lover and faithful proponent of religious poverty and the discipline of the Rule.¹³

During Stephen’s early reign the abbey of Cîteaux almost failed, but it was rescued by new recruits. Indeed, thirty clerics and nobles and men of power who were laymen entered Cîteaux. There is no mention that one of these recruits was probably Bernard, the later abbot of Clairvaux.¹⁴

Chapter 2 continues with a description of the multiplication of houses, again in familial language. There were apparently twenty offspring within twelve years, as we are told:

Donec tam de suis quam de filiis filiorum suorum viginti infra annos circiter duodecim de solis patribus monasteriorum tamquam novella olivarum in circuitu mensae suae laeta mater conspiceret.

So that within about twelve years there were twenty not only of these offspring, but of the sons of these sons from a single father monastery, like new olive trees surrounding the estate of their happy mother.¹⁵

Finally, Stephen's writing of a constitution is asserted:

Unde et scriptum illud cartam caritatis competenter voluit nominari, quod ea tantum quae sunt caritatis tota ejus series redoleat.

Hence he wished to call that text a Charter of Charity, appropriately enough because its whole contents concerned such love.¹⁶

That the text says that these customs are about to be "briefly" described in the *Summa Cartae Caritatis* of the next chapters does not mean that this is a later summary of the *Exordium Parvum*; *breviter* here echoes the opening of the text with its *sub brevi tempore*.¹⁷

The familial imagery of the *Exordium Cistercii* is continued in the *Summa Cartae Caritatis*. The latter constitutes Chapter 3 of this grouping and is the earliest recorded Cistercian constitution, or Charter of Charity. It is significant that the manuscripts of the *Exordium Cistercii* refer to the *Summa Cartae Caritatis* as Chapter 3; only modern scholars have separated the two parts. The *Summa Cartae Caritatis*, the earliest surviving form of the Cistercian constitution, promises the independence of affiliates. There will be no exactions by mother-abbeyes from daughter-houses and only limited (once a year) visitation by father-abbots of daughter-houses:

Igitur juxta cartae illius tenorem, inter omnes cisterciensis ordinis abbatias statutum est, matres filiabus nullam posse temporalis commodi exactionem imponere, abbatem patrem abbatis filii monasterium visitantem non ejus novicium in monachum benedicere, non ejus monachum ipso invito inde abducere, non alium ad habitandum introducere, nihil denique ibidem praeter illius voluntatem constituere, aut ordinare, excepto quod ad curam pertinet animarum.

Therefore, in conformity with the tenor of that charter, it was established that among all abbeys of the *ordo cisterciensis*, mother-houses should not impose any exactions of a temporal sort on their daughters. Furthermore, father abbots should not visit monasteries which are their sons to bless novices becoming monks, to entice away monks there, to introduce new members to those communities, or to order or establish anything against the will of those communities, unless it concerns the care of souls.¹⁸

Father-abbots should neither bless novices as monks, nor entice away the most promising ones, nor force monks on daughter-houses, but be concerned solely with spiritual things. These are not injunctions to introduce uniformity of economic practices or to describe the proper method for the admission of monks or nuns or the foundation and incorporation of new houses, as are usually attributed to the Order's earliest constitution. This is instead a constitutional guarantee of minimal interference.

Much of the rest of the textual grouping found with the *Exordium Cistercii* concerns an incipient leadership by committee. Chapter 4, the second of the *Summa Cartae Caritatis*, declares that abbots should assemble once a year at Cîteaux, *omnium mater ecclesia cisterciensis*, to tend to the affairs of the group of abbeys, *ordinis reparandi*, and to review the activities of the abbot of Cîteaux.¹⁹ In addition, this chapter tells us that abbots who did not attend the General Chapter meetings were to send their priors as representatives; abbots who absented themselves without cause were to be punished.²⁰

Significantly, this early text promises that if the poverty of any individual house becomes known, that community will be provided for from the wealth of other houses, each giving according to its ability:

Sed et hoc bonum de conventu illo provisum fuit, ut si cujus abbatum nimia forte paupertas in communi innotuerit, fratris penuriam prout singulis caritas dictaverit, et facultas permiserit, omnes relevare procurent.

But for the good of the group, it was provided that, if it came to their attention that any abbot was in poverty, as love dictated and resources permitted, they should provide him relief.²¹

Clearly here is a notion of “charity” extending beyond a single abbey to all those in need; this clause does not appear in later versions of the Charter of Charity. Indeed, it may be a vestige of a practice probably already gone by the time this textual grouping was written in the 1150s or 1160s. Only within a small and closed congregation of abbeys, such as that attached to Cîteaux in Burgundy in the earliest part of the twelfth century, could such a practice have been contemplated or put into effect.

Chapter 5 describes the process by which a negligent abbot of any house should be deposed by the father-abbot in concert with the bishop and clergy of the diocese in which the transgressor’s abbey was located.²² In the case of Cîteaux, deposition was entrusted to the abbots of la Ferté, Pontigny, and Clairvaux. Election of a new abbot of Cîteaux was limited to someone from within the congregation, but electors would include all abbots who could assemble at Cîteaux within fifteen days. Meanwhile, the abbot of la Ferté was in charge.²³ There is no mention yet of Morimond as the fourth daughter.

The last chapters of the *Summa Cartae Caritatis* consist of a brief summary of practices with regard to acceptance and transfer of monks and lay-brothers, the material resources needed to found a new abbey, and a description of the process by which six or twelve monks and an abbot were sent forth to found a new community. There are also limited injunctions concerning uniformity in liturgical books, clothing, and food, which persons may or may

not live within the monastic compound, how lay-brothers and granges should be managed, income, burial, luxury goods, and decoration.²⁴

It was through establishing a sequence of the liturgical manuscripts in which this and the succeeding text are found (as described in Chapter 2), that I have established the chronological priority of the *Exordium Cistercii* and texts accompanying it over the *Exordium Parvum* and its grouping. As I argue in that chapter, the *Exordium Cistercii* textual grouping is that found in the earliest manuscripts, but even those manuscripts postdate 1160. So it is probably this Charter of Charity, possibly with the *Exordium Cistercii* as preface, that Alexander III confirmed in 1165 (see below).

The *Exordium Parvum*

The earliest textual grouping described above was soon replaced by an expanded version of the foundation account, the *Exordium Parvum*, which was accompanied in the manuscripts by one of two revised versions of the Charter of Charity, the earlier called the *Carta Caritatis Prior* and the later the *Carta Caritatis Posterior*. The *Exordium Parvum* with the earlier *Carta Caritatis Prior* (essentially the middle version of the Charter of Charity) is found in the series that begins with Ljubljana 31. It must thus date to about 1170 (although the manuscript from Ljubljana is often dated as late as 1178–82). The *Carta Caritatis Posterior*, in which Morimond's abbot joins three other daughter-houses already assigned to oversight by Cîteaux's abbot, dates to about 1175; it is found in several Paris manuscript versions of the "primitive documents" dated to slightly earlier than the Cîteaux exemplar manuscript Dijon 114 (dated to between 1182 and 1188). The numbering of chapters is inconsistent between the two expanded versions of the Charter of Charity, but basic points remain much the same.²⁵ The major difference is the *Carta Caritatis Prior*'s consistent use of the term *Novum Monasterium* for Cîteaux, which is dropped in the *Carta Caritatis Posterior*.²⁶

The text of the *Carta Caritatis Prior* opens by telling us that "it is itself called a Charter of Charity because it does not allow exactions, but only charity, and what is useful for souls":

Hoc etiam decretum cartam caritatis vocari censebant, quia ejus statutum omnis exactionis gravamen propulsans, solam caritatem et animarum utilitatem in divinis et humanis exequitur.

This decree they have agreed to call a Charter of Charity, because this statute establishes no burden of exactions either human or divine, but only love and what is useful for souls.²⁷

Both the *Carta Caritatis Prior* and the *Carta Caritatis Posterior* incorporate increasingly complex regulations for visitation, correction, and deposition of abbots, including oversight of the abbot of Cîteaux. Efforts are enjoined to enforce uniformity in the observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict and according to the customs of the new monastery. The first inklings of Cistercian conformity are found here, in paragraphs that maintain that all liturgical books should be identical to those at Cîteaux.²⁸ Precedence in seating and dining is given to abbot visitors, but limits on their power are still emphasized — they should correct spiritual faults only and not become involved in local affairs.²⁹ Visitation by a church's abbot "of all the coenobia which he has founded" should be done annually, but more frequent visitation should be gladly welcomed.³⁰

The *Exordium Parvum* is much expanded from the *Exordium Cistercii*. A few details of the earlier narrative have been retained and are given considerable elaboration in this much longer text, which consists of a preface followed directly by a listing of chapter titles and then by eighteen chapters. The *Exordium Parvum* would continue to have small accretions added to it, particularly in chapter titles and rubrication, throughout the later Middle Ages. Thus, in a thirteenth-century manuscript now in Zurich from the Cistercian house of Wettingen, the *Exordium Parvum* is entitled *Epistola primitivorum cisterciensium ad omnes futuros successores eiusdem Ordinis super exordium cisterciensis coenobii*.³¹ Many published versions of this text call it "The letter of the first Cistercians to all their successors about the origins of the monastery of Cîteaux."³² Such accretions as this assert even more than does the original account of the 1170s that the *Exordium Parvum* contains the very words of the founders of Cîteaux and provides the "true facts" about the abbey's creation. But such assertions are borne out neither by the dates of the manuscripts nor by the text itself, which alternates between the voice of the founders and that of their anonymous successors. Indeed, to speak in the voice of the founders is itself an innovation. There were no such claims made in the earlier *Exordium Cistercii*.

The *Exordium Parvum* is a mixed genre. It is in part a narrative account, but this account is supported by what are purported to be documents that serve to elaborate its story. It may, moreover, have been composed in response to growing criticism of the Cistercians, particularly a letter of Alexander III dated 1170, as discussed below. This new text turns the simple familial language of the earlier *Exordium Cistercii* into a piece of rhetoric, a legal brief arguing for the legality of Cîteaux's secession from Molesme. It is accompanied in the manuscripts by an expanded Charter of Charity. Most manuscripts containing the *Exordium Parvum* also contain a series of statutes, roughly equivalent to those published by Canivez under the year 1134, starting with "How our houses are founded."

The text of the *Exordium Parvum* provides the most commonly cited version of Cistercian origins, that incorporated almost wholly without change into Book One of the *Exordium Magnum*. It is also the account that continued to be copied for distribution throughout the Order, from the early thirteenth century onward, in manuscripts containing the Cistercian liturgical *ordines* and statutes.³³

The preface to the *Exordium Parvum* begins on an apologetic note, telling us that “we Cistercians” had founded the new abbey “canonically,” but also with “what authority” and by “what persons” and at “what time” those who founded Cîteaux had left Molesme:

Nos cistercienses, primi hujus ecclesiae fundatores, successoribus nostris stilo praesenti notificamus, quam canonice, quanta auctoritate, a quibus etiam personis, quibusque temporibus, coenobium et tenor vitae illorum exordium sumpserit.

We Cistercians, first founders of this church, notify our successors with these words, how canonically, with what authority, by what persons, and at what time those founding this monastery established its way of life.³⁴

Their account is the “sincere truth,” *ut hujus rei propalata sincera veritate*.³⁵ Such a rhetorical statement suggests that there was more than one truth about the foundation at Cîteaux. The *Exordium Parvum* protests too much that “We Cistercians” tell only the true facts about a past that is also somehow still present.

Chapter 1 of the *Exordium Parvum* expands on the earlier *Exordium Cistercii* story, telling us that, even before departing from Molesme and going to the wilderness at Cîteaux, Robert and his followers had gone to ask for permission from Hugh, archbishop of Lyons and apostolic legate.³⁶ This statement is followed by documentation of that fact, in the form of a purported charter from Hugh that constitutes Chapter 2 of the *Exordium Parvum* text. It maintains that Hugh “joyfully” confirmed their foundation and their lives “under the authority of the holy Rule of the Father Benedict.”³⁷

This first embedded “document” in the *Exordium Parvum* is a letter very much in the form of a charter, opening with the *Notum sit omnibus* so familiar to those reading charters, and closing by mentioning the placement of a seal.³⁸ It tells us that Robert and his followers have come before Hugh, who then issued a charter describing their ambitions and the failings of Molesme:

Notum sit omnibus de sanctae matris ecclesiae profectu gaudentibus, vos et quosdam filios vestros Molismensis coenobii fratres, Lugduni in nostra praesentia astitisse, ac regulae beatissimi Benedicti quam illuc huc usque tepide ac negligenter in eodem monasterio tenueratis, artius deinceps atque perfectius inhaerere velle professos fuisse.

Let it be known to all who are pleased by the moral progress of the mother church, that you and certain of your sons, who are brothers of the monastery of Molesme, having come to stand in our presence in Lyons, contended that you wished henceforth to live more strictly and perfectly according to the Rule of the most blessed Benedict which has been only tepidly and negligently followed at the monastery of Molesme.³⁹

The letter complains of the lukewarm monastic life at Molesme and tells us that, in their desire to live “more strictly and perfectly according to the Rule of the most blessed Benedict,” Robert and his group requested permission to leave that house. Hugh, papal legate and archbishop, confirms that he has permitted this, allowing Robert and his followers to leave Molesme for a new place that God would provide, but that he has also allowed others to remain at Molesme. The foundation of Cîteaux is given apostolic authority by Hugh’s having impressed this charter with his seal.⁴⁰

This charter from Hugh acts as support for the *Exordium Parvum*’s narrative assertions. Cîteaux’s case is presented by the highest ecclesiastical authority in the vicinity, but it is also the testimony of a presumably neutral outsider, an independent witness, to the legality of the foundation of Cîteaux. In this and every other “document” embedded in the *Exordium Parvum*, the purpose is to assure the reader of the veracity of the statements and to put accusations against Molesme into the archbishop’s mouth rather than those of Robert and his followers.

Like the other documents included in this account, however, this charter is not found outside the *Exordium Parvum* itself. It contains no language by which it can be authenticated as an original act—there is no place given, no dating clause, no witnesses, no description of the seal, except to say that it gives apostolic authority. While its contents are unusual, its form is similar to that of most charters monastic scribes wrote and copied every day. Its rhetorical function is crucial in this context, however. Like the other charters included as documentation in this tract, Hugh’s charter allows the anonymous authors of the *Exordium Parvum* to make the case for the legality of having abandoned one monastery for the foundation of another. Indeed, it transfers responsibility for the decision to leave Molesme to the highest ecclesiastical authority to be found, Hugh, archbishop of Lyons and papal legate.

That the *Exordium Parvum* acted as a legal brief, that a real issue was being argued, can only be surmised, but the dates of surviving manuscripts for the *Exordium Parvum* suggest its composition shortly after 1170. If so, it would have been necessary to make the case to the highest authority, pope Alexander III. Indeed, in the *Exordium Parvum* we probably see the Cistercian response to a letter written by that pope in 1170, a letter that was critical of the Cistercians’ activities. Although that papal letter had begun with praise of the

Order's support for Alexander during the recent schism, later parts of it (suppressed from official publications and forgotten until rediscovery by Jean Leclercq in 1952) criticized the emerging Order's recent behavior.⁴¹ The charters in the *Exordium Parvum* thus constitute the documents collected (indeed created) in response to the letter from Alexander III dated 1170.

Considering that the documents in the *Exordium Parvum* are found nowhere else except in the manuscripts of the *Exordium Parvum* itself, it is surprising that charters such as that purported to come from Hugh, existing only because they are embedded in the text of this Cistercian-authored *Exordium Parvum*, have been so little questioned. By detaching the text of the *Exordium Parvum* itself from its authentic date and manuscript context, historians of the Cistercians have lost track of the circumstances in which that narrative account and polemic, the *Exordium Parvum* and its documentation, were themselves constructed. They assume the authenticity of its incorporated letters rather than querying them as possible inventions, and this despite the fact that many chroniclers of the time wrote speeches for the protagonists of their histories.⁴²

Yet reasons for questioning these documents abound. The *Exordium Parvum* does not provide complete documents, only easily concocted portions of documents, often in nonstandard forms. Some have imprecation clauses, none have dating or signation. Among reasons for skepticism is the way they all speak from a single side of the debate, as outside witnesses to the legality of Cîteaux's foundation, rather than as part of an authentic correspondence between Cistercians and others.⁴³ No alternate contemporary manuscript evidence exists for even a single one of the documents found in the narrative account of the *Exordium Parvum*.⁴⁴ To witness to the events described in the *Exordium Parvum*, such documents should have existed independently of the manuscript context in which they are found, or be cited in other manuscripts of independent origin, or survive as originals or original copies containing all the proper diplomatic paraphernalia of seals, dating clauses, or formulae found in authenticated papal bulls or episcopal letters, or be cited in papal or episcopal registers.⁴⁵ At the very least such texts should have been demonstrated to conform to well-studied diplomatic norms for similar documents of the same date and context—their language and style should parallel that of other well-authenticated documents from the same chanceries, dates, and reigns. There is no available argument to be put forth that they do.⁴⁶

Moreover, in making their case, the *Exordium Parvum*'s authors have left out certain facts. The *Exordium Parvum* implicitly attacks Robert of Molesme, but does not mention either Bernard of Clairvaux or Cistercian women, such as those at le Tart. Perhaps this omission is more understandable if the text is viewed as primarily a rhetorical response to papal criticisms of the Order

found in Alexander III's letter of 1170. To leave Bernard unmentioned may be desirable in a tract that insists that the new monastery at Cîteaux had been legally founded, a tract in which Robert of Molesme is dramatically changed from hero to villain when he abandons the austerity of the *heremus* at Cîteaux to return to Molesme. Robert may have exhibited great instability of purpose in his role as founder of Cîteaux, but for Cistercian authors in the 1170s to have both praised Bernard and attacked Robert for returning to Molesme at the advice of the papal legate (as the *Exordium Parvum* itself tells us was the case) would have been difficult.⁴⁷ It is not easy to exonerate Bernard's own failure to maintain monastic stability, a failure to stay home to attend to his duties as abbot of Clairvaux.⁴⁸ It was better simply to leave him out of the story completely.

As for the *Exordium Parvum*'s leaving out the women who were founders, patrons, and early recruits of houses later identified as Cistercian, that too shows the text to be rhetoric, not history. There is considerable charter and narrative evidence to contradict the *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium Parvum* in their silence about women in the early Cistercian movement. Such evidence is found, for instance, in the mid-twelfth-century tract by the canon of Laon, Herman of Tournai, which includes a description of some of those reform nuns at Montreuil-les-Dames in the diocese of Laon.⁴⁹ That there were women from early in the Order's history is also shown in much surviving charter evidence such as that which was published for le Tart in 1954.⁵⁰ It was a common tendency among third-quarter-of-the-twelfth-century reformers to begin ignoring the women who were part of their earlier reform activities. Modern theories about the development of religious movements, such as those of Max Weber, would explain that, whereas women are often welcome in the most primitive moments of such religious reform, they are shunned as institutionalization progresses. The *Exordium Parvum* appears to be a case in point.⁵¹

Historians have often limited their understanding of the *Exordium Parvum* by approaching it without the context that could be provided by the early Molesme documents, which are much richer than those from Cîteaux's archives. These documents from Molesme are very relevant to our understanding of the foundation at Cîteaux, in showing, for instance, that Robert of Molesme had made a number of new priory foundations like that at Cîteaux.⁵² The Molesme documents also reveal a close association between Bernard of Clairvaux and the nuns at Jully that belies most assertions that Bernard was opposed to women's communities.⁵³ Records about Jully's foundation, moreover, reveal that the women were sent to that place from what was essentially a

double community of religious men and women living together at Molesme.⁵⁴ This is something left wholly unmentioned in any of the accounts of Cistercian origins. It remains to be seen whether historians will be able to link the increasingly anti-Molesme stance of the *Exordium Parvum* to specific events after 1170, now that the text is more accurately dated. Certainly its tenor should be considered within the larger anti-Benedictine, anti-Cluniac, and possibly also anti-syneisactic “groundswell” of the time.⁵⁵

Chapter 3 of the *Exordium Parvum* returns to the narrative line, and chapters thereafter alternate between narration and citing “documents” that serve as rhetorical vehicles for criticizing Molesme and praising Cîteaux. Chapter 3 tells us that Robert (at this point still a hero), having been given permission for the move, went back to Molesme to collect his twenty-one followers; with them he then departed for the *heremus* of Cîteaux. That place is described twice in a few lines as being full of dense woods and thickets, inhabited only by beasts, not men.⁵⁶ Efforts to build a monastery there of wood (rather than stone) were completed by Eudes, duke of Burgundy. Eudes is described as having given abundantly of land and livestock to supply their needs:

Tunc domnus Odo, dux Burgundiae, sancto fervore eorum delectus sanctaeque romanae ecclesiae praescripti legati litteris rogatus, monasterium ligneum quod inceperunt de suis totum consummavit, illosque inibi in omnibus necessariis diu procuravit, et terris et peccoribus abunde sublevavit.

The Lord Eudes, duke of Burgundy, informed of their sanctity by letters sent by the said legate of the holy Roman church, completed the entire wooden monastery which they had begun, provided them with all their necessities for a long time, and generously gave them lands and flocks.⁵⁷

Again despite the implication of later manuscripts that the authors of this *Exordium Parvum* with its incipit, *Nos Cistercienses*, are the abbey’s founders, what is being recited here is the mythical origin of a monastic observance in which all present Cistercians still partake. Yet its authors are at some points clearly describing something that had happened in the past, at a time when the abbey of Cîteaux was still made of wood, or even before, when they had just begun to build that *monasterium ligneum*. Indeed, to mention the wooden structure suggests that by the time of composition those wooden structures had already been replaced by stone.⁵⁸

Chapter 4 further affirms the apostolic and canonical authorization for the foundation by Robert who received the *virga*, the abbot’s staff, from the bishop of the diocese:

Eodem tempore abbas qui advenerat ab episcopo illius dioecesis virgam pastoralem cum cura monachorum, jussu praedicti legati suscepit, fratresque qui secum advenérant, in eodem loco stabilitatem regulariter, firmare fecit; sicque ecclesia illa in abbatiam canonice apostolica auctoritate crescendo surrexit.

At that time the abbot who had come there at the command of said legate, received the pastoral staff and the care of the monks from the bishop of that diocese. He made sure that the brothers who came with him conformed to monastic stability at that place, and thus was that church elevated into a canonical abbey by ever-increasing apostolic authority.⁵⁹

This is the entire chapter. In the next we learn that despite such affirmations, Robert was called back to Molesme. According to the heading for Chapter 5 of the *Exordium Parvum*, the monks of Molesme “bothered or harassed (*inquietaverint*)” the pope to have Robert returned to them.⁶⁰

Chapter 6 is the letter from Urban II to the legate. It is written in the form of a private charter rather than a papal bull and contains none of the usual authenticating signs for such a papal document as it purports to be. Its text (which I reproduce here in full as it appears in the *Exordium Parvum*, its only source) contrasts the monastery of Molesme with the desert of Cîteaux:

Urbanus episcopus, servus servorum Dei, venerabili fratri et coepiscopo Hugoni apostolicae sedis vicario, salutem et apostolicam benedictionem. Molismensium fratrum magnum in concilio clamorem accepimus, abbatis sui reditum vehementius postulantium. Dicebant enim religionem in suo loco eversam, seque pro abbatis illius absentia odio apud principes et ceteros vicinos haberi. Coacti tandem a fratribus nostris, dilectioni tuae per praesentia scripta mandamus, significantes gratum nobis existere, ut si fieri posset, abbas ille ab heremo ad monasterium reducatur. Quod si implere nequiveris, curae tibi sit, ut et qui heremum diligunt conquiescant, et qui in coenobio sunt regularibus disciplinis inserviant.

Bishop Urban, servant of the servants of God, to his venerable brother and fellow bishop Hugh, vicar of the Apostolic See, greetings and apostolic blessings. We have heard the complaint of the brothers of Molesme who are very insistently demanding the return of their abbot. Indeed, they have said that regular life at Molesme has been overturned and that because of the absence of their abbot they are treated with scorn by princes and other neighbors. Urged by our brothers, we inform you by this letter how much it would please us if you could return that abbot from the desert to the monastery. But if you cannot do that, that you take care that those who love the desert be left to their quiet and those who are in the monastery follow their Rule.⁶¹

Chapter 6 ends by telling us that the legate, Hugh of Lyons, had read this papal letter, consulted with those who had power or piety, *viros authenticos et religiosos convocavit*, and made a decision as recounted in the following chapters.⁶²

Chapter 7 includes more correspondence attributed to Hugh of Lyons instructing Robert to return to Molesme and telling Gaufredus, erstwhile abbot of Molesme, to step down; it also assured the return of books to Molesme.⁶³ In Chapter 8, bishop Walter of Châlons transferred Robert of Molesme back to the jurisdiction of bishop Robert of Langres. Robert was absolved of his earlier obedience to the bishop of Châlons, but those monks remaining at the new monastery were also absolved from their obedience to Robert.⁶⁴

Chapter 9 describes how Cîteaux was deprived of its founder — “became a church widowed of its shepherd” — and had to elect a new abbot, Alberic:

Viduata igitur suo pastore, cisterciensis ecclesia convenit, ac regulari electione quemdam fratrem Albericum nomine in abbatem sibi promovit.

The church of Cîteaux found itself widowed of its shepherd, and by canonical election promoted a certain brother named Alberic to be abbot.⁶⁵

Alberic rather than Robert is described in the rubric as the first abbot of Cîteaux.⁶⁶

Chapter 10 tells us with what admirable forethought Alberic had sent two monks, carrying letters from a series of supporters, to Pascal II in Rome to obtain papal approval.⁶⁷ The letters they carried comprise Chapters 11, 12, and 13. The first, from two cardinals, describes the need for peace between the new abbey and Molesme, from which Cîteaux had seceded for religious reasons, *a qua religionis causa discesserant*.⁶⁸ The second, in Chapter 12, is yet another letter from Hugh of Lyons explaining that the move from Molesme occurred because certain monks wished to lead a stricter and more holy (or more retired) life at the new place, following the Rule of the Blessed Benedict:

Propter artiore et sanctiore (alt. secretiore) vitam secundam regulam beati Benedicti.

Because they wished to live more strictly and religiously (or secretly) according to the Rule of the blessed Benedict.⁶⁹

Hugh's letter attacks all other monks but those of Cîteaux. He requests the apostolic blessing for Cîteaux because its *pauperes Christi* had no defense except in God and in the pope.⁷⁰ He argues that the monks at the new monastery would be denounced by those from Molesme and elsewhere because those attackers could not be seen as anything but despicable in comparison to the reformers at Cîteaux. This statement implies not only that anyone criticizing the Cistercians was merely jealous of their famous austerity, but also that such

criticism was rife at the time of composition — something more likely in the third than in the first quarter of the century.⁷¹

In a third letter, bishop Walter of Châlons explains that the monks at Cîteaux had departed from Molesme because of its laxity, but they had only made their move with the advice of pious men. He pleads for their freedom from all authorities except himself, his successors, and the pope.⁷²

Chapter 14 is the “Roman privilege” of Pascal II, seemingly a confirmation of Cîteaux’s site and foundation. It is incorrect in its protocol in addressing Alberic as venerable, a title reserved by the pope for fellow bishops and their equivalents or for institutions.⁷³ Further niggles about diplomatic formulae in it might be made, such as the *vos igitur* and *sane si quis* clauses found here, instead of the more usual *si qua igitur* of normal imprecation clauses of this date.⁷⁴ More important, there is no independent document to witness this act. It is found in no other twelfth-century manuscript except those containing the *Exordium Parvum*. In fact, it is found in no other manuscript earlier than the *Liber Privilegiorum Cistercii*, Dijon MS 69 (598), of the late Middle Ages.⁷⁵ Finally, even if this were an authentic papal confirmation, most of it has little to do with the issue of Cîteaux’s secession from Molesme and does not address either a General Chapter or a religious Order, but only Cîteaux itself. Its confirmation of earlier settlements with Molesme (which I have marked in italics in the full text below), could easily be interpolated. Despite having a fuller text than other purported documents found in the *Exordium Parvum*, it is still lacking a dating clause, seal, and attestation.

The letter (for which the *Exordium Parvum* is the only source) reads as follows,

Paschalis, episcopus, servus servorum Dei: venerabili Alberico abbati novi monasterii, quod in cabilonensi parrochia situm est, ejusque successoribus regulariter substituendis in perpetuum: Desiderium quod ad religiosum propositum et animarum salutem pertinere monstratur, auctore Deo sine aliqua dilatione est complendum. Unde nos, o filii in Domino dilectissimi, circa difficultatem omnem vestrarum precum petitionem admittimus, quia religioni vestrae paterno congratulamur affectu. Locum igitur illum quem inhabitandum pro quiete monastica elegistis, ab omnium mortalium molestiis tutum ac liberum fore sanctimus, et abbatiam illic perpetuo haberi, ac sub apostolicae sedis tutela specialiter protegi, salva cabilonensis ecclesiae canonica reverentia. Praesentis itaque decreti pagina interdicimus, ne cuiquam omnino personae liceat statum vestrae conversationis immutare, neque vestri, quod novum dicitur coenobii monachos sine regulari commendatione suscipere, neque congregationem vestram astutiis quibuslibet aut violentiis perturbare. *Eam sane controversiae decisionem, quam inter vos et molismensis claustris monachos, frater noster lugdunensis archiepiscopus tunc apostolicae sedis vicarius, cum provinciae suae episcopis aliisque viris religiosis ex praecepto predecessoris nostri apostolicae memoriae Urbani secundi perpetravit, nos tanquam rationabilem ac laudabilem confirmamus.*

Vos igitur, filii in christo dilectissimi ac desiderantissimi, meminisse debetis, quia

pars vestri saeculares latitudines, pars ipsas etiam monasterii laxioris minus austeras angustias reliquistis. Ut ergo hac semper gratia digniores censeamini, Dei semper timorem et amorem in cordibus vestris habere satagite, ut quanto a saecularibus tumultibus et deliciis liberiores estis, tanto amplius placere Deo totis mentis et animae virtutibus anheletis. Sane si quis in crastinum archiepiscopus aut episcopus, imperator aut rex, princeps aut dux, comes aut vicecomes, iudex aut ecclesia, quaelibet saecularisve persona hanc nostrae constitutionis paginam sciens, contra eam venire temptaverit, secundo tertiove commonita, si non satisfactione congrua emendaverit, potestatis honorisque sui dignitate careat, reumque se divino iudicio existere de perpetrata iniquitate cognoscat, et a sacratissimo corpore et sanguine Dei ac Domini nostri Jhesu Christi aliena fiat, atque in extremo examine districtae ultioni subiaceat. Cunctis autem eidem loco justa servantibus, sit pax Domini nostri Jhesu Christi, quatinus et hic fructum bonae actionis percipiant, et apud districtum iudicem praemia aeternae pacis inveniant.

Bishop Paschal, servant of the servants of God to the venerable Alberic, abbot of the New Monastery, located in the realm of Châlons and all his successors who are canonically elected there, in perpetuum. Something desired for religious purposes and the health of souls ought to be fulfilled by the will of God without delay. Hence, oh dearest sons in the Lord, we listen to the requests of your petition without difficulty because we examine your religious practices with the concern of a father. We sanctify that place where you have chosen to live in the wilderness in monastic quiet, so that it be free of all molestation by mortals, and that you have there in perpetuity an abbey protected under the special tutelage of the Apostolic See, saving only the canonical reverence owed to the church of Châlons. We forbid by this decree that any person be allowed to change the status of your abode or of your selves, or that you should have to accept monks at your new monastery except in a canonical way, or that anyone perturb your monastic family by guile or violence. *We confirm as both reasonable and praiseworthy the decision ending the controversy between you and the monks of the cloister of Molesme that was made by our brother the archbishop of Lyons, then vicar of the Apostolic See, with the bishops of his province and other religious men, undertaken at the request of our predecessor of apostolic memory, Urban II.* (my emphasis)

You therefore, most dear and most beloved sons in Christ, must keep in mind that a part of you have departed directly from the wide spaces of the world, and that others of you have left the less austere paths of a more lax monastery. Therefore to assure that you be esteemed, you must strive very carefully that you always have both the fear and the love of God in your hearts, and that in all the strength of your minds and souls you have as large a place for pleasing God as you have freedom from the tumult and temptations of the world. If hereafter any archbishop or bishop, emperor or king, prince or duke, count or viscount, judge or church, or any sort of secular person knowing of this letter is tempted to contravene what we have established here, and after being warned several times does not make adequate satisfaction, let him be denied the power and honor of his position and be aware that he is subject to divine judgment for the crime he has done and that he will be excluded from the sacrament of the body and blood of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and subjected to strict judgment at the end of time. But may those who serve this place receive the Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that they may realize that good actions bear fruit here on earth and bring the reward of eternal peace from the strict judge.⁷⁶

This privilege quoted ends with an imprecation against all who would try to overturn the reformed life at this new monastery, and a papal blessing of peace, but contains no subscriptions or dating clause.⁷⁷ This confirmation, *Desiderium quod*, opens by stating: "Something desired for religious purposes ought to be fulfilled by the will of God without delay." But even if it is authentic this is at best a commonplace confirmation addressed to any number of new monastic houses by Pascal and his successors.⁷⁸ For instance, we find a text opening with the same words addressed to the nuns of le Tart by pope Eugenius III in 1147.⁷⁹

Chapter 15, entitled *Instituta monachorum*, paraphrases the *Instituta* found with the earlier *Exordium Cistercii*.⁸⁰ It affirms that Cistercians live by the Rule of Saint Benedict, rejecting anything contrary to that Rule or to the Life of Benedict, such as full mantles and furs or diverse foods in the refectory. Also rejected because they are not attested to in the Rule are ownership of churches, altars, oblations, burial payments, tithes on the labor of others, ovens, mills, villas, and peasants.⁸¹ Also included is a limitation on women entering or being buried in Cistercian houses, with an oblique reference to the exception found in the Life of Benedict, Scholastica, Benedict's sister.⁸² This limitation on interaction with women appears to be an innovation of the 1170s documents. In versions of the *Instituta* associated with the earlier *Exordium Cistercii*, only live-in women servants are forbidden, not the burial of women who were presumably the Order's women patrons.⁸³

Chapter 15 also describes what constituted perhaps the most important innovations of Cistercians and other reformers of the twelfth century, their allowing "bearded" lay-brothers to enter Cistercian communities, where those conversi would help the monks produce food for their communities and guests. It describes Cistercians accepting land to make into granges for that purpose:

Tunc diffinierunt se conversos laicos [barbatos] licentia episcopi sui suscepturos, eosque in vita et morte, excepto monachatu, ut semetipsos tractaturos, et homines mercenarios; quia sine amminiculo istorum non intelligebant se plenarie die seu nocte praecepta regulae posse servare; suscepturos quoque terras ab habitatione hominum remotas, et vineas et prata et silvas, aquasque ad facienda molendina, ad proprios tamen usus.

Then they decided to use hired laborers and to accept lay-brothers with the permission of their bishop, treating the latter in life and death like any of themselves except for their vows as monks, because without the support of such laborers they did not think they could possibly observe day and night all the precepts of the Rule. They accepted land located at some distance from settlements and vineyards, meadows and woodlands, and watercourses for making mills for their own use.⁸⁴

This section also describes the organization of estates under the control of those lay-brothers. The latter are given control so that monks may remain, as is asserted to be most appropriate, within the confines of their monasteries,

Et cum alicubi curtes ad agriculturas exercendas instituissent, decreverunt ut praedicti conversi domos illas regerent, non monachi, quia habitatio monachorum secundum regulam debet esse in claustro eorum.

And when they had established farmsteads for the practice of agriculture, they decreed that said lay-brothers rather than the monks ought to be in charge of such houses, because according to the Rule the residence of monks ought to be in their enclosure or cloister.⁸⁵

Such a description of the management of Cistercian estates found here suggests the relatively late date of the *Exordium Parvum* text, for the institution of such grange agriculture on Cistercian lands using lay-brothers cannot be documented using the administrative records for earlier than the late 1140s and was not widespread until several decades later.⁸⁶ As for the protests about enclosure and stability, they deserve more attention.⁸⁷

Chapter 16 describes the sorrow that was felt at Cîteaux because there were no new recruits to its way of life in the early years. The earlier text, the *Exordium Cistercii*, had assigned this problem to the early part of Stephen's reign (1108–33), but in the *Exordium Parvum* it is shifted back into Alberic's (1099–1108). Chapter 17 describes the death of Alberic, the election of Stephen, the increase in properties, and the entrance of many new recruits; again Bernard of Clairvaux is not specifically mentioned.⁸⁸

Chapter 18 of the *Exordium Parvum* describes the establishment of abbeys in many dioceses, saying that within eight years (possibly this is counting only from when the first houses were established outside the diocese of Châlons or the ecclesiastical province of Lyons) twelve houses had been founded:

Abhinc abbatias in diversis episcopatibus ordinauerunt, quae tam larga potentique Domini benedictione in dies crescebant, ut infra octo annos, inter illos qui de cisterciensi coenobio specialiter fuerant egressi, et caeteros qui ex eisdem fuerant exorti, XII coenobia constructa fuerint inventa.

Henceforth they established abbeys in various dioceses, which increased daily by the great and powerful blessings of the Lord. Thus, within eight years, out of those who had gone forth from the monastery of Cîteaux in particular and of the rest who would spring forth from it, twelve new monasteries were founded.⁸⁹

This number is smaller, but covers a shorter period, than that given in the earlier *Exordium Cistercii*, which cited twenty houses in twelve years. Both statements may be correct, with twelve houses (or three a year) in the first eight years and another eight houses (or two a year) over the next four. Neither number can in itself, however, be used to date these accounts or to argue for when the Charter of Charity was issued. The numbers twelve and twenty may have been chosen for their mystical significance.⁹⁰ Probably merely indicative of a perceived rate of expansion, they could not possibly have represented a census of abbeys, at least not one beyond a tiny Burgundian congregation, which had no need of such institutions as are proposed in the Charter of Charity.

Efforts by earlier scholars to date these two *exordia* to very early in the twelfth century by reference to these numbers have caused intense scrutiny of early local archives. Those scholars have attempted to correlate the foundation dates of the first twelve or the first twenty abbeys in the Order to the early composition of the Charter of Charity and these *exordia*.⁹¹ But this is not possible. Such experts on the early Cistercians have assumed that these texts are those of eyewitnesses to the foundation at Cîteaux, as well as that the numbers contained in them are accurate. But we should question the accuracy of these numbers, just as we should query the authenticity of documents embedded in the *Exordium Parvum* account. These same scholars cite as independent confirmation of the *Exordium Parvum* the papal bull purported to have been written by Calixtus II in 1119 confirming the Cistercian constitution.⁹² But, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is easy to show that the Calixtus II bull is a forgery. The only possible shred of authentic documentation even within the *Exordium Parvum* is the “Roman privilege” of Pascal II, with all its problems.

The numbers in the earlier *Exordium Cistercii* (written circa 1165) may in fact be derived from what I shall argue is the roughly contemporary 1165 papal confirmation by Alexander III for Cîteaux. It lists sixteen daughter-houses as if they were Cîteaux’s own properties:

In quibus hec propriis duximus exprimendi vocabulis, locum ipsum de Cistercio cum terris, pratis, aquis, silvis, pascuis, et omnibus pertinenciis suis, abbatiam de Firmitate, abbatiam de Pontiniaco, abbatiam de Claravalle, abbatiam de Morimundo, abbatiam de Pruliaco, abbatiam de Curia Dei, abbatiam de Bonavalle, abbatiam de Helemosina, abbatiam de Oratorio, abbatiam de Buxeria, abbatiam de Miratorio, abbatiam de Sancto Andrea, abbatiam de Balanciis, abbatiam de Personia, abbatiam de Erivado, abbatiam de Obezinna.

Which properties included the site of Cîteaux with lands, meadows, watercourses, woodlands, pasture lands, and all its appurtenances, the abbey of la Ferté, that of

Pontigny, that of Clairvaux, that of Morimond, that of Preuilly, that of la Cour Dieu, that of Bonnevaux, that of l'Aumône, that of le Leroux, that of les Bussièrres, that of le Miroir, that of Saint-Andrew-de-Gouffern in Normandy, that of Balerne, that of Perseigne, that of Arrivour, that of Obazine.⁹³

The *Exordium Parvum* and accompanying Charter of Charity and *Instituta* continued to be influential after the twelfth century because they serve as the introduction to the Cistercian liturgical order-books. The *Exordium Parvum* was also incorporated into the first book of Conrad of Eberbach's *Exordium Magnum*, where it is detached even more from the context in which it was originally composed. As argued in the next chapter, analysis of the manuscripts for the *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium Parvum* and associated texts shows that neither of them was an eyewitness account. The *Exordium Cistercii* and the slightly later *Exordium Parvum* were both written by anonymous Cistercians in the third quarter of the twelfth century. These texts were constructed by authors whose interest was to explain Cistercian origins to a later generation of monks (and nuns) who had not been there at the outset. Increasingly, however, Cistercians of the later twelfth century were coming under criticism, a fact that may explain the particularly strident tone of the *Exordium Parvum*. Its language of isolated sites and pioneering activities and the clear insinuation in the attached *Instituta* that the gestation of the Order came entirely from Burgundy turn out to be more rhetorical than true.

Yet this is an account that has been repeated by generations of historians. It has remained popular in part because there has been a tendency to think that independent affirmation of the mythical events described in one text can be found in other parts of the "primitive document" groupings, or are authenticated by the documents incorporated into the *Exordium Parvum* or the Calixtus II bull attached to it. Such purported verification by citing parallels between different texts all found in the same manuscript is obviously false, but it has been made convincing by separately denoting texts, such as *Exordium*, Charter of Charity, or *Instituta*, which in fact are part of a single larger account. The same fuzzy thinking is used in attempts at verification of the myths of Cistercian foundations using arguments from material remains.

Buildings and Sites

Cistercian historians have frequently pointed to buildings and sites as proof of the "facts" of early Cistercian history found in the two *exordia* just outlined. Pioneering activities described in the early texts just discussed are said to be

confirmed by the sites and remains of Cistercian abbeys that may still be seen in places like southern France. These sites seem to confirm descriptions of Cistercian foundations “in horrid deserts and vast solitudes” and wildernesses “occupied only by savage beasts.” But such sites, although they appear to conform to descriptions found in the twelfth-century accounts of the Order’s origins, are sometimes more isolated today than they were in the Middle Ages.⁹⁴ Our conclusions about them, moreover, are often based on vague memories evoked by the black-and-white photographs with which studies such as this are illustrated. These lead to discussion of the “aura” or “spirit” of such buildings and the “effect of their light,” or about “isolated valley sites” chosen by Bernard of Clairvaux. Such talk lends credence to assertions of early Cistercian isolation and austerity, but such impressions are usually totally false. In fact, few Cistercian sites in southern France or anywhere else were ever more than superficially the “deserts” of which Bernard and his companions dreamed.

Moreover, although historians of monastic architecture have known for decades that there is considerable diversity in detail even in those Cistercian churches most often cited as being identical, nonspecialists to architectural history continue to see evidence of Cistercian unanimity in what they perceive as the “nearly identical” early Cistercian churches found in regions like southern France.⁹⁵ Closer examination, however, contradicts assertions of any identity in plan, construction methods, or austerity in southern French Cistercian architecture. Like any other medieval construction, that associated with the Cistercians throughout Europe was influenced by climate, available materials and local building techniques, changes in secular style, and available funds. Yet advocates of Cistercian mythology assert that Cistercian churches in their pristine simplicity reflect the spirituality of early Cistercians, whose unanimous brotherhood of Burgundy’s colonizing monks conformed to a single model of monastic practice, even for the construction of their buildings. They also use such notions of a purported universal Cistercian architecture to argue that communities that do not conform to such architectural prejudices, like that of Valmagne with its thirteenth-century cathedral-Gothic church discussed in Chapter 4, could not possibly be Cistercian — because Cistercians did not build cathedral-Gothic.⁹⁶

Favored examples, such as the “three sisters of Provence,” the Cistercian churches of le Thoronet, Sénanque, and Silvacane, when examined in depth, do not provide the much-vaunted evidence of unanimity of early Cistercian architectural style that they are said to display. A survey of the plans of these three churches may demonstrate this point. Although all three churches have similar cruciform plans with simple east ends, in other details, even in the plans

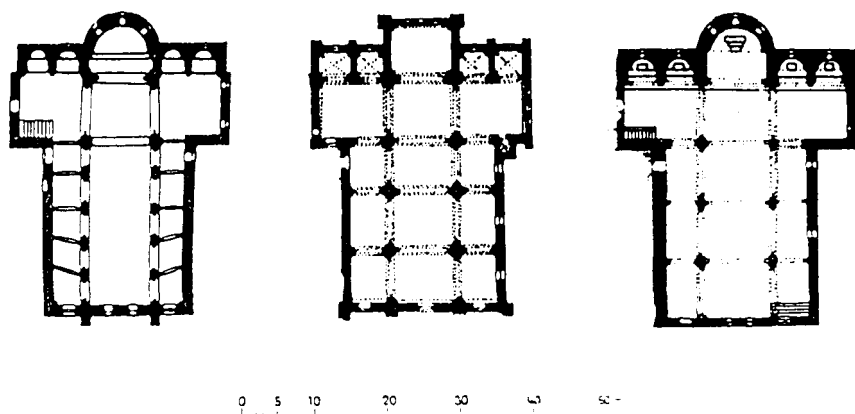


Figure 2. Plans of the Cistercian churches for monks at Sénanque, Silvacane, and le Thoronet. (Berman, after Dimier).

of these churches (see Figure 2), there is sufficient diversity to belie any claims about monolithic organization and uniform architecture among such houses. Of these three, only Sénanque (see Figure 3), had an octagonal crossing tower, for instance. Le Thoronet and Sénanque both have two chapels built on each side of a rounded main apse (see Figure 4), but those apsidal chapels are so tiny that they are built into the interior of a flat wall. Silvacane in contrast has a square apse and very obvious side chapels.

Aisles also vary. Le Thoronet has aisles with quarter-round barrel vaults that allow a thin arcade wall between nave and aisle; these had to be supported by thick exterior walls. At Sénanque and Silvacane, the aisle vaults were stilted three-eighth round vaults. Silvacane has complex piers supporting a thinner wall. Silvacane and le Thoronet have definite bays in nave and aisles. Sénanque did not, but at Sénanque the arcade wall was so thick that its pier-supports appear as deep as they are wide; see Figures 4 and 5 for Sénanque.

Light at the east ends of all these churches was the more striking because of the lack of side lighting, but solutions differed as to how the fenestration at each of them was organized. Le Thoronet has only three aisle windows and was dark, but, as we see from Figure 5, Sénanque had light from the crossing tower as well as clerestory window openings necessitating the use of exterior applied buttresses and heavy piers for support.⁹⁷

The argument that these three churches should exhibit any unanimity in their construction becomes totally absurd if we consider their early history. They were all, in fact, incorporated houses, created at different times, occupy-



Figure 3. Cistercian church for monks at Sénanque, exterior. (Friedman)

ing different places even on the filiation trees from the thirteenth century, and having in common not much more than the fragmentary nature of their early documentation and their survival in relatively close proximity in Provence.

Art historians working on these churches have tended to project patronage relationships of the thirteenth century back onto the twelfth. Thus the church of Silvacane in the diocese of Aix-en-Provence is sometimes said to have been built between 1175 and 1230 by the lords of les Baux.⁹⁸ Although thirteenth-century documents may address the lords of les Baux as founders, this was an honorific granted to allow them burial rights there. Attributions of a date for this church to 1147, moreover, confuse the purported date at which Cistercian practices are first found for this house with that of its construction.⁹⁹

Silvacane appears in fact to have originated a century earlier, when (in 1048) it was a cell belonging to the abbey of Saint-Victor of Marseilles; attachment to the Cistercians is only demonstrated from the 1190s.¹⁰⁰ Silvacane did have a daughter-house for monks founded at Valsainte in the diocese of Apt; it was probably founded under pressure from the lords of Forqualquier about 1188, perhaps at about the same time both became Cistercian.¹⁰¹ Similarly, both le Thoronet and Sénanque were houses founded before Cistercian affiliation and were totally independent of each other at the outset. They were only



Figure 4. Sénanque, nave looking east. (Friedman)

later attached to the Cistercian practices by way of the hermits of Mazan and the filiation of Bonnevaux, an affiliation that may have taken place in the 1160s or later. The two houses were not necessarily affiliated simultaneously.

Inferences about the architecture of all three churches, moreover, are based on misdating of Cistercian statutes about architecture to 1134 and 1152. In fact the dates of both the statutes and the construction of these churches need reexamination.

That conflicts rather than ties among these houses were more common in the Middle Ages is suggested by a document drawn up in 1193 to settle a controversy between Silvacane and Sénanque over granges, a document from which much of our early information about both is derived.¹⁰² For Silvacane this document may be much closer to the time of its attachment to the Cistercians than was once thought. Silvacane seems to have been particularly recalcitrant in face of efforts to enforce unanimity by the early Order. Complaints about discipline at Silvacane were made to the General Chapter in 1236, and again in the 1280s Silvacane's monks and conversi were said to be wearing black habits in contradiction to the Order's regulations.¹⁰³

Cistercians and other new reformers of the twelfth century built their first churches in wood and then replaced those cruciform churches built on a series

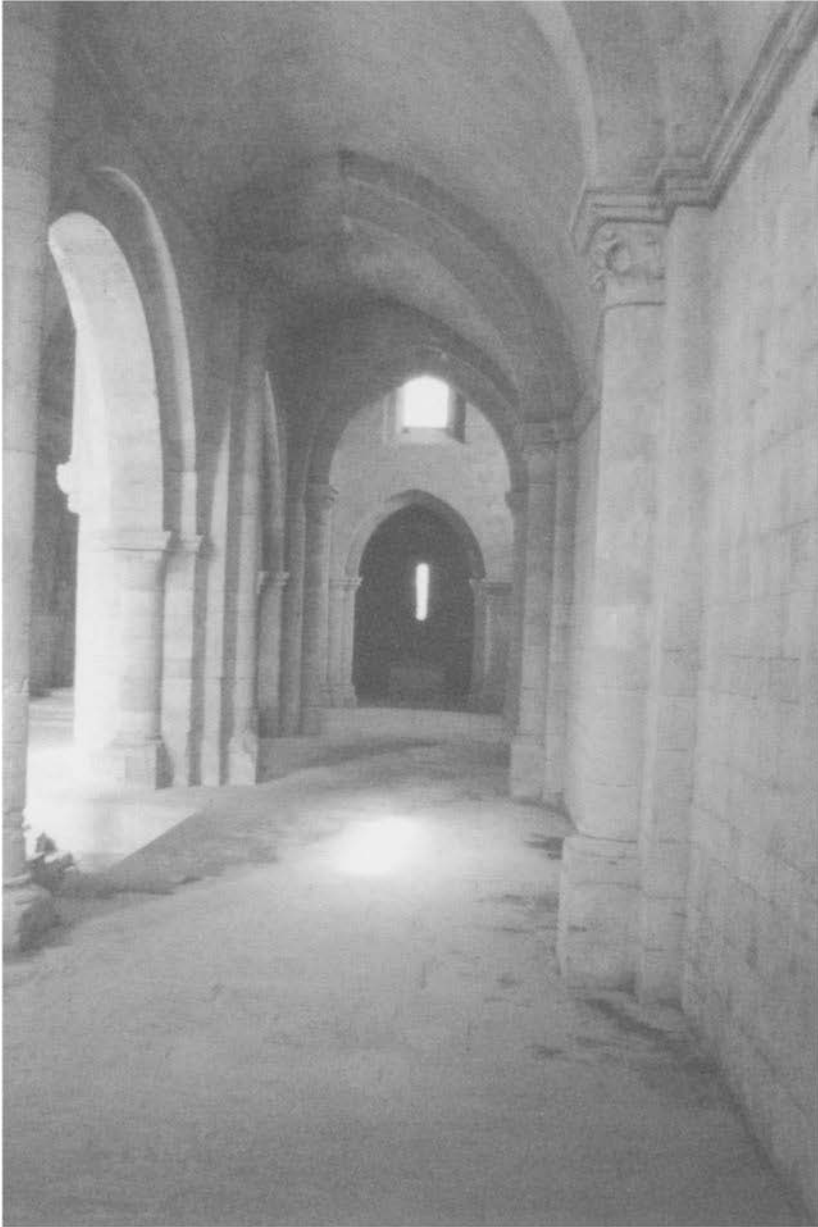


Figure 5. Sénanque, south aisle. (Friedman)

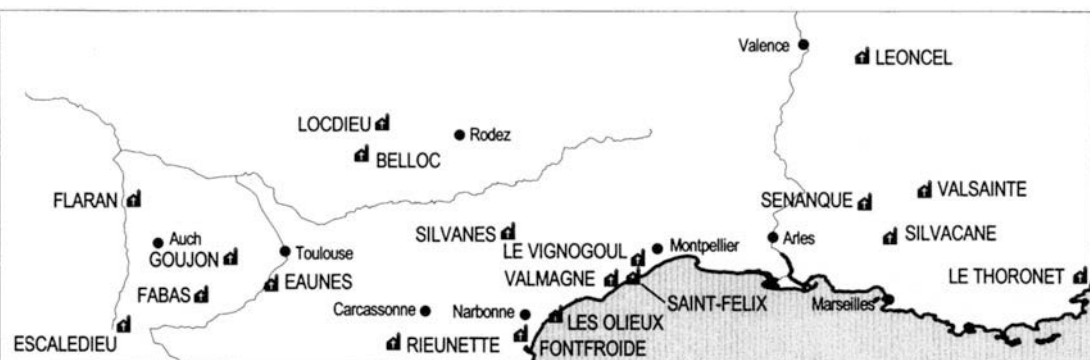


Figure 6. Locations of southern-French Cistercian abbeys and architectural remains.

of easily reproducible rectangular modules; similar churches were later constructed of stone using local construction practices. That Cistercian churches appear somewhat similar in type may be the result of retaining long-used building types that were limited by the wooden parts originally employed. But abundant remains of twelfth- and even thirteenth-century architecture for Cistercians in southern France (see Figure 6) are more a witness to the poverty of monastic communities in that region than anything else. If twelfth- and thirteenth-century churches and buildings are still standing, it is because communities were too poor to have replaced them later. Similarly, poverty is the primary explanation for the austere churches constructed for Cistercian women in this region.

Specialists on Cistercian architecture would probably now suggest that the special qualities distinguishing such Cistercian architecture from that of other twelfth-century buildings are its old-fashioned or conservative elements. These twelfth-century Cistercian churches look austere and similar primarily in comparison to newer building types being constructed in the more fashionable cathedral-Gothic style. What really determined the austerity of a Cistercian church was in general not the dictates of style but lack of wealth, for no poor house could update its architecture in later centuries.

But austerity in style and lack of substance are not always correlated in Cistercian building, because wealthy communities could also build and keep churches in an austere style. What at first glance seems a poor and isolated church may have only been disguising its assets. Nowhere is this more true than at Fontfroide, where differences between the monastic architecture in its austere setting and the realities of Cistercian wealth are extreme.¹⁰⁴

The desolation of the site and monastic complex of the abbey for monks

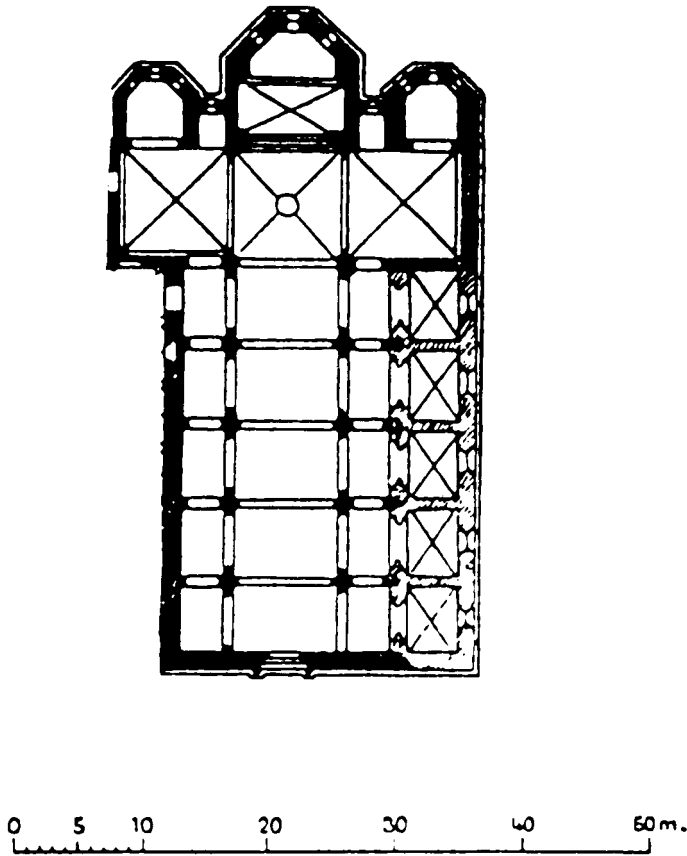


Figure 7. Plan of Cistercian church for monks at Fontfroide.

at Fontfroide (see Figures 7 and 8), located in a valley near Narbonne that is surrounded on three sides by the rugged garrigues, makes it a striking oasis of monastic solitude. Whether in the bright, blinding southern light or on a windy, rainy day, Fontfroide's church and site appear on first inspection to epitomize the "Cistercian spirit" of poverty, isolation, and rough simplicity. Much of the simplicity of Fontfroide's church and monastic buildings is deceptive. They are neither small nor humble.

The church of Fontfroide with its flat east end may look from its plan (see Figure 7) like a modest early Cistercian church. But that east wall with polygonal apse and round windows has five-sided chapels on each side and contains a complex tracery window of Gothic design higher on the end wall; see Figure 8. Fontfroide's church is not Gothic in a classic sense, having its height supported



Figure 8. Fontfroide church and abbey from garrigues to the east.

primarily by thick walls and applied buttresses. These contribute to the austere effect, but the church is both longer and much higher than it appears at first. The three-quarter vaults with pointed ribs of its north aisles rise to fourteen meters; these are heights found only at the center of the nave in other Cistercian churches in the region. Austere too is the effect of its having (like other churches in the Midi) flat roofs, although these are topped by an octagonal crossing tower and another bell tower; see Figure 9. Fontfroide's cloister is on the north side of the church for protection from the heat. Ornate elements of the arcade and columns of the cloister (seen in Figures 9 and 10) are usually explained as deriving from Fontfroide's pre-Cistercian past. Certainly the cloister's architecture is difficult to categorize, possibly because of the incorporation of materials such as capitals (see Figure 10) from earlier buildings.

Fontfroide was clearly an early incorporated house that was at first very poor. Its obscurity in the early twelfth century is confirmed by the fact that, when Bernard of Clairvaux came to Toulouse and began the process that ended in Grandselve's becoming a daughter-house of Clairvaux, Fontfroide was a mere annex to Grandselve. Yet from such obscurity Fontfroide rose to become one of the most powerful Cistercian monasteries in the Mediterranean region.¹⁰⁵ Fontfroide's monks, abbots, and lay-brothers were far from poor or powerless. The abbey site was not as isolated or uncomfortable as has

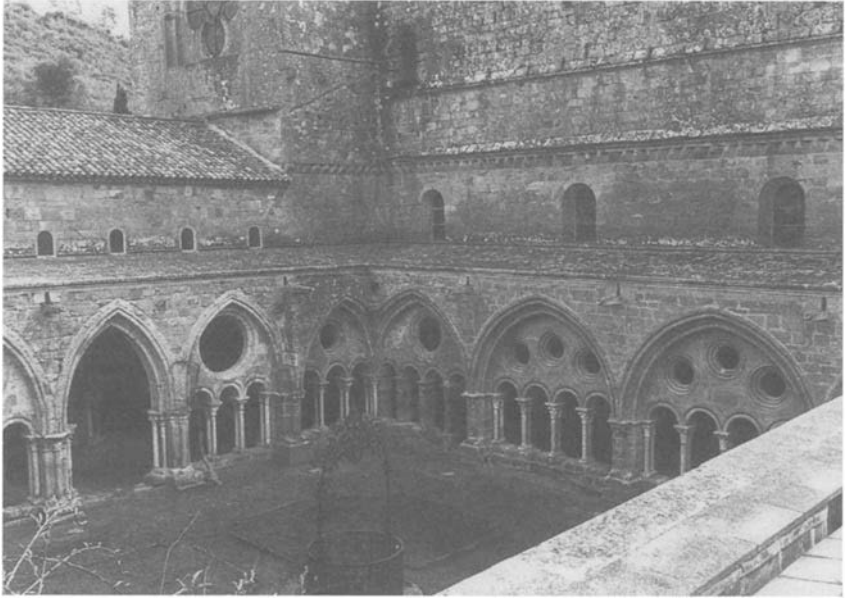


Figure 9. Fontfroide, cloister from northwest roof.

been contended; it was in fact protected from the diseases associated with the coastal swamps and its monks had adequate water for milling. The valley was the hub of a huge monastic estate surrounded by numerous granges, as seen in any map of its possessions; see Chapter 3, Figure 32. Fontfroide's massive monastic complex was built with a late twelfth-century confidence that the space would be needed for large numbers of monks and conversi. Whatever poverty Fontfroide may have experienced before the mid-twelfth century had disappeared in a managerial explosion of the second half of the century. Its buildings must be read as evidence not of poverty, but of the enormous wealth Fontfroide had acquired after it had adopted Cistercian practices, as is argued further in other parts of this book.

More austere in fact were the church and site of another independently founded, probably originally eremitical community in the diocese of Mague-lonne. This community became a house for Cistercian nuns, the abbey at Saint-Félix-de-Montseau. Located near Gigean, the abbey sits like a fortress on an outcropping in the garrigues looking south toward the Mediterranean; see Figure 11. There are remains of two successive churches at this site. The earlier stone church may be a reflection of still earlier reform churches of the eleventh or twelfth century. Such churches were usually built in wood; here on the



Figure 10. Fontfroide, cloister capitals.

rocky outcropping where it was sited, wood, not stone, was the scarce commodity; see Figure 12. The tiny original church of Saint-Félix measured only four by eight meters; it was built directly on the rock; see Figures 12 and 13. That tiny edifice was later incorporated as a passageway from the nuns' courtyard into the second church. The northern wall was extended and incorporated into the southern wall of the new church; see Figure 13.

The newer, twelfth-century church at Saint-Félix was much larger, measuring 8 meters by 24.5 meters. It was not excessively elaborate but resembles other churches for Cistercian women in this region. Its single nave of three rib-vaulted bays and choir has ribs extending upward from corbels halfway up the walls; see Figure 14. Narrow lancet windows in its side walls and a polygonal apse with three double lancets and quatrefoil *oculi* oppose a moderate rose window on its west wall. Access for the priest or public from outside the cloister was by a north portal, which has a plain tympanum, rolled arches, and simple colonettes.¹⁰⁶

Saint-Félix was a priory associated with Cistercian practices probably from 1167. Marthe Moreau has suggested that it was founded certainly before 1104 and possibly even before 1053. It was elevated to abbey status only in 1252, when Innocent IV moved its nuns from their obedience to the local



Figure 11. Church for Cistercian nuns at Saint-Félix, exterior from north.

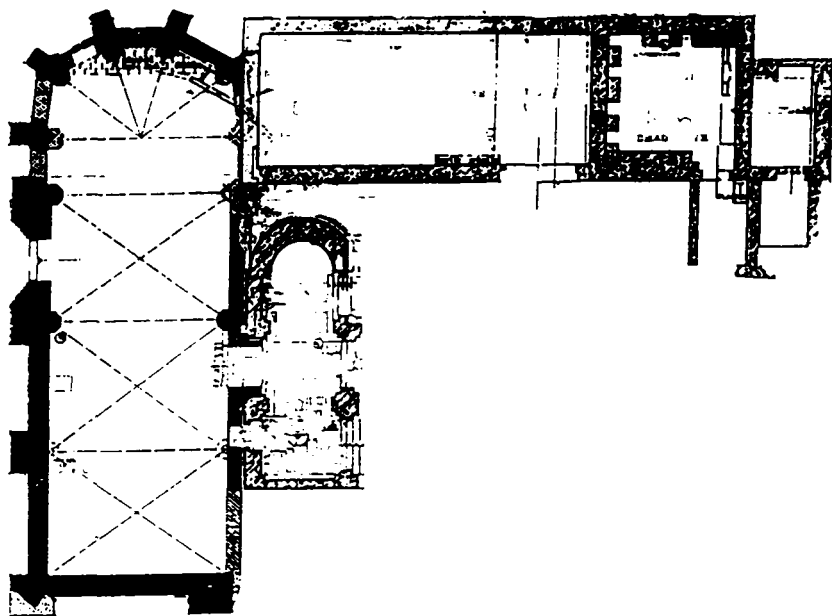


Figure 12. Plan of Saint-Félix.



Figure 13. Saint-Félix, southern portal and earlier church.

bishop to visitation by Valmagne. That pope's insistence on such regularization for many houses of Cistercian nuns suggests that the move had little to do with specific conditions at Saint-Félix. In any case, the nuns of Saint-Félix successfully left the Cistercian Order in 1332, presumably disaffected with the increasingly hostile attitudes of the Cistercian General Chapter to the Order's women.¹⁰⁷ We know nothing of the abbey's granges or properties and have only the remains of church and monastic buildings, and lists of prioresses and abbesses from the *Gallia Christiana*, to suggest, nonetheless, a community of women with wealth enough to build a larger second church to replace their smaller one, frugality enough to incorporate the older structure into a newer monastic complex, and a community of sufficient size to need more space.¹⁰⁸

Such treatment of Saint-Félix as a twelfth-century house of Cistercian women requires an answer to the frequently heard question, "But were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?" While architectural historians have been unusual in their ability simply to study the remains of Cistercian women's houses without getting involved in such debate, even some of these historians have occasionally used the powerful image of an early Cistercian Order without women to argue that such stunning architectural remains as those for le Vignogoul (see the frontispiece and discussion in Chapter 4) were construc-

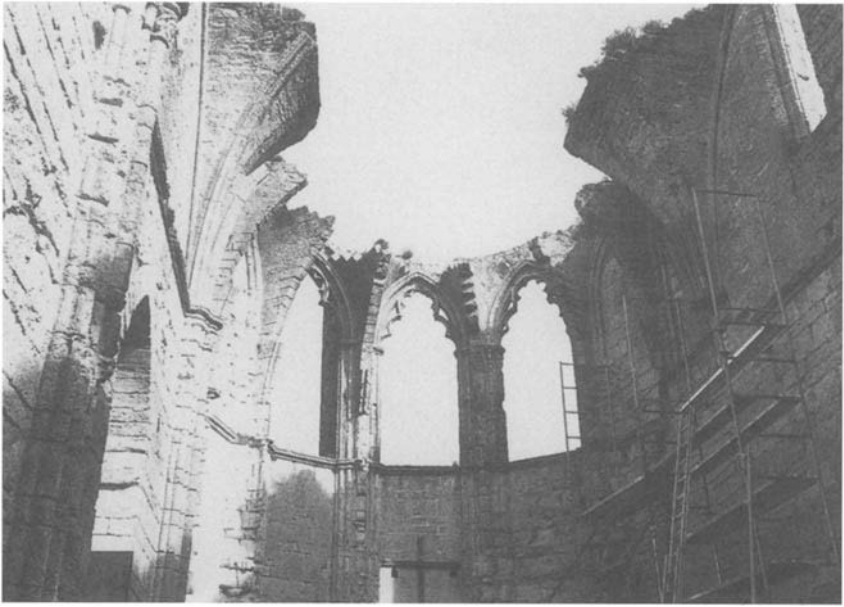


Figure 14. Saint-Félix, nave.

tions based on mere imitation of the Cistercians. Yet often such buildings in southern France are the strongest evidence for the very existence of such communities of early Cistercian nuns whose archives are often in disarray, if documents have survived at all. Several houses for nuns in the twelfth-century Midi are documented almost only by the remains of their churches. Thus in the diocese of Comminges a house of nuns reputed to have been associated with le Tart in Burgundy was founded at Fabas or Lumen-Dei in 1145. It would in turn found a community of nuns at Oraison-Dieu near Muret in 1167. The abbey of Fabas is also associated with other houses of women, including fourteenth-century foundations at Saint-Sigismond and Salenques, although Salenques is sometimes attributed to Beaulieu-en-Mirepoix.¹⁰⁹ Remains of a church built in the thirteenth century can be seen at Fabas on the boundary of the Ariège; see Figures 15 and 16. The building is now used as a barn; although the current owners acknowledge that their house was the convent, they assert that the abbey church was a quarter mile away.¹¹⁰

Similarly, not far east of Gimont another women's abbey was reportedly founded between 1135 and 1148 at Goujon on the edge of the diocese of Toulouse between Gimont and Muret. It was elevated from priory status to an



Figure 15. Church for Cistercian nuns at Fabas, exterior, portal.



Figure 16. Fabas, exterior, north side.



Figure 17. Church for Cistercian nuns at Goujon, exterior, portal.



Figure 18. Goujon, exterior, north side.

abbey in 1178, and it may have founded a bastide in the thirteenth century.¹¹¹ One can locate the church at Goujon (see Figure 17) because the abbey's valley site is marked on maps today by references to the forest of Goujon. This church too has now become a barn. Details of Gothic portals and windows are still readily apparent in its brick walls, even where they are shored up with rubble; see Figure 18. Other examples of such architectural remains of women's houses may be cited; they include those at les Olieux (Figures 33 and 34) and le Vignogoul (Figures 43–46), both discussed in later chapters.

The Illusion of an Order Without Women

Were there Cistercian women in the twelfth century?¹¹² The archaeological record preserves evidence of houses of Cistercian nuns in the Middle Ages, and documents suggest that they were there from as early as there was an Order.

In Burgundy, starting with the foundation at le Tart by Stephen Harding in the 1120s, and probably even earlier for nuns at Jully who had been associated with Molesme from 1113 or so and had been encouraged by Bernard of Clairvaux, nuns looked like and thought of themselves as part of the Cistercian reform movement.¹¹³ In other parts of Europe, houses of nuns were also an important part of the monastic reforms of the early twelfth century, including that which would become the Cistercian Order. Sometimes such houses of nuns became Cistercian when the earlier congregation to which they belonged decided to adopt Cistercian practices and gradually became affiliated with the Order. Others predate the houses of monks to which they would eventually become subject, particularly as part of the movement of double houses or family monasteries, from which derived so many houses of reformers, monks and nuns alike, in the twelfth century.¹¹⁴ Other houses of women were founded independently; they decided on their own to follow Cistercian practices, and they eventually became attached to the Order.

Although le Tart's daughters are often described as genuine foundations made by colonies of women sent out from Burgundy from 1120 onward, such references to colonization in groups of six or twelve nuns and an abbess may turn out to reflect the same mythology of apostolic gestation seen for Cistercian men and may be equally contrary to fact.¹¹⁵ Certainly many houses among the so-called daughters of le Tart in southern France—Fabas in the Ariège and Rieunette in Languedoc, for instance, or the nunnery at Marrenz or Marrenx said to have been founded in 1157 by Count Raymond V of Toulouse—were local independent foundations that were not made by colonization from Burgundy.¹¹⁶ Indeed, such houses of nuns thinking themselves Cistercian often had

their earliest ties to one another, like those between nuns at Bellecombe in the Auvergne and their daughters at the house of Nonenque in the Rouergue.¹¹⁷

Why have illusions been so pervasive of a Cistercian Order free of women, of a Golden Age before the deluge of women into the Order, of women eager to become Cistercians, working on the land as hard as the monks of Clairvaux, but said to “only imitate” Cistercian practices? Why has there been so much confusion about Cistercian nuns despite the considerable local administrative evidence and architectural remains that document their existence? Telling the story of these women within that of the Cistercians in southern France and beyond has necessitated confronting the Order’s myth of a Golden Age without nuns. Overturning arguments that before the introduction of a “female branch” there was no Cistercian decadence contributes to a better understanding of the history of the twelfth-century reform movement generally as well as of the history of Cistercian women.

Assertions that there were no Cistercian women are possibly based on the increasing misogyny within the religious orders of the later Middle Ages, misogyny that takes a definite upward turn in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, as discussed below. But these assertions are also supported by a false image of a Cistercian Order of great uniformity closely controlled by a General Chapter that from the early twelfth century could have decided to exclude women. This excessively juridical definition of Cistercians has begun to be challenged by some of the foremost historians of the Cistercians themselves. Thus, toward the end of his life, Father Jean Leclercq would suggest:

If we consider the definition of Cistercian not in a juridical way, but as a way of life, then the women inspired by Bernard at Jully, or those fostered by Stephen Harding at le Tart, were Cistercians just as much as were the men at Cîteaux or Pontigny or Poblet.¹¹⁸

Such reevaluations of the role of women within the movement that eventually became the Cistercian Order reveal much about the diversity of religious practice out of which the early Cistercians developed as well as the slowness with which they coalesced into an Order.

Maintaining a “no women” myth has led to increasingly tortuous explanations of the entire history of the early Cistercians.¹¹⁹ Indeed, not only is there considerable evidence of women’s houses participating in the Order from its creation, but evidence is also being uncovered that many of the Order’s earliest houses derived from double communities consisting of both religious women and religious men, such as that at Obazine and Coyroux.¹²⁰ In these double houses the religious women may have originally had the leading role, as seems to have been the case at Nonenque and Silvanès, as discussed in Chapter 4. A revised reading of the history of such early Cistercian

women, like that of Cistercian sites and architecture or of the early *exordia* accounts themselves, demonstrates the flaws in traditional myths of early Cistercian unanimity, apostolic gestation, or single-gendered (masculine) monasteries “far from cities, castles, and human habitations.”

Yet historians of the Cistercians have been able to argue successfully for only limited participation by women within the early Cistercian Order. Recent denials that there were twelfth-century Cistercian women may be traced to the 1935 thesis by Herbert Grundmann in which he had concluded (quite wrongly, as it turns out) that Cistercian women’s houses date only to the thirteenth century.¹²¹ Although Grundmann’s treatment of religious women is usually deemed enlightened (he wrote when much women’s history was simply ignored), he followed traditional explanations in his erroneous contentions about Cistercian women. He did so in part because of his reliance on local documentation coming almost entirely from German and eastern-European areas — where the Cistercians often had arrived relatively late — but his conclusions about Cistercian women upheld as well a schematization of the history of religious reform that supported his theories about heresy and mysticism. Thus, in Grundmann’s thinking, the twelfth century was characterized by women’s participation in heretical groups or their entry into women’s religious houses that were part of double monasteries founded by Robert of Arbrissel at Fontevrault, Norbert of Xanten at Prémontré, and Gilbert at Sempringham.¹²² Grundmann also saw the decisions of the early thirteenth-century Dominicans and Franciscans (and, in his view, Cistercians) to found women’s abbeys as constituting a direct response to the threat of heresy and necessitated by that threat.¹²³ Although this may have been the case, that view does not preclude the existence of twelfth-century houses for Cistercian nuns.

Grundmann’s comments on Cistercian women directly influenced the work of Ernst Krenig, whose dissertation on Cistercian nuns appeared in 1954 and soon stood as the official treatment.¹²⁴ Krenig employed Grundmann’s description of the eventual admission of nuns into the Cistercian Order, one that presents monastic women in an extremely negative way. Nuns are described as “an overwhelming flood which the Order was unable to stem,” and the “admission” of such women is presented as “forced on” the Order’s reluctant abbots. Moreover, the Order’s growing decadence is related to this addition of women.¹²⁵ Such a view ignores the considerable local evidence for the foundation of individual abbeys of women even before there was an Order — houses of nuns eventually recognized as Cistercian. The official denial that there were Cistercian women in the twelfth-century Order, moreover, has often caused historians to date the affiliation of individual houses of Cistercian nuns to the thirteenth century and deny the significance of twelfth-century evi-

dence for such communities. This was particularly so if those twelfth-century houses of women were called priories rather than abbeys; in fact, twelfth-century priories of Cistercian nuns often existed.¹²⁶

New evidence for twelfth-century nuns at le Tart, which was presented in France at the time of the 1953 celebrations of the octocentenary of Bernard's death, appeared just before the publication of Krenig's work.¹²⁷ Krenig incorporated it as evidence of an *imitatio cisterciensis* by women "wearing the habit of the Order and following the practices of the brothers at Cîteaux, but not officially part of the Order and not entitled to its privileges."¹²⁸ This notion of women "only imitating" the Cistercian Order, which Krenig borrowed from earlier studies, has enabled traditional histories to dismiss evidence found in local administrative records for such houses of Cistercian nuns. Even when women's participation in the Order has been acknowledged, it has been qualified by assertions based on references to Grundmann and Krenig. By treating every case as the sole exception to a more general rule, women's presence was denied or treated as aberrant.¹²⁹

Such treatment of twelfth-century and later Cistercian women as "only imitating" the Order's practice generalizes from the example of the recluse, Yvette of Huy, who may have lived in *imitatione cisterciensi* as an anchoress.¹³⁰ But this makes an aberrant case into the rule. Yvette was clearly exceptional; most Cistercian nuns lived in communities thinking of themselves as Cistercian, following Cistercian practices, arguing for a share in the privileges of the Order (such as its tithe exemption), and seeking papal confirmation of such privileges.¹³¹ Indeed, historians have often failed to notice that the wording found in papal confirmations of Cistercian practices by women's houses like le Tart—that they "followed the Rule of Saint Benedict and the customs of Cîteaux" (wording that when applied to nuns is used to argue that they were "imitation Cistercians")—is the same language used in twelfth-century confirmations for houses of monks as part of the Cistercian Order.¹³²

In the face of such ideologies denying the existence of early Cistercian nuns, historians of women at first responded to such misconceptions by proposing that there were several stages in the early Order's treatment of women: at first totally ignoring them, then allowing women on a limited basis in the early thirteenth century, but soon attempting to exclude them again. These views, formulated primarily by Brigitte Degler-Spengler and deriving from her work on the houses of nuns in what is today Switzerland, see a brief moment between 1190 and 1250 when there were Cistercian nuns.¹³³ But in this perspective the brief stage of tolerance for women was already nearing an end in 1228 when the General Chapter tried to discourage abbots from further incorporations of nuns. Incorporation at that time occurred because these

religious women, with the help of patrons and popes, successfully pressured the Cistercian Order's General Chapter for incorporation of women's houses. Indeed, the presence of Blanche of Castile in France from 1200 to her death in 1252, as wife of a future king, queen, and queen-regent, may have been instrumental in forcing official support of Cistercian nuns at the General Chapter. Agreements in 1251 that papal recommendations of houses of nuns to the Order would be limited henceforth may mark the end of an era of support, but they are not evidence that the Order's incorporation of new houses of nuns had ceased. In fact, the addition of women's communities after that date slowed but did not halt.¹³⁴

In Degler-Spengler's view and those of many before her, houses of Cistercian nuns appeared only after there was an official procedure for their incorporation established by the express decision of abbots in General Chapters. She extracted from the thirteenth-century *Statuta* a list of criteria for identifying "authentically incorporated" houses of Cistercian nuns. These included notices of incorporation in the Order's *Statuta* or of inspection of resources by commissioned abbots, papal recommendations, documents mentioning the *ordo cisterciensis*, and concessions of freedom from episcopal visitation.¹³⁵ Obviously such criteria are increasingly valid ones for identifying any house, whether of monks or of nuns, added to the Order after 1190 or so. Nonetheless, given the frequent lacunae in the documents even for the thirteenth century and particularly for women's houses, the absence of such proofs means nothing. Moreover, such criteria cannot be applied to either men's or women's houses in the twelfth century, because for most of the century a fully functioning Order did not yet exist, as the next chapters of this study will argue.

But was it in any case a question of women forcing themselves on the Order? In grappling with such views of a limited admission of nuns to an Order controlled by men who did not want them, we tend to view abbots within the Cistercian Order as struggling to maintain their monastic solitude by denying or carefully controlling the incorporation of women. Yet local evidence suggests that it was sometimes the nuns themselves who actively opposed being incorporated into the Order, particularly if such incorporation would lead to their dependence on father-visitors who were the abbots of neighboring abbeys of monks, their natural rivals for property and patronage.¹³⁶ Such houses of nuns may have preferred adopting Cistercian practices informally and maintaining the practice of visitation by the bishops who had often founded their communities.¹³⁷

Certainly some abbots' willingness to "accommodate" such pious women stemmed not from a generosity of spirit but from the temptations presented by the property belonging to those religious women. We see this, for instance, in

the abbot of Staffarda's attempts to acquire property from the nuns at its daughter-houses of Rifreddo in late thirteenth-century Italy, and other such examples may also be cited.¹³⁸ Finally, even if women's houses had been attracted to Cistercian practices in the twelfth century, the growth of a more uniform Order would not necessarily have encouraged them to continue to seek such affiliation. Thirteenth-century Cistercian statutes about women's communities suggest increasingly harsh and inequitable treatment of the Order's nuns.¹³⁹ The only possibly favorable legislation declared that members of men's houses were not to demand hospitality from women's communities. (On the other hand, lay-brothers and chaplains attached to nuns' communities and who took vows directly from abbesses could still request hospitality at men's houses when they traveled.)¹⁴⁰ Otherwise, stern legislation mandated that nuns were to be strictly enclosed and sufficiently endowed so as not to prove a burden on neighboring men's houses. The numbers of women in these communities of nuns were to be carefully controlled. Internal visitation would only be by father-abbots, not by founding abbesses as well. Neighboring abbeys of Cistercian monks should not be required to provide chaplains or lay-brothers to the nuns, although they might choose to do so. Abbesses were not to attend the General Chapter at Cîteaux but were allowed an annual meeting at le Tart presided over by the abbot of Cîteaux. He would announce to the assembled abbesses decisions made by the General Chapter of abbots that had just met, but nuns were apparently allowed no legislative capacity. Indeed, the le Tart assembly would be disbanded by the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁴¹

The long denial of the presence of women in the twelfth-century reform movement that became the Cistercian Order, along with a tendency by other groups to cut off or limit acknowledgment of women's participation, both seem to date from the third quarter of the twelfth century, a fact deserving additional attention from historians of medieval religion. What happened in the 1160s and 1170s that made Cistercian abbots, and those of other groups as well, so anxious to distance themselves from women? Much of the documentation is not yet in. We cannot yet even count the number of women's religious houses in Europe, and guesses based on published materials from their archives are often wholly incorrect, for there is much evidence yet to be uncovered. Local archival depositories, from which all the materials on men's houses have long been available, can often not provide access to materials on religious women who would now be called Cistercian nuns. Those materials have not yet been organized and catalogued, in part because of what has remained an ambiguous status for such women's reform communities. We are finding evidence as well for many more ephemeral communities of these religious women in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries than was believed

possible only a few years ago. The existence of these nursing and caregiving sisters is only now beginning to be noted because it occurs in peripheral references to such women in documents preserved for other branches of the Church.¹⁴² Getting right the sequencing of Cistercian texts and the dating the Order's invention to the third quarter of the twelfth century, and disabusing monastic historians of their notions that there were no Cistercian nuns, will facilitate additional research on religious women, those who were part of the movement that became the Cistercian Order and those much more ephemeral women of communities of sisters that derived from similar circumstances.