

Examination Sources

RLBcB547 Monasticism beyond the monastery: religious life and society in the medieval West

Instructions:

In the examination period, you will give a short oral/visual presentation in English (around 10 minutes, maximum 15 mins) on two historical sources that tell us something about the relationship between monasticism and medieval society. Your presentation will be followed by a short (c. 10 minute) period for questions on and connected to what you have presented.

You will pick these sources from a selection provided in English translation within this document. While different from the sources we discussed in class, they all closely connected to the lectures/powerpoints and things we have discussed already.

Due to ongoing restriction on contact teaching / examination, you will give these presentations in a Microsoft Teams session.

Marking criteria:

- 1) **showing a good understanding of the context of the sources.** Each source comes with a short Background section to help you with the basic details of who the authors were, when they lived, the type of document, etc. The aim here is not simply to repeat this information, but to expand on it, using knowledge you have learnt in the course. E.g. showing clear knowledge of the monastic group/s the author and source are related to, the environment in which the authors lived, the genre of the source (e.g. a “rule”, a “saint’s life” etc.), and the broader historical context of place and time.
- 2) **accurately explaining the content of the sources.** The aim here is not simply to repeat what the source says explicitly, but to show that you understand the meaning of the words. This is fundamentally about showing good understanding of the medieval terms and ideas we have discussed in class and which also occur in your chosen sources. Try to analyse what the most important words and sentences are, and “zoom in” on them in your presentations
- 3) **analysing what these sources tell us about the interactions between monasticism and medieval society.** This is builds on 1) and 2): if you understand the context of a source and the content of a source, you can begin to use it to tell us something about the past. In doing so, however, your focus should be not only on what is going on in monasteries or in the outside world, but on how monasticism and wider society gave to, took from, and reacted to each other. The nature of this interactivity could be material (e.g. resources), social (e.g. doing things for people), or cultural (e.g. ideas, beliefs) – or indeed a combination of these things! A source doesn’t have to show an explicit interaction between a monk/nun and an outsider for the traces of such interactions to be present – and even where there is such an explicit interaction, you should still think about what it suggests on a broader, societal level
- 4) **comparing and contrasting the two sources and what they tell us about the relationship between monasticism and medieval society.** This part involves comparison of 1) context and 2) content of the sources, but most importantly, 3) what they tell us about the relationship

between monasticism and medieval society. There are many ways to approach such comparisons. For instance, you could pick two sources from different times and places, and discuss what you think is different or similar / what has changed or lasted in the interaction between monasticism and society. Or you could pick two sources from a similar time and use them to show the diversity of interactions and reactions between monasticism and society that could occur within similar contexts. Also, it is not necessary to compare every aspect of the sources - some aspects may not be that comparable! Rather, it is better to focus on those interesting comparisons that really tell us something about the relationship between monasticism and society

Further guidance:

- Be creative! Don't be afraid to suggest or argue something even if you have not heard it in class or read it in your reading. Provided that you draw your ideas from a deep reading of the sources and show a good understanding of the broad historical context around them, there are no "wrong" answers and lots of things are possible. Showing independent thought will be rewarded.
- Exploration of the views of historians might sometimes be helpful, but it is not the fundamental aim of the task. I recommend using the reading lists in the Powerpoints if you want to gain further context around a topic and period. Googling topics or the names of the sources themselves will also potentially allow you to find articles by other historians that help provide further context. And if you find that other views are relevant to your discussion of the sources, then you should cite them explicitly in your presentation (i.e. mention who said it and where). BUT: showing your own thoughtful reading interpretation of the sources is what gets the best marks, rather than citing other people. You should not obsess over what others have said: rather focus on showing me your own, well-grounded interpretations. Plagiarism must also of course also be avoided.
- Presentation style and tips: I leave the exact style of presentation open to you. You could prepare a simple oral speech concerning the sources, if this is most comfortable for you. A Powerpoint presentation is very helpful I think though: it allows you to show the sources on the screen, to highlight bits you find important, and to provide some key bullet points explaining your views that you can expand on when you speak. It also works completely naturally over Microsoft Teams, and it is a program you all have access to due to MUNI's Office 365 subscription.

Source 1: Lausiatic History (c. 419-20 AD), by Palladius of Galatia

Background

Palladius of Galatia (d. 420s AD)

- Bishop of Heliopolis in Asia Minor (from c. 400 AD until his death in the 420s AD)
- Became a monk in 386 AD or sometime after, travelling to Egypt to learn from ascetics there

Lausiatic History (c. 419-20 AD)

- Written for an urban, aristocratic audience in Constantinople
- It was requested by Lausus, chamberlain of the imperial court of the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II (reigned 402-450 AD)
- Describes Palladius's own experiences with the ascetics of, and above all, his conversations with those he learnt from
- Although originally written in Greek, it was probably first translated into Latin in the fifth century and became popular in Western monastic libraries.
- The following text concerns **Saint Ammonius** (or Amun), a well known late fourth century hermit.

Text

“This Ammonius, Pambo's disciple, with his three brothers and two sisters, having reached the perfection of the love of God, made their home in the desert, the women living separately by themselves, and the men by themselves, so as to have a sufficient distance between them. But since Ammonius was exceedingly learned and a certain city coveted him for its bishop, a deputation waited on the blessed Timothy, beseeching him to ordain him as their bishop. And he said to them: ‘Bring him to me and I will ordain him.’ When therefore they had gone with a force and he saw that he was caught, he besought them and swore that he would not accept ordination, nor depart from the desert. And they would not give way to him. So before their eyes he took scissors and cut off his left ear to the base, saying to them: ‘Well, be convinced now that it is impossible for me to be ordained, since the law forbids a man with ear cut off to be raised to the priesthood.’ [...] About this Ammonius the following marvellous story was also told. When desire arose in him, he never spared his poor body, but heating an iron in the fire he would apply it to his limbs, so that he became a mass of ulcers. His table from youth until death contained raw food only. For he never ate anything that had passed through the fire except bread. Having learned by heart the Old and New Testaments and (passages) in the writings of the famous [Christian] authors Origen, Didymus, Pierius and Stephen, he could repeat 6,000,000 (lines), as the fathers of the desert testify. He was a comforter to the brethren in the desert beyond all others. To him the blessed Evagrius, an inspired and discerning man, gave testimony, saying: ‘never have I seen a more unshakeable man than him.’”

Source 2: Sayings of the Desert Fathers (5th century AD), anonymous

Background

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (5th century AD)

- A selection of sayings and anecdotes that are attributed to a number of early Egyptian ascetics, primarily men, but also three women.
- These sayings and anecdotes were initially transmitted orally.
- Compiled in Greek sometime in the fifth century, and in Latin probably not long after.
- Another relatively common text in medieval monastic libraries: widely excerpted as well as transmitted as a single text.
- The following text is one of the anecdotes concerning **Poemon**, about whom few biographical details are known: it is sometimes theorised that there may have been more than one “Poemon”, or that he is a constructed, fictitious person (his name means “Shepherd” in Coptic language).
- The information in the *Sayings of the Fathers* appears to describe a man who had lived as a hermit, but who often had monks around him nearby whom he guided and led. This Poemon has more “sayings” in the compilation than another other monk.

Text:

“A brother said to Poemen, ‘If I give my brother something, for instance a piece of bread, the demons made the gift worthless by making me think that it was done to please men.’ The hermit said to him, ‘Even if it is done to please men, we still ought to give our brothers what they need.’ He told him this parable: ‘In a town there were two farmers. One of them sowed seed, and gathered a poor harvest; the other was idle and did not sow, and had no harvest to gather. If famine came, which of them would survive?’ The brother answered, ‘The one who sowed seed, even if the harvest was poor.’ He said, ‘It is the same for us. We sow a few seeds, and they are poor, but in the time of famine we shall not die.’”

Source 3: The Institutes (c. 420 AD), by John Cassian

Background

John Cassian (c.360 – c. 435 AD)

- Probably born in Eastern Europe. He was from a well educated background, and was fluent in both Greek and Latin.
- As a young adult, he went to the Holy Land, then to Egypt with his friend Germanus. They spent 25 years travelling together
- Eventually settled in Marseille, Southern Gaul, where he founded two monasteries.

The Institutes (c. 420 AD)

- This work is Cassian's description of how a coenobitic monastery should be run. It is based on his experiences in Egypt, where he visited monasteries as well as hermits, and spoke to many leading monks.
- It is a companion volume to his *Conferences*: the *Institutes* were a practical guide to monastic life; the *Conferences*, meanwhile, were an idealised write-up of the conversations he had with monks in Egypt, providing material for mental and spiritual reflection.
- It was written in Latin for the benefit of Gallic followers, at the request of Bishop Castor of Apt, who wished to found a monastery in Southern Gaul (modern day France).
- The text can be seen as an early monastic "Rule", even though Cassian did not give it this title at the time: it also certainly influenced Benedict of Nursia (d. 543), who drew on this and other sources when writing his rule.
- While not as common as his *Conferences*, the *Institutes* became well known in monastic manuscripts throughout the Latin West across the Middle Ages.
- The following text is taken from the chapter of the work that concerns the reception of new monks.

Text

“On admission [as a monk of the monastery], each person is stripped of all his former possessions, so that he is no longer allowed to keep even the clothes which he has on his back. Rather, with the brothers gathered around him, he is brought forward into their midst and stripped of his own clothes, and dressed by the Abbot's hands in the clothes of the monastery [i.e. monastic habit]. Through this, he will know not only that he has been removed from all his old things, but also that he has laid aside all worldly pride, and come down to the want and poverty of Christ. He will also know that he will no longer be supported by seeking wealth through the skills of the world, nor by anything reserved from his former state of unbelief, and that, rather, he will only receive rations from the holy and sacred funds of the monastery for his service. As he knows that he will, from then on, be clothed and fed and that he has nothing of his own, he can learn not to be anxious about the next day, according to the saying of the Gospel. And he will not be ashamed to be on the same level as the poor - that is to say, with the community of the brothers - with whom Christ was not ashamed to be numbered, and to call himself their brother. Rather he may glory that he has been made to share the lot of his own servants.”

Source 4: Rule of Saint Benedict (c. 516 AD) by Benedict of Nursia

Background

Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-550 AD)

- The son of a Roman noble from Nursia (modern day Norcia, Italy).
- According to his earliest biographer, pope **Gregory the Great** (reigned 590-604 AD), he was sent to receive a traditional Roman education, but became disillusioned with this and left Rome.
- On his way to the countryside near Subiaco (modern day Italy), he is said to have met a monk, Romanus, under whose influence and education Benedict became a hermit, living in a single cave for three years.
- Eventually leaving his seclusion, he founded monastic communities near Subiaco, and then – his major achievement – the monastery of Monte Cassino (famously destroyed in a WW2 battle!), which he led as abbot.

The Rule of Saint Benedict (c. 516 AD)

- Originally written in Latin for his monks at Monte Cassino in order to provide a standing set of instructions for the growing monastic community there.
- Benedict's *Rule* soon became influential outside of the house, where, alongside other "rules" it circulated and influenced the way of life at various monasteries
- Heavily promoted by the Carolingian Emperors from the early 9th century (e.g. at the Synods of Aachen, 816-819): despite some long-standing resistance, it would become increasingly well recognised as the standard rule for monasteries in their territories.
- The following text is taken from the 1st chapter of the work, in which Benedict defines the different types of monastic life he had heard about.

Text

There are clearly four kinds of monks. First, there are the cenobites, that is to say, those who belong to a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot. Second, there are the anchorites or hermits, who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time, and have passed beyond the first fervour of monastic life. Thanks to the help and guidance of many, they are now trained to fight against the devil. They have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert. Self-reliant now, without the support of another, they are ready with God's help to grapple single-handed with the vices of body and mind. Third, there are the "Sarabaites", the most detestable kind of monks, who with no experience to guide them, no rule to try them as gold is tried in a furnace (Prov 27:21), have a character as soft as lead. [...] Their law is what they like to do, whatever takes their fancy. Anything they believe in and choose, they call holy; anything they dislike, they consider forbidden. Fourth and finally, there are the monks called "Gyrovagues", who spend their entire lives drifting from region to region, staying as guests for three or four days in different monasteries. Always on the move, they never settle down, and are slaves to their own wills and gross appetites. In every way they are worse than the "Sarabaites".

Source 5: Rule of Donatus (first half of 7th century AD), by Donatus of Besancon

Background

Donatus of Besancon (d. after 658 AD)

- From a Frankish aristocratic background. He was the son of Duke Waldelenus (d. early 7th century AD), who had been a powerful figure in the court of Childebert II (reigned 575-595 AD), the Merovingian Frankish king of Austrasia (modern day Northern/Eastern France).
- His family were some of the earliest supporters of the Irish monk **Columbanus of Bangor** (c. 540-615 AD) in the region. As a result, Donatus was baptized by Columbanus and entered the monastery of Luxeuil that the latter had founded in c. 585-590 AD.
- At some point before 627 AD, he moved away from the monastery to become bishop of Besancon (Eastern France).
- He continued to promote monastic life and founded a monastery (the house of Saint-Paul) there. His widowed mother Flavia also founded a monastery in the area.

Rule of Donatus (first half of 7th century AD)

- Written in Latin for his mother's monastery near Besancon: this monastery mostly recruited women from noble/aristocratic backgrounds
- An influential rule beyond this house and copied fairly widely at the time. It is included in **Benedict of Aniane's** *Concord of Rules*, written to support the latter's reform work at the Synods of Aachen (816-819 AD).
- Its influence gradually faded as the *Rule of Saint Benedict* became increasingly standard in the Carolingian empire.
- The following text is taken from the introduction of the work, describing his reason for writing.

Text

“To the holy virgins of Christ whom I venerate most highly, Gauthstruda and all her flock, whom God's handmaid Flavia gathered into a community, greetings from Donatus, the least worthy of all the men and women serving God. Though I am eminently aware, most precious vessel of Christ, that you live in a regular fashion by certain norms, nevertheless you have wisely always asked how you might achieve still more. For this reason, you have often urged me that, having explored the rule of the holy Caesarius, bishop of Arles, which was especially devoted to Christ's virgins, along with those of the most blessed Benedict and the Abbot Columbanus, I might select their choicest “flowers”, gathering them, as I might say, into a bouquet or handbook, collecting and promulgating all that is proper for the special observance of the female sex. For you say that, since the rules of the aforesaid fathers were written for men and not for women, they are less suited to you. And though holy Caesarius dedicated his own rule to virgins of Christ, like yourselves, their enclosed life is not at all suitable to your circumstances. At last, after long and hard resistance, I am ready to do your will.”

Source 6: Grant of land for the foundation of a monastery (692 AD), by King Nothhelm of the South Saxons

Background

Nothhelm (d. early 8th century AD)

- A minor regional ruler of the South Saxons (in the area of Southern England now called Sussex), who reigned around the turn of the 8th century. He ruled alongside two other men, and they all appear to have been sub-kings of the more powerful Christian kings of Mercia (in central England). Little is known about his background or how he became a “king”.
- At the time of Nothhelm’s power, Christianity was still not well established in the area of Sussex and many pagans remained. In the 680s, Wilfred (c. 633 – 709 or 710 AD), who had been abbot of Ripon monastery (in Northumbria) and then bishop of York, established a bishop’s seat in the region and began to convert pagans.
- Nothhelm was Christian – or possibly became Christian under Wilfred’s influence – and was probably an important support of the missionary work in the region.

Grant of land for the foundation of a monastery (692 AD)

- One of the earliest surviving English charters (written in Latin) related to the founding of a monastery – albeit it is not clear what monastery emerged from his action!
- Charters of this sort were not widely copied, but were usually preserved and copied from time to time by those who needed them as proof of rights and possessions (i.e. the family of the granter, the recipients and their heirs).

Text

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour. I, Nothhelm, king of the South Saxons, for the relief of my soul, knowing that whatever I devote from my own possessions to the people of Christ will benefit me in the future, gladly give to you, my sister Nothgyth, some portion of land for the founding of a monastery on it and the building of a church which may be devoted to divine praises and honouring the saints [...] If anyone dare to diminish this donation to you, in anything great or small, let him know that he will incur the penalty for his presumption in the stern judgement of Almighty God.

[...]

I Nothgyth, servant of Christ, give this land [...] to the reverend bishop Wilfred, and, in the presence of God I offer myself as a nun to him [...]

Source 7: Boat Song (c. 7th-8th century AD?)

Background

Boat song (c. 7th-8th century AD?)

- This poem or song is known in just one early medieval manuscript, originally copied up in the Carolingian period, found now in Leiden, Netherlands. The poem itself has been attributed to an earlier time, however, and to **Columbanus of Bangor** (c. 540-615 AD), the Irish monk and saint who became famous for his activities on the continent.
- It is now believed more likely that it was written by an unidentified monk in the early Carolingian period (i.e. late 8th century AD). It has been suggested that this writer was perhaps named after the Irishman and that he was probably influenced by the Irish monastic style.
- The text (written in Latin) is thought to adapt a traditional sailing song of Germanic origin to a Christian monastic context.

Text

“Behold, little boat on the twin-horned Rhine, Cut from the forest to skim the brine, Heave, lads, and the echoes ring!

The winds howl, the storms dismay, But manly strength can win the day, Heave, lads, and let the echoes ring!

For clouds and storms will soon pass on, And victory will lie with work well done, Heave, lads, and let the echoes ring!

Hold fast! Survive! And all is well, God sent you worse, he’ll calm this swell, Heave, lads, and let the echoes ring!

So Satan acts to tire the brain, And by temptation souls are slain, Think, lads, of Christ and echo Him!

Stand firm in mind against Satan’s guile, Protect yourselves with virtues’ foil, Think, lads, of Christ and echo Him!

Strong faith and zeal will victory gain, The old foe breaks his lance in vain, Think, lads, of Christ and echo Him!

The King of virtues vowed a prize, For him who wins, for him who tries, Think, lads, of Christ and echo Him!”

Source 8: Life of Saint Cuthbert (c. 700 AD) by Bede

Background

Bede (672-735 AD)

- An English monk, from the kingdom of Northumbria (Northern England); probably from a good, possibly noble, family.
- Bede was given by his parents to the monastery of Monkwearmouth (in Northumbria) as a boy, and later transferred to its nearby sister house at Jarrow. The monasteries of this region were heavily influenced by Irish monks who helped to bring Christianity to the region.
- Bede was a noted intellectual who writes biblical commentaries, biographies of saints, scientific treatises (on nature and time), geographic works, as well as history: his most famous work is his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

Life of Saint Cuthbert

- A piece of “hagiography” – i.e. a life of a saint – designed to celebrate the life, virtues and miracles of **Saint Cuthbert** (c. 634 – 687 AD), a celebrated Anglo-Saxon monk and bishop.
- Saint Cuthbert was born in Northumbria around the time that Irish monks were beginning to preach to and convert pagans there. Cuthbert himself became a monk at Melrose abbey, a daughter house of the famous Lindisfarne monastery founded by **Saint Aidan** (d. 651 AD).
- He later moved to Lindisfarne monastery itself: as well as living with the community there, he had frequent spells where he lived as a hermit outside the monastery. He gained a strong religious reputation, and as a result was crowned bishop of Lindisfarne (with religious authority over much of Northumbria) in 684 AD. Feeling his health failing, he resigned two years later and returned to a hermitage to prepare for death.
- Cuthbert was a popular saint – he is still well remembered in the North of England today – and Bede’s work was widely copied for centuries in English monasteries.
- The following extract of Bede’s description of this life concerns Cuthbert becoming bishop.

Text

“Not long after, in a full synod - with Archbishop Theodore presiding and in the presence of God's chosen servant, the holy King Egfrid – [Cuthbert] was unanimously elected to the bishop’s seat of Lindisfarne. But, although they sent many messengers and letters to him, he could not by any means be drawn from his habitation, until the king himself sailed to the island, attended by the most holy Bishop Trumwine, and by as many other religious and influential men as he could find: they all went down on their knees before him, and adjured him by the Lord, with tears and pleas, until they drew him away from his hermitage with tears in his eyes and took him to the synod. Having arrived there, although still much resisting, he was overcome by the unanimous wish of all, and compelled to submit to undertake the duties of a bishop.”

Source 9: Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict (c. 820 AD), by Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel

Background

Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel (c. 760-840 AD)

- Little is known of his early life before becoming a monk. He first appears as the head of the convent school at the monastery of Mount Castellion in Northern Gaul (modern day France), and then as abbot of the same house in 805.
- In 814, he and his monks moved to new lodgings at nearby Saint-Mihiel monastery near the banks of the river Meuse. He would become a strong advocate of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*
- Well connected with the Carolingian imperial court, who provided him and his monks with support. A respected intellectual he is also called upon by both Charlemagne and Louis I (the Pious) for advice and service
- A well-known writer, particularly of commentaries on religious texts, whose works were widely read in his time.

Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict (c. 820 AD)

- One of Smaragdus's best known and most widely read commentaries, written to explain and expand upon the Rule of Saint Benedict. He generally advocated quite a strict reading of the Rule
- Written around the time of the Synods of Aachen (held between 816 and 819 AD) in support of its monastic reform work.
- This extract here addressed Benedict's statement in the prologue of his rule: "Therefore we intend to establish a school for the service of the Lord"

Text

"We have to build up a 'School for the Service of the Lord' for us. 'Scola' is the Greek expression for the place where young people are engaged in the study of the letters and where they listen to their teachers ... Thus like boys in school learn with discipline what they need and get to know what will benefit them in future, so monks, in the school of the monastery under the rule, are bound to learn both those things which may assist them to live an honourable life at present and also things which they, as fortunate men in later life, may pass on again wisely and effectively."

Source 10: Confirmation of the rights of San Salvatore monastery in Brescia (856 AD), by emperor Louis II

Background

Emperor Louis II

- A Carolingian emperor, son of Lothair I, and grandson of Louis the Pious: he held this title jointly with his father from 844-855 and alone from 855-870.
- Despite his elevated title, his real authority centred on Italy: by this stage, even if Louis II was acknowledged as overall emperor, the empire was split up between (often warring) family members

Confirmation of the rights of San Salvatore monastery in Brescia (856 AD)

- The female monastery of San Salvatore in Brescia (Italy) had been founded by Lothair I in 837. Lothair gave his wife Hirmingardis supervisory authority over the monastery, which was led internally by the Abbess Amalberga.
- After the death of Hirmingardis in 851, Lothar I and Louis II transferred the monastery to the care of his sister, Gisola.
- The following document was given shortly after Louis took up sole authority in Italy, and confirmed the rights of the monastery. Texts like this were preserved and copied over the years by the parties concerned so that they could legally claim their rights if necessary.

Text

“Louis, by the grace of God, Emperor Augustus. If we willingly open our ears to the please of the servants God, we will not fail to be paid back by the eternal rewarder. Thus all of our present and future faithful of the holy church of God should know that, Gisola, our most beloved sister, made it known to [us] how our lord and father [Lothair] ordered that a new monastery in honour of our Lord and Saviour be built within the walls of Brescia under the abbess Amalberga. He did this so that those assiduously serving the Lord within the house would live a regular life in accordance with the instruction of Saint Benedict, and pray for him [Lothair] and his followers. But lest any hinderances and disturbances distract them from this instruction, it pleased him to give certain [properties, incomes and rights] by his act, so that, supported by these things, they should have no occasion to depart from the Rule. Accordingly, our beloved sister [Gisola] asked that the instruction of our father should be strengthened by our piety. Freely agreeing to her request, [we command] that the aforesaid abbess should rule over the said monastery, in so far as her proposed institution should in no way deviate from the regular path, but govern and dispose things according to the normal path of sanctity. We likewise decree that the [properties, incomes and rights] that our lord and father provided them by reasonable promise must remain, so that without hinderance or disturbance from anyone, they should have enough from these things for their necessities, and, living peacefully, rightfully pray for divine mercy for us and our faithful. If when the aforesaid abbess [dies], with our consent and supporting will, they should have the future right to elect an abbess among themselves, who will govern them and rule them according to God and the institution of lord Benedict [...]”

Source 11: The Life of St. Liutberga (late 9th century AD), anonymous

Background

Life of Saint Liutberga (late 9th century AD)

- **Saint Liutberga** (d.c. 870 AD) spent much of her career in the service of Gisla, a noblewoman from Saxony (modern day Germany) in the Carolingian Empire.
- After Gisla died, she eventually became an anchoress (a type of hermit who was tied to a small cell for life – see lecture 4) attached to the women’s monastery of Windeshausen. She became respected for her training of young women (often aristocratic) at the monastery as well as her sewing and textile works.
- Her “saints’ life” was written by a male monk from a nearby monastery to promote the virtues and miracles of a woman he saw as a saint: the model of sanctity he describes was one of tireless domestic service at the monastery.
- The section here does not concern her time at Windeshausen, however: rather it concerns the family and religious background of Gisla, who Liutberga served before becoming an anchoress, and their first meeting at an unnamed monastery.

Text

“In his time, the emperor Charles the Great [i.e. Charlemagne] [...] subjugated many nations to the kingdom of the Franks. One of the first and most noble [lords to submit] was named Hesse, with whom he [Charlemagne] spent more time than others. Charlemagne gave Hesse great honours because he remained faithful to him in everything. Hesse lacked male children, for his only son died in his youth, leaving his rich possessions to his daughters. When he grew very old, he distributed the inheritance among his daughters and entered the Lord’s service at Fulda and died happily in the monastic habit [i.e. monastic clothes]. One of his daughters, Gisla, the firstborn, took a husband named Unwan by whom she had a son, Bernhart, and two daughters, one called Bilihild and the other Hruothild. Both daughters founded monastic houses after the death of their husbands and took the monastic habit: one in Winithohus (*Windenhausen*) in Saxony, in the country called Harthagewi (*Harz*) which separated Saxony and Thuringia; the other in Franconia in Salugewe, in the neighbourhood of Bochonia in the place called Karolsbach (east of Gemundae at Moenum). Each of the girls ruled their own convents [i.e. monastic communities] of virgins respectively (Bilihild at Windenhausen and Hruothild at Karolsbach). Gisla herself in widowhood led a religious life [but not in a monastery], building many churches and giving alms and caring for pilgrims. [...] When [Gisla] was travelling on business, because she had to care for possessions in many different places, she arrived at a certain place where the time of day forced her to request hospitality. The monastery of virgins there had a guesthouse nearby and the proper buildings they had prepared seemed comfortable enough. One of the servants of the house serving her caught her eye, a young girl who seemed to excel above the others of her age in form and intelligence. With a servant’s diligence and with a clever mind, this one directed all the others. [Gisla] silently observed this young girl’s consideration and her way of acting and began to make enquiries about who she was and what family she came from, her birth and what she did. The girl answered all these questions in a prudent and orderly fashion, saying that she came from decent parents in Salzburg, explaining their ancestry and condition and describing her whole way of life, and that she would willingly have taken the vow [i.e. formally joined the monastery] already if not for her young age.”

Source 12: Letter to Rainerius II, marquis of Monte Santa Maria (1067 AD), by Peter Damian

Background

Saint Peter Damian (d. 1072/73 AD)

- From a noble (if not so rich) background in the city of Ravenna (modern day Italy)
- In his early life, he became a noted scholar in theology and church law at the cathedral schools of Ravenna and Parma.
- Subsequently, he became a monk at Fonte Avellana (in 1035), a monastic community inspired by Romuald of Ravenna's rigorous example, near to Camaldoli: Romuald is a hero for Peter Damian.
- He led the monastery of Fonte Avellana from 1043 until his death; under his influence, a number of nearby hermitages were also founded, where eremitic monks lived subject to his rule. He was also a proponent of wider Church reform.

Letter to Rainerius II, marquis of Monte Santa Maria (1067 AD)

- Rainerius was a nobleman, a dependent lord of the marquis of Tuscany (who ruled a large portion of northern Italy). His own area of authority was not far from Peter Damian's monastery at Fonte Avellana.
- Peter Damian had disapproved on the way Rainerius governed and treated the common people of his territories. He contacted Rainerius' wife, Gulla, and asked her to provide a good influence on his actions. Rainerius also came to know Peter and became a supporter of his monastery.
- Like many medieval letters, they were not intended to be purely "personal", but rather to be read by others, who might also gain something from them.

Text

"For the sins you confessed to me, noble sir, I have urged you to travel to Jerusalem, and thus appease divine justice by the penance of this long pilgrimage. But since, according to Scripture, you have no idea what tomorrow will bring, you are putting off this matter until later; and while fearing the uncertainties of the journey, you are not providing for yourself a secure [heavenly] city in which you might live. Obviously, I maintain a certain restraint and regularity in assigning this kind of penance [...] Indeed those who live under a rule, and properly observe the dictate of the canonical or monastic life, I persuade to persevere in the vocation in which they find themselves, and not to neglect necessary tasks in favour of those left to our free choice. [...] But I exhort those who serve the world in the military - as well as clergy who are dedicated to the service of God, but are unfaithful to their profession - to undertake this journey as a sort of spiritual exile, and to make satisfaction to the awesome judge, whose laws and commands they have not observed at home while engaged in the stress of everyday living. By wandering about in this fashion on their pilgrimage, they may provide for themselves a quiet dwelling in their [heavenly] homeland. [...] And now to say a few words about the pilgrimage with which we are concerned. It came to my attention from the report of my brother and fellow monk, Richard [...] that this very year eight men are returning from Jerusalem, having fulfilled the vow they had been so piously intent on making. But as they walked through uninhabited regions, and had been suffering for four days without food, as one man they began to beg God's mercy to help them in their great necessity [...] Just as they had finished praying, they saw a loaf of bread of enormous size and marvelous brightness lying in the road. [...] They at

once recognized this bounty as evidence of God's goodness. [...] Therefore, noble sir, meditate on these and similar flowers of heavenly mercy, do not depend on your own ability, but, as is only proper, place your trust in the unfailing protection of him who is almighty. Our ignoble body is afraid, but the native ardour of a courageous soul is already on fire.”

Source 13: Letter to Gundulf (c. 1072 AD) from Anselm of Aosta

Background

Anselm of Aosta (1033/4-1109 AD)

- From Aosta in north-western Italy.
- He went to Normandy due to the intellectual prestige of his countryman Lanfranc and the monastic school the latter had founded at the abbey of Bec: Lanfranc had previously been invited to the house for this purpose by the founder (and first abbot) of Bec, Herluin (who had previously been a knight, then a hermit).
- Anselm became a very able student, teacher, and religious writer and was appointed abbot when Herluin died in 1078.
- He later succeeded Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury in England (which the Normans had conquered in 1066) in 1093.

Letter to Gundulf (c. 1072 AD)

- **Gundulf** was a former monk of Bec who followed Lanfranc to England when the latter was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070. He served under Lanfranc as chamberlain and was eventually made bishop of Rochester in 1075.
- This letter was written after Gundulf had departed for England and Anselm remained at Bec.
- Like many medieval letters, they were not intended to be purely “personal”, but rather to be read by others, who might also gain something from them. Anselm’s letters were collected widely copied throughout the Middle Ages. They were frequently read and cited in monasteries and by other intellectuals.

“Whenever I intend to write to you, soul most beloved of my soul, whenever I intend to write to you, I am undecided about where exactly I should begin what I want to tell you. For everything I feel about you is sweet and joyful to my heart; everything I wish for you is the best my mind can imagine. For I see you as the sort of person I must love, as you know I do; I hear about you as the sort of person I must long for, as God knows I do. From this it comes about that wherever you go my love follows you; and wherever I may be, my longing for you embraces you.

And do you inquire about me by your messengers, exhort me by your letters, shower me with you gifts that I may remember you? Let my tongue cleave fast to the roof of my mouth if I cease to remember you [c.f. Ps. 136.6], if I do not place ‘Gundulf’ at the pinnacle of my friendship. [...] How could I forget you? How could someone imprinted on my heart like a waxen seal slip out of my memory? Moreover, why do you complain so sorrowfully, as I hear, that you never see any letters of mine, and why do you beg me so lovingly that you may often receive them when you have my thoughts with you all the time? Even when you are silent I know you love me; and if I am silent you know that I love you [c.f. Jn. 21.16].”

Source 14: Letter to the Provost of Noyon (12th century AD) by Peter de Roya, a Cistercian Novice

Background

Letter to the Provost of Noyon by Peter de Roya

- Little is known about either the Provost of Noyon – a royal official – or Peter de Roya, who was apparently a Cistercian novice. The letter purports to describe the early days of the monastery of Clairvaux (modern day France), founded by **Saint Bernard** in 1115, through the eyes of a new recruit.
- It may indeed not be a genuine letter, but rather a work added and distributed among Cistercian letter collections (sometimes with those of Saint Bernard) in later decades in order to celebrate the early life of the monastery.
- Regardless of the truth, like many medieval letters, they were not intended to be purely “personal”, but rather to be read by others, who might also gain something from them.

Text.

“As regards their manual labour, so patiently and placidly, with such quiet faces, in such sweet and holy order, do they perform all things, that although they exercise themselves in many works, they never seem moved or burdened by anything, however tough it may be. It is thus clear that that Holy Spirit works in them, giving all things a sweetness: they are thus refreshed by Him, so that they rest even in their toil. Many of them, I hear, were once bishops and earls, and many were illustrious through their birth or knowledge. But now, by God's grace, all social distinctions are forgotten among them: the greater anyone thought himself in the world, the more in this flock he considers himself as less than the least. I see them in the garden with hoes, in the meadows with forks or rakes, in the fields with scythes, in the forest with axes. To judge from their outward appearance, their tools, their bad and disordered clothes, they appear a race of fools, without speech or sense. But a true thought in my mind tells me that their life in Christ is hidden in the heavens. Among them I see Godfrey of Peronne, Raynald of Picardy, William of St. Omer, Walter de Lisle, all of whom I knew formerly [as noblemen]. Now I now see no trace [of this status], by God's grace. I knew them when they were proud and puffed up. Now I see them walking humbly under the merciful hand of God.”

Source 15: Correspondence (before 1173 AD) between Godfrey, bishop of Utrecht, and Hildegard of Bingen

Background

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179 AD)

- From a minor noble family in the service of the counts of Sponheim (modern day Western Germany) within the Empire.
- In her teenage years, she was placed under the tutelage of Jutta, a daughter of the Count of Sponheim who became a hermit dwelling in a small house attached to the male Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg in the Palatinate Forest, and under the authority of the abbey. This house was influenced by the German Benedictine reformer, William of Hirsau (d. 1091)
- Other women gathered around Jutta and Hildegard, forming a small community of nuns. When Jutta died, these nuns picked Hildegard as *magistra* (“mistress” / “teacher”). As the numbers grew larger, she gained external backing to found two successive female monasteries, first at Rupertsberg, then at Eibingen.
- From a young age, Hildegard had experienced visions, and began to record them while still at Disibodenberg. These brought her widespread fame; she was also able to win papal approval from Eugenius II for her visionary writings in 1148.

Correspondence with Godfrey, bishop of Utrecht (before 1173 AD)

- Godfrey was not from a monastic background. A secular priest, he had advanced to become bishop of Utrecht with the support of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I in 1159. He was nevertheless a religious admirer of Hildegard.
- Like many medieval letters, they were not intended to be purely “personal”, but rather to be read by others, who might also gain something from them. This correspondence (written in Latin) was collected and circulated with other letters of Hildegard. While not as common a text as compilations of her visions, her fame ensured these letters enjoyed a good readership.

Text

Godfrey, bishop of Utrecht, to Hildegard

“Dearest sister, ever since I began to love you in Christ never has your memory departed from my mind, for it is sweeter to me than honey and the honeycomb [cf. Ps 18.11]. And indeed, beloved lady, I am compelled to hold you in esteem by the power of God which dwells in you, works through you, and causes you, beyond all others, to be cherished by that Bridegroom who saves all who have set their hope in Him. And since divine love is diffused in your heart, I ask you through that love with which you abound for all people that with all diligence and effort you undertake to pray to God on my behalf, so that I may deserve to be relieved from the burden of my sins in this life. May the Lord guide you to that place of blessed eternity, eternal blessing, joyful tranquillity, and joy without end. Like one thirsting for the fountain, thus do I desire your reply.”

Hildegard to Godfrey

“O man, you have been chosen and called by God to work according to His will by imitating Him, since God builds, rules, and anoints all things. [...] Now, O shepherd, beware lest you live in a childish time which does not know God, and make sure that you live in the time of just and holy men, in the time of the revelation of the prophets, and seize justice in all your works, just as God

foresaw all things before He made them, and rule your people in accordance with His will [...] Make sure, too, that you do not drag terrible shame in your wake, by accepting bribes for “justice”. And invoke His name, standing always in awe of Him, for He is King. And you will do these things all the days of your life, while you live in this world, so that, afterward, you may live for ever and ever.”

Source 16: Courtiers' Trifles (late 12th century AD) by Walter Map

Background

Walter Map (1140 – c. 1210 AD)

- Probably from a Welsh minor-noble background, Map managed to get to Paris and studied at the emerging University there.
- He later became an administrative servant and agent of King Henry II of England (1133 – 6 July 1189).
- Despite becoming a noted royal diplomat who travelled across Europe, he was sometimes distracted by affairs nearer his home: he apparently became involved in a significant dispute with a Cistercian abbey in Wales over their encroachment on his property rights.

Courtiers' Trifles (late 12th century AD)

- An unusual work – a series of Latin anecdotes concerning people and places that Walter knew. Some seem quite factual, others are rumours, while others seem satirical in nature.
- It was not well-copied at the time, but provides an interesting insight into the outlook of a 12th century courtier.
- The following extract is an anecdote about the encounter of a royal procession with a monk

Text

“The late lord king, Henry II was riding as usual at the head of all the great procession of his knights and clerks, talking with Reric, a distinguished [black] monk and an honourable man. There was a high wind; and lo! A white monk was making his way on foot along the street and looked around, and made haste to get out of the way. He dashed his foot against a stone and [...] fell in front of the feet of the king’s horse, and the wind blew his habit [monastic costume] right over his neck so that the poor man was candidly exposed to the unwilling eyes of the lord king and Reric. The king, that treasure-house of all politeness, pretended to see nothing, but Reric said in a quiet voice, ‘A curse on this bare-bottom piety’. I heard the remark and was pained that a holy thing was laughed at, though the wind had only intruded where it was rightfully at home. However, if a harsh diet and rough clothing and hard work cannot tame them, and they must have ventilation too to keep Venus [Roman god of desire – a reference to lust] at bay, let them go without their breeches [i.e. underpants] and feel the draught. I know that our flesh – worldly and not heavenly though it be – does not need such defences: with us Venus [i.e. lust], when separated from Ceres [Roman god of grain – a reference to beer] and Baccus [Roman god of the grape-harvest – a reference to wine], is cold: but perhaps the Enemy attacks those more fiercely whom he knows to be more stoutly fenced in. Still, the monk who tumbled down would have got up again with more dignity had he had his breeches on.”

Source 17: *First Life of Saint Francis (1228-9 AD)*, by Thomas of Celano

Background

Thomas of Celano (1185-1260 AD)

- From a noble family in central Italy; Thomas received a good education, probably from the Benedictine monastery school at Celano.
- He joined the new Franciscan order in 1215.
- Well known for the quality of his writing, and especially his poetic style. He would write three works devoted to the life and miracles of saint Francis at the request of papal and Franciscan authorities.

First Life of Saint Francis (1228-9 AD)

- Thomas knew **Saint Francis** well towards the end of his life (Francis died in 1226) and thus had heard many things directly from him and other early disciples.
- His first account of Francis's life was written at the request of Pope Gregory IX, around the time that Francis was declared a saint.
- Like all "saints' lives", it is meant to describe the virtues of the saint and the miracles they brought about, in order to prove their sanctity.
- A very popular Latin text in both mendicant and traditional monastic libraries.
- This section concerns Francis being brought before the bishop of Assisi by his merchant father, who sought to strip him of his inheritance for having stolen some cloth with the aim of paying for the repair of a chapel.

Text

"When brought before the bishop, Francis would accept no delay nor hesitation in anything: rather, without waiting to be spoken to and without speaking he immediately put off and cast aside all his garments and gave them back to his father. Moreover, he did not even keep his drawers [i.e. underwear] but stripped himself stark naked before all the bystanders. But the bishop, observing his disposition, and greatly wondering at his fervour and steadfast nature, arose immediately, gathered him into his arms and covered him with a cloak which he himself was wearing.⁹ He understood clearly that it was God's will and perceived that the actions of the man of God which he had witnessed contained a [divine] mystery. Immediately therefore, the bishop became his helper, and, cherishing and encouraging him, he embraced him with charity.

Behold, even at this time [Francis] wrestled naked with his naked foe, and having cast off all that is of the world, he concerned himself with God's righteousness alone! Even at this time, for the sake of that righteousness, he laid aside all anxiety and strived to set aside his own life, so that as a poor man he could find peace [...] and so that only the barrier of the flesh separated him from the sight of God."

Source 18: Life of Saint Anthony of Padua (c. 1232-1249 AD)

Background

Life of Saint Anthony of Padua (c. 1232-1249 AD)

- **Anthony of Padua** (1195 – 1231) was actually from Lisbon, Portugal, even if he became famous in Italy. He was born Fernando Martins de Bulhões to a wealthy noble family.
- He began his monastic life as an Augustinian Canon Regular, and received a strong education at their house at Coimbra, Portugal.
- When some Franciscans travelled to Coimbra in c. 1214 and set up a small hermitage just outside the city, he received dispensation to leave the Canons Regular and join them. He took the name Anthony in honour of the Egyptian monk “Anthony the Great”.
- He went to Africa to preach the Gospel to Muslims there but ultimately ended up in Italy, where he met Saint Francis in the early 1220s. Francis, although somewhat suspicious of people being too educated (due to the danger of arrogance), was apparently impressed by Anthony’s combination of learning and humility, and put him in charge of the friars’ studies.
- Settling in Padua, Anthony became particularly noted for the quality of his preaching. He attracted large crowds wherever he went, and appears to have been particularly popular in many Italian towns and cities.
- His Latin biography was written by an anonymous author between c. 1232-1249: like all “saints’ lives”. It was widely copied and read, especially among the Franciscans
- This section describes Anthony’s preaching following a return to Padua.

Text

“Gathering in an impressive crowd, the people came from everywhere to listen to him, like the land that thirsts for rain. [Anthony] established daily stations through the churches of the city. And as soon the churches could not contain the growing throngs of men and women who had come to listen to him, he retired to the vast meadows [outside the city]. They came from the cities, castles, and villages surrounding Padua in an almost innumerable crowd. There were both men and women there, all united in the greatest devotion, thirsting for the word of life, hanging on his words for their salvation with a steadfast hope. Rising in the middle of the night – everyone wanted to get there first – they went out enthusiastically, in torchlight, to the place where he was going to preach. You would have seen knights and noble ladies rushing out into the darkness, warming exhausted limbs in soft blankets, who then, without any difficulty by all reports, spent a good part of the day wide-awake before the preacher. The old were there, the young hurried along: they were men and women of every age and condition. Casting off their ornaments and jewellery, each appeared, in a sense, to take on the “habit of religion” [i.e. monastic costume]. Even the venerable Bishop of Padua, along with his clergy, was a devoted follower of the preaching of Anthony, the servant of God: moved in his soul to become a model for his flock, through his humble example he showed the people that they should listen. Each and every one of them sought to grasp his words; they did this so avidly that, despite the size of the gathering, amounting to thirty thousand men according to some accounts, there were no loud voices nor murmuring to be heard. Rather, in continuous silence, they were as if one man, the ears of their body and those of their heart held in suspense: all looked to the speaker.”

Source 19: History of the West (c. 1226 AD) by Jacques de Vitry

Background

Jacques de Vitry (1160/70 – 1240 AD)

- Born in central France – we do not know much about his parents.
- Jacques studied arts and theology at the nascent University of Paris, before becoming an Augustinian Canon Regular in 1210 at the house of Saint-Nicolas d'Oignies in the Diocese of Liège.
- Having already preached in support of the “Albigensian Crusade” – directed at Cathar heretics in Southern France –, in 1216 he was taken away from the monastery to become bishop of Acre in Syria – then under Crusader control. He stayed in the East until 1225.
- Following his return, he was made a cardinal and spent the rest of his life in Italy.
- A noted theologian and writer, he also showed interest (usually supportive) in Beguine women and their religious lives.

History of the West (c. 1226 AD)

- A companion piece to his *History of the East* – one of the most important sources for crusader history –, this history is devoted to the Latin West.
- Written in Latin, the texts were well read at the time, but the *History of the West* was not as popular as the *History of the East* (which survives in over 100 manuscripts!). Nevertheless, copies of the *History of the West* were found in monastic and also some secular libraries.
- As well providing historical discussions, Jacques took time to describe the life and culture of the Latin West in his own times, as well as his hopes for future Church reform. The following passage describes academic life at Paris, which he had previously experienced.

Text

“Almost all the students at Paris, foreigners and natives, did absolutely nothing except try to learn or hear something “new”. Some studied merely to acquire knowledge, which is curiosity; others to acquire fame, which is vanity; others still for the sake of gain, which is greed and the sin of simony. Very few studied for their own betterment, or for that of others. They did not merely argue and dispute over the various academic divisions and disagreements between them. Rather, the differences between the countries also caused dissent, hatred and virulent dislike among them and they impudently uttered all kinds of affronts and insults against one another. [...]

I will not speak of those logicians, before whose lecterns “the gnats of Egypt” [cf. Ex 8.16-18] fly about: that is to say, all the sophisticated subtleties they employed, to the point that no one could comprehend their eloquent speeches in which, as Isaiah said, “there is no wisdom.” [Is. 45.9] As for the doctors of theology, “seated, in Moses’s seat,” [Mt. 23.1] they were full of learning, but their charity was lacking. Teaching but not practicing, they have become like a “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” [1 Cor. 13.1], or a canal of stone, always dry, which ought to carry water to “beds of spices.” [Cant. 5.13] They not only hated one another, but by their flatteries they enticed away the students of others; each one seeks his own glory, but cares nothing for the welfare of souls.”

Source 20: Memorial (1292-1300 AD), by Angela of Foligno

Background

Angela of Foligno (1248 – 1309 AD)

- From a wealthy urban family, she grew up in the town of Foligno in central Italy. She married at an early age, but was widowed by age 40.
- Angela began having religious visions at this point. Seeking a more penitential life, she became a member of the Franciscan third order.
- Her fame for visions led her to gain followers: she organised a house for women, who went further than most Franciscan tertiaries in living a full common life, but nevertheless refused full enclosure.

Memorial (1292-1300 AD)

- The *Memorial* was copied up by an unknown Franciscan brother and supporter of Angela; he translated her Italian vernacular dictation into Latin. As a result of the dictation process, the text often slips between third and first-person perspectives. The resultant text was copied in several different versions.
- The work is designed as a recollection of the religious experiences and visions she had throughout her life.
- The following section describes the arrival of a particular religious vision that she experienced in Assisi.

Text

“[While in Assisi], she confessed herself as best she could so as to put her soul in order, and she prepared herself to receive communion. While the Mass was being sung, she placed herself near the cross and between the iron grills. In this place she heard God speaking to her with words that were so sweet that her soul was immediately and totally restored. What he told her was: ‘My daughter, you are sweet to me’- and words that were even more endearing. But even before this, it seemed to her that God had already restored her soul when he had spoken to her as follows: ‘My sweet daughter, no creature can give you this consolation, only I alone.’

Afterwards, he added: ‘I want to show you something of my power.’ And immediately the eyes of the soul were opened and in a vision I beheld the fullness of God's presence encompassing the whole of creation, that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself and everything else. And in everything that I saw, I could perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, and in a manner totally indescribable. And my soul in excess of wonder cried out, ‘This world is pregnant with the presence of God!’”

Source 21: The Romance of the Rose (mid 13th century AD), by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun

Background

Guillaume de Lorris (1200 – c. 1240 AD) and Jean de Meun (c. 1240-c. 1305 AD)

- Two French poets. Little is known about Guillaume. Jean de Meun is thought to have been educated at the University of Paris and spent most of his life in Paris.

The Romance of the Rose (mid 13th century AD)

- A courtly poem, written in French vernacular, designed for public, sung performance before aristocratic audiences.
- Begun by **Guillaume d Lorris** as a classic romantic tale of a courtier wooing his beloved woman; its much longer continuation, by **Jean de Meun**, is far more complex, with numerous allegorical characters and a greater element of social commentary
- This part, written by Jean de Meun, is the speech of the character “False Seeming”, a mendicant friar.

Text

“[False Seeming:] I dwell among the proud,

the devious, the cunning,

who covet worldly honours

and pursue great enterprises

and seek great rewards,

and strive for the acquaintance

of powerful men and follow them.

And they are poor, and they nourish themselves

with luxurious foods

and drink precious wines.

And they preach poverty to you,

and they gather great wealth

with their nets and traps”

Source 22: Letter to Gherardo Petrarch (1352 AD), by Francesco Petrarch

Background

Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374 AD)

- The son of a notary in Florence, he spent some of his early life in France, when his father found employment at the papal court of Clement V.
- He subsequently studied law at the University of Montpellier, then the University of Bologna, with the aim of following his father into the legal / administrative profession.
- Petrarch did in part pursue an administrative career within the Church, but he was more interested in literature than law. He was fond of classical as well as Christian literature and sought out old manuscripts looking for lost works of literature, grammar and rhetoric. He is widely considered to be one of the first “humanist” scholars.
- The quality of his own writing became well known, and he was a successful poet and writer with numerous powerful patrons.

Letter to Gherardo Petrarch (1352 AD)

- Gherardo was Francesco Petrarch’s brother. He had also studied law, but in 1343, he became a Carthusian monk.
- Francesco stayed in close contact with his brother by letter, like the one, originally written in Latin (although Francesco also wrote in Italian vernacular), preserved here.
- Like many medieval letters, they were not intended to be purely “personal”, but rather to be read by others, who might also gain something from them. Petrarch was also inspired by the example of the ancient Roman writer Cicero, who had carefully curated his own letter collection, to do the same. His letters proved popular and were widely copied.

Text

“In the three following respects I have complied with your injunctions. In the first place, I have by means of solitary confession, laid open the secret uncleanness of my transgressions, which would otherwise have fatally putrified through neglect and long silence, I have learned to do this frequently, and have accustomed myself to submit the secret wounds of my soul to the healing balm of Heaven. Next, I have learned to send up songs of praise to Christ, not only by day but in the night. And following your urgings, I have put away lazy habits, so that even in these short summer nights the dawn never finds me asleep or silent, however wearied I am by the vigils of the evening before. I have taken the words of the Psalmist to heart, ‘Seven times a day I praise you’ [Ps. 119.164]; and never since I began this custom have I allowed anything to distract me from my daily devotions. I observe, likewise, the admonition, ‘At midnight I rise to give you thanks.’ [119.62] When the hour arrives, I feel a mysterious stimulus which will not allow me to sleep, however oppressed I may be with weariness. In the third place, I have learned to fear more than death itself that association with women which I once thought I could not live without. And, although I am still subject to severe and frequent temptations, I have only to recollect what woman really is, in order to dispel all temptation and return to my normal peace and liberty. In such straits I believe myself aided by your loving prayers, and I trust and beg that you will continue your good offices, in the name of Him who had mercy on you, and led you from the darkness of your errors into the brightness of his day. In all this you are most happy, and show a most consistent contempt for false and fleeting joys, May God uphold you. Do not forget me in your prayers.”

Source 23: Letter of the Council of Constance calling the Benedictine chapter meeting at Petershausen (1417 AD)

Background

Letter of the Council of Constance calling the Benedictine chapter meeting at Petershausen (1417 AD)

- The **Council of Constance** (1414-1418) was convened in the city of Constance (modern day southern Germany) to resolve the **Great Western Schism** (1378-1417) in which the Latin West had been divided by obedience to different competing papal claimants. Supported by most lay governments across the region, in 1417 it succeeded in electing a new undisputed pope, **Martin V**.
- The division had enhanced calls for the wider reform of the Church: the churchmen and representatives of lay governments at the Council all claimed this as a central mission.
- The language of reform at the council often revolved around the enforcement of laws to maintain better order, as well as the leadership role of general councils. As the decree **Frequens** (approved later in 1417) declared: “A frequent celebration of general councils as an especial means for cultivating the field of the Lord and effecting the destruction of briars, thorns, and thistles – that is to say, heresies, errors, and schism – and of bringing forth a most abundant harvest. The neglect to summon councils fosters and develops all these evils, as may be plainly seen from a recollection of the past and a consideration of existing conditions.”
- The following letter – sent at the instigation of certain ‘Observant’-style abbots and monks present at the Council in its name – was distributed to local monasteries.

Text

“The sacred general Council of Constance, to the beloved sons of the Church, the abbots, priors [...] and other professed men of the sacred religion of the “black monks” of the order of Saints Benedict [...] greetings and the blessing of almighty God.

[The experience of earlier times] shows that there is little point in writing celebrated laws, unless they are duly executed. At many earlier points, both the general councils of the Church, as well as the Roman popes, Honorius III and Benedict XII, of happy memory, produced many healthy statutes regarding the necessity of provincial chapter meetings in this [Benedictine] religion and order every three years [...]. In many regions, however, these provincial chapters have rarely been executed for a long time. From their omission, many harmful things in spiritual and temporal matters and an almost irrecoverable level have damage have come to this [form of] religion. From the celebration of these chapters, the correction of deformed things, the reformation of morals, the avoidance of many bad things, and the promotion of multiple good things doubtless tend to come about. Thus, we who in charitable hearts seek the reformation of this sacred religion and order, whose sanctity and venerable nature is clear in the memory of its fathers, propose to restore those things which are omitted and to ordain new executors of the said statutes in places where the old statutes are not properly enforced, and to do so before the sacred council is dissolved.

And for now, we begin in the province of Mainz, in which we presently reside. We want and ordain that the provincial chapter of abbots and priors [...] of the said province of Mainz and the diocese of Bamberg (added to this province in the previously mentioned constitutions of Benedict XII) should

be celebrated in this city of Constance or in its suburbs: to be precise, in the monastery of Petershausen, a house of the said order of Saint Benedict, which lies just over the bridge from this city where the sacred general Church council resides. In this council indeed there are many abbots and priors of this order from many other regions: they will provide their opportune help to the provincial officials of the province of Mainz, and even direct them, if they are more knowledgeable about the celebration of such chapters from long experience.”

Source 24: Foundation charter of the Celestine monastery of Marcoussis (1408 AD), by Jean de Montaigu

Background

Jean de Montaigu (1363 – 17 October 1409 AD)

- The illegitimate child of Biette Cassinel – an aristocratic lady who was also the mistress of King **Charles V of France** (reigned 1364-1380) – and a non-noble father, Gerard de Montaigu, who had been a royal notary.
- Like his father, Gerard, Jean forged a career in royal administration. He was more successful however, rising to the rank of Master of the Household under King **Charles VI of France**.
- During the long period of mental illness suffered by Charles VI, Jean was aligned with Louis, duke of Orleans (Charles VI's brother) in a factional struggle against John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy. When John the Fearless gained control of royal government in 1409, Jean de Montaigu was executed and his corpse publicly displayed in Paris

Foundation charter of the Celestine monastery of Marcoussis (1408 AD)

- Jean had begun work on a French Celestine monastery, built in the grounds of his grand country residence in 1404. The entrance to the church would be adorned with statues of Charles VI and his queen, Isabeau of Bavaria.
- This charter, written in French in 1408, was written on the completion of the building works.
- Charters of this sort were not widely copied, but were usually preserved and copied from time to time by those who needed them as proof of rights and possessions (i.e. the family of the granter, the recipients and their heirs). In this instance, the survives in later Celestine compilations.

Text

“[...] The Lord [Jean de Montaigu] and Lady [his wife], moved by devotion, consider that the temporal and worldly pilgrimage and goods of this transitory life are ordained by God, who lends out all goods. They remember and consider also the very great goods and honours that they have had and received from the late King Charles [V] and his queen, Jeanne de Bourbon – whose souls are in God's possession –, from King Charles [VI] our lord and his queen, Isabeau of Bavaria who are now present, and from all the very noble dynasty and house of France. [As a result, we act] in honour, praise and reverence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – one true God and Holy Trinity – and of the glorious virgin Mary, our lady and His mother, of his messengers Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, of his messengers the apostles Saint James the Greater and Saint James the Lesser, and of all the blessed saints of paradise. [We also act] in order to have masses and prayers and other spiritual benefits perpetually for the late King Charles [V] and his queen, for our King Charles [VI] his son and his queen who now reign, [for the other royal princes of France]; for the health of the souls of [all the members of our family and ourselves]; on account of the very great and singular love, devotion and affection that the said lord and lady have towards the holy and devoted order of Saint Benedict, modified by the statues of Saint Peter Celestine; and for the increase of divine service and so that [all the people mentioned] will always be supported and accompanied by and share in all the masses and praises, prayers, and spiritual goods that will be made by the monks of this order. Thus, we, the said Lord and Lady of Montagu [...] want and ordain [...] that a monastery, church, and accommodation suitable for a community of a prior and twelve monks of the

said Celestine order should be made, constructed, built and established in honour and under the title of the blessed and glorious Trinity [...] in Marcoussis, quite close to the castle and gardens of the said place. [...] [For these things] they give to them [the prior and monks] by these present letters 600 livres of perpetual revenue, totally amortised [i.e. freed from any royal or other rights or claim] by our lord the King.”

Source 25: *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (1520 AD)* by Martin Luther

Background

Martin Luther

- Born in the town of Eisleben to a good family, he attended the University of Erfurt, where he studied theology.
- In 1505, however, he was almost struck by lightning, and came to fear the afterlife more greatly. Keen to repent for his sins and find greater purity, he became Augustinian Friar at the Observant influenced monastery of Erfurt in Germany, which had been very influenced by rigorous “Observant” reform.
- He was a very dedicated monk at first, but from 1517, it is clear that he had become disillusioned with the Church and, soon afterwards, even monastic life itself.
- His criticism of Catholic theology and institutions led to his excommunication from the Church in 1520, but he was successful in winning local support among both the powerholders and people of his region. With their help, more followers were gained, and the Protestant Reformation had begun.

Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (1520 AD)

- One of Luther’s key Protestant works, this Latin text was published in print as a direct appeal for support for his views from the German aristocracy: he wrote it at the moment of his final break with the Roman Papacy.
- The following extract details his criticisms of religious orders.

Text

“Besides this, one should also do away with the sections and the divisions in the same order which, caused for little reason and continued for even less, oppose each other with unspeakable hatred and malice. The result is that the Christian faith, which is very well able to stand without their divisions, is lost on both sides, and that a true Christian life is sought and judged only by outward rules, works, and practices, from which arise only hypocrisy and the destruction of souls, as everyone can see for himself. Moreover, the Pope should be forbidden to institute or to confirm the institution of such new orders; indeed, he should be commanded to abolish several and to lessen their number. For the faith of Christ, which alone is the important matter, and can stand without any particular order, is at risk if men should be led away [...] to live for such works and practices than to care for faith; and unless there are wise prelates in the monasteries, who preach and urge faith rather than the rule of the order, it is inevitable that the order should be injurious and misleading to simple souls, who have regard to works alone. [...] It would be, I think, necessary, especially in these perilous times, that foundations and convents should again be organised as they were in the time of the Apostles and a long time after, namely when they were all free for every man to remain there as long as he wished. For what were they but Christian schools, in which the Scriptures and Christian life were taught, and where folk were trained to govern and to preach? [...] Truly all foundations and convents ought to be free in this way: that they may serve God with a free will, and not as slaves. But now they have been bound round with vows and turned into eternal prisons, so that these vows are regarded even more important than the vows of baptism. We daily see, hear, read, and learn more and more about what has resulted.”

Source 26: Report to Thomas Cromwell by the visitors Sent to Examine the Abbot of Glastonbury (1539 AD)

Background

Report to Thomas Cromwell by the visitors sent to examine the abbot of Glastonbury (1539 AD)

- **Thomas Cromwell** (c. 1485-1540) was from an urban background in London, the son of a blacksmith and a cloth merchant. He worked his way into positions of power and influence, however, by taking up legal and administrative roles, and became a member of the English parliament.
- He proved himself an effective government administrator and was effectively Henry VIII's chief advisor from c. 1530. He played a key role in enacting the royal-led English Reformation that followed Henry VIII's contested divorce from Catherine of Aragon in 1533.
- This administrative letter, sent to Thomas, concerns the inspection and assessment made of the monastery of Glastonbury and its abbot by the English royal commissioners who closed the house.

Text

“It should be known to you, our lord, that we came to Glastonbury last Friday, about ten o'clock in the morning. And [because] the abbot was then at Sharpham, a property of the house, a mile or so away from the abbey, we, without any delay, went into the same place, and there [...] examined him upon certain accusations [of treason]. And [because] his answer was not what we wanted, we advised him to remember that which he had then forgotten, and to declare the truth. We visited him again, on the same day, at the abbey; and we proceeded that night to search his study for letters and books. We found in his study [...] a written book of arguments against the king's divorce [...]; but we could not find any letter that [proved him guilty]. And so we proceeded again to his examination concerning the articles we received from you: in his answers you can see his cankered and traitorous heart and mind, set against the king and his succession; we send the same answers, signed with his hand, to you lord, so you can see them more clearly. And so [...] we have brought him to the Tower [of London], [...] We have found 300 pounds or more in money; we do not yet know for certain the value of the [silver] plate and other things [of the monastery] for we have not had the opportunity to assess them, but we soon intend (God willing) to proceed to this task [...] Your lordship should also know that we have found a fair chalice of gold, and other parcels of [silver] plate, which the abbot had secretly hid from the royal commissioners who had previously visited. [...] We assure your lordship it is the richest house of this sort that we have ever seen. If only you knew it as we do, you would doubtless judge it a house fit for the king's majesty, and for no one else.”

Source 27: Letter to the President of the Council of the Indies (1571), by Geronimo de Mendieta

Background

Geronimo de Mendieta (1525–1604)

- Joined the “Observant” arm of the Franciscan order in 1545 in Bilbao, Spain
- In 1554, he went to New Spain (modern day Mexico) to pursue missionary work among the Native Americans (the Spanish referred to them as “Indians”). In the process, he learnt the local Nahuatl language.
- A noted writer, Geronimo was commissioned in 1573 by his order to write a history of the Franciscan missionary work in the region. This *Historia eclesiástica Indiana*, written in Spanish, was completed in 1597.

Letter to the President of the Council of the Indies (1571)

- The Council of the Indies was the Spanish royal administrative body that effectively ran all the Spanish colonies.
- In this letter, Geronimo is officially reporting back on the progress of missionary work to this body. He is open about the difficulties encountered, and is forthright in suggesting changes that he felt, from his experience, would make for better progress.

Text

“Some people might argue, as the bishop of Michoacan Vasco de Quiroga used to, that “It is against God's will to disrupt the hierarchical order of the sacred ecclesiastical law.” Against that argument one must realize that people were not created for the laws or for the ecclesiastical decrees, no matter how holy they are. On the contrary, the laws and the ecclesiastical decrees were instituted on men's behalf and for his profit and utility. It would be hard words to say that what really matters is to observe inviolably in the Indies what these sacred [laws] have instituted, even though the natives never become good Christians, rather than for the Indians to become good and true Christians by changing some of the sanctions and decrees that the Holy fathers have promulgated.”