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Medieval Histories

Clairvaux 1115 - 2015

Cistercians at Kalamazoo 2015

Cistercian Business

Royal Abbey of Santa Maria de Poblet

Of Gods and Men

Medieval Histories

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Medieval Histories

- read about new exhibitions, books, research and much more

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Expositio in Apocalypsim. Cambridge University MS Mm.5.31, fol 229.



The Abbey of Clairvaux is surrounded by 3 km of high walls, symbol of the prison © Sylvain Bordier

Clairvaux 1115 - 2015

Aube en Champagne celebrates the 900th anniversary of the Cistercian foundation, the Abbey of Clairvaux in 2015

Clairvaux was founded in a secluded valley in Champagne in 1115 by Steven of Harding together with a dozen brothers. The abbey rapidly found itself as the head of the 339 other Cistercian abbeys across Europe. After the French Revolution the monks left the abbey and in the 19th century it was turned into a huge French prison. It still functions as such with infamous inmates like the Carlos the Jackal, imprisoned for life. The remaining medieval buildings may be visited as part of

a guided tour, which has been reorganized in connection with the anniversary.

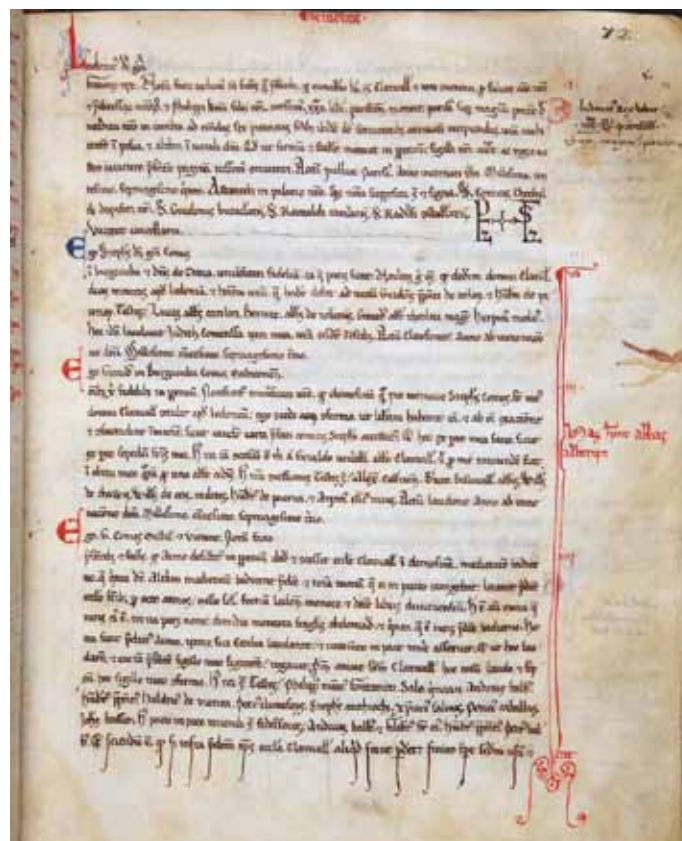
The main event in connection with the anniversary of Clairvaux is a large exhibition in nearby Troyes: "Clairvaux. L'aventure cistercienne".

With more than 150 rare documents, objects and relics the exhibition tells the story of the Cistercians and their monastic, political, economic, artistic and intellectual life at Clairvaux until the Revolution.

The exhibition has been curated by André Vauchez, who has also edited the accompanying catalogue.



Illuminations in a bible donated to Bernard of Clairvaux by Count Thibaud de Champagne
© Grand Troyes



Extract from a cartulary from the 13th century
© Grand Troyes

The Archive

In connection with the anniversary a digitization of the former archive of the Abbey of Clairvaux has also been undertaken. This site will “open for business” in June. The archive holds 230 charters from the 12th and 13th centuries plus a vast amount of other material. All in all 67.720 pages and 1700 manuscripts have been digitized.

In the following years 20.000 royal and papal documents will be made accessible. The project is scheduled to be finished in 2020 under the auspices of “Les Archives de l'Aube”.

The Library

According to an inventory from 1472 made by the abbot, Pierre de Virey, the ancient library of Clairvaux held 1750 manuscripts. After the revolution the library was transferred to Troyes, where more than 1150 manuscripts of these are still kept.

This collection constitutes one of the most important medieval libraries and is designated as part of the collection: “Memory of the World” by UNESCO. For more than ten years the library in Troyes have worked to digitize and catalogue the collection properly.

Guided tour of the Abbey

Of primary medieval interest is the lay refectory from the 12th century. However, it is also possible to visit the monks' refectory from the 18th century as well as the prisoners' chapel. This tour will be available from mid-June. ("The old guided tour" is available from March – October.)

It is recommended, though, to make a trip app. 70 km southwest to Fontenay, which is the best preserved of the ancient abbeys.

Other sights in the Neighborhood

- Cistercian barn at d'Outre-Aube. This is used as a centre for local members and visitors, which are lay members of the Cistercian order.

- Cistercian wine cellar at Colombé-le Sec, which is now owned by the family, Calon-Egger. They produce Champagne Monial
- Cistercian barn at Cornay (Saulcy) which is still in use by the local farm

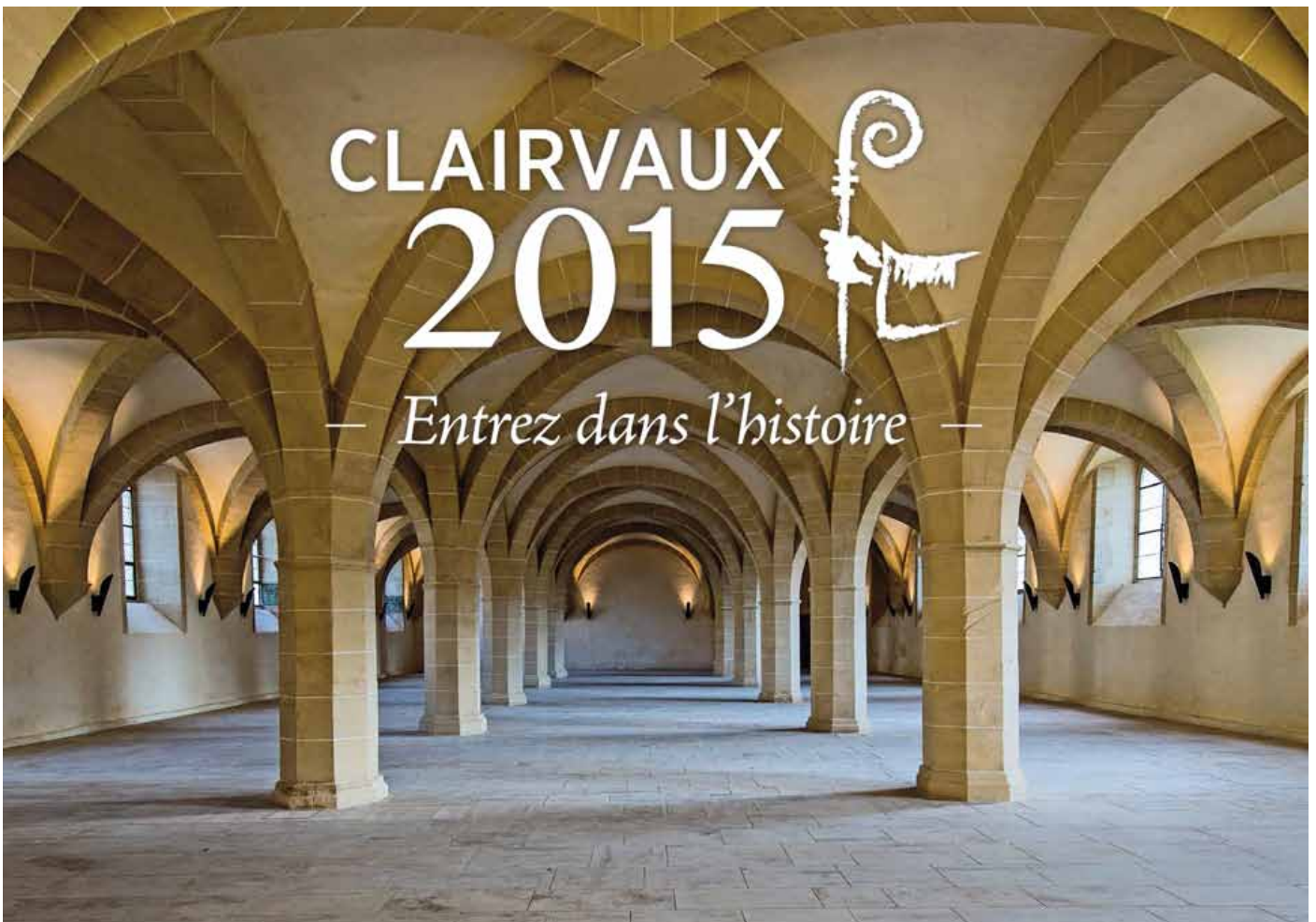
Guided Tour

Shuttle bus between Troyes and Clairvaux with visit(s) to Clairvaux and Colombé-le Sec, including champagne tasting, transport and a meal.

Information and bookings: Voyages Col-lard

Find out about all the events:

Clairvaux 2015. L'abbaye de Clairvaux fête ses 900 ans

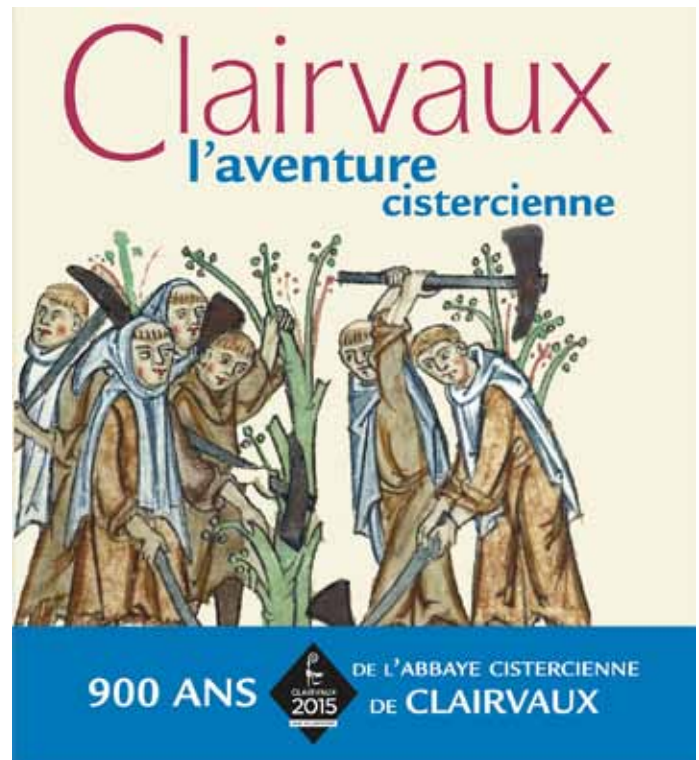


Catalogue

Clairvaux. L'aventure cistercienne

Ed by Nicolas Dohrmann, Arnaud Baudin, and Laurent Veyssi re. Scientific committee headed by Andr  Vauchez.

Co dition Somogy- ditions d'art et
D partement de l'Aube 2015
EAN : 9782757209349



New Cistercian Studies – A Handlist of Good Books

Cistercian Studies is a fruitful field inside Medieval Studies. Here is a list of books, which can be used as introduction.

In the 11th century small groups of young noblemen from Northern France began to build communities, which they believed were closer to the original dreams of St. Benedict than those, which they experienced in the huge and successful Cluniac institutions. One of these groups, led by a young noble, Robert, founded a small monastery in Molesmes. Later he sought together with his friend Steven of Harding, to found an even more remote and austere community. This led to the first monastery in C teaux. In 1108 Steven of Harding was called as abbot. He was soon known as a charismatic leader as well as gifted administrator and soon it was possible to sprout new monasteries, called 'daughters'.

From around 1120 it became obvious that the 'Novum Monasterium', C teaux, was not only a vibrant abbey, but also the centre of a whole new religious order, which came to revolutionise the way in which religious monasteries, convents and abbeys were organised. In short: the Abbot of C teaux was not only responsible for his own institution, he was also called upon to visit and oversee his "daughters". This system laid the foundation for an enormous administrative bureaucracy, which means that the study of the spiritual as well as practical ways of life in the Cistercian Abbeys offers vast opportunities to study new and fascinating aspects of the life of the monks and (later) sisters.

As is well-known, the order grew exponentially in the first decades. From the very fragile start around 1100, the order could muster 322 abbeys in 1150 and double that a hundred years later. Around 1300,

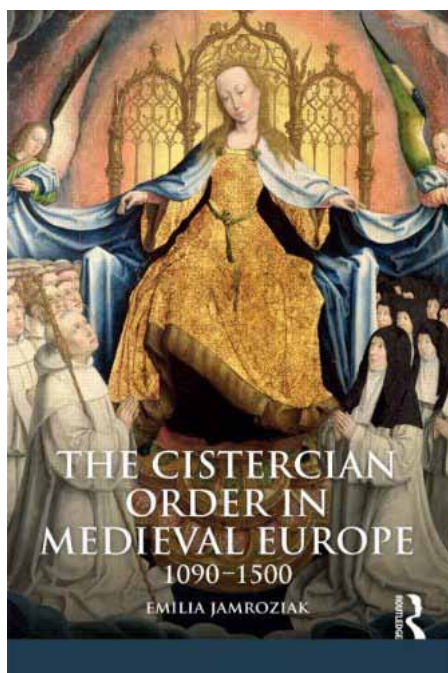
when the religious fever had expired, there were 697 abbeys from Lyse, north of Trondheim in Norway, to Rocca di Taormina in Sicily. All these abbeys were organized inside 5 families: Cîteaux and its four primary daughters, Clairvaux, Morimond, Pontigny, and La Ferté.

A decisive factor was of course the recruitment of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose spiritual and aesthetic inspiration came to define the Cistercian way of life in such a way, that we even today are able to recognise the special aura, which surrounds the

physical remains of these many abbeys, monasteries and convents.

Another important feature was the focus on both prayer and work. While the Cluniacians hired peasants to do the hard work, the Cistercians created a space for peasants dreaming of a monastic life.

As lay-brethren they lived apart from the monks. However, their life was steeped in the monastic experience, and at peak times all brethren took part in the work - harvesting, digging, building.



The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe: 1090-1500 (The Medieval World)

By Emilia Jamrozik

Routledge 2013

ISBN-10: 1405858648

ISBN-13: 978-1405858649

ABSTRACT:

The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe offers an accessible and engag-

ing history of the Order from its beginnings in the twelfth century through to the early sixteenth century. Unlike most other existing volumes on this subject it gives a nuanced analysis of the late medieval Cistercian experience as well as the early years of the Order.

Jamrozik argues that the story of the Cistercian Order in the Middle Ages was not one of a 'Golden Age' followed by decline, nor was the true 'Cistercian spirit' exclusively embedded in the early texts to remain unchanged for centuries. Instead she shows how the Order functioned and changed over time as an international organisation, held together by a novel 'management system'; from Estonia in the east to Portugal in the west, and from Norway to Italy. The ability

to adapt and respond to these very different social and economic conditions is what made the Cistercians so successful.

This book draws upon a wide range of primary sources, as well as scholarly literature in several languages, to explore the following key areas:

- the degree of centralisation versus local specificity
- how much the contact between monastic communities and lay people changed over time

- how the concept of reform was central to the Medieval history of the Cistercian Order

This book appeals to anyone interested in Medieval history and the Medieval Church more generally as well as those with a particular interest in monasticism.

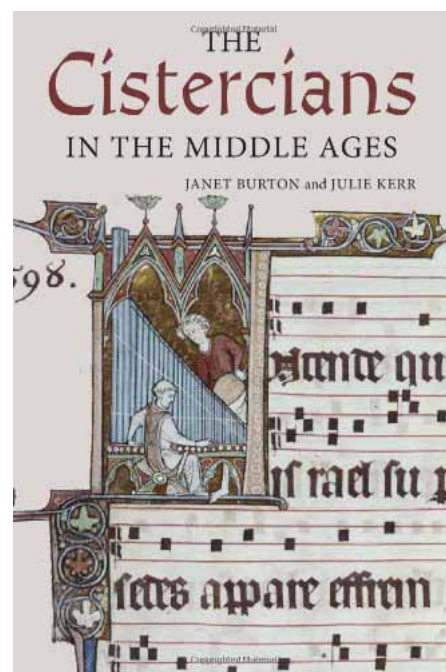
The Cistercians in the Middle Ages

Series: Monastic Orders
by Janet Burton Julie Kerr
Boydell Press 2011
ISBN-10: 184383667X
ISBN-13: 978-1843836674

ABSTRACT:

The Cistercians (White Monks) were the most successful monastic experiment to emerge from the tumultuous intellectual and religious fervour of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By around 1150 they had established houses the length and breadth of Western Christendom and were internationally renowned. They sought to return to a simple form of monastic life, as set down in the Rule of St Benedict,

and preferred rural locations “far from the haunts of men”. But, as recent research has shown, they were by no means isolated from society but influenced, and were influenced by, the world around them; they moved with the times. This book seeks to explore the phenomenon that was the Cistercian Order, drawing on recent research from various disciplines to consider what it was that made the Cistercians distinctive and how they responded to developments. The book addresses current debates regarding the origins and evolution of the Order; discusses the key primary sources for knowledge; and covers architecture, administration, daily life, spirituality, the economy and the



monks' ties with the world. Professor Janet Burton teaches at the School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Dr Julie Kerr is Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, University of St Andrews.

The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century

(Penguin Classics)
By Thomas Wyatt (Author),
Pauline Matarasso (Introduction, Translator)
Penguin Classics 1993

ABSTRACT

This volume brings together a selection writings by St Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153) – including his letters, The Life of Malachy

the Irishman, sermons on the Song of Songs and the sharply satirical Apologia for Abbot William.

The texts reveal him to be a highly individual and influential writer of the Middle Ages. Also included here are a charming description of Clairvaux, biographies of abbots and a series of exemplary stories, all drawing on the Scriptures to express intensely personal forms of monastic theology.



The Cistercian World
Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century

The Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order

Ed. by Mette Birkedal Bruun

**Series: Cambridge Companions to Religion
Cambridge University Press 2012**

ABSTRACT:

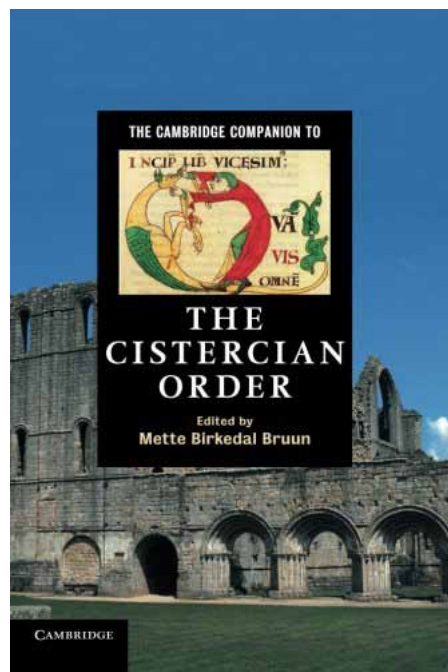
This volume presents the composite character of the Cistercian Order in its unity and diversity, detailing the white monks' history from the Middle Ages to the present day. It charts the geographical spread of the Order from Burgundy to the peripheries of medieval

Europe, examining key topics such as convents, liturgy, art, agriculture, spiritual life and education, providing an insight into Bernard of Clairvaux's life, work and sense of self, as well as the lives of other key Cistercian figures.

This Companion offers an accessible synthesis of contemporary scholarship on the Order's interaction with the extramural world and its participation in, and contribution to, the cultural, economical and political climate of medieval Europe and beyond.

The discussion contributes to the history of religious

orders, and will be useful to those studying the twelfth-century renaissance, the apostolic movement and the role of religious life in medieval society.



Separate but Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers 1120-1350

by James France

Series: Cistercian Studies, Book 246

Cistercian Publications 2012

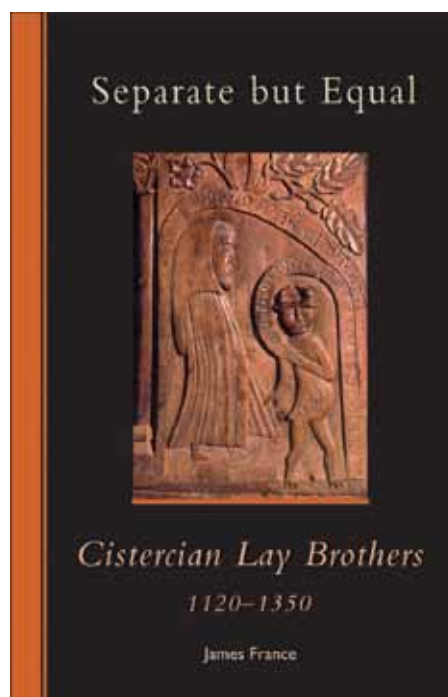
ABSTRACT:

The institution of the lay brotherhood was not original to the Cistercians, but they developed it to its fullest extent. Although lay, the conversi were under the same vows as monks and represented a new form of

religious life. While monks were bound to the recitation of the Divine Office, the lay brothers were dedicated to a life of toil and acted as the monks' auxiliaries. Their contribution to the spiritual and material life of the Cistercian Order was immense.

By consideration of tales from the exemplum literature, evidence from general chapter statutes, and information on the architectural provisions made for the lay brothers in the abbey and on the outlying granges,

this book puts flesh on the bare bones of a life directed by their own usages.





'New Clairvaux' in California houses a rebuilt Cistercian Cloister from 12th century Spain

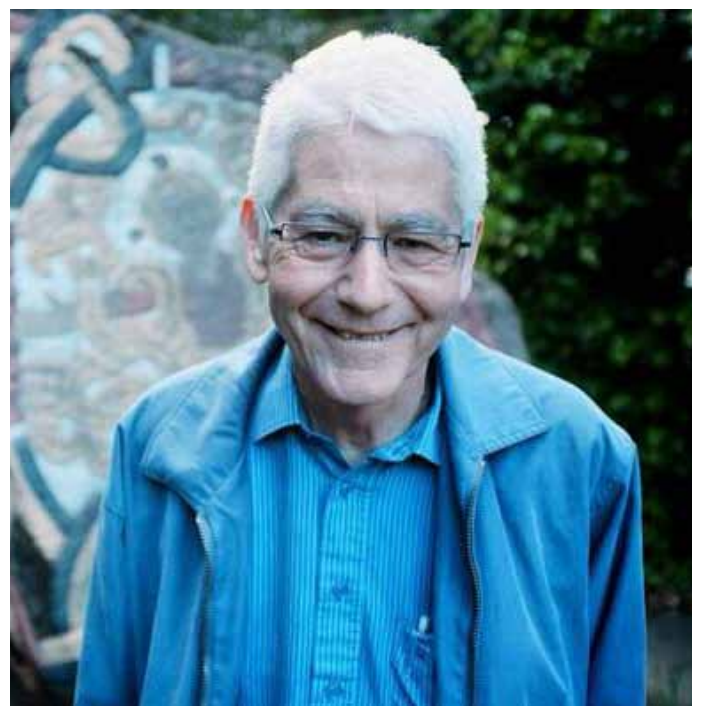
Cistercians at Kalamazoo

Brian Patrick McGuire tells about his life-long immersion in Cistercian Studies and the Cistercian Studies Conference in Kalamazoo

The city of Kalamazoo in Western Michigan is best known for the Glenn Miller song "I've got a girl in Kalamazoo" but for the past fifty years it has been home every May to an international conference of medieval studies which now brings 3000 scholars from all over the globe to Western Michigan University for four intense days of seminars, lectures and events focusing on life and learning in medieval Europe.

One segment of the Medieval Congress is made up of the Cistercian Studies Conference. Here monks, nuns and lay scholars delve into the long history of the Cistercian Order, founded in Burgundy in the 12th century and still alive today in more than a hundred houses for men and for women all over the globe. The idea of the Conference is to make it possible to living Cistercians to talk about their heritage with lay

persons. Some of these are Roman Catholics, but there are just as many Protestants and those with no religious faith but with a fascination for the group of contempla-



tive monks that changed the geography of medieval Europe with their 700 foundations. Each of us is encouraged to give a 20 minute paper, followed by 10 minutes of discussion, and with three papers in a session, and three sessions in a day, plus an evening session, it is an intense and exhausting experience!

I first came to the Cistercian Conference in 1989 and was amazed to discover the openness of the monks and nuns to critical studies of their traditions and past. I was told that I was a “Cistercian scholar” and was welcome to visit Cistercian monasteries in the United States and lecture on the topics that I presented at Kalamazoo. So I am one of a privileged group of lay scholars who first visit the United States by spending a week in a monastery and live the daily life of monks or nuns and then come to Kalamazoo. I have just come from the Abbey of New Melleray in Iowa, founded by Irish monks in 1849 and now home to about 30 monks who listened to three days of my presentations on the history of private prayer and the life and writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, the best-known Cistercian of the twelfth century.

This year’s Cistercian Studies Conference will be especially memorable, for the key figure in Cistercian studies, Professor Rozanne Elder, who has been based at Western Michigan University since the 1970s, is retiring from her professorship. A successor has been chosen, but the future of the Cistercian Conference is in question, with a university that like other American institutions of higher learning is trying to cut back on expenses. It remains to be seen if Western Michigan will continue to house what Rozanne Elder helped create, the Center for Cistercian and Monastic Studies, or if it will have to move elsewhere. If so, the Cistercian Conference would not be



Dr. Rozanne Elder visiting Cistercians at 'New Clairvaux' in California

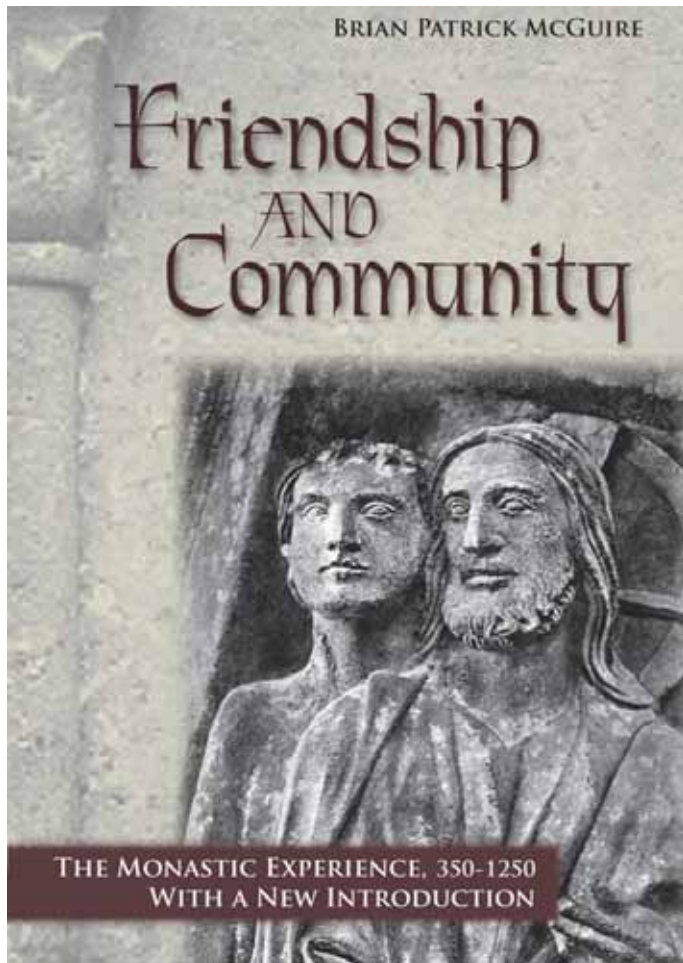
allowed to continue offering twelve sessions over three days with scholars from North America, Europe and Asia. There will no longer be a Cistercian Conference separate from the Medieval Congress and a wonderful meeting place of kindred spirits will be lost.

The modern Cistercians used to be called Trappists, from the branch of the movement that was reformed in the 17th century, but most Cistercians today prefer their medieval name and not the name derived from the strict abbey of “La Trappe”. Thus the initials of these Cistercians remains OCSO, meaning the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. The Trappists were famous for never speaking, and there are still monks and nuns alive today who can remember the old regime when they only spoke to each other on special occasions.

Today the Cistercians are much better known for loving to talk, and at Kalamazoo the talk will spread out of the lecture hall to the coffee room and the pathways of the university, bursting with spring flowers and a sense of renewal.

*Brian Patrick McGuire
Professor Emeritus, Roskilde University*

Selected Works by Brian Patrick McGuire



Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250

by Brian Patrick McGuire

Cornell University Press (1988) 2010

ABSTRACT:

Human beings have always formed personal friendships. Some cultures have left behind the evidence of philosophical discussion; some have provided only private or semipublic letters. By comparing these, one discerns the effect exercised by the society in which the writers lived, its opportunities, and its restrictions. The cloistered monks of medieval Europe, who have bequeathed a rich literary legacy on the subject, have always had to take into account the overwhelming fact of community. Brian Patrick McGuire finds that in seeking friends and friendship, medieval men and women sought self-knowledge, the enjoyment of life, the commitment of community, and the experience of God.

First published in 1988, *Friendship and Community* has been widely debated, inspiring the current interest among medievalists in the subject of friendship. It has also informed other fields within medieval history, including monasticism, spirituality, psychology, and the relationship between self and community. In a new introduction to the Cornell edition, McGuire surveys the critical reaction to the original edition and

The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and His Tradition

by Brian Patrick McGuire

Cistercian Publications Inc. 1989

ISBN-10: 0879076267

ISBN-13: 978-0879076269

ABSTRACT:

Controversial in his own day, Bernard still today excites both admiration and dislike. McGuire looks at various facets of Bernard's personality, and at the enduring legacy that has followed him for over eight centuries.

A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux

Ed. by Brian Patrick McGuire

Series: Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition

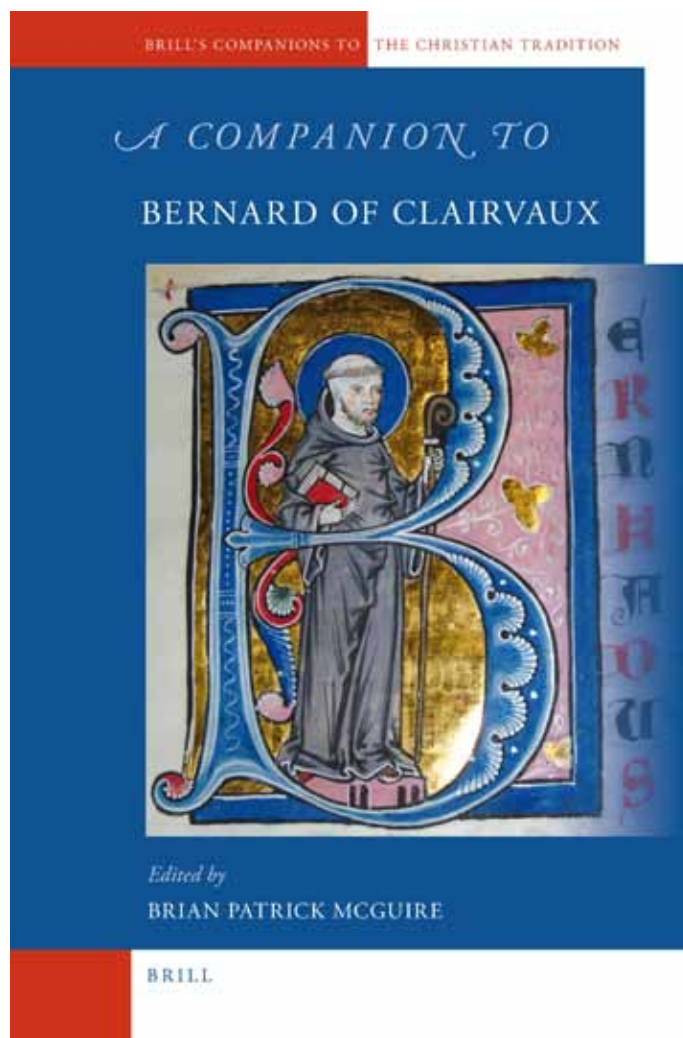
Brill 2011

ABSTRACT:

Bernard of Clairvaux emerges from these studies as a vibrant, challenging and illuminating representative of the monastic culture of the twelfth century. In taking on Peter Abelard and the new scholasticism he helped define the very world he opposed and thus contributed to the renaissance of the twelfth century.

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Holdsworth, Michael Casey, James France, Diane Reilly, John Sommerfeldt, Mette B. Bruun, Burcht Pranger, Chrysogonus Waddell, E. Rozanne Elder, and Brian Patrick McGuire.



Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and Their Stories, 1100-1250

Brian Patrick McGuire

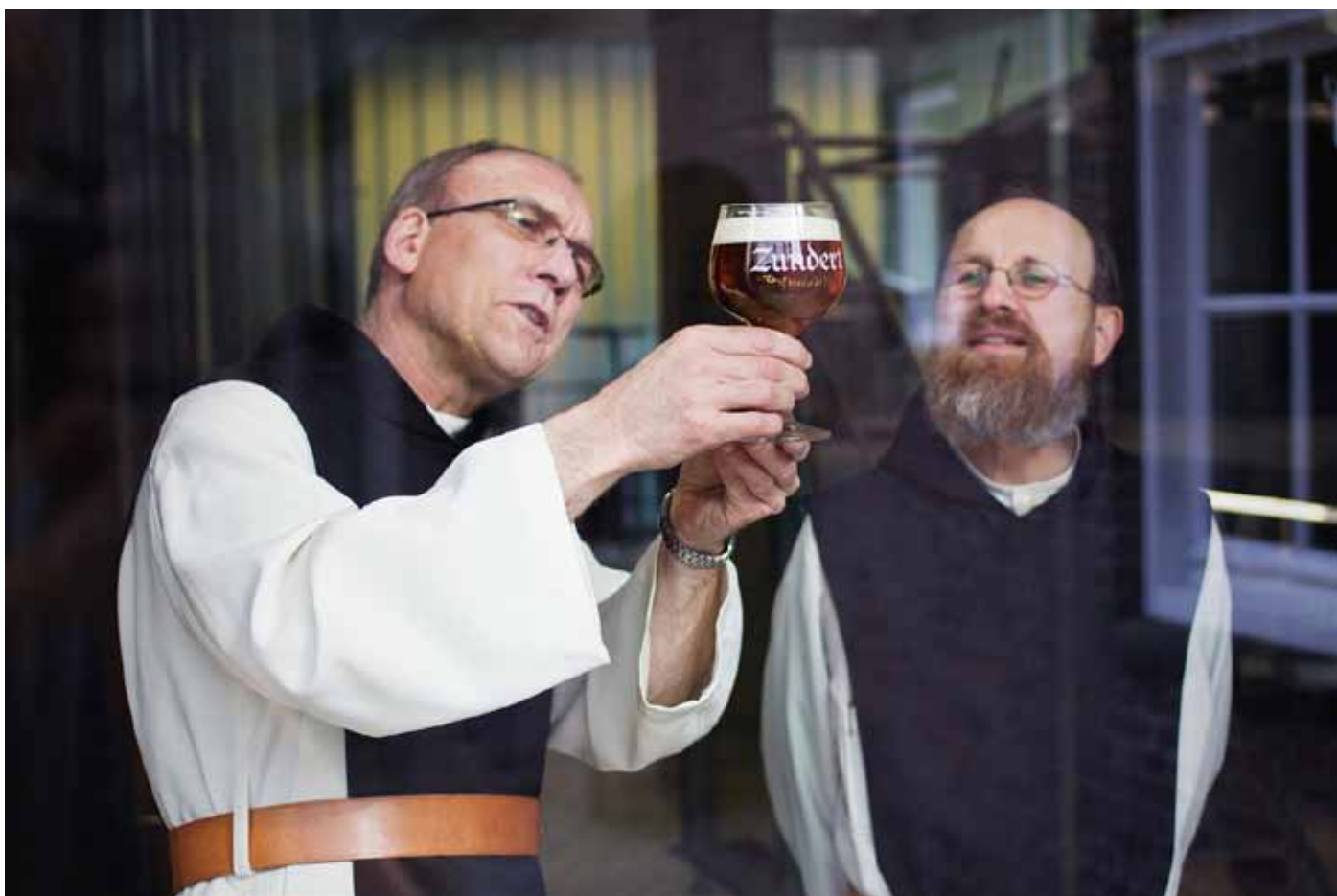
Series: Variorum Collected Studies Series: CS742

Ashgate Variorum 2002

ABSTRACT

In these articles Professor McGuire explores the riches of the Cistercian exemplum tradition. These texts are made up of brief stories, often with a miraculous content, which provided moral support for novices and monks in Cistercian abbeys all over Europe in the High Middle Ages. The Cistercians have been seen mainly in terms of their great writers like Bernard of Clairvaux and the impressive buildings

they left behind. But Cistercian literature also provides us with more humble insights from daily life, shedding light on questions of sexuality, anger, depression, and bonds of friendship, also between monks and nuns. They bring a freshness of insight and immediate experience, and their seeming naivety lets us be aware of monks' commitment to each other in individual and community bonds. In Cistercian storytelling, the Gospel's message meets an historical context and bears witness to a transformation of Christian life and idealism, while at the same time allowing us precious insights into how ordinary men and women, not just monks and nuns, lived and thought.



Zundert Beer © Boom Packaging

Cistercian Business

The Cistercians were always known as keen businessmen, busy developing the economic foundation for their life. Today, this effort is continued; but in a modern version

Ora et Labora

Part of the Cistercian reinvention of the monastic traditions of St. Benedict was the equal stress on both prayer and work. While the later Benedictines hired peasants and in general ran their monasteries as large domains, the Cistercians focused

on creating home-farms – granges – near their monastery complete with vegetable gardens, orchards, dovecotes, barns, granaries, stables, workshops etc. It was stipulated that such granges in principle should be situated so close to the monastery that it was possible for the lay-brethren, who worked the land, to take part in the religious life on Sundays and feast-days.

An important element was harnessing the waterways in order to secure fresh water as well as sufficient milling and fish-ponds. Often extensive canals were dug to supply means for transportation, for instance of building material.

A vast literature has naturally touched upon the different ways in which this system differed according to the geographical location of the monastery, as well as how it evolved through time. Central, however, was – at least in theory - the direct involvement of the monks in not just overseeing, but also taking part in the daily grinding business of keeping their community fed and clothed. This is of course still a chal-

lenge.

Religious shopping

Today, however, their business has much more to do with tourists seeking authentic and spiritually rewarding experiences.

Simple living is big business and can be “bought” not only at the app. 170 living Cistercian monasteries, but at the many

One story repeatedly told about the Cistercians tells how the Virgin and other female saints went into the fields to dry the sweat off their foreheads. Painting by Jürg Breu the Elder (1475 - 1537).

Source: Wikipedia



“lay-communities” peopled by spiritually engaged locals, who are busy building community centres, cultural meeting houses or small museums.

Primary products are of course spiritual literature of all sorts ranging from serious publications with selections of the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux to less than serious monastic cookbooks. Other merchandise is Trappist beer, honey, cheese, wool-blankets etc. The prices are frequently steep, but it has been documented that tourists shopping at monasteries consider themselves in the “business” of supporting people, who have chosen a better lifestyle than their own busy and consumerist ethos dictates them.

Brands

In order to safe-keep this brand, an international organisation – **The International Trappist Association** – was formed in 1997 in order to safeguard the brand, Trappist (not Cistercian!).

The range of products currently offers 26 different products ranging from beer to banners and flags. The Association is run by 20 monasteries belonging to the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance (commonly known as Trappists or Trappistines). The monasteries are primarily of Belgian origin, but members may also be



found in Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands.

Another such network, **Association Monastic**, from 1989 peddles wares under another brand; ‘Monastic’. It has 20 Cistercian monasteries and 22 Cistercian convents as members, all French.

An important goal for both associations is to protect the brand and the image.

Modern Information Centres

Another avenue is organizing the broader spiritual and informational effort. In 1996, this agenda inspired the Abbey of Cîteaux to found the Association pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Cistercienne (Arccis). The aim is to “inform, spread, and defend the Cistercian heritage and to stimulate Cistercian spirituality”. This has a sister, the **Centre Européen pour la Rayonnement de la culture Cistercienne - CERC-CIS**, a documentation center that offers a platform for researchers and scholars.

Such an institution can also be found in Austria at the Cistercian abbey of Heiligenkreuz: **Europainstitut für cisterciensische Geschichte, Spiritualität, Kunst und Liturgie – EUCIST**.



The new Hostatgeria inaugurated in 2010 © Medieval Histories

The Business of Cistercian Heritage

While the above-mentioned initiatives seek to cater for more-or-less religiously inspired tourists, other associations work to promote cultural tourism of a more secular character.

One such organization is the '**Charte Européenne des Abbayes et Sites Cisterciens**', which accommodates a very well visited website. With 178 members from all-over Europe they spread information about the many places, where it is possible to experience Cistercian ruins, museums or landscapes.

Partner here is the **Cistercian Route** developed by the European Institute for Cultural Routes. This initiative received an official recognition in 2010 by the Council of

Europe. However, as with all these "routes" developed by the Institute, communication is sorely lacking.

Reial Monestir de Poblet

Very early on five Cistercian Abbeys in Europe were designated as World Heritage by UNESCO: Fonteney (France), Fountains (England) Maulbronn (Germany), Alcobaça (Portugal) and Poblet (Spain).

Of these, Reial Monestir de Poblet has a special status, since it is the only one still functioning as an Abbey with a community of more than 30 monks plus dependents. As the monastery is also the official royal pantheon for the kings of Catalonia and Aragon, the monks oversee the yearly business of catering for more than 150.000 tourists plus playing an important part in the preservation of the nature

reserve, which the monastery is located in the midst of.

In 2010 the monastery finally succeeded in finishing the construction of a brand new guest-house or 'hostatgeria', which can cater for up to 84 persons (42 rooms). Simple, yet elegant this has been designed by **Mariano Bayón from Madrid**.

The history behind this new guest-house was fraught with controversies. First aired as a renovation project of the old hospital and pilgrim-centre at the monastery 80 years ago, it was started in earnest in the 80s, before the site became World Heritage in 1991. Early on conservation groups fought the plans and in 1997 a new project was launched, financed by the Spanish government. Nevertheless, the project dragged on due to lack of funding and shifting governments. However, in 2010 the guest-house was finally opened for business with representatives from the

Spanish government, which had in fact funded the project.

At the opening ceremony in 2010 the Abbot José Alegre claimed that the guest-house was a 'hospice' and not a hotel and that its main object was not to make money, but provide a space for visitors to sample a breathing space filled with silence, tranquility and simple living. Nevertheless, there has been much local muttering. The fact remains that the local inns and hotels have lost a lot of their prior business; not least, since the Monastery does not consistently advertise openly at what times the public has access. Visitors have to shop for a ticket first and then - hopefully - there is room. As a living community, the church, cloister and ancient buildings may only be visited as part of a guided tour. Times shift periodically according to season and services held in the church.

To sample the experience in full, you have

One of the issues raised by institutions safeguarding the built heritage was the incorporation of the 12th century chapel, dedicated to pilgrims. © Hostatgeria Poblet





to stay either at the new guesthouse or as a proper pilgrim in the monastery (the last option requires that you are a male and preferably lay Cistercian).

It goes without saying that the 'Hostatgeria' serves a simple and very delicate menu – small portions, steep prices and expensive local wine from the local vineyards.

SOURCES

El monestir de Poblet, «únic al món», obre les portes de la nova hostatgeria

L'hostatgeria veu la llum més de vint anys després, superades les dificultats econòmiques, lluites Estat-Generalitat i recursos en defensa del patrimoni
Hostatgeria de Poblet

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Identity Ambivalences of Monastic Heritage and International networks: The Case of the Cistercians and Trappists

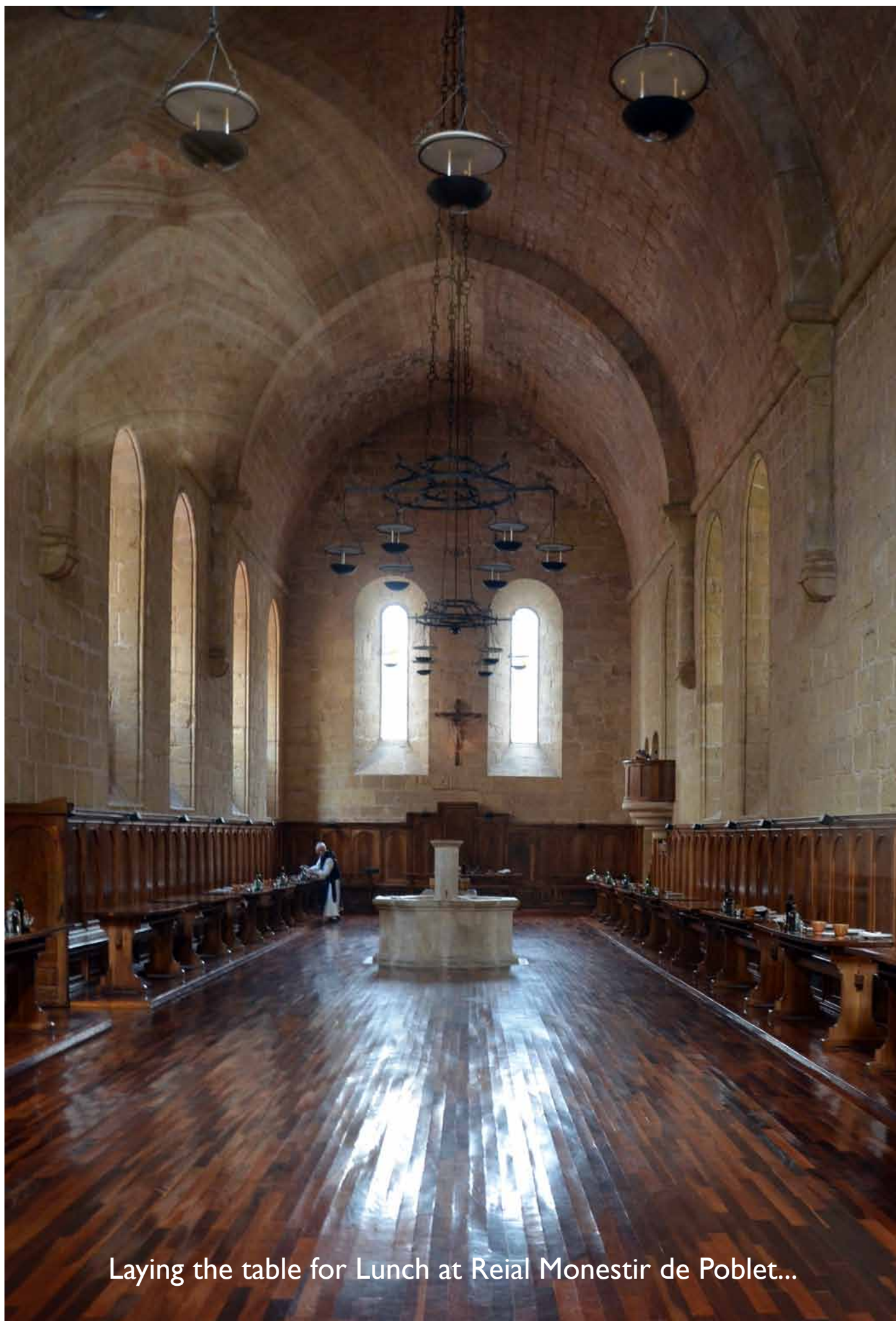
By Thomas Coomans

In: EAC Occasional Paper Nr. 7: Heritage reinvents Europe. Proceedings of the International Conference, Ename, Belgium, 17 – 19. March 2011. Ed. by Dirk Callebaut, Jan Mařík and Maříková-Kubková, Europae Archaeologiae Consilium (EAC), Association Internationale sans But Lucratif (AIS-BL) 2013, pp. 93 – 100

The Monastic Landscape of Poblet: a place where spirituality, culture and nature joins hands.

By Lluç M. Torcal and Joseph-Maria Mallarach.

In: protected Landscapes and Spiritual Values. Ed. By Joseph-Maria Mallarach. Kasparek Verlag Heidelberg 2008, pp. 80 - 91



Laying the table for Lunch at Reial Monestir de Poblet...



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Royal Abbey of Santa Maria de Poblet

The Abbey in Poblet is known for its royal pantheon and for its status as World Heritage. Not least the scenery makes it worth a visit

The Cistercian monastery in Catalonia, Santa Maria de Poblet, was founded in 1149 by Ramon-Berengar IV, count of Barcelona and later king of Catalonia. The monastery was colonized by monks from Fontefroide, who arrived in 1151 under the leadership of Abbot Etienne. Inside two years the first buildings were erected and in 1170 the building of the large church was begun.

The church measures 85 x 21 m and the nave is 28 m high. To the east is an apse, an ambulatory and three semi-circular

chapels, flanked by two minor apsidioles on each side of the transept. The elaborate royal chapel with tombs from the 14th century and the magnificent retable from the 16th century are in stark contrast to the otherwise plain and serene architecture of the church itself. The monastery itself is a mixture of Cistercian traditions





brai, Jaume Cascalls and Pierre Oller, who all worked in the 14th and 15th centuries. The tombs are one of the reasons why tourists flock to the place.

The Garden

The name of the monastery in Poblet derives from Latin: *populetum* for white poplar (*populus alba*). This tree grows abundantly along the rivers and streams in the valley around the monastery even today.

The monastery covers an area of 16 ha inside the perimeter wall and includes a couple of vineyards, through which the stream of St. Bernard runs. This is lined with poplars and ashlar.

Inside the monastery complex a number of gardens are tended by the monks. These are private. However, at the heart of the monastery is the main cloister, which was built in a transient style mixing Romanesque and Gothic elements. Inside this cloister is a garden, which has recently been renovated after an archaeological excavation was undertaken in 2010 – 11. Visitors since 2012 have had the distinct

interspersed with both Gothic and Muslim influence. For instance the capitals in the cloister reflect a decided Moorish inspiration.

It is probable the monastery was fitted with Cistercian glass windows. In 1189 a certain glass-master, Guillermo, was granted the privilege to harvest all the nettles around Poblet, Nettle was a well-known source for sodium carbonate.

The outlay of the monastery itself reflects the classic Cistercian design manuals. The royal residences next to monastery, however, reflect local secular traditions. All in all the monastery covers more than 12000 m².

The royal pantheons were created by the sculptors Gil de Morlanes, Aloi de Mont-



opportunity to experience a profusion of scents, colours and birdsong reflecting a thorough renovation undertaken by Joseph-Maria Mallarach.

He explains that the principles for renovating the garden was that it should be 1) ecologically friendly 2) easy to maintain and 3) biblical and historical

Inspiration was primarily found in research undertaken in the medieval and renaissance gardens in Barcelona from the 12th to the 16th century. Paramount here were the many lemon and orange trees, which may be enjoyed in the present garden in the cloister next to the cathedral there. The idea behind these gardens was to recreate the “paradise” of the hortus conclusus. Apart from lemons and oranges the most common trees were cherries, apples and pomegranates. Flowering plants included roses and lilies.

Further inspiration was gathered from the work of Catalan King Martin (1356 – 1410), who is famous for his gardens, which he planted in Barcelona. The king appears to have personally directed the design of the gardens, which were planted with oranges, medlars, cherries, lemons, peaches, grapefruits and apples. Jasmines, myrtles, thyme and vine are also mentioned.

Finally another inspiration was found in the Islamic gardens reflecting the Hispano-Moorish design of the capitals with their plant-motives. The monastery was right on the border of al-Andalus and maintained cordial relations with its Muslim neighbours.

In the end the restoration also had to consider a number of specifications dictated by the need to preserve the cloister itself.



The breviary of King Martin I was produced in Poblet. Perhaps the artist was inspired by the gardens here and in Barcelona?

From: Breviarium Secundum Ordinem Cistercianum, BnF, MS Rotchild 2529, fol 240

Primarily a path was laid out along the four sides of the cloister-walk in order to secure the drain of water dripping from the gargoyles. Another specification was the wish to preserve the four large cypresses, which had been planted in the corners in the 20th century. Finally, the position of the fountain or lavabo had to be respected. As per Cistercian tradition, this was located to the side. Within this framework it was decided to divide the future garden into four squares laid out in the form of a cross. Plants were chosen according to their aromatic scent, their ability to flower under arid conditions and with a wish to prolong the flowering season for as long as possible.

Further a colour system was chosen, re-

flecting the work of Frédéric Portal. Near the southern wing next to the church, white flowers were planted signaling divine unity, perfection, purity and chastity. To the east, yellow flowers were destined to create light symbolizing faith. To the north were planted red flowers, signaling sacrifice, blood and sanctification. And finally, to the west, near the entrance from the cloister, blue flowers were planted to signal infinity. In the center of each of the four squares were planted roses, symbolizing the heart of the four flowerbeds and the monastery itself, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A special rose was created, mixing the four colours. Today this rose carries the name, Abadia de Poblet.

A full description of the garden and the ideas behind can be found in the writings of Joseph-Maria Mallarach.

Sources:

Poblet Monastery Cloister Garden on the Al-Andalus border: aims and meaning of the restoration work.

By Joseph-Maria Mallarach.

Unpublished paper 2014

Poblet Abbey

By Jesús M. Oliver with photographs by Francesc Bedmar

Editorial Escudo de Oro 2002 (4th edition)

The new garden in the cloister in St. Mary de Poblet on a cold morning in the autumn 2014. Still lovely
© Medieval Histories







Of Gods and Men

Perhaps the best way to sample Cistercian simplicity is simply to see the movie, **Of Gods and Men**, directed by Beauvois in 2010

The film was photographed at the abandoned monastery of Azrou in Morocco. However, it tells the story of a group of nine Trappist monks, who used to live peacefully in Tibhirine in Algeria among a predominantly Muslim population. However in 1996 seven of them were kidnapped and assassinated during the Algerian Civil War.

The film follows the monastic rhythm and the soundtrack is minimal, consisting entirely of chant sung by the actors themselves (before filming they spent a month learning the art).

The film opens with a quotation from the Book of Psalms, Psalm 82:6–7: “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.”

However, the monks’ peaceful routine of

prayer, medical assistance, and community interaction is soon interrupted by the threat of an Islamic fundamentalist group.

Despite the growing danger, the monks come to consensus on the moral importance of maintaining their committed lives with, and ministry to, the local population, even when faced with violence and death. Ultimately, the terrorists seize seven out of nine monks during a nighttime raid and hold them hostage. As the captive monks trudge a snowy path towards their grim fate, the film concludes with the spiritual testament of prior Christian de Chergé, bravely written in the face of death.

The monks were later found decapitated. It has later been claimed that the real culprit was the French army.

The film won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2010 and became a remarkable commercial success in a series of countries around the world.

Of Gods and Men (Des hommes et des dieux)
About the monks at Tibhirine in Algeria
(Beauvois 2010)