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Were There Twelfth-Century Cistercian Nuns?

CONSTANCE H. BERMAN

It has been a truism in the history of medieval religious orders that the Cistercians only admitted women late in the twelfth century and then under considerable outside pressure. This view has posited a twelfth-century "Golden Age" when it had been possible for the abbots of the order of Cîteaux to avoid contact with women totally. Only later did the floodgates burst open and a great wave of women wishing to be Cistercians flood over abbots powerless to resist it. This paper reassesses narrative accounts, juridical arguments, and charter evidence to show that such assertions of the absence of any twelfth-century Cistercian nuns are incorrect. They are based on mistaken notions of how the early Cistercian Order developed, as well as on a biased reading of the evidence, including a double standard for proof of Cistercian status—made much higher for women's houses than for men's. If approached in a gender-neutral way, the evidence shows that abbeys of Cistercian women appeared as early as those for the order's men. Evidence from which it has been argued that nuns were only imitating the Cistercian Order's practices in the twelfth century in fact contains exactly the same language that when used to describe men's houses is deemed to show them to be Cistercian. Formal criteria for incorporation of women's houses in the thirteenth century are irrelevant to a twelfth-century situation in which only gradually did most

Parts of this paper were presented in 1995 and 1996 in Copenhagen, Lawrence, Kans., and Iowa City, Iowa; information on July and le Tart was used in a paper "Religious Women and the Earliest Cistercians," presented to the Third History of Religious Women conference, Loyola University, Chicago, June 1998. The paper owes much to the author's continued relationship with the "Medieval Religious Women Communities and Lives, 500-1500" project, and to its founders, Mary Martin McLaughlin and Suzanne Fonay Wemple. I am grateful to NEH for support in 1988, to the president and fellows of Clare Hall, Cambridge, who appointed me a visiting fellow in 1994-95, and to the University of Iowa for a Faculty Scholar Award in 1993-96. Travel monies for research on early Cistercian documents conducted in May 1997 and in July 1998 came from the UI Vice-President for Research, the UI International Travel Committee, and the Dean of Liberal Arts. This article was originally submitted in 1997. The editors apologize for the delay in publication.

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communities of monks or nuns eventually identified as Cistercian come to be part of the newly developing religious order.

I. CHARTER AND CARTULARY EVIDENCE

Overwhelming evidence from the documents of practice shows that women were present from the start of the religious movement that grew out of the Burgundian reform monastery of Molesme to become the Cistercian Order.¹ In documents for the house at Molesme from which Cîteaux originated, we find women not only as donors and patrons of the reform monastic movement, but also entering the abbey of Molesme as sisters. We see a charter for Molesme, for example, detailing a donor's daughter entering that abbey after 1075.² In another act dating from between 1076 and 1085, a donor's sister was given as a nun at Molesme.³ A third act from circa 1100 in the Molesme cartulary shows a woman entering Molesme with her son in a text mentioning the community of other nuns there.⁴

By 1113 or so Molesme had founded a house of nuns at Jully which would eventually have at least seven daughters.⁵ Jully is said to have followed a rule established for it collectively by Guy, second abbot of Molesme, by the famous Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, and by abbots of two or three other Cistercian houses at circa 1130.⁶ Milo count

1. The findings of this paper constitute a separate topic for investigation, but also lie at the interstices of two long-term research projects. See Constance H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: Transformation of a Religious Order in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming, 2000); eadem, *Sisters in Wealth and in Poverty: Endowment and Administration of Cistercian Houses for Women in the Ecclesiastical Province of Sens, 1190–1350*, a project still in preparation; and eadem, "Abbeys for Cistercian Nuns in the Ecclesiastical Province of Sens: Foundation, Endowment and Economic Activities of the Earlier Foundations," *Revue Mabillon* 73 (1997): 83–113, and related articles. Even standard accounts such as that of Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians, Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977), 347 ff., have moved in the direction of less rigid exclusions of women from any role in the Cistercian Order. Perhaps the most important work to date has been that of Jean-de-la-Croix Bouton, *Les Moniales cisterciennes*, vol. 1, *Histoire externe* (Grignan : Abbaye N.D. d'Aiguebelle, 1986), which has treated much of the evidence for nuns as if they were at least related to the order. It is now time to deconstruct the arguments which state that while imitating the order these women were somehow lesser Cistercians than were the order's monks.
2. *Cartulaires de l'Abbaye de Molesme, ancien diocèse de Langres, 916–1250; Recueil de Documents sur le Nord de la Bourgogne et le Midi de la Champagne, publié avec une introduction diplomatique, historique et géographique*, ed. Jacques Laurent, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1907, 1911), no. 126.
3. Laurent, *Molesme*, no. 135.
4. Laurent, *Molesme*, no. 79: "Et ipsa cum aliis mulieribus in loco eodem, post positus omnibus seculi curis, religiose viveret."
5. *Histoire du Prieuré de Jully-les-Nonnains, avec pièces justificatives*, ed. Abbé Jobin (Paris, 1881), 29.
6. Jean Leclercq, "Études sur Saint-Bernard," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 9 (1953): 153 ff.

of Bar gave Molesme the property at a castle called July on which the priory was founded, at approximately the same moment that Bernard was founding Clairvaux.⁷ The bishop of Langres confirmed tithes in two villages to July in 1126–1136, and other charters of circa 1130 also confirm rents, tithes, and other properties given to the nuns at July.⁸ A number of charters suggest the close relationship of the priory with Bernard of Clairvaux. They include a charter recording a conveyance of tithes given to the community of nuns by Humbelina, sister of Bernard of Clairvaux, when she entered July in 1133.⁹ Charters reveal that already in 1128 Aanolz, widow of Walter of la Roche, gave July a rent of ten livres when she left the world and entered that abbey. She is described as making her gift in the presence of Bernard abbot of Clairvaux and three of his monks, and three monks from Molesme.¹⁰ A house at Bar-sur-Aube given to Clairvaux was transferred by Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux to the nuns at July, but whether the donor had explicitly intended that the gift be received by Clairvaux for the nuns of July is unclear.¹¹ Nonetheless, the relationship was still close in 1142 when Bernard himself, along with the bishop of Langres (who was present at July with Andrew of Baldimento and his son Guy), received

7. Jobin, *July*, no. 1 (n.d.): “Eaedemque mulieres sub ordinatione Molismensis abbatis, Deo servire quiete valeant. Quarum victus et conversatio, mea petitione, per domnum Guidonem Molismensem abbatem, et ejus conventum sic constituitur, ut de proprio nutrimento et labore, boumque suorum cultura et elemosynis fidelium in commune victum vestitumque recipiant, servos vel ancillas, ecclesias aut decimas, villasque non habeant; sed, si ab aliquo vel aliqua haec eis data fuerint, Molismensi ecclesie permanent; aliud sane mobile Julienses teneant. Terra etiam si eis data fuerit alia, quam propriis carrucis excolere non queant, Molismensi conceditur coenobio. Quibus ad regimen sui tam corporum quam animarum, quatuor deputabuntur monachi per Molismensem abbatem, qui eas ob omni peculiaritatis vitio atque vagatione, secundum Dominum, tueantur.” Jean Leclercq has remarked on the similarities of economic regime between these nuns and the early Cistercians in “Cisterciennes et filles de S. Bernard à propos des structures variées des monastères de moniales au moyen âge,” *Studia Monastica* 32 (1990): 139–56; and idem, “La ‘Paternité’ de S. Bernard et les débuts de l’ordre cistercien,” *Revue Bénédictine* 103 (1993): 445–81. Additional information on what has historically been thought to have been the economic regime of these nuns, but also on how such communities of nuns were moved from one reformed practice to another, is suggested by *July*, no. 12 (1155), drawn from the history of the monks of Saint John of Reomaensi, who had property in the parish of July; obviously this is a very problematic text since it asserts that the women were associated with Fontevrault.
8. Jobin, *July*, no. 8 (1126–36), by Guilencus, bishop of Langres; *July*, no. 4 (1129), Guilencus, bishop of Langres, notes a gift by Lady Eluidis of Montregal and Ancericus her son; *July*, no. 5 (1130), Hato, bishop of Troyes, notes what was given for his daughter by Erlebaudus Goziaudus.
9. Jobin, *July*, no. 6 (1133).
10. Jobin, *July*, no. 3 (March 1128): “Quo defuncto, uxor ejus Aanolz, relinquens seculum et veniens Juliaceum, eidem loco et sese conversam tradidit et predictum casamentum donavit.”
11. Jobin, *July*, no. 7 (before 1137). This charter seems to have been written and sealed by Bernard himself.

and vested as nuns at July Andrew's daughters Mahaut and Halvide. Andrew and Guy gave the nuns a rent of forty solidi over a villa called Johei, to be paid annually at the feast of Saint Rémy.¹²

Three years later, however, when Eugenius III confirmed July's rights in a papal privilege of 1145, it was Molesme not Clairvaux that was in question. The pope confirmed the gift from Milon of Bar of July's site to Abbot Gerald of Molesme and the brothers "professing the regular life there," establishing that July and the holy nuns of that church and their properties in the dioceses of Langres and Chalons be under the management of Molesme. Those nuns, described as following the institutes established for July, were to be enclosed, and the monks of Molesme were to provide for their secular business.¹³ It may indeed be that this moment in 1145 marks the point when ties between July and Clairvaux were permanently severed. Certainly at some point between 1142, when Bernard was still overseeing the abbey, and 1145, it had been decided that, rather than have its nuns be under the authority of Clairvaux, July would remain tied to Molesme, the abbey which had originally founded it as a priory.

In addition to the efforts of Bernard of Clairvaux in support of the women at July from 1113 and over the next several decades, there had also arisen by the 1120s a house of nuns at le Tart, reputed to have been founded by the abbot of Cîteaux, Stephen Harding.¹⁴ This abbey of Cistercian nuns is usually treated as an unofficial foundation made by Stephen in the 1120s, having nothing to do with the Cistercian Order, which Stephen was reputed to have founded in the previous decade.

12. Jobin, *July*, no. 9 (1142).

13. Jobin, *July*, no. 10 (1145): "Eugenius, episcopus, servus servorum Dei, dilectis filiis Geraldo, Molismensi abbati, ejusque fratribus tam presentibus quam futuris, regularem vitam professis in perpetuum. Sicut injusta poscentibus nullus est tribuendas assensus, sic legitima desiderantibus non differenda petitio, quatinus et devotionis sinceritas laudabiliter enitescat et utilitas postulata vires indubitanter assumat. Ea propter, dilecti in Domino filii, vestris justis postulationibus, placido occurrentes assensu, donationem Milonis, comitis Barri, Molismensi ecclesie de Juliaco factam, et Josceranni felicis memorie, Lingonensis episcopi, canonico munimine roboratam, vobis vestrisque successoribus, inconvulso jure, concedimus obtinendam, et presentis scripti suffragio roboram; statuentes ut ipsa Juliacensis et que, Deo favente, jam ex ea processerunt sanctimonialium ecclesie, quas propriis congruum duximus exprimendas vocabulis: in episcopatu Lingonensi, ecclesie Ose; in episcopatu Catalaunensi, ecclesia Vivifontis et ecclesia One; vel si que future sunt Juliaci propagine, arbitrio et ordinatione abbatis Molismi regulariter disposite, ad laudem et gloriam Dei, sub ditione Molismensis ecclesie jugiter perseverent. Quia vero predictae sanctimoniales, secundum Juliacensis institui propositum, perpetua signate clausura ad secularia non declinant negotia, de monachis Molismensibus habebunt sibi spiritualium et temporalium bonorum provisos et ministros."

14. Jean-de-la-Croix Bouton, "L'Abbaye de Tart et ses filiales au moyen âge," in *Mélanges à la mémoire du père Anselme Dimier*, ed. B. Chauvin (Pupillin: Arbois, 1981-82; hereafter *Mélanges Dimier*), 2.3:19-61.

In fact much of the most reliable information about le Tart comes only from the 1140s or later. The foundation account for le Tart, presented as if it were a document of practice or charter, is probably actually a narrative composed later than the twelfth century, and listing the various gifts that had been made to Elizabeth, abbess, and Maria, prioress of the house.¹⁵ That this was a house of aristocratic women is seen by a confirmation made by Matthew duke of Lorraine of whatever his mother Adelaide had given to le Tart when she entered that house.¹⁶ It is also likely that at least one daughter of the lord of Montpellier was sent to le Tart in the 1170s.¹⁷ Le Tart had at least eighteen daughter houses by the end of the twelfth century.¹⁸ We have a papal confirmation from 1147 in a bull, *Desiderium quod*, that parallels other confirmations by Eugenius III to Cistercian houses for men. The bull lists le Tart's site, five granges, more than fifteen other properties, and its Cistercian tithe privileges, telling us that these nuns followed Cistercian practices.¹⁹

15. *Patrologia Latina* (1844–65; hereafter PL) 185:1409–1411, *Fundatio Monasterii de Tart sanctimonialium diocensi Lingonensis quae intra muros urbis Divionis ex anno Christi 1623 sunt deductae. (Ex autographo archivi Tartensis)* could have been written at any time, but the style of its opening suggests a considerably later date than the twelfth century: "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Benignus et omnipotens Deus, sanctae Ecclesiae caput et rector, ex quorundam fidelium suorum abundantis pauperum inopiam misericorditer supplet, ut in aeterna retributione, pauperum copia divitum penuriam mercede repleat. Sed modernae donationes ad delendam mortis similitudinem oblivionem utiliter litterarum monumentis adnotantur, ut in hoc quoque misericordia et veritas quodammodo salubriter sibi et obviare videantur. Idcirco praesentibus et futuris notificamus quod tempore Guilenci Lingonensi episcopi, Hugone in Burgundia ducatum regente, sanctimonialia in loco qui dicitur Tart congregatae sunt; et concessione ac confirmatione Lingonensis capituli, abbatissa, nomine Elizabeth eis prelata est, sub qua quaedam Maria prioratum aliarum gessit. Rogatu ergo et etiam emptione ipsius ducis et Mathildis uxoris ejus, Arnulfus Cornutus quidam miles, cum uxore sua nomine Emilina, quae ibi postea tumulata est, ipsum locum ipsis sanctimonialibus, per manum domni Stephani abbatis Cisterciensis dedit, secundum determinationem prius factam domno Christophoro, sive domno Goceranno Lingonensi quondam episcopo, in silvis et aquis, gurgitibus, terris cultis et incultis. Testes hujus rei. . . . Facta sunt haec anno Dominicae Incarnationis 1132, indictione xi, concurrente v, epacta 1." Other charters follow in this publication, but the next is from the year 1142. The inclusion of a prioress in the discussion suggests drafting after the introduction of commendatory abbesses.

16. PL 185:1411.

17. *Liber instrumentorum memorialium; Cartulaire des Guillems de Montpellier*, ed. A. Germain (Montpellier: Jean Marel Ainé, 1884), no. 96 (1172), will of William VII of Montpellier.

18. Bouton, "Le Tart," passim.

19. PL 180:1199–1200: "Eugenius episcopus, servus servorum Dei, dilectis in Christo filiabus Elizabeth abbatissae de Tart, ejusdem sororibus, tam praesentibus quam futuris, regularem vitam professis in perpetuum. Desiderium quod ad religionis propositum et animarum salutem pertinere dignoscitur animos nos decet libenter concedere, et petentium desideriis congruum impertiri suffragium. Eapropter, dilectae in Christo filiae, vestris justis postulacionibus clementer annuimus, et praefatum locum in quo divino mancipate estis obsequio, sub beati Petri et nostra protectione suscipimus, et praesentis scripti privilegio communimus; statuentes ut quascunque possessiones, quaecunque

For the thirteenth century there are a number of accounts of meetings of Cistercian abbesses at le Tart held under the presidency of the abbot of Cîteaux. It is from these documents that we can reconstruct the list of eighteen daughters.²⁰ This filiation of women's houses parallels that which the king of Castile wished to establish in the 1180s in Spain under the leadership of the royal foundation of las Huelgas.²¹ In addition to these two, there are also scattered references suggesting the existence of several other small congregations or filiations of houses of Cistercian nuns in the thirteenth century—for instance, those following the practices of the Cistercian nuns of Saint-Antoines-Champs outside Paris.²²

Many other houses of early twelfth-century nuns associated with the Cistercians might be mentioned. They include some foundations made by Jully and le Tart from the 1120s on. Many of these have been described in traditional narratives as genuine foundations made by colonies of women sent out from Burgundy. Such references to monastic colonization in groups of six or twelve nuns with an abbess,

bona idem locus in praesentiarum juste et canonice possidet, aut in futurum concessione pontificum, largitione regum vel principum, oblatione fidelium seu aliis justis modis, Deo propitio, poterit adipisci, firma vobis vestrisque succedentibus et illibata permanent: in quibus haec propriis duximus exprimenda vocabulis: Locum ipsum de Tart, et locum qui dicitur Marmot cum appendiciis suis, et plenarium usagium totius nemoris de Villers; grangiam de Lamblento cum appendiciis suis, quam Humbertus de Bisseo vobis libere dedit cum Patro majore et heredibus ejus, de assensu Hugonis de Bello-Monte, de cujus casamento erat et plenarium in campis et in silvis et in pascuis; et decimas quas possessores earum ante dedicationem ecclesiae illius grangiae in aspectu domini praesulis Cabilonensis verpierunt. Sane laborum vestrorum, quos propriis manibus aut sumptibus colitis, sive de nutrimentis vestrorum animalium, nullus a vobis decimas exigere praesumat." Benoît Chauvin, "Papauté et abbayes cisterciennes du duché de Bourgogne," in *L'Église de France et la papauté (Xe–XIIIe siècle); Die französische Kirche und das Papsttum (10.–13. Jahrhundert). Actes du XXVIe colloque historique franco-allemand organisé en coopération avec l'École nationale des chartes par l'Institut historique allemand de Paris (Paris, 17–19 octobre 1990)*, ed. Rolf Grosse, *Études et documents pour servir à une Gallia Pontificia* 1:326–62 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1993), 351, discusses the original of this papal bull of Eugenius III for le Tart.

20. *Les Monuments primitifs de la Règle cistercienne*, ed. Philippe Guignard, *Analecta Divionensia* 10 (Dijon: Rabutot, 1878), 643–49; Bouton et al. "Le Tart," *passim*.
21. *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, ed. J.-M. Canivez (Louvain: Bureaux, 1933), 1187. (In citations of Canivez, all numbers not otherwise specified are years.) See discussion of this filiation in Elizabeth Conner, "The Abbeys of Las Huelgas and Tart and Their Filiations," in *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women: Medieval Religious Women* 3:1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 29–48.
22. On nuns being sent from Saint-Antoine to Maubuisson to found the new house, see Anselm Dimier, *Saint Louis et Cîteaux* (Paris: Létouzey et Ané, 1954); see also references to nuns following the practices of Saint-Antoine in *Gallia Christiana* entries for La-Cour-Notre-Dame near Sens, and Iles-les-Dames, near Auxerre; see Constance H. Berman, "The Labors of Hercules, the Cartulary, Church and Abbey for Nuns of La-Cour-Notre-Dame-de-Michery," *Journal of Medieval History* 26 (forthcoming Jan. 2000).

however, reflect a widespread gestational myth of apostolic foundation among the Cistercians that sees all houses of nuns or monks as having necessarily sprung from some earlier community.²³ Certainly many houses among the daughters of le Tart, like Fabas and Rieunette in Languedoc, were local independent foundations similar to the nunnery at Marrenz founded in 1157 by Count Raymond V of Toulouse. This last house did not even claim to have ties to le Tart, but nonetheless did consider itself Cistercian.²⁴

Such women's houses also included many independent houses of religious women that were founded locally without any impetus from Burgundy, although they may have been encouraged by the preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux to practice the *ordo* or way of life of Cîteaux and Clairvaux. There were among them some houses of women that became Cistercian only after having become attached to local communities and congregations of monks, which in turn eventually adopted Cistercian practices. For instance, in 1147 nuns at Coyroux were apparently incorporated or at least began to adopt Cistercian practices along with monks from their sister house at Obazine.²⁵ Nuns at l'Abbaye-Blanche and at Villers-Canivet would come to be incorporated by Cîteaux along with Savigny at an unknown date. The date of 1147 is often given for this attachment, but there is little clear evidence that this congregation was practicing Cistercian customs until the early 1160s.²⁶ It was into this category of incorporated communities that Gilbert of Sempringham had apparently attempted to affiliate his nuns and canons at Sempringham, possibly as early as the late 1140s, but more likely in the 1160s as is discussed below.²⁷ Another group of

23. Such assumptions are present in unfounded statements such as, "Tart was established by dissident nuns from Jully with the help of Stephen Harding," in Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 95; cf. Bruce Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 73-74.

24. Pierre-Roger Gaussin, "Les Communautés féminines dans l'espace languedocien," in *La Femme dans la vie religieuse du Languedoc (XIIIe-XIVe s.)*, *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 23 (1988): 299-332, esp. 307-308.

25. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye cistercienne d'Obazine (XIIe-XIIIe siècle)*, ed. Bernadette Barrière (Clermont-Ferrand: Université, 1989), provides no references to Stephen attending the purported 1147 meeting; see also Bernadette Barrière, "The Cistercian Monastery of Coyroux in the Province of Limousin in Southern France, in the 12th-13th Centuries," *Gesta* 31 (1992): 73-75.

26. Jacqueline Buhot, "L'Abbaye normande de Savigny, Chef d'Ordre et fille de Cîteaux," *Le Moyen Age* 46 (1936): 1-19, 104-121, 178-90, 249-72, is the standard treatment; but see forthcoming work by Patrick Conyers.

27. Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c. 1130-c. 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 26 ff.; but see also Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 133 ff.; Thompson, *Women Religious*, 73 ff.

early independent houses of nuns who considered themselves Cistercian in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire was founded in the middle years of the twelfth century.²⁸ In Spain, las Huelgas in 1187, but also Tulebras as early as 1157, might also be considered to have begun to adopt Cistercian practices independently of any men's house. This also appears to have been true of the abbey of nuns at Montreuil-les-Dames in northern France, founded in 1136 near Laon and described by Herman of Tournai in his history of that diocese of circa 1150 discussed below.²⁹

Sometimes such communities of women even predated the houses of monks to which they would eventually become subject, or had early ties to one another. These include those between the nuns of Bellecombe in the Auvergne and its daughter house at Nonenque in the Rouergue. Both of these communities of nuns first appear in records in 1139 and both were later attached to Cîteaux along with the congregation of Mazan. While Nonenque and Bellecombe date to the 1130s or earlier, only later did the monks of nearby Silvanès take control of Nonenque, in this case breaking Nonenque's earlier link to another house of women, and eventually making it a dependent satellite. Possibly in response to their house's forced dependence on Silvanès, the abbesses of Nonenque eventually tried, and failed, to secede from the order altogether.³⁰ Careful analysis of such examples suggests that these twelfth-century houses of nuns were as Cistercian as were twelfth-century houses of monks founded at similar dates. Their

28. David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in Medieval England*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), 362, "Of the thirty-odd Cistercian nunneries which were in course of time established in England almost one-half date from the period 1175–1215," glides over the fact that most of the other half were founded earlier; see Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37, fig. 7.

29. These three houses are discussed in Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "The Incorporation of Cistercian Nuns into the Order in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," in *Hidden Springs*, 85–134, cited at 87 ff.; Catherine E. Boyd, *A Cistercian Nunnery in Medieval Italy: The Story of Rifreddo in Saluzzo, 1220–1300* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1943), 78–81.

30. See *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Silvanès*, ed. P.-A. Verlaquet (Rodez: Carrère, 1910); *Cartulaire et documents de l'abbaye de Nonenque*, ed. C. Couderc and J.-L. Rigal (Rodez: Carrère, 1955); the relationships are discussed at length in Constance H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*; see eadem, "Men's Houses, Women's Houses: The Relationship between the Sexes in Twelfth-Century Monasticism," in *The Medieval Monastery*, ed. Andrew MacLeish (St. Cloud, Minn.: University of Minnesota, 1988), 43–52; eadem, "The Foundation and Early History of the Monastery of Silvanès: the Economic Reality," in *Cistercian Ideals and Reality*, ed. J. R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1978), 280–318; and Beverly M. Kienzle, "The Tract on the Conversion of Pons of Lérans and the True Account of the Beginning of the Monastery of Silvanès," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 29 (1995): 219–43.

existence problematizes, however, traditional notions of just what we mean by the early Cistercian Order.

While documents of practice concerning religious women at Molesme, Jully, le Tart, and elsewhere provide abundant evidence for twelfth-century Cistercian nuns, the standard monastic histories have tended to leave out or marginalize these women.³¹ This is probably because the early Cistercian narrative texts are remarkably silent about religious women associated with early Cîteaux.³² The silence of the Cistercian *exordia* has allowed historians to apply juridical arguments about Cistercian status suitable to the thirteenth century, but not to the twelfth-century situation, and hence to argue that twelfth-century houses of religious women were not really Cistercian. Such historians claiming that there were no twelfth-century Cistercian women—or at least that there were no Cistercian nuns before the late 1180s when abbots in General Chapter were consulted with regard to such nuns in Spain—have based their claims on a picture of the early Cistercians that is wholly unfounded.³³

Such a reading of the sources, disallowing any claims regarding religious women's participation in early Cistercian life, is in striking contrast to the presentation of the Cistercian Order's monks. That this is so should not be surprising given how much the discourse concerning medieval religious women was controlled by the men who wrote the earliest histories of the Cistercian Order and other orders. It was apparently men within the Cistercian Order who wrote the accounts of its earliest history in the *Exordium Cistercii*, *Exordium parvum*, and *Exordium magnum*, as well as writing and editing the *Vita prima* of Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁴ For centuries these texts have been taken as

31. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2d ed. (London: Longman, 1989), gives nuns a separate chapter.

32. On these texts (described in note 37 for dating) see David Knowles, "The Primitive Cistercian Documents," in *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), 197–222; Giles Constable, "The Study of Monastic History Today," in *Essays on the Reconstruction of Medieval History*, ed. Vaclav Mudroch and G. S. Cousé (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 21–51; and François de Place, "Bibliographie raisonnée des premiers documents cisterciens (1098–1220)," *Cîteaux* 35 (1984): 7–54.

33. Anselm Dimier, "Chapitres généraux d'abbesse cisterciennes," *Cîteaux* 11 (1960): 268–75; Micheline de Fontette, *Les Religieuses à l'âge classique du droit canon: Recherches sur les structures juridiques des branches féminines des ordres* (Paris: Vrin, 1961), 27–63; and Sally Thompson, "The Problem of Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 227–52.

34. See Conrad of Eberbach, *Exordium magnum Cisterciense, sive narratio de initio Cisterciensis Ordinis*, ed. Bruno Griesser (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1961). Internal evidence suggests a date no earlier than 1200. The earlier *exordia* are anonymous, as are some of the editorial revisions of the *Vita prima* of Bernard of Clairvaux; on the latter see Adriaan H. Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans,

truthful descriptions assigned authority because of presumed early dates. Only recently has the reliability of those narratives as virtual eyewitness accounts come under question, in part because we now question the accuracy of texts which would so obviously distort the early history of Cistercian women in contradiction to the widespread evidence of their existence found in the documents of practice. If we look at the origins of the Cistercian Order not according to the self-glorifying texts called *exordia*, which Cistercian men wrote and from which they excluded women, but from the viewpoint of local administrative records, we must argue for a slowly developing order that included nuns.

II. A NEW VIEW OF THE ORDER

Usually the twelfth-century Cistercian Order has been seen as one made up wholly of monks whose precociously invented institutions allowed great numbers of monks to emanate from Burgundy to found abbeys by colonization in the 1130s and 1140s in all other parts of Europe. This outflow from Burgundy was by a process of apostolic gestation in which mother abbeys sent out communities of twelve monks and an abbot to found daughter houses. Such language of mothers and daughters is indeed found in the earliest text of the Cistercian foundation stories, the *Exordium Cistercii*. In the model of Cistercian colonization based on that and other early texts, miraculous numbers of Burgundian monks left the region, taking with them Cistercian customs, to found new communities of monks in all parts of Europe. According to this view, top-down decisions were made about the creation of new houses because the order's early corporate structure had emerged fully formed from the brain of Stephen Harding by 1119. An order was created by the foundation of a series of daughter houses like new colonies in far-flung territories. Each new monastery

1997), 6 ff. Translations of the *Exordium Cistercii* and *Exordium parvum* are found in the appendices of Lekai, *Cistercians*, 442 ff., and more recently in *The New Monastery: Texts and Studies on the Early Cistercians*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1998); they are based on *Les Plus Anciens Textes de Cîteaux: Sources, textes et notes historiques*, ed. Jean-de-la-Croix Bouton and Jean-Baptiste Van Damme (Achel, Belgium: Abbaye Cistercienne, 1974). They have until recently been treated as accounts of circa 1120 found in manuscripts dated to the 1140s (see Constable, *Reformation*, 38 n. 171), but arguments for manuscripts before 1152 are incorrect. Despite being treated by pious admirers of the Cistercians as virtual eyewitness accounts, these "documents" are retrospective accounts filled with paraphrases of the Rule of Saint Benedict, Deuteronomy, and other standard monastic exemplars (see Jean-Baptiste Auberger, *L'Unanimité cistercienne primitive: Mythe ou réalité?* [Achel, Belgium: Abbaye Cistercienne, 1986], 109 ff.), which have rarely been subjected to codicological or literary scrutiny; relationships between various texts and manuscript contexts are not well established. I discuss the manuscript dating in n. 39.

was the result of a positive decision on the part of a mother abbey, which sent out its surplus of monks to an unsettled place to make clearances in the wilderness where members of the new group could lead their contemplative lives.

In this explanation, abbots from the newly founded houses would return to Burgundy each year to a General Chapter to consult further on the order's practices. Such an organization was believed to provide considerable unanimity and standardization of practice, for instance, in its creation of granges and buildings, and in the recruitment of members, as well as in the practice of the liturgy or copying of texts of the Bible. The filiation trees of the order, despite dating only to the thirteenth century when they became necessary for organizing the order's practice of internal visitation, have tended to be used to support such a mythical presentation of the order's early history. Filiation trees have distorted the actual events of the expansion of the numbers of new men's houses by their implication of a movement overflowing from the original houses in Burgundy. That implication, however, is an artifact of the structure of the filiation trees themselves, rather than reflecting a reality about Cistercian expansion.³⁵ Moreover, the moment of finding an official place on the filiation trees for women (by their reduction to satellites of men's houses) cannot be seen as the moment at which women were "allowed" into the order.

New and considerably later dating for internal narrative accounts such as the *Exordium Cistercii* and *Exordium parvum*, and for the earliest collections of Cistercian statutes (once thought to have been in place before 1134), and for the papal confirmation of a Charter of Charity (probably first done in 1165 rather than in 1119), now challenges assumptions about the validity of the traditional depictions of the order.³⁶ The new dating is based on careful consideration of the twelfth-century manuscripts of these texts and the statutes, lay-brother treatises, and liturgical *ordines* which frequently accompany them. Particularly, it is from small changes in the liturgical treatises that it is possible to construct a chronological series of such primitive Cistercian documents in surviving manuscripts and to date them to no earlier than the 1160s.³⁷ These findings about the *exordia* manuscripts

35. But on this see Marcel Pacaut, "La Filiation claravallienne dans la genèse et l'essor de l'Ordre cistercien," in *Histoire de Clairvaux: Actes du Colloque de Bar-sur-Aube/Clairvaux, 22-23 June, 1990* (Bar-sur-Aube: Némont, 1991), 135-47.

36. The arguments that follow regarding the institutions of the Cistercians and their dating are made in further detail in Bertram, *Cistercian Evolution*.

37. There are two alternate versions of the Cistercian foundation story in the twelfth century, both dating to no earlier than the 1160s. The earlier *Exordium Cistercii* is very short, containing only a few paragraphs describing the departure from Molesme and the foundation, and is probably found in its earliest form in Paris, Sainte-Geneviève MS

are confirmed by the fact that the earliest references to a Cistercian Order even in the documents of practice come only from the last years before mid-twelfth century.³⁸ There is in addition no documentary evidence for any references to either a General Chapter or to an order in the sense in which we think of it today before the late 1150s.³⁹

1207. The longer, later narrative is the *Exordium parvum*, which contains a series of "documents" supposedly supporting its account; later manuscript versions of it (but still dating from the twelfth century) contain a papal confirmation purported to be by Calixtus II, usually immediately following the *Exordium parvum*. On the relationship of this forged papal bull to authentic confirmations for Bonnevaux, see below. The establishment of an accurate series of manuscripts for these *exordia* is based on making a series out of all the surviving twelfth-century manuscripts of the liturgical *ordines* known as the *Ecclesiastica Officia*, which are found in the same manuscripts along with all the *exordia* texts with the exception of that from Sainte-Geneviève. A primitive fragment of those liturgical *ordines*, found in Montpellier H322 in a book of Cistercian usages without any *exordia* texts at all, dates the entire group to after 1160. This is in accord with the evidence of the most-cited early manuscripts of the *Ecclesiastica officia*, Trent 1711 and Ljubljana 31, which have been dated incorrectly to before 1152 by Danièle Choiselet and Placide Vernet, *Les "Ecclesiastica officia" cisterciens du XIIe siècle: Texte latin selon les manuscrits édités de Trente 1711, Ljubljana 31 and Dijon 114*, La Documentation Cistercienne 22 (Reiningue: Abbaye d'Oelenberg, 1989), because they believed that the absence of a liturgical practice outlined in Canivez (1152), *Statuta*, vol. 1, no. 6, made those two manuscripts earlier; in fact, the statute in question cannot be definitively dated to before 1185, and dating for Trent 1711's *exordium* to before 1135 cannot be upheld once it is noted that this text has been added on as an additional opening quire plus one sheet surrounding the next quire. On the wholly hypothetical dating of parts of vol. 1 of Canivez's edition of the Cistercian *Statuta* to such years as 1134 and 1152, and for further discussion of these "Institutes" or *Capitula* in manuscripts such as Paris, B.N. Latin MSS 4221, 4346B, and N.A. 430; Ljubljana 31, and Trent 1711—which all date to between 1161 and 1185—see Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*.

38. See discussion at n. 86 ff.

39. Careful appraisal of the dating for the earliest Cistercian General Chapters in studies by J.-B. Mahn, *L'Ordre cistercien et son gouvernement des origines au milieu du XIIIe siècle* (1098–1265) (Paris: Boccard, 1945); Jacques Hourlier, *Le Chapitre Général jusqu'au moment du Grand Schisme: Origines, développement, étude juridique* (Paris: Sirey, 1936); and Jane Sayers, "The Judicial Activities of the General Chapters," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 15 (1964): 18–32, 168–85, suggests how often our attribution of these assemblies to an early date is based entirely on the misdated attribution of Cistercian statutes to the years 1134 and 1152. In published documents for Burgundian abbeys dated to before the 1170s, references thought to be to the General Chapter turn out to refer to internal chapters at Cîteaux; but cf. *Chartes de Cîteaux*, no. 90 (1132) (which turns out to be the interpolation of a Lucius III bull from the 1180s—the surviving copy still bears the 1180s rota), and *Recueil de Clairvaux*, ed. Waquet, no. 4 (1132), the original which the Cîteaux charter mimicked. The authentic Clairvaux title privilege does not mention an order but rather a congregation under Bernard of Clairvaux—a distinction I clarify below. The "original" cited in Canivez, *Statuta*, vol. 1 (1142), for a Charter of Peace between the Cistercians and the Praemonstratensians has dating clauses which suggest an interpolation from the 1160s. There are three references to a General Chapter, possibly none of these from before the 1150s: *Chartes de Cîteaux*, no. 128 (1146–53); *Le Premier Cartulaire de l'Abbaye Cistercienne de Pontigny (xii^e–xiii^e siècles)*, ed. Martine Garrigues (Paris, 1981); no. 114 (attributed to 1156); and *Recueil des pancartes de l'abbaye de la Ferté-sur-Grosne: 1113–1178*, ed. Georges Duby (Aix-Marseille, 1953); and no. 8 (from an act of 1158 describing earlier events). Later references to a General Chapter include one for the count of Macon: "cupiens fieri particeps orationum et spiritualium beneficiorum fratrum ordinis Cistercii, pro remedio

Indeed, the first papal confirmation of a Cistercian Charter of Charity was only by Alexander III, dating to 1163 or 1165, and may parallel demands by this pope that all reform religious groups present him with such written customaries.⁴⁰ Such recent research on the early "constitutional" documents of the Cistercians demonstrates that depictions of an early Cistercian Order refusing to accommodate women are false. No such order existed before the second half of the twelfth century. This is not the usual way the Cistercians have been described.

There was no miraculous expansion from Cîteaux. We can now see that early abbeys directly associated with Cîteaux constituted only a tiny congregation in Burgundy united by nothing more than a vision of monastic love and equality. This tiny congregation of abbeys emanating from Cîteaux and Clairvaux in the first half of the twelfth century cannot have numbered more than a couple dozen houses.⁴¹ Its expansion into an order of hundreds of abbeys occurred through massive "takeovers" of independently established pre-Cistercian religious houses and congregations, which had gradually been adopting certain Cistercian practices. Such communities of monks and nuns in the earliest stages of their adoption of Cistercian practice might be described as a proto-order. Admiration for the way of life of the brothers of Cîteaux and Clairvaux may have increasingly motivated such independent reform communities to adopt Cistercian customs even before there was an order with which to become affiliated. Influence was not unidirectional from the Burgundian center and growth oc-

anime mee et parentum meorum in generali capitulo abbatum ordinis Cistercii, dedi et concessi" (*Chartes de Cîteaux*, no. 222 [1173]); and, in recently edited charters for Vauluisant, the earliest reference to a General Chapter dating to 1176: "Alexander, dei gratia abbatu cisterciensis, Willelmus de Firmitate, Henricus Clare Vallis, Henricus Morimondensis, omnibus ad quos littere iste pervenerint, salutem in Domino. Noverit universitas vestra quod Arduinus abbas de Ripatorio, consilio fratrum suorum et assensu tocuis capituli sui, vendidit grangiam unam que dicitur Chevreium cum omnibus appenditiis suis et quicquid ex dono Anscheri Senonis habebant Petro, abbati Vallis Lucentis, et fratribus eiusdem domus pro sescentis et .L. marcis fini argenti ad pondus trecense. Actum est hoc in generali capitulo Cisterciensi, anno ab incarnatione domini M.c.lxx.sexto. Quod ut ratum omni tempore habeatur, sigillorum nostrorum attestacione roboravimus," from Paris, A.N. AB XIX 1713; *Cartulary of Vauluisant*, ed. William O. Duba (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1994).

40. This suggests that J.-B. Van Damme, "La Constitution Cistercienne de 1165," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 19 (1963): 51–104, actually concerns the earliest constitution, that approved by Alexander III, and the first Cistercian constitution submitted to any pope. More work on how this then parallels other statutes presented to that pontiff at similar dates would contribute largely to our understanding of an understudied pope. One later copy in a Dijon manuscript is dated to 1163. See Dijon, Bibl. Mun. MS 87, fol. 168v–169r.

41. This congregation might then be thought to include only those nine or ten houses each of whose sites were chosen by Bernard of Clairvaux or Stephen Harding, as shown in Auberger, *L'Unanimité cistercienne primitive*, esp. 395 ff.

curred not by an overflowing of reform ideals from Burgundy, but by a complex interchange of institutional ideas.

The creation of the new twelfth-century institution, the religious order, was thus probably a more collaborative activity than historians have usually believed. Some parts of the new Cistercian institutions may not even have been invented at Cîteaux but elsewhere. Cistercians undoubtedly borrowed from other reformers and vice versa at a time when all were similarly attempting to create larger supramonastic structures for their followers. Such new umbrella groups of abbeys (and that is what the new twelfth-century invention, the religious order, is really about) could not have been unanimous and monolithic in the early twelfth century because structures for control did not exist at such an early date. All evidence shows that a General Chapter, written statutes, and well-developed internal visitation came for the Cistercians only after mid-twelfth century. Until then the status of many individual abbeys of such reform monks was just as ambiguous as was that of the houses of nuns that also eventually came to be recognized as Cistercian. For most, such ambiguity remained up into the thirteenth century.

This is not to say that there was no Cistercian movement in early twelfth-century Burgundy, or to deny a "conversation about charity," or a "textual community" around Bernard of Clairvaux that created much enthusiasm for the practices of the brothers at Cîteaux. Nor is this to deny that a tiny congregation of houses began to appear around Clairvaux before mid-twelfth century.⁴² The semieremital movement developing from Cîteaux and Clairvaux in the first half of the twelfth century might even be called a Burgundian congregation, although apparently the Cistercians themselves rarely used this term. During the movement's earliest years, training and indoctrination into its monastic customs were conducted in personal, informal, oral, and indeed charismatic ways, as apprenticeships in monastic charity which need not have excluded either lay brothers and lay sisters or noble women. As this small congregation became known more widely, probably principally through the preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, houses that were still not part of any religious order or congregation began to adopt the liturgical practices and lay-brother customaries associated with Cîteaux—at this stage forming the proto-order. After circa 1150 administrative institutions began to appear which eventu-

42. Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 88 ff., 405 ff.; Martha B. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098–1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 10 ff.

ally joined together all these abbeys of the proto-order into a supra-monastic government or order, in which training in the monastic life and relations between abbeys were increasingly backed up by written statutes.⁴³

The process by which this proto-order of independently founded houses gradually merged with the earlier Burgundian congregation and coalesced into an increasingly controlled and unanimous entity, the religious order, is not very clear, but it had begun by the 1160s. The new entity, the Cistercian Order as described by historians, did not come to be fully formed until the 1180s, 1190s, or even later, but the statutes of those years clearly reveal the process of "order-building" underway.⁴⁴ Only after this new order grew to be more administratively oriented in the last decades of the twelfth century did legislation by the Cistercian General Chapter on the incorporation of nuns appear.⁴⁵ Pressures that it articulate its policies about religious women probably arose because some abbots within the Cistercian movement (for example in Flanders) had become overwhelmed by the *cura monialium*, having large numbers of houses of women under their care.⁴⁶ It was becoming increasingly obvious as well that although many wealthy communities of nuns were being founded, in some cases women's communities were not suitable—in all likelihood because they did not have sufficient endowment to be economically independent.⁴⁷

That there was no such regularly established procedure for the incorporation of women's houses, or those for men, in the twelfth

43. On the more general trends toward use of written documents, written constitutions, etc., see Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); and Ellen Kittel, *From Ad Hoc to Routine: A Case Study in Medieval Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

44. See Canivez, *Statuta*, vol. 1, for years 1179–1189; the issues addressed in those years concern the minutiae of creating an order, enforcing attendance and accommodating abbots at an annual, universal General Chapter meeting, size of abbeys, etc.

45. See de Fontette, *Les Religieuses*, 27–63; Degler-Spengler, "Incorporation," 99 ff.

46. See accounts by John Freed, "Urban Development and the 'Cura Monialium' in Thirteenth-Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972): 311–27; Simone Roisin, "L'Efflorescence cistercienne et le courant féminin de piété au 13ème siècle," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 39 (1943): 342–78; Roger de Ganck, "The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century Seen against the Background of the Second Wave of Cistercian Spirituality," *Cistercian Studies* 5 (1970): 169–187; idem, "The Integration of Nuns in the Cistercian Order particularly in Belgium," *Cîteaux* 35 (1984): 235–47; and Ernst McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1954).

47. It is important not to lump them together as all alike; there were extremely wealthy communities of Cistercian women like that founded by Blanche of Castile at Maubuisson as described by Anselm Dimier, *Saint Louis et Cîteaux* (Paris, 1954); there were also very poor ones like Netlieu as described by Daniel Rouquette, "Note sur la date de fondation et l'emplacement de l'abbaye de Netlieu," *Mélanges Dimier* 3.6:697–700.

century that was comparable to procedures established in the thirteenth century must be viewed as an entirely normal result of how the Cistercian movement grew, even though it had included women as well as men from nearly the start. Until the articulation of the order's administrative structures in the third quarter of the twelfth century, no formal criteria could have been in place for the admission of either women's or men's houses into the order.⁴⁸ Moreover, that such issues became noticeable in the thirteenth century does not indicate that Cistercian nuns were not there from the beginning of the reform movement, or that Cistercian houses for twelfth-century nuns were any more problematic with regard to their juridical status than were most twelfth-century abbeys for Cistercian monks.⁴⁹ What the sudden flurry of regulation of women's houses in the early thirteenth century shows instead is the enormous surge of Cistercian foundations in the years 1190 to 1250. This later process consisted almost entirely of the creation of women's houses.⁵⁰

The Cistercian Order must then be viewed as an only gradually established institution which later constructed stories about its own origins. That these origins were complex and now nearly untraceable has been rarely discussed by historians. Indeed, the ad hoc nature of the entire Cistercian movement has been discussed by Cistercian historians only insofar as they have discussed those irregularities about the foundation of the new monastery at Cîteaux that were treated in the standard Cistercian foundation accounts, the *Exordium parvum* and the later *Exordium magnum*. The fact that such irregularities are "confessed to" in those accounts, however, must in itself put us

48. Such issues about women's communities arose across the spectrum of new religious groups at this time, but the thirteenth-century history of many reform groups founded in the twelfth century, particularly of their "women's branches," has been neglected until recently.
49. This means that explanations of aberrance, such as found in L. de Lacger, "Ardorel," *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* 7 (1924): 1617–20, or of the introduction of decadence with incorporations, as found in Bennett D. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), or of a conflict between ideals and reality, as found in Louis J. Lekai, "Ideals and Reality in Early Cistercian Life and Legislation," *Cistercian Ideals and Reality*, 4–29, are irrelevant.
50. R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1970), 317 n. 19, gives totals for the entire Middle Ages of 654 houses for women as against 742 for men, but admits his numbers for women's houses are low for some cases; more recent studies show even more houses included; for instance, Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "Die Zisterzienserinnen in der Schweiz," *Helvetia Sacra* (Bern) 3 (1982): 507–574; Dominique Mouret, "Les Moniales cisterciennes en France aux XIIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Mémoire de Maîtrise*, Université de Limoges, 1984; Elkins, *Holy Women*; Constance H. Berman, "Fashions in Monastic Patronage: The Popularity of Supporting Cistercian Abbeys for Women," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 17 (1990): 36–45; Thompson, *Women Religious*; Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*.

on guard about the veracity of such “witnesses” to early Cistercian history.

The *Exordium parvum* and later histories admit that Abbot Robert of Molesme left that abbey with a group of monks for the site at Cîteaux and that he abandoned his earlier community at Molesme without episcopal permission. Such accounts assure us, however, that although Robert may have been disobedient and broken a vow of stability in acting without episcopal permission, the abbot’s waywardness had nothing to do with the validity of his foundation. Once Robert had been returned to his duties at Molesme, those of his followers who had stayed at Cîteaux were justified in having made the foundation and in their decision to stay. These accounts assure us that these men at the New Monastery had chosen the better road, having abandoned a less rigorous life for a stricter one, and had done so with the assent, indeed the participation, of their immediate superior. Theirs was the narrower path because they had left the comforts of the community at Molesme for the harsher life of the desert of Cîteaux—these texts use such language of community and desert. Despite the confession of a weakness, the account thus becomes an occasion to describe early Cîteaux’s purity in comparison to Molesme. More importantly, this “admission” of Robert’s fault becomes the rhetorical means of disarming readers, persuading them of the validity of the rest of this self-deprecating source.

The rhetorical aspects of the Cistercian foundation accounts are even more obvious if we look at the events from other viewpoints, including that of Molesme. Obviously the events read differently from the viewpoint of Molesme, which may well have seen the foundation at Cîteaux as that of just one more priory among many established by Abbot Robert. From Molesme’s viewpoint, it was only a slight irregularity that Robert had left Molesme with monks he had sent to Cîteaux to participate personally in the foundation of a priory. It may in fact have been his intention to stay there only temporarily and then return to Molesme—we have the account only from Cîteaux’s viewpoint. The “admission” that Robert of Molesme may have acted in error in leaving Molesme not only casts Cîteaux in a better light in comparison to Molesme, but probably itself reflects a slightly later sensibility about monastic stability than would be present at circa 1100, when we find many monastic reformers wandering around Europe from site to site.⁵¹ Such concern about monastic stability makes more sense in the third

51. On the dating of this phenomenon and its results in new religious houses, see for instance Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000–1150* (London: MacMillan, 1984).

quarter of the century when indeed the first surviving manuscripts of this account appear. A greater irregularity from Molesme's viewpoint must have been the growing independence of its priory at Cîteaux. This independence appeared in such actions as its election of a head who was declared to be an abbot not a prior, and eventually in its foundation of its own daughter houses and its splitting away from the congregation of houses attached to Molesme. Readers of the *Exordium parvum* and the *Exordium magnum* often miss the extent to which only Robert was condemned by these accounts while the other monks going to Cîteaux were praised. When this is taken into account, the rhetorical argument that this is a true account because it shows the foundation "warts and all" loses validity.

Once we begin to think about Cîteaux's foundation in these terms, the *Exordium parvum's* insistence that this was a "New Monastery" rather than a new priory seems more pointed. Such references to a new monastery in that text, which historians have used to argue for its primitive nature, in fact probably only mark the moment of the height of the debate about the secession, when the Cistercians were asserting that this was not just another priory, but a monastery from the start. This terminology has to do with the issue of Cîteaux's independence from Molesme, and cannot necessarily be viewed as an accurate pointer to chronology within the early documents.

That the *Exordium parvum's* admission of "slight irregularities" in Robert's flight from Molesme to Cîteaux may mask considerably more—the disobedience of a priory, which eventually became a successful secession from Molesme's congregation—is suggested by consideration of other sources not usually consulted. For instance, the Molesme cartulary shows the frequent foundation of such priories by Robert of Molesme in these years. Among such foundations were obviously both Cîteaux and Jully—despite the fact that the latter is attributed in the *Vita* of Bernard of Clairvaux to that abbot alone, there are charters for Jully in the Molesme cartulary. That the charters there give no indication of the acquisition of the site at Cîteaux, and that there are no early originals for the foundation or site acquisition in the Cîteaux archives either, lends credence to the supposition that certain documents were suppressed by both houses—probably in the 1140s as argued next.

Another view is to consider whether there had also been an unsuccessful attempt by Jully to secede from Molesme as Cîteaux had done. If so, was the 1145 privilege for Jully by Pope Eugenius III, former monk of Clairvaux and protégé of Bernard, made in favor of Molesme's getting control over Jully as a quid pro quo intended to end debate over the earlier secession of Cîteaux itself? Whether or not this

is so, such a possibility suggests that the attachment of July to Molesme in 1145 rather than to Clairvaux says less about Bernard's attitudes about religious women or Cistercian ones in particular, than about the need to end the political confusion concerning Molesme's claims over the very religious house at which Bernard had made his monastic profession, Cîteaux itself.

The *Exordium parvum* is elsewhere packed full of "documents" providing a chorus of praise for the good motives of the monks who founded Cîteaux. Authors of these letters include everyone from nearby bishops and papal legates to the popes themselves. That there are no manuscripts for the *Exordium parvum* before the 1160s, and no independent sources for any of the documents included in it praising the Cistercians and denouncing Molesme, however, is rarely mentioned by historians of the Cistercians. They point to those documents as proof not only of the authenticity of the *Exordium's* account, but also of its early date. While it is likely that the letter from Pascal II recorded therein has some relationship to a real document addressed to Cîteaux, most of the other documents found in the *Exordium parvum* were concocted by the *Exordium parvum's* authors. Even when they have been published separately, the manuscript references show that they were extracted from the *Exordium parvum*. Notable, also, is the one-sidedness of this "correspondence," which presents no letters by Cistercians themselves, but only letters purported to have been written in their favor by diverse hands.

Another forgery is the purported papal confirmation of the Cistercian constitution dated to 1119 in which Calixtus II is claimed to have confirmed the Charter of Charity. That papal confirmation is not present along with the earliest version of the *Exordium parvum* (in Paris 4346A), but only appears in the Ljubljana/Laibach 31 manuscript where it immediately follows the *Exordium parvum* and the *Carta caritatis prior*. There is no independent confirmation of this papal document outside the *Exordium parvum* manuscripts either, and the confirmation by Calixtus II of the "Cistercian constitution" dated to 1119 is probably a forgery based on an authentic papal confirmation of the foundation of a daughter of Cîteaux at Bonnevaux in the province of Vienne with the assistance of Calixtus II while he was still bishop of Vienne.⁵² The parallels of language are clear, yet the entire argument

52. That a confirmation of Bonnevaux's properties of circa 1120 was used as the basis for an interpolated text dated to 1119 and turned into a papal confirmation of the order's practices is confirmed by the fact that only the last of the twelfth-century manuscript versions of the *Exordium parvum* contain this papal bull, that there are sentences out of order in all versions of it until the *Exordium magnum*, and that only the later manuscript versions contain its dating clause.

for the precocious foundation of an order is based on this 1119 document, which is not even present in the earliest surviving manuscripts of the so-called "eyewitness" accounts. Refutation of claims to the authority and authenticity of the primary "primitive" documents of the Cistercians, along with a careful rereading of the private charter record, papal privileges from the twelfth century, and such outside reports as that of Herman of Tournai at circa 1150, suggest that traditional denials of the existence of Cistercian nuns are based on a false picture of the order itself.

Such evidence suggests that we need to understand the evolution of the Cistercian Order as part of a slow process taking place over several generations. There was a slower break from Molesme than is usually thought, but also a slower articulation of the Cistercian administrative institutions. All this makes it less surprising that the female presence at its origins is not documented before the late twelfth century.⁵³ Charter evidence showing that important Cistercian abbots, including Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux and Abbot Stephen Harding of Cîteaux, had founded or had somehow affiliated themselves with houses of nuns can as a consequence be revalued as well. Traditional historians have interpreted the acts of these abbots regarding nuns as peripheral to the real story of the Cistercians, and as evidence that those abbots acted in a private, unofficial, even officious capacity when they acted on behalf of religious women. Such traditional treatments have contended that although such women were befriended by early Cistercian abbots, they should nonetheless be judged as having had nothing to do with the Cistercian Order itself. The revised dating of the Cistercian primitive documents, including the *exordia*, however, suggests that such evidence need no longer be discounted in these ways. The fact that internally generated but anonymous narrative accounts like the *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium parvum* say nothing about nuns thus cannot be interpreted to mean that there were no Cistercian women. Indeed, this argument is strengthened by the fact that these sources say nothing about Bernard of Clairvaux either, an omission explained best by the post-1153 context in which other abbots disputed the excessive claims of Bernard's successors at Clairvaux to primacy within the order.⁵⁴

53. Such an account is in accord with the account of gradual regularization of women's houses in other reform groups, described by Penny Shine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 80–81.

54. Bredero, *Bernard*, 248 ff.; Pacaut, "Filiation"; Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, pushes this explanation further in light of the new dating of the *exordia*.

III. THE LITERARY EVIDENCE INTERPRETED

Book 1 of the *Vita prima* in its full text, as well as the charter evidence showing Bernard's interest in Jully and its nuns, must be seen to counter any silence of the "official" *exordia* sources. In fact, the narrative's sources, other than the official Cistercian *exordia*, confirm the revised picture of the twelfth-century Cistercians and the women among them. In chapter 4 of the *Vita prima*'s book 1, written by William of Saint-Thierry circa 1147, we read,

In the year of the incarnation of the Lord 1113, the fifteenth year since the foundation of Cîteaux, that man of God, Bernard, at about age twenty-three, entered Cîteaux with more than thirty companions, submitting himself to the yoke of Christ under Abbot Stephen. From that day forward the Lord gave his blessing and the vines of that Lord Sabaoth gave forth fruit, extending their tendrils up to the sea and propagating beyond it. *Because some of his companions were already married, those wives took vows with their husbands for this sacred transformation. Out of concern for those women Bernard built a monastery for holy nuns in the diocese of Langres called Jully which with the aid of the Lord increased to great proportions. Jully has become extremely famous in the opinion of the religious and is now growing in both personnel and possessions so that it has expanded to other places and has not ceased up to now to produce even greater fruit.*⁵⁵

This reference to women at Jully in the *Vita prima* written by William Saint-Thierry before 1150 (if the section in italics has not been excised, as in some printed versions of the *Vita prima*), obviates the silence about Cistercian nuns in the other early sources created by the Cistercians themselves.

References to nuns in the *Vita prima* of Bernard are paralleled by those found in other lives of founders of religious communities which became Cistercian, such as the *Vita* of Pons de Léras, founder of Silvanès in the Rouergue (written circa 1170), and that of Stephen of

55. PL 185:237, "Anno ab incarnatione Domini millesimo centesimo decimo tertio, a constitutione domus Cisterciensis quindicesimo, virus Dei Bernardus annos natus circiter tres et viginti Cistercium ingressus, cum sociis amplius quam triginta, sub abbate Stephano, suavi jugo Christi collum submitit. Ab illa autem die dedit Dominus benedictionem, et vinea illa Domini Sabaoth dedit fructum suum, extendens palmites suos usque a mare, et ultra mare propagines suas. Quia vero ex predictis sociis ejus uxorati aliqui fuerant, et uxores quoque cum viris idem votum sacrae conversationis inierant; per ipsius sollicitudinem aedificat coenobium sanctimonialium feminarum, quod Julleium dicitur, in Lingonensi parrochia, Domino cooperante, magnifice satis excrevit usque hodie religionis opinione celeberrimum, et personis ac possessionibus dilatatum; set et propagatum jam per loca alia, et non cessans adhuc ampliolem facere fructum"; for date of William, see Bredero, *Bernard*, 285.

Obazine (written slightly later).⁵⁶ The first claimed that Silvanès had founded a house of nuns at Nonenque (mentioned above); only later did it become a satellite of the men's house. The second is about what was at the outset a double community, which then developed into a house for men at Obazine and a women's house nearby at Coyroux. Both *Vitae* describe how early reformers' concerns about women's religious needs were included in decisions made by early communities about what practices their foundations should follow. In both cases, the men's houses appear to have been part of "double communities" at the outset.

One can hypothesize that decisions to adopt Cistercian customs may have been what triggered those communities to begin treating the women's and men's components of their communities as separate entities. This conjecture seems to be confirmed by one external witness, Herman of Tournai. Herman, writing circa 1150, turns out to be the only one of the four earliest external narrative witnesses to the Cistercians to mention Cistercian women.⁵⁷ From Herman's report it seems that this separation of the genders into separate houses, rather than hostility to women per se, was what differentiated Cistercians from Praemonstratensian reformers.

At first sight, the passages in his book in praise of the church of Laon appear contradictory on the subject of Cistercian women. Herman discusses the religious reform in the diocese of Laon in the 1130s, describing new foundations there. In commenting on the house of nuns at Montreuil-les-Dames near Laon, he remarks on the extraordinary ability of these women to work as hard as the brothers of Clairvaux, not at weaving or sewing, but in the fields. He asserts, moreover, that they followed the way of life of Clairvaux (the *ordo cistellensis*, but as it is practiced by the brothers of Clairvaux):

There were also eight new monasteries of which three were of monks from Clairvaux and five were of clerics from Prémontré thus totaling eight reform houses of monks constructed by the Lord Bishop Bartholomew in his diocese. Also he ordained that there be added a ninth abbey bringing the number of new communities up to the number of

56. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Silvanès*, no. 470, 371 ff.; Kienzle, "The Tract," passim; and *La Vie de Saint Etienne d'Obazine*, ed. Michel Aubrun (Clermont-Ferrand: Université, 1970).

57. Both Orderic and William, when they discuss Cistercians, discuss not the Cistercians as an order, but the monks of the abbey of Cîteaux itself; see *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* 8.26, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969–80), 4:322; and *De Gestis Regum Anglorum de Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi*, ed. William Stubbs, 2 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), passim. This is approximately the same with the *De institutione clericorum* of Philip of Harvengt, PL 203:836–37, from the 1140s. See relevant parts of the *De miraculis sanctae Mariae Laudunensis* of Herman of Tournai, PL 156:962–1018.

the nine virtues of the order of the angels. This new monastery was for the feminine gender and made at a place called Montreuil where he named as abbess an extremely religious girl named Guibergis. In no other part of the world has it ever been read in books or heard by ears of such women as lived at this abbey. . . . They lived according to the *ordo* of Cîteaux which is difficult even for men . . . working hard not at sewing and weaving, which are usually women's work, but also in harvesting the fields, pulling up brush and cutting the forest, and working in the fields in the vicinity of wild beasts. Seeking their food in silence, they show themselves imitating in all things the lives of the monks of Clairvaux. This is clearly a sign from the Lord that all is possible for those who believe.⁵⁸

Thus Cistercian nuns are attested to from the 1130s, albeit as rare examples of what women can do. It is important to note, however, that Herman does not refer to imitation of an order, or membership in an order, but *ordo* as a way of life. The term "imitating" does not mean then that these women were less Cistercian than were contemporary Cistercian monks.

A different passage (although falling earlier in Herman's text) has been interpreted as evidence that nuns were not part of the Cistercian Order. In contrasting the two great monastic leaders of the first half of the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux and Norbert of Prémontré, Herman says that Norbert allowed monks and nuns to live under the same roof, while the abbey of Cîteaux had no women: "Furthermore, the monastery of Cîteaux receives only men, whereas Lord Norbert has allowed that not only the male gender but the female as well be accepted in religious conversion; thus we see that the harsher and

58. Herman, PL 156:1001-1002: "Haec itaque octo monasteria, tria quidem ex clarevallensium ordine monachorum, quinque verso ex Praemonstratensium clericorum, instar octo beatitudinum evangelicarum in dioecesi? sua dominus Bartholomaeus construens, et singulis proprium abbatem ordinans, ad ultimum ut compleretur numerus novem ordinum angelicarum virtutum, etiam novum monasterium sexus feminei in loco qui Monasteriolum dicitur, prope Clarafontanam superaddidit, abbatissamque ibi religiosissimam puellam, nomine Guiburgem, ordinavit; quo uno monasterio non immerito dixerim Laudunensem ecclesiam omnibus aliis debere praeferrī. In nulla enim orbis parte antea vel lectum in codicibus, vel auditum fuit auribus, huiusmodi religionis abbatiam feminarum existisse. Hae siquidem quasi illius Domini dicti exsecutrices: 'Regnum coelorum in patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud' (Math XI,12): ad idem regnum toto conatu ascendere nitentes, terrena funditus despiciunt; et non solum saeculum, sed ipsum quoque sexum vincere gestientes, ordinem Cistellensem, quem multi virorum et robustorum, juvenum aggredi metuunt, violenter, imo libenter, spontanea assumpserunt; depositisque omnibus lineis indumentis, atque pellicis, solis tunicis laneis utuntur, et non solum nendo, vel texendo, quod femineum opus esse constat, sed etiam in agris fodiendo, et cum securi et ligone silvam succisam exstirpando, spinas et vepres evellendo, manibus propriis assidue laborantes, cum silentio victum sibi quaerunt; vitamque Clarevallensium monachorum per omnia imitantes in semetipsis ostendunt verum esse illum Domini sermonem: quia omnia possibile sunt credenti."

stricter conversions of women rather than those of men alone are seen in Norbert's monasteries."⁵⁹ Herman's report does not say that Cistercian reformers refused to have anything to do with nuns, but that Bernard and other Cistercians favored separate communities of men and women rather than the double monasteries of the Norbertine or Praemonstratensian canons.⁶⁰

Slightly later writers have also been misread in attempts to demonstrate that Cistercian women were insignificant during the "Golden Age" of the Cistercian Order's formation. Historians of the Cistercian Order have thus preferred the witness of the anonymous Lincolnshire author of *The Book of Gilbert*. According to this author, Gilbert's request for incorporation of his reform communities was denied because Cistercians claimed they did not have authority over houses of other religious, particularly of women: "Then [in 1147] he [Gilbert of Sempringham] went to the Chapter of Cîteaux, where Pope Eugenius of happy memory chanced to be present at that time, for Gilbert intended to entrust the responsibility for his religious houses [of women] to the care of monks of Cîteaux. . . . However, the lord Pope and the Cistercian abbots said that monks of their order were not permitted authority over the religious life of others, least of all that of nuns; and so [Gilbert] did not achieve what he desired."⁶¹ The author of Gilbert's

59. *De miraculis sanctae Mariae Laudunensis* of Herman of Tournai, PL 156:962–1018, cited at col. 996: "Praeterea in Cisterellensi coenobio soli viri suscipiuntur, domnus vero Norbertus cum sexu virili etiam femineum ad conversionem suscipi constituit, ita ut etiam arctiorem et districtiorem in ejus monasteriis videamus esse conversationem feminarum quam virorum."

60. That Cîteaux was promoting a less syneisactic approach to the inclusion of religious women in its reform does not necessarily mean that its leaders were denouncing the inclusion of women altogether. Indeed, it even seems likely that it was only later Cistercian commentators who saw a denunciation of women or of syneisacticism in Bernard's famous sermon 65 from the collection of his homilies on the *Song of Songs*, parts of which were written after 1147. Perhaps that sermon should not be interpreted as anything more than a sermon on heretics who hypocritically called apostolic their living together with women. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum*, no. 65, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), 2:172–77. The emphasis in the text is on heretics, not syneisacticism, although this is how it is often read by modern interpreters. My reading of this sermon suggests a reflection on Bernard of Clairvaux's anxiety about the hypocrisy of heretics who pretended to be true Christians, claiming among other proofs their apostolic lives in common with women. It became a convenient way to avoid the *cura monialium* to claim that Bernard had said that the care of religious women was heretical. Cf. Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–29.

61. "Tunc adiit capitulum Cisterciense, ubi forte tunc aderat bone memorie papa Eugenius, ut curam domorum suarum manciparet custodie monachorum Cistercie. . . . Dominus autem papa et abbates Cistercie dixerunt sui ordinis monachos aliorum religioni, et persertim monialium, non licere preesse: et sic quod optavit non optinuit" (*The Book of*

Life was attempting to explain what he and other Gilbertines clearly saw as the slighting of Gilbert and his nuns by the Cistercians who had refused to incorporate them. The statement attributed by this early-thirteenth-century Gilbertine to the abbots at a chapter in 1147 is clearly anachronistic. As historians of the Gilbertines have shown, however, there is no independent or contemporary verification of Gilbert's purported visit to a Cistercian General Chapter in 1147. Indeed, the evidence for such an 1147 meeting in Gilbertine or other sources of the time is nonexistent.⁶² Gilbertine negotiations with Cistercians seem to have been undertaken in the 1160s when there was at issue a Charter of Peace similar to that established at about the same time between Cistercians and Praemonstratensians.⁶³

Only the prejudice about admitting the possibility that there were Cistercian women has led monastic historians to prefer the account of the anonymous canon of Sempringham in *The Book of Gilbert* over that of the prominent, university-trained theologian James of Vitry, who was named bishop of Acre at the beginning of the thirteenth century and who says in his *Historia occidentalis*, circa 1220: "The reverend religious men of the Praemonstratensian Order, wisely attending to the assertions of experts within their own family that it was burdensome and dangerous to guard such charges, decided that they should henceforth not receive women into the houses of their order. Thereafter abbeys of nuns of the Cistercian Order multiplied like the stars of heaven and increased enormously, blessed by God as it is said, 'Increase and be multiplied and replenish the sky.'"⁶⁴ One can thus hardly deny the presence of Cistercian women by that date.

Indeed, not able altogether to deny James de Vitry's positive statements about the existence of Cistercian women, Cistercian historians have eventually conceded a brief moment between 1190 and 1250 when, with the help of patrons and popes, women successfully put

Saint Gilbert 5, ed. Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keire [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987], 40–43); this book by an anonymous canon of Sempringham was written no earlier than 1205.

62. There is no contemporary evidence even for that meeting of a General Chapter supposed to have taken place at Cîteaux in 1147 (when Eugenius III is said to have been present and Savigniacs and Obazine were incorporated while Gilbert's nuns were rejected); Golding, *Gilbert*, 26 ff., finds no evidence before the *Vita prima* of Bernard.

63. On that charter see n. 39 above.

64. "Postquam autem premonstratensis ordinis uiri timorati et religiosi sapienter attendentes et familiari exemplo experti quam graue sit et periculosum ipsos custodes custodire, in domibus ordinis sui feminas iam de cetero non recipere decreuerunt, multiplicata est sicut stelle celi et excreuit in immensum cysterციensis ordinis religio sanctimonialium, benedicente eis domino et dicente: 'Crescite et multiplicamini et implete celum,'" *The "Historia Occidentalis" of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. John Frederick Hinnebusch (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1972), 117; dating, 6, 16.

pressure on the order's General Chapter for their incorporation. But they still have misread James of Vitry. They assume that an actual decision was made to admit women at the end of the twelfth century as a response to the move by the Praemonstratensian canons not to admit any more sisters. This should not be inferred from James of Vitry's statement, which only says that Cistercian nuns became extremely prevalent thereafter. As evidence that Cistercian women were commonplace and highly respected (indeed more so than Cistercian monks if one looks elsewhere in this tract), and that they had been around for some time, James de Vitry's *Historia occidentalis* may be a reliable source, but it does not date the initial addition of women to the order. Their participation dates to much earlier.

Frequent citation of James of Vitry's *Historia occidentalis* with regard to Cistercian nuns has led even the most traditionalist historians of the Cistercians, those who dismiss twelfth-century houses of nuns as not yet really Cistercian, to admit that by the thirteenth century there were houses of Cistercian nuns. Such concessions have been on a limited scale, however, and might be deemed efforts at "damage control." Thus a nearly official view, that found in Lekai's survey, concludes:

The founders of Cîteaux had no intention of establishing a new order of monks, much less of initiating an order of Cistercian nuns. Nevertheless, at a place called Tart, some ten kilometers north of Cîteaux, a foundation was made in 1125 for pious women, who were determined to imitate the austere example of the Cistercian monks. . . . There is no evidence that the Cistercian General Chapter took any responsibility for the nuns, or that monks of the order were in any way engaged in the spiritual and material care of the new community. Throughout the twelfth century the General Chapter scrupulously maintained a policy of aloofness, lest involvement in the nuns' affairs endanger the purely contemplative character of the order. . . . [B]etween 1190 and 1210, the gates of the order had been forced open for the admission of nuns.⁶⁵

In this standard version of events, houses of Cistercian nuns existed only once there was an official procedure for their incorporation, one established by the express decision of abbots in General Chapter meetings starting around 1190. Even so, such houses are deemed somewhat unusual.⁶⁶

65. Lekai, *Cistercians*, 347–49.

66. Dimier, "Chapitres généraux"; Degler-Spengler, "Incorporation," 96 ff.; Canivez, *Statuta*, vol. 2, 1213, nos. 3 and 4; 1218, nos. 4 and 84; 1219, no. 12; 1220, no. 4; 1225, no. 1; 1228, no. 16; 1233, no. 12; and 1239, no. 7.

· IV. ARE CRITERIA FOR LIMITED MEMBERSHIP REASONABLE?

Lekai supported the view that there were a few authentic houses of Cistercian nuns, but that they appeared at the end of the twelfth century and were admitted into the order only during a very limited span of time. Lekai also qualified this concession that there was female participation in the order by asserting that many houses of nuns claiming to be Cistercian and inspired by the practices of the brothers of Cîteaux were only "imitating" those practices, a word drawn from Herman of Tournai's comments about Laon. He asserted that by 1228, the General Chapter had begun to discourage individual abbots from additional incorporation of houses of nuns into the order and that papal promises made in 1251 to limit any more papal recommendations of nuns to the chapter were indeed effective in closing off the possibility of the addition of any more houses of nuns. Lekai's account, moreover, repeats the very negative depiction found in almost all earlier treatments of the entry of women into the Cistercian Order as an overwhelming flood. The image of the pressure of women "forcing open the Cistercian floodgates," a pressure that the General Chapter's abbots were powerless to resist, is an extremely misogynous one. Such a depiction links women's admission with an onset of decadence, and treats women as uncontrollable powers, needing to be confined and enclosed.⁶⁷

Recent standard treatments thus do in fact treat of thirteenth-century Cistercian women, but in those views, these women were part of the order only because carefully controlled. Historians like Lekai assert that the most important decisions undertaken by the General Chapter at this time were that Cistercian nuns were to be strictly enclosed and sufficiently endowed so as not to prove a burden on neighboring men's houses. The number of women's communities that might be incorporated was strictly limited, and the maximum size of many individual communities was set out in charters. Neighboring abbeys of Cistercian monks should not be required to provide members of their communities as chaplains or lay brothers to the nuns. Members of men's houses were not to demand hospitality from women's communities, for instance, from the nuns of Saint-Antoines-Champs in Paris. Lay brothers and chaplains attached to nuns' communities would be received like equivalent members of men's houses when travelling. Abbesses were not to attend the General Chapter at Cîteaux, but were allowed an annual meeting at le Tart

67. Ernst Günther Krenig, "Mittelalterliche Frauenklöster nach den Konstitutionen von Cîteaux," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 10 (1954): 1-105, esp. 15 ff.

presided over by the abbot of Cîteaux. He would there announce to the assembled abbesses any decisions of note made by the earlier General Chapter of abbots. Visitation would be by father abbots rather than by founding abbesses.⁶⁸ In fact many of these points would only come about gradually, as the result of the regularization of women's houses over the course of the thirteenth century as discussed below.

More recently, Brigitte Degler-Spengler has made explicit a series of well-documented moves by which the General Chapter gradually formalized the procedure for the affiliation of houses of nuns to the order in the thirteenth century, and lists criteria by which historians may identify such houses of Cistercian women.⁶⁹ These criteria are: (1) concession of freedom from episcopal visitation; (2) notice from the order's *Statuta* showing incorporation after inspection of resources by commissioned abbots; (3) papal recommendation of nuns to the General Chapter; (4) less explicit in Degler-Spengler, but included in other studies, is a fourth criterion, documents mentioning the *ordo cisterciensis*.⁷⁰

This list sets an unusually high standard of proof for women's houses as opposed to men's, which is possibly inappropriate given the fragmentary nature of the surviving documents dealing with women's houses. Yet many thirteenth-century houses of nuns can be found fulfilling some or all of these qualifications. Historians using a list such as Degler-Spengler's usually assume that an authentic house of Cistercian nuns founded between 1190 and 1250 would fulfill all these criteria and that houses without these documents or references in their archives were never houses of Cistercian nuns. Even if it is argued that documents in individual archives could have been lost, such treatments have assumed that the *Statuta* of the General Chapter at least would nonetheless have provided evidence for incorporation. If this evidence too is missing, a house of nuns tends to be described as having "only imitated" the Cistercians.

Many historians of religious women have assumed that such tests for determining which convents were authentic houses of Cistercian nuns in the thirteenth century are appropriate for either that time or later, and that such tests may also be legitimately applied to the twelfth century. Others have tried to sort through this web of pseudojuridical

68. Lekai, *Cistercians*, 347 ff.; on Saint-Antoine, see Constance H. Berman, "Cistercian Nuns and the Development of the Order: The Cistercian Abbey at Saint-Antoine-des-Champs outside Paris," in *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Essays in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 121–56.

69. Degler-Spengler, "Incorporation," 96 ff., lists all but *ordo cisterciensis*.

70. Coburn Graves, "English Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire," *Speculum* 54 (1979): 492–99, as discussed below.

argument on which historians have based assertions that there were no twelfth-century Cistercian nuns.⁷¹ Most have missed the fact that such criteria as are demanded for asserting Cistercian incorporation of women's houses have established a double standard of proof—one in which standards for authentication of women's abbeys within the Cistercian Order are not applied to men's houses either in the twelfth or the thirteenth century. What needs to be demonstrated here is that such proof of Cistercian women's status, although possibly appropriate to thirteenth-century houses of Cistercian nuns, is irrelevant to the twelfth century. Taking each of the criteria mentioned above in turn, it may be shown that they are invalid for determining the authenticity of a twelfth-century women's house as part of the Cistercian Order:

First, Cistercian exemption from episcopal visitation is irrelevant to much of the twelfth century. Although a hallmark of the Cistercian Order of the thirteenth century was the replacement of episcopal visitation by a system of internal visitation by father visitors, historians of the order have known, at least since the publication of work by J.-B. Mahn in 1945, that the privilege of internal visitation was not granted to the Cistercians until 1180 or so.⁷² Tithe privileges came earlier and were granted to both monks and nuns, but the issue of internal visitation was only resolved for the Cistercians very late in the reign of Alexander III (1159–1181). To assume that twelfth-century houses of nuns needed to have such exemption from episcopal visitation in order to be considered Cistercian, when in fact the men's houses of the order were only just receiving that exemption at the end of the century, is to apply an anachronistic criterion for the authentication of such houses of nuns.

A second criterion, the expectation that Cistercian affiliation would have been documented by notices in the statutes of the order, is also irrelevant to the twelfth century.⁷³ As is apparent from a careful study of the first volume of statutes of the Cistercian General Chapter published in 1933 by Canivez, no surviving *statuta* concern any individual house of monks or nuns before 1190, except for the five heads of filiations which are mentioned in the 1180s.⁷⁴ If we apply such arguments from the *Statuta* in a non-gender-biased way to decide which houses were Cistercian before 1190, we might indeed conclude that there were no houses of Cistercian nuns, but equitable application

71. My own early efforts in that regard are found in the footnotes to an early article; see Berman, "Men's Houses," which is cited in the more recent work by Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*.

72. Mahn, *L'Ordre cistercien*, esp. 148 ff.

73. Cf. Thompson, "Problem," 227–52.

74. Canivez, *Statuta*, vol. 1, passim.

of such arguments would require that we conclude as well that there were no more than five houses of Cistercian monks in the twelfth century.

Nonetheless, the argument that twelfth-century Cistercian nuns did not exist because they are not mentioned in the published statutes has been particularly convincing to outsiders to the field of Cistercian history. Such scholars have tended too often to treat the order's published *statuta* as a compendium in which all available—and all possible—information about any Cistercian house may be found, assuming that all entries have been critically edited and that there is coverage for all years. When making arguments from the silence of the statutes, such assumptions about Canivez's edition and in particular his volume 1 are injudicious in the extreme. Statutes dated to earlier than 1190 are of a general nature and concern the beginnings of the enforcement of uniform practices among Cistercian houses. There is no continuous series before 1179, except for the years 1157–61, and none concerning individual houses' problems until 1190.⁷⁵ There are also fewer surviving statutes than a first glance suggests. There are many years for which no records survive. For some Canivez provides extracts from Manrique's much later history of the order, but other years are skipped over entirely. Many dates assigned to statutes, including those for 1134, 1152, 1154, 1156, are wholly fanciful, having no basis in the twelfth-century manuscripts.⁷⁶ Indeed, the fact that the *prima collectio* cannot be dated to 1134 in the twelfth-century manuscripts, and that its contents in fact are more likely to date to circa 1160, means that all claims about 1134 statutes being "ideals" by which abbots attempted to live are false.⁷⁷ That there is no contemporary dated evidence for a Cistercian General Chapter until 1150 or later, as discussed next, also suggests that there could be no statutes from such early dates; it is not simply that they are missing.

As for criterion three, the requirement for papal letters urging that houses of nuns be incorporated, such papal recommendation is not expected for men's houses of the twelfth century. It could not be

75. The earliest annual statutes in a series are found in Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l'École de Médecine, MSS H322, dated in the manuscript to 1157–61. I argue at length that this predates any other series of statutes—all the others contain no dates—because this is also the earliest manuscript for parts of an early liturgical *ordo* and the earliest Cistercian lay-brother treatises; see Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*. Cf. *La Législation cistercienne abrégée du manuscrit de Montpellier H322*, ed. Louis Duval-Arnould (Paris: Champion, 1997), who contends that this is a truncated later text.

76. With the exception of a single statute attributed to 1152 in an 1185 manuscript (Dijon 114) none of the statutes dated in that publication to 1134 and to 1152 bear dates in any twelfth-century manuscript.

77. The *prima collectio* is dated in no twelfth-century manuscript.

expected for men's or women's houses before at least mid-twelfth century, moreover, because there was no General Chapter of the annual universal sort to which such houses could have been recommended by a pope before that date. The fact, which derives from the redating of the early Cistercian documents, that there was no annual, universal General Chapter until the second half of the twelfth century, needs to be underlined here. While Cîteaux may have hosted local informal meetings which resembled somewhat the "General Chapter" held at Cluny in 1132 and mentioned by Orderic Vitalis in his history, there is no evidence for a Cistercian General Chapter in the first half of the twelfth century.⁷⁸

Such evidence for an annual, universal General Chapter of all Cistercian abbots does not appear until the 1150s (perhaps not coincidentally the same time as that of the first dated *statuta*).⁷⁹ Moreover, references to it remain limited into the 1160s, only suddenly burgeoning in the 1170s.⁸⁰ What we do find for the first half of the twelfth century (although primarily for the 1140s) are papal privileges confirming properties for early houses of Cistercian nuns like le Tart, as well as for a few houses of Cistercian men, but of a General Chapter or order there is no evidence.⁸¹

These papal privileges just mentioned for abbeys of women like le Tart have been misread. They have been interpreted as evidence that Cistercian women were in fact only "imitating" the Cistercian Order, that such nuns were Benedictines in Cistercian habits. This conclusion is to generalize widely the example of women like the recluse Yvette of Huy, who may have lived *in imitatione cisterciensi* as an anchoress.⁸² Women such as Yvette who may be classed as imitating the order were but a tiny number, while there were many houses of nuns at the time who acted like Cistercians, thought they were Cistercian, resisted efforts to deny that they should share in the privileges of the order such as its tithe exemptions, and received papal confirmation of their Cistercian privileges. Historians have treated these women as "only imitating Cistercian practices" because papal privileges announce that they "followed the Rule of the Blessed Benedictine according to the

78. Orderic Vitalis, ed. Chibnall, 6:424–27.

79. Statutes from before 1150 have not been lost, but were simply never made; the first distribution of statutes throughout the order only occurred in 1202; see Lekai, *Cistercians*, 75–76.

80. See n. 39 above.

81. Bouton, "L'Établissement," 98, 115; and see n. 19 above.

82. Jennifer Carpenter, "Juette of Huy, Recluse and Other (1158–1228): Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life," in *Power of the Weak*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 57–93.

norms (mores, practices, or customs) of the brothers of Cîteaux."⁸³ But this is the language for all papal confirmations of Cistercian customs in mid-twelfth-century documents, whether for houses of monks or of nuns. The identical words when found for a men's house have been interpreted to indicate a house of the Cistercian Order; only with regard to women's houses do historians conclude that these abbeys were but "imitation" Cistercian. Thus, ironically, the papal privileges which best document the properties and practices of communities of Cistercian nuns like those at le Tart have been used by traditional historians as evidence that such houses of women were not Cistercian. Despite paralleling their sister houses of monks in having founders and friends who had offered them sites, endowment, recruits from among their sisters and mothers, tithe exemptions and others, confirmations by bishops, and eventually papal protection, these nuns have been declared "imitation" Cistercians. Despite possessing papal privileges in their archives which are identical to those of houses of Cistercian monks, such communities of nuns have been dismissed, as being *not* part of the order.⁸⁴

As for the fourth criterion mentioned above, references to houses of nuns as part of the *ordo cisterciensis*, these again cannot be expected given the lack of institutional articulation of an order at all before 1150. In fact we find no authentic documentary references from before the thirteenth century to specific men's houses or women's houses identified as part of an *ordo cisterciensis*.⁸⁵ *Ordo* is a frequently discussed term in the twelfth century, inspiring whole tracts, such as the *Libellus de*

83. Roisin, "L'Efflorescence cistercienne"; reference to imitation is found as well in the Herman of Tournai passage quoted at n. 58 above.

84. For instance, the references cited in a recent article by René Locatelli to a papal bull dated 1185 concerning nuns at Corcelles in the diocese of Besançon describe nuns who were definitely Cistercian, reproducing what he describes as the standard formulation, "Ordinem monasticum qui secundum Deum et beati Benedictini regulam atque institutionem Cisterciensium fratrum"; René Locatelli, "Papauté et cisterciens du diocèse de Besançon," in Grosse, *L'Église de France*, 306. For monks at Silvanès, founded in the late 1130s, see the papal bull of Alexander III in *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Silvanès*, no. 1 (1162), "Ut ordo monasticus qui secundum Deum et beati Benedicti regulam et normam fratrum Cisterciensium"; see also a bull of Eugenius III for the monks of Chaalis, "Ut ordo monasticus qui in eadem ecclesia secundum beati Benedicti regulam et Cisterciensium fratrum observantiam auctore Domino institutus esse dinoscitur," in François Blary, *Le Domaine de Chaalis: XIIe-XIVe siècles* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1989), no. 2 (1153).

85. Earliest references to an *ordo monasticus* at Cîteaux or to *universus ordo Cisterciensis* appear in papal bulls of Alexander III from 1163, *Recueil de Clairvaux*, nos. 92 (1163) and 97 (1163); this is confirmed by the following CD-ROM databases: Cetedoc: Library of Christian Latin Texts: CLCLT-2, published by Brepols; Cetedoc: Corpus Diplomaticorum: Belgium Latin Text, published by Brepols; and Patrologia Latina, CD-ROM index published by Chadwick-Healy.

diversis ordinibus et professionibus qui sunt in aecclesia.⁸⁶ While there is considerable discussion of *ordo monasticus* in pre-1150 documents, letters, treatises, and sermons, the practice of describing monks and nuns as part of a group called an order (as opposed to their living an *ordo* as a way of life) was a new usage of the term *ordo*.

Careful study of twelfth-century sources shows that *ordo* as a term to mean "a religious group" had not come into regular usage at the time of the foundation for women of houses like le Tart in the 1120s or Jully in 1113 or even of Nonenque in 1139. It was developing over the twelfth century and was still at mid-twelfth century subject to a considerable amount of ambiguous usage.⁸⁷ Except for suspect, retrospective foundation charters, the earliest references I have found to an *ordo cisterciensis* come from William VI, lord of Montpellier in 1146, and from Henry II, as king of England, in the 1150s.⁸⁸ So this particular criterion cannot show that there were no Cistercian nuns for much of the twelfth century.

The conventional view, then, that nuns were "not admitted" to the Cistercian Order during the twelfth century is obviously in error. But this erroneous statement and all the discussion of the admission of women into the Cistercian Order, and of the date at which they were finally admitted, mask a larger misconception of the issues involved. In fact, as the above reevaluation shows, the administrative order which we think of as the Cistercian Order emerged only gradually from an early Cistercian movement that in fact included women. That order began as a tiny congregation to which was added a great number of pre-Cistercian foundations in some sort of "takeover" of the third

86. *Libellus de diversis ordinibus et professionibus qui sunt in aecclesia*, ed. Giles Constable and B. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), never discusses a Cistercian Order. Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 174–76, stresses uniformity as the issue seen as creating orders by 1215, but this is not what *ordo* necessarily meant in the twelfth century.

87. Giles Constable, "The Orders of Society," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 251 ff.

88. For examples of early but ambiguous usage, see *Chartes et documents concernant l'abbaye de Cîteaux: 1098–1182*, ed. J.-M. Marilier (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1961), no. 69 (1119), and no. 85 (1131), but see no. 90 (1132), which refers to both congregation and *vestri ordinis abbatiiis*.

See *Liber instrumentorum memorialium*, ed. A. Germain (Montpellier, 1884), no. 95 (1146), for the will of Guillem VI. The findings on this score for southern France are tabulated in Constance H. Berman, "From *ordo monasticus* to *ordo cisterciensis* in the Twelfth Century," paper presented at the Haskins Society annual meeting, Houston, Tex., November 1997, forthcoming in volume in honor of Jaroslav Pelenski. Examples from the published cartularies for Cistercian houses in England are discussed at length in a paper presented at the 1998 meeting of the Haskins Society in Ithaca, N.Y., "The Cistercian Mystery: How Was the Order Formed and by Whom?" *The Haskins Society Journal*, forthcoming.

quarter of the twelfth century. Such houses of monks and nuns, those not founded from any other Cistercian house, would become the mainspring of this new institution, the Cistercian Order. In those terms, the question of "admitting women" becomes ill-stated. Twelfth-century Cistercian women's houses, like men's houses, "just happened" and gradually coalesced into an order. There was no admission of men's houses by women's or vice versa.

V. A NEW VIEW OF CISTERCIAN NUNS

How do these interpretations change our view not only of twelfth-century, but of thirteenth-century Cistercian women? First, although certainly the two generations from 1190 to 1250 saw an enormous growth of Cistercian houses for women, whose numbers came to equal numbers of the order's men's branch, this was a second wave, for there were many twelfth-century foundations for nuns as well. Moreover, the thirteenth century saw significant changes in the status of both the newest and the earliest Cistercian women's houses. In certain cases, older, richer, more prestigious foundations of women, like that of the women at Nonenque mentioned above, were transformed into the satellites of houses of monks which had once been their equals or juniors. Indeed, both charter evidence and statute evidence provides many indications of such transformations. In general the gradual regularization of many priories of Cistercian women into abbeys of Cistercian nuns in mid-thirteenth century may have made them less able to function independently, and more dependent on houses of men. Thirteenth-century evidence concerning maximum size of communities, or attaching them to neighboring abbots as *filia*, or elevating them into abbeys, however, should not be seen as marking the moment of the addition of women's houses to the Cistercian Order. In a few cases sufficiently astute patrons were successful in attaching them not to the local abbey of monks but to Cîteaux and Clairvaux, a tactic which at least deferred some of the ill treatment.⁸⁹

In fact thirteenth-century records mark a time during which the order instituted a massive regularization of houses of nuns of diverse types (some priories, some abbeys still not dependent on local Cistercian visitors, many clinging to their episcopal founders) into a single type of community, the abbey of nuns placed as *filia* under the direction of a local abbot visitor. This was part of the continued "invention" of the order itself, a process that was ongoing for men's as well as women's houses. Only in the thirteenth century did all men's

89. But see Berman, "Labors," passim.

houses take their places on filiation trees designed to allow internal visitation, and only then did all women's houses become demoted into satellites of nearby men's houses. As women's places in this hierarchical organization became more regularized, earlier visitation by bishop-founders was eliminated at the same time that all priories of women were elevated to abbey status, and maximum as well as minimum numbers of nuns (and monks) were established. Father visitors, chaplains, and confessors were assigned for purposes of discipline and liturgy. Sometimes the nuns were successful as well in claiming that father visitors must provide them with lay brothers to undertake business with the outside world.⁹⁰ But not all lay brothers came from outside the houses of nuns. Lay brothers also took vows directly to the abbess of the community—kneeling down before her and kissing the Rule of Saint Benedict rather than touching the abbess.⁹¹ Too often this thirteenth-century evidence, however, has been misread as the norm for both earlier and later, or papal decrees about all religious women which cut across the boundaries of orders are read as evidence of problems specific to individual communities.

It is unfortunate that the great authority on religious women's movements, Herbert Grundmann, in his work on women's religious movements, heresy, and the use of the vernacular in the later Middle Ages, originally published in 1935, from which much later discussion stems, mistook this thirteenth-century formalization process for the beginnings of the Cistercian Order's "admission" of women.⁹² Grundmann thus presented all Cistercian women's houses as part of a movement of foundation paralleling that of Dominican and Franciscan women, rather than a second Cistercian wave, which followed a first wave of Cistercian women's houses founded in parallel with the twelfth-century "double communities," such as that of Fontevault. Grundmann was followed in this error by Sir Richard Southern who saw efforts by nuns in the thirteenth century to resist pressures to be regularized into dependencies of men's houses as evidence of resistance to the order and its practices.⁹³ The assumptions of scholars such

90. Promises of this sort to July are documented; see n. 7 above; Reinhard Schneider, *Vom Klosterhaushalt zum Stadt- und Staatshaushalt: Der Zisterziensische Beitrag* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1994) provides the example of a count and countess of Flanders in 1238 who petitioned the General Chapter in the mid-thirteenth century to lend them three lay brothers. This evidence suggests that the precedents for such assignment of monks and *conversi* outside their own communities may well have been in the detailing of members of neighboring Cistercian men's houses to Cistercian women's communities.

91. See Ljubljana (Laibach), State and University Library, MS 30, for example.

92. Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, *passim*.

93. Southern, *Western Society*, 317, cites instances from Canivez, *Statuta*, vol. 2, 1242, nos. 15–18; 1243, nos. 6–8, 61–9, and 1244, no. 8, of nuns rebelliously locking out new abbot visitors; in this he mistook resistance to local visitors for resistance to being Cistercian.

as Grundmann and Southern that there were no twelfth-century Cistercian nuns, however, began to be disproved by publications from French archival materials starting in the early 1950s, especially those by Jean-de-la-Croix Bouton and Anselm Dimier, both of whom discussed evidence for twelfth-century women's houses associated with the Cistercians.⁹⁴ A thesis by Krenig attempted to incorporate this evidence, but did not really take proper account of it.⁹⁵

Other quasi-juridical arguments have been invoked in denying the existence of twelfth-century Cistercian nuns. One of these is that all truly Cistercian houses are identifiable by unanimous practices having to do with property, or by typical material remains. Such contentions have been used to argue away much positive evidence for early Cistercian nuns by citing the negative evidence of such things as buildings or economic practices. Historians thus have claimed that we may judge "just how Cistercian" were communities of nuns on the basis of evidence for material remains of architecture, or charters concerning endowment. By projecting an idealized image of what a Cistercian house should have been—one which no house of twelfth-century monks would have conformed to either—Cistercian nuns have been deemed "more Cluniac than Cistercian." For instance, because twelfth-century women's houses were called priories rather than abbeys, or because they owned tithes, a practice presumed contrary to Cistercian ideals, it has been argued that these nuns could not have been Cistercian.⁹⁶ Obviously such reasoning is faulty inasmuch as it is founded on assumptions of a uniformity and unanimity of Cistercian practice which is untrue for the twelfth century whether applied to women's or men's houses. Conformity to regulations was not there for most of the twelfth century and it cannot be given such "gatekeeping" functions. Insofar as there was a Cistercian movement in the twelfth century, local administrative records must be considered sufficient documentation to prove that there were twelfth-century Cistercian nuns, or monks. Neither group exhibited much conformity to ideals.

What then about the houses of women in England called "English Cistercian Nuns"? This is a term invented by Coburn Graves for what he claimed was a subspecies of only partially Cistercian nuns who followed the order's practices, but were not really part of the order.⁹⁷ It occurs because of a single letter arising from a question in 1268–1270 as

94. Jean-de-la-Croix Bouton, "L'Établissement des moniales cisterciennes," *Mémoire de la société pour l'histoire du droit et des institutions des anciens pays bourguignons, comtois, et romands* 15 (1953): 83–116; Anselm Dimier, "Chapitres généraux."

95. Krenig, "Mittelalterliche Frauenklöster," *passim*.

96. On this see both Boyd, *Rifreddo*, and Roisin, "L'Efflorescence."

97. Graves, "English Cistercian Nuns."

to whether six houses of nuns in Lincolnshire—Stixwold, Greenfield, Nun Cotham, Legbourne, Gokewell, and Saint-Michael's Stamford—were or were not liable to tithes because of their Cistercian status. The case is much obscured by our assumptions about what kind of administrative knowledge would have been available to the thirteenth-century Cistercian General Chapter. We know of it because of a copy of a letter that survives on Henry III's Close Rolls for 1270. This letter, copied onto the royal roll, was purported to be the response sent by the abbots in General Chapter to William of Lexington, archdeacon of Lincoln, responding to an earlier query from the archdeacon, now lost. In his lost inquiry, William probably represented himself as writing on behalf of the king of England (whose tax collector he was). This would explain the anomaly of his being mentioned first before the abbots in the reply. The wording of the surviving letter is confusing. Particularly ambiguous is its use of the word *ordo*. Its reference to *abbesses* for houses that we know of as having prioresses at this date, moreover, suggests less than full knowledge on the part of the abbots in General Chapter. The letter, purported to be from the General Chapter, says, "For your information, we enjoin by the present words that it is permitted for the abbesses of the monasteries of Stixwold, Greenfield, Nun Cotham, Legbourne, Gokewell, and Saint Michael's, Stamford, to wear the habit of our order. But they are not of our order or incorporated to our order, and therefore they should neither enjoy the privileges and freedoms of our order, nor be taken to be of our order."⁹⁸ This is all we know about what was apparently discussed at Cîteaux. But just what did the abbots at Cîteaux mean when they said that these abbesses were not of their order? Could they not have meant by *ordo* the *ordo clericus*, rather than the *ordo cisterciensis*? Could they be distinguishing themselves as a corporation from the abbesses who met at le Tart? Could they be using the term in two senses in the same letter?

While English authorities of considerable weight and documents

98. "Venerabili et in Christo dilecto domino W. decano majori Linc' ecclesie frater Johannes dictus abbas Cyster' salutem. Discrecioni vestre per presentes litteras intimamus quod abbatisse monialium de Stikeswolde, de Grenefeld, de Cotun, de Legburn', de Goukewell, de Sancto Michael'e extra Stamf' licet habitum ordinis nostri portare videantur, non tamen sunt de ordine nostro nec eidem ordine incorporate propter quod nec gaudere debent privilegiis et libertatibus ordinis nec de nostro ordine reputari. Datum apud Cisters' tempore capituli generalis. Anno Domini m.c. septuagesimo," *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry III, 1268–1272*, 301 (43 Henry III, 1270); the letter is accompanied by another item of business concerning the archdeacon, suggesting that he indeed had caused both to be enrolled, cited in Graves, "English Cistercian Nuns," 496 n. 28. I have translated *ordo* here as Graves apparently does to mean group—as in *ordo cisterciensis*, but there are other meanings, such as the *ordo clericus*, which might be at issue here, as discussed above.

produced by the nuns themselves all assert that these women were Cistercian, only this abbreviated letter in a version that William of Lexington himself caused to be copied onto the royal roll contends that those nuns were not Cistercian. Can we trust this letter, reputed to be from the General Chapter at Cîteaux, as more valid than the counterevidence? Moreover, was the General Chapter the most reliable witness, or the "last court of appeal" in such a case of monastic identity, as Graves has suggested?⁹⁹ How reliable was its voice when there is much local evidence to the contrary? In balancing these rival sources, can we assert that the abbots in General Chapter could have known more specific things about the status of these nuns in England than did the king or the bishop of Lincoln?

In his discussion of these documents, Graves has demonstrated that King Henry III, the bishop of Lincoln, and the archbishop of York had all independently declared that the houses of nuns contained in this list were Cistercian, that the nuns were poor, and that they should not have been expected to pay crusader tenths. Graves suggests, moreover, that William of Lexington, who had been assigned to collect taxes in the diocese, was either ignorant or insubordinate in writing to the General Chapter at all. If we agree that membership in the *ordo cisterciensis* is what is at issue here (although that is not altogether clear), how do we weigh the relative authority of conflicting witnesses? Are those abbots in any case to be relied upon? To treat the abbots' statement as authoritative, we must explain how the abbots at the General Chapter in Burgundy could have had better evidence than the king and the two bishops on the spot.¹⁰⁰ The abbots in General Chapter might have called on whatever English abbots were present at this meeting, but we should recall that any one of them was required to be present only once every three years. Moreover, would such English abbots have been wholly disinterested witnesses, since tithe burdens that did not fall on the nuns would surely have fallen more heavily on them?

We can see something of an answer in the response itself. If the response had said that some of the abbesses of these houses of nuns inquired about were Cistercian and others were not, that would have implied an investigation, that inquiries had actually been made by the General Chapter. Indeed, if such an investigation had been commis-

99. Graves, "English Cistercian Nuns," 499; we do not have today quite the same faith in the order's early record-keeping.

100. There was no reason for tax lists until the 1250s and none survive for another two centuries; those used by Janauschek to compile his list of abbeys in the order come from circa 1450; see *The Tax Book of the Cistercian Order*, ed. Arne Odd Johnson and Peter King (Oslo: Universitets Forlag, 1979), 9–17, esp. 17.

sioned, one might expect to find some reference to it in the statutes by this date. The abbots' response with its confusion about abbesses and prioresses, abbeys and priories (which Graves noted) is more general, a response that does not imply any investigation. What is most likely is that the General Chapter's response is a hypothetical one, based on its assumption of the truth of the assertions in a letter addressed to them by William of Lexington. The abbots were not acting here as a court of last resort deciding upon whether these nuns were Cistercian, but only saying something about what the consequences would be for those women if it were true that they were indeed not Cistercian. Must we not then read what they said as roughly the following? "You tell us that these nuns are not Cistercian, if that is so, then although they may wear white, they have no claim to the tithe privileges of our order." That the king and local clergy had decided that the nuns were Cistercian is clear from the local documents, as Graves shows. How could the General Chapter have been anything but operating in the dark? A subspecies of "English Cistercian nunneries" need not be created because in 1270 the abbots in General Chapter made a hypothetical response to a wholly officious query from a royal officer eager to collect taxes from a group of vulnerable houses of nuns. To assume, as Graves has done, more extensive administrative powers in the order at this time is probably to assume monastic institutions of control that may have existed nowhere before the Council of Trent.

Finally, it has been an assumption in all considerations of Cistercian nuns that the many new groups of religious women appearing in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe actually sought or desired affiliation with the Cistercian or some other order. Historians assume that the pressure for the incorporation of nuns by such groups came from the women themselves, or at least from patrons and authorities outside the order who saw the admission or incorporation of women by the Cistercians as a desideratum. In the old view, abbots within the Cistercian Order struggled to maintain their monastic solitude by denying or carefully controlling incorporation, but were overcome by a deluge of women wishing to be admitted. This is not necessarily true. Although many patrons often successfully sought the foundation of Cistercian houses, including those for women that their daughters might enter or they themselves might retire to, Cistercian affiliation was not necessarily a good thing for nuns. This is especially true once houses of nuns were no longer treated with the equality that they should have been guaranteed by the Charter of Charity after its promulgation in the 1160s. (Of course, promulgation of legislation may actually suggest widespread problems in need of correction.)

Local evidence suggests that women sometimes actively opposed

the incorporation of their abbeys when it would lead to their dependence on father visitors who were abbots of neighboring and rival abbeys of monks. Nuns preferred visitation not by abbots of rival communities, but by bishops and archbishops who were supporters and even founders of their houses.¹⁰¹ Regularization was not necessarily a good thing for the filiations of women's communities either. Ties were broken between women's houses, and eventually abbesses even of le Tart and las Huelgas no longer held General Chapters or had filiations over which they were official visitors of daughter houses. The evidence of resistance by some nuns to having new visitors imposed on them or to having outsiders determine how many nuns they could admit suggests that becoming Cistercian was not necessarily a consummation devoutly to be wished for by all women's religious houses. Perhaps the phenomenon remarked on by many historians of the constant shifting from order to order of late medieval religious women reflects how little any existing order provided for their needs. A related issue, although rarely discussed, is how much some abbots' willingness to accommodate the care of souls for such pious women derived from the considerable temptations presented by the property belonging to women's houses.¹⁰² The seductive pressure to incorporate a community of nuns as a daughter because it was rich or had rival claims to tithes and property is seen, for instance, in the northern Italian example of Staffarda's attempted incorporation of tithes belonging to the nuns of Rifreddo.¹⁰³

We must conclude that the early Cistercian Order's history with regard to nuns has been misread in the past. Arguments that denied that there were Cistercian nuns in the twelfth century, or claimed that most thirteenth-century nuns were "imitation Cistercians," were based on false premises about how the sources should be read. Such contentions have been difficult to counter because many scholars have not realized how much the central texts have lacked critical editing. Such misreading has also happened because historians looking only at women have not understood that the same lacunae in the documents for nuns' houses exist for houses of monks as well.

101. See Martin Aurell i Cardonna, "Les Cisterciennes et leurs protecteurs en Provence rhodanienne," *Les Cisterciens de Languedoc (XIIIe-XIVe siècle)*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux 21 (Toulouse: Privat, 1986), 35-68; and *Cartulaire de Notre-Dame de Voisins*, ed. Jules Doinel (Orleans: Herluison, 1887).

102. Berman, "Labors"; Anne Bondéelle-Souchier, "Les Moniales cisterciennes et leurs livres manuscrits dans la France d'ancien régime," *Cîteaux* 45 (1994): 193-336; and next note.

103. Boyd, *Rifreddo*, esp. 95 ff., describes the "takeover" by Rifreddo and disputes over tithes; a reassessment of this evidence on Cistercian women's agriculture and tithes is found in Constance H. Berman, "Cistercian Women and Tithes," *Cîteaux* 49 (1998): 95-128.

We also have underestimated the amount of work ahead. My work on Cistercian nuns over more than a decade has shown that women cannot just be stirred in as an extra ingredient to the broth of an existing narrative. To add nuns, lay sisters, and female patrons to the narrative of early Cistercian history means first writing the histories of individual houses of religious women which have not to date even been noted in the gazetteers. More dramatically it means rewriting the narrative of early Cistercian history itself. As this consideration of twelfth-century Cistercian women has shown, both telling individual histories and fitting women into a larger narrative often requires peeling away many layers of misinterpretation.