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978-0-521-12393-8 - Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition, c. 900-1200

Scott G. Bruce

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SILENCE AND SIGN LANGUAGE IN MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM

Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism explores the rationales for religious silence in early medieval abbeys and the use of nonverbal forms of communication among monks when rules of silence forbade them from speaking. After examining the spiritual benefits of personal silence as a form of protection against the perils of sinful discourse in early monastic thought, this work shows how the monks of the abbey of Cluny (founded in 910 in Burgundy) were the first to employ a silent language of meaning-specific hand signs that allowed them to convey precise information without recourse to spoken words. Scott Bruce discusses the linguistic character of the Cluniac sign language, its central role in the training of novices, the precautions taken to prevent its abuse, and the widespread adoption of this custom in other abbeys throughout Europe, which resulted in the creation of regionally specific idioms of this silent language.

SCOTT G. BRUCE is Assistant Professor of Medieval History at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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for Anne and Mira,
share this with me

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Fast gleichen sie einander alle;
in Gottes Gärten schweigen sie,
wie viele, viele Intervalle
in seiner Macht und Melodie

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Engel* (1902)

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Language,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 52 (2001): 193–209; and “Lurking with Spiritual Intent: A Note on the Origin and Functions of the Monastic Roundsman (*Circator*),” *Revue bénédictine* 109 (1999): 75–89. I owe the editors and anonymous readers of these journals and collections my thanks for helping me to shape and nuance many of the ideas presented here. I would also like to acknowledge with gratitude the audiences who listened to conference papers and public lectures on the topics treated in this book, specifically those at Boston University, Harvard Divinity School, Technische Universität Dresden, the University of California at Santa Cruz, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster and Williams College.

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SGB

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Note on Latin words and biblical citations

Several of the words for signified objects that appear in the monastic sign lexicons of the Middle Ages are not attested in any other source from the period (Tables 1 and 3–5). While it is reasonable to deduce the general meaning of some of these terms (*rufeolae*, for instance, are clearly a special kind of bread), others resist a reliable translation without further corroboration of their meaning (for example, *navetum*, *verves*, *cigara* and *burcium*). When in doubt, I have left the original Latin term untranslated.

The biblical citations in this book refer to the Vulgate, which follows the numbering of the Psalms found in the Septuagint rather than the original Hebrew.

ABBREVIATIONS

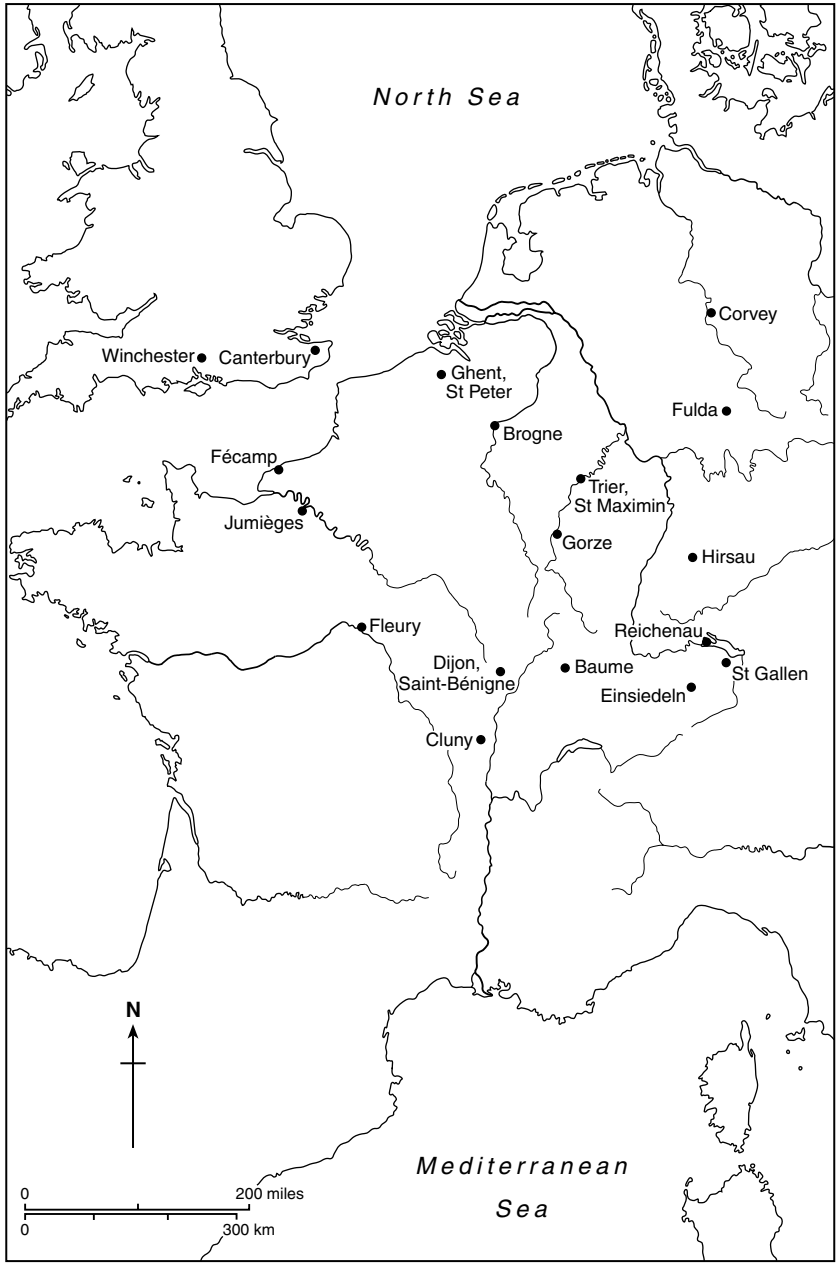
AASS	<i>Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur</i> , ed. Jean Bolland <i>et al.</i> (Antwerp, 1643–)
Bernard	Bernard of Cluny, <i>Ordo Cluniacensis sive Consuetudines</i> , ed. M. Herrgott, in <i>Vetus Disciplina Monastica</i> (Paris, 1726; repr. Siegburg, 1999), pp. 136–364 (cited by book, chapter and page number)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis</i> , 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898–1901) with supplemental volumes published in 1911 and 1986 (cited by BHL number)
BN	Bibliothèque nationale, Paris
Canterbury	The Canterbury Sign Lexicon (individual signs cited by number)
CCCM	<i>Corpus christianorum: Continuatio medievalis</i> (Turnhout, 1966–)
CCM	<i>Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum</i> (Siegburg, 1963–)
CCSL	<i>Corpus christianorum: Series latina</i> (Turnhout, 1963–)
Cluny	The Cluniac Sign Lexicon (individual signs cited by number)
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i> (Vienna, 1866–)
DHGE	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</i> (Paris, 1912–)
<i>Dictionnaire de spiritualité</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique doctrine et histoire</i> (Paris, 1922–)
Fleury	The Fleury Sign Lexicon (individual signs cited by number)
Hirsau	The Hirsau Sign Lexicon (individual signs cited by number)
MGH SRG	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> (Hanover and Berlin, 1871–)
MGH SS	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica inde ab anno christi quingentesimo usque ad annum millesimum et quingentesimum: Scriptores in folio</i> , 32 vols. (Hanover and Leipzig, 1826–1934)
PL	<i>Patrologia cursus completus: Series latina</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–1888)

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RB	<i>Regula Benedicti</i> , ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, in <i>La règle de saint Benoît</i> , 7 vols., SC CLXXXI–CLXXXVII (Paris, 1971–1972)
RM	<i>Regula magistri</i> , ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, in <i>La règle de Maître</i> , 3 vols., SC CV–CVII (Paris, 1964–1965)
SC	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i> (Paris, 1941–)
Statuta	<i>Statuta Petri Venerabilis abbatis Cluniacensis</i> , ed. Giles Constable, CCM VI (Siegburg, 1975), pp. 19–106
Ulrich	Ulrich of Zell, <i>Consuetudines Cluniacensis</i> , PL CXLIX, cols. 643–779 (cited by book, chapter and column number)
William	William of Hirsau, <i>Constitutiones Hirsaugienses</i> , PL CL, cols. 923–1146 (cited by book, chapter and column number)

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Monastic centres in the tenth and early eleventh centuries