

I

General Introduction

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Between January of 1417 and the last session of the great Council of Constance (1414–18) in April of 1418, Sigismund of Luxemburg (d. 1437), King of Germany, Hungary, and Croatia, was quartered intermittently at the House of Augustinian Hermits (f. 1268) in the southern part of the old city. The honor of hosting the king—the *defensor ecclesiae*—along with much of his vast retinue, must have come at great cost both to the community and to the townsfolk of Constance. Perhaps in recognition of this effort and expense, and surely aware that the Augustinians' church had not yet been fully restored in the wake of a devastating fire in 1398, Sigismund arranged for the impressive sum of 1,400 guilders to be paid to three local artists—Heinrich Grübel, Kaspar Sünder, and Johann Lederhoser—to paint the nave of the monastery church. Work on the frescoes began in July of 1417, and by September the job was complete.¹

The three painters created a three-register visual program along the south, west, and north walls of the church. The lower register comprises a series of images of saints, enthroned in the pendentives between the arcades. The upper register, at the level of the clerestory, was decorated with images (mainly destroyed by later modifications to the church) of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. In the middle register, groups of four or five kneeling men are framed by eighteen double and thirty-seven single painted arches; the men in each cluster, depicted in the habit of a particular religious order, gesture toward a standing figure who represents the author of the rule of that order

¹ Harald Derschka, "Die Wandbilder in der Konstanzer Dreifaltigkeitskirche (Augustinerkirche): Entstehung, Wiederentdeckung und Deutung," in *Das Konstanzer Konzil. Essays*, ed. Karl-Heinz Braun et al. (Stuttgart, 2013), 204–9; and Harald Derschka, *Die Konzilsfresken der Dreifaltigkeitskirche Konstanz* (Lindenberg, 2015).

ALISON I. BEACH AND ISABELLE COCHELIN



Figure 1.1 South Wall of the Dreifaltigkeitskirche (Church of the Trinity), Constance.

(see Figure 1.1). Together, the images of this middle register recount the history of Western monasticism, from the ancient desert in the East down to the present day, from the point of view of a community of late medieval Augustinian Hermits.

The story begins at the east end of the south wall of the nave with Paul of Thebes (d. c. 342) and Antony (d. 356), alongside Pachomius (d. 348) and Basil (d. 379). Directly following these great men comes Augustine (d. 430), who stands in his episcopal regalia and hands a scroll representing the so-called Rule of St. Augustine (RA) to a group of five suppliant Augustinian hermits. The bishop is depicted again under the next set of painted arches, this time with the Regular Canons of St. Augustine (see Figure 1.2). The succession of groups that follow the RA continues with the Dominicans and proceeds chronologically down the south wall, across the western wall, and into the first ten arches of the north wall. It is only at the end of this visual procession of groups following the RA that we first encounter Benedict of Nursia (d. c. 540), leading communities of monks who followed the Rule of

General Introduction



Figure 1.2 Augustine gives the *Rule of St. Augustine* to the Regular Canons, Dreifaltigkeitskirche, Constance.

St. Benedict (*RB*). The Franciscans and Carmelites constitute the last groups, at the east end of the north wall.

This visual history of monasticism makes a clear if somewhat unusual claim about monastic identity; it is the Augustinians who are the most direct heirs of the Desert Fathers. Perhaps the community was emboldened by a pronouncement that Pope John XXII (r. 1316–34) had issued just two years earlier, stating that the regular canons of Kreuzlingen (just south of Constance) merited a more prominent place in liturgical processions than the Benedictines of Petershausen (across the Rhine from the city), owing to the greater antiquity of their order.² As the followers of an ancient rule, they held a place of greatest importance in the history of monasticism. Even though

² For the text of this as-yet unpublished pronouncement and its interpretation, see Harald Derschka, “Die geistlichen Gemeinschaften in der Stadt Konstanz zur Zeit des Konzils: Stifte, Klöster, Schwesternhäuser,” *Das Delphinbuch 13* (forthcoming 2019).

ALISON I. BEACH AND ISABELLE COCHELIN

the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine had only been founded in 1254, they had themselves painted standing in an unbroken tradition, via the RA, with the most ancient ideals of Christian retreat into the desert. Benedict and the RB came later, and their connection to the sources of monastic tradition was depicted as more remote.³ It was certainly no coincidence that this visual argument was painted onto the walls of an Augustinian church only a few months after representatives of some 133 German Benedictine abbeys had convened a meeting of the German provincial chapter of the Benedictine Order at the monastery of Petershausen, just across the Rhine from the city, at which questions of reform and identity (including the return to a common habit and tonsure, as well as to dormitories and strict enclosure) were prominent on the agenda.⁴

Order-Based Monastic History and Its Legacy

The beginning of the story transmitted in the Constance frescoes is consonant in many ways with histories of monasticism in the Latin West handed down by generations of monastic historians who were themselves monks. While the intellectual achievements of these scholars are massive and essential, we must be ready, when necessary, to reject some of the fundamental premises on which they based their historical analysis. Our approach has been to question any aspect of this traditional approach that is not sound, to keep what is good, and to present the new questions and new answers that emerge.

Their story traditionally begins with Antony as the father of monasticism. Antony's form of monasticism is generally classified as eremitical, soon followed by the emergence of communal, or cenobitic, monasticism at the initiative of Pachomius and then of Basil. The wisdom and ways of these few great men was subsequently handed down, as the frescoes show, into a succession of (primarily and sometimes exclusively) male orders, even though the hierarchy and even the list of orders varies.

This focus on orders and institutions is, in part, a reflection of early modern and modern monastic historiography: much of the foundational scholarly work on medieval monasticism—"great historical enterprises" with origins in the seventeenth century—was undertaken by monks with a keen interest in, and from the perspective of, their respective orders.⁵ Individuals or groups

³ Derschka, "Die Wandbilder in der Konstanzer Dreifaltigkeitskirche," 208–9.

⁴ Philip H. Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance: 1414–1418* (Leiden, 1994), 155–7.

⁵ David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London, 1963).

General Introduction

marginal to, or entirely outside the perceived order structure of, the monastic world only began to receive more attention in the second half of the twentieth century, as a growing number of secular scholars began to approach monastic history from a broader range of perspectives.

Another issue at hand is that earlier generations of monk-historians often approached the topic ahistorically—assuming that the fundamentals of monasticism had remained more or less the same since the time of the Desert Fathers. This static definition, combined with the production of compartmentalized historiographies produced by institutionalized orders—reflected clearly in the clustering of the various groups under separate arches in the Constance frescoes—tends to obscure the astonishing vitality and diversity of monastic life through spaces and across centuries. The articles that comprise these two volumes represent a different, less teleological, approach. We have chosen not to organize our book with separate sections devoted to the Cluniacs, Cistercians, Premonstratensians, and so on. First, there is already a wealth of excellent studies and overviews that focus on individual monastic families or orders. Second, monastic orders only started to emerge in the twelfth century, quite late in the medieval history of monasticism. For most of the Middle Ages, religious communities were organized individually—even if some were or became dependencies of others (like so many controlled by Cluny in the eleventh century).

For this reason, we have encouraged our authors to speak of “black monks” or “traditional monasticism” rather than of “Benedictines” or “Benedictine monasticism” before the late Middle Ages. In the Carolingian Empire, especially after the Council of Aachen (816–17), and often much later in other areas, most monasteries did follow the *RB*; but using the term “Benedictine” to describe them before the formation of a Benedictine Order properly speaking tends to give the impression of a unity and uniformity that did not yet exist. The expression “black monks” appeared from the early twelfth century on to distinguish traditional monks from the Cistercians, who wore white habits.

Integrating Women into the Narrative

Nowhere is the legacy of order-based monastic history clearer or more problematic than in the historiography of medieval religious women. Much of the scholarship on *feminae religiosae* has focused on their inclusion in—or exclusion from—various orders. The limited research on women associated with the Premonstratensian Order, for example, while conceding that Norbert himself had had female followers whom he settled in cenobitic houses connected

ALISON I. BEACH AND ISABELLE COCHELIN

to male communities, generally takes for granted that the men of the order would have experienced any female presence within their institutions as a burden to be put off at the first opportunity. For example, Joseph E. Jansen, an early twentieth-century Premonstratensian, cited the “inconveniences” of female presence as the motivation for official pronouncements, such as the 1140 decree of the Chapter General of the order that called for the separation of dual-sex communities, and the 1198 decree prohibiting further female professions.⁶ In his influential *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, Herbert Grundmann spoke of the Order’s efforts to “free itself from the participation of women.”⁷ The historiographical terrain is similar for the Cistercians, particularly in the debate over the formal inclusion of women’s communities in the order.⁸

We are not suggesting that such questions and approaches are invalid or uninteresting, but rather that they have dominated the way that we think about what it meant to be a religious woman in the Western Middle Ages. The tendency to see women as marginal to—or even problematic for—the work of orders is popular in contemporary histories and encourages the continued relegation of religious women to their own, separate chapters in monastic surveys. In C. H. Lawrence’s standard English-language survey, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in the Middle Ages*, for example, the “Sisters or Handmaids” are still mainly confined to their own single chapter, whose first section carries the title, “*Frauenfrage*—the question of sisters.”⁹

There is no denying that this historiographical trajectory has been sustained in large part with the backing of surviving written and iconographic sources from the Middle Ages. Like their early modern and modern counterparts, medieval monastic historians overwhelmingly speak from a male perspective as they imagine narratives that respond to particular institutional needs and interests. The Constance frescoes, for example, reflect the perspective of the Augustinian Hermits, an order with no contemporary female counterpart.

⁶ Joseph E. Jansen, *La Belgique norbertine ou l’Ordre de Prémontré en Belgique à travers huit siècles d’existence*, vol. 1 (Averbode, 1920), 72.

⁷ Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Robert E. Lerner (Notre Dame, IN, 1995), 77–8.

⁸ See Constance H. Berman, “Were There Twelfth-Century Cistercian Nuns?” *Church History* 68 (1999): 824–64; for a similar critique, see Alexis Grégois, “Clairvaux et le monachisme féminin des origines au milieu du XVe siècle,” in *Le temps long de Clairvaux. Nouvelles recherches, nouvelles perspectives (XIIe–XXIe siècle)*, ed. Arnaud Baudin and Alexis Grégois (Paris, 2016), 155–60.

⁹ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 4th ed. (London and New York, 2015), 199.

General Introduction

Plans to include four female communities, reflected in the surviving written sketches for the frescoes, were apparently scuttled owing to a lack of space.¹⁰ In the end, theirs is a version of monastic history that excludes women, despite the fact that Augustine's Letter 211 (423), one of the earliest textual sources for the RA, was addressed to a community of religious women. Here and elsewhere, the role of women in the development of various forms of religious life was simply not seen as integral to the development of the "family tree" of monasticism, but rather as a side-growth. The problems with this selective reading of the sources are already evident in the *Life of Antony* (c. 360): when Antony decides to abandon all his wealth and to live a perfect life, the first thing he does is to place his younger sister in a female monastery. Decades before the male monasteries of Pachomius and Basil, then, at least one women's community already existed, raising the possibility that female forms of monasticism were the real point of departure, and not the other way around.

In these volumes, we have tried to write women back into the broader narratives of monastic history. To that end, whenever possible, women have been integrated rather than confined to separate chapters or sections. Further, many of our authors challenge the received tradition that interprets religious women as marginal, or as a "problem" for men that needed solving.

Rethinking the Boundaries of Monasticism

Scholars of monastic history need to be aware of the ways in which both medieval and modern historiography have shaped our most basic understandings of what monasticism is, down to how we define seemingly self-evident categories such as "monk," "nun," "order," and even "monasticism" itself. These definitions depend on who is telling the story. For the purposes of the present volumes, we have defined as monastic those individuals who were devoted to contemplation and prayer, generally with an element of separation from society (e.g. living in extremely ascetic conditions, and/or removed from centers of population, and/or enclosed architecturally), whether or not they did so in community. Although cenobitic monasticism would become the predominant form of male monasticism in the West during the early Middle Ages, it was never the exclusive one. From the beginnings of monasticism in the East, and throughout our period and beyond in the West, there were

¹⁰ Harald Derschka, "Die Ordensdarstellung in der Konstanzer Augustinerkirche: eine Gesamtschau der Männerorden aus der Sicht der Augustinereremiten," in *Dreifaltigkeitskirche Konstanz*, ed. Landesdenkmalamt für Denkmalpflege im Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart (Lindenberg, 2007), 31.

ALISON I. BEACH AND ISABELLE COCHELIN

“wandering monks,” hermits, recluses, house ascetics—and the list could go on—side by side with religious individuals living in more or less regulated communities. This continued diversity, and the permeability of the frontiers between these categories, were especially characteristic of female monasticism, as many of the articles that follow show.

One of the main reasons why so little space has been dedicated to female religious in previous monastic histories is that they often had a fluid monastic identity, hard to place within a single order or to characterize with a single term. For example, Jutta of Sponheim (d. 1136) probably began her dedicated religious life as a house ascetic before she and her protégée, Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), became recluses in the outer court of Disibodenberg, a male monastery. Hildegard would later found the female monastery of Rupertsberg, where she was the abbess.¹¹ Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) was not a Dominican tertiary; this stamp was only put on her *a fortiori* by the Dominican order.¹² The female monastery of Blesle, in Auvergne, followed the RB in the central Middle Ages, but at some indeterminant point (and probably gradually) before 1751, the women started living in individual houses and calling themselves canonesses.¹³ These examples can be easily multiplied. Only detailed regional, ecclesiastical, and political studies, side by side with surveys like our book, can help open up and move the history of medieval religious women forward.

The ubiquity and variety of forms of monastic life in the Middle Ages challenge simple formulations. Our approach to the fundamental problem of defining monasticism has thus remained open, sensitive to the fluctuating ways in which medieval religious defined themselves, and especially to how these responses might have varied by gender, and across time and space. For instance, although mendicants considered themselves to be quite different from cenobitic monks when their orders first appeared in the early thirteenth century, a history of Western monasticism cannot bypass them completely: their story is too entwined with that of monasticism in the later Middle Ages. It is especially difficult to pinpoint the border between the female mendicant orders, whose women were usually cloistered, and the traditional monastic orders. We have thus asked each of the contributors to keep the question of self-definition in mind, and to be wary of relying on definitions

¹¹ A. Silvas, ed. and trans., *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (Turnhout, 1998).

¹² Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200–1600* (Oxford, 2018), 75–7.

¹³ Martin de Framond, “Notes sur l’histoire des Bénédictines de Saint-Pierre de Blesle (IXe–XVIIIe siècles),” in *La place et le rôle des femmes dans l’histoire de Cluny*, ed. Jean-Paul Renard *et al.* (Saint-Just-près-Brioude, 2013), 79–112.

General Introduction

that medieval lay or ecclesiastical hierarchies might have attempted to impose on monastics.

Even after the seven years that have gone into the preparation of these two volumes, including the vigorous and challenging debates that animated our contributors' workshop at the former Cistercian monastery of Heiligkreuztal (Germany) in July of 2015 and the many fruitful conversations with our graduate students at the University of Toronto and The Ohio State University, we are left with more questions than answers about where to place the boundaries of monasticism. Is it valid, for example, to exclude, as we did, the military orders? Where is the boundary between "monastic" and "secular"? Should monasticism really be positioned in opposition to forms of religious life more oriented toward engagement in the secular world, such as communities that focused on pastoral care and public preaching, or communities created to manage hospitals, lodge pilgrims, and so on? In the end, we opted to raise questions and open debates rather than to resolve them, and to allow for rich variation across contexts. All of these decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion could be challenged with various arguments.

The Organization of the Volumes

The two volumes are organized into four sections. Volume I covers the origins to the eighth century (Part I) and the Carolingians through to the eleventh century (Part II). Volume II covers the long twelfth century (Part III) and the later Middle Ages (Part IV). The chronological break between Part I and Part II corresponds to the stabilization of Western monasticism under the Carolingians, with the (theoretically) general adoption of the *RB* within the empire. It was also marked by the attempt to establish a clear distinction between monks and canons, a fundamental distinction for some monastic authors that was nevertheless challenged again and again through the centuries by monks and regular canons. We refer to the period covered by Part II as the central Middle Ages in order to distinguish it from the late antique and early medieval periods that precede it, and from the high and late medieval periods that follow.

The division between Part III and Part IV marks the emergence of the "new" monasticism that developed first in Italy in the eleventh century with key figures such as Romuald of Ravenna and Peter Damian, and then north of the Alps in the second half of the eleventh century and early twelfth century. Part IV starts with the beguines and the flowering of the mendicant orders. It offers a fresh look at the evolution of monasticism in the late Middle

ALISON I. BEACH AND ISABELLE COCHELIN

Ages, forcefully and convincingly challenging common characterization of the period as marked by decadence and decline.

There are obvious limitations to this, and indeed any, chronological division. Continuities can and should be observed, and comparisons over time are essential. For example, how different were the house ascetics of Marcella and Jerome's circle from the beguines and recluses of the late Middle Ages? How do the "wandering monks" of the first centuries compare to the early mendicants almost a thousand years later? Many of the articles here consciously cross these chronological divisions, as their titles reflect. With so many articles including material from across the four periods, we have provided ample cross-references, and the index to the volumes is a vital resource for readers seeking to make connections and identify additional related material.

Each of the four parts that comprise these volumes begins with a historiographical essay pointing to both past and future research and an article that surveys the range of surviving primary sources for the period covered: for Origins to the Eighth Century, Albrecht Diem and Claudia Rapp (historiography) and Anne-Marie Helvétius, with the collaboration of Michel Kaplan, Anne Boud'hors, Muriel Debié, and Bénédicte Lesieur (sources); for the Central Middle Ages, Felice Lifshitz (historiography) and Scott Bruce (sources); for the Long Twelfth Century, John Van Engen (historiography) and Lauren Mancina (sources); and for the Later Middle Ages, Elisabeth Lusset and Bert Roest (historiography) and Cécile Caby (sources).

Other Central Geographic, Thematic, and Interpretive Questions

The full list of authors reflects a rich diversity of approaches to the history of medieval Western monasticism. Contributors come from all over Europe, North America, and Australia, and many are presenting their work here in English for the first time. While the majority are historians, more than one third are specialists in disciplines such as archaeology, art, music, philology, religious studies, and theology. There is also a wide range of specializations reflected among the historians, including economic, political, social, and gender history.

Although the geographical focus of the two volumes is continental western Europe and the British Isles, Part I, which covers the first centuries of the history of Christian monasticism, also includes the eastern part of the Mediterranean. There was no fixed border in the Roman Empire between the Greek East and the Latin West, and one cannot understand