**High Medieval Monastic Reform and Society I: living examples and** powerhouses of prayer **(c. 900-1050 AD)**

# Carolingian Europe and Monasticism

- The Carolingian period had seen monastic institutions become solidly implanted as part of Western and Central European public life

- Carolingian emperors and the imperial court had worked not only to standardize monasteries, but to support them financially and enhance their cultural prominence (e.g. in education).

- On the other hand, monasticism had become a very stable part of imperial society; the separatist, "counter-cultural" appearance that monasticism had once possessed arguably became weaker as a result

# The Collapse of the Carolingian Empire, c. 830-900

- The Carolingian empire, despite the power and success of emperors like Pepin III and Charlemagne, soon splintered.

- The later reign of Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's successor is marked by civil war: he is deposed for some time by his own sons (who he gave sub-kingdoms to). When he dies, his son Lothar takes over and is immediately attacked by his brothers Charles the Bald and Louis the German.

- At the treaty of Verdun in 843, the Carolingian Empire was split up between these brothers. Further conflicts follow, resulting in more splits, despite a brief unification under Charles the Fat (d. 888) in the 880s. His successor as Emperor – Guy of Spoleto – had little power outside of his duchy of Spoleto in Italy.

# Europe c. 1000 AD

- The other force which transformed the European political map in this period was the Scandinavian invasions ("the Vikings"). They established long-term political power in parts of Britain from c.800 and in northern France (Normandy) and in Southern Italy in the course of the 900s.

- By 1000 AD, what is known as the "Empire" is effectively a German polity, which also held power in Northern Italy; within it, many princes vied for power.

- The Capetian kings succeeded the Carolingian rulers in Northern France as the "kings of the Franks", and began to gradually establish and expand their polity there.

- Spain is largely ruled by the Muslim Umayyad Caliphs, but the Christian fight-back (later called the *Reconquista*) is beginning to gain strength in a collection of small polities in the north (the Kingdom of Leon, the kingdom of Navarre, the County of Castille, the Country of Barcelona)

# A hermit revival

Amid the collapse of political stability and order, monasticism finds some new expressions. A good number of these drew influence from eremitic monasticism.

- Eremitic – i.e. solitary – monasticism, the earliest form of monasticism to gain prominence in Egypt, had always had a presence in Europe alongside monasteries. This often occurred where monks or nuns who began in monasteries left to leave a tougher, solitary life.

- The Irish monastic tradition, in particular, produced numerous solitary monks: eremitic life sometimes intersected with the Irish ideal of ascetic *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage), discussed in lecture 2.

- Throughout Europe, eremitic life was often a relatively formal arrangement: e.g. *anchorites* (male), or *anchoresses* (female), a type of hermit who is bound to one hermitage and a form of life - rather than being able to move about – usually under the supervision of a local bishop or abbot.

**BUT:** from the 10$^{th}$ century, eremitic monasticism begins to take a new prominence: perhaps most importantly, it also inspires the formation of new kinds of monasteries, that take influence from both coenobitic and eremitic life: such monastic houses/orders are called "semi-eremitic".

# Saint Romuald of Ravenna

**Romuald of Ravenna** (951-1027 AD)

- From an aristocratic family in the Italian city of Ravenna

- After witnessing his father kill a man in a duel, he did 40 days penance and became a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Sant'Appolinare in Classe.

- Finding this life not rigorous enough, he left the monastery and decided to follow a harsher, eremitic way of life, instructed by another hermit, Marinus, about whom less is known. Romuald and Marinus travelled to Spain around 978, where they established hermitages alongside the Benedictine monastery of San-Miguel-Cuxa, with the support of the abbot there.

- Romuald returned to Italy in c. 987. He became a noted reformer and founder of hermitages and monasteries; he emphasised a very stringent asceticism, inspired by his eremitic life, that went far beyond Benedictine norms. His famous foundation at Camaldoli began as a collection of hermitages.

# The Camaldolese order

The monastic foundations begun or inspired by Romuald had some variety, encompassing both hermitages and more communal houses.

The isolated monastery of Camaldoli came quickly to possess both; the communal house was also organised in individual, separate cells (rather than the dormitory preferred by Benedict of Nursia), to give a taste of eremitic life to even the monks who lived within the community.

The Rule of Saint Benedict still held a very important place. But the Camaldolese grew to possess customs that regulated this combination of eremitic and coenobitic monastic life.



The monastery of Camaldoli – note its isolation

# The Followers of Romuald

Romuald was not only a very influential figure himself: his followers found fame too.

**Bruno of Querfurt** (d. 1009) and the 'Five hermit Brothers'

- Bruno – from North Eastern Germany – studied under Romuald at the monastery of Ravenna (founded for Romuald by the German emperor Otto III).

- He became an important missionary leader among the pagans of Eastern Europe. He travelled as far East as Kiev, where he attempted to lead the conversion of the Pechenegs, a local steppe tribe.

- He later went to the Baltic to convert pagans there. His five companions were martyred there. He himself was beheaded by pagans in 1009.

**Peter Damian** (d. 1072/73)

- From Ravenna (like Romuald): from a noble (if not so rich) background

- In his early life, he became a noted scholar in theology and church law at the schools of Ravenna and Parma

- Subsequently, he bacame a monk at Fonte Avellano (in 1035), a monastic community inspired by Romuald's rigorous example, near to Camaldoli. His love of Romuald's example leads him to write the latter's *vita* (i.e. his saint's life), even though he did not know him personally.

- He led the monastery of Fonte Avellano from 1043 until his death; under his influence, a number of nearby hermitages were also founded, where eremitic monks lived subject to his rule.

- He also goes further than Romuald in his ascetic demands of other monks: calls for monks to practice flagellation (*disciplina*) as a regular penitential practice (which Romuald, seemingly, did not). This becomes a common practice in many monastic settings in the Middle Ages in light of Peter's influence.

# Saint Bruno of Cologne

Another semi-eremitic monastic movement emerges at the end of this period under **Saint Bruno of Cologne** (c. 1030-1100):

- Born in Cologne (modern day Germany). He was from a clearly wealth background: traditional accounts say he was a member of one of the leading families of the city. He was sent to study theology in Reims (modern day France), and eventually became head of the cathedral school there (1057-75)

- He ledt Reims in 1075 following a disagreement with the new archbishop, and sought a solitary life, alongside several companions. Hugh, bishop of Grenoble (modern Southern France) found them a secluded place to live as hermits in the lower Alps: Chartreuse.

- In 1090, he was called to Rome by one of his former students, who had become pope Urban II, in order to provide assistance in church reform.

- He soon retreated to Calabria, Southern Italy, however, in order to live an eremitic life, along with a small band of followers.

# The Carthusian order

- Bruno and his followers become organised as a new "semi-eremitic" order, only for men – the Carthusians. They do not take the Benedictine rule and live by their own "customs.

- While their houses contain multiple monks, they have large individual cells that allow for an even more socially-isolated life than that seen at Camaldoli.

- The monks usually eat separately in their cells (meals were passed through the doors of the cells) and only come together for church services.



A typical Carthusian cell, with 2 floors. On the first floor, a living room, a study, and a bedroom/prayer room. Upstairs, room for work/crafts. Outside, a private garden

# Semi-eremitic monasticism and society

Despite the rigours that Romuald practiced – inspired by his experience of eremitic life – he remained very much in contact with the outside world

- He tirelessly sought to impose greater rigours on monastic communities throughout Italy, with support of powerful laymen

- He engaged closely with these lay rulers on a personal level: Pietro Orseolo I, the Doge (i.e. ruler) of Venice, adopted a life on penance for his sins under the Romuald's influence, and followed him to San-Miguel-Cuxa in Spain, where he became a monk

- Later, Romuald becomes close to the German Emperor Otto III (reign 980-1002), who supports his reform efforts; Romuald advises him to take harsh penances, although Otto never becomes a monk like Pietro Orseolo.

Bruno of Cologne is similarly engaged

- He is drawn to Rome – to the papal court of Urban II – despite having previously founded a semi-eremitic community at Chartreuse

- Notably, however, he refused the title of Archbishop of Reggio in Calabria during his time there and fled to a new hermitage.
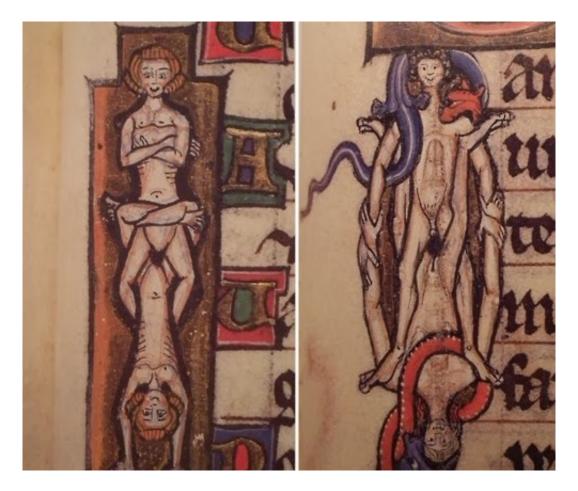
This moving in and out of engagement is characteristic of this new brand of hermit monastic reformer: their otherworldly holiness means their influence is strongly desired in the world; they don't turn down this invitation, but engage to try to improve the ascetic purity and moral standards of others: monks, churchmen and layman alike. Nevertheless, they also retreat to the monastic environment – and even total eremitic solitude – regularly.

**Their semi-eremitic style allows them to be both highly engaged with the world but also fiercely and obviously separate.**

# Peter Damian and the vices of churchmen

Peter Damian provides another example of this sort of engagement. While living at Fonte Avellano, he used his pen as a weapon to exert influence far beyond his own monks

- Wrote a series of open letters on a variety of subjects concerning the morality of priests and other clerics

- Frequent topics of these letters included simony (the overt selling of positions and spiritual services within the Church), and the corruption of bishops

- Most famously, he focused on the sexual morality of priests and other clerics. In particular, he was concerned by homosexual activities, however: these are the subject of his famous *Book of Gomorrah* (*Liber Gomorrhianus* (an extended letter written to pope Leo IX in c. 1051).

- Under his influence, homosexual activities became the accepted meaning of the sin of "sodomy" (*sodomitas*); the term had previously encompassed a wider range of non-reproductive sexual activity



Illumination from a manuscript of the Book of Gomorrah

# Another path: Cluniac monasticism

**Cluny**

- Cluny was a Benedictine monastery in Burgundy, founded in 910, by William II, duke of Aquitaine. He endowed the monastery with what were his hunting lands.

- Unusually, Berno, the first abbot, persuaded William to write himself out of any rights over the monastery and its lands: unlike many earlier Frankish founders, he could not interfere in the election of abbots or exercise any authority over the property of the monks. The only authority recognised by monastery was the distant papacy (in practice too far away to have much power over the monastery in its earliest years)

- If William and his heirs lost oversight of the monastic foundation, they gained other things
  - The expectation that the monks would pray for him, his successors, and his subjects was significantly amplified.
  - The surrendering of influence in this new model made William stand out, perhaps adding to his cultural prestige: his gift could be seen as a more complete gift to God, and his monks could be seen as holier than those who remained more closely tied to aristocratic influence

# Cluny and its reform

The model of Cluniac reform proved very popular with founders and benefactors

- The independence of Cluniac foundations from outside lay influence allowed Cluny to form a monastic congregation that was far more centralized and cohesive than any that had been seen previously.

- The abbey of Cluny had "daughter" abbeys, which themselves have dependent monasteries.

- The abbot of Cluny thus sits at the head of a hierarchical monastic movement that spread across the Latin West in the 10$^{th}$ and 11$^{th}$ centuries.



Cluny, its congregation, and reformed monasteries, c. 1100 AD

# Cluniac liturgy

One of the defining features of Cluniac Benedictine life was its greatly enhanced 'liturgy' – i.e. the cycle of prayers and masses said by the monks.

- Peter Damian, who visited Cluniac monasteries, mentioned that they performed so much prayer that the monks barely had half an hour free to themselves
- This was partly a necessity of the new model of foundation: much of this liturgical activity was understood to benefit the founders, who had surrendered worldly rights they might have enjoyed with a regular Benedictine house in order to gain such benefits.
- But it was also understood as having a monastic purpose:
  - A life of constant effort in prayer and worship was as a life of constant penance – of asking for forgiveness.
  - The rigour of performing this extensive cycle every day could also be seen as a form of ascetic training that would help drive back the temptations of the flesh (even if the Cluniacs were less physically severe than the semi-eremitic monks in terms of food, clothing etc).
  - Prayer and mass were thought to bring one closer to communion with God; thus the Cluniac liturgical expansion could be seen to make monks and nuns open more open to divine influence as they strove for perfection

# Monasticism at the dawn of the "High Middle Ages

After a period of 'normalization' under the Carolingians – in which monastic institutions came to occupy quite a standard and closely integrated place within society –, the beginnings of a renegotiation between monasticism and society took place in the new political landscape of the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

Approaches we have seen in this lecture:

1. Eremitic/Semi-eremitic revival – e.g. Saint Romuald and the Camaldolese reform

2. Powerhouses of prayer – e.g. the Cluniacs

While these approaches were different we can see some common threads:

- The expectation that monasticism would be closely involved in society had not changed: both movements show close connections with aristocratic culture in particular

- Nevertheless, taking influence from the rigours of eremitic life and/or going to spectacular new lengths in prayer, these reformers also find new ways to re-establish their difference and separation from the life of the world.

- Aristocratic audiences saw a powerful cultural value in such forms of life that sought this difference and separation. This value seems to have gone beyond that possessed by the standard Benedictine institutions inherited from the Carolingian era. The aristocracy can be seen as almost as important as the monks themselves in promoting this new wave of monastic reform (see Howe in bibliography)

# Sources – Life of Saint Romuald, by Peter Damian (c. 1043)

Peter Damian (d. 1072/1073)

- Described in earlier slides, Peter Damian was a major proponent of semi-eremitic monasticism in this period, and also very interested in the reform of the Church.

*Life of Saint Romuald* (c. 1043)

- Peter's most important early work was his life of Romuald of Ravenna, a figure he was greatly inspired by

- Peter did not know Romuald personally, but was well-informed by followers of Romuald who urged him to write the work and informed him.

- A popular Latin text in monastic libraries throughout the Middle Ages.

Reference:

Peter Damian, 'Vita beati Romualdi', *Patrologia Latina* 144, 953-1008 [My simplified translation]

# Sources – Life of Saint Romuald, by Peter Damian (c. 1043)

Chapter 25

The aforesaid emperor [Otto III] was indeed a great patron of the monastic order and showed much devotion to the servants of God.

He himself, moreover, confessed to the blessed man about the crime concerning Crescentius [ordering the execution of a Roman aristocrat despite promising not to]. To do penance, he proceeded barefoot out of the city of Rome and went as far as the church of San Michele on Monte Gargano.

He also stayed for the whole of Lent in the monastery of the blessed Apollinare in Classe, with a few members of his entourage. There he dedicated himself to fasting and reciting psalms as much as his strength allowed. Beneath his imperial robes, he wore a hair-shirt that pressed against the flesh. And although glittering covers were spread upon [his] bed, he scratched his tender limbs on a mattress made of rushes.

He even promised the blessed Romuald that he would one day renounce the empire and take the monastic habit and that he to whom so many men were subject, would make himself answerable to Christ the poor man and begin life anew as a debtor in service of Christ.

Chapter 37

Eventually, when he had distributed no small number of his disciples in Val di Castro, he travelled to the Orvieto region and built a monastery on the estate of Count Pharulph. There were many supporters, but it was principally Count Pharulph who provided for the expenses.

For in the saint's breast, there burnt a white-hot desire for doing good: it was so great that he was never content with what he had already achieved. While he was still doing one thing, he would already be pushing on to other things. Anyone might have thought he that his plan was to turn the whole world into a hermitage and for everyone to become monks.

# Sources – Life of the Five Brothers, by Bruno of Querfurt (c. 1005)

Bruno of Querfurt (d. 1009)

- Described in earlier slides, Bruno was another major proponent of semi-eremitic monasticism in this period – he was a follower of Romuald

- He was also an active missionary, who would end up martyred for his attempts to convert pagans in the Baltic

Life of the Five Brothers (c. 1005)

- Written concerning Bruno's friend Benedict and four other followers of Saint Romuald who, like him, went to became missionaries in Eastern Europe

- While it discusses their missionary work, the text also provides many stories concerning Saint Romuald and the way of life he established.

Reference: Bruno of Querfurt, 'Vita quinque fratrum eremitarum', *Monumenta Poloniae historica* NS 3-4 [My translation]

# Sources – Life of the Five Brothers, by Bruno of Querfurt (c. 1005)

And he [John] received this brief rule from Master Romuald, which he was very careful to practice throughout his life: Sit in the cell as in paradise. Cast all memory of the world behind you. Cautiously watch your thoughts, as a good fishman watches the fish. There is one way to perform the Psalms. Do not abandon it. If you who have arrived with the fervour of a novice cannot understand everything, strive to recite with the understanding of spirit and mind, now here, now there, and when you begin to wander while reading, do not stop, but strive to correct yourself by concentrating. Above all, place yourself in the presence of God with fear and trembling, like someone who stands in the sight of the emperor. Destroy yourself completely. And sit like a chick, content with the grace of God, for unless its mother gives it something, it tastes nothing and has nothing to eat.

[…]

Three treasures [were] offered to those who sought the way of the Lord [under Romuald]. For novices coming from the life of the world, there was the monastery they needed; for mature followers, thirsty for God, there was precious solitude; and for those who desired to disappear and bury themselves in Christ, there was the evangelization of the pagans

# Sources – The Book of Gomorrah, by Peter Damian (c. 1051)

Peter Damian (d. 1072/1073)

- Described in earlier slides, Peter Damian was a major proponent of semi-eremitic monasticism in this period, and also very interested in the reform of the Church.

*Book of Gomorrah* (c. 1051)

- Perhaps Peter's most consequential work for Western society

- While homosexual practices were long considered sinful, prior to Peter's work, they had been considered at a similar level to other non-reproductive sexual practices, including those that took place between men and women. All these practices were sometimes described as the sin of sodomy (*sodomitas*, taken from the biblical towns of Sodom and Gomorrah that were destroyed by God for their immorality)

- Peter, however, in the book of Gomorrah, found in homosexuality the worst of all non-reproductive sexual acts. He believed it was particularly "against nature" and thus the worst sexual practice: he is also particularly concerned that it was lowering the dignity of the priesthood, since priests indulged in such activities in order to subvert papal demands that priests should be celibate / not marry.

- The reaction to the text – written for pope Leo IX – was initially lukewarm: Leo does relatively little to curb homosexual practices among priests. The text becomes influential over time, however, and contributed to the particular vilification of homosexuality (in comparison to other sexual acts) in pre-modern and modern Western culture.

# Sources – The Book of Gomorrah, by Peter Damian (c. 1051)

This carnal man whom sacred authority judges to be degraded by such ignominious sins […] should carefully consider whether he can safely administer the ecclesiastical duties. […] To punish this crime, this enormous crime, is it enough to be whipped in public, to lose his tonsure, to be shamefully shaven, to be smeared with spit, to be cruelly imprisoned for a long time, and to be bound in iron chains besides? He should also be ordered to fast on bread made only of barley: since it is right that whoever acts like a horse and a mule should not eat the food of men but feed on the grain of mules. [Moreover], whoever is made to submit to such public penance must surely be judged unworthy of holding any ecclesiastical office, in accordance with the wise judgment of the fathers. […] Since blessed Saint Basil [see lecture 3] commands those guilty of this crime to undergo not only hard but also public penance, and pope Siricius forbids someone who performs public penance from becoming a priest, we can clearly understand that one who is polluted by the filthy stain of sexual impurity with another male does not deserve to perform ecclesiastical duties.

# Sources – Foundation Charter of Cluny, by William, duke of Aquitaine (910)

William I, duke of Aquitaine (875-918)

- A powerful prince in post-Carolingian southern France.

- Son of Bernard II, count of Auvergne, he originally controls just Auvergne and Limousin (in central France), but greatly expands his power through war and treaty, becoming duke of Aquitaine in 893

- While technically subject to the kings of West Francia, he effectively ruled a large swathe of southern and central France, from the West coast (Aquitaine itself) to much further East in Burgundy.

*Foundation Charter of Cluny* (910 AD)

-  Cluny was William's major religious foundation: situated in the east of his realm, in Burgundy (c. 50 km north of Lyon)

Reference: Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages,* (London, 1910), 329-333 [I have simplified the language]

# Sources – Foundation Charter of Cluny, by William, duke of Aquitaine (910 AD)

I William, and my wife Ingelberg, give these things […] first for the love of God; then for the soul of my lord king Odo [the previous king of West Francia, who died in 898], of my father and my mother; for myself and my wife […] and not least for that of Ava who left me these things in her will; for the souls also of our brothers and sisters and nephews, and of all our relatives of both sexes; for our faithful ones who adhere to our service; for the advancement, also, and the integrity of the Catholic religion. Finally, since all of us Christians are held together by one bond of love and faith, let this donation be for all: for the orthodox Christians of past, present or future times. I give these things, moreover, with this understanding: that at Cluny a regular monastery will be constructed in honour of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and that there the monks will congregate and live according to the rule of St. Benedict, and that they will possess, hold, have and be in charge of these same things for all time. They will have these things in order that the this venerable house of prayer will be faithfully filled with vows and prayers, and that a heavenly way of life will be sought and strived for with all desire and with the deepest fervour; and also so that prayers, requests and exhortations will be persistently directed to God, both for me and for all others, according to the order in which I have mentioned them above. And let the monks themselves, together with all the possessions I have mentioned, be under the power and dominion of the abbot Berno, who, as long as he lives, will preside over them […] But after his death, those same monks will have the power and permission to elect any one of their order as abbot and rector, in accordance with the will of God and the Rule of St. Benedict: neither our own power nor any other power should ever stand in the way of such a pure, canonical election. […] We are also pleased to state in this document that, from this day, those same monks congregated in this house will be subject neither to our authority, nor to that of our relatives, nor royal might, nor to any earthly power.

# Sources – Monastic schedules in Rule of Saint Benedict and the *Horarium* of Cluny

The following timetable of monastic life is not a transcription of an "original" medieval source.

Rather, it is a reconstruction – provided by the historian David Knowles –, of daily life based on the 6th century Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia (see Class 3 powerpoint), and the *Horarium* (i.e. timetable) described in the Cluniac customs of 980 AD.

Reference: D. Knowles, 'The Monastic Horarium 970–1120', *Downside Review*, 51(4) (1983), 706–725.
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001258063305100410

# Sources – Monastic schedules in Rule of Saint Benedict and the *Horarium* of Cluny

**RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT**

2.30 a.m. NOCTURNS

3.30 a.m. Reading

5.00 a.m. MATINS

5.45 a.m. Reading

6.30 a.m. PRIME

7.00 a.m. Reading

8.15 a.m. TERCE

8.30-12.00 noon work

12.0 noon SEXT

12.15-1.15 p.m. Work

2.15 p.m. NONE

2.30 p.m. First light meal

3.00 p.m. Reading

4.15 p.m. VESPERS

4.45 p.m. Second light meal, with readings

5.00 p.m COMPLINE

**CLUNY (c. 980 AD)**
- Triple prayer
- Thirty (last) psalms

NOCTURNS
- Office of dead
- Matins of All Saints
- Deus auribus or Verba mea
- Sit in choir or pray

MATINS
- Two psalms (prostrate)

PRIME
- Two psalms (prostrate)
- Three psalms for dead
- Seven penitential psalms
- Litany
- 30 psalms
- Reading
- Triple prayer

TERCE
- Two psalms (prostrate)
- Morning Mass
- Chapter

- Thirty (first) psalms
- Reading

SEXT
- Two psalms (prostrate)
- Psalms for benefactors
- Work
- Mass

NONE
- Psalms for benefactors
- Two psalms (prostrate)
- First light meal

VESPERS
- Psalms for benefactors
- Two psalms (prostrate)
- Vespers of All Saints
- Vespers of dead
- Second light meal, with readings

COMPLINE
- Psalms for benefactors

# Select Bibliography

Beyond the general reading, the following are very useful and easily available:

John Howe, "The Nobility's Reform of the Medieval Church." *The American Historical Review*, 93.2 (1988), 317–339. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1859921

Irven Resnick, "Peter Damian on Cluny, Liturgy and Penance", *Journal of Religious History* 15.1 (1988), 61-75. https://www.academia.edu/4665581/Peter_Damian_on_Cluny_Liturgy_and_Penance