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

Carolingian Europe and Monasticism

By the Carolingian period, **monastic institutions had attracted significant support in Latin West**

- The relative **independence** of those who had "fled the world" allowed them to **adapt to the political realities of a post-Roman world**

- Flexing to **the needs of local elites** supported their **success as missionaries** and **ability to found houses**.

On the other hand, monasticism had arguably became **more normalized** and **less challenging to worldly norms**

- Carolingian emperors and courtiers **sought to standardize monasteries** under the Rule of Benedict

- Monasteries had become the **dominant intellectual centres**

- Some **loss of "counter-cultural" appearance** as a result?

Europe c. 1000 AD

- From 830-900 AD, the **Carolingian Empire begins to fracture**. Civil war beginning at the end of Louis the Pious's reign, and his empire is split between his sons and their successors.

- 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.

- The other force which transformed the European political map in this period was the **Scandinavian invasions** ("the Vikings").

- The **Vikings 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.

- **Spain is largely ruled by the Muslim Umayyad Caliphs**, but the Christian fight-back (later called the *Reconquista*) is beginning to gain strength in the North

Europe c. 1000 AD

Monastic Reform

- Just as the world changes, **monasticism adapts and develops new forms**

- In the process it **influences changes in the Church and society**

- Monks and churchmen often associated such activities with the idea of **"reform"** (*reformatio*)
  - **Reform looks backward** to idealised earlier forms (e.g. primitive Church), perceived as purer
  - But, by envisaging the re-enlivening man's divine seed, **reform also looks forward to new perfection**

- Historians have often spoken of reform in terms of "waves" affecting certain periods dominated by cohesive "movements"
  - Recent research, however, suggests a **diversity of reform efforts** related to **local circumstances of place and time** (see Vanderputten in bibliography)

Eremitic influence

Some expressions of monastic reform **drew influence from eremitic monasticism**.

- Eremitic – i.e. solitary – monasticism, had always had a presence in Europe alongside monasteries.
  - This often occurred where monks or nuns who began in monasteries left to lead a tougher life.
- As in Egypt, this did not mean the total loss of interaction with society
  - Eremitic life intersected with the Irish ideal of missionary *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage).
  - Hermits might be involved in exchange of goods for prayer and in charity
- Throughout Europe, eremitic life was often a relatively formal arrangement
  - e.g. *anchorites* (male), or *anchoresses* (female), a type of hermit bound to one hermitage and a form of life usually under the supervision of a local bishop or abbot.
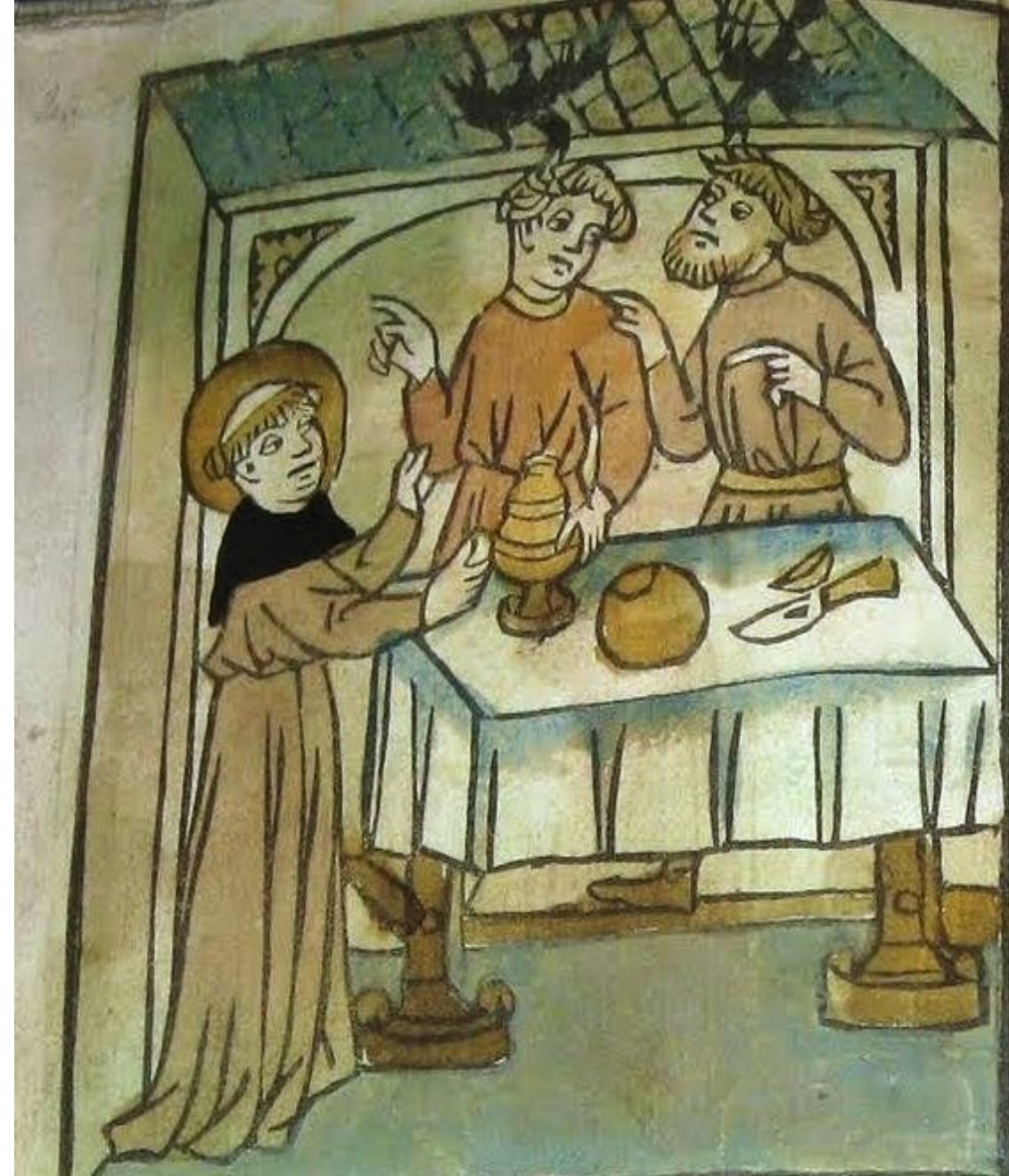
St Meinrad of Einsiedeln (c. 797-861) giving away gifts to the poor

Semi-Eremitic Monasticism

BUT: from the 10th century, eremitic monasticism begins to take a new prominence among monastic activists

- As well as true hermits, it also inspires the **formation of new kinds of monasteries**, taking influence from both coenobitic and eremitic life.

- Such monastic houses/orders are called "**semi-eremitic**".

- Semi-eremitic groups become some of the most influential monastic reforms of the period. Most important:
  - **Camaldolese** – under the Rule of St. Benedict
  - **Carthusians** – under their own customs, rather than an existing "rule"

Saint Romuald of Rave

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.

St Romuald of Ravenna, portrayed in a 12th century musical manuscript

Saint Romuald of Rave

Romuald of Ravenna (951-1027 AD)

- Romuald and Marinus travelled to Spain c. 978, where they established hermitages alongside the Benedictine monastery of San-Miguel-Cuxa

- Romuald returned to Italy in c. 987. He became a noted reformer and founder of hermitages and monasteries there. His famous foundation at Camaldoli began as a collection of hermitages.

- He emphasised a very stringent asceticism, inspired by his eremitic life, that went far beyond Benedictine norms.

St Romuald of Ravenna, portrayed in a 12th century musical manuscript

The Camaldolese order

The monastic foundations begun or inspired by Romuald had some variety

- Both **hermitages and more communal houses**.

- **Monks** but also **some nuns by the end of the 11th century**

The isolated monastery of **Camaldoli** came quickly to possess **both a communal house and hermitages**

- The communal house was also organised in individual, separate cells (rather than the dormitory preferred by Benedict of Nursia)

- The aim was 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.

The Followers of Romuald

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

Peter Damian (d. 1072/73)

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

- A **scholar in theology and church law** at the cathedral schools of Ravenna and Parma

- Became 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 biography), 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.

- 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

Saint Bruno of Cologne and the Carthusians

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), a member of one of the leading families of the city.

- Sent to study **theology**, and became **head of the cathedral school of Reims** in modern day France(1057-75)

- He left Reims with several companions in 1075 following a disagreement with the new archbishop, and **sought seclusion**. 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, to **assist in reforming the Church**.

- 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.

- They 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 the leaders of these semi-eremitic groups practiced they remained **very much in contact with the outside world.**

Romauld is classic example of this:

- He tirelessly **sought to impose greater rigours on monastic communities** throughout Italy

- He **engaged closely with lay supporters on a personal level**, shaping their religious lives too:
    - 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.
    - Advises his supporter German Emperor Otto III (reign 980-1002) **to take harsh penances**

Bruno of Cologne is similarly engaged

- He is **drawn to Rome – to the papal court of Urban II – to help in Church reform** 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.

In addition, the **association of monastic asceticism with dangerous missionary work was re-enlivened** (e.g. the "Five brothers")

Semi-eremitic monasticism and society

Peter Damian provides another example of pro-active engagement beyond the cloister, this time via writing:

- **Wrote a series of open letters** 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**: these are the subject of his famous *Book of Gomorrah*, sent 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

Semi-eremitic monasticism and society

Moving in and out of engagement is characteristic of this new brand of hermit monastic reformer

- Their **enhancement of certain aspects of otherworldliness** means their **influence is particularly 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 and nuns, churchmen and layman alike.

- Nevertheless, they **also retreat** to the monastic environment – and even more complete eremitic solitude – regularly.

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

Another path: Cluniac monasticism

Cluny

- A **Benedictine monastery in Burgundy**, founded in 910, by William II, duke of Aquitaine.

- Unusually, William **wrote himself out of any formal rights over the monastery, its estates, and abbatial elections**

- The only authority to be recognised by monastery was the **distant papacy, still limited in its power and reach**

- Cluny thus possessed **unusual independence and power over its possessions** in comparison to earlier Frankish monasteries

Another path: Cluniac monasticism

Cluny

- Traditional explanation:
  - The first abbot, Berno, persuaded William of the spiritual benefits of **a more complete gift to God** and of the **particular commitment of the monks to prayer and worship**
- More recent historians:
  - Fractured **political situation** in Burgundy meant William was worried about the claims of others over his lands.
  - Gave them to the abbey to safeguard them, **hoping to keep informal power** over what he had given.
 - Died in 917 with **no heirs: monks were left with everything**

Cluniac liturgy

Cluny II church, built c. 955-981
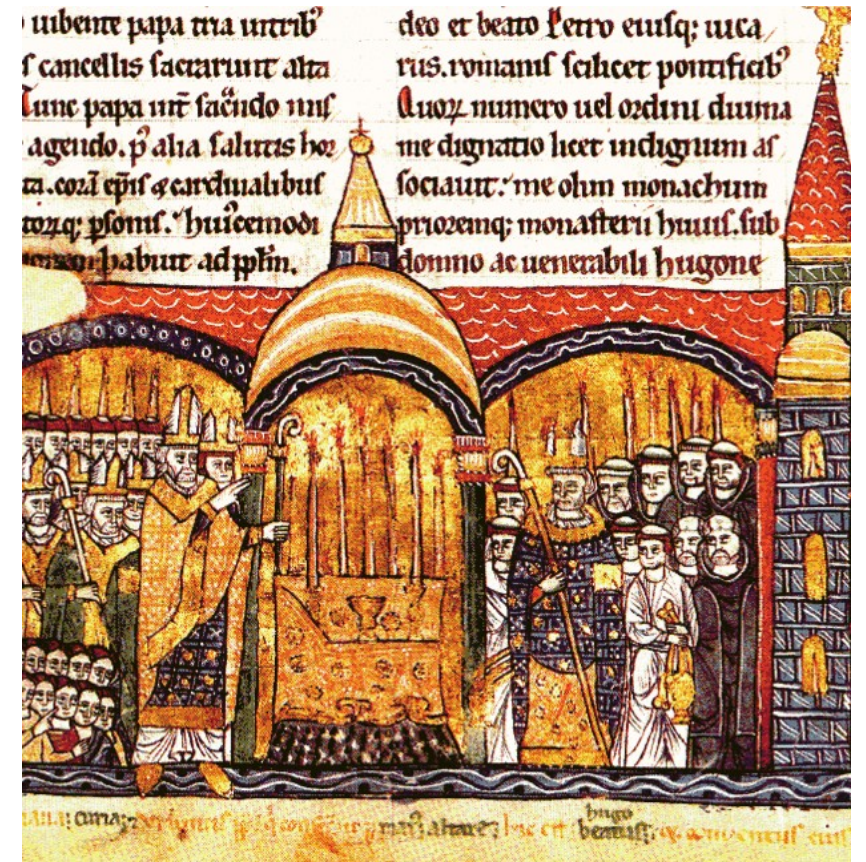
Cluny's manner of foundation might have been somewhat accidental

- BUT **the model proved popular with other benefactors**, who expand the house and paid for other Cluniac monasteries:

Why? **Liturgy** plays a big role.

- **Liturgy** = the cycle of prayers, psalms, masses etc.

- More expansive liturgy -> **greater spiritual benefits for benefactors**, and **trade off for loss of power** over their monasteries

- **Odo, second abbot of Cluny (d. 942) implements a more expansive liturgy** at the monastery and **builds a large network of benefactors**

- Monastery becomes very large, **church is expanded twice in the 10th and 11th century**, accommodating a larger choir and more side chapels.
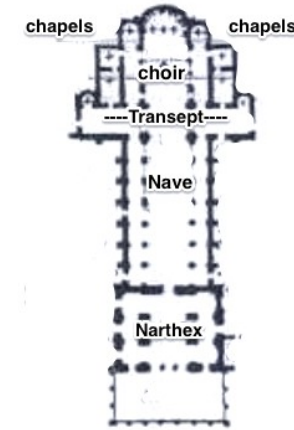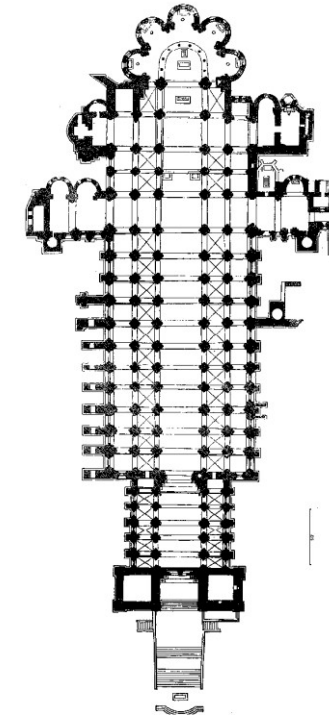
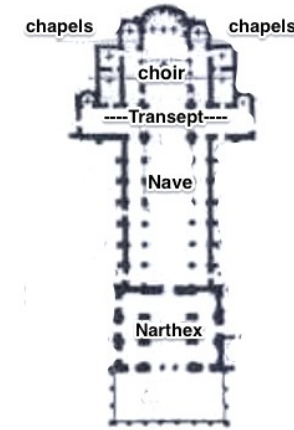
Cluny III church, built c. 1095-1130

Cluniac liturgy

Cluny II church, built c. 955-981

- Greater liturgical effort was also understood as having **a strong monastic purpose**:
  - A life of constant effort in prayer and worship was as a **life of constant penance**
  - The rigour of performing this extensive cycle every day could also be seen as **a form of enhanced ascetic training** that would help drive back the temptations of the flesh
  - Prayer and mass were thought to bring one **closer to communion with God through worship**

- But, especially given its focus on spiritual care of benefactor, it **could also be criticised from the same perspective**:
  - Peter Damian, who visited Cluniac monasteries, mentioned that they **performed so much prayer that the monks had barely any time free for contemplation**
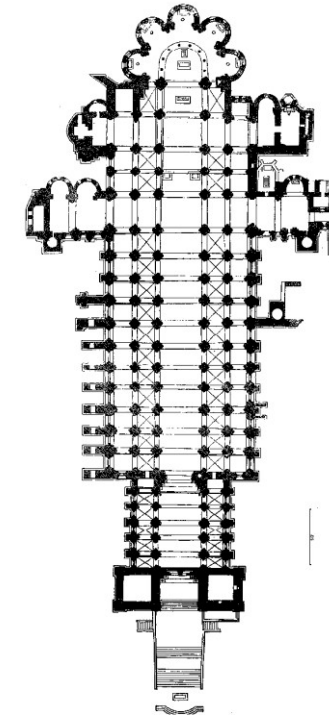
Cluny III church, built c. 1095-1130

Cluny and its reform

The **unusual independence** of Cluniac monasteries from outside power – as the model spread – also **consolidated monastic power in the world**

- 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 sat at the **head of a powerful monastic hierarchy** with **enormous possessions** across the fractured Latin West in the 10th and 11th centuries.

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

Monasticism at the dawn of the "High Middle Ages

A **complex and varied 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. **Reform movements inspired by eremitic/semi-eremitic monasticism** – e.g. Saint Romuald and the Camaldolese reform, Carthusians – which made monastic separation more tangible and asceticism more physical

2. **Powerhouses of prayer** – e.g. the Cluniacs – serving society through more expansive liturgical duties.

But there were **many variations on and beyond these models** (see Vanderputten in bibliograpy)

Monasticism at the dawn of the "High Middle Ages

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

- **Re-establishment of perceived monastic separation**, by taking some elements of tradition to **new extremes.** E.g.:
  - Re-emphasising rigours derived from the eremitic model of monastic life
  - Going to spectacular new lengths in prayer and liturgy
- Emphasising extreme difference in some aspects, however, actually **helped build new social engagement in other aspects**
  - The most rigorous monks pressed other churchmen to become more like monks in areas like sexual morality.
  - Ascetic rigour could also spark close spiritual friendships with aristocrats, some of whom wished to take up a more ascetic life themselves and become big promoters of monastic reform (see Howe in bibliography).
  - Multiplication of liturgical efforts was greatly appreciated by benefactors and often perceived as a social good.

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 […] 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, [Romuald] 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 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 – 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 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:

Steven Vanderputten, "Monastic Reform from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century", in *Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West,* vol. 2, ed. A.I. Beech and I. Cochelin (Cambridge, 2020). On **IS filestore**

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