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The Cult of Saints in Medieval Cistercian English Houses

A Forgotten Phenomenon?

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Abstract

The article explores the cult of saints in medieval Cistercian communities in England using the evidence from the statutes of the Cistercian General Chapter. While the article explains the significance of different types of saints that were added to the liturgical calendars of English Cistercian houses, it also shows how it was part of order-wide practices. The poor survival of evidence from the monasteries themselves is compensated by the documents from the centre of the order, with contextualization, that can significantly broaden perspective on the Cistercian engagement with the cult of saints and its place in the monastic culture.

Keywords

Medieval Cistercian Order, cult of saints, General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, medieval England.

The traditional narrative of the history of the Cistercian order tended to overlook the cult of saints within the White Monks' communities. Besides the acknowledged importance of the Virgin Mary, veneration of saints has been marginalized in the scholarship as alien to Cistercian culture. The myth of Cistercian art as a distinct style driven by an ideological agenda and defined by simplicity or even absences of decorations has also influenced perception of the place of the saints' veneration in Cistercian monasteries.¹ Some of the older literature even equated the cult of saints with the 'excesses' of Cluniac culture — taking 'Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem' very literally — and thus claimed that it was rejected by the White Monks.² Moreover, this thinking fitted very clearly into the golden age and decline model, in which the presence of cults functioned as evidence for the loss of the original 'simplicity'. Even in a recent article this type of interpretation can be found:

Relics were the great treasures of medieval churches, they had tremendous spiritual and economic values, since they attracted many pilgrims for veneration. Not surprisingly, reliquaries are among the most impressive and creative examples of medieval metalwork to survive, and Cistercians did not always keep to their intended simplicity in this area.³

¹ Holdsworth, 'Chronology and Character of Early Cistercian Legislation', pp. 40–55; Lymant, 'Die Glasmalerei bei den Zisterziensern', pp. 345–56; Melczer and Soldwedel, 'Monastic Goals in the Aesthetics of Saint Bernard', pp. 31–44.

² 'Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem', ed. by Leclercq and Rochais. For an overview of the scholarship see: Gajewski, 'Another Look at Cistercian Architecture. Part One', pp. 9–20.

³ Cezabonne, 'Liturgical Life as Art: Cistercian Liturgical Objects', p. 202.

The longevity of this interpretation comes perhaps from the strategy of comparing normative sources with very fragmentary evidence for what was deemed ‘reality’. By necessity, this approach conflated the alleged Cistercian prescription concerning decorative art — especially the ‘Exordium Parvum’ as well as passages of the *Statuta* concerning liturgical uniformity in the twelfth century and admonishments against novelties and curiosities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries — with the subject of veneration of saints and their relics.⁴ It is a very unproductive route which tells us next to nothing about Cistercian material culture in relation to the liturgy. Whilst the concept of tradition and apprehension of novelties were deeply rooted in Cistercian thinking and manifested also in the vocabulary of the *Statuta*, ‘tradition’ was very much a subject of development, capable of assimilating change and helping the Cistercian communities to develop in the late medieval context. As Carola Fey has noted, there was nothing specifically Cistercian in the normative rules concerning care and upkeep of relics, but they represent typical concern over the spiritual and material wealth that these objects represented to any owner.⁵

Whilst the model of ‘golden age and decline’ is no longer upheld in Cistercian studies — although it is alive and well in many popular publications or guides to monastic sites — the Cistercian engagement with the cult of saints, especially in the post-1300 period, remains overlooked. In part, this is the result of the very poor survival of sources related to late medieval monastic history in parts of Europe which were subject to Reformation in the sixteenth century. Paradoxically, we know far more about the twelfth-century history of Yorkshire monasticism than we know about its situation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶ Moreover, the preservation bias of textual and material sources from English Cistercian houses strongly privileged economic and legal evidence much more than anything related to the spiritual and religious life and mission of these institutions. Whilst liturgical books were destroyed in the process of suppression, cartularies and even original charters survived in much greater numbers because they were useful to the new owners of the secularized estates. No Cistercian chant books survive from medieval English houses. One office book of the mid-fourteenth century — perhaps from Fountains⁷ or Meaux⁸ — has survived as well as five missals — four of them dated from the twelfth/early thirteenth centuries, one from the fifteenth century, and three psalters.⁹ In terms of liturgical vessels and church furnishing their survival must be below 1 per cent across the British Isles and not a single liturgical vessel from a Cistercian monastery in Yorkshire exists.¹⁰ This major lacuna is compounded by the very low survival rate of medieval monastic inventories. Whilst some information can be gained from wills, antiquarian descriptions, and archaeological evidence, those explorations have only begun.¹¹

For Cistercians, as for any other monastic and later mendicant communities, the cult of saints was an integral part of their culture. This includes liturgy, relics, and visual depictions. Saints were present in liturgical texts, in readings at mealtime, in the collation gallery, and in sermons. The calendar organizing the circle of Cistercian time regulated veneration and thus placed saints at the centre of monastic life. It was part of the shared culture between the monastic and wider world and, as I will explain later, an important facet of these interactions.

Despite the limitations, there is enough evidence to establish which saints were a part of the liturgical calendar in many English Cistercian communities.¹² This, in turn, is very informative for the understanding of the development of these communities in the Middle Ages, their identities, their relationships with secular Church,

⁴ Fey, ‘Reliquien in Zisterzienserklöstern’, pp. 557–62, ‘Exordium Parvum’, ed. by Brem and Altermatt, Chapter **xii**: 6–7, p. 92; *Twelfth-Century Statutes*, ‘Instituta Generalis’, ed. by Waddell, Chapter **xxv**, p. 516; Norton ‘Table of Cistercian Legislation on Art and Architecture’, pp. 315–93.

⁵ Fey, ‘Reliquien in Zisterzienserklöstern’, pp. 556–57.

⁶ Carter, *The Art and Architecture of the Cistercians in Northern England*.

⁷ Fountains Abbey, O.Cist., near Ripon, co. North Yorkshire.

⁸ Meaux Abbey, O.Cist., near Beverley, co. Yorkshire, East Riding.

⁹ Chadd, ‘Liturgy and Liturgical Music’, pp. 300, 306–07, 309–10, 312. Office book: BL, MS Burney 335; missals: London BL MS Add 17431, BL MS Add 46203, Cambridge University Library MS Add 4079, BL MS Harley 1229, Stonyhurst College MS2.

¹⁰ This is a very approximate number derived from the calculation for Central Europe, see Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik*, p. 35.

¹¹ Carter, ‘Cistercian Abbots as Patrons of Art and Architecture’; Carter, ‘Abbot William Marshall’; Carter, ‘The Tower of Abbot Marmaduke’; Carter, ‘Remembrance’; Willmott, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*.

¹² For the discussion of the cult of saints in the Cistercian liturgy based on the evidence from surviving manuscripts see: Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England*, pp. 251–60.

specific localities, and the wider Cistercian family. Examining which cults were particularly important to these communities can help us see both the regional and trans-European nature of the Order.

Within the Cistercian Order the cults were subject to authorization in the spirit of concern about the uniformity of liturgical practice. Not all saints venerated in the Cistercian communities were recognized by the General Chapter and such recognition was not necessary. However, this annual gathering of the abbots was a reactive body and unless a matter was brought to its attention, it would not be considered. There were numerous saints' feasts that were important and relevant only to some communities and subject to local veneration only. They were in no way illegal, rather simply had only local significance. A good example of this type of cult is that of St William, the canonized Archbishop of York, who enjoyed veneration across several dioceses.¹³ His relics are attested to be in the possession of Meaux Abbey, and his name was also added to the calendars in the printed missals that have been identified as belonging to Kirkstall and another northern Cistercian abbey.¹⁴

Throughout its medieval history, the General Chapter responded positively to numerous requests of individual communities to commemorate saints particularly important in their regions. These cults were given appropriate liturgical form and were celebrated within a specific house, its filiation, Cistercian houses simply within a region, or a single monastery. The highest number of such requests occurred in the mid-thirteenth century, primarily between 1220 and 1260,¹⁵ and coincided with a peak in requests for individual benefactors' commemorations and the growth in lay burials in the Cistercian houses. Some existing cults were also 'upgraded' with more extensive liturgical celebrations, and this was also recorded in the *Statuta*. In any case, each initial decision to include a saint in the Cistercian calendar was accompanied by a pronouncement about its liturgical form.¹⁶ In addition, a relatively small number of cults was prescribed for celebrations throughout the order, and these included St Benedict of Nursia, St Bernard of Clairvaux, Robert of Molesme, St Malachy, St Peter of Tarentaise, St Thomas Becket, St Edmund of Canterbury, St William of Bourges, St Cuthbert, St Francis, St Dominic, St Elizabeth, St Thomas Aquinas, and the Eleven Thousand Virgins.¹⁷ These figures were important as an embodiment of Cistercian roots (Bernard and Robert), holy (arch)bishops (Edmund of Canterbury, William of Bourges, Peter of Tarentaise), and as a link to the wider monastic tradition (Benedict and Cuthbert). However, they also show a connection to the mendicant world (St Francis, St Dominic, and St Thomas Aquinas). Moreover, the changes in the Cistercian calendar reflected other wider religious trends, for example inclusion of the cult of St Elisabeth in 1235 and St Barbara in 1227.¹⁸

Applications for the addition of a saint's name to the liturgical calendar were made primarily, but not exclusively, by abbots and occasionally by patrons, or by local bishops or royal patrons, and could refer to veneration within one house only, or within its immediate filiation, or within a wider region, diocese, or large structure, such as a kingdom.

Let us first consider applications made by individual English abbots for the inclusion of singular cults within their own communities. In 1247 the Abbot of Meaux applied for the inclusion of the liturgical celebrations of Bishop John of York (St John of Beverley), who was an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon saint, in his house. A few

¹³ York, North Yorkshire; Norton, *St William of York*, pp. 149–201.

¹⁴ Kirkstall Abbey, O.Cist., near Leeds, co. West Yorkshire; Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints Relics', appendix with an edition of relics list from Meaux, BL Cotton MS Vitellius C vi, pp. 517, 522; Carter, 'A Printed Missal'; Carter, 'Unanswered Prayers', pp. 1–2.

¹⁵ Charvátová, 'Zisterzienserliturgie und -heilige in Böhmen', p. 217.

¹⁶ The Cistercian liturgy had different grades of celebrations. The lowest was (*commemoratio*, 'commemoration'), then commemoration with one conventual mass, followed by twelve readings with one mass. This could be amplified to twelve readings with two masses and finally twelve readings with two masses and a festive sermon, see Backaert, 'L'évolution du calendrier cistercien', p. 83.

¹⁷ References to the liturgical celebrations of St Benedict: *Twelfth-Century Statutes*, ed. by Waddell, 1199/10 p. 424, *Statuta*, ed. by Canivez, t. 2, 1222: 13, 1236: 2, 1239: 1; t. 4, 1439: 81, 1439: 97, 1448: 2; St Bernard of Clairvaux: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1236: 2, 1239: 1; t. 3, 1295: 5; Robert of Molesme: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1224: 22, 1259: 6; t. 3, 1321: 3; St Malachy: *Twelfth-Century Statutes* 1191/60 pp. 232, 1192/1 pp. 235, 1192/2 p. 235, *Statuta*, t. 3, 1317: 1; St Peter of Tarentaise, St Edmund of Canterbury, St William of Bourges: *Statuta*, t. 3, 1294: 2; St Peter of Tarentaise: *Twelfth-Century Statutes* 1192/2 pp. 235, 1196/60 pp. 374, 1197/1 pp. 379, 1198/1 p. 402; St Thomas Becket: *Twelfth-Century Statutes* 1173 p. 661; St Cuthbert: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1226: 9; St Francis: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1228: 2; 1259: 9; St Dominic: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1226: 9, 1255: 4, 1256: 2, St Elisabeth: *Statuta*, t. 2, 1235: 1, 1236: 1; St Thomas Aquinas: *Statuta*, t. 3, 1329: 2; the Eleven Thousand Virgins: *Statuta*, t. 3, 1262: 14, 1282: 5.

¹⁸ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1235: 1, t. 2, 1236: 1, *Statuta*, t. 2, 1227: 49. The cult of St Barbara in connection with eucharistic symbols became particularly significant in the later Middle Ages and reflected in her depictions holding the chalice and host, see Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Deviation'.

years later in 1253 the Abbot of Netley¹⁹ requested permission to include the feast of St Edward the Confessor in the calendar of his house.²⁰ In the next decade, in 1266, the Abbot of Boxley²¹ applied for the inclusion of the cult of St Augustine of Canterbury, ‘the Apostle of the English’, in his monastery.²² The next request of this kind appeared in the late fifteenth century, when in 1495 the Abbot of Fountains applied for the addition to the liturgical calendar in his monastery of Oswald, the seventh-century Northumbrian king and martyr.²³ This was followed, a year later, by a request that the feast of St Oswald should be celebrated in all Cistercian monasteries in the dioceses of York.²⁴ It is very striking that all these saints had strong connections and significance in the regions in which these Cistercian monasteries were located. Some of them had acted as holy missionaries with special connection to the region, as St Augustine had to Kent where Boxley was located. They all represent some of the oldest layers of Christian history in their areas as martyrs, early bishops, and holy rulers. Through veneration of these saints, the Cistercian communities connected themselves to the significant points in the past of their locality, acknowledged the protective nature of these figures, and spiritually embedded them in the religious landscape. Meaux Abbey was located only 3.5 miles from Beverley Minster²⁵ where St John (d. 712), Bishop of Hexham and then Beverley, had a shrine. It was a very strong cult even beyond the British Isles by the tenth century and it continued to evolve. From the reign of Henry I the royal connection to the saint was manifested by the appearance of a saint’s banner when the shire of York was summoned to the royal army and its appearance was attested to during the campaigns of Edward I, II, and III and Henry IV against Scotland.²⁶ As we will see with further examples, the categories of saints added to the Cistercian calendars in England were indicative of wider trends within the Order and similar in many parts of Europe.

Occasionally, abbots made requests beyond individual houses and that can also be revealing of wider bonds. This was the case in 1253 when the Abbot of Buildwas²⁷ and its daughter house of Basingwerk²⁸ (a monastery on the Anglo-Welsh frontier) applied for the recognition of the veneration of Saint Winifred, a seventh-century Welsh saint, in both their houses.²⁹ There is strong evidence of the cult of St Winifred in Basingwerk well before its official recognition — the abbey owned a church with such a dedication. In the twelfth century Basingwerk was under the patronage of the earls of Chester with estates on both sides of the border which ‘must be seen in the context of their desire to consolidate and maintain Norman political control’.³⁰ With both English and Welsh abbots applying, we can also see how the filiation system was a vehicle for the spread of cults across political boundaries, a phenomenon that can be observed elsewhere within the Cistercian family.³¹

There were also requests from groups of abbots for the inclusion of specific cults in all Cistercian houses within a given territory. These were figures of trans-regional importance and their inclusion reflected both monastic but also wider political concerns. In 1221, the veneration of St Edmund of East Anglia, holy-king martyr, was introduced in all houses of the Cistercian order in England with twelve readings.³² In 1221 the veneration of Bishop Hugh in the Cistercian houses in the diocese of Lincoln was approved, with twelve readings and the conventual mass.³³ Several decades before the feast of St Edmund of Canterbury became celebrated across the order (see above), it was recognized in English communities in 1259 as a result of the petition of English

¹⁹ Netley Abbey, O.Cist., co. Hampshire.

²⁰ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1253: 24.

²¹ Boxley Abbey, O.Cist., co Kent.

²² *Statuta*, t. 3, 1266: 23.

²³ *Statuta*, t. 4, 1495: 30 For the hagiography of St Oswald see Tudor, ‘Reginald’s Life of S. Oswald’, pp. 178–94.

²⁴ *Statuta*, t. 4, 1496: 36.

²⁵ Beverley, co. Yorkshire, East Riding.

²⁶ Wilson, *The Life and After-Life of St John of Beverley*, pp. 105–24.

²⁷ Bildwas Abbey, O.Cist., co. Shropshire.

²⁸ Basingwerk Abbey, O.Cist., near Holywell, co. Flintshire.

²⁹ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1253: 24.

³⁰ Golding, ‘Politics, Piety and Plunder’.

³¹ The most spectacular example of this phenomenon was the transmission of the cult of St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins through the filiation of Altenberg Abbey, see Mosler, *Altenberg*, pp. 202–04. On the Altenberg relics collection see Janke, *‘Dat werde leve hiltom’*.

³² *Statuta*, t. 2, 1221: 50.

³³ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1221: 51.

abbots, in the form it was practised in Pontigny,³⁴ where St Edmund died in 1240 and was buried. Shortly after the application made by the Abbot of Boxley, English abbots petitioned in 1267 to introduce the veneration of St Augustine of Canterbury in all English Cistercian houses as well as the feasts of translation of Thomas Becket and Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury.³⁵ Two years later, a separate request was made to standardize the veneration of St Thomas in English Cistercian houses.³⁶ Very symptomatic was the decision of the General Chapter to introduce veneration of Aelred of Rievaulx in all English Cistercian houses in 1476 — recognizing the new and old miracles attributed to this saint, his feast was to be accompanied by twelve readings.³⁷ Besides introduction of feasts or alteration to the liturgical celebrations in England, abbots from English houses together with the heads of Scottish monasteries requested in 1268 inclusion of the feast of St Margaret of Antioch, following the same form as the celebrations of St Catherine of Alexandria.³⁸

The saints who were venerated across English Cistercian communities were overwhelmingly holy bishops and archbishops. Some of them, especially Hugh of Lincoln and Edmund of Canterbury, had connections with them, but it was more than simply honouring ‘our friends’. Parallels between both archbishops of Canterbury — Thomas Becket and Edmund — were a clear theme of the hagiography of the latter ‘as the epitome of a virtuous cleric’.³⁹ This connection was not lost on Cistercians who considered the quality of prelates central to the success of church reform. Bishop Hugh of Lincoln (1140?–1200), an Augustinian canon and then Carthusian monk, had an interest in the Cistercian observance too. He personally visited Cîteaux and Clairvaux and his hagiography, written by Benedictine monk Adam from Eynsham monastery in Oxfordshire, shows affinity with Cistercian spirituality.⁴⁰ Archbishop Edmund of Canterbury (c. 1174–1240), an energetic reformer, visited Pontigny Abbey on the way to Rome in 1240, having entered confraternity with the White Monks there, and died shortly after in an Augustinian house in Soisy.⁴¹ His body was promptly claimed by the Abbot of Pontigny and buried there. As William Chester Jordan has shown persuasively, Pontigny became, in the hagiography of Thomas Becket, the place of spiritual growth and this motif was later applied to other exiled or travelling English ecclesiastics who stayed in the abbey, some of whom died there.⁴² In his exile in this abbey, Archbishop Langton was accompanied by Bishop Mauger of Worcester, who died there as a Cistercian monk.⁴³ So when Archbishop Edmund came to Pontigny, it was presented in his hagiography as an exile, to follow the topos of his predecessors. He was followed by the Bishop of Durham, William de Wickwane, (d. 1285) who also died and was buried in Pontigny whilst travelling to Rome. All the bishops who were buried there were subject to cult and various miracles were attributed to them, whilst Archbishop Edmund’s canonization process was already initiated by the General Chapter in 1241 and his sainthood was promulgated by Pope Innocent IV in 1246.⁴⁴ Edmund’s shrine at Pontigny was visited by English pilgrims and the abbey itself was often referred to as ‘the Abbey of Our Lady of Saint Edmund of Pontigny’.⁴⁵ Similarly, the inclusion of the cult of Aelred of Rievaulx built on the strong local cult of the early abbot who was venerated by the community and within the locality, for centuries after his death in 1167. It is certain that the cult of the fourth abbot of Rievaulx had significance for the local laity and was not a purely internal affair.⁴⁶

³⁴ Pontigny, dép. Yonne, arr. Auxerre, cant. Chablis; *Statuta*, t. 2, 1259: 31.

³⁵ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1267: 64.

³⁶ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1269: 54.

³⁷ *Statuta*, t. 4, 1476: 69.

³⁸ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1268: 24. The feast of St Catherine was added to the Cistercian calendar in 1207, with commemoration and mass in 1214 upgraded to twelve readings and a mass and in 1300 to twelve readings and two conventual masses, see Bock, ‘Les codifications du droit cistercien’, p. 113.

³⁹ Moreau, ‘Saintly Virtue, Clerical Vice’, p. 162.

⁴⁰ Farmer, ‘The Cult and Canonization of St Hugh’; Mayr-Harting, ‘Hugh of Lincoln’.

⁴¹ Soisy-Bouy, dép. Seine-et-Marne, arr. Provins, cant. Provins.

⁴² Jordan, ‘The English Holy Men of Pontigny’.

⁴³ Worcester, co. Worcestershire.

⁴⁴ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1241: 15; Lawrence, *St Edmund of Abingdon*, pp. 187–202.

⁴⁵ Jordan, ‘The English Holy Men of Pontigny’.

⁴⁶ The scale of the veneration by the lay people in the later Middle Ages is impossible to assess as only very fragmentary evidence survives, for example a will of John Rogerson specifying a gift of two beads for the shrine of St Ailred in 1525 or 1526, *Testamenta Eboracensia*, CLIV, p. 194.

Finally, it is important to examine three requests that were made not by the members of the order, but by other individuals. In 1235 King Henry III successfully applied for the inclusion of the feast of Saint Edward the Confessor (canonized in 1167), a fortnight after the feast of St Michael the Archangel was marked by twelve readings in the Cistercian calendar throughout England.⁴⁷ Later in the same century, in 1272, King Edward I requested the General Chapter to include the feast of Edward the Martyr with two masses and to add his name to the litany.⁴⁸ Edward the Martyr was a King of Essex (d. 978) who was venerated at Shaftesbury.⁴⁹ Both represented important types of holy rulers — an early holy-king martyr and ‘chaste ruler’, a model that gained popularity in the twelfth century.

An altogether different case involved the patron of Hailes Abbey.⁵⁰ In 1275, Edmund Earl of Cornwall requested the addition of the feast of *Corpus et Sanguis Christi*, ‘the Body and Blood of Christ’, at that abbey, which was founded by his father, Richard Earl of Cornwall, a brother of King Henry III, in 1246.⁵¹ This example is important on several levels. It is a case of very direct influence by a patron, but also a symptom of a much wider trend — Cistercian commitment to the Eucharistic cults gaining popularity across the Order. This wider context can be traced through the evidence of the *Statuta*. In 1278 the Abbot of Heilsbronn successfully appealed for the inclusion of the feast of *Corpus et Sanguis Christi*, in the calendar of his monastery.⁵² In 1296 the patroness of Clairefontaine⁵³ secured permission from the General Chapter to celebrate the feast of sacrament at the abbey’s altar whilst the Duke of Austria secured inclusion of the feast of *Corpus Christi* in the Cistercian houses within his territory in 1313.⁵⁴ The celebration of that feast with two conventual masses was fixed in the *Statuta* in 1318 and two years later the General Chapter authorized a commission consisting of the abbots of Pontigny and Preuilly,⁵⁵ to create the office for the feast that would be uniform for the whole Order.⁵⁶ The concerns both over the importance of the feast and the uniformity of the celebrations were reiterated in 1326.⁵⁷

After Hailes Abbey acquired a Holy Blood relic, the east end of its church was rebuilt in 1271–1277 to accommodate a prestigious shrine. When Edmund Earl of Cornwall died in 1300 he was the subject of a divided burial between Ashridge Priory,⁵⁸ another of Edmund’s foundations, which received his entrails, and Hailes Abbey, which received his bones.⁵⁹ The relic given by the patron was directly connected to the growing cult of Eucharist, which was gaining greater prominence in the Cistercian liturgical calendar. The feast of *Corpus Christi* which had originated in the visions of an Augustinian nun, Juliana of Liège, in 1208, was formally established by papal bull in 1264, and was flourishing by the early fourteenth century.⁶⁰ The Cistercians were among its early devotees with the General Chapter ordaining in 1318 that the feast of *Corpus Christi* should be marked with two conventual masses. All across the Cistercian order, there were clearly connections between the commemoration of the patrons, their burials, the multiplication of altars in the Cistercian churches, and expanding collections of relics.⁶¹ Cistercian houses amassed significant collections of Christ’s relics including vials of blood. This is much better documented in French and German houses, but it was also a significant trend in England, as the case of Hailes shows.⁶² The presence of such powerful objects in the abbey generated a regular influx of pilgrims, which focused, most likely, on the gate chapel.⁶³ In order to support and develop this cult further, Hailes Abbey sought

⁴⁷ *Statuta*, t. 2, 1235: 15.

⁴⁸ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1272: 54.

⁴⁹ Rollason, ‘The Cult of Murdered Royal Saints’.

⁵⁰ Hailes Abbey, O.Cist., near Winchcombe, co. Gloucestershire.

⁵¹ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1275: 69.

⁵² *Statuta*, t. 3, 1278: 46.

⁵³ Clairefontaine Abbey, O.Cist., near Arlon, Province of Luxembourg, Belgium.

⁵⁴ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1294: 63, 1313: 4; Wipfler, ‘*Corpus Christi*’, p. 33.

⁵⁵ In Égligny, dép. Seine-et-Marne, arr. Provins, cant. Provins.

⁵⁶ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1320: 12; Wipfler, ‘*Corpus Christi*’, p. 32.

⁵⁷ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1326: 1.

⁵⁸ Ashridge Priory, O.S.A., Friars of the Sack, co. Hertfordshire.

⁵⁹ Coldstream, ‘Architecture from Beaulieu to the Dissolution’, p. 158.

⁶⁰ Wipfler, ‘*Corpus Christi*’, pp. 17–18.

⁶¹ For the recent summary of this issue see Oberste, *Die Zisterzienser*, pp. 144–53.

⁶² Wipfler, ‘*Corpus Christi*’, pp. 80–89.

⁶³ Brown, ‘Evolving views of Hailes Abbey and its Environs’, p. 295.

indulgences from several popes: from John XXI in 1276, Callixtus III in 1458, Paul II in 1468, and Innocent VIII in 1487.⁶⁴

The evidence from the *Statuta* seems limited, however. Besides the details outlined above, wider trends are also manifest in this material, first of all, in the cult of saints in the regional context. This was one of the obvious ways in which communities of White Monks became a part of the local religious landscape. By sharing the cults of saints who long pre-dated their arrival in a given area, they expressed the idea of belonging to the locality and its long Christian history. It was a way of bonding with the local society and other religious institutions. Such cults could be supported by Cistercian communities for the benefit of the outside world too, for example through the gate chapels or other chapels outside the walls of the monastery, and parish churches under monastic control. Internally, it was manifested by altar dedications, inclusion in the calendar, and liturgical celebrations. A good example here is the case of St Augustine at Boxley, mentioned above. St Augustine of Canterbury became the missionary of the whole kingdom, but of course was particularly connected with Kent.⁶⁵ He helped in this way to connect a Cistercian abbey with the oldest layer of Christian history going back to the late fifth century and became a part of the Christian history of the region. The veneration of this type of saint by Cistercian communities can be observed in other parts of Europe too. Cistercian houses in Pomerania supported the cult of Bishop Otto of Bamberg, the twelfth-century missionary of the region, whilst Bavarian and Franconian houses were involved in the cults of St Kilian (d. 689), the missionary-martyr and patron of the diocese of Würzburg, and St Willibald (d. c. 787), also a missionary and patron of the diocese of Eichstätt.⁶⁶

Chronologically, the second layer of saints with strong local associations venerated by Cistercians were holy bishops. This category is very important because it is directly linked to the other types of relationship that White Monks had with bishops, including their role as founders and supporters of Cistercian houses. In east-central Europe bishops frequently gave Cistercian houses tithes and, in southern Germany, parishes.⁶⁷ The cult of holy bishops had frequently a strongly protective nature not just over their cathedral city, but also in the dioceses. Many Cistercian houses across Europe venerated holy bishops of the dioceses where they were located and it was often a positive gesture towards the living too. There were several holy bishops of York, but John's cult focused on Beverley — of which he was believed to be a founder — in close proximity to Meaux, in Yorkshire. The veneration of Bishop Hugh in the Cistercian houses in his diocese of Lincoln had a similar character. As the request came within a year of his canonization in 1200 it represents a very clear manifestation on the part of the Cistercians of their sense of belonging to the dioceses and of their connection to other religious institutions.

Another example of explicitly engaging with tradition was the request from the Abbot of Fountains in the very late fifteenth century for the veneration of St Oswald. In a letter to the General Chapter in 1496, Abbot Marmeduke Huby of Fountains, one of the most important monastic leaders of the fifteenth century, made a strong case for extending the cult of St Oswald to all Cistercian houses in the diocese of York.⁶⁸ His argument is particularly telling — he stated that this cult was well established in many monasteries within the English kingdom which had relics of this saint in their possession. However, this was not done in the Cistercian houses which possessed relics of St Oswald and the White Monks 'longed deeply to observe his feast properly'.⁶⁹ It is a very rare case, for which we have more information about the application to the General Chapter besides a dry entry in the *Statuta*. What is particularly relevant here is the argumentation that other monastic communities venerated St Oswald in a long-established tradition and that the Cistercians also wanted to be a part of this custom. What Abbot Huby emphasized here is the shared tradition of different monastic institutions in which Fountains and other Cistercian houses wanted to participate fully, all the more because they already possessed relics of the Northumbrian martyr. The same abbot built a chapel dedicated to St Cuthbert and St Oswald in the township of

⁶⁴ Bell, 'Hailes Abbey and its Books', p. 360.

⁶⁵ *Statuta*, t. 3, 1266: 23.

⁶⁶ Jamroziak, *Survival and Success on Medieval Borders*, pp. 18, 20, 58, 84, 119, 143; Borchardt, 'Der hl. Kilian als Symbolfigur des Bistums Würzburg'; Lehner, *Die Zisterzienserabtei Fürstenfeld*, pp. 400–01.

⁶⁷ Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe 1090–1500*, p. 52; Machilek, 'Kloster Fürstenfeld und seine Pfarreien', pp. 350–57.

⁶⁸ *Letters of the English Abbots to the Chapter at Cîteaux*, ed. by Talbot, no. 94, pp. 189–90; see no. 89, pp. 181–82.

⁶⁹ Rollason, 'St Oswald in Post-Conquest England', p. 164.

Winksley-cum-Grantley (that was mostly controlled by Fountains), which acquired indulgence granted in 1502 by Archbishop Thomas Savage.⁷⁰

The last significant theme that is present in the English evidence is the cult of holy abbots and this is exemplified by that of Aelred of Rievaulx. This type of cult usually formed a part of the myth of origins and was associated with the early history of a monastic community. It was an old monastic practice which significantly pre-dated the emergence of the Cistercian order. Among well-known examples whose cults spread well beyond 'their' monasteries were Benedict of Aniane (d. 821), the Carolingian reformer, or Odo of Cluny (d. 942) the second Abbot of Cluny and its reformer, venerated by Cluniacs and later by Cistercians as well.⁷¹ These holy abbots were believed to exercise a protective power over their home communities and to intercede on behalf of their brethren in the next world. For the White Monks, the topos of the holy abbot was strengthened by the canonization of Bernard of Clairvaux in 1174 and the visual splendour of his cult at Clairvaux Abbey.⁷² For the Cistercians it became a model which spread across the Order. The abbots were normally buried in the chapter houses, and if they were later venerated, their remains were translated to more elaborate tombs and shrines. By the 1230s these shrines were frequently situated behind the high altar of the monastic church, a space traditionally associated with the cult of relics.⁷³ William, the first Abbot of Rievaulx (d. 1145), was originally buried in the chapter house and his body was moved in 1250 to a more prominent location at the entrance to the chapter house, which was also more accessible to the members of the community. This is a clear connection to the growth of his cult at Rievaulx. An inscription on his shrine proclaimed 'Saint William the abbot'.⁷⁴ Similarly, Aelred was first buried in the chapter-house at Rievaulx Abbey, after his death in 1167. In the early thirteenth century, his shrine was built in the east end of the abbey church, behind the high altar. In the figures of the holy abbots, Cistercian communities could celebrate their own past and seek assistance in times of need. The importance of Aelred's cult was also reflected in other Cistercian sources — he is listed in the first catalogue of Cistercian saints commissioned by Abbot Jean de Cirey of Cîteaux in 1491.⁷⁵ This list, and Aelred's presence there, shows how in the late Middle Ages, the Cistercian saints became an important aspect of the corporate identity. It is not an accident that Jean de Cirey was one of the most active reformers of the order, who attempted to rescue Cistercians from the exploitative clutches of the papacy, by curbing appointments of commendatory abbots in particular. He was clearly interested in harnessing all spiritual resources of the order for its defence. The list makes it clear that holy monks and abbots were not only the 'property' of the individual houses but an element of the common heritage of the whole order to be celebrated beyond individual communities because they were a spiritual asset of the whole of the Cistercian family.

The evidence of the cult of saints formalized in the liturgical celebrations in the English Cistercian houses is important not only to bring about a fuller understanding of the communities of White Monks in this part of Europe, but also to place it in wider context. Firstly, the cult of saints was always of part of Cistercian life, and it was something vital both internally, for the communities themselves, and externally, as a link with the outside world. The gifts of precious relics from the patrons fostered connections just as strongly as a generous grant of land, because relics were an element of a wider religious culture which the monks and their lay friends shared. The cult of saints in English Cistercian monasteries contributed to the process of becoming part of the locality and its holy history. It was a way of building connection with other religious institutions and bishops. The evidence from the *Statuta* shows that what English Cistercian communities did in respect to the cult of saints was 'typical' for monasteries across the Order. This adds an important element to our understanding of the White Monks communities within the British Isles and is particularly valuable in the absence of most of the source evidence that could inform us about engagement with the cults of saints.

⁷⁰ Binns, 'Pre-Reformation Dedications', p. 266.

⁷¹ 'Vita s. Benedicti abbatis Anianensis', ed. by Waitz, pp. 200–20; 'Vita Odonis abbatis', ed. by Waitz, pp. 586–88.

⁷² Gajewski, 'Burial, Cult, and Construction at the Abbey Church of Clairvaux (Clairvaux III)'; Gajewski, 'The Architecture of the Choir at Clairvaux Abbey'.

⁷³ Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx Abbey*, pp. 166–69.

⁷⁴ 'S[an]c[tu]s Willmus abbas', Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx Abbey*, pp. 99, 166–67.

⁷⁵ The list was printed in *Les monuments primitifs de la règle cistercienne*, ed. by Guignard, pp. 291–302; Van Moolenbroek, 'A Cistercian Saint?', p. 206.

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