

ROBERT OF MOLESME

| DATE | AGE | EVENT | COMMENT |
|-------|-----|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1028 | 0 | Born in Champagne | Parents: Theodoric, Ermengard |
| 1043 | 15 | Entered Montier-la-Celle | Diocese of Troyes |
| 1053@ | 25 | Prior of Montier-la-Celle | |
| 1068+ | 41+ | Elected Abbot of Tonnerre | Diocese of Langres |
| | | Returned to Montier-la-Celle | |
| 1072 | 44 | Prior at St-Ayoul | Diocese of Sens |
| 1074 | 46 | Hermit in the forests of Colan | |
| 1075 | 47 | Foundation of MOLESME | 20 December |
| 1082 | 54 | Bruno trials Carthusian life | |
| 1090 | 62 | Hermit at Aux | |
| 1094 | 66 | Fund-raising tour of Flanders | |
| 1095 | 67 | Papal confirmation of Molesme | 29 November |
| 1097 | 69 | Charter erecting Aulps as Abbey | Signed by Alberic and Stephen |
| | | Foundation at Vivicus | Includes Alberic and Stephen |
| 1098 | 70 | Foundation of CITEAUX | 21 March (Palm Sunday) |
| 1099 | 70 | Meeting at Port d'Anselle | May-June |
| 1099 | 71 | Return to Molesme as Abbot | |
| 1110 | 82 | Concordat of Molesme/Aulps/Balerne | |
| 1111 | 83 | Death | 17 April |
| 1220 | | Canonisation | |
| 1222 | | Insertion into Cistercian Calendar | Feast: 29 April |

ALBERIC

| DATE | AGE | EVENT | COMMENT |
|-------|-----|--|---------------------------|
| 1050@ | 0 | Born | |
| 1070@ | 20 | Joined hermits at Colan | |
| 1075 | 25 | Moved to Molesme with Robert | Maybe he entered directly |
| | | Foundation at Vivicus | |
| | | Prior at Molesme | |
| 1097 | 47 | Signed <i>Abbatiae Alpensis Creatio</i> | |
| 1097 | 47 | Meeting with Hugh of Die | |
| 1098 | 48 | Foundation of Citeaux | |
| 1099 | 49 | Meeting at Pont d'Anselles | June |
| 1099 | 49 | Becomes Abbot of Citeaux | |
| 1100@ | 50 | Correspondence with Lambert of Pothieres | |
| 1100 | 50 | Roman Privilege | 19 October |
| | | Monastery moved | |
| 1106 | 56 | Stone Church consecrated | 16 November |
| 1108 | 58 | Death | 26 January |

STEPHEN OF CÎTEAUX

| DATE | AGE | EVENT | COMMENT |
|---------|-----|--|-------------|
| 1059@ | 0 | Born Harding, at Merriot in Dorset | |
| 1066 | 7 | Norman Conquest of England | |
| 1071@ | 12 | Entered Sherborne Abbey as <i>puer</i> | |
| 1078+ | 19+ | Departed from Sherborne | |
| | | Journey to Scotland | |
| | | Liberal arts in France: changes name | |
| | | Pilgrimage to Rome with Peter | |
| 1085@ | 26 | Entered Molesme | |
| 1097 | 38 | Secretary for <i>Abbatiae Alpensis Creatio</i> | |
| 1098 | 39 | Foundation of Citeaux | |
| 1099 | 40 | Alberic becomes abbot: Stephen prior ? | |
| 1109 | 50 | Abbot of Citeaux | |
| 1109 | 50 | <i>Monitum</i> to "Stephen Harding Bible" | |
| 1109-12 | 50 | Famine | EM 25, 28 |
| | | <i>Preface</i> to first Cistercian hymnal | 1108-1113 |
| 1111 | 52 | 3 tomes of <i>Moralia in Iob completed</i> | 24 December |
| 1113 | 54 | Foundation of La Ferte | 18 May |
| 1113 | 54 | Entry of Bernard of Fontaine and others | |
| 1114 | 55 | Foundation of Pontigny | 31 May |
| | | Primitive <i>Carta Caritatis</i> | |
| 1115 | 56 | Foundation of Morimond | 25 June |
| 1115 | 56 | Foundation of Clairvaux | 25 June |
| 1118 | 59 | Foundation of Preully | 26 August |

| | | | |
|-------|----|---|--------------|
| 1119 | 60 | Foundation of La Cour-Dieu | 30 April |
| 1119 | 60 | Foundation of Bonnevaux | 11 July |
| | 60 | Callixtus II approves texts | 23 December |
| 1121 | 62 | Foundation of L' Aumone | 28 June |
| 1121 | 62 | Foundation of Loroux | 14 September |
| 1124 | 65 | Painting of Stephen by Osbert of St Vaast | |
| 1124 | 65 | Visit to Flanders: Arnold of Morimond | December |
| 1125 | 66 | Statutes of affiliation given to nuns of Tart | |
| 1128 | 69 | Council of Troye | |
| 1131@ | 72 | Letter to Thurstan of Sherborne | |
| 1131 | 72 | Foundation of La Bussiere | 21 March |
| 1131 | 72 | Foundation of Le Miroir | 5 September |
| 1131 | 72 | Foundation of San Andrea di Sestri | 5 November |
| 1132 | 73 | Bull of Innocent II | 10 February |
| 1133 | 74 | Resignation | September ? |
| 1134 | 75 | Death | 28 March |

COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY

| <i>YEAR</i> | <i>ROBERT</i> | <i>ALBERIC</i> | <i>STEPHEN</i> | <i>BERNARD</i> |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1030 | BORN: 1028 | | | |
| 1035 | | | | |
| 1040 | | | | |
| 1045 | MONK: 1043 | | | |
| 1050 | | BORN: 1050 | | |
| 1055 | | | | |
| 1060 | | | BORN: 1059 | |
| 1065 | | | | |
| 1070 | | MONK: 1070 | MONK (1) : 1071 | |
| 1075 | ABBOT: 1075 | | | |
| 1080 | | | | |
| 1085 | | | MONK (2) 1085 | |
| 1090 | | | | BORN: 1090 |
| 1095 | | | | |
| 1100 | | ABBOT: 1099 | | |
| 1105 | | | | |
| 1110 | DIED: 1111 | DIED: 1108 | ABBOT: 1108 | MONK: 1113 |
| 1115 | | | | ABBOT: 1115 |
| 1120 | | | | |
| 1125 | | | | |
| 1130 | | | RESIGNED: 1134 | |
| 1135 | | | DIED: 1135 | |
| 1140 | | | | |
| 1145 | | | | |
| 1150 | | | | |
| 1155 | | | | DIED: 1153 |

Unit 2: Primary Sources 1

**THE LIFE OF BLESSED ROBERT
ABBOT OF MOLESME
AND CÎTEAUX**

*Here begins the prologue to the life of Blessed Robert, First Abbot of Molesme and Cîteaux.*¹

Since Jesus, the great priest who, by his own blood entered the sanctuary but once and revealed life for the saints, I consider the work of writing of the lives and actions of these saints as precious. Amid the storms of this present life they have imitated our Saviour, as far as human frailty permits. They have valiantly persevered through the toils of warfare. They glorified Christ Jesus and carried him in their bodies and up to the end of their lives they remained most constant in their commitment to holiness. These are they of whom Scripture speaks: “The way of the just grows like rising light and increases until it is perfect day.” These are the stars which the supreme high-priest has constituted in the firmament of the Church. Their brightness drives away the darkness of human ignorance and they show salvation’s haven to those who toil on this wide and spacious sea.

Among these Blessed Robert, a man of revered life, shines particularly. He was the first abbot of the church of Molesme, whose unblemished holiness is rightly proclaimed as glorious, especially since in our days, scarcely anyone is found who is god-fearing. I have begun to write his life not presuming on my own wit or knowledge, but putting my hope both for the progress and completion of the work now begun in him who makes the tongues of infants eloquent and who, in ancient times, gave the power of human speech to a dumb beast to correct a prophet’s

¹ This is a draft translation of the edition of the *Vita* edited by Kolumban Spahr, *Das Leben des hl. Robert von Molesme: Eine Quelle zur Vorgeschichte von Cîteaux* (Fribourg: Paulusdruckerei, 1944). I follow the section division adopted by Spahr. This differs from that found in PL 157, cols 1269-1288. I have omitted Spahr’s ample listing of sources and variant readings.

madness.

Add to this the order given by the most reverend Lord Abbot of Molesme, Odo and the insistent and devoted demands of the brothers of that place. I considered it totally inappropriate to deny anything to such people lest I appear empty-handed before the Lord. Although I myself do not have the virtue or merit to be able to be an example to others, nevertheless I have undertaken the task so that [Blessed Robert] may not be completely concealed, since he merited to be given in holiness for the adornment of holy Church.

Whoever you are who came as a reader, I ask that you do not inquire about the name of the author. I flee human glory and seek to be praised only by God. So, in this work, I do not give my name. This is to avoid any reduction in the value of the work among the inexperienced because the name of a sinner appears on the very front of the work. If I should say anything crudely or inappropriately I hereby ask pardon of the reader. At the same time I admonish all to whom the present text comes that they do not seek fancy words from me since truth is sufficient of itself and does not want to be coloured by finely-phrased artifice or painted with Jezebel's harlot antimony. Finally let them listen to the Doctor of the Gentiles, the disciple of Truth itself when he says that the Kingdom of God is not in word, but rather in power.

The prologue ends.

1 *Here begins the life of Blessed Robert, Abbot of Molesme and Cîteaux.*

Blessed Robert took his origin in the region of Champagne. He shone, fair like a flower of the field, whose beauty was in goodness of life that was pleasing to all who saw it. The fragrance of his holy reputation spread far and wide and invited many to imitate him. I think this holy man is rightly compared to a flower since it is about the saints that Scripture says, "they flourish in the city like grass on the earth." Now we will show that there was also a certain nobility; praise be to the parents from whom the blessed man took his origin.

His father was Thierry (Theodoric) and his mother was called Ermengard. Both were distinguished according to worldly dignity and most distinguished before God

Life of Saint Robert

because of the uprightness of their conduct. They had an abundance of temporal goods but they so used them so as to seem more like stewards of the supreme head of the family than like owners of worldly goods. Knowing that those who show mercy to the poor lend to the Lord, they cleansed themselves of the dust of earthly life by the kindness of almsgiving. Although their situation was to be in the flesh they did not live according to the flesh, but in all their thoughts and longings they dwelt in heaven, adorning their crowns with works of virtue as if with the glory of precious stones. I say this to demonstrate that there was a holy root from which our saint drew his growth, like a shoot on the tree of life.

Because we have made mention of his parents, we should briefly tell the story of how the Holy Spirit went before him with the blessing of sweetness, while he was still enclosed in his mother's womb. For when his mother was pregnant, the virgin Mary, the glorious mother of God, appeared in a dream having in her hand a golden ring. She said to her, "Ermengard, I will that the son whom you bear in your womb will be espoused to me by this ring." With these words, the Blessed Virgin left the sleeping woman and disappeared. When [Ermengard] rose from sleep she began to reflect inwardly on what she had seen. The Blessed Mother of God appeared again to the woman, as of old the Lord is said to have appeared a second time to Samuel to confirm his promise. When the days were complete, the woman brought forth a son. When he was weaned she gave him to be trained in literary studies. In these he surpassed all his contemporaries since with a pure heart he drew forth from the fountains of salvation the grace of salvation that he would later bring forth for the people.

When he was fifteen years old, avoiding worldly contagion, he made up his mind to consecrate himself completely to the Lord. So he offered to the Lord the flower of his most pleasing youth. He received the regular habit at [the monastery] of St Peter of Celle.² There, day and night, he gave himself to prayer and fasting, offering a pleasing service to the Lord, subjecting the flesh to the spirit and the spirit to the Creator.

The time came for God to be glorified in his servant and for the lamp that had been hidden under a measure to be placed on a lamp-stand to give light to the Church. God, in whose hand are the hearts of men, inspired the brothers of the house to elect the man of God Robert, as their Prior. He was certainly worthy, since he who, under

² The Benedictine abbey of Montier (Moutier) La Celle, founded towards the end of the seventh century.

the guidance of grace, had learned by long practice to attend to the governance of his own life, was worthy to become the judge and governor of the lives of others.

2 *Of a certain hermit and two knights who were converted.*

There was, in those times, in the deep recesses of the forests, a certain hermit who desired to serve God freely and secretly. He punished the flesh with determined fasting and strengthened the spirit with fervent prayers. The Lord looked upon his humility and by a great miracle increased through him the number of God's servants. There were two brothers, according to the flesh, who, according to the spirit, did not have the same mind. Zealous for empty glory and dedicated to showing off their prowess, they were in search of these cursed fairs which are called tournaments. They were on their way when they happened to pass through the forest in which the aforesaid hermit was leading his solitary life. The two of them began secretly to think about killing the other. Both of them were being eaten up by the poison of envy and they were thinking how if one of them died, the survivor would come into possession of the dead man's property. Almighty God, however, knew that they would become vessels of mercy, did not permit them to be tempted above what they were able, but provided the outcome with the temptation lest they put into effect the evil they had conceived. The providence of God permitted them to be troubled by such an evil temptation so that afterwards, when they made progress in virtue, they would not proudly attribute to themselves what they had but rather would redirect it to the one by whose mercy they had been set free.

When they had completed the business which was the purpose of their journey in which they had performed strenuously, in the manner of people of that kind, so that they were carrying back the fruit of human praise from all those who were present, they came, full of success, to their own region and to the place where they had both entertained the thought of killing the other. It was as though the place itself admonished them. Rather by God's inspiration they experienced compunction and began to feel repugnance for the wickedness they had planned and they began to be disturbed interiorly about the crime they had conceived. They remembered that they were near the hut of the hermit mentioned above, and so with equal desire they made their way to his little abode. By a humble confession they got rid of the disease-laden virus hidden in their hearts. Once the filth had been eliminated, they gladly prepared an interior dwelling-place for God. Finally, after they were rebuked

by the man of God for the wickedness they had planned, they left him, instructed by his salutary admonitions.

The hermit's burning speech was like kindling and stirred up heavenly desires in their minds, completely wiping out in them ambition for earthly dignity and sweetly and soundly creating in them the beginnings of the fire of virtue.

Accordingly, when they came to that place where previously they had thought about rising up against each other, they began to discuss it among themselves and talk about it. One of them said: "Dear brother, what were you thinking in this place yesterday when we passed by?" The other revealed to his brother the thought of his heart. The first replied, "I was thinking exactly the same thing myself."

At once, pierced by compunction of heart they returned to the man of God, and despising the pomps of the world, and treading underfoot all its display, they began to live a spiritual life in company with him, humbly bending the necks of their hearts to carry the sweet yoke of Christ.

Who could doubt that their conversion was due to the merits of Blessed Robert? As the following narrative will reveal, it was by his teaching that they were imbued with regular discipline.

And so God, who consoles the humble, multiplied his servants so that in a brief space of time they numbered seven — by which number is indicated the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit by which we know that the salvation of many was accomplished through the instrumentality of his servant, Blessed Robert. The same Spirit prepared these seven men as the seven columns of a spiritual house. Through them the monastic order began to revive. Having sent down its roots to the moisture of grace it began to produce spiritual fruit. Even though it was thought to have reached its term, at the scent of grace it again germinated and produced foliage like a young plant.

3 *How Blessed Robert became Abbot of Tonnerre*

Meanwhile, Blessed Robert's holiness and his favour with God and with people became well-known. He was elected abbot by the monks of [the monastery of] St Michael at Tonnerre. These hermits did not have anyone who could instruct them in regular discipline. Hearing of the reputation of the blessed man, they took the trouble to send two of their brothers to him. When they came to the place in which the man of God was faithfully serving God, they found the Prior of the house in the *auditorium*. They made known to him the purpose and cause of their journey. It was only with difficulty and with much beseeching that they succeeded in being taken to the office of the man of God. The Prior had been pierced by the sword of envy and thought to himself that he would lose if the Lord made provision for the advancement of others by his servant's praiseworthy work. Whence he tried to persuade the brothers of that house and the abbot's companions not to consent to the petition of the brothers who came seeking the man of God as their superior. Nevertheless, Blessed Robert, while welcoming their request and just hopes, would satisfy their desire only on condition that the brothers of Tonnerre persisted in it unanimously. Instructed by such salutary admonitions, accompanied by prayers and strengthened by blessings he sent them back to their own people. He gave them the hope that as soon as the Lord provided the opportunity he would quickly fill them with joy in his presence.

He wanted to reflect for a while on God's plan. Although their purpose was holy and their desire appropriate, he delayed so that the desire would expand and grow so that what they were so eager to seek they would cherish it when they had it and observe it more carefully.

The Lord's man was always thinking not of the things of the world but of those that were of the Lord. When he saw the brothers of that place fall away from the pattern of justice, he feared that the evil companion would communicate his own blight to one who was radiant and simple and make ugly the beautiful face of his soul, since conduct is usually shaped by those with whom one lives. So he parted company and returned to the monastery of Celle. There, having spent time working hard, he enjoyed the long-desired embraces of the beloved Rachel, drawing forth in joy from the fountains of salvation what he would afterwards give to the faithful for their salvation.

4 *How he was made Prior of St Ayoul*

A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. Blessed Robert, rooted firmly and founded on the mountain of Christ was again chosen, at the death of the Prior of St Ayoul, to be a shepherd for the humble flock of Christ.³ He was made prior by the unanimous vote of the brothers in that house and by common desire. These hermits, infused by the love for a heavenly life when they saw how the man of God constantly made progress in God and became better, having sought counsel, sent two of their brothers to the Apostolic See to obtain from the Supreme Pontiff by their prayers that the man of God, Blessed Robert should become the shepherd and father of the little flock of Christ. They knew it was a crime to contradict the Supreme Pontiff or rashly to go against his orders. The Supreme Pontiff heard their proposal and rejoiced greatly. He kindly approved their petition and, strengthening them with the apostolic blessing, sent them back rejoicing to their own. He wrote an apostolic rescript to the Abbot of Celle authoritatively commanding that whoever among the brothers was elected should be given to them as abbot. The Abbot of Celle, knowing what the Supreme Pontiff was ordering, gave up the Blessed Robert to those who sought him. He was sad and grieving but he dared not go against the apostolic command. He saw that their consolation was his tribulation since a firm and incorruptible cedar column was being taken away from his house.

5 *How he was a superior for the hermits.*

Blessed Robert accepted the office of pastoral care with good will, seeing that his labour was not without fruit because the flock was unanimous in despising the things of earth and seeking those of heaven and therefore they obeyed his salutary admonitions. Whence he again was joined to Leah in the active life for the purpose of begetting spiritual sons. In the inner man he served the Lord in a spirit of humility, but outwardly he fulfilled his ministry with great energy. In that place which is now called Colan they served the Lord in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, fasting and praying, bearing the burden of the day's heat with equanimity. They sowed in tears and rejoicing they carried back to the Lord's barn the sheaves of righteousness. But the sight of fellow-workers is a comfort for labourers so God, who looks on the desires of the humble, added to and multiplied his servants so that quickly they were thirteen and, and as far as they could, the goodness of their lives as well as their number was like those of the Apostles.

³Saint-Ayoul was a priory dependent on Montier-la-Celle, founded in 1048 at Provins, in the diocese of Sens.

6 *How Molesme was founded by the blessed man.*

Robert, the Lord's man, considering the unsuitability of the place, left watchmen there and, taking the brothers, withdrew to the wooded pastures named Molesme. There working with their own hands they cut down branches from the trees and constructed from them a dwelling where they could live quietly. They completed an oratory also in the same material in which they frequently offered to the Lord with contrite spirits the saving victims and sacrifice. When they had to bread to restore their strength after long bodily labour, they ate only vegetables.

7 *The Bishop of Troyes visits them.*

It happened that the Bishop of Troyes was travelling through the wood in which the men of God were serving God in the utmost poverty and humility. He came to that place at the hour of the meal with a great crowd of companions. The men of God received them attentively but were embarrassed because they had nothing to put before them to eat. The bishop was highly edified at their humility and poverty and, experiencing compunction, bade farewell to the brothers and went away.

8 *How Blessed Robert sent brothers to Troyes without any money and barefoot.*

After some time, when the brothers did not have enough even for a meagre subsistence, they took refuge in the counsel of Blessed Robert. He, who never based his strength on gold nor said to what is golden "I put my trust in you", knew that God would not allow the soul of the just to be afflicted with hunger for a long time. Although they had no money he sent them to Troyes to buy food, in agreement with the letter of the prophet's counsel: "You who have no money, come, hasten to buy and eat." When they entered the city of Troyes barefoot, immediately a rumour about them went up to the bishop. He had them brought into him and received them kindly. He showed his love for God in the attention he gave to the human needs of God's servants. He clothed them new garments in accordance with the rule and sent them back to their brothers in a cart

loaded with cloth and bread. The bothers were powerfully comforted by this blessing. They learned to be patient in hard times, even tough from that day onwards there was always someone to provide them with the necessary food and clothing.

9 *On his move to Aux.*

They persevered in the service of God with great constancy. Many came to them fleeing from the world and rejecting the burden of the world, they placed their neck under the sweet yoke of the Lord. Some from distant regions sent them what they needed to receive the reward of the just because in this present life they provided the just with what was necessary. But since a multiplicity of things gives rise to moral indigence, as they began to abound in temporal goods, they became spiritually empty and their wickedness seemed to grow like an ear of corn. Blessed Robert did not set his heart on an abundance of riches but tried to make more and more progress towards God and to live an upright, pious and sober life according to the regulations of Saint Benedict. When the sons of Belial saw this they rose up horribly against the man of God, provoking him to bitterness and crucifying the soul of the just man by their wicked deeds. Let it not disturb you, O reader, that in that holy community evil claimed the place as its own, since pride invaded heavenly minds, calling them away from their heavenly country to its own region and hid amid dust and ashes that which was more accustomed to appear in purple and fine linen. Finally the witness of Scripture teaches us that on a certain day the sons of God stood in the presence of the Lord and that Satan was in their midst. So it is that there have always been in the church both the just who make progress and the wicked who are a trial. When the man of God saw that his corrections were fruitless and that the observance of regular discipline was left aside, each one walking according to the depravity of his own heart, he decided to leave them behind lest while he was vainly trying to obtain some spiritual profit in them, he should suffer loss in his own soul, When discord rose among them he withdrew from them and came to a place called Aux in which he heard that there were brothers living who served the Lord in a spirit of humility. When he came to them he was warmly received by them and he lived with them for some time, working with his own hands so that he would have something to give to those who suffered need. He was incessantly fervent in vigils and prayers and served the Lord without tiring. Though he excelled all in holiness he acted as a servant to all, reckoning himself the least of all. For this reason not long afterwards he was elected abbot by them. He took care to act as superior in all modesty, not dominating over the group but with his whole heart serving as a model for the flock, taking great care

of the weak and encouraging the strong.

10 *How he was called back to Molesme.*

Meanwhile the monks of Molesme repented that they had offended the man of God and had, as it were, expelled him by their disobedience. Now they fretted and wept over both their moral and financial ruin. Now in the house they were deprived, whereas by the merits of Blessed Robert they Lord bestowed on them abundance, even in temporal goods. Having taken wholesome counsel, they approached the Supreme Pontiff and strengthened by his authority, called the man of God back to Molesme. There he was intent on fasting and incessant prayer, and his zeal toward those under him was the zeal of God. In a short time he reformed their observance of monastic discipline.

There were among them four of stronger spirit, namely Alberic and Stephen and another two who after the elementary exercises of the cloister longed for the solitary struggle of the desert. They left the monastery of Molesme and came to a place named Vivicus. When they had lived there for a short time, on the instigation of the monks of Molesme, they received from Joceran, Bishop of Langres, a sentence of excommunication if they did not return.

11 *Taking up residence for the first time at Cîteaux.*

Because they were compelled to leave the place we previously spoke about, they came to a wooded area named Cîteaux by those who lived there. There they built an oratory in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Thenceforth neither threats nor prayers could call them back from their purpose. Fervent in spirit they served God untiringly night and day.

12 *How Blessed Robert moved to Cîteaux.*

When Blessed Robert heard about their holy way of life, taking with him twenty-two brothers, he went over to them, so that he might share in their purpose and help them. They received him with the utmost warmth and he led them for some time with fatherly solicitude, instructing them how to live

and act in accordance with the Rule, and acting as a model and example for them of religious observance and goodness.

13 *How he returned from Cîteaux to Molesme.*

The monks of Molesme were disgruntled to lose such a good shepherd and so they approached the Supreme Pontiff with the purpose that Blessed Robert, the Lord's man, should be forced to return to the church of Molesme which he had founded first. When the Supreme Pontiff heard that the new plantation of the Cistercians had strongly taken root, he rejoiced greatly to learn that they were growing in all goodness of life and that, formed by the example of Blessed Robert, they were observing the Rule of Saint Benedict more fervently. Seeing that the monks of Molesme were facing destruction if they were deprived of the presence of the man of God, he wrote to the Archbishop of Lyon to the effect that another abbot should be established at Cîteaux and that he should compel Blessed Robert to return to Molesme.

When he learned this, Blessed Robert, who knew that obedience is better than sacrifice and that to be unwilling to comply is like the crime of idolatry, having made all the arrangements relevant to the observance of the new institute, he set over them as abbot, Alberic, a man worthy of God, who had been one of the first monks of the church at Molesme. Thus having made good provision for everything, he returned to the monastery of Molesme which he had founded in honour of Blessed Mary. When Alberic died after two years, Stephen succeeded, made abbot for the Cistercians by Blessed Robert. Thus, since he was the founder of the new plantation, the administration of both monasteries (Molesme and Cîteaux) fell within his purview.

He returned to Molesme with two monks: the Cistercians grieved for his departure, whereas the monks of Molesme rejoiced at his return. A huge crowd gave him an honourable welcome at the town of Bar-sur-Seine, and received him with great boisterousness and praise of God. Robert, however, with his — or rather Christ's — tiny flock, namely the Molesme group entered the place prepared for him by God. He glorified with great happiness of mind the divine providence that had arranged everything for him. With a father's love he nurtured the flock committed to him, teaching them the regular observances — rather he became for them an example of the rule by living among them in accordance with the rule. How the holy man migrated from the prison of flesh and by what signs the Lord showed that his

death was precious in his sight, I shall now make known to your charity.

14 *Blessed Robert's Passing*

Blessed Robert fought many battles in labouring for the Lord and he was often wearied because this present life failed to satisfy and so he longed with ardent desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ. God heard his desire and chose to reveal to him the hour of his departure many days in advance. Robert, knowing this to be imminent communicated it to the brothers. For some time he was bedridden with bodily weakness and so accumulated the merits of the virtue of patience, in his infirmity gladly boasting of the power of Christ who was preparing a dwelling-place in him. In the 83rd year of his age, on 17 April,⁴ his body returned to the earth. His spirit was freed to go back to God to whose service he had been tirelessly committed. Earth wept and heaven rejoiced. His sons, the monks of Molesme, whose sole joy and solace he had been, devoutly assisted at the funeral rites of their revered father weeping most bitterly. They did not doubt that he would receive the heavenly reward of his merits, nor that they would receive favours through his merits, but they were very upset that their father's presence had been removed from this light. Because by his just deeds while he was still on earth he had proved that he had been a son of light, God made known in the manner of his death the extent of his merits.

Inserted at this point is a series of miracles. Kolumban Spahr, the editor of the Vita, notes pithily: "The chapters that follow are legendary throughout" (p. xlvii).

⁴ *XVo kalendas maii*, some manuscripts read *tertio kalendas maii* (29 April), his feast day. The Cistercian martyrology gives 18 February as his day of death.

Unit 2: Additional Reading

For this Unit there is a selection of texts of primary sources. These need to be read with an awareness that medieval approached matters from a different viewpoint. They were less concerned with empirical facts and details, and were more overt in seeking to persuade — to win us over to their particular reading of a situation. These authors were less “objective” than we believe ourselves to be.

1 Read some of the narratives. For example, the authors of the *Life of Robert* and the *Life of Peter of Jully* want to convince us that their subjects were holy man, worthy of veneration. William of Malmsbury had a partisan’s view of Stephen, whereas Ordericus Vitalis is a bit suspicious of Cistercians, despite their good reputation, and keeps his distance.

2 The three texts written by Stephen of Cîteaux deserve to be read very closely. They are not manifestly personal documents — as many of Bernard’s letters are — but they are invaluable means of access to the personality of Stephen. If we wish to build up an acquaintance with Stephen nothing is a better means than reading these texts closely and trying to imagine what sort of man would have written them. There is a detailed exegesis of the letter to Thurstan by Fr Chrysogonus Waddell in *Noble Piety and Reformed Monasticism*.

3 It will be clear that the task of understanding the Founders calls us to return again these texts that will become so familiar during the course of the year: the *Exordium Parvum*, the *Charter of Charity* and the *Exordium Cistercii*. It is hoped that this reading of them will generate questions for us that will make our study of them in future Units both more interesting and more fruitful.

4 This is a long Unit, but if you have time read something extra to get a different point of view. If something interests you seek further information. Look up words and terms you do not understand or ask somebody else. Write your own explanations into the notes for easier reading in the future.

Exordium

Unit 2: Primary Sources 2

Ordericus Vitalis *Historia Ecclesiastica* VIII, 25

St Robert and the Rule

In this present chronicle I attempt to make clear how and by whom the change of the ancient monastic habit began to blossom, since I believe that this will be of interest to later readers.

In Burgundy there is a monastery called Molesme of which Renard the bishop of Langres wrote: “Molesme, to those that love it, is like a baptism.” There in the time of Philip, King of the Franks, the venerable abbot Robert founded a monastery and inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, gathered there disciple of high religious observance and he instructed them graciously in zeal for the virtues and in holy poverty according to the usages of other communities.

After some years he read the Rule of St Benedict closely and looked at the writings of other holy fathers. He called the brothers together and said this.

“Dear brothers, we made profession according to the norm of St Benedict. But it seems to me that we do not follow this rule in its integrity. We observe many things that are not in it and negligently leave aside many of its injunctions, If you do not believe me, my friends, read the deeds of Saints Antony, Macarius , Pachomius and especially St Paul the Apostle. We have an abundance of food and clothing from tithes and church offerings and we have, by cleverness or by force taken belongs to the priests. Thus we fill ourselves with the blood of the people and so share in sin. What I would wish us to do, therefore, is to hold fast to the Rule of St Benedict in its entirety, taking care that we do not turn away from it to right or to left. Let us provide our food and clothing by the work of our hands. Let us abstain from the use of breeches or finely woven material and lambskins in accordance with the Rule. Let us leave tithes and offerings for the clerics who serve the diocese. Thus let us spend our efforts fervently in running after Christ, following the footsteps of our fathers.”

[The account continues with further arguments between the monks and Robert and an account of the foundation of the New Monastery and its observances.]

Exordium

Unit 2: Primary Sources 3

Stephen of Cîteaux: *Letter to Thurstan of Sherborne*

To T[hurstan], venerable abbot of Sherborne
and the community entrusted to him by God,
from Brother Stephen, servant of the Church of Cîteaux:
Fear Christ with love and love him with fear.

The purpose of a letter is to speak to the absent as though they were present and by love to bridge the gap between those physically separated by distance. Therefore, because you are my own bone and flesh, I ask you to bear patiently with me as I write these few things.

I was once your monk and with my staff I crossed the sea, so that the Lord might show the riches of his mercy, and incite you to follow my example — since I was the least of all of you and of no importance among you. He wanted an empty vessel so that he, the flowing fountain, could fill it as he willed. In this way, you who were better by reason of your holy pedigree, might hold firmly to religious life and dare to place your reliance on the Lord.

I came out of my land alone and poor. Now I am joyfully entering the way of all flesh as a rich man, with 40 communities with the sure hope of the denarius promised to the faithful workers in the vineyard.

I exhort you, beloved, that you be active in adding advancement in virtue to the good reputation that has flowed all the way from you to us. In this way, going from good to better and firmly attaching yourselves to genuine religious observance, you will never cease practising chastity and humility, lovingly and zealously devoted to parsimony until death. Thus you will be worthy to see the God of gods. Amen.

Exordium

Unit 2: Primary Sources 6

Life of Saint Peter:

Prior of the Women's Monastery of Jully and Monk of Molesme

PL 185.1259-1260

At length Peter entered the region of Burgundy to explore its holy places. He discovered there a very chaste youth of English origin named Stephen, who was led by the same desire as himself in coming to this region. Peter, seeing and approving of his life and behaviour, joined up with him as a friend and companion.

The two of them remained faithful to this holy bond that they had made, and each tried to excel in showing honour to the other. They held back the instincts of the flesh from all evil and impurity, eliminating their own lusts and punishing their unlawful desires. Each guarded his heart with all vigilance, knowing that from the heart life proceeds. They gave themselves to prayer fairly often so that each day they recited the whole Psalter, alternating the verses.

Finally, by God's inspiration, they set off for Rome for the sake of prayer. There they entered the oratories of St Peter and Paul and they offered in the sight of the divine majesty, the calves of their lips and the victim of their hearts, seethed in the oil of inner devotion. They went around the churches of other saints as well. Everywhere they knocked on the doors of God's ears with fervent prayer. Everywhere they offered in full fine sacrifices, to reduce the debt owed by them and their kin and to obtain the gifts God has promised.

Their own devotion satisfied, they left the city and returned again to Burgundy whence they had come. By the Lord's providence they came to Molesme. There they shaved their heads, exchanged their secular clothes for the religious habit and dedicated themselves totally to the service of God.

Blessed Peter, having entered the monastery, by his observance radiated like the morning star among all the other stars. He shone like a great lantern. To arrive at goodness he emulated those who were perfect. He placed before his eyes as an example, the virtues of the saints. He was zealous to be a consecrated vessel, so that he might receive God to dwell in the guest-house of his mind. In the furrows of unrighteousness he sowed no evil nor did he harvest the scandal of their fruits. He was quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. There was in him no root of avarice, no swelling of pride or arrogance. He walled off his mouth from idle and vain speech and refrained from detraction by perpetual silence. At definite times he was fervent for reading, at other times for prayer. Since the custom of the monastery did not permit him to continue saying the Psalter with Stephen his companion, as he used to when he was in the world, they made a law for themselves that each of them

would say daily half a Psalter and the other would say the second half. This custom Blessed Peter retained almost to the end of his life.

At one stage Blessed Peter was sent by the abbot to live at one of the dependent houses that belonged to the monastery. It happened that the new Cistercian foundation (*plantatio*) — which fled from the tumult of the people and the storm of the world to struggle to live for God alone (*solī Deo vacare*) in the wilderness — had been deprived of its father and shepherd. They asked for the prayers of their mother-house. Then, with the counsel of God-fearing men, in accordance with the Rule, they ordained Stephen as abbot for themselves. Peter was devoted and diligent in praying before God for Stephen's success and welfare. Taking stock of the different concerns that now burdened his friend, he realised that he would be unable to complete his assigned half of the Psalter. So this great man of prayer took the whole Psalter on himself to say both for himself and for his companion. What a man — so full of charity! What a true disciple of Christ who imitated what the Apostle said, "Bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfil the law of Christ."

Exordium

Unit 2: Primary Sources 4

Stephen of Cîteaux: *Preface to the “Stephen Harding Bible”*

MONITUM

Brother Stephen, abbot of the New Monastery,
to both present and future servants of God:
Health!

Having determined to write this volume, among the many books that we gathered from various churches in order to follow what was more authentic, we came upon one that was greatly dissonant with nearly all [the others]. We found this to be fuller than the others and gave it credence. So we have written this volume according to what was contained in the same book.

Having done that, we were not a little disturbed by the dissonance among the volumes. Full reason teaches that they all received [their matter] from a single Hebrew source of truth translated by a single interpreter (namely Blessed Jerome) - omitting other interpreters - and hence should sound the same. There are certain books of the Old Testament which were translated by our interpreter not from Hebrew but from Chaldean because this was how he found them among the Jews. He writes this in his prologue to Daniel. We have accepted these as we did the other books according to his translation.

Much astonished at the discordance in our books, although we received them from a single interpreter, we approached certain Jews who are expert in their scriptures and made diligent inquiries of them in the romance language about all those places in the scriptures in the aforesaid copy that we have where we find passages and verses that we have now inserted in this work of ours which are not found in many other Latin volumes. These men opened their many books before us and in those places where we had a question they expounded the Hebrew of Chaldean Scripture to us in romance words. They did not find [*or* they found few of] the passages and verses about which we had been troubled.

So, giving credence to the truth of the Hebrew and Chaldean [text] and to many Latin books that did not have these [passages], since in the two languages agreed in everything, we have erased completely those superfluities, as it appears in many places of this book, and especially in the books of Kings, where the majority of the mistakes were found.

We ask all those who will read this volume that they do in no way add further to this work the superfluous passages and verses mentioned above. The places they were will be sufficiently clear, since the scraping of the parchment reveals the places.

By God's authority and that of our community, we forbid anyone to deal dishonestly with this book, prepared with much labour, or to presume to make marks with fingernails in the text or in its margins.

Exordium

Unit 2: Primary Sources 5

Stephen of Cîteaux: Preface to the “First Hymnal”

[Here begins the letter of Dom Stephen, second Cistercian Abbot, on the use of hymns]

Brother Stephen,
second servant of the New Monastery
to his successors.

Good health!

For the information of the sons of holy Church.

We have had these hymns, which clearly were composed by the Blessed Archbishop Ambrose, brought from the church of Milan where they were sung, here to our place, that is to the New Monastery. By the common advice and consent of our brothers we have decided that henceforth these and no others shall be sung by our successors. These Ambrosian hymns are the ones that our blessed father and master Benedict set forth to be sung. And we have decided that his Rule will be observed with great zeal in this place.

Therefore, by God’s authority and our own, we enjoin that you do not presume out of levity to change or abolish the integrity of the Rule which you see put into practice and adopted by us in this place with so much sweat.

Be rather lovers and imitators and propagators of the ideal of our holy father, already mentioned, and hold onto these hymns tenaciously.

[So — with God’s help — the letter ends. Amen!]

Exordium


Unit Two: Topics for Group Sharing

*It is always helpful to use your **imagination** in reading history; it helps it to come alive. There is, however, a danger that the pictures you draw from the text are purely subjective. This is why it is helpful to share your impressions with others and so arrived at a more nuanced product.*

1. Share your images of each of the founders. Are they different from what you thought previously? Do they resemble someone you know? what sort of men were they? In what did their holiness consist?
2. Share with the others some of the texts that you found enlightening. Try to explain what they mean to you in your own words.
3. On the reflection sheet you were asked to imagine what message each of the Founders would have for us today. Perhaps some of you would like to read what you have written to the group and allow others to respond.
4. Do you have any thoughts on how Providence uses particular persons, each with their particular talents and limitations, to do a good work. What does this say to you in your own situation.
5. How would you or your community respond to Robert, Alberic and Stephen if they were your contemporaries?

Unit 2: Reflection Sheet

1 How well do the following words describe each of the founders? If you can't tell, leave a gap.

|  | ROBERT | ALBERIC | STEPHEN |
|---|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Originator <> Continuator | | | |
| Attractive <> Distant | | | |
| Active <> Passive | | | |
| Organised <> Chaotic | | | |
| Exciting <> Boring | | | |
| Severe <> Gentle | | | |
| Challenging <> Affirming | | | |
| Leader <> Follower | | | |
| Stable <> Flighty | | | |
| Intellectual <> Average | | | |
| Anxious <> Relaxed | | | |
| Artistic <> Non-artistic | | | |
| Practical <> Dreamer | | | |
| Solitary <> Sociable | | | |


2 Looking vertically at the qualities you have listed for each of the individual Founders, try to picture them. Do they remind you of

- ! A character in the Bible ?
- ! Someone in history ?
- ! Someone in your own community ?

3 Do you think that the words attributed to Robert by Ordericus Vitalis reflect his values?

4 Alberic is described as “a lover of the Rule and of the brothers” and Stephen as “a lover of the Rule and of the place”. Do you think there is a significant difference in the descriptions? What does it mean?

5 What do you think was the particular gift of each founder? What value(s) do you think were the most important to each?

|  SPECIAL GRACE | VALUES |
|---|--------|
| Robert | |
| Alberic | |
| Stephen | |

6 If you were to design an icon showing the three Founders, how would you make them different? If you are good at drawing, make a sketch.

7 How would you feel if you had to deal with Robert, Alberic and Stephen?

- ! (For monks) As a member of the community?
- ! (For monks) As abbot?
- ! As Father Immediate?
- ! As Abbot General?

8 Write a short message from each of the founders to yourself, your community and the Order.

Exordium

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Exordium

Notional Map of Locations in the Life of Robert of Molesme

St Ayoul de Provins



Montier-la-Celle



TROYES

Molesme



Colan



S. Michel de Tonnerre



LANGRES

Aux



DIJON



Cîteaux



Balerne



CHALON



Pont d'Anselme



Aulps



LYON



Legend

- Monastery
- Diocese
- City
- Forest Hermitage
- Meeting Point

— Not to Scale —