

exalted and disdains the other states of mortal life as inferior.”¹⁰ Because of how he defined virginity, those statements implied that traditional Benedictines, as the only true community of virgins, were superior to new monks and canons regular.

Rupert’s construction of virginity ultimately validated the Black Monks’ right—and perhaps more significantly, Rupert’s right—to perform pastoral activities. If virgins were the highest representatives of religious life, then they enjoyed the most intimate relationship with God. That being the case, they clearly had the most authority to preach and teach God’s word. Rupert spells out the implications of his construction when he writes:

...although the Holy Spirit uttered clear and profound testimonies of God’s Word through all [the apostles’] mouths, obviously these were even more clear and profound when he spoke through those who remained virgins both in flesh and in mind.¹¹

All of the apostles were envoys of God’s word, but those who were virgins were his most efficacious messengers.

By making male virginity significant, by depicting it as a physical component of the body, and by insisting on physicality’s pivotal role, Rupert took a Christian ideal that was usually amorphous and impotent with respect to men and made it into something tangible and meaningful. He endowed male virginity with a powerful image of physical integrity that could be enlisted as a declaration about society and the body’s relationship to it. His goal was to make a statement about traditional Benedictine monks and their status within the religious community. To preserve the only way of life he had ever known Rupert constructed male virginity as significant and embodied—in doing, so he created an impermeable barrier that stood between traditional and reformed religious communities, safe-guarding the Black Monks’ very way of life.

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¹⁰ “[Virginitas] quae prae cunctis meritorum gradibus regnum coelorum possidet” (545D) & “[Virginitas] apud se sublimis est, et despiciit caeteros mortalis vitae gradus, velut inferiores” (550D).

¹¹ “Cumque per omnium illorum ora Spiritus sanctus lucida et alta locutus sit verbi Dei testimonia, manifestum est, quia lucidiora, et altiora sunt ea, quae per illos locutus est, qui mente, et carne virgines permanserunt...” (554C).

ISABELLE COCHELIN

ON THE “PATH” TO SALVATION: WRITING DOWN, MAKING UP AND KEEPING CUSTOMS IN ELEVENTH-CENTURY CLUNY¹

in *Rule Makers and Rule Breakers* (see reference at the end of the article)

ABSTRACT. Monastic customaries have been little studied in and of themselves by historians. In order to use them as historical sources, it is necessary to understand better in what circumstances they were written, for what purpose, and how they were used in daily life. The evolution of customaries through time gives us interesting insights on the evolution of monastic history.

The greatest cause of murder inside medieval monasteries was probably the change of customs. To be more precise: the most written about cause of a (real or imagined) attempt to murder inside medieval monasteries was probably the change of customs. I have not collected exhaustive statistics, but a few famous examples easily come to mind. Gregory the Great narrated in his *Dialogues* how Benedict of Nursia was almost killed by the first monks he ruled; they did not want to live as he wanted them to (II, 3, 4). It is important to note, given the central theme of this article, that Benedict had not yet written his famous rule; he wanted to change his monks’ way of life, in other words their customs, through his speech, behaviour and charisma.² Some 350 years later, when most Western monasteries had adopted the rule of Saint Benedict, John of Salerno wrote in his *Vita Odonis* that the monks of Fleury envisaged killing Odo of Cluny because he wanted to impose a different set of cus-

¹ I thank Marc Saurette and Sébastien Barret for having commented on this article. All mistakes are, of course, mine.

² Unlike the following authors, Gregory the Great never uses the word *consuetudines* in his *Dialogues*, i.e. the most common, but not the only, term used to designate customs in the following centuries; he rather employs the expressions *vita regularis*, *iter conversationis*, *norma*, *mores* (II, 3, 3–4). However, they all refer to (un-written) norms of life, and were therefore similar to the later *consuetudines*. On the various terms used to designate customs, see Hallinger 1980: p. 147.

toms on them (col. 81bc). Once again, we find a tale of monks ready to murder for customs. John wrote the *Vita* in order to convince the monks of Salerno to change their way of life. He used writing because he had little legitimacy; he was an ex-secular canon coming from Rome, with no family to speak about, except for Odo whom he depicted compellingly as his “spiritual father.” Therefore he wrote his *Life* and explained the most illustrative “Odonian” customs at the same time (Cochelin 2002: 184-186). However, Odo did not seem to have used any written text to reform Fleury and other monasteries; he relied on his speech, behaviour, charisma, and sometimes the power of the lords who had asked him to reform specific places. In the case of Fleury, for instance, he had an army led by at least two counts waiting behind him. Again, approximately two hundred years later, Abelard feared that his monks in Brittany might attempt to kill him because he was trying to change their way of life, as he reported in his *Historia calamitatum* (p. 78). He wrote a rule, but only years later and at the demand of Heloise, for herself and her nuns of the Paraclete when the distance between the two ex-lovers had made it necessary to resort to the written medium (Lo-brichon 1005: 284, and Griffiths 2004). However, in the Breton monastery of Saint-Gildas, Abelard was relying only on his speech, behaviour, charisma, and, no doubt, his bad character.

These three stories illustrate two issues. First, they show the fundamental importance of the customs in monks’ life, as they accepted murder in their monastic tales as a potential reaction to changes in customs. Second, they address the possible failure of the abbots’ intervention to transform customs. The latter begs the question of what other means were then available and were less conducive to tension. I will treat the question of the importance of customs before moving to a longer and more detailed analysis of the abbots’ role in changing custom.

Not only was a change of customs hard to accept for the monks of the Middle Ages (as, in fact, for people today), but also, medieval monks’ sense of identity – their *raison d’être* – was implicated in such a change. From the medieval monks’ point of view what made them different and, ideally, more perfect than the laity, the secular clergy, as well as the neighbouring monastery, was their way of life, and this was primarily and foremost guided by their customs. It is indeed essential to recall two of the three vows asked by Benedict of Nursia: *stabilitas* and *conversatio morum* (the third was obedience; *Regula Benedicti* 58, 17). As a monk, one was theoretically attached to only one place for life, a place with its specific set of customs, its *mores*, which were far more numerous

than simply the symbolical and literal renouncement of the flesh; it concerned for instance when and how to pray, sleep, eat, bathe, dress, be punished, and interact with the external world. To attempt to modify these customs was to endanger the sense of self, the identity of the monks living there. Hence, the thoughts of murder.

The second point raised above is closely linked to the “rule makers and rule breakers” issue of this volume of collected essays. I mentioned various individuals, mostly but not only abbots attempting to impose new customs (Benedict, Odo, John and Abelard), and others, mainly simple monks, hoping to preserve their old ones. This leads to the main question discussed in this article: how were customs made and kept in medieval monasteries? The three above stories of attempted murder, as well as some stories of successful change of customs – which were not always accompanied with attempts to murder, but were always pivotal in the life of a monastery – give us only one point of view: they depict the heroic and holy abbot attempting to transform bad customs into good customs. He is the maker of the good customs and the monks their transgressors. Was it really usually the case? Were the customs, so important to the monks’ sense of identity, normally imposed from the top down? I will use the remaining pages of this article to answer this question in the negative for the period prior to the late eleventh century.

Let’s look again, for the last time, to the above stories, as their conclusions are quite telling. Of the four attempts to reform customs by Benedict, Odo, John and Abelard, the success of only one is known, and it was a temporary one: the *Vita Odonis* explains that the monks of Fleury accepted Odo’s reform (col. 81c); however, some decades later, it seems that Fleury had quite thoroughly “forgotten” its Odonian/Cluniac customs (Nightingale 1996). The customary of Fleury, written at the beginning of the eleventh century (i.e. approximately three-quarters of a century later) for a German bishop, maybe desirous to use it for a new monastic house he had just founded, shows no real trace of Odonian/Cluniac influence.³ According to its editors, the customs of Fleury are representative of a Frankish monasticism predating Cluniac influence, which therefore indicates the erasure of the imported customs.⁴

³ *Consuetudines Floriacenses antiquiores*, eds. Anselme Davril and Lin Donnat, *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* 7.3, Siegburg: Schmitt, 1984, pp. 3-60. *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* is from now on abbreviated CCM. See also Anselme Davril et Lin Donnat, “Introduction,” in *L’abbaye de Fleury en l’an Mil*, Paris: Édition du CNRS, 2004, pp. 150-51.

⁴ Davril 1984: 337, Donnat 1990, and Nightingale 1996: 33-41.

The impact of John's reform on the monastery of Salerno is a complete unknown; in fact, the identity of the monastery has escaped inquiry (Cochelin 2002: 185n). Benedict and Abelard decided to leave their "ungrateful" monks and, more or less literally, to run for their lives. No need to specify that they had no impact on the customs of their monks. Complete reforms of customs by powerful figures, usually abbots but occasionally external figures of authority, were therefore not always successful.⁵ We could hypothesise from this that they were not the norm. What were the other, maybe more "natural," or "legitimate" – it is difficult to know what adjective to use – ways of producing and changing customs? In other words, who were the main custom makers?

It is hard to know exactly how customs were made in monastic communities. The same is true for customs that were followed in the secular medieval world for that matter. However, for the former, unlike for the latter, some scholars seem to be convinced that customs were produced by the highest echelons in the social hierarchy of monasteries, monastic families or, later, monastic orders to be imposed on the lower echelons. Years of working with customaries has made me doubtful of these assertions, at least for the period prior to the late eleventh century. It would be impossible to study a large array of case figures in a few pages. Rather I will concentrate my demonstration on the abbey I know best, Cluny.

The famous Burgundian abbey was not only the most admired monastery of the eleventh century mainly because of its customs, it is also the medieval monastery for which the most information on the topic survives. Indeed, four customaries describe its customs between the end of the tenth century and the end of the eleventh (Iogna-Prat 1992, Barret 2005 and Cochelin 2005b). The oldest was written between 990 and 1015, more probably the late tenth century, and is called the *Consuetudines antiquiores* (here abbreviated *CA*). Its content is mostly liturgical. The second was written in different steps, mostly between 1027

⁵ John of Salerno was probably sent to Salerno by Odo at the demand of the local prince, desirous to have one of his monasteries reformed. Besides this case and bishop Bernward's attempt to use the text of the customary of Fleury, other examples can be listed of external authorities attempting to reform the customs of monasteries. The two most famous ones were discussed at the council of Aachen and the council of Winchester, under the aegis of the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious and King Edgar of England. The first one led to *Synodi primae Aquisgranensis decreta authentica*, ed. Joseph Semmler, in *Initia consuetudinis benedictinae*, CCM 1 (1963), 449-468, and the second one to the *Regularis concordia Anglicae nationis*, eds. Thomas Symons, Sigrid Spath, CCM 7.3 (1984), 69-147.

and 1040, and is known as the *Liber tramitis* (LT), the "book of the path"; the title is due to the fact that this set of Cluniac custom were perceived as the "path" leading monks towards salvation. The third was probably composed around 1080 by Ulrich of Zell (abbreviated *Ulr*), and the fourth probably around 1085 by Bernard of Cluny (*Bern*). I will first discuss the role played by the abbots in the defining and imposing of the customs, before looking at other actors.

It is crucial to remember that custom-making at Cluny, as elsewhere, changed by the late eleventh century. The monasticism that developed after the Gregorian Reform is, on many points, but especially regarding custom-making, quite different from the old. For the Cluniac order, scholars talk about a constitutional monarchy ruled by the abbot of Cluny from the thirteenth century onward (Melville 1990: 123-124). In fact, already in the twelfth century, one can see Peter the Venerable (1122-1156) actively eliminating "bad" old customs and imposing new ones.⁶ In a recent dissertation, Marc Saurette analyzed the complex set of writings Peter the Venerable composed in order to convince his monks of the legitimacy of his enterprise to transform their customs. Peter's *De Miraculis*, his compilation of his *Statuta* as well as his collection of letters were made partly in order to justify his right to alter his monks' *modus vivendi* (Saurette 2004). However too many scholars of monasticism are convinced that the post-eleventh century situation –customs normally imposed from the top down– was also prevalent in earlier times (for instance Tutsch 1998: 37 and Iogna-Prat 2002: 27-28).

If one looks at the Cluniac customaries chronologically, one can observe the increasing, but still quite minimal, interventionism of the abbots through the eleventh century. In a recent article, I outlined the proof for this argument when studying the process of compiling customs into customaries (Cochelin 2005a). I will simply summarise my conclusions here. Odilo (996-1049) possibly never learned that the *Consuetudines antiquiores* existed. All the surviving manuscripts come from monasteries independent from Cluny that wanted to be influenced by its way of life; likely they obtained a description of the Cluniac customs in order to learn about them and perhaps to adopt them without losing their freedom. Indeed, since Odilo had just decided that any community

⁶ Constable 1976: 157-159 and Barret 2005: 72-74. Except for few scholars, such as Constable 1976, specialists of Cluny have insisted on the fact that the Cluniac abbots were all powerful prior to the twelfth century (e.g. Hillebrandt 1997). However a closer look to customs (their production, writing down and implementation) leads to question this picture for certain spheres of activities inside the cloister.

reformed by Cluny had to remain afterwards under its dominance (Iogna-Prat 2002: 56), I doubt that it is a mere coincidence that customaries describing Cluny started circulating among non-Cluniac monasteries from that time onwards. They were the best solution for monasteries desirous to be influenced by Cluny's perfect customs without becoming a dependent Cluniac satellite. Subsequently, the *Liber tramitis* was compiled, primarily for the benefit of the imperial abbey of Farfa, also independent from Cluny (Boynton 2005a: chapter 3). In this case, the Abbot Odilo probably learned that this customary describing the customs of his abbey was written down, but there is no sign that he had any direct role in its production. In the 1080s, Ulrich of Zell wrote his customary of Cluny for his friend William, the abbot of Hirsau. Here again, it is more or less certain that the permission of the abbot of Cluny, then Hugh of Semur (1049-1109), was never sought (contrary to Wollasch 1993: 321, 347 and Tutsch 1998: 27, 29); however, abbot William later chose to ask him for permission to modify the Cluniac customs, in order to adapt them to his (independent) monastery, and Hugh granted it.⁷ Last but not least, around 1085 Bernard of Cluny, probably an oblate who had become the man in charge of the library and the liturgy at Cluny, i.e. the *armarius*, wrote his customary;⁸ if we are to believe his dedicatory letter, he independently conceived the need for his text, but almost immediately turned to Abbot Hugh to obtain his permission to continue writing. This same letter is addressed to Hugh and concludes with the presentation of Hugh as responsible for the text; but this should not lead us to ignore Bernard's initial claim.⁹ This rapid overview of the compilation of the four Cluniac customaries illustrate that a subtle change had taken place by the time of Hugh's abbacy. The Cluniac abbots saw their role in the customary writing process evolve from non-existent to legitimating. However, they were never the initiators of the compilation proper, and did not dominate the process of writing down usages before the twelfth century.

⁷ William of Hirsau, *Constitutiones hirsaugienses seu gengenbacenses*, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 150, col 929cd. On William's reform of Hirsau, see the various articles in *Hirsau*.

⁸ On the identity of Bernard, see the articles by Davril, Cochelin, Boynton and Paxton in *From Dead of Night*.

⁹ This passage is quoted further below in this article. The whole letter can be found in Bernard 1726: 134-135. The text as it is found in the only Cluniac medieval manuscript of the customary (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, latin 13875) and its English translation can also be found in the Appendix of *From Dead of Night*, pp. 349-353.

I would like now to offer here a more in-depth study of the customary making process (i.e. the initializing of new customs) and show that a similar evolution took place. In other words, I would like to demonstrate that it is a mistake to claim that abbots were responsible for creating all new customs. In *CA*, the oldest customary describing Cluniac customs, nothing is said about any role of the abbots regarding customs. It is true that this text mainly discusses liturgy, but the abbots of Cluny could have been presented as playing a significant role in the creation of new liturgical customs. One must wait for the *Liber tramitis* to find such references; it evokes the instauration of the famous feast of All Souls on November 2, created by abbot Odilo *circa* 1030, and his participation in the re-shuffling of the hierarchy between religious feasts (*LT* pp. 58, 198, 199; Longo 2002: 174). In the customaries of Ulrich and Bernard one observes an increasing interventionism of the abbots, however still limited. Of the extensive customs listed in their customaries (*Ulr* is more than one hundred columns long in the *Patrologia Latina*, and *Bern* is some 200 pages long), they refer less than twelve times in total to Odo's, Mayeul's and Odilo's interventions.¹⁰ If the abbots were responsible for all customs, why underline their paternity for only some of them, and such a small number at that? One cannot justify these few references by the fact that the customs were rarely evolving. One finds various references in *Ulr* and *Bern* to old customs contrasted to new ones without any evocation of the possible role of abbots in this development.¹¹ For

¹⁰ Constable 1976: 154-156. I base this conclusion on a search of 1) *Ulr* as contained in the digital version of the *Patrologia Latina* produced by Brepols and 2) the transcription of *Bern* made by Susan Boynton and myself of Paris, BNF, latin 13875, containing the oldest and only text of Bernard from Cluny. In neither of *Bern* nor *Ulr* are Berno and Aymard, the two other Cluniac abbots who ruled before Hugh, ever mentioned. This means that, from the foundation of Cluny in 910 to the year Hugh became abbot in 1049 (i.e. one hundred and thirty-nine years), less than twelve interventions of the abbots were considered worth remembering as such. Therefore I disagree with Giles Constable when he writes, "abbatial initiative was an important factor in the revision of custom." (ibid. p.156). However, more importantly, he insists in the same article that the Cluniac abbots were not the sole ones responsible for the customs: "The statement of Dom Besse that the Cluniac *Consuetudines* derived their authority only from the consent of the abbots of Cluny is based on sources from the late Middle Ages and does not apply to the eleventh century." (ibid. p. 157).

¹¹ An un-systematic search (based on the sole use of the adverb *olim*) indicates that the care for the dead contains a higher proportion of such changes. It would illustrate the centrality of this ritual in Cluny. On these changes, see Paxton 2005: 304-305. On the importance of the cult of the Dead in Cluny, see particularly Longo 2002 and Iogna-Prat 1998. The fact that the reverse claim can also be made –i.e. if a custom has been

specialists of secular customs, these conclusions –the very limited interventionism of the head of a given community in the making of its customs– would seem too obvious to be discussed in an article,¹² but scholars of monastic customaries have conceived the production of their sources in very different manner from their counterparts working in the secular field.

The error of ascribing responsibility for Cluniac customs to the abbots of Cluny is partly based on the interpretation of one sentence in Ulrich's and Bernard's customaries (e.g. Hunt 1967: 37 and Iogna-Prat 1992: 31-32). It can be found in the chapter concerning the abbot, and more specifically in the section discussing how to behave in chapter vis-à-vis him (*Ulr* col. 754; *Bern* p. 137). The previous sentence explained that "whenever the abbot's name has been mentioned, if he is present, all (the convent) including him, must bow" (*Nomen eius quociescumque recitari audierint si presens est omnes sicut et ipse inclinant*). To this, Ulrich and Bernard added, "if one has doubts about this custom, whatever he [the abbot] will have decided is to be held more or less as law from then on." (*Si de qua consuetudine dubitatur, quicquid ille inde diffinierit de cetero quasi pro lege tenetur*). However the latter sentence does not refer to *any and all* custom, but specifically to the one mentioned right before: the abbot can change the ritual of the whole community, including himself, of bowing at his name; whatever way he chooses to change it, it will have force of law. Probably the custom was perceived as constraining, maybe only from the abbot's point of view, and given it concerned reverence towards himself, *he* had the ability to change *this* one custom. Using a similar argument to that of the previous paragraph, I believe that this clarification demonstrates that, in other matters, the abbots were not free to interfere at their own will. At least this was the case in the Cluny up to the early 1080s, i.e. in the Cluny described by *both* Ulrich and Bernard. But by the late 1080s, the situation had started to change.

changed by an abbot, it is specified– reinforces, I believe, my point. On a change in the handling of a dead brother made by abbot Hugh, see Bernard 1726: 195.

¹² In fact, for some specialists of medieval secular customs, the latter are by definition what is not defined by the highest echelon of society, but rather by society itself. See for instance Carbasse 2003, p. 326: "On peut en effet définir la coutume, au moins de façon provisoire, comme un droit non étatique, ou pré-étatique; un droit qui trouve son origine dans le corps social et non dans la volonté de la puissance publique; un droit qui échappe ainsi, du moins dans son principe, à l'emprise de l'État. Et c'est bien pourquoi l'État moderne (celui qu'a consacré la Révolution) n'aime pas la coutume." More generally, on secular customs in the Middle Ages, see Gilissen 1982.

In the hundreds of folios filled up by the four Cluniac customaries (all written prior to the twelfth century), there is only one clear sign that abbots had a key role to play in the definition of customs. It is ironic that it has been unnoticed by previous scholarship, given that, at first glance it seems to fit so well with the extent belief in the normative character of the customaries. It has been ignored so far because it is found only in some manuscripts of *Bern*, and not in the printed text. However I am convinced that this reference can in fact be used as proof that this legislative role of the abbots of Cluny was a novelty of the very late eleventh century. Indeed it is found only in the last Cluniac customary, Bernard's. More precisely it can be read in some but not in all manuscripts of this text, including the only one that is both medieval and *stricto sensu* Cluniac: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 13875.¹³ On folio 103^r, one finds: "it should be noted that no-one can ever change or get rid of any custom except the sole lord abbot. However if he changes one outside the chapter, he himself does not have to keep to it except on this one occasion." (*Notandum autem quia nullus potest unquam mutare uel mittere aliquam consuetudinem nisi dominus abba solus. Si autem mutat aliquam extra capitulum ipsemet non tenetur nisi illa sola uice.*) It is in addition, and therefore quite probably a new custom, for the following reasons. It is positioned in lat. 13875 between two very different topics: the reception of the fugitives and the novices. Found in a paragraph at the end of the chapter on fugitives, it is mixed up with other short sentences on very different and divergent issues, concerning primarily how when the abbot is absent from the monastery, he should be replaced by certain duties performed during masses on special days. This paragraph was so obviously filled with miscellaneous additional remarks that the eighteenth-century editors of the text, both the Cluniac ones and Marquard Herrgott, decided to ignore it.¹⁴ My guess is that it is an addition of the second re-writing of Bernard's text, made from the middle of the 1080s onwards, but before the end of the eleventh century, the date

¹³ Of all the other manuscripts of Bernard's text, only one of the seventeenth century is from Cluny (Paris, BNF, lat. 942). All the others come from different, Cluniac or non Cluniac, communities. See Cochelin 2005b: 63 and Saurette 2005.

¹⁴ Herrgott wrote *Additur hoc loco in MS. San-Germanensi* [this manuscript is Paris, BNF, lat. 13875] *integer #, de offerendis et oblationibus, quem consulto hic praetermissimus, cum ad aliud capite pertineat*. On the fact, that miscellaneous information inserted at the end of chapters and parts were often later additions, see Cochelin 2005b: 64.

of lat. 13875.¹⁵ Of course, this was not a revolutionary custom, otherwise it would not have been placed in such an off-handed manner, as an after-thought, at the end of a paragraph on various issues. But it is still a novel custom given its absence in some manuscripts, its fluctuating position in the others, and the fact that no similar role is assigned to the abbot in the previous Cluniac customaries, including the first version of *Bern*. Regarding this last point, I can add: on the contrary... other mentions of the custom-making process in *Bern* contradict this assertion of the primacy of the abbot in this matter. This will be illustrated while looking at the other avenues used by monks to create customs, besides the mere interventionism of the abbots.

In his dedicatory epistle, Bernard explains that debates on the customs were raging in the chapter:

Since, most glorious father, the elders of Cluny gradually go the way of all flesh and give way to novices, certain controversies arose very often concerning the customs, different people understanding them to mean different things, so that the novices, hearing these things, were often leaving chapter more uncertain than they had arrived, I judged it worth the labor, if your authority should so order me, that with as much diligence as I might muster, I might investigate the truth itself.

Quoniam, pater gloriosissime, prioribus loci cluniacensis viam uniuersae carnis paulatim ingredientibus ac nouitiis succedentibus, quedam de consuetudinibus sepiissime oriebantur controuersie, diuersis diuersa sentientibus, ita ut plerumque nouitii hec audientes, incertiores de capitulo discederent quam accessissent, opere precium iudicavi, si uestra mihi auctoritas imperaret, ut cum quanta possem diligentia ipsam ueritatem inuestigarem... (*Bern* p. 134; *From Dead of Night* pp. 350-351).

If the abbot had always played the key role in the custom-making and custom-changing processes, these debates would have made no sense. The abbot would have stepped in and made his decision prevalent as, if worst comes to worst, it would have been a simple issue of custom-changing. However, given the great frequency of these troubling controversies, he did not have this power at the time Bernard started his

¹⁵ On the fact that I consider that there were two (if not more) redactions of *Bern*, see Cochelin 2005b: 53-54. I did not do a systematic search of this passage in all the manuscripts of *Bern*, but on the four that I have consulted here, I have so far found the striking addition in the manuscripts containing the later version of *Bern* (lat. 13875, lat. 13874 and Liège, Bibl. Universitaire, MS 1420) but not in one presenting the earlier version of *Bern* (Paris, BNF, nal 3012).

first version, in the first half of the 1080s. He definitely did not have it earlier, as will be shown.

Both Ulrich of Zell and Bernard of Cluny explain in their respective customaries how new customs were integrated in the community prior to their time, i.e. very probably prior to the 1060s.¹⁶ The custom-making process they describe is very different from the process existing at the end of the eleventh century, the time of the second re-writing of *Bern*, when the abbots had a much more interventionist role to play. In some thirty years, the changes had been drastic. Before Ulrich and Bernard's time, the new customs were to be presented in chapter, on Holy Thursday, by a child. According to both authors, a *puer* was chosen for this office because nobody would fear disagreeing with him, i.e. it permitted a real debate about the value of the new customs.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that no abbot is evoked in this former process by Ulrich nor Bernard, neither as the custom-maker nor as the custom-chooser (by custom-chooser, I indicate the person or group granting assent to the new custom). Perhaps the abbot could ultimately decide whether to incorporate or to reject proposed new customs, but –tellingly– he is not mentioned. What is important, according to both Ulrich and Bernard, was to preserve a deliberative space within which the new customs could be evaluated and then legitimized.

Another known source of Cluniac customs is Baume-les-Messieurs, the source monastery for the first Cluniac monks, including the famous Odo, Cluny's second abbot (927-942). The *Vita Odonis* identifies Baume as typically Carolingian: according to the author, John of Salerno, the monks of Baume had inherited their customs from Benedict of Aniane (col. 54a). John's text was intended to transmit and justify Cluniac customs; therefore it established their antiquity and legitimacy in order to have the monks of Salerno accept them. But some historians today doubt that there was a direct line of transmission between a monastery reformed by Benedict of Aniane, Baume, and later Cluny (Rosenwein 1977: 307-20). Our understanding of Baume's customs is hampered,

¹⁶ On the fact that Ulrich depicted in his customary the Cluny he knew best, i.e. the Cluny of the 1060s, see Cochelin 2005b, p. 59, n. 145. When appropriate, Bernard recycled entire sections of *Ulr*, including the one discussed here (ibid.: 52-62).

¹⁷ *Ulr*, col. 658d: *Antiqua consuetudo erat satis probabilis ut in isto die, et in praecedenti, et in sequenti, etiam per totum annum, quoties tale aliquid debuerit fieri, quasi novum pro qualitate temporis, hoc in capitulo ab uno puero ediceretur, qui si quid mendosum proferret, non esset talis persona cui contradici non auderetur. Nunc autem nescio propter quid hoc est mutatum, et si dominus abbas non adest, nec prior, talis multum inde peritus praecentori, vel alii fratri alicui, potius quam puero imperat hoc munus.* See *Bern* pp. 310.

moreover, since John only evokes a few such customs: the habit of staying silent at certain times of the day, of washing one's own shoes, of collecting the crumbs after meals and, for the children's master, the necessity to bring any of them to the toilets in the middle of the night with a candle (col. 56-58, 73-75). Overall these customs were kept in later Cluny but with some slight changes.

Only a limited portion of the numerous customs described in *Ulr* and *Bern* likely originated from Baume; similarly, probably just a tiny portion of the Cluniac customs were created through the Holy Thursday ceremonial. Most likely, the majority of Cluniac customs had a foggy origin, like most secular customs: they derived from occasional gestures slowly transformed into habits, and later consecrated into customs.¹⁸ The admiration for the most pious brothers and the prevalence of the teaching process (and therefore learning process) via examples rather than words, a well-known monastic *topos*, could also have been a significant source of new customs. For instance, Rodulfus Glaber wrote about William of Volpiano, when he was still a simple monk at Cluny before he left to reform or found other monasteries:

Now Mayol, the man of God, had private and very frequent conversation with William concerning those things which are necessary for true salvation. And once a whole year, more or less, had passed in that place, he was regarded as worthy of admiration and respect by all, and by the most honourable as worthy of imitation. (Rodulfus, p. 267)

Nam et isdem uir Dei Maiolus peculiare frequentius cum eodem Willelmo de his que uere salutis sunt exercebat colloquium. Iamque expleto in eodem loco plus minus anno integro cunctis admirabilis uenerabilisque necnon honestioribus imitabilis habebatur. (Rodulfus, p. 266).

The conjunction of the two adjectives *admirabilis* and *imitabilis* can help us understand how some customs might have originated from saintly figures, who were so admired that they were imitated by their brothers. What is certain is that customs were usually not produced nor imposed by the abbots, and that they were kept and transferred from generation to generation because of the consensus of the monks.

I make this new claim concerning the custom-keeping on the basis of two factors. The first is that surveillance was exerted by all, as is il-

lustrated by the mode of functioning of the chapter. Anyone was allowed, even encouraged, to denounce a brother in chapter if the latter had committed an error, in other words, if he had been unfaithful to the customs. The onus of denunciation was not only on the second prior, in charge of internal affairs, nor on the *circatores*, in charge of touring the abbey to scare potential wrongdoers and observe faulty brothers (*Ulr* cols. 708c), but on all monks of the abbey. In fact, as the oblates learned in their own chapter, not denouncing a brother could lead to a punishment as heavy as committing the fault (*Bern* p. 207).

The second factor is that the abbots, who were not oblates, were tasked more with the relations with the exterior than the strict enforcement of the customs. Of course, there were some exceptions: founder and reformers were undoubtedly custom-makers and –therefore as well– custom-keepers. But besides these extraordinary circumstances, the abbots did not necessarily possess expert knowledge of the customs of a monastic place. Indeed, they were often outsiders, entering the monastery only as an adult. All the abbots of Cluny from Odo to Hugh –with the possible exception of Aymard (942-949) about whom nothing is known– had entered the monastery as adult converts, not as oblates. The fact that the *armarius*, the monk in charge of the library and, more importantly, the liturgy, had to be an oblate, is a perfect example that the oblates were the best suited to know the customs well (*Ulr* col. 749a). The abbots, who had arrived later in their lives than most monks and who were quite busy managing the relationship between the community and the external world, were probably less informed about proper customs than most.¹⁹

We can see, however, that things were changing from the late eleventh century regarding writing and making customs. There are many reasons for this transformation, but the most important is probably that more and more monks were now in the situation of the abbots: they were adult converts, who had not drunk at the fount of customs from their infancy onwards (to use an image of Bernard of Cluny: *Bernardus* 1726: 135 and *Dead of Night*: 352-53; Cochem 1998). Having arrived late to the monastery, after having learned another way of behaviour in the outside world, their sense of identity was not so intimately bound with custom observance as past monks. They were more ready to change them, based on important claims such as reason and logic, and reliance

¹⁸ One can read for instance few times in *Bern* a usage being justified *per antiquam consuetudinem*, e.g. p. 184 and p. 188. In the latter example, the old custom is reinforced by a new one taken by abbot Hugh.

¹⁹ See for instance the numerous references in the Cluniac customaries to the possible absence of the abbot from the abbey (*et si dominus abbas non adest*), as he was quite busy with external affairs.

more and more on written texts to remember the customs. It is in this context that *Bern* was written, and that an increasingly interventionist role was assigned to the abbots.

By glancing through the processes of custom-writing, custom-making and custom-keeping in eleventh-century Cluny, I hope to have shown that the golden cage in which most monks had been enclosed by their parents since childhood in order to be transformed into terrestrial angels, had its bars designed by these same angels *en devenir*, not by authoritarianism. Customs emanated from a multitude of sources, including a shadowy past and the idiosyncracies of the perfect brethren. But these customs needed the consensus of the community to be transmitted through gestures and speeches from generation to generation. Abbots might have had the last word, but only exceptionally did and could they play a larger role. If abbots attempted to transform radically the customs, they encountered resistance, anger and even in some cases murder plots. To conceive the abbots as the main controllers, producers and keepers of customs leads to a distorted picture of the monasticism of the central Middle Ages, which neither accounts for the weight ascribed to its traditions nor, maybe more importantly, for its survival and success.

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Rule Makers and Rule Breakers

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