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Erin L. Jordan

Old Dominion University, [ejordan@odu.edu](mailto:ejordan@odu.edu)

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# Gender Concerns: Monks, Nuns, and Patronage of the Cistercian Order in Thirteenth-Century Flanders and Hainaut

By Erin L. Jordan

The Cistercian order, which had its origins in the late eleventh century, transformed the spiritual landscape of western Europe. The order's insistence on a return to the austerity and simplicity that had originally informed Benedictine life reenergized monasticism, spawning hundreds of new abbeys within decades.<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Cistercians dominated monastic life, surpassing their black-robed predecessors in terms of popularity and replacing them among patrons as favored recipients of donations.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while a sizable body of historiography exists concerning the ability of men's houses to translate this appeal into spiritual and material success, questions remain regarding the order's female members. In particular, some scholars have constructed a narrative of financial difficulties and eventual decline for Cistercian nunneries, one that began in the thirteenth century and accelerated throughout the late Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> According to this narrative, such difficulties, by-products of the secondary status of religious women, manifested themselves in small monastic complexes and limited patrimonies. In her work on English Cistercians, Sally Thompson argues that religious women were dependent upon men because of their inferior position in

I would like to thank the members of the faculty seminar of the History Department at the University of Northern Colorado as well as Nicholas L. Syrett, Ann M. Little, Thomas Bredehoft, and Constance H. Berman for their contributions to this project. The suggestions from the very attentive anonymous readers for *Speculum* were extremely clear and helpful.

<sup>1</sup> Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), pp. 22–23. See also R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Pelican History of the Church 2 (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1970), pp. 250–51.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Tobin, *The Cistercians: Monks and Monasteries of Europe* (London, 1995); Léon Presouyre, *Le rêve cistercien* (Paris, 1990); Louis J. Lekai, *The White Monks: A History of the Cistercian Order* (Okauchee, Wis., 1953); R. A. Donkin, "The Growth and Distribution of the Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe," *Studia monastica* 9 (1967), 175–86; Jean-Baptiste Auberger, *L'unanimité cistercienne primitive: Mythe ou réalité?*, Cîteaux: Studia et Documenta 3 (Achel, Fr., 1986); Constance Hoffman Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia, 2000); and Marcel Pacaut, *Les moines blancs: Histoire de l'Ordre de Cîteaux* (Paris, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of scholarship that characterize female houses as poverty-stricken, poorly managed, or merely ignored by patrons include Southern, *Western Society and the Church*; C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (London, 1989), who describes nunneries as "small and poorly endowed" (p. 217); Janet Burton, "Yorkshire Nunneries in the Middle Ages: Recruitment and Resources," in *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England, 1000–1700*, ed. John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton (Phoenix Mill, Eng., 1997), pp. 104–16; and William C. Jordan, "The Cistercian Nunnery of La Cour Notre-Dame de Michery: A House That Failed," *Revue bénédictine* 95 (1985), 311–20.

medieval society and generally lacked a true religious vocation, characteristics that led to smaller, impoverished houses.<sup>4</sup> Cistercian nunneries are portrayed in monastic histories as constantly struggling and are often “lumped together as being poor, scandalous, passive institutions which were eschewed by medieval patrons.”<sup>5</sup> The majority of their houses are characterized by modern historians as enjoying a perilous existence at best, permanently poised on the brink of extinction and beset by a host of financial and spiritual difficulties.<sup>6</sup>

The economic difficulties experienced by the nuns (typically assumed to have led to spiritual difficulties) are often understood as stemming from a variety of factors, ranging from female mismanagement of resources to the problems posed by strict claustration.<sup>7</sup> However, one of the most common explanations proffered for material and financial difficulties experienced by nunneries involves patronage. It has been suggested that potential patrons of the Cistercian order gravitated toward foundations of men, drawn by the prestige offered by association with such austerity as well as the lure of powerful prayers. The ability of monks to curry the favor of patrons is perceived as leading to more donations, larger complexes, healthier internal economies, and the ability to support more monastics. While men’s abbeys benefited from the sustained generosity of patrons over the course of the centuries, women’s houses are portrayed as languishing, relegated in the eyes of patrons to secondary status. Perceived by founders as serving a more social than religious purpose in society (primarily as outlets for unmarried daughters) and unable to offer the type of commemorative practices so compelling to thirteenth-century patrons, Cistercian nuns are often presented as failing to attract the volume of donations deemed vital for the sustenance and

<sup>4</sup> Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1991), p. 11. Thompson presents similar arguments in “Why English Nunneries Had No History: A Study of the Problems of the English Nunneries Founded after the Conquest,” in *Medieval Religious Women, 1: Distant Echoes*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, *Cistercian Studies Series 71* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1984), pp. 131–49.

<sup>5</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archeology of Religious Women* (London, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Many of the studies making such assertions focus their attention on nunneries in England and are heavily influenced by the early work of Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge, Eng., 1922), which has been characterized by a number of recent studies as extremely misleading because of the largely anecdotal nature of her sources. See Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 91; also Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350–1540*, *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion 12* (Woodbridge, Eng., 1998), pp. 2–3. For the poverty of nuns on the Continent see Micheline de Fontette, *Les religieuses à l’âge classique du droit canon* (Paris, 1967), p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> On claustration see Peter F. Anson, “Papal Enclosure for Nuns,” *Cistercian Studies 3* (1968), 109–23 and 189–206; Caroline Bruzelius, “Hearing Is Believing: Clarissan Architecture ca. 1213–1340,” *Gesta 31* (1992), 83–91; James R. Cain, “Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women,” *Review for Religious 27* (1968), 243–80 and 652–71; Elizabeth Markowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: “Periculoso” and Its Commentators, 1298–1545*, *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law 5* (Washington, D.C., 1997); Gérard Huyghe, *La clôture des moniales: Des origines à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Roubaix, Fr., 1944); and Penelope Johnson, “The Cloistering of Medieval Nuns: Release or Repression, Reality or Fantasy?,” in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), pp. 27–39.

success of a monastic foundation.<sup>8</sup> The physical and economic differences that distinguished men's and women's abbeys are then interpreted as a reflection of the inferiority of nuns in medieval society, perceived as less capable than men of offering patrons an effective spiritual return on their material investments precisely because of their sex.

However, the reality of Cistercian life for both men and women differs considerably from the narrative presented above. Until quite recently, reliance upon outmoded assumptions and beliefs about the scarcity of documents prevented us from delving deeply into the history of Cistercian nuns. New research has addressed the relationship between women's houses and the order generally in hopes of resolving the perennial question "were there Cistercian nuns?" and laying to rest the debate between "official affiliation" versus "imitation of customs."<sup>9</sup> Studies of individual nunneries have proliferated, as have regional investigations that attempt to position Cistercian abbeys for women more accurately within the accepted historiography of the order.<sup>10</sup> As a result of those efforts, a

<sup>8</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 15. Assumptions about the secondary status of nuns are often based on modern presumptions that these women were seldom motivated by a true religious vocation but rather were forced into the nunnery by their families. See Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 217, and Lekai, *The Cistercians*, p. 353, who suggests that a true vocation was rarely the primary motive of women entering nunneries during this period. Challenges to such views are posed by Penelope Johnson, "Mulier et moniales: The Medieval Nun's Self-Image," *Thought* 64 (1989), 242–53; and Jean de la Croix Bouton, ed., *Les moniales cisterciennes*, 1/1 (Grignan, Fr., 1986), p. 85. For a discussion of the church's stance toward the ordination of women see Francine Cardman, "The Medieval Question of Women and Orders," *Thomist* 42 (1978), 582–99. These assumptions are by no means limited to Cistercian women. See the articles in *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger (New York, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> On the position of nuns in the early years of the order's history see Constance H. Berman, "Were There Twelfth-Century Cistercian Nuns?," *Church History* 68 (1999), 824–64; and Elizabeth Connor, "Le gouvernement des moniales: Point de vue historique," *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorem* 34 (1972), 230–36. On the specific issue of affiliation see Jean de la Croix Bouton, "The Life of 12th and 13th Century Nuns of Cîteaux," in *Medieval Religious Women*, 3: *Hidden Springs*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series 113 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1995), pp. 11–27; Coburn V. Graves, "English Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire," *Speculum* 54 (1979), 492–99; and Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "The Incorporation of Cistercian Nuns into the Order in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," in *Medieval Religious Women*, 3:85–134. More recent studies have broadened the definition of affiliation, advocating ways to determine membership in the order without relying exclusively on general chapter statutes. See Elizabeth Freeman, "'Houses of a Peculiar Order': Cistercian Nunneries in Medieval England, with Special Attention to the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 55 (2004), 245–86; and Anja Ostrowitzki, "L'attitude des cisterciens face aux moniales de Rhénanie aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles," in *Cîteaux et les femmes*, ed. Bernadette Barrière and Marie-Élizabeth Henneau (Grâne, Fr., 2001), pp. 239–47. For Belgium in particular see Roger De Ganck, "The Integration of Nuns in the Cistercian Order Particularly in Belgium," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 35 (1984), 235–47, and "The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 5 (1970), 169–87.

<sup>10</sup> G. Bourgeois, "Les granges et l'économie de l'abbaye de Nonenque au moyen âge," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 24 (1973), 139–60; Catherine E. Boyd, *A Cistercian Nunnery in Medieval Italy: The Story of Riforma in Saluzzo, 1220–1300*, Harvard Historical Monographs 18 (Cambridge, Mass., 1943); Brigitte Pipon, "Un monastère de moniales cisterciennes: L'Abbaye-aux-bois (1202–1906)," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 45 (1994), 91–108; and Heike Reimann, "Cistercian Nuns in the High Middle Ages: The Cistercians of Bergen in the Principality of Rügen (North

new understanding of the order's history and early development has emerged that is much more inclusive of women. However, an accurate understanding of the position of religious women in the spiritual and economic landscape of the Middle Ages has proven elusive, and our understanding of the impact of gender on the lives of monks and nuns remains incomplete. In spite of recent progress, questions remain regarding Cistercian nunneries and their status relative to their male counterparts that can only be answered through a comparative investigation that includes both monks and nuns.<sup>11</sup> The following examination of thirty-seven Cistercian foundations for men and women in thirteenth-century Flanders and Hainaut addresses these questions, focusing in particular on the connection between gender and patronage.

The aim of this study is twofold. First, it attempts to bring to light a considerable body of documentation about monasteries previously neglected by scholars.<sup>12</sup> Documents generated by Cistercian abbeys in this region number in the thousands, facilitating the formulation of an understanding of religious men and women based on evidence rather than on assumptions. Second, this study devel-

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Germany)," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 55 (2004), 231–43. For the current status of research on the question of Cistercian women see Eleanor Campion, "Cîteaux, Our Mother? Early Cistercian Women's History Revisited," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 34 (1999), 483–500; and Constance H. Berman, "Sisters in Arms: Reshaping the Research Agenda for the Future," *Magistra* 3/2 (1997), 48–69. While assumptions about poverty and mismanagement have proven extremely difficult to dislodge among general works, a few scholars have successfully subjected such arguments to scrutiny. These works are part of a larger discussion about medieval nuns in general, including Lisa Bitel, "Women's Monastic Enclosures in Early Ireland: A Study of Female Spirituality and Male Monastic Mentalities," *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986), 15–36; Marilyn Oliva, *Convent and Community*, and "Counting Nuns: A Prosopography of Late Medieval English Nuns in the Diocese of Norwich," *Medieval Prosopography* 16 (1995), 27–56; Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2001); Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); and Burton, "Yorkshire Nunneries," pp. 104–16.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars have chosen to study Cistercian monks (or nuns) in isolation for a number of reasons. Among the most prominent are beliefs about the dearth of extant records for women's houses. See David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London, 1953), and Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Holy Entrepreneurs: Cistercians, Knights, and Economic Exchange in Twelfth-Century Burgundy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991). However, Berman makes the cogent argument that it is not so much that the documents do not exist in archival form but that historians have overlooked and neglected them, particularly when preparing editions. See Constance H. Berman, "New Light on the Economic Practices of Cistercian Women's Communities," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 41 (2006), 75–88, at p. 75. A related assumption leading to neglect of women's houses is that an absence of records indicates poverty or poor management. See, for example, Thompson, "English Nunneries," p. 140, and *Women Religious*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> One of the problems that scholars face in certain regions is the absence (real or imagined) of evidence from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, forcing them to rely upon documents generated centuries later for the early history of Cistercian communities. For example, Thompson asserts that nunneries founded in postconquest England "seem to have been poor," yet she acknowledges that "evidence of their financial state in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is not easy to find" (*Women Religious*, p. 12). As a result of this assumption about the absence of evidence, itself open to debate, scholars often rely on evidence from the very turbulent and debt-ridden late Middle Ages or records generated during the Dissolution, a practice that distorts our understanding of the situation of these houses in earlier, more peaceful and prosperous, centuries.

ops an interpretative framework for the evidence we do have that more accurately understands the role played by gender. Attitudes about sexual difference undoubtedly shaped society's views of monks and nuns and their respective communities in the thirteenth century. However, in order to reposition nuns more accurately within the social and spiritual landscape of the Middle Ages, we need to reassess many of the gendered assumptions that inform modern notions of medieval perceptions of the sexes. Scholars argue that the sex of an abbey's monastics was a primary consideration of patrons, often assuming that it worked to the detriment of nuns for a number of reasons. They have suggested that after 1000, shifts in inheritance practices as well as new spiritual currents led patrons of both sexes to privilege men's communities in terms of new foundations and donations.<sup>13</sup> Further, they cite the increasing popularity of individual commemorative practices as working to the detriment of religious women, who were unable to offer the quantities of anniversary masses demanded by patrons and who were consequently perceived as less capable of guaranteeing salvation.<sup>14</sup> According to this line of reasoning, when gender operated in the realm of religious patronage, it ensured the financial success of men's abbeys and consigned most women's houses to serious difficulties.

There are several flaws in this analysis. First and foremost, the majority of studies in which it appears fail to cite sufficient evidence to support it, relying instead on isolated examples or conjecture.<sup>15</sup> Second, it positions the male monastic experience as the norm, automatically consigning any divergence by religious women to failure. Such an interpretive stance, while revealing much about mod-

<sup>13</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307–1485* (London, 1972); Emma Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England, 1066–1135* (Woodbridge, Eng., 1998); Victoria Chandler, "Politics and Piety: Influences on Charitable Donations during the Anglo-Norman Period," *Revue bénédictine* 90 (1980), 63–72; André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, Ind., 1993); and Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994). For suggestions that nunneries attracted fewer patrons than houses for men see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Women's Monastic Communities, 500–1100," in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett et al. (Chicago, 1989), pp. 208–39.

<sup>14</sup> In the words of Lawrence, "The lay donor who endowed a monastery hoped to reap spiritual benefits from his gift, and the most highly valued of these was one that women could not provide: women could not celebrate mass" (*Medieval Monasticism*, p. 219). See also Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, p. 310; and Janet E. Burton, *The Yorkshire Nunneries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Borthwick Papers 56 (York, 1979), p. 2. In her study of Yorkshire, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069–1215*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 40 (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), p. 145, Burton argues that nunneries attracted donations but not on the same scale as their male counterparts, which attracted patrons seeking individual forms of commemoration, such as obits, anniversary masses, and burials. See also Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 191 and 224, who argues that their ability to say masses made men's abbeys the recipients of ten times the bequests of their female counterparts; she also suggests that the demand for such services proved to be an additional expense for nunneries that was difficult to meet in the later Middle Ages, when their finances were already thinly stretched.

<sup>15</sup> For example, neither Lawrence nor Southern offers any evidence for their conclusions, anticipating that women would have been disadvantaged by certain commemorative practices based on logic rather than proof. See n. 14, above.



ern expectations regarding gender in the past, tells us little about the medieval reality. In particular, it obscures the daily experience of nuns. In addition, we need to examine how we understand the acquisition of wealth by monastic communities. The tendency to view material gain through a modern, Western, capitalist lens distorts our ability to understand the medieval attitude toward monastic communities.<sup>16</sup> Is it possible that we assign value to actions that would have elicited criticism from medieval society, subconsciously interpreting the material condition of a monastic community as a reflection of its spiritual worth in a way unrecognizable to a medieval patron, who preferred poverty and austerity to wealth and accumulation? This study argues that while physical and financial differences did exist between nunneries and monasteries, those differences were not necessarily predicated on perceptions stemming from gender. Patrons of both sexes established Cistercian nunneries, and those nunneries went on to attract gifts from both male and female donors, who sought prayers and commemorative services from them. Since patronage can no longer be identified as the root of the physical disparities between men's and women's houses, an alternative explanation is required. The evidence examined here suggests that such explanations lie in the consideration of more pragmatic factors, notably the date of foundation, location, and circumstances of origin.

Cistercian abbeys in the counties of Flanders and Hainaut provide an ideal opportunity to explore the complex relationship between monasticism, gender, and patronage in the thirteenth century. Located north of the kingdom of France and adjacent to the Holy Roman Empire, the powerful, densely populated, and highly urbanized county of Flanders was united to that of Hainaut under the rule of Baldwin IX in 1190. After Baldwin's unexpected demise on the Fourth Crusade, the two counties were ruled jointly for nearly a century by his daughters, Jeanne, acting with a regent from 1204 to 1206, then independently from 1206 to 1244, and Marguerite, from 1244 to 1278 (Flanders) and 1280 (Hainaut).<sup>17</sup> In spite of (or perhaps because of) their tumultuous personal and political lives, both women were avid supporters of religious communities in their domains.<sup>18</sup> Their preference for the Cistercian order was shared by patrons and potential adherents in

<sup>16</sup> This sentiment echoes that expressed by Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago, 1985), p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> Baldwin IX gained fame as one of Philip II's most powerful opponents and briefly reigned as the first Latin emperor of Constantinople. His wife Marie also died on crusade, leaving their eldest daughter Jeanne, a minor at the time, to inherit Flanders and Hainaut. For a detailed summary of these events see Robert Lee Wolff, "Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut, First Latin Emperor of Constantinople: His Life, Death, and Resurrection, 1172–1225," *Speculum* 27 (1952), 281–322.

<sup>18</sup> Although both women were married twice, circumstances resulted in their autonomous rule of the counties for most of their reigns. After Marguerite's abdication in 1278, her son Gui of Dampierre succeeded in the county of Flanders, while Jean of Avesnes, her son from a prior marriage, succeeded in Hainaut. For Jeanne and Marguerite see Theo Luykx, *Johanna van Constantinopel, gravin van Vlaanderen en Henegouwen: Haar leven (1199/1200–1244), haar regeering (1205–1244), vooral in Vlaanderen*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schoone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren, jaarg. 8, 5 (Antwerp, 1946); Geneviève de Cant, *Jeanne et Marguerite de Constantinople, comtesses de Flandre et de Hainaut du XIIIe siècle* (Brussels, 1995); and Erin L. Jordan, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, Eng., 2006).

the region, which witnessed the foundation of thirty-seven Cistercian communities by the year 1250, seven for men and thirty for women.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Cistercian nunneries in England and on the Continent, the official status of these foundations was never in question. They were mentioned in Cistercian general chapter statutes, enjoyed the exemptions typically granted to houses in the order, and were assigned father abbots from nearby Cistercian monasteries.<sup>20</sup>

Although documents do not exist for all of the Cistercian foundations in this region, significant archival collections are available for an impressive number of them.<sup>21</sup> Women's abbeys are particularly well represented in this sample, with charters for several foundations numbering in the hundreds for the thirteenth century alone. Such evidence provides an ideal opportunity to assess the impact of perceptions on monastic communities for both sexes, identifying what, if any, differences existed in the appeal of men's and women's houses to patrons and how such differences may have translated into physical and financial disparities. After exploring the foundation of new communities, this discussion will trace patterns in donations that divide along gender lines, identifying the considerations that may have informed the decisions of patrons. It will measure the extent to which the inability of nuns (who, as a result of their sex, could not be ordained) to offer more complex liturgical commemoration deterred donations, prompting

<sup>19</sup> This number includes the men's abbeys of Ter Duinen, Ter Doest, Aulne, Clairmarais, Cambron, Loos, and Boudelo and the women's abbeys of Ath, Beaupré at Grimminge, Beaupré sur-la-Lys, Blendecques, Bijloke, Bonham, Brayelle, Doornzele, Épinlieu, Flines, Fontenelle, Hemelsdale, Groeninghe, Maagdendale, Marquette, Mont d'Or, Nieuwenbos, Notre-Dame des Près, Notre-Dame d'Olive, Oosteeklo, Ravensberg, Saulchoir, Soleilmont, Spermalie, Ter Hagen, Ter Roosen, Vivier, Verger, Woestine, and Zwijveke. For the order generally in this region, which comprises the modern Belgian provinces of West Flanders, East Flanders, and Hainaut and the French departments of Pas-de-Calais and Nord, see Joseph Marie Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux en Belgique: Des origines (1132) au XXe siècle* (Forges-lez-Chimay, Belgium, 1926); and Édouard Michel, *Abbayes et monastères de Belgique: Leur importance et leur rôle dans le développement du pays* (Brussels, 1923). More recently see *Bernardus en de cisterciënzerfamilie in België, 1090–1990*, ed. Maurits Sabbe, Mathijs Lambertigts, and Frans Gistelincx (Louvain, 1990); Thomas Coomans, "Cistercian Nunneries in the Low Countries: The Medieval Architectural Remains," in *Studies in Cistercian Art and Architecture*, 6, ed. Meredith P. Lillich, Cistercian Studies Series 194 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2005), pp. 61–131; Dominique Mouret, "Les moniales cisterciennes en France aux XIIIe et XIIIe siècles" (thesis, Université de Limoges, June 1984); and *Van Beaupré tot Zwijveke: Cisterciënzers in Oost-Vlaanderen (1200–1999)*, ed. Martine Pieteraerens, Luc Robijns, and Geert Van Bockstaele (Ghent, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> *Statuta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis*, 2, ed. Joseph Marie Canivez, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique 9 (Louvain, 1933), 1232, 1234, 1236, and 1240.

<sup>21</sup> As noted earlier, scholars of religious women often cite the scarcity of extant documentation as the most serious impediment to forming an understanding of nuns' experience that is as accurate as our understanding of the experience of monks. However, women's abbeys in this region are nearly as well documented as their male counterparts. This study includes archival evidence from twenty-four of the thirty-seven houses in the region. Published collections, cited in the notes throughout this article, were consulted for six of the men's houses and ten of the women's (Ter Duinen, Ter Doest, Cambron, Clairmarais, Aulne, Boudelo, Zwijveke, Hemelsdale, Soleilmont, Épinlieu, Beaupré at Grimminge, Ravensberg, Bijloke, Groeninghe, Brayelle, and Spermalie). Unpublished material from the Archives départementales du Nord (ADN) and the Rijksarchief Gent was consulted for the remainder, including the abbeys of Marquette (ADN, 33 H non-côté), Flines (ADN, 31 H non-côté), Notre-Dame des Près (ADN, 30 H non-côté), Fontenelle (ADN, 32 H non-côté), Beaupré-sur-la-Lys (ADN, 29 H non-côté), Loos (ADN, 27 H non-côté), Doornzele (Rijksarchief Gent, Inventaris 27), Nieuwenbos (Rijksarchief Gent, Inventaris 50), and Oosteeklo (Rijksarchief Gent, Inventaris 31).



patrons to prefer men's houses. Ultimately, this study seeks to find evidence of a causal relationship between medieval attitudes about gender, religious patronage, and the economic and spiritual status of nunneries in thirteenth-century society. By applying both quantitative and qualitative analysis to the documents generated by these foundations, it is possible to query the logic underlying current assumptions about men's and women's abbeys, assumptions that continue to permeate Cistercian historiography, as well as histories of monasticism and medieval women more generally.

In many ways, the experience of the Cistercians in Flanders and Hainaut mirrored that of Cistercians elsewhere in Europe; six of the seven houses for men were founded in the twelfth century, while foundation activity on behalf of Cistercian nuns surged in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>22</sup> However, unlike England, Cistercian houses for men in Flanders and Hainaut were vastly outnumbered by houses for women. As noted above, by 1250, thirty abbeys for women had been founded in the two counties, compared with seven for men. Such figures clearly reflect the appeal of Cistercian nuns to potential founders and a failure of patrons generally to prefer houses for male monastics when making determinations about a new foundation. However, although founders in this region did not necessarily prefer monks to nuns, gender concerns can still be detected in foundation patterns. A correlation certainly exists between the sex of the founder and the sex of a foundation's monastics in Flanders and Hainaut. This correlation is most pronounced regarding men's abbeys, as all seven were founded by men: Ter Duinen in 1107, Clairmarais in 1128, Aulne in 1147, Cambron in 1148, Loos in 1149, Ter Doest in 1174, and Boudelo soon after 1200. Several of these houses were established at the tail end of the first wave of Cistercian expansion and became dominant forces in the monastic life of northern Europe.

Yet, while male founders clearly felt an affinity for monks, this correlation is not as exact in respect to foundations for Cistercian nuns in the region. Of the twenty-nine houses for which the identity of the founder is known, nineteen were founded by women, eight by men, and two jointly by a couple.<sup>23</sup> Eight of these

<sup>22</sup> In the region under discussion here, women's houses outnumbered men's by three to one. See Benoît Chauvin, "À travers les sources illustrées de quatre abbayes cisterciennes féminines de Flandre française," in *Cîteaux et les femmes*, pp. 101–18. The pattern of expansion in Flanders and Hainaut mirrors that of other regions, including Sens, where foundations for women began around 1200 and slowed considerably by 1251. A difference did exist, however, in the number of women's houses in Sens (twenty-two) compared with those for men (eighteen). See Constance H. Berman, "Fashions in Monastic Patronage: The Popularity of Supporting Cistercian Abbeys for Women in Thirteenth-Century Northern France," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 17 (1990), 36–45.

<sup>23</sup> The only abbey in the region for which a founder cannot be identified is Verger, established in 1227 along the southern boundary of the county of Flanders. Several of these abbeys have been the subject of individual case studies. See Lucienne Cnockaert, "De stichting der cisterciënzerinnen abdiij Ter Hagen onder Axel (1236)," *Cîteaux in de Nederlanden* 9 (1958), 121–31; J. J. de Smet, "Notice historique sur l'ancienne abbaye du Nouveau-Bois, à Gand," *Bulletins de l'Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique* 29 (1870), 548–58; L. van Puyvelde, *Un hôpital du moyen âge et une abbaye y annexée: La Biloke de Gand*, Université de Gand, Recueil de Travaux Publiés par la Faculté de philosophie et lettres, 57 (Gand, 1925); L. Adriaensen, "De ontstaansgeschiedenis en de verdere groei van de cistercienserinnenabdiij van Oosteeklo van ca. 1226–1506" (the-

houses were comital foundations, established by Jeanne or Marguerite, sisters and successive countesses of Flanders and Hainaut from 1206 to 1280. This group includes Ath (1216), Bijloke (1228), Doornzele (1234), Flines (1234), Marquette (1224), Nieuwenbos (1215), Oosteeklo (1228), and Ter Hagen (1235). While Ath, Bijloke, Marquette, Nieuwenbos, and Oosteeklo are attributed to Jeanne, Marguerite was responsible for Flines and Ter Hagen. The abbey of Doornzele is identified as the product of a joint effort of the two women. The countesses were essential to the foundation and success of these eight communities, contributing both material resources and administrative support.<sup>24</sup>

Eight of the remaining eleven abbeys known to have female founders—Ravensberg, Brayelle, Épinlieu, Mont d'Or, Beaupré at Grimminge, Zwijveke, Bonham, and Hemelsdale—were founded by a variety of individual women, ranging from powerful widows to girls still in their minority. The earliest Cistercian foundation for women in the region, Ravensberg, was established by Christina, identified in the archives as “dame de Ravensberg” in 1194.<sup>25</sup> The abbey of Brayelle, initially founded as Benedictine by Ada de Harnes in 1196, was officially incorporated into the Cistercian order in 1212. In 1216 Béatrice de Lens, a member of one of the most powerful families in the county of Hainaut, retired to a hermitage on the river Hayne, just outside the town of Mons; with the aid of Countess Jeanne, the simple dwelling was transformed into the abbey of Épinlieu, officially incorporated into the order by the end of that year.<sup>26</sup> The abbey of Mont d'Or, first located at Moorseele and later transferred to Wevelgem, was founded by Marguerite de Guînes, castellan of Courtrai, in 1214.<sup>27</sup> Beaupré at Grimminge was founded in 1228 by Alice de Boulers, the widow of Michel de Harnes, formerly constable of Flanders.<sup>28</sup> Zwijveke, first founded in 1214 by Mathilda de Termonde, became Cistercian in 1233.<sup>29</sup> The abbey of Bonham, located along

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sis, Université de Louvain, 1965–66); and É. Hautcœur, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Flines* (Paris, 1874). Others, however, remain seriously neglected in Cistercian historiography.

<sup>24</sup> Jordan, *Women, Power, and Patronage*, pp. 88–90.

<sup>25</sup> See Geert Berings, “Cinq abbayes cisterciennes en Flandre française: Fondation et histoire des premières décennies,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 45 (1994), 63–89. The foundation charter is published in Edouard de Coussemaker, “Notice sur l'abbaye de Ravensberg,” *Annales du Comité flamand de France* 6 (1861), 223–82, no. 1, p. 249.

<sup>26</sup> According to an eighteenth-century chronicle of the abbey, Béatrice used her dowry to provide the funds necessary for construction of the abbey. See Léopold Devillers, “Chronique de l'abbaye d'Épinlieu,” *Analectes pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique de la Belgique* 15 (1878), 161–86, at p. 161. The six *bonniers* that constituted the initial site were donated by Countess Jeanne in memory of her parents, Baldwin and Marie. Jeanne also arranged for the abbots of Villers and Cambron to inspect the site, paving the way for its official incorporation into the order. See R. Wellens, *Inventaire des archives de l'abbaye cistercienne d'Épinlieu: XIIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Brussels, 1970), pp. 6–7. The charters generated by the abbey, once numbering in the thousands, were nearly completely destroyed by fire in 1940. Many of them, however, were published prior to that date by Léopold Devillers, “Cartulaire de l'abbaye d'Épinlieu,” in *Description analytique de cartulaires et de chartriers accompagnée du texte de documents utiles à l'histoire du Hainaut*, 3 (Mons, 1867), pp. 7–70.

<sup>27</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 423. It was moved to Wevelgem as early as 1234.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446; J. Verschaeren, *Inventaris van het archief van de abdij van Beaupré te Grimminge* (Brussels, 1973).

<sup>29</sup> See below, n. 115.

the southern periphery of Flanders, was established by Béatrice de Bourbourg in 1233. The only heir of Gautier of Bourbourg, Béatrice was married to Arnould, son of Baudouin, count of Guînes, and became an active patron of several houses in the region.<sup>30</sup> Hemelsdale, first located at Essen-lez-Dixmude, was founded by the widowed Elizabeth de Steinfort, with the consent of her daughters Marguerite and Adelaide.<sup>31</sup>

The three remaining abbeys known to have been founded by women had joint founders. The abbey of Groeninghe was founded in 1237 by two sisters, Jeanne and Agnes of Rodenborch, described in the charters as the daughters of Wautier, seigneur of Rodenborch. It became a favored foundation of Béatrice of Brabant, the widow of Countess Marguerite's son Guillaume. Although Guillaume's death occurred while Béatrice was still quite young, she chose to stay in the county of Flanders instead of returning home to Brabant. Rather than agreeing to a second marriage, Béatrice lived a life of celibacy, eventually retiring to the abbey of Groeninghe several years before her death.<sup>32</sup> Not uncommonly in this region, several abbeys began as informal communities of women, described in the documents as beguines. Later elevated to abbatial status and officially incorporated into the Cistercian order, these abbeys include Fontenelle, established in 1212 by the sisters Jeanne and Agnes d'Aulnoy, and Notre-Dame des Près, attributed to Sainte, Roselle, and Foukeut de la Hale, inhabitants of the town of Douai.<sup>33</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, only two of the Cistercian abbeys for women in Flanders and Hainaut were founded jointly by a husband and wife. The endowment of the abbey of Maagdendale, located near Flobecq in Hainaut, was provided by Gossuin d'Aubeke and his wife Marie in 1233. The initial site near Flobecq soon proved less than conducive to monastic life, prompting half of the community to relocate to Oudenaarde.<sup>34</sup> In a similar fashion, the abbey of Saulchoir was first

<sup>30</sup> Berings, "Cinq abbayes," pp. 79–81. Béatrice's marriage to Arnould plays a central role in the chronicle of Lambert of Ardres. See Leah Shopkow, *The History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres: Lambert of Ardres* (Philadelphia, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 433; M. Desideratus, *De abdij's Hemelsdale te Eesen (1237–1270), te Zillebeke (1270–1295), te Werken (1295–1575), te Diksmuide (1607–1671), te Brugge (1671–1804): Geschiedekundige aantekeningen* (Westmalle, 1949). In the original foundation charter Elizabeth announced her desire to enter the convent upon its completion, along with her two daughters. See Charles Louis Carton and Ferdinand van de Putte, *Chronique et cartulaire de l'abbaye de Hemelsdale* (Bruges, 1858), no. 1, December 1237, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 414. Originally founded approximately three kilometers from Courtrai, at Marke, the abbey's transfer to Groeninghe was arranged by Béatrice in 1258. See Marguerite Gastout, *Béatrix de Brabant, landgravine de Thuringe, reine des romains, comtesse de Flandre, dame de Courtrai (1225?–1288)*, Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie, 3rd ser., 13 (Louvain, 1943). The wealthy widow provided a generous endowment for the nuns, donating land and funding the construction of a new monastic complex, which was ready by 1285.

<sup>33</sup> For the connection between the Cistercians and beguines see De Ganck, "Integration of Nuns" (above, n. 9). For the foundation and early history of Notre-Dame des Près see Gaele Lachambre-Cordier, "Les moniales de Notre-Dame-des-Prés de Douai à travers un martyrologe gothique," in *Cîteaux et les femmes*, pp. 249–65. The archival collections for both Fontenelle and Notre-Dame des Près are considerable and are currently housed in the Archives départementales du Nord in Lille.

<sup>34</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 442; *Monasticon belge*, ed. Ursmer Berlière et al., 8 vols. (Bruges, 1890–1993), 7:392. The original site near the village of Flobecq was considered too dangerous because of its isolation. Half of the nuns of the community were dispatched from the abbey of Ath,

located on land near Barbarnisart, donated by Jean and Agnes de le Take, the former described in the documents as a “bourgeois of Tournai.” Thirteen nuns were brought from the nearby abbey of Brayelle. However, by 1238, the abbey had moved to a more hospitable location, called Saulchoir.<sup>35</sup>

The eight Cistercian nunneries founded by men include Beaupré-sur-la-Lys, established in 1220 by Daniel, seigneur of Béthune, and officially incorporated in 1224, and Spermalie, first founded in 1200 and officially incorporated in 1234.<sup>36</sup> The abbey of Ten Roosen, although often attributed to Countess Jeanne because of her role in securing its official incorporation, was actually founded by the knight Raso de Fontinella in 1228.<sup>37</sup> Blendecques, established as early as 1186 by Ghison d’Aire, was officially accepted by the general chapter in 1228. Similarly, the abbey of Soleilmont housed Benedictine nuns when it was founded in 1088.<sup>38</sup> It later adopted the customs of Cîteaux and was incorporated into the order in 1237 with the assistance of Baudouin de Courtney, count of Namur, and Countess Jeanne. Because of the absence of extant records, little is known of the abbeys of

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established over a decade earlier by Countess Jeanne. See Bernard Augustyn, “Abdij van Maagden-dale te Pamele-Oudenaarde,” *Handelingen van de Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Oudenaarde* 31 (1994), 73–105. The few charters that exist for this abbey are primarily housed in the Rijksarchief, Ronse, Belgium, although some can be found at the Stadsarchief, Oudenaarde, Belgium.

<sup>35</sup> Canivez, *L’Ordre de Cîteaux*, pp. 405–6.

<sup>36</sup> The charters of Beaupré-sur-la-Lys are currently housed in ADN, 29 H. The initial site of Spermalie included a chapel at Hunkevliet, first founded by a woman named Gela. Following her death around 1200, the chapel, along with the land on which it was built, was donated to the Cistercian order. See Canivez, *L’Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 430. Plans to erect an abbey on the site were approved by Countess Jeanne in 1235 and by Gregory IX in the same year. However, construction did not actually begin until 1241, under the supervision of Egidius van Bredene. See E. I. Strubbe, *Egidius van Bredene (11.–1270), grafelijk ambtenaar en stichter van de abdij Spermalie: Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het grafelijke bestuur en van de cistercienser orde in het dertiende eeuwse Vlaanderen*, Université de Gand, Recueil de Travaux Publiées par la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres 94 (Gand, 1942).

<sup>37</sup> Canivez, *L’Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 449. The abbey, a daughter house of Aulne, would eventually move twice, from Moorseele to Mylbeke and eventually to a site near Alost (*Monasticon belge*, 7:449). The six *bonniers* that constituted the second site of the abbey were donated by Countess Marguerite, who orchestrated its transfer (ADN, 2187 51 H, no. 1180, March 1256). See Canivez, *Statuta*, 2 (above, n. 20), 1236, p. 166, for the official incorporation.

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed summary of Blendecques in the early years after its foundation see Berings, “Cinq abbayes,” pp. 66–71. It has been impossible to determine the identity of the founder of Soleilmont. Canivez (*L’Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 366) says that the initial foundation, instigated by Henri l’Aveugle, count of Namur, was intended for wives of the men who followed Godefroid de Bouillon on the First Crusade. The chronology of the events, however, suggests otherwise. Also problematic is the fact that the count of Namur in 1088 was Albert III, not Henri l’Aveugle. In any case, Soleilmont’s affiliation with the Cistercians, as a daughter house of Aulne, occurred in 1237 and was supported by the abbots of Villers, Val-Saint-Lambert, and Grandpré. See also Elizabeth Connor, “Ten Centuries of Growth: The Cistercian Abbey of Soleilmont,” in *Medieval Religious Women*, 1 (above, n. 4), pp. 251–67; Philippe Buxant, “Les bâtiments conventuels de l’ancienne abbaye Notre-Dame de Soleilmont,” *Revue des archéologues et historiens d’art de Louvain* 19 (1986), 115–19; and Ignace van Spilbeek, “L’abbaye de Soleilmont et la ville de Gand,” *Messenger des sciences historiques de Belgique* (1882), pp. 478–86.

Vivier, founded by Eustache de Neuville in 1219; Woestine, attributed to Gerard de Renescure; and Notre-Dame d'Olive, established around 1233 by a hermit named Guillaume.<sup>39</sup>

As the above discussion indicates, though an exact correlation did not exist between the sex of an abbey's founder and that of its intended monastics, certain trends are evident. Women were more likely to establish houses for nuns, and men were more likely to establish houses for monks. This evidence casts doubt on past arguments that founders of both sexes preferred abbeys for men.<sup>40</sup> However, the existence of an affinity for one's sex seems hardly surprising, considering the practical concerns that often informed acts of religious patronage. The discussion here is predicated upon the notion that the decisions made by a patron when contemplating a potential new foundation were deliberate. Considering the medieval understanding of the purpose of patronage, an array of factors would have influenced such decisions, ranging from the perceived piety of the order to economic constraints to a determination to create religious opportunities for family members. In the thirteenth century, individuals had a wide array of monastic and religious orders from which to choose. Affiliation with Cîteaux was by no means accidental but should be viewed as the product of careful consideration on behalf of the founder.<sup>41</sup> In a similar manner, the sex of the new community's monastics was also a determination made by the founder. One such consideration influencing this decision would have been the desire of the founder to enter the community after it was established. That is certainly the case with a number of Cistercian abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut. The founders of the abbeys of Épinlieu, Fontenelle, Groeninghe, Mont d'Or, Notre-Dame des Près, Oosteeklo, and Hemelsdale all took orders in the community whose establishment they had instigated.<sup>42</sup> For these women, the foundation of a Cistercian nunnery represented a marriage of piety and pragmatism.

<sup>39</sup> For Woestine see Berings, "Cinq abbayes," p. 78. Few documents remain for the abbey of Notre-Dame d'Olive, although the original site has been subject to excavation. See Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, pp. 381–87.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, the early work of Janet Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire* (above, n. 14). However, these arguments have been revisited by Burton in "The 'Chariot of Aminadab' and the Yorkshire Priory of Swine," in *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200–1630*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Rees Jones (Cambridge, Eng., 2001), pp. 26–42. (I would like to thank Janet Burton for bringing this article to my attention.)

<sup>41</sup> This is not to suggest that founders were motivated solely by practical considerations or that one can even separate pragmatic and pious motives in evaluating such actions. Clearly such concerns would have been conflated in the mind of the medieval donor. See Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession* (above, n. 14), p. 34, as well as the general discussion of patronage above, n. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Though not officially credited with the foundation of the abbey of Bijloke, the Utenhove family was instrumental in providing its endowment. Not surprisingly, Elisabeth and Maria, two members of the family, served as its first two abbesses (*Gallia Christiana*, 5:221). Although Mathilda of Termonde, the founder of Zwijveke, did not enter the abbey, her daughter Heylwidis did, serving as its first abbess from 1223 to 1232 (*ibid.*, p. 225). The situation in Flanders and Hainaut contrasts sharply with that in England, where few female founders or female kin of male founders joined the new community. See Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), p. 69; and Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, pp. 34–35.

A second, and related, advantage enjoyed by a founder was residence within a community's walls without taking orders. Jeanne and Marguerite, founders of Marquette and Flines respectively, constructed houses within the walls of their favored foundations, visiting periodically during their rules and becoming permanent residents at the end of their lives. Although Flines remained the foundation to which she was the most personally attached, Marguerite also funded the construction of a residence within the walls of Marquette.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Béatrice of Courtrai constructed a house within the enclosure of the abbey of Groeninghe. Although not the abbey's founder, the daughter-in-law of the current countess had established herself as Groeninghe's most powerful and generous patron, one worthy of such a privilege as temporarily residing within the community's walls.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, for a female patron, establishing an abbey for women offered certain opportunities that an abbey housing men did not.

Gender also played a role in other, less obvious ways than those described above. Recent studies have challenged assumptions about the restrictions placed upon the ability of secular women to wield power and alienate property in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>45</sup> While I would argue that women had more access to resources than previously supposed, there is no doubt that available land was increasingly difficult to come by as the centuries progressed. The large tracts of arable that made up monastic patrimonies in the twelfth century were scarce at best in the thirteenth. Individuals interested in establishing a monastic foundation would have been aware of this new economic reality, and it may have predisposed them toward nunneries, perceived as tending to require more modest endowments than their male counterparts. In other words, it was not a question of whether female founders in the thirteenth century were less able than their predecessors to alienate the land they had inherited but rather of whether their inheritances overall had diminished, so that women, as well as men, had fewer resources at their disposal when contemplating a new foundation. Such market conditions, when combined with gendered perceptions about the needs of religious women compared with those of men, explain why the thirteenth century witnessed twenty-eight foundations for nuns and only one for monks; founders of both sexes may have gravitated to abbeys intended for women

<sup>43</sup> Maurice Vanhaeck, ed., *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Marquette*, 1, Société d'Études de la Province de Cambrai, Recueil, 46 (Lille, 1937), p. v; Hautcœur, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Flines* (above, n. 23), p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 414. This is not to say that women were categorically denied residence within the walls of a men's abbey. However, the examples are so infrequent that it seems safe to conclude that secular women seeking residence within an abbey's walls tended to gravitate to nunneries.

<sup>45</sup> A number of scholars have encouraged a reassessment of our understanding of female agency in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including Amy Livingstone, "Noblewomen's Control of Property in Early Twelfth-Century Blois-Chartres," *Medieval Prosopography* 18 (1995), 55–72; Linda E. Mitchell, "The Lady Is a Lord," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 18 (1995), 71–98; Kimberly A. LoPrete, "The Gender of Lordly Women: The Case of Adela of Blois," in *Pauns or Players?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin, 2003), pp. 90–110; and Erin L. Jordan, "The 'Abduction' of Ida of Boulogne: Assessing Women's Agency in Thirteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 30 (2007), 1–20.



during this period precisely because they required smaller patrimonies and less land.<sup>46</sup>

While such practical considerations would have influenced a founder's decision, the spiritual appeal of abbeys should not be discounted. Religious communities for women abounded in this region, varying from traditional Benedictine nuns to the more innovative Victorine canonesses. By the middle of the century, beguinages dotted the landscape of Flanders, offering women an opportunity to live a religious life without exacting a binding commitment. When presented with this range of possibilities, patrons interested in finding a place for themselves or a member of their family did not have to resort to the establishment of an entirely new community.<sup>47</sup> When they did, the Cistercians were by no means the only option. However, as the number of new abbeys for women founded in Flanders and Hainaut between 1200 and 1250 suggests, many patrons chose to do exactly that. Clearly, these founders did not view an abbey of Cistercian nuns as a spiritual liability but believed that their material investment would guarantee a pious as well as a practical return. As revealed in the wording of numerous foundation charters, in establishing and supporting abbeys for women, founders understood themselves as acting in the interests of the divine, ultimately furthering their own chances of salvation.<sup>48</sup>

Further, while many modern observers conclude that the humble nature of most nunneries in the region would have been viewed as a liability, deterring future donations by patrons who feared their imminent collapse, the medieval reality may have differed considerably. In remaining small with modest endowments, and faced with the challenges posed by patrimonies not exactly ideal for cultivation, women's houses were actually more successful than their male counterparts in adhering to the standards of poverty and austerity espoused by the Cistercian order.<sup>49</sup> By the middle of the thirteenth century, Cistercian abbeys for men in the region had become enormous, generating considerable profits from their entre-

<sup>46</sup> This possibility is raised by Constance H. Berman, "Les acquisitions rurales des abbayes cisterciennes féminines en l'Île-de-France," *Paris et l'Île-de-France* 48 (1997), 113–20, at p. 119. See also Pamela Stucky Skinner, "The Cartulary of Clairmarais, a Monastery of Cistercian Nuns at Reims, France, c. 1220–1460: Edition and Commentary" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 2005), p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> For a similar discussion see Skinner, "Clairmarais," pp. 46–47.

<sup>48</sup> For examples of such declarations see the foundation of the abbey of Beaupré-sur-la-Lys (ADN, 29 H 3/25, 1221) and that of Épinlieu (Devillers, "Cartulaire de l'abbaye d'Épinlieu" [above, n. 26], no. 4, November 1216, pp. 63–64). A more detailed discussion of the piety motivating founders as reflected in the charters can be found in Jordan, *Women, Power, and Patronage* (above, n. 18), pp. 89–91; and Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> According to Lekai, the true goal of the order was the "establishment of an austere life in poverty, simplicity, and undisturbed solitude" (*The Cistercians* [above, n. 1], p. 32). To quote Southern: "The Cistercian ideal demands complete self-abnegation, poverty, simplicity, retirement, purity, and refinement of spiritual life" (*Western Society and the Church* [above, n. 1], p. 252). The ability of the order's men as well as its women to attain this goal has been challenged by a number of scholars, including Constance Hoffman Berman, *Medieval Agriculture, the Southern French Countryside, and the Early Cistercians: A Study of Forty-Three Monasteries*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 76/5 (Philadelphia, 1986).

preneurial ventures. Ter Duinen and Ter Doest were so invested in the cloth industry that they maintained fleets to carry wool from their flocks to English weavers. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the abbey of Ter Duinen commanded a patrimony large enough to support 120 choir monks and 248 lay brothers.<sup>50</sup> According to Louis Lekai, the monks had successfully transformed twenty-five thousand acres of wasteland into arable, which they divided into twenty-five granges.<sup>51</sup> Of the seven abbeys for men in this region, only one experienced financial difficulty in the thirteenth century—the abbey of Boudelo, founded just after 1200. The other six thrived, benefiting from the efforts of hundreds of lay brothers, access to extensive capital, and proximity to the urban markets of Flanders.

Although often viewed by historians as an indication of spiritual as well as material success, such secular entanglements could also impede the ability of these communities to maintain the high standards of poverty, isolation, and austerity to which the Cistercian order aspired. Their prosperity, praised by modern scholars as indicative of an abbey's ability to attract patrons and effectively manage assets, may have appeared differently in the thirteenth century. After all, it was precisely the accusations of decadence and material wealth that had led to the creation of the Cistercian order, and the desire to avoid the perceived mistakes of their predecessors informed much of the general chapter's early legislation. Yet, in spite of the Cistercian mandate on austerity, men's abbeys in this region had acquired vast patrimonies and incomes, becoming key players in the burgeoning economy of the region. It is possible that potential patrons were wary of supporting abbeys with such extensive entanglements in the secular world, fearing their attention might be diverted from the task at hand: securing the salvation of others. In contrast, most women's houses in Flanders and Hainaut controlled limited patrimonies, often consisting of marginal land that required reclamation and produced modest yields. They tended to be located in areas of the counties that experienced flooding or were prone to disease. In her study of female monasticism in late-medieval England, Marilyn Oliva suggests that rather than hindering their ability to attract patrons, such obstacles worked in the nuns' favor. In being viewed as "having more to conquer," nuns were considered "holier and more worthy of people's respect and patronage."<sup>52</sup>

As will be discussed below in connection with Table 2, the tendency to equate material wealth with spiritual success and poverty with failure may be more modern than medieval. When accounting for the difference in size and numbers of monastics, men's houses by no means outpaced their female counterparts in terms of requests for prayers and more concrete commemorative services. In limiting

<sup>50</sup> *Monasticon belge*, 3/2:327. Southern, who provides these figures, describes the patrimony of Ter Duinen as "one of the biggest agrarian enterprises of the Middle Ages" (*Western Society and the Church*, p. 265).

<sup>51</sup> Lekai, *The Cistercians*, p. 298.

<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Oliva argues that the wealth and material prosperity enjoyed by so many men's abbeys threatened to divert their attention from their spiritual purpose in society (*Convent and Community* [above, n. 6], p. 213).

their involvement in commercial transactions, overseeing small patrimonies, and building modest churches and other conventual buildings, nuns may have been better able than monks to maintain a standard of living closely aligned with Cistercian ideals.<sup>53</sup> Their success is reflected not only in their popularity among patrons but in the constant pressure placed on nunneries in this region to accept additional members. The addition of new recruits to a community, even if their endowment was limited, should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of mismanagement; it could instead reflect a community's continued ability to attract aspirants interested in the Cistercian commitment to poverty and simplicity.<sup>54</sup>

Proof may lie in the appeal of the mendicants in the region, who eclipsed Cistercian monks during the thirteenth century in popularity and patronage. While only one Cistercian monastery was established in Flanders and Hainaut after 1200 (Boudelo), the region witnessed the foundation of dozens of Dominican and Franciscan convents. These newest arrivals on the religious scene, founded on the dual mandate of the *vita apostolica* and absolute poverty, proved to be serious competitors to the White Monks, in terms of both patrons and recruits.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, the Cistercian order continued to dominate women's monastic life in the region throughout the century, facing few challenges from the mendicant orders. While the evidence examined here indicates that gender informed the actions of patrons in a variety of ways, it seldom worked to the disadvantage of nuns in the realm of foundations.

In the case of donations to existing communities of Cistercians, the influence of gender is slightly more subtle. Quantitative analysis of extant documents for fifteen of the abbeys included in this study indicates that men were just as likely as women, and in some cases even more so, to direct donations to Cistercian nuns. (See Table 1.) With the exception of Boudelo, Flines, Zwijveke, and Ravensberg, all of the abbeys included in my quantitative analysis received more donations from men than women. These results would be even more dramatic if the gifts of the countesses of Flanders and Hainaut were subtracted from the totals here,

<sup>53</sup> As argued by Barrière, the austerity of these communities was perhaps deliberate, a manifestation of the nuns' success in realizing the ideals of the order. See Bernadette Barrière, "Les patrimoines cisterciens: Principes et réalités," *Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire du Berry* 136 (1998), 31–40; and Bourgeois, "L'abbaye de Nonenque" (above, n. 10). See also Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 373. For a discussion of the inherent contradiction between patronage and the ideals of absolute poverty that informed thirteenth-century spirituality see Erin Jordan, "A Clash of Wills: Religious Patronage and the *Vita apostolica* in Thirteenth-Century Flanders," in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000–1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power*, ed. Emilia Jamrozak and Janet Burton, *Europa Sacra* 2 (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 241–61.

<sup>54</sup> See Brenda M. Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women in the Low Countries: A Special Case?," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 61 (1981), 7–29. Bolton challenges the notion that such women were forced into convents by families attempting to dispose of "surplus" daughters. Rather, the numbers of convents continued to climb because of their appeal to women with a true monastic vocation.

<sup>55</sup> A fascinating discussion of the shift in spiritual *mentalité* that prompted so many patrons to turn their attention to the mendicants can be found in Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities," *Past and Present* 63 (1974), 4–32.

TABLE 1  
 Donations to Cistercian Foundations in Flanders and Hainaut (1200–1300)

Foundation	Rents	Land	Tithes	Total
(M) Boudelo (post-1200)				20
Men (35%)	1	3	3	7
Women (40%)	1	3	4	8
Couples (25%)	1	2	2	5
(M) Cambron (1148)				82
Men (78%)	22	9	33	64
Women (5%)	2	2	—	4
Couples (17%)	9	3	2	14
(M) Clairmarais (1128/1140)				17
Men (65%)	8	2	1	11
Women (18%)	2	1	—	3
Couples (18%)	2	1	—	3
(M) Ter Duinen (1107/1139)				75
Men (59%)	28	13	3	44
Women (9%)	4	3	—	7
Couples (32%)	14	10	—	24
(W) Beaupré at Grimminge (1228)				25
Men (48%)	6	3	3	12
Women (20%)	4	1	—	5
Couples (32%)	5	3	—	8
(W) Beaupré sur la Lys (1220/1224)				13
Men (62%)	—	4	4	8
Women (23%)	2	1	—	3
Couples (15%)	—	1	1	2
(W) Épinlieu (1216)				42
Men (60%)	8	13	4	25
Women (24%)	3	6	1	10
Couples (17%)	2	4	1	7
(W) Flines (1234)				59
Men (34%)	14	5	1	20
Women (63%)	12	22	3	37
Couples (3%)	1	1	—	2
(W) Fontenelle (1212)				47
Men (57%)	9	16	2	27
Women (28%)	4	9	—	13
Couples (15%)	1	6	—	7
(W) Hemelsdale (1238/1241)				7
Men (43%)	2	1	—	3
Women (29%)	2	—	—	2
Couples (29%)	1	1	—	2
(W) Marquette (1224)				67
Men (33%)	14	8	—	22
Women (30%)	9	8	3	20
Couples (37%)	12	9	4	25

*(continued)*

TABLE 1 (continued)

Foundation	Rents	Land	Tithes	Total
(W) Notre-Dame des Près (1218)				47
Men (43%)	8	11	1	20
Women (40%)	2	17	—	19
Couples (17%)	4	4	—	8
(W) Ravensberg (1194)				26
Men (15%)	—	3	1	4
Women (42%)	7	2	2	11
Couples (42%)	5	5	1	11
(W) Soleilmont (1088/1237)				4
Men (50%)	1	1	—	2
Women (25%)	—	1	—	1
Couples (25%)	—	1	—	1
(W) Zwijveke (1221/1228)				24
Men (46%)	4	6	1	11
Women (54%)	5	5	3	13
Couples	—	—	—	—

M = men's houses. W = women's houses.

Dates are the dates of foundation. When two dates are given, the first is the date of the original foundation; the second is the date of incorporation within the Cistercian order.

Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCES: See n. 21.

as they were responsible for the vast majority of the donations intended for Flines and for all of the donations made to Boudelo by women.<sup>56</sup> Medieval gender norms privileging men may explain this pattern to some extent. Although women had considerably more access to authority in the thirteenth century than previously suggested, there is no doubt that men still wielded more power, controlling more resources and possessing the ability to disperse them.<sup>57</sup>

However, other patterns in donations emerge that are slightly less predictable. First and foremost, the results here challenge arguments by scholars that donors of both sexes favored men's houses when attempting to secure their salvations: female donors in this sample disproportionately directed donations to foundations for women, virtually neglecting men's abbeys. With the exception of Boudelo (explained above), the men's abbeys included in this sample failed to attract female donors of even modest numbers. Ter Duinen, Cambron, and Clairmarais all received significantly greater numbers of donations from men than from women, suggesting that female patrons turned to Cistercian nuns with consider-

<sup>56</sup> Donations by men considerably outnumber those by women, 64 percent to 36 percent, and the discrepancy would be even greater if Marguerite's donations were excluded. While the abbey of Zwijveke proves the exception to the overall pattern, the difference is relatively minor, with women granting two more donations than men.

<sup>57</sup> Erin L. Jordan, "Female Founders: Exercising Authority in Thirteenth-Century Flanders and Hainaut," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 553–61.

able frequency.<sup>58</sup> Even when men made a disproportionately greater number of donations to the women's abbeys (Fontenelle, Beaupré-sur-la-Lys, Hemelsdale, Soleilmont, Épinlieu, and Beaupré at Grimminge), the disparity is considerably less pronounced than in the case of men's abbeys. While men tended to direct more overall donations to abbeys regardless of sex, women were more inclined to favor abbeys of women when dispensing patronage. While quantitative analysis reveals who preferred to direct patronage to communities of which sex, qualitative analysis explains why. As the examples included here demonstrate, preferences for men's or women's abbeys were clearly prompted by both pragmatic and pious concerns.

For patrons of both sexes, a certain number of donations were prompted by practical considerations, as revealed in the charters produced for individual abbeys. While, predictably, women made donations to abbeys that they later entered as nuns, men directed donations to communities on behalf of female relatives who had become or were planning to become members.<sup>59</sup> For instance, in 1250 Pierre Ogiel made a donation to the abbey of Beaupré on behalf of his sister Aighline prior to her entrance into the abbey.<sup>60</sup> Roger de Potelles and his wife Gelvide agreed to donate land located at Potelles to the abbey of Fontenelle in 1250 on behalf of their daughter Elekine, described in the charter as a future choir nun.<sup>61</sup> In 1281 Jean, seigneur of Velu, donated land to the abbey of Notre-Dame des Près. He stipulated that the revenue generated by the land be used only for the necessities of his daughter Isabelle, already a nun.<sup>62</sup> Notre-Dame des Près also received an annual rent of two *muids* of wheat from Robert de Quiery, who made the donation expressly on behalf of Susenain, "his daughter, a nun of that place,"<sup>63</sup> and land at Beaumont from Baude li Caudrelier on behalf of his daughter Ghislaine, "*religieuse* of the abbey."<sup>64</sup> In 1261 Renaud du Hamel donated an annual rent of ten *sous paris* to the abbey of Blendecques to pay for the habits needed by his sister, Liesse, over the course of her lifetime.<sup>65</sup> The abbey of Marquette was the recipient of several donations made by men on behalf of relatives who were members of the community. In 1246 Jean de Mandre agreed to an annual payment of 100 *sous de Flandre* on behalf of his sister Isabelle. After what seems to have been an extended dispute, Bernard de Bailleul, seigneur of Ledrenghiem, sold a fief at Damme to the

<sup>58</sup> Although women were outnumbered by men in terms of overall representation among donors, the disparity is relatively minor for two of the abbeys: women were responsible for almost as many donations as men to Marquette and Notre-Dame des Près. For three abbeys—Flines, Ravensberg, and Zwijveke—women outnumbered men as donors.

<sup>59</sup> However, this pattern occurs far less often than one would assume. See Erin L. Jordan, "For the Safety of My Soul: Gender and Monasticism in the Thirteenth Century," forthcoming.

<sup>60</sup> ADN, 29 H 3/28, 2 April 1250.

<sup>61</sup> The land in question was held in fief of Countess Marguerite for an annual rent of 2,000 *livres blancs* (ADN, 32 H 18/221). The donation was also approved by an official of Cambrai (ADN, 32 H 18/222).

<sup>62</sup> ADN, 30 H 14/204, October 1281: ". . . ne en autres usages il ne les puerit ne doivent tourner ne convertir en tout ne en partie fors es necessites sereur Isabiel me fille devant dite."

<sup>63</sup> ADN, 30 H 14/198, 1273.

<sup>64</sup> ADN, 32 H 14/184, 3 June 1257.

<sup>65</sup> Berings, "Cinq abbayes" (above, n. 25), p. 71.



abbey at a reduced price in lieu of the 450 *livres flandrenses* he still owed for the entrance of his sister Mathilda.<sup>66</sup> Guy, count of Flanders and Hainaut, made several donations to the abbey of Flines, including an annual rent of 100 *livres* “for the needs and necessities of his dear daughter Sister Jeanne, nun of Flines.”<sup>67</sup>

While these examples reveal the pragmatic appeal of Cistercian women’s abbeys to patrons, measuring their spiritual appeal is more complicated. Scholars have long questioned the ability of nuns to offer spiritual compensation on par with their male counterparts, suggesting that donors interested in securing salvation tended to look to abbeys of monks.<sup>68</sup> However, the evidence provided by the wording of the donation charters themselves challenges such assumptions. Although often dismissed as merely formulaic phrases that lack individual meaning, I would argue that the presence of *pro anima* clauses in charters is, in fact, significant. While not explicitly requesting prayers, the inclusion of such phrases as *pro remedio anime sue*, *pro salute anime mee*, or *in puram et perpetuam elemosinam* does represent the value placed on the intercessory powers of the community and a belief in the efficacy of its members’ prayers.<sup>69</sup> Such clauses often included the name of the donor, his or her spouse or children, and general mention of ancestors and successors, indicative of the donor’s intention to share the earned collective goodwill of the monastic community with a number of close relations. Detailed examination of monastic records indicates that such clauses were not included in all charters but were restricted to those that conveyed something of worth to the community in question. In other words, patrons recognized that they could not expect a spiritual return unless a material investment had been made. Hence, *pro anima* clauses function in charters to indicate that such an exchange had, in fact, occurred.<sup>70</sup> As evidenced in analysis of the charters summarized in Table 2, such clauses were by far the most common type of commemoration anticipated by donors and were directed toward both men’s and women’s houses.

<sup>66</sup> Vanhaeck, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Marquette* (above, n. 43), no. 121, pp. 105–6; and no. 100, pp. 89–90.

<sup>67</sup> É. Hautcœur, ed., *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Flines*, 2 vols. (Lille, 1873–74), no. 232, 21 May 1283, pp. 253–54.

<sup>68</sup> For example, Gilchrist suggests that it was a personal prejudice, rather than an accurate characterization of medieval attitudes, that led Christopher Brooke to write of nuns that “there were a number of reasons, sensible and absurd, for supposing their prayers less efficacious than those of men.” Gilchrist dismisses Brooke’s conclusion as “a misconception which has remained within the historical literature” (*Gender and Material Culture* [above, n. 5], p. 24). According to Michel Lauwers, while women’s communities fielded a number of requests from patrons, these requests were typically limited to prayers, and the donations that accompanied them tended to be small; see Michel Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts: Morts, rites et société au moyen âge*, *Théologie Historique* 103 (Paris, 1996), p. 429.

<sup>69</sup> See Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship and Gifts to Saints: The “Laudatio parentum” in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988); Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire* (above, n. 14), p. 182; and McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints* (above, n. 13), p. 143.

<sup>70</sup> For the significance of *pro remedio* clauses and donative phrases generally see McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, p. 179; and Ludo J. R. Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men: Monasticism and Its Meaning to Medieval Society* (Woodbridge, Eng., 1992), pp. 87–91.

TABLE 2  
Commemorative Requests to Cistercian Abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut, 1200–1300

Foundation	<i>Pro remedio</i>			Total Donations
	Clauses	Pittances	Masses	
(M) Aulne	38	2	9	102
(M) Boudelo	13	2	1	25
(M) Cambron	49	1	1	82
(M) Clairmarais	4	7	1	17
(M) Ter Duinen	41	9	4	75
(W) Beaupré at Grimminge	6	2	3	25
(W) Beaupré-sur-la-Lys	6	0	1	13
(W) Brayelle	26	3	5	34
(W) Doornzele	4	0	3	18
(W) Épinlieu	15	3	2	42
(W) Flines	39	8	9	59
(W) Hemelsdale	3	0	3	7
(W) Marquette	43	9	4	67
(W) Nieuwenbos	9	2	3	46
(W) Notre-Dame des Près	38	2	1	52
(W) Oosteeklo	2	0	2	5
(W) Ravensberg	18	2	3	26
(W) Soleilmont	2	0	0	4
(W) Zwijsveke	14	2	5	24

M = men's houses. W = women's houses.

SOURCES: See n. 21.

Pittances, described by Emilia Jamroziak in her study of Rievaulx as “a symbolic but also practical way of commemorating benefactors,” were the third most common requests appearing in the donation charters examined here.<sup>71</sup> Arranging to have extra servings of food or wine distributed among the monks or nuns on the anniversary of one's death was intended to secure the collective goodwill of the community on behalf of the benefactor. The appeal of such practices to patrons is reflected in the frequency with which they were requested from both men's and women's abbeys. In some instances, abbeys fielded more requests for the distribution of pittances than they did for anniversary masses. Such was the case with the abbeys of Ter Duinen, Clairmarais, Boudelo, Épinlieu, Notre-Dame des Près, and Marquette. Since such requests were accompanied by monetary donations necessary to compensate the abbey for the expense incurred, they were also opportunities for individual foundations to add to their annual revenues. For example, in 1290 Theodericus de Agro and his wife Cristina donated an annual rent of thirty-two *solidi* to the abbey of Ter Duinen to provide pit-

<sup>71</sup> Emilia Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey and Its Social Context, 1132–1300: Memory, Locality and Networks*, Medieval Church Studies 8 (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 206–7. Pittances were a component of the new commemorative practices that began to dominate spiritual life in the high Middle Ages, signaling a shift in the way patrons and monastic communities understood the exchange that occurred in conjunction with donations. See Richard Keyser, “La transformation de l'échange des dons pieux: Montier-la-Celle, Champagne, 1100–1350,” *Revue historique* 305 (2003), 793–816.

tances after their deaths.<sup>72</sup> In arranging for the distribution of a pittance of wine to the nuns of Zwijveke on behalf of her deceased son Johannes, Margareta, lady of Woume, granted the abbey an annual rent of thirty *solidi flandrenses*.<sup>73</sup> In 1263 Countess Marguerite granted the abbey of Bijloke an annual rent of eight *livres*, fourteen *solidi*, nine *deniers*, stipulating that the money be used to fund a pittance of wine and fish.<sup>74</sup> Nicolas de Lalaing presented the nuns of Flines with a similar request, granting an annual rent in return for a pittance to be distributed “on the day of his death and that of his dear wife.”<sup>75</sup> Gossuin, a priest, donated a rent of twenty *solidi flandrenses* to the nuns of Zwijveke to provide a pittance to be distributed to the members of the community on the anniversary of his death.<sup>76</sup> It was not uncommon for patrons to anticipate that the provisions they made for their pittance would exceed the actual expense, as was the case with a donation of twelve *solidi alborum* annual rent made by the canon Gui de Brache for a pittance to be distributed on the anniversary of his death to the monks of Cambron. Gui specified that any remaining funds be used by the abbey at its discretion.<sup>77</sup> Mathieu de le Buskaille donated an annual rent of forty *sols* to the abbey of Marquette for “his obit each year after his death and for a pittance to be made to the said convent on the day of his death.”<sup>78</sup> Both men’s and women’s houses benefited from such monetary provisions, suggesting the need to revisit a number of deep-seated assumptions about the perceived efficacy of female prayers.

As discussed above, the documents clearly demonstrate that patrons valued the prayers and the spiritual goodwill of Cistercian nuns. However, were Cistercian women disadvantaged by the increasing popularity of more concrete forms of commemoration, particularly those that required ordination to perform? Attempts to explain the perceived lack of interest of patrons in nunneries often cite the shift from cumulative to individualized commemorative practices that occurred in the central Middle Ages, noting most frequently the increased demand for anniversary masses.<sup>79</sup> While pittances and prayers were a gender-neutral com-

<sup>72</sup> Ferdinand van de Putte, *Chronica et cartularium monasterii de Dunis*, Recueil de Chroniques, Chartes et Autres Documents Concernant l’Histoire et les Antiquités de la Flandre-Occidentale, 1st ser., 12 (Bruges, 1864–67), no. 545, p. 501.

<sup>73</sup> Alphonse de Vlaminck, ed., *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Zwijveke-lez-Termonde* (Gand, 1869), no. 48, 28 March 1246, pp. 43–44.

<sup>74</sup> Marguerite demanded that the pittance distributed to the nuns of the abbey be valued at 100 *solidi*, while that given to the women of the adjacent hospital be valued at 74 *solidi*, 9 *deniers* (ADN, 2187, 51 H, no. 1330).

<sup>75</sup> Hautcœur, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Flines*, no. 170, April 1270, pp. 182–83.

<sup>76</sup> De Vlaminck, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Zwijveke*, no. 73, 7 January 1283, p. 74.

<sup>77</sup> J. de Smet, ed., *Cartulaire de Cambron*, Monuments pour Servir à l’Histoire des Provinces de Namur, de Hainaut et de Luxembourg 2 (Brussels, 1869), no. 5, October 1221, pp. 901–2.

<sup>78</sup> Vanhaeck, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Marquette* (above, n. 43), no. 314, March 1296, pp. 299–300.

<sup>79</sup> See above, n. 8. For the increased demand for such commemorative practices generally see Jean-Loup Lemaître, *Mourir à Saint-Martial: La commémoration des morts et les obituaires à Saint-Martial de Limoges du XIe et XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1989), and Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres*. Johnson engages in a detailed discussion of the shifts in attitudes across the church regarding the roles of men and women and their implications for nuns in *Equal in Monastic Profession* (above, n. 14), p. 165. She posits a corresponding decline in female monasticism beginning in the thirteenth

memorative activity, anniversary masses were slightly more complicated, requiring the presence of a chaplain to perform the requested service. Male communities could adjust to this shift in commemoration by including more ordained monks among their ranks. Women, however, who could not be ordained, were perceived to be at a distinct disadvantage. Such arguments remain largely speculative and seldom cite concrete figures or calculations. Further, the quantitative analysis here failed to produce any discernible difference in the propensity of donors to request such forms of commemoration or in the ability of women's houses to provide such services. In fact, women's houses (with the sole exception of Soleilmont) received as many requests for obits as did the men's houses included in this study, reflecting not only the tendency of patrons to seek such forms of commemoration from women's abbeys but the ability of nuns to provide them.

Men and women appear in the charters on numerous occasions making arrangements for daily prayers to be said on their behalf. While prohibitions on female ordination meant that the nuns themselves were not eligible to perform the masses requested by donors, if sufficient revenue was placed at their disposal, they could easily hire chaplains who could. Ida, described in the charter as the daughter of Soykinus van Idegem and a nun of Beaupré at Grimminge, donated an annual rent of ten *solidi* and four capons to the abbey. Ida stipulated that the money be used to fund an anniversary mass after her death, with the rent of capons reverting to her fellow nun Elizabeth van Geraardsbergen.<sup>80</sup> In addition to providing funds for chaplains to perform daily masses, donors also arranged for the construction of chapels, ultimately facilitating the ability of Cistercian nuns to attract patrons and offer masses with more frequency. For example, Mathilda, lady of Tenremonde, requested that the abbey of Zwijveke arrange for a priest to perform a mass on her behalf every Sunday after prime "in accordance with the rights of the Cistercian order." She provided the funds necessary to establish a chapel and pay for the services of a chaplain.<sup>81</sup> In 1219 Jeanne, countess of Flanders, donated twelve *bonniers* of land to the abbey of Nieuwenbos for her soul and that of her husband, Ferrand. The countess stipulated that the revenue generated by the donation be used for the upkeep of the abbey's priests.<sup>82</sup> The countess also established a chapel at the abbey of Ravensberg, donating an annual rent of eleven rams, to be valued at no less than thirty *deniers* per ram. The funds were to be used to provide for daily masses on behalf of her and her husband.<sup>83</sup>

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century. The chronology of this decline, however, is challenged by Bruce Venarde, who extends the vitality of female monasticism several decades further than Johnson. See Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Numeries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997), p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> After the death of Elizabeth, the rent of capons would also revert to the abbey. See Verschaeren, *Abdij van Beaupré te Grimminge* (above, n. 28), no. 33, 30 October 1278, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> De Vlaminck, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Zwijveke*, no. 59, 7 February 1250, pp. 52–53.

<sup>82</sup> Gustaaf Asaert, *Het archief van de abdij van Boudelo te Sinaai-Waas en te Gent*, 1 (Brussels, 1976), no. 20, 9 October 1219, pp. 181–82.

<sup>83</sup> ADN, 2187 51 H, no. 451, November 1227.

A number of individuals founded chapels in the abbey of Flines, including the founder, Countess Marguerite, her son Guy, and her daughter-in-law Mahaut. Mahaut became an avid patron of Cistercian women in Flanders and Hainaut, erecting chapels in the abbeys of Flines, Beaupré-sur-la-Lys, and Zwijveke.<sup>84</sup> Flines also received a donation of twenty *livres* from Jean, seigneur of Dampierre and of St. Dizier, to fund “a *chapellenie* in the church for the soul of his dear seigneur and father of good memory Jean.”<sup>85</sup> In 1219 the knight Gautier du Flos founded a chapel in the church of the abbey of Beaupré; in 1288 Meelin, the constable of Flanders, established one in the abbey of Marquette.<sup>86</sup> Several male donors established chapels in the abbey of Hemelsdale, including Salemons Morins, bourgeois of Ypres, and Michiel de Trehout.<sup>87</sup> By including monetary provisions for the chaplains needed to perform the desired masses, such donations surmounted the obstacles faced by religious women in fulfilling their requests.

The evidence here indicates that Cistercian nuns were not at a disadvantage in terms of their ability to offer anniversary masses to donors. However, the dearth of such requests made to Cistercian abbeys overall is somewhat perplexing considering larger trends in patronage emphasizing individual over collective commemoration. The answer may lie in differences between monastic orders more generally and the peculiarities of Cistercian practice. While scholars have noted a trend toward individual commemoration culminating in the tenth and eleventh centuries, they have also noted the increasingly complex and time-consuming liturgy that resulted. Perhaps in reaction to such trends, Cistercian practice encouraged foundations to move away from such individualized prayer in order to return the liturgy to a simpler state, as Emilia Jamroziak notes in her study of the abbey of Rievaulx.<sup>88</sup> Such limitations first appear in the statutes of the general chapter in 1196 and were reiterated in 1201.<sup>89</sup> While these restrictions were relaxed over time, they would certainly have influenced the types of spiritual returns donors to Cistercian abbeys would have expected from their material investments. If commemorative practice in Cistercian foundations in Flanders and

<sup>84</sup> Mahuat made several donations to Flines to provide monetary support for a chaplain to perform masses on her behalf (ADN, B 446/202, 27 March 1259, and B 446/1264, 13 April 1262). For Beaupré see ADN, 2187 51 H, no. 1202, 1258, and for Zwijveke, ADN, 2187 51 H, no. 1202, 1258.

<sup>85</sup> Hautcœur, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Flines* (above, n. 67), no. 145, September 1263, pp. 158–59; and no. 240, 19 October 1284, pp. 261–62.

<sup>86</sup> ADN, 29 H 3/23; Vanhaeck, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Marquette*, no. 299, January 1288, pp. 283–85.

<sup>87</sup> Carton and van de Putte, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Hemelsdale* (above, n. 31), no. 20, 1270, p. 61; and no. 17, March 1266, p. 58. Both charters include detailed discussions of the monetary provisions provided by each donor.

<sup>88</sup> For the Cistercian stance on commemoration see Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*, pp. 206–7. The Cistercians modified their necrologies considerably, including far fewer names than most Benedictine abbeys. They also introduced a cumulative prayer across the order, attempting a distinct move from individualized to cumulative commemoration.

<sup>89</sup> The initial shift toward individualized commemoration is traced by McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints* (above, n. 13), p. 94. For the pressure felt by all Cistercian foundations to meet the demands of patrons seeking anniversary masses see Megan Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and Their Meanings: Thirteenth-Century English Cistercian Monasteries*, *Medieval Church Studies* 1 (Turnhout, 2001).

Hainaut mirrored that of the order more generally, the ability of nunneries to offer anniversary masses would have had little effect on their attractiveness to patrons.

An equally attractive commemorative practice was the opportunity to be buried among the monks and nuns of a community. This type of commemoration was particularly compelling to patrons, who believed that burial within the monastic enclosure would significantly bolster their chance of salvation. In spite of initial attempts to limit such lay burials, the Cistercian order gradually relaxed its restrictions.<sup>90</sup> According to Megan Cassidy-Welch, the increasing frequency of such burials “was not an indication of the increasing influence of the lay people over these institutions, but rather of the changing ways of commemoration of the dead.”<sup>91</sup> For the Cistercians in particular, burial provided an alternative to anniversary masses and other forms of commemoration that complicated liturgical practice. Such relaxation of restrictions on lay burials is reflected in the charters issued to Cistercian abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut. While the abbey of Flines received permission from the general chapter to bury members of the laity in 1267, the abbey of Zwijveke had received similar rights to lay burial nearly a decade earlier, in 1256. Such rights were not to be extended to “the bodies of public usurers nor excommunicates, nor those previously refused church burial.”<sup>92</sup>

However, the number of burials remained rather limited in both men’s and women’s abbeys, and burial was often restricted to the founder and immediate family members, consistent with the directives issued by the order on this matter. Not surprisingly, the abbey of Ter Duinen, the largest abbey in this study, granted the most requests, agreeing to lay burials on five occasions for various members of the community. However, nunneries also fielded such requests from patrons, especially founders and members of their families. For example, Jeanne, countess of Flanders and Hainaut and the founder of Marquette, requested and received permission to be buried in the abbey’s cemetery in 1236, alongside her husband Ferrand and daughter Marie, both of whom had predeceased her. In similar fashion her sister Marguerite, the founder of the abbey of Flines, was interred in the abbey’s church, along with her second husband, William of Dampierre; her son and successor Guy; Guy’s wife, Mahaut de Béthune; and her grandson Robert de Béthune and his wife, Blanche of Sicily. A number of prominent men requested and received permission to erect sepulchres in the abbey of

<sup>90</sup> Emilia Jamrozak, “Making Friends beyond the Grave: Melrose Abbey and Its Lay Burials in the Thirteenth Century,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 56 (2005), 323–35. Jackie Hall traces the evolution of the order’s stance toward burials as reflected in its legislation in “The Legislative Background to the Burial of Laity and Other Patrons in Cistercian Abbeys,” *ibid.*, pp. 363–71. Although the general chapter initially issued legislation prohibiting burial in churches or chapter houses, it amended its position in 1157 and 1179 to allow for the burial of founders.

<sup>91</sup> Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces*, p. 232.

<sup>92</sup> De Vlaminck, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Zwijveke*, no. 62, 14 February 1256, p. 61: “. . . sepe-  
liendi in monasterio vestro illorum corpora qui sepeliri apud vos eligunt cum decedunt dummodo  
non sint publici usurarii vel vinculo excommunicationis astricti, vel alias interdicta sit eis ecclesiastica  
sepultura. . . .”



Flines, including Jean de Neuville, *prévôt* of Soignies and a canon at the cathedral in Cambrai; Gerard, *prévôt* of Cassel and archdeacon of Hainaut; Guillaume of Hainaut, the bishop of Cambrai; and Robert of Béthune, seigneur of Termonde. All of these requests were accompanied by donations.<sup>93</sup>

Smaller abbeys were equally willing to accommodate such final requests from their patrons. In 1252 Guillaume de Calonne donated twenty-three *journaux* of land at Calonne-sur-la-Lys to the abbey of Beaupré “for the celebration of the anniversary of his mother who had been buried in said abbey.”<sup>94</sup> In 1270 Michel de Neuvireuil, the prior of the Dominican convent in the city of Lille, donated land to Notre-Dame des Près in exchange for permission to inter his parents in the abbey’s cemetery.<sup>95</sup> Egidius van Bredene, a canon of Saint-Donatien and chancellor of Flanders during the rule of Countess Marguerite, was buried in the choir of the abbey of Spermalie, a foundation that benefited considerably from his patronage throughout his lifetime.<sup>96</sup> Although little is known of the early history of the abbey of Notre-Dame d’Olive, excavations have indicated that its founder, Guillaume, described as a member of the local community and the abbey’s first chaplain, was buried in the church, to the right of the main altar.<sup>97</sup> Jean de la Take, the founder of Saulchoir, was buried in the abbey’s church alongside his wife and cofounder, Agnes.<sup>98</sup> Marguerite de Guînes, the founder and first abbess of the abbey of Mont d’Or, was buried in the church at the abbey’s original site. Following its relocation in 1245 and the construction of a new church, her body was transferred to the center of the new church’s choir.<sup>99</sup> Since such requests were nearly uniformly accompanied by donations, offering burial privileges to patrons would have provided nunneries valuable opportunities to secure material resources to sustain their communities.

Overall, quantitative and qualitative research reveals the appeal of men’s and women’s houses to patrons and the ability of women’s houses to offer the same type of commemorative practices as their male counterparts. While some differences can be discerned, especially in regards to the tendency of women to neglect men’s houses, men’s houses clearly did not have a monopoly on commemoration. Admittedly, most Cistercian nunneries did not attract the volume of

<sup>93</sup> Hautcœur, *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Flines*, no. 335, January 1296, pp. 363–64; no. 328, 17 November 1294, pp. 357–58; no. 312, 10 July 1292, pp. 341–43; and no. 148, September 1265, p. 161. The comital family’s preference for the abbey of Flines when contemplating burials is discussed by Thomas Coomans, “Moniales cisterciennes et mémoire dynastique: Églises funéraires princières et abbayes cisterciennes dans les anciens Pays-Bas médiévaux,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 56 (2005), 87–145. Coomans suggests that in the Low Countries in particular, patrons interested in burial in Cistercian abbeys actually preferred women’s houses to those of men. The significance of the burial location to a patron is discussed by Brian Golding, “Burials and Benefactions: An Aspect of Monastic Patronage in Thirteenth-Century England,” in *England in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, Eng., 1985), pp. 64–75.

<sup>94</sup> ADN, 29 H 3/29, 11 May 1252.

<sup>95</sup> ADN, 30 H 14/194, August 1270.

<sup>96</sup> Canivez, *L’Ordre de Cîteaux* (above, n. 19), p. 430.

<sup>97</sup> *Monasticon belge*, 1/2:371.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 378–79; also Canivez, *L’Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 405.

<sup>99</sup> *Monasticon belge*, 3/2:479.

donations enjoyed by their male counterparts, even in Flanders and Hainaut. However, the number of donations they did receive exceeds the expectations of many modern historians, and it reflects the positive value placed on the nunneries' commemorative services by patrons. Furthermore, in light of the size of these communities, which were considerably smaller than Cistercian houses for men in Flanders and Hainaut, the steady stream of donations they did receive suggests that these houses were not in a state of financial ruin but were constantly adding new means of support to their existing resources throughout the thirteenth century. The propensity of donors to look to Cistercian women for commemoration surely challenges past assumptions about the perceived efficacy of female prayers, suggesting the need to revisit arguments about the secondary status of Cistercian nunneries in particular and that of religious women more generally. The evidence from Cistercian abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut suggests that any material differences between men's houses and women's houses did not result from the failure of women's houses to appeal to patrons or the inability of nuns to offer compelling commemorative practices like anniversary masses.

While the evidence cited here suggests that patrons were equally drawn to Cistercian monks and nuns, it does not deny the existence of physical differences between men's and women's houses: men's foundations tended to support more individuals, control larger patrimonies, and command considerably more financial resources than women's houses. Yet, if gender concerns do not completely account for these differences in size and economic well-being, what does? Investigation of the individual circumstances of many of the abbeys located in Flanders and Hainaut indicates that these differences often resulted from pragmatic considerations on the part of founders, including date of foundation, location, and intended social function of the community, concerns that had little, if anything, to do with gender. Such factors in turn limited the ability of Cistercian nunneries to amass patrimonies on the scale of their male counterparts, founded a century earlier under considerably different demographic circumstances, placing *de facto* restrictions on their size and number.

The size of the patrimony controlled by an abbey would have been dependent on the resources available to donors. Six of the seven Cistercian houses for men in Flanders and Hainaut were founded between 1100 and 1148, while twenty-six of the thirty foundations for women were founded between 1200 and 1250, indicating that most Cistercian nunneries were founded after the dramatic population increases and urbanization that transformed the region in the early thirteenth century.<sup>100</sup> Unlike their predecessors in the previous century, patrons of Cistercian nunneries were confronted with an entirely different set of rules governing the land-prayer exchange of any proposed monastic foundation. Land was scarcer, so communities were naturally smaller and more typically urban. It can hardly be deemed a coincidence that the abbey of Boudelo, the only

<sup>100</sup> The abbey of Ravensberg, founded in 1194, was the only Cistercian nunnery established prior to the thirteenth century. Three houses, Blendecques, Brayelle, and Soleilmont, were originally founded as Benedictine before the thirteenth century and were refounded as Cistercian in the thirteenth.

Cistercian foundation for men established in Flanders after 1200, controlled a considerably smaller patrimony than most of the other men's houses in the region.<sup>101</sup>

Consideration of the geographical distribution of women's abbeys provides evidence for this correlation between the century of foundation and the size and location of a monastic patrimony. The few Cistercian abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut located in more rural areas were initially Benedictine foundations, established in the late eleventh or twelfth century and incorporated into the Cistercian order in the thirteenth. These include the abbeys of Brayelle (1196/1212), Blendecques (1186/1228), Ravensberg (1194/1200), and Soleilmont (1088/1237). Three of these four abbeys were located along the northwestern border of Flanders, an area that remained predominantly rural and agricultural in the late twelfth century.

It seems plausible that in the late twelfth century, rural land was still available to founders. In contrast, few foundations established after 1200 enjoyed such rural, isolated locations. Many of them were founded on the northern periphery of the county of Flanders, with patrimonies made up of marginal land, requiring considerable time and money before it was suitable for cultivation.<sup>102</sup> Others were located near urban centers, just outside the walls of a town or city. For these foundations, isolation was rare, as the region witnessed a proliferation of abbeys in a rather short period of time. The large number of nunneries sharing limited space meant that proximity to one another was often unavoidable, further increasing competition for the scarce resources still available to patrons.

Examples of larger nunneries, such as Flines and Marquette, prove that patrons of women's foundations could envision large abbeys with spacious monastic complexes that resembled the male abbeys founded primarily in the twelfth century. Flines was unusually large, controlling a patrimony large enough to support a hundred choir nuns and eighteen *conversi* by 1234.<sup>103</sup> Although exact figures for Marquette do not exist, the abbey was most likely of a similar size, considering the extent of its patrimony and the generosity of its founder, Countess Jeanne. While such exalted patrons as the countesses of Flanders continued to enjoy access to large tracts of rural land, more modest founders would have

<sup>101</sup> Janet Burton has discovered a similar situation in Yorkshire, where all houses in the thirteenth century, regardless of the sex of their monastics, were less wealthy than their predecessors founded in the previous century (*The Monastic Order in Yorkshire* [above, n. 14], p. 141).

<sup>102</sup> In fact, as a result of the marginal nature of the land donated to Cistercian nunneries, they were even more likely than their male counterparts to engage in reclamation. See Erin Jordan, "Patronage, Prayers and Polders: Assessing Cistercian Foundations in Thirteenth-Century Flanders and Hainaut," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 53 (2002), 99–125. The marginal nature of the land was reflected in the name originally given to the abbey of Épinlieu, "spinosus locus" (Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 396). See also Mireille Mousnier, "Impact social des abbayes cisterciennes dans la société méridionale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 50 (1999), 67–82.

<sup>103</sup> Hautcœur, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Flines*, no. 173, pp. 184–86. The abbey of Bijloke, founded by Marguerite's sister and predecessor as countess, Jeanne, received papal permission to raise the number of choir nuns to forty in 1243 to reflect the expansion of the abbey's patrimony. See Jean-François Foppens, *Diplomatum Belgicorum nova collectio sive supplementum ad opera diplomata Auberti Miraei*, 4 (Brussels, 1734), no. 37, May 1243, p. 593.

encountered obstacles that limited their generosity.<sup>104</sup> In addition, tracing their landholdings demonstrates that few Cistercian houses established after 1200 enjoyed the consolidated, contiguous patrimonies of their predecessors, further reflecting the impact of demography on their size and location.<sup>105</sup> Yet, while the women's communities founded in the thirteenth century were physically smaller, they outnumbered male houses by four to one in the counties of Flanders and Hainaut.<sup>106</sup> Such disparity in numbers may be explained as the logical result of the land market in the thirteenth century, which limited the amount of land controlled by individual houses and dictated location but failed to stymie the overall growth of the women's branch of the order.

Size was also undoubtedly related to location. Unlike men's houses, which were predominately located in rural areas, many women's houses were situated near urban centers, where large, empty tracts of land would have been even scarcer. Difference in location may have been dictated in part by gender norms of the medieval period. Proximity to urban centers was perceived as providing protection for women, as indicated by the number of site changes that occurred among nunneries in Flanders and Hainaut. Transfers are mentioned in the charters of a number of Cistercian abbeys in Flanders and Hainaut, including Flines, Ath, Saulchoir, Mont d'Or, Groeninghe, Ter Hagen, and Bijloke.<sup>107</sup> The abbey of Hemelsdale changed location three times in the thirteenth century alone, beginning at Esen, near Dixmude, and ending up eight kilometers away at Werken.<sup>108</sup> As the number of Cistercian abbeys for women in the region grew, competition also proved a factor in determining location.<sup>109</sup> For example, the abbey of Ter Hagen, first located in the parish of Axel in the northern region of Flanders, was transferred to Merelbeke because of frequent flooding. However, the new location, near the city of Ghent, proved problematic on account of the abbey's proximity to the Cistercian foundations of Nieuwenbos and Bijloke. In response to their complaints, Countess Marguerite intervened in December 1278, orchestrating Ter Hagen's return to its original location and authorizing the construction of a dike to prevent future flooding. The countess contributed an additional 242 *mesures* of land to the abbey's endowment and provided funds for the construction of a new church.<sup>110</sup> Like Ter Hagen, the abbey of Mont d'Or, founded in

<sup>104</sup> For limitations faced by founders in the thirteenth century see Constance H. Berman, "Abbeys for Cistercian Nuns in the Ecclesiastical Province of Sens," *Revue Mabillon* 73 (1997), 83–113.

<sup>105</sup> See Richard Roehl, "Plan and Reality in a Medieval Monastic Economy: The Cistercians," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 9 (1972), 83–114.

<sup>106</sup> This ratio is similar to that found in Yorkshire; see Burton, "Yorkshire Nunneries" (above, n. 3).

<sup>107</sup> These transfers, and the rationale prompting them, are addressed by Bouton, *Les moniales cisterciennes* (above, n. 8), 1/1:103–14.

<sup>108</sup> The first transfer, to Zillebeke near Ypres, occurred in 1267. The documents do not reveal the reason behind the transfers. See Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 433; and *Monasticon belge*, 3/2:545.

<sup>109</sup> Among the flurry of general chapter statutes issued in the 1230s concerning nuns was the stipulation that women's abbeys be at least six lots from men's houses and ten lots from each other (Bouton, *Les moniales cisterciennes*, 1/1:69: "six lieues . . . dix lieues"). According to Bouton, the balance between the isolation mandated by the order and proximity to needed resources posed a challenge to all Cistercian foundations.

<sup>110</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, pp. 481–82; Bouton, *Les moniales cisterciennes*, 1/1:94; Cnockaert, "Abdij Ter Hagen onder Axel" (above, n. 23).

1214 by Marguerite de Guînes, castellan of Courtrai, and transferred to Wevelgem by 1268, encountered difficulties due to its proximity to the Cistercian abbey of Groeninghe, near Marke. The dispute was eventually arbitrated by Countess Jeanne, who decreed that Mont d'Or could acquire lands only beyond the river Lys to the north and Groeninghe to the south.<sup>111</sup>

While the examples of Ter Hagen and Mont d'Or speak to general concerns about competition voiced by all religious foundations, regardless of the sex of their monastics, the relocation of the abbey of Groeninghe was prompted by concerns directly related to gender. After several incursions from brigands, the nuns of Groeninghe were moved from their original rural location to just outside the town of Courtrai "for the protection of the religious women."<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the abbey of Maagdendale, initially founded in 1233 at Pamele near the village of Flobecq, was transferred to a less deserted location, closer to the city of Oudenaarde, within decades of its foundation. The nuns were forced to move because of "the dangers that they encountered night and day in the middle of such solitude."<sup>113</sup> As women, nuns were perceived as considerably more vulnerable to bodily harm than their male counterparts, their communities threatened by the very isolation associated with the order. In such instances, location was certainly dictated by gendered concerns, as urban centers were presumed to provide greater protection for women and their communities. However, the safety of an abbey's residents was only one factor among many in determining location, as the other examples cited here indicate. Regardless of the cause, such movement could only have proven disruptive to the community, impeding its ability to consolidate the land donated by patrons and possibly even preventing the formation of ties to the local community, a key source of potential donors.

While location often dictated size, both were directly connected to the intended social function of institutions at the time of foundation. A number of Cistercian nunneries in Flanders and Hainaut originated as beguinages, a social function demanding an urban location. The abbey of Fontenelle began as an informal community of beguines, led by Jeanne and Agnes, daughters of a local noble. Officially accepted into the Cistercian order in 1212, Fontenelle was located just outside the prosperous city of Lille. Like Fontenelle, the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés began as a modest community of beguines. Foukeut, Roselle, and Sainte de la Hale, the originators of the foundation, are described in an early charter as the daughters of one Raoul le Roux. Beguines inhabited the location, just within the walls of the city of Douai, as early as 1212, and the community was officially transformed into a Cistercian abbey in 1218.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup> *Monasticon belge*, 3/2:479. Cistercian abbeys also encountered resistance from existing communities affiliated with other orders. For example, the very modest foundation of Notre-Dame d'Olive was engaged in a protracted dispute with the Premonstratensian abbey of Bonne-Ésperance, eventually settled in 1245. The monks of the abbey feared that the community of nuns would prove to be competition for donations (*ibid.*, 1/2:386). The abbey of Saulchoir was relocated in 1238 because of complaints from the nearby chapter of Oignies, which opposed its proximity (*ibid.*, pp. 378–79).

<sup>112</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Citéaux*, p. 414. The transfer of Groeninghe was arranged by Béatrice of Courtrai, who also funded the construction of new abbatial buildings.

<sup>113</sup> *Monasticon belge*, 7/2:392.

<sup>114</sup> Jordan, *Women, Power, and Patronage* (above, n. 18), p. 96.

The abbeys of Zwijveke and Bijloke originated as hospitals, charitable institutions that would only have made sense in urban areas. Initially founded as a hospital located within the town walls of Termonde, Zwijveke was transformed into an abbey in 1233. Its founder, Mathilde, lady of Termonde, added considerably to the community's patrimony, ensuring its acceptance into the Cistercian order.<sup>115</sup> Although its early history is rather complicated, it is clear that at its formation the abbey of Bijloke included a hospital. Founded by Ermentrude Utenhove around 1204, a community of nuns was established at Lokeren to administer to the poor and sick. A second expansion occurred in 1227–28, when the nuns expressed concern over reconciling the mandates of the order with the demands necessitated by caring for the sick. The community divided into two separate establishments. The abbey of Nieuwenbos remained in its original location at Lokeren until 1246, when it moved to Heusden, on the left bank of the river Scheldt. According to legend, the transfer occurred as a result of an inadequate water supply and the lack of pasture for the abbey's herds.<sup>116</sup> In the meantime, Bijloke had been officially incorporated into the Cistercian order in 1228.<sup>117</sup> In a charter issued by the count and countess of Flanders and Hainaut in November 1233, the foundation of Bijloke was confirmed, and the number of inhabitants was set at twenty choir nuns and twenty-five lay sisters.<sup>118</sup> The transfer occurred in response to complaints from the Cistercian order about excessive contact between the nuns and the secular community.<sup>119</sup>

Although later transformed into abbeys, these communities often retained the stamp of their original vocation in terms of their urban locations. Since communities originating as hospitals were explicitly intended to interact with the laity, a location adjacent to a town was considered ideal at the time of foundation. In contrast with their rural counterparts, whose potential for growth was limited only by the land market, urban foundations would have encountered many more obstacles to physical expansion. Land near cities would have been even more scarce, and competition among religious houses even more intense. Hence, regardless of support from patrons, the physical size of Cistercian foundations that originated as urban institutions would have been determined, at least in part, by their location.

The conclusions presented here are not only relevant for scholars interested in Cistercian historiography but also contribute to our understanding of medieval religious women more generally, allowing us to position them more accurately in the social landscape of the high Middle Ages. While historians today often interpret differences between monasteries and nunneries as the result of gender,

<sup>115</sup> Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux*, p. 452. The community was later transferred to a more solitary location at Zwijveke, several kilometers from Termonde. See also *Gallia Christiana*, 5:225.

<sup>116</sup> De Smet, "L'ancienne abbaye du Nouveau-Bois" (above, n. 23), pp. 548–52.

<sup>117</sup> Vleeschouwers, *Abdij van Boudelo te Sinaai-Waas en te Gent*, no. 49, p. 197. See also van Puyvelde, *La Biloke de Gand* (above, n. 23); and *Monasticon belge*, 7/1:336.

<sup>118</sup> Ghent, Rijksarchief Gent, fonds Abdij van Boudelo, O.206. However, within a mere decade, Bijloke had increased its revenues sufficiently to increase the number of lay sisters to forty (Vleeschouwers, *Abdij van Boudelo te Sinaai-Waas en te Gent*, no. 117, May 1243, p. 232).

<sup>119</sup> Foppens, *Diplomatum Belgicorum nova collectio* (above, n. 103), 4, no. 24, 1215, p. 581.



the accuracy of such interpretations is open to debate. When the influence of gender is detected in monasticism, it frequently operates in more complex ways than previously assumed. In particular, the question of the appeal of women's communities to patrons lingers in the minds of many historians, who continue to assert that Cistercian nuns attracted fewer patrons and less patronage than their male counterparts for reasons clearly stemming from gender. The evidence here indicates that such assertions should be viewed as suspect, revealing more about modern expectations than the medieval reality. Biased in part by their own gendered expectations, scholars anticipate that nuns, understood first and foremost as women rather than as religious, were viewed as members of the secondary sex and deemed less capable than men of wielding spiritual power; their communities were thus consigned to poverty and failure.

Such linear thinking (the perception of piety attracted more patrons, leading to more prosperity for male communities and frequent impoverishment for female communities) and the logic upon which it is based, however, are confounded by examination of Cistercian communities in northern Europe. In the counties of Flanders and Hainaut in particular, comparison of donations to male and female houses of Cistercians reveals the need for an explanation of difference that does not stem from gendered preferences of patrons. By offering a number of more pragmatic alternatives, this study dispels a range of generalizations about Cistercian nuns based upon modern assumptions about gender rather than on the medieval evidence. Further, in integrating monks and nuns into a single study, it provides a more accurate basis for analysis of that evidence. The practice of examining men's and women's communities in isolation from each other has prevented effective comparison, and the tendency to position the experience of men as the norm reveals more about modern expectations than medieval views. Such studies do a dual disservice: not only do they underappreciate the complexity of medieval society, but they impose modern assumptions of gender relations upon a medieval past that may, in fact, have subscribed to a less hierarchical view of the sexes than is often supposed, particularly in the spiritual realm.<sup>120</sup>

Further, while the examples cited here indicate that physical and locational differences between men's and women's abbeys did exist, and were frequently conditioned by gender, I question the notion that in the medieval mind, this translated into a superior/inferior dichotomy. In part, the tendency to equate material well-being with spiritual respect on the part of modern scholars needs to be reassessed. Would medieval patrons have accepted this equation, or would they have preferred the recipients of their patronage to adhere to a higher level of austerity, as manifested in the poverty and simplicity of their community?

Clearly, the geographical and chronological parameters of this study prevent the application of these conclusions to all women (or even all nuns) in medieval Europe. However, the evidence cited does demonstrate that, contrary to past be-

<sup>120</sup> For the danger of adopting a single standard based on the experience of male monastics see Janet Burton, "Cloistered Women and Male Authority: Power and Authority in Yorkshire Nunneries in the Later Middle Ages," *Thirteenth-Century England* 10 (2005), 155–65, and *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, p. 125, in which she warns against the assumption that "the labels which have traditionally been applied to male houses are applicable to female ones."

liefs, the commemorative services offered by nuns were valued by medieval patrons of both sexes.<sup>121</sup> Consideration of location, date of foundation, and relationship to the secular community provides further evidence that difference in intended function, rather than in perceptions of piety or the managerial abilities of nuns, is more useful in explaining the disparities between houses of Cistercian monks and nuns. This study does not deny the presence of very real differences between men's houses and women's. Monasteries, even those affiliated with the same order, had very different histories and served a variety of needs within the secular community. Yet, while medieval gender norms may have influenced the function of these communities, the resulting differences should be viewed without assigning value.<sup>122</sup> As the above discussion indicates, a range of pragmatic answers, some predicated upon gender, some not, can adequately explain why women's abbeys seldom looked identical to those of their male counterparts. Medieval attitudes about women, particularly religious women, were extremely complex. Positing a single, uniform attitude toward nuns undermines our ability to comprehend the complexities of their experience and to appreciate the full range of views harbored by patrons toward their communities. The conclusions here suggest that, ultimately, it is more productive for scholars to approach men's and women's abbeys as complementary rather than as competitors. Not only will this approach free us from the interpretive constraints of the presumed inferiority of women, but it will result in a more inclusive, complex, and accurate assessment of medieval society.

<sup>121</sup> Similarly, while ideology may have projected regulations upon women's behavior that would have had a considerable impact upon the overall experience of nuns, such ideals did not automatically translate into reality, as illustrated by the lively discussion of the impact of claustration. See n. 7, above.

<sup>122</sup> Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin* (above, n. 16), p. 152.