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IHS Book Talk: "Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks" by Martha G. Newman

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Presented by Dr. Martha Newman,
Associate Professor of History
& Religious Studies,
University of Texas at Austin



Dr. Alison K. Frazier, Discussion
Associate Professor of History,
& French & Italian Studies,
University of Texas at Austin



Dr. Oliver Freiberger, Discussion
Professor of Asian Studies &
Religious Studies,
University of Texas at Austin

"In 'Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks,' Martha G. Newman places the monk, author, and sometime abbot Engelhard of Langheim in the social, spiritual, and intellectual milieu of late twelfth-century monastic life. Her important and fascinating book enriches our understanding of a period of tremendous change as universities displaced monasteries as centers of learning, the Mass displaced prayer as a core spiritual experience, and monasticism seemingly gave way to new forms of religious life and devotion."
-Jana Griffin, Stanford University

WED., APR. 7, 3-4:15PM CST Info & Register: bit.ly/3cmgChO
Sponsored by the Institute for Historical Studies in the Department of History, and the Center for European Studies, at the University of Texas at Austin.

Institute for Historical Studies, Wednesday April 7, 2021

The History Faculty New Book Series presents:

Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks *The Sacramental Imagination of Engelhard of Langheim*
 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020)

A book talk and discussion with
DR. MARTHA G. NEWMAN
 Associate Professor of History
 The University of Texas at Austin
<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/newmanmg>

With discussants:

DR. ALISON K. FRAZIER
 Associate Professor of History
 The University of Texas at Austin
<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/akf7035>

DR. OLIVER FREIBERGER
 Professor of Asian Studies and Religious Studies
 The University of Texas at Austin
<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/asianstudies/faculty/of63>

Around the year 1200, the Cistercian Engelhard of Langheim dedicated a collection of monastic stories to a community of religious women. Martha G. Newman explores how this largely unedited collection of tales about Cistercian monks illuminates the religiosity of Cistercian nuns. As did other Cistercian storytellers, Engelhard recorded the miracles and visions of the order's illustrious figures, but he wrote from Franconia, in modern Germany, rather than the Cistercian heartland. His extant texts reflect his interactions with non-Cistercian monasteries and with Langheim's patrons rather than celebrating Bernard of Clairvaux. Engelhard was conservative, interested in maintaining traditional Cistercian patterns of thought. Nonetheless, by offering to women a collection of

narratives that explore the oral qualities of texts, the nature of sight, and the efficacy of sacraments, Engelhard articulated a distinctive response to the social and intellectual changes of his period.



In analyzing Engelhard's stories, Newman uncovers an understudied monastic culture that resisted the growing emphasis on the priestly administration of the sacraments and the hardening of gender distinctions. Engelhard assumed that monks and nuns shared similar interests and concerns, and he addressed his audiences as if they occupied a space neither fully sacerdotal nor completely lay, neither scholastic nor unlearned, and neither solely male nor only female. His exemplary narratives depict the sacramental value of everyday objects and behaviors whose efficacy relied more on individual spiritual formation than on sacerdotal action. By encouraging nuns and monks to imagine connections between heaven and earth, Engelhard taught faith as a learned disposition. Newman's study demonstrates that scholastic questions about signs, sacraments, and sight emerged in a narrative form within late twelfth-century monastic communities.

- "In *Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks*, Martha G. Newman places the monk, author, and sometime abbot Engelhard of Langheim in the social, spiritual, and intellectual milieu of late twelfth-century monastic life. Her important and fascinating book enriches our understanding of a period of tremendous change as universities displaced monasteries as centers of learning, the Mass displaced prayer as a core spiritual experience, and monasticism seemingly gave way to new forms of religious life and devotion."
—Fiona Griffiths, Stanford University

Dr. Newman is a scholar of medieval European history who explores the ways religious practices and ideas intersect with social change. Her research focuses on Christian monasticism, especially monastic miracle collections, monastic attitudes toward women and the poor, and religious conceptions of labor. In the last year, she has published two essays in addition to her book under discussion today. One, "Defining Blasphemy in Medieval Europe: Christian Theology, Law, and Practice" appeared in *Blasphemies Compared: Transgressive Speech in a Globalised World*, edited by Anne Stensvold; and the other, "The Benedictine Rule and the Narrow Path: The Place of the Charter of Charity in the *Exordium Magnum* and Other Late Twelfth-Century Cistercian Texts," appeared in *La Charte de Charité 1119-2019. Un document pour préserver l'unité entre les communautés* [*The Charter of Charity 1119-2019. A document to preserve unity between communities*], edited by Éric Delaissé. Her other publications include *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180*, and numerous book chapters and articles dealing with medieval Christianity. In 2006-07, she was the William Cottrell Member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton. Her work has been supported as well by the National Endowment for the Humanities and by competitive fellowships from the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Newman has served in numerous service positions during her tenure at UT-Austin, including Associate Chair of the History Department, Associate Director of the Plan II Honors Program, and Director of the History Honors Program. She is currently the Graduate Advisor for the Department of Religious Studies and the Director of the Medieval Studies Program. Her classes include "The Medieval Millennium," "The Twelfth-Century Renaissance," "The Crusades," and "Religions in Practice."



This discussion is part of the IHS History Faculty New Book Series.

Sponsored by: Institute for Historical Studies in the Department of History, Center for European Studies

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