

Patrimony, culture and hospitality
Benedictine monasteries as places of the meeting

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*Benedictine monasteries
as places of the meeting*

*Klasztory benedyktyńskie jako miejsca
spotkania: patrimonium, kultura, gościnność*



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Introduction

Monasteries and monks living in them have long been an intriguing topic. From the very beginning of the monastic movement in the 4th century in Egypt, people visited monks, asking them for advice and prayer. Examples of such meetings can be found in the surviving literature, which sometimes even gives the impression that a kind of “monastic tourism” was developing at the time. This concerns not only Egypt, but also other regions where monasteries were established: Palestine, Syria, Cappadocia and later also Italy and Western Europe. Written in the late 8th century in Palestine, after the Arab invasion, the life of one of the monks from the Great Laura of St. Sabbas (Kidron Valley) mentions the fact that this saint, cultivating the old custom of Lenten wanderings in the wilderness, visited local monasteries, some of which had already been abandoned and partially ruined. In the Middle

Ages and the modern era, too, the practice of visiting monasteries during pilgrimages to holy sites or during other travels did not stop. We can cite here, for example, an account of Peter Damian's visit to Cluny in 1063, with admiring descriptions of not only the piety of the Cluny monks, but also of the appearance and furnishings of the local monastery. Similarly, towards the end of the 16th century, Charles de Croÿ recorded descriptions of not only castles and towns, but also of monasteries situated in what is now Belgium (including an interesting iconography in his accounts). In the 17th and 18th centuries in France Jean Mabillon and his pupils meticulously described the monasteries they visited, paying particular attention to libraries and archives.

Today, with a changed social and cultural situation, we may wonder what makes people attracted to monasteries and how people see them. In the case of new monastic communities living in modern buildings the answer seems to be fairly straightforward, as their sacred and spiritual dimension is not obscured by the baggage of historical heritage. On the other hand, communities living in centuries-old monaster-

ies must face the challenge of today's increasingly secularised mentality, for which monasteries as monuments of art and architecture, contributing to the beauty of the landscape, are more interesting than the idea behind their foundations. However, this is not about juxtaposing these two approaches or excluding either of them; on the contrary, this is about combining them in a harmonious manner. For both can creatively complement one another.

Reflections on how to harmonise both views of the place and role of monasteries in the socio-cultural context today have inspired the present project. A Benedictine monastery is especially predestined to be a place of the meeting. It is such a place for several reasons and in several dimensions. It combines the dimensions of a historical monument, work of art, beautiful location, sacredness and unique atmosphere of openness to visitors, for, as the Rule of St. Benedict says: "Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ (...). And let due honour be shown to all". Thus, we have here a long tradition, spirituality, art, beauty and hospitality, i.e. openness to other human beings, which is manifested in the very act of welcoming them,

and also in making an effort to meet their needs and expectations by creating the right conditions and an attractive offer: retreat, museum, education, culture.

Therefore, when examining all the dimensions of heritage-patrimony, culture and hospitality, we may discover a new dimension of the meeting, which is a fruit of a merger of all the values mentioned here. What is significant is their harmonious and joint analysis, because to different people getting into contact with a monastery these elements may appeal differently and in varying proportions, often also initiating a creative process of questioning or reflecting on other dimensions. For example, people admiring the beauty of a place or a work of art may start wondering why a monastery was founded here and not elsewhere, or, conversely, the spiritual dimension may lead them to a reflection on the historical and cultural influence of monasteries.

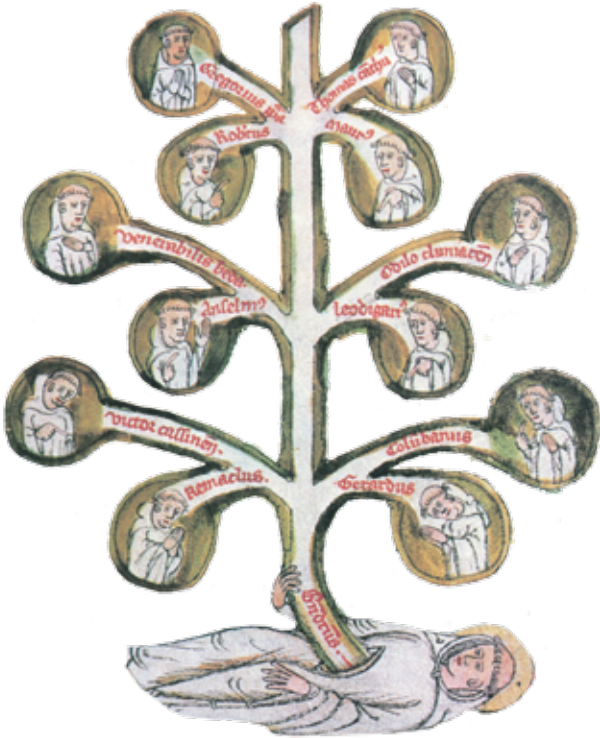
All these aspects make up a force that carries the idea of the monastery as patrimony – heritage of specific values. This has its fullest impact when the continuous existence of a monastery has been preserved, as it is the

case, for example, in Pannonhalma. Often we also deal with a renewal of patrimony: a monastery existed somewhere for centuries, was dissolved, but after a while monks returned to it (Tynec, Břevnov). We see how big that force can be in cases we could call translations or transformations of patrimony. A monastery is dissolved and abandoned, after some time the monks return and settle not in the old monastery, but somewhere in its vicinity. There is an interesting case of *Landévennec* in Brittany, France, an abbey from the early Merovingian period, second half of the 5th century, which was dissolved during the French Revolution. In the 20th century monks returned to the place, but built a completely new monastery, near the ruins of the old one; they believe they are the heirs of the old abbey. In this second case, what remains of an old monastery are just ruins, but the local community is still aware that this was a Benedictine monastery and that monks lived there, as it is the case of Hronský Beňadik in Slovakia. Sometimes the role of monks as hosts is, in a way, taken over by lay people who live there. And these lay people play, so to speak, the role of the monks,

becoming the hosts and, in some sense, continuing to carry this heritage (e.g. the former abbey in Hirsau in Germany).

The present study, which is an introductory, theoretical and programmatic basis of the project, has been supported by the Visegrád Group Fund and carried out by the monks and employees from the monasteries in Sampor (Slovakia), Pannonhalma and Tihany (Hungary), Břevnov (Czech Republic), as well as the Faculty of History of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia). An important contribution to the study has been made by Dr Rastislav Kožiak (Matej Bel University) and Marta Sztwiertnia (Benedictine Institute of Culture, Tyniec Abbey), who has analysed the aspects related to education in Benedictine monasteries. In addition, participants in two preparatory meetings included Fr Adalbert Gáspár, OSB (Tihany), Br Aleš Vandrovec, OSB (Břevnov), Br Michal M. Kukuča, OSB (Sampor).

The issues raised in the study will be complemented by materials prepared as part of an international conference summing up the entire project, materials that will be included in a separate publication.



I Patrimony

Patrimony

The beginning of monasticism or where did monks come from...

For a very long time there have been people in various religions who for religious reasons undertook a specific lifestyle that made them different from the rest of humanity: they gave up marriage, observed fasting and mortified their bodies or served others on a larger scale than everybody else. In Christianity they were present from the very beginning in the community of the believers, i.e. in the Church. They were always very highly regarded and were referred to as ascetics. There were many of them, both men and women. They lived in their homes, pursued their occupations, maintained contact with those around them. However, they were all characterised and distinguished by the observance of sexual abstinence. However, it was not until the late 3rd century that a big change



took place – in Egypt – leading to the emergence of monks. The Egyptian desert, enclosing the land on both sides of the Nile, is primarily a rocky desert crisscrossed by valleys in which streams once flowed. Only in some places does the sandy desert with wandering dunes come closer to the Nile. Therefore, in order to avoid stereotypes, we should explain what, in fact, constituted a desert or wilderness where monks would settle and where they by no means lived among endless sands and dunes and where they

did not live – perhaps paradoxically – entirely on their own...

The desert in Egypt is everywhere and is always easily accessible. People can live only in those places where water is available or where it can be reached relatively quickly, i.e. in the Nile valley. Depending on the region, its width ranges from several to more than ten kilometres. It is surrounded by the rocky slopes of a plateau known as *jebel*. Since time immemorial life has concentrated in the valley, where population density was usually very high. However, just by travelling only a few kilometres and climbing the rocky edge of the valley, one would find oneself in the desert, from where the activity at the bottom of the valley could be seen. Thus Egypt,



as its people saw it, was a country in the Nile valley, near the river, and everything outside the valley – the desert, that is – was the world outside Egypt. However, this world was constantly present in the lives and minds of people living in the valley. They had been going there for a long time and for a variety of purposes, mostly, however, in order to hide. When, for example, officials recruiting for the army entered a village, some, as we would say, conscripts, fled to the desert; similarly, when peasants rebelled against low wages or high taxes, they moved to the desert; this was also true of debtors or various “restless souls”. Thus the desert emerges primarily as a space or margin separated from society, lying outside its structure, laws and customs, in other words – outside life at that time. It is no coincidence that monks would say that those travelling to sell what they had produced were going to Egypt. Similarly, those who came to visit them came from Egypt.

St. Anthony was considered to be the first Christian monk already in Antiquity. He was not the first to have lead a pious and ascetic life, but he was the first man who made more radical choices: abandoning the place where he lived,

breaking off contact with other people and going outside civilisation, i.e. to the desert. This took place in Middle Egypt, probably around 286. After twenty years in complete isolation, he left his hermitage and admitted some disciples. From that moment on we can talk of monks.

The word monk comes from Greek: *monachos* (plural *monachoi*), which can be translated as one who is single, i.e. one who is internally a unity, for whom only one thing matters – seeking God. Thus, a monk is someone who has abandoned the world – with its multiplicity or chaos, with its conflicting tendencies, with people who have various tastes – and who seeks inner integration and harmony, first with himself and through that with God and other people. Sometimes people believe that a monk is someone who lives alone. This could be understood as someone who is unmarried. It does not mean, however, that a monk is someone who lives completely on his own. Paradoxically, there were very few cases of individuals living in complete solitude, without any contact with other people. Usually, when a monk was breaking off contact with the world, he looked for other *monachoi*. In most cases monks made

up groups of several or dozen or so individuals; often they would form larger communities (if only for reasons of safety). What does need to be explain, however, is the word “Benedictine”, because this term was not commonly known in the Middle Ages.

A monk, i.e. a cenobite or anchorite, eremite, hermit...

These various, sometimes exotic-sounding terms may be confusing. To some extent, they are synonyms. A cenobite (from the Greek word *koinonia* i.e. community) is a monk who lives with other monks and with them says prayers every day, has his meals, works and is subordinated to a superior. This model of life was created in Upper Egypt by St. Pachomius (4th century). However, those monks who did not live in a strictly organised community but stressed a solitary rhythm of life in separate cells are referred to (for reasons of convenience) as hermits, i.e. eremites or anchorites.

Monastery – a word of Greek origin (*monasterion*, which has a Latin version as well: *monasterium*), denotes an enclosed space surrounded by a wall, i.e. a space inhabited by

monks. In some languages the word for monastery is associated with the Latin word *claustrum* (e.g. Polish: *klasztor*, German: *Kloster*, Czech: *klášter*, Slovak: *kláštor*, Hungarian: *kolostor*). A monastery is usually associated with a specific building or group of buildings in which monks live. However, the word *monasterion* initially denoted a single cell and not a place where a group of monks lived. Soon, however, there emerged assemblages of cell-flats of various monks, e.g. disciples' cells surrounding that of their master. Such loose assemblages were very characteristic of monasticism in Egypt. Monks lived separately and on Saturday evenings they would gather together to pray in a centrally-placed oratory. For security and safety reasons such settlements were surrounded in their entirety by walls.

There is also another expression describing places where monks lived. The word *laura* did not originally exist in Egypt and its monastic application comes from Palestine. The term describes a group of individual cells surrounding a common centre made up of a church and bakery; ascetics would gather there on Saturdays and Sundays, spending the rest of the week in

their cells. Perhaps the term comes from the Arabic word *suq* signifying “market”. This is where ascetics would bring their products on Saturday mornings, would pray together, eat and conducted all necessary transactions. From here on Sunday evenings they would take back to their cells bread, water and bulrush, which they needed for work over the following week. However, both *laura* and *suq* suggest not so much an open space but a street full of shops and outdoor stalls. Perhaps this corresponds better to the most common, geographical nature of Palestinian *lauras*: caves or cells the entrances to which were turned towards a river – path running along the edge of a ravine. Often, this also resembles a village with its various buildings scattered around the central square along various “streets”. In Egypt, monasteries founded by St. Pachomius were very similar in nature and shape.

Founders

The phenomenon of Egyptian monasticism, which emerged in the first half of the 4th century, can be associated with two great figures: Anthony and Pachomius. They founded the

main centres of monastic life in Egypt and at the same time two types of life: anchoretic (reclusive) and cenobitic (communal). Anthony's disciples lived in semi-anchoretic colonies in Middle Egypt in Pispir on the Nile. Pachomius, on the other hand, founded his communities on the Nile in Upper Egypt.

Anthony

He was born in Middle Egypt in a fairly wealthy family around 251. His parents died when he was still quite young. At the age of about 20, when he was looking for a purpose in his life, one Sunday in church he heard the following words from the Gospel: *If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me* (Mt 19:21). These became key in his life. Anthony followed this counsel, though initially he retained some of his property to provide for his sister. Then he once again heard the words of the Gospel: *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow* (Mt 6:34). So he gave away the rest of the property, entrusted his sister to a community of virgins and moved to what could be described as a pigsty or cowshed



located on the outskirts of the garden in his former estate. This happened in Egypt, probably in the early days of Emperor Aurelian's reign, i.e. around 270–272. After a while (around 286) Anthony decided on a more radical step: he crossed the Nile on his own and shut himself for twenty years in an abandoned fort on the edge of the desert, where bread was delivered to him twice a year. In the

period of increased persecution (306–313), when arrested Christians were transported to Alexandria,, Anthony left his seclusion and followed them to help and bring comfort to them. After leaving his seclusion, Anthony became a master for many whom he persuaded to choose monastic life and for whom he cared like a father. Not only did people come to him seeking advice, but he himself travelled extensively, visiting Alexandria and communities of monks on the outskirts of the Nile Delta. However, as

he desired greater solitude, he moved farther into the desert towards the Red Sea and settled in a small oasis at the foot of Mount Kolzim. Occasionally, he visited his disciples in Pispir on the bank of the Nile. He died in 356 at the age of 105.

Pachomius

Pachomius came from quite a wealthy pagan family in Upper Egypt. He was born around 292. Conscripted at the age of 20 during Maximinus' last war against Licinius (312–313), he marched with other recruits down the Nile. They spent the night in a prison in Luxor, probably in some legionary camp set up on the premises of an ancient Egyptian temple. Local Christians came with food and drink to bring comfort to the wretched youths. When Pachomius asked what this act was supposed to mean, he heard that Christians showed mercy to strangers and all people in general. He asked again: "Who are Christians?", only to hear that they "are people who carry the name of Christ, the only Son of God, and, trusting God, who created Heaven, earth and us, do good to all people". When he heard about such grace, his heart filled with joy

and fear of God. Retiring to a secluded corner of the prison, he lifted his arms towards heaven to pray with the following words: “O God, Creator of Heaven and earth, if you deign to cast your eyes upon my baseness – for I do not know you, the one true God – and deliver me from my present misery, I shall earnestly serve You all the days of my life and, loving all people, I shall serve them as You command”. After a few months Maximinus was defeated and killed, and Pachomius found himself back in Thebaid. He decided to become baptised in the village of Chenoboskion and then became a follower of the hermit Palaemon. Having spent a few years with him, around 323 Pachomius settled in a deserted village of Tabennisi. Soon he was joined by others and, as their number grew, he established new monasteries for them. By the time he died (in 346) he had established nine monasteries in total.

Prayer – work – daily life

Monks’ prayer books were based mainly on the Book of Psalms and New Testament. Monks usually learned their prayers by heart, in order to be able to recite them at any moment, e.g.

when travelling or working. The basic time for prayer was the night. Monks prayed facing the east. In order to help their concentration, they painted crosses and wrote fragments from the Holy Scripture on the walls of their cells and oratories. They gathered to pray on Saturday evenings. Together, they recited psalms sotto voce until the dawn on Sunday, when they celebrated the Holy Mass.

In addition to prayer, the second pillar of monks' life was work. Their ideal was to be able to earn their living working with their hands. They wove baskets, mats, made ropes, took part in harvest, picked olives and grapes; some of them copied books.

Their main food was bread baked several times a year, which was moistened with water before eating. They also ate fruit and drank water as well as small quantities of wine. On the other hand, they avoided meat and boiled dishes, which were seen as a manifestation of luxury and were given only to the sick and guests visiting the monks.

Contrary to popular belief, monks travelled a lot. They set out to work (leaving their monasteries at harvest time) or to sell their products.

They visited their neighbours, other monks, which was to be a sign of mutual care, as well as famous masters of spiritual life. This latter scene is often presented in literary sources.

The life of Benedict

The monastic movement, which developed very dynamically in Egypt at the turn of the 4th century, quickly began to influence other regions of the world in late Antiquity, and already in the 4th century spread to Western Europe. At the same time it attracted many representatives of the Latin culture who left Italy and Gaul, going to the East and usually starting a new life in Egypt. Some stayed there till the end for their lives, while others eventually settled in Palestine or returned to their homelands, promoting new ideas there.

The first hermits, monks and the first monasteries appeared in Italy in the 4th century. The very landscape of the Apennine Peninsula – full of mountains, secluded valleys and rocky caves – was conducive to and encouraged seclusion. At the same time, in major cities and near them monasteries were established either by bishops or by pious aristocrats. In addition,

disciples would gather round famous hermits, leading a pious life according to their precepts. Towards the end of the 5th century there were many such places.

The many people who were fascinated with the idea of ascetic life included Benedict, born in a wealthy family around 480. He began his monastic life, like many of his contemporaries, as a hermit, establishing a community later on. It was Benedict who left a Rule – set of precepts for monks – which survived more than a millennium, shaping monastic life in Europe.

St. Benedict's biographer

We know very little about Benedict's life. The only sources for getting to know his biography are the Rule he wrote and the second book of *Dialogues* by Pole Gregory the Great (d. 604). Gregory began his career as prefect of Rome, but, as many other Roman aristocrats, he succumbed to the appeal



of monastic life and withdrew from public life to a monastery he established in his own house in Rome. Around 579 Pope Pelagius II ordained him a deacon and sent him on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople. After the death of his protector Gregory was elected his successor. Gregory's pontificate came at a difficult time in the history of Italy. He had to not only face problems within the Church but also care for the preservation of peace in the face of the havoc wreaked by the Lombards in Italy. During Gregory's times Rome was struck by a terrible plague.

Despite numerous worries, Gregory retained deep sympathy for monastic life. He promoted it in his writings and also sent some monks on an evangelising mission to Britain. Gregory also gave shelter to monks from the Monte Cassino monastery, which had been destroyed by the Lombards. They probably told him about St. Benedict and Gregory included this information in Book Two of his *Dialogues*.

Subiaco

Located among picturesque mountains, about 80 km north-east of Rome, Subiaco



became a dream place for Benedict to start a solitary life (in 499). At the beginning of his monastic experience, he met an older monk, Romanus, who gave him the habit and delivered food to a cave, where young Benedict lived. In the light of Gregory's account, it was in Subiaco that Benedict moved from solitary to communal life. After three years in solitude, Benedict founded the first monasteries near his cave for

the disciples quickly gathering round him. He remained in charge of these monasteries for nearly twenty years, when he and a group of his closest disciples moved to Monte Cassino.

Benedictine life continues in Subiaco to this day. Visitors can see the cave in which St. Benedict initially lived and around which a monastery – called *Sacro Specco*, i.e. Sacred Cave – was built among the rocks. In the 13th century it was decorated with beautiful polychromes. Another monastery, of St. Scholastica, was established at the foot of the cave, probably as early as in the 9th century.

Monte Cassino

Situated about 130 km south of Rome and made famous during WWII (1944), Monte Cassino has, however, a much longer history and is a special place for the Benedictines. It was here that St. Benedict came and settled with a group of disciples, probably around 520. At that time an abandoned temple of Apollo stood on top of a high hill. A church was built on its site and around it – the first modest monastery. Benedict spent the rest of his life there, until his death in 547. Within that time he wrote



a Rule for the monks, in which he included his personal experiences.

Monte Cassino has had a very turbulent history. On several occasions the monks had to flee the place, for the first time soon after St. Benedict's death during a Lombard invasion. The monastery was destroyed several times, but kept being rebuilt and the monks kept returning to it, resuming their life there, sometimes among rubble and ruins. This is what is expressed by the Abbey's emblem, depicting a felled tree with young shoots sprouting from its trunk, and its motto: *succisa virescit* – cut down, [the tree] grows.

Writing the Rule

Initially, the word “rule” denoted a rope used by carpenters at construction sites to lay stones or brick along a straight line. Very early on, in the 4th century, this concept found its way into monastic writings to describe a set of precepts addressed by a master to his disciples. Many such sets emerged at the time, but they were not uniform legal codifications but, rather, collections of various instructions, sometimes questions and answers.

The Rule written by St. Benedict was neither the first nor the only one of its kind. Nor was it a wholly original creation. Unfortunately, Benedict’s autograph has not survived; the oldest of the manuscripts surviving to this day comes from the 9th century and was copied from an older manuscript in the Sankt Gallen Abbey (in what is now Switzerland). Philological studies have made it possible to establish that Benedict to a large extent used a slightly older anonymous rule (written between 500 and 530), known today as the Rule of the Master. He took from it the overall structure of the whole document, using some fragments verbatim,

transforming others and making his own additions. Benedict's Rule contains many quotes from and allusions to the Holy Scripture, but its author also used material from other collections of monastic precepts or lives of saints, e.g. the Rule of St. Basil, *The Rule of the Fathers*, *The Life of St. Anthony*, writings of John Cassian.

Thus, the Rule of St. Benedict is a mature fruit of the entire earlier tradition of monastic life, not only in Italy, but also in Gaul or Egypt. Benedict's originality lies not so much in coming up with something new, but, first of all, in remaining faithful to tradition and in drawing on the experiences of others. Perhaps as a result of this, his work has survived 1500 years and is still applied today.

Benedictine Europe

The period between the 5th century and the beginning of the 9th century is often referred to as the period in which Europe was shaped. The still existing remains of the structures of the ancient Roman Empire, when confronted with the barbarian peoples coming to and settling within the territory of the former empire, evolved into new structures. This evolution can

be followed on a variety of planes: social, demographic, legal, cultural, as well as in literature, art and language.

The period can also be called a time of monks, because they took an active part in the on-going confrontation between the “old order” and the new reality, for, as missionaries, they preached Christian (Latin) faith to the barbarian peoples. The death of St. Benedict and the reforms of Charlemagne are separated by about 250 years. The period was marked the foundation of many monasteries by rulers and bishops, who were guided by various rules. In the early 9th century, the Rule of St. Benedict became commonly observed by monks. From that moment we can speak of a Benedictine Europe, for the monasteries existing at the time marked the boundaries of the civilised, Latin world.

Expansion of monks

Monasticism has never been – as might be thought – a static phenomenon. On the contrary, monks would very often leave their peaceful monasteries. The period between the mid-6th century and the mid-7th century was marked by an extremely interesting phenomenon fraught

with consequences, a phenomenon that can be called a merger of the monks, with the Celtic monks from the isles, i.e. Ireland and Britain, coming to the continent and the Roman monks going to the isles. The encounter between these two types of monasticism proved to be very fruitful and made an impact on the entire culture of the old continent between the 7th and the 9th centuries.

Christianity reached Ireland already in the first half of the 5th century (St. Patrick's mission). Monasticism that emerged there remained different from the forms existing on the continent. We do not know the rules according to which those monasteries lived, though we may suspect that a number of ascetic practices resembled those of the monks in the East. One of the forms of asceticism was leaving one's homeland and setting off for unknown countries, i.e. undertaking a *peregrinatio*. This was one of the reasons behind a veritable "expansion" of the Celtic monks, first to neighbouring England and then to the continent.

The second direction of the "expansion" was set by Pope Gregory the Great, who in 597 sent a group of Roman monks from St. Andrew's

monastery on a mission to England. The monks settled in Canterbury. In addition to books, they brought with them Roman traditions, liturgy or way of singing, which they then instilled in their Anglo-Saxon disciples. The encounter between the two worlds turned out to be very fruitful, a fact that can be seen in, for instance, the surviving manuscripts – richly decorated and written in a new script.

One of the best known Celtic monks, Columban of Bangor, who in 590 crossed the English Channel with a group of disciples, initially settled in Luxeuil (Burgundy) and then travelled across northern Gaul, parts of Germania and eventually settled in northern Italy, in Bobbio. Throughout the 7th century several dozen monasteries, modelled on Luxeuil, were founded, with Columban's disciples and monks from the British Isles being present in many regions of the old continent. Their disciples in turn moved even further east, on a Christianising mission among the pagan Germans. The best known among them were: Willibrord, apostle of the Frisians and founder of the Utrecht bishopric; Boniface-Winfrid, apostle of the Germans and founder of, among

others, the Fulda Abbey; and Oscar (Ansgar), founder of the Hamburg bishopric and apostle of Denmark and Sweden.

Carolingian reforms

In the mid-8th century monasteries on the old continent did not have one single rule. The credit for its introduction goes to Emperor Charlemagne. Towards the end of his life (813), wanting to renew and improve the life in monasteries, he asked the abbot from Monte Cassino to send him a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict, which seemed to him the best for the purpose. The individual who was to become a reformer of monastic life, if not its second founder, was Benedict of Aniane. In 818-817, Benedict and Emperor Louis the Pious organised a number of reform synods, crowned with the proclamations of *Capitulare monasticum*, i.e. a codification based on the Rule of St. Benedict, which from that moment on was to be followed in all monasteries of the empire.

The effects of the reform included inventories of the monasteries' property taken at that time. Many of them have survived to this day. Their value lies in, among others, the fact that

they provide us with information about not only the property belonging to a given monastery, but also about its whole “infrastructure”. An example here are the statutes written down in 822 by Abbot Adalard of Corbie, which list, in addition to mills and gardens, a night shelter for the poor or a bakery. Another obligation introduced at the time were monks’ prayers for the salvation of the emperor and prosperity of the empire.

The first monks and first monasteries in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Slovakia

The work started by St. Benedict in Subiaco and Monte Cassino in the 6th century has survived centuries. The monks following his Rule – and hence called (though in later periods) Benedictines – with time expanded their activities to the entire Western Church. They came to Central Europe – to what is now the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – from various centres in the Empire and Italy as early as in the mid-10th century. They put down roots there and have survived – with some interruptions – until today. Although we have source accounts – not entirely clear, it has to be said

– testifying to the presence of monks already in the 9th century in Hungary (Mosaburg/Zalavár) and Slovakia (Zobor), the beginnings of the presence of Benedictines are largely associated with the Christianisation of these lands in the 10th century.

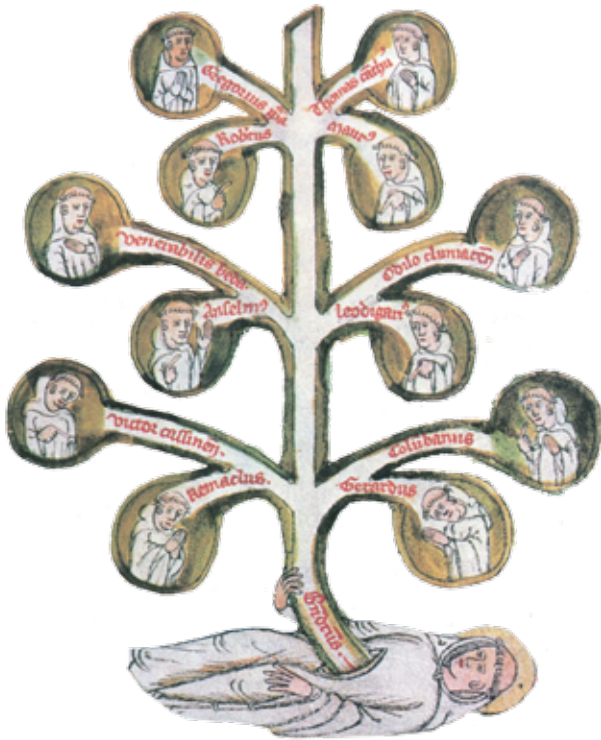
The first monks came to Poland with the Bohemian princess Dobrava, who married Mieszko I (in the mid-960s). They probably settled near the residence of the ruler, perhaps in Poznań or – temporarily – the ducal *palas* in Ostrów Lednicki. Probably as early as in the 970s the first female abbey was founded in Prague by the sister of Prince Boleslaus II, Mlada. The last decade of the century was marked by the foundation of three communities of monks. The Břevnov Monastery was founded by St. Adalbert, probably around 992-993, and St. John the Baptist's Monastery was founded shortly before the year 1000 in Ostrov near Prague. In 996 the first monastery in Hungary was founded in Pannonhalma, not without some contribution of St. Adalbert's disciples. Around 1000 a monastery was established in Międzyrzecze, Poland, and this is where disciples of St. Romuald brought from

Italy probably settled and were later joined by St. Bruno of Querfurt.

We can assume that the first abbeys had about 10-15 monks, if the community in Międzyrzecz is to be a typical example. Unfortunately, we know very little about the daily tasks and activities of the first monks. Their main task was liturgical prayer said together for the living and the dead and for the prosperity of the state. For this was the prime task set for the monks by their founders. Another important job was to educate new, local personnel for the needs of the Church. Abbeys became not only the pillars of the missions and the emerging organisation of the Church, but also important centres of culture and art. After all, monks brought with them books, liturgical robes and vessels as well as relics.

The process of founding Benedictine communities that began in the second half of the 10th century developed dynamically in all the countries mentioned here and the first convents described above gave rise – directly or indirectly – to dozen or so new communities, established on the initiative of monarchs and later also bishops and magnates.

However, if we examine the monastic foundation process in the context of the early Middle Ages, we should always bear in mind that this was a complex process. It should be seen – in most, though not all cases – as a phenomenon sometimes lasting many years, a phenomenon involving endowments from successive rulers or bishops, and bringing together monks from many different parent monasteries. A good example of this is the Tynieć Abbey. It was established (probably in the 1040s) by Prince Caisimir the Restorer and initiated perhaps by his mother, Queen Richeza. Successive rulers – Boleslaus the Munificent, Queen Judith, wife of Ladislaus Herman, and Boleslaus the Wry-mouthed – granted more estates to the monastery, thus becoming its co-founders. The foundation process ended when the monastery church was consecrated by a papal legate, probably around 1124, who also issued a document confirming all the endowments.



II Culture

Culture

Culture and liturgy

If we want to understand the monks' contribution to the development of a broadly defined culture, we need to understand their approach to the material side of the monastery and to what constituted it. After all, as St. Benedict reminded the monks in his Rule, all objects belonging to the monastery should be treated "as if they were sacred vessels of the altar". If so, then this was to be expressed with appropriate dignity, both in monastic architecture and in furnishings as well as objects, especially those used for liturgical purposes. Such an approach translated into a quest for beauty, which in turn significantly affected architecture, art, crafts, writing and music. The approach was very accurately expressed by one of the most distinguished scholars studying monasticism, J. Leclercq: "For the house of God and everything

found in it, like the old tent of the meeting and temple of Solomon, should be worthy of God, who was its host and before whom monks simply had to perform courtly functions". Monks found a synthesis of all human actions and endeavours in liturgy, because it was in liturgy that they offered God the fruits of the work of the mind and the hands, and thus paid homage to Him, confessing that all these works came from Him.

It should also be added that both the entire monastic architecture and art – its form, sculpture decorations, stained-glass windows, furnishings, the richness of motifs depicted on the altars, liturgical robes, books and vessels – are by no means accidental. They are to show examples from the Gospel, i.e. the history of salvation.

Genius loci

Despite the fact that in the early Middle Ages there was no specific provision that would define how a monastery should be designed and built, there did emerge a certain model-canon which was followed almost everywhere. Perhaps one of the sources of inspiration was

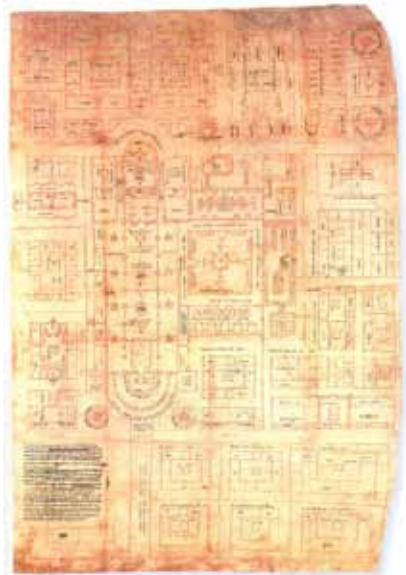


a precept in the Rule of St. Benedict whereby a monastery should be organised in such a way that all the monks needed for prayer and their work would be found inside it and the monks would not need to go outside. In addition, it became customary to build monasteries on hilltops. Perhaps the example of Monte Casino exerted its influence there. Even today, when we stand on top of Monte Cassino, admiring the beautiful panorama, we find it difficult to resist the charm of the place. It was undoubtedly no coincidence that St. Benedict chose such a beautiful site for his monastery. In any case, already in the Middle Ages he was described as a man who loved mountains (*montes amabat*). His example was often referred to in the Middle Ages and also in later periods, with monasteries being built on hilltops and in beautiful surroundings. We can also say that the “mysticism of the mountains” was encouraging, as it well expressed the ideal of longing and looking for God, and contemplating Him in the beauty of the world. This is what was behind an inscription placed by a window in one of the monasteries: wide-eyed, we look at the great world of God around us.

The fact is that when we look at the examples of Pannonhalma, Tihana, Tyniec or many other monasteries – to which we could add Mont Saint Michel or Canigou – we can admire their *genius loci*, which even today attracts just as many tourists as it attracted pilgrims in the Middle Ages. The tradition of locating monasteries in such surroundings is still very much alive. The most recent Benedictine foundations, for example Sampor in Slovakia, are an example here. Today, the highest-lying monastery, situated on the roof of the world, so to speak, is the monastery on the shore of Lake Titicaca.

Art and architecture

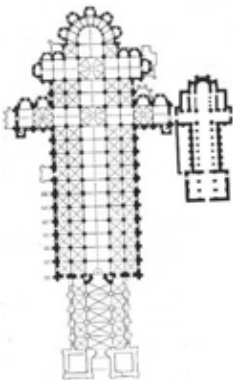
The oldest surviving architectural “plan” is a drawing of the Sankt Gallen Abbey from the 820s. The abbey resembles a real town with a church at its centre. On its south side, around a square courtyard with a garden, we find the various rooms



used by monks: a chapter house, i.e. a place where they met, a refectory, where they ate, and others. This was the most frequently used model over the following centuries. Monastery buildings enclosed a quadrangle with a courtyard and garden at its centre, a layout that had a symbolic meaning: it referred to the Biblical image of the heavenly Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden.

The most impressive element of every monastery was always the church. Usually, in order to emphasise its prominence among the monastery buildings, it was built on top of the mountain or hill on which the monastery was situated. Many surviving monastery churches, despite alterations of later periods, have retained their original, early medieval climate, to this day impressing with their harmony and

the beauty of their austere architecture. This applies to, for example, Vézelay, Fleury, Silos or the recently renovated church in Pannonhalma. The biggest and most magnificent of the monastery churches was the church in the Cluny Abbey, known as Cluny III (*maior ecclesia*), which until the expansion of St. Peter's





Basilica in Rome in the early 16th century, was the biggest church in Latin Europe.

Due to a number of historical upheavals, including the dissolution of nearly all Benedictine abbeys over the course of the 19th century and the resulting destruction of archives and libraries, most of the oldest Benedictine historical monuments have not survived. The Pannonhalma abbey is all the luckier in this respect, as it boasts a continuous history and, consequently, well-preserved buildings and furnishings. Another interesting example is the Břevnov Abbey, which, having avoided the dissolution in the 19th century, survived until the communists came to power. After its dissolution in 1950, the buildings were turned into ar-

chives for one of the government departments. Thanks to this the library, located in the buildings that were closed and not accessible to the general public, has survived in the form it had in the 18th century.

Excavation and restoration works in Polish abbeys in Tyniec, Lubiń and Mogilno, or, similarly, in Břevnov in the Czech Republic, have revealed the remains of monastic architecture and art. These are some of the best examples of Polish and Czech Romanesque art. They include, first of all, the foundations and remains of the first churches in Břevnov, from the early 11th century, and in Tyniec, dating back to ca 1100; carved capitals of columns, probably from a Romanesque cloister in Tyniec, or the crypt in Mogilno. The church in this abbey was modelled on Benedictine churches built in the 1030s between the Meuse and the Escaut, and had its roots in Ottonian architecture. Around 100 years later it was copied – though in a reduced form – during the construction of another monastery church in Lubiń. The church in the Ołbin Abbey in Wrocław, consecrated in 1149, was probably the largest Romanesque church in Poland: its aisle was about 55 metres long.

Monastery buildings are a magnificent testimony to the long and turbulent history of any abbey. In Tyniec – and to some extent also in Břevnov – there are surviving fragments of the Romanesque foundations from the second half of the 11th century (the church) and the turn of the 12th century (part of the monastery). In the following centuries, especially in the second half of the 15th century, the church and the monastery were altered and expanded in the Gothic style, with materials for the works coming from some Romanesque buildings. In the modern era, 17th and 18th centuries, more works were carried out and a Baroque vaulting was placed on the Gothic walls of the church. At the same time, the medieval walls of some of the monastery buildings were used as foundations for the Baroque walls, which can be seen in the exposed parts of the old library.

Culture of writing

In monasteries “there was a desire to have books, plenty of beautiful books. For what reason, if not because they



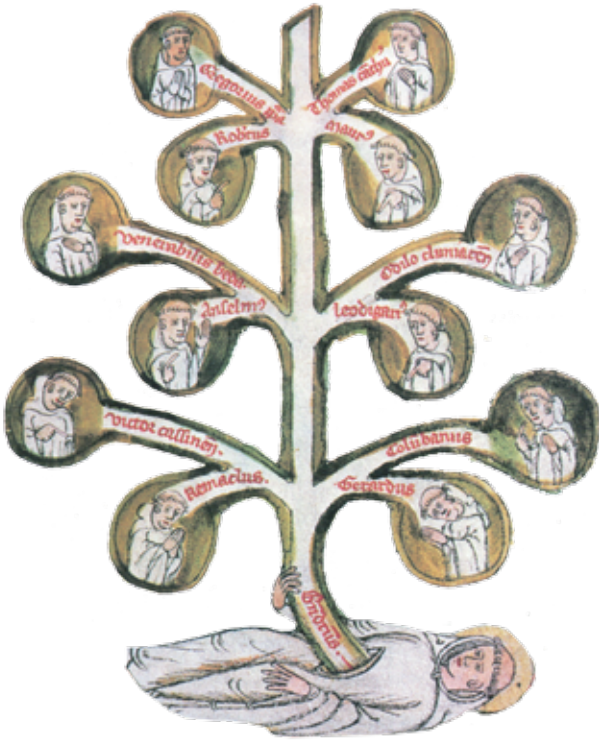
were loved? They were valued for their content, their beauty and their usefulness” (J. Leclercq). It would be difficult to find a better way of describing monks’ love of books. Already in late Antiquity monks in most monasteries were obliged to learn to read in order to be able to participate in liturgy and as well as understand the Holy Scripture and the Psalms. Moreover, they quickly realised that writing and copying books was an appropriate occupation for a monk, requiring as it did concentration, precision and patience. However, monks copied not only sacred writings for liturgical purposes, but also historical works, grammatical treatises, treatises on style and the art of poetry or music, excerpts from secular works (including those by pagan authors) and, of course, poems. Many works by ancient authors are known to us from copies made in monastic scriptoria.



Copied works were used in monastery schools as textbooks for teaching grammar, rhetoric and style. Usually, it was also in scriptoria that pupils would learn the various styles of writing used at the time.

Although it would be difficult to talk of a “Benedictine” education system – for the choice of authors whom the pupils learned or books which they read differed depending on the monastery – the fact is that monasteries had schools in which children and adolescents were taught; some of these young people would remain in the monasteries as monks.

From the very beginning, monks arriving in Poland, Bohemia and Hungary would bring with them liturgical books. One of the most finest examples of such books in the Tynieć sacramentary from the mid 11th century. Although it is difficult to reconstruct the full inventory of monastic libraries, we know that all abbeys collected books and monks working in scriptoria copied not only liturgical books but also historiographical works. The National Library in Warsaw has in its collections a richly illuminated manuscript with the works by the ancient historian Flavius Josephus, a manuscript that was copied in the Tynieć Abbey in 1466 and is the only extant manuscript in Poland containing the complete version of works by this author. From the Holy Cross Abbey come the so-called Holy Cross Sermons written in Polish.



III Hospitality



Hospitality

Benedictines today

Benedictines have never created an order, i.e. a centralised organisation. The monasteries founded in various periods did invoke the Rule of St. Benedict, but they retained their autonomy. Sometimes they formed more or less closely linked associations called congregations, with some taking their name from the main abbey, e.g. Vallombrosians, Olivetans or Camaldolites, others – from the name of their organiser, e.g. Sylvestrines. It was not until the late 19th century that Pope Leo XIII established a fairly loose organisation bringing together all monasteries and called the Benedictine Confederation of the Order of St. Benedict. It is headed by the Abbot Primate, elected once every 8 years to be an honorary representative of the entire Benedictine family. Pope Pius XII explicitly ordered that the Confederation be regulated by

its own law, amended after the Second Vatican Council. Today, the Confederation consists of 20 congregations, i.e. associations of monasteries. The monasteries retain their autonomy within the various congregations. The congregations are headed by Abbots Presidents, who usually are visitors of monasteries affiliated to each congregation. The Polish and Slovakian Benedictines belong to the international Congregation of the Annunciation, bringing together 40 monasteries located in Europe, Africa, Asia and both Americas. The Hungarian monasteries make up their own Hungarian Congregation (9 monasteries in total, including 2 in Brazil), while the Czech monasteries (together with the houses in Croatia and Slovenia) are part of the Slav Congregation (6 monasteries in total).

Sant'Anselmo Abbey on the Aventine Hill in Rome is the headquarters of the entire Confederation of Benedictine monks. Since the end of the 19th century it has been the seat of the Abbot Primate and a university – Atheneum of St. Anselm – and has provided accommodation for monks and professors from all over the world, who come to study or lec-



ture in Rome. Every four years abbots and superiors from across the world come here for the Confederation's Congress.

Prayer and work

St. Benedict did not write the famous maxim *ora et labora*, yet, deeply rooted in tradition, it very well reflects the Benedictine approach to a harmonious combination of these two realities, important to normal human and Christian development.





The Benedictine prayer focuses on two axes: liturgy and *lectio divina*, i.e. meditative reading of the Bible in the context of the Church tradition. The liturgy and the *lectio* are the main points of their meeting with God, points to which monks are to return every day. The Scripture and liturgy, read and experienced anew, though they return cyclically to the same point, are to help monks praise God in their everyday life and work.

The overriding rule of organising work in the Benedictine tradition stems generally from the needs of the local Church in which a community lives. That is why the range of tasks undertaken by monks has always been very broad: from eremitic life to missions in Africa, from copying books to working in schools and at universities, and many others. In his Rule St. Benedict stresses that monks should live by the work of their hands, which is also a requirement for preserving their identity. The type of work or, more broadly, activity depends thus mostly on the local conditions as well as on the possibilities of the community in question – presence of monks with various talents. It can change as one generation of monks replaces another. Various

monasteries sometimes cultivate a specific type of activity that may have evolved centuries ago, a type that makes their work characteristic. A good example here is the Pannonhalma monastery, whose school had such a long tradition and enjoyed such prestige that it was not closed even during the communist regime.

In Tyniec, after their return to the abbey in 1939, the monks, in addition to restoration of the buildings, undertook a number of other initiatives as well. They prepared a post-Vatican II *Roman Missal* as well as other liturgical books. These works were carried out by Fr Franciszek Małaczyński. At the same time the monks worked on a translation (from the original languages) and edition of the so-called Millennium Bible (its fifth edition was published in 2000). Fr Augustyn Jankowski was in charge of that project. They did not fail either to study the history of Tyniec and of Polish Benedictines as well as the history of liturgy, a work to which Fr Paweł Sczaniecki devoted many years of his life.

More recently, they launched Wydawnictwo Tyniec (Tyniec Publishing House). It focuses mainly on editions of translations of source

texts dealing with monastic history and spirituality (*Źródła Monastyczne – Monastic Sources* with no fewer than 62 volumes published so far) and on the promotion of the Benedictine tradition. In any case, many monasteries today like to go into publishing, as if in reference to the medieval tradition of copying books. The monks from Břevnov and Sampor, too, publish books. Looking for new sources of income in the new economic reality in Poland, in 2006 the Polish Benedictines started an economic entity, *Benedicite*, which promotes and sells Benedictine products. Pannonhalma is engaged in a similar activity, famous as it is not only for its school but also for wine growing and wine making, and, recently also for its plantation of lavender.

Tourism and hospitality

In the 20th century, with the growth of tourism, old monasteries became places visited not only by pilgrims, but also numerous tourists, who not so much seek contemplation and prayer, but want to see interesting historical monuments, especially given the fact that they usually combine interesting architecture

with picturesque locations (as has already been mentioned earlier). In a natural response to such expectations monks began to organise visits for tourists, expand tourist facilities in the form of reception centres, projection rooms, souvenir and book shops, catering facilities and, if possible, to create museums presenting works of art collected in their monasteries or, more broadly, making people familiar with the monastic tradition and heritage. An excellent example of such actions are recent projects carried out in Pannonhalma and Tihany. As a result, even when the number of visitors exceeds 100,000, monks manage to preserve the religious nature of these sites and an atmosphere encouraging the visitors to admire the beauty of art and nature, to calm down and to reflect.





However, monasteries attract not only tourists but also people who want to spend a few days meditating and praying, and who seek spiritual renewal. Already in the Middle Ages, as we can see in the drawing of the Sankt Gallen Abbey mentioned earlier, in some monastery buildings separate rooms were designated for guests. Today, nearly all abbeys cultivate this tradition. In addition to offers of individual visits, monasteries also prepare programmes of organised retreats or meditation days, biblical or liturgical workshops, workshops devoted to Gregorian chant, or offer their guests an opportunity to meet monks for spiritual conversation or confession.



Museum and education

Apart from educational activity in the form of running a school, today monasteries increasingly organise extra-curricular activities, usually involving the monastery museums, an approach that follows the current trends of combining museum with education. As the beginnings of modern museum education in Europe are to a large extent associated with England, it is no coincidence that the first monastery which launched education activities in the form of museum workshops is located in the United Kingdom. It is the Buckfast Abbey (south-west England), which has had a Department of Education for over 20 years. Another country

where Benedictine monasteries are involved in museum education is Austria. Various forms of activities for children and young people have been introduced by monasteries in Admont, Altenburg, Gottweig, Kremsmunster, Fiecht and Lambacht. We may wonder why this activity is so popular in Austria. Perhaps this is a re-



sult of the Benedictines' experiences with formal education. In the 19th century many monasteries were dissolved and those that survived were those that were useful to society – running schools of hospitals. This type of activity is pursued on the largest scale by the Admont Abbey (which has a special educational room). Its offer is based on subjects which are interest-

ing from the point of view of school (and not only school) education and which are at the same time closely associated with monastic culture: “Monastery pharmacy”, “Paper making”, “Visiting a medieval scriptorium”, “From a sheet of paper to a book”, “Form – Paint – Master”. All their classes are interactive, making it possible for children to make specific objects, experience various games, play roles from a distant past and, through this, “touch and feel” the reality of those days.

The Benedictine Abbey in Tyniec is the first and so far the only monastery in Poland organising activities that are part of museum education. With the rebuilding of the so-called Great Ruin, i.e. one of the wings of the Abbey, financed to a large extent by EU funds, the monks began to adapt the methods and forms of communication to younger audiences. Their offer of workshops – as in the examples from other countries cited earlier – is linked to the function of the place and its historical structure.

All topics relate to the place in which the workshops are conducted, but, undoubtedly, the most popular of all workshops are those devoted to the history of books. Monasteries, es-

pecially Benedictine monasteries, are the best places to talk about medieval manuscripts. In many European monasteries there are magnificent libraries, which have survived centuries; a visit to one of such libraries is an excellent starting point for a discussion about the history of books. Unfortunately, as a result of its dissolution, the Tyniec Abbey lost a majority of its precious book collection. Thus, we have the place and its atmosphere providing the background for the workshops, but we lack exhibits that would bring the workshop content closer to the participants and make it more tangible. These dilemmas inspired the idea of reconstructing a medieval scriptorium that would enable us to show the work of scribes and the

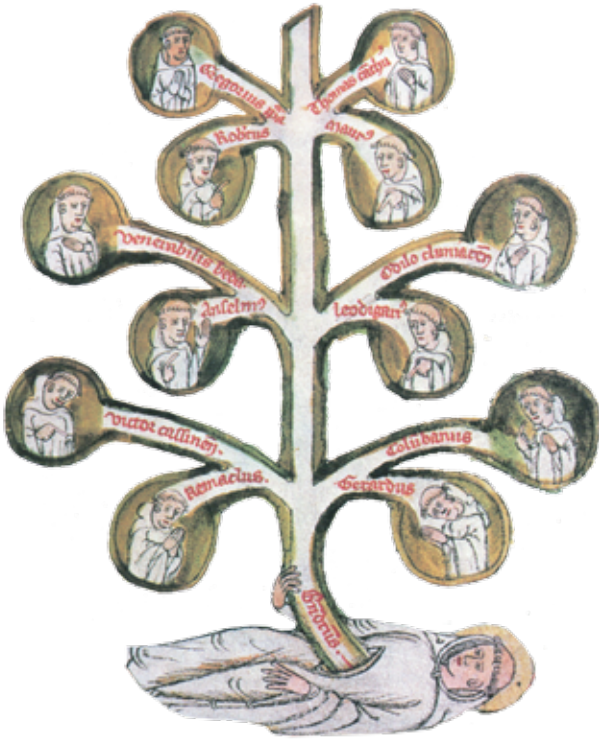


history of medieval books in an interactive and imaginative way. The aim was to create a space that would affect all senses: sight, hearing and touch. The practical aspect is very important – each participant tries his or her hand at being a scribe. Writing with a quill is by no means easy in an era of computers and universally available multimedia. Words are becoming increasingly cheap, very easy to record and spread – it is worth making everybody, not only children and young people, aware of how valuable books are to our culture and how much effort people once had to put in for books to survive and be passed on.

Charity

One of the important aspects of monastic culture, which we cannot forget either, was charity. St. Benedict wrote in his Rule that all guests, especially the poor and the pilgrims, should be welcomed in the monastery, for in this way the monks would follow the great commandment of love and serve Christ himself. Sometimes even the founders explicitly stressed this precept of St. Benedict in the foundation documents. Charitable works, in addition to their

spiritual dimension of pursuing fundamental Christian virtues of mercy and helping others, obviously had a social and cultural dimension as well. Monasteries were places where the poor and the sick were cared for, and where pilgrims, travellers or all in need found shelter. It would be difficult to overestimate this type of activity in the evangelisation of Central Europe.



In lieu of a conclusion

In lieu of a conclusion

How to sum up reflections on the role of monasteries as places of the meeting and merging of patrimony, culture and hospitality, reflections on their significance for European society today and on the challenges this society poses to the Benedictine community? We could refer to a thesis put forward by a contemporary scholar studying the Christianisation of early medieval Europe (primarily Western Europe, mainly what is now France, the Benelux countries, Germany and England). Without getting into the details of her scholarly analysis, we can say that according to this author there were three Christianisation zones. The first zone was the Christian zone, i.e. area that had already been Christianised and where there were monasteries that would subsequently organise the Christianisation process in the neighbouring countries. In this Christianised zone monasteries constituted a base for missionaries sent to

the neighbouring zones, providing them with, for instance, books or clothing, and preparing new missionaries. The second zone is called mixed or convergence zone, i.e. a place where the Christian religion and pagan religions meet. In this zone monks sent as missionaries founded new, smaller monasteries, which they linked to their parent houses. The main tasks of monasteries in this convergence zone was, first of all, to show the local residents how to live, to train newly arriving missionaries, teaching the language for the purposes of communication as well as the basics necessary for religious instruction. The third zone – the pagan zone – was the area where the Christianisation process

was yet to take place and where missions were also planned.

An example can be one of the first monasteries founded in Poland around 1000. As Bruno of Querfurt writes, the first monks, who came from Pereum



(Italy), followed the local way of living, started learning the language of the local residents and began to attract the attention of those people, who would then start coming to that first monastery. This is exactly the motive of building a model that was to exert influence and also, in a way, to convey some religious message, though not directly.

It is no coincidence that we refer to this idea in the conclusion, as it seems that in the context of today's question about the influence of monasteries on local communities this model seems to be still relevant, despite the differences between the periods. What comes to the fore first of all is influence through example, through way of life. Only then are some specific actions taken. In today's globalised world the pace of life is increasing so much, social forms and forms of communication are becoming so excessive – the paradox of “anonymity/loneliness on the net” – that monasteries can be places where people come to find some fundamental values and rediscover the value of the meeting: with heritage, culture, beautiful landscape, with their own past, with another human being and with God.

Finally, one more question arises: in the modern social and cultural context, are Benedictine monasteries not called to be in this convergence zone – to be places of the meeting between the still living Christianity and various forms of “post-Christian” culture, less and less interested in remembering its roots?

When we visit the Tihany Abbey and watch a brief film about the history and life of this community, we hear several times:

“Peace to those who come, blessing to those who leave”.

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