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Chapter Four The Patronage of Medieval Learning

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Chapter 4

The Patronage of Medieval Learning

Prior to the twelfth century, a lord or a noble lady who wished to signal his or her intent to found a monastery might arrange to have a square of turf cut from the land that was to be set aside for the establishment of a religious house. The turf would then be carefully placed on the altar, as the donor pronounced a solemn oath dedicating the land to the church before witnesses. While a trace of this ritual remains with us in the public groundbreaking ceremonies that are often held for a new public building, the medieval practice with the turf gave way to the presentation of a witnessed Foundation deed, which still might have a tree twig from the land attached to it.¹ The founders of a monastery might alternatively leave a single glove on the altar, following the common phrase of making gifts “by the hand” (*manu sua*).² Or they might place a book or a ring or, more dramatically, a bent knife, indicating that a family was cutting ties to the designated land. Still, the deed gifting the land to the church might allow for the continuing use or renting of the land for a limited period.³

¹ Formal charters came into common legal use during the early thirteenth century in Denmark and elsewhere; Linda Rasmussen, “Monastic Benefactors in England and Denmark: Their Social Background and Gender Distribution,” in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400*, vol. 2, eds. Emilia Jamroziak and Janet E. Burton (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 78. See also Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 77.

² Isidore of Seville explains: “*Mancipatio* is so called because the property is ‘taken in the hand’ (*manu...capitur*). Hence is it appropriate for whoever takes formal possession to grasp the property itself that is given into his possession”; *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.25.31 122. Benedict’s Rule advises novices taking the vows: “Let the novice make his mark, and with his own hand place it on the altar”; *Rule of Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin, 2008), 58 86.

³ Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld, *Do ut des: Gift Giving, Memoria, and Conflict Management in the Medieval Low Countries* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 63-70. Bijsterveld, who documents the examples of sod, twig, glove, book, and bent knife, states that the donor might receive a counter-gift of a coin or

The church altar is where God's gift to humanity is communally celebrated through the Eucharist. It is where this divine gift is met by an offering from the faithful in return, as the founding of a monastery was, above all, a gift to God. It was part of a medieval "economy of salvation," in the words of David Ganz, a paleographer at King's College, London.⁴ This chapter considers the ways in which this economy both served and shaped learning. In the first instance, it afforded learning a certain autonomy, while still requiring the discipline, devotion, and piety that signaled the monastery's value within this salvational economy.

"Lands and property of other kinds were given by royal bounty to establish monasteries," Bede wrote of King Oswald's pious generosity in seventh-century Northumbria, "and English children, as well as their elders, were instructed by Irish teachers in advanced studies and in the observance of the discipline of a Rule."⁵ The charter granted to the monasteries by the landholder not only designated the extent and position of the tract that had been granted, whether cultivated field, pastureland, meadowland, vineyard, or marsh, but might also include mills, toll-bridges, peasants, serfs, and even the fishing rights to a river, as the brothers Roger Fitz Richard and Gilbert of Tonbridge granted to the monks of Bec in the early twelfth century.⁶ Once established, the monastery might be further endowed by dowries, involving property or

two to secure and document the gift; *ibid.*, 65, 77.

⁴ David Ganz, "Giving to God in the Mass: The Experience of the Offertory," in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.

⁵ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3.3 133.

⁶ David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council 943-1216* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 577; J. C. Ward, "Fashions in Monastic Endowment: The Foundations of the Clare Family, 1066-1314," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32, no. 4 (1981), 441, 434.

perhaps a book that accompanied a child entering the monastery as an oblate. When Heliseus gave a copy of Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*) to the monks of St. Germain in the early part of the ninth century, it was inscribed, "Archdeacon Heliseus gave this book to St. Germain for eternal life."⁷

A lord and lady, having decided to convert to monasticism, would prepare an inventory of their worldly possessions to serve as the charter of their gifts to the monastery in which they planned to spend the remainder of their days. This aristocratic largesse, which peaked during the tenth century, was only the high end of the monastic economy.⁸ It also benefited from the clergy, knights, merchants, and tenants who pooled their resources through public subscription to support this pious form of life.⁹ Townspeople flocked to an abbey's initial dedication ceremony, bringing wool for monastic clothing, plates for the table, and hides for leather goods. The people also offered pittances, which the monastics used for extra holiday food, books, or support for the poor.

In a common theme for learning in this book, the monastery operated as both part of and apart from the prevailing economy. The monastery's land grant made it fully part of a medieval economy based on land and its transfer. Land changed hands through inheritance, acts of war, rewards for military service, and bequeathals to

⁷ Cited by Mariken Teeuwen, "The Pursuit of Secular Learning: The Oldest Commentary Tradition on Martianus Capella," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 18 (2008), 37.

⁸ Van Engen points to how "truly sizable gifts from kings and princes had probably peaked already in the early eleventh century"; "The 'Crisis of Cenobitism' Reconsidered," *Speculum* 61 (1986), 278.

⁹ James G. Clark, "Monastic Confraternity in Medieval England: The Evidence from St. Albans Abbey *Liber Benefactorum*," in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power*, eds. Emilia Jamrozak and Janet E. Burton (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 316. Georges Duby speaks of a "stream of pious donations"; *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. C. Postan (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 174.

religious houses. Monastic benefaction eventually assumed the character of the feudal bonds that dominated the High Middle Ages. Where the lord offered protection to the vassal in exchange for military service in the typical feudal arrangement, the lord agreed to defend the abbot against external threats in exchange for extended spiritual advocacy. The lord was trading in a surplus good, given the nobility's possession of more land than they could possibly exploit during their time in this world and thus might well invest excess land in the life to come.¹⁰

The initial land granted to a monastery was often sufficient to feed, clothe, and otherwise sustain a religious house, largely through the daily and humble labors of its members, following the Rule of Benedict. With subsequent gifts to the monastery – that might include serfs, mills, bridges, and churches with tithes – as well as through the wise management of the monastic estates' rights and tenures, abbeys were able to generate sufficient wealth for the members to turn their labors from the cultivation of the fields to the preparation of manuscripts.¹¹

These acts of beneficence proved an effective, if initially inadvertent, means of underwriting the labor of learning. And this learning, in time, contributed to the disciplined spirit of monasticism, which attracted benefactors who saw in such learning

¹⁰ R. W. Southern: "In a Europe only sparsely settled, in which rulers disposed of lordly rights over vast areas of country which they could not effectively exploit, there were opportunities for lavish gifts of land"; *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1970), 229. A.M. Honoré notes the bonds and obligations between lord and tenant made it difficult to say that property was *owned* with the rights that we associate with that kind of ownership today, with this right of gift an early exception; "Ownership," *Oxford Essays in Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 109.

¹¹ Southern reports on the Foundation deed of the priory at St. Mont in Gascony: "It was given by its founder the profits of forty-seven churches, one hamlet, seven manors, four small parcels of land, one vineyard, six arable lots, one wood, one stretch of fishing rights, and various small rents and tolls"; *Western Society and the Church* (London: Penguin, 1970), 233. Ilana F. Silber holds up the twelfth-century Cistercian monastery as "the arch example of economic rationalization and productivity"; "Monasticism and the 'Protestant Ethic': Asceticism, Rationality and Wealth in the Medieval West," *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1993), 109.

a proof – along with fields of golden wheat, the care of lepers, and hospitality shown to travelers – of a religious house’s intimacy with God’s mercy.¹² The monastics were spiritual surrogates for their benefactors. Their sponsored lives of piety, prayer, and learning represented for the nobility an investment opportunity in the life to come, as promised in the Gospel: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt 19:29). More explicitly, the founding charter frequently called for a reciting of the benefactor’s name, as well as those of family members, during daily mass in the abbey chapel.¹³

In the twelfth century, to take one example, Alice de Gant, wife of Roger de Mowbray, granted her dowry to the Cistercian abbey at Fountains in return for a gold ring from the monks, along with reassurances that, as she wrote, “after my death [they] will perform full service for me in masses and psalms, as is done for a monk of their house.”¹⁴ As well, “burial gifts” assured benefactors that they would be placed, on their death, in a burial plot, crypt, or mausoleum on the holy ground of the monastery,

¹² Anne E. Lester reports that providing for the care for the poor and sick appears in Cistercian monastic charters by the early thirteenth century as a “particularly effective form of penitential piety”; “Cares Beyond the Walls: Cistercian Nuns and the Care of Lepers in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Northern France,” in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400*, 207, 223. The Benedictines in England included hospitality to travelers among their charitable acts; Julie Kerr, *Monastic Hospitality: The Benedictines in England, c. 1070-c.1250* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), 181-82.

¹³ As late as 1249, the Benedictine Order in Canterbury called for the heads of religious houses to ensure that a private mass was celebrated at least every four days, lest, as Roger Bowers nicely puts it, “the souls of benefactors be defrauded of the expected mitigatory benefits”; “The Almonry Schools of the English Monasteries c.1265–1540,” in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1999), 189.

¹⁴ Cited by Janet E. Burton, “*Fundator Noster*: Roger de Mowbray as Founder and Patron of Monasteries,” in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe 1000-1400*, 35. Roger’s own dealings as patron were such that at one point the monks paid off his debts: “The monks of Combe out of love (*caritative*),” as Roger put it, “have acquitted me of 80 marks owed to the Jews”; cited *ibid.*, 36.

virtually at heaven's gate.¹⁵ Or a brave knight might promise his estate to the monastery before departing on a crusade, placing the monks in something of a conflict of interest when praying for the knight's safe-keeping as part of the chartered contract.¹⁶ The charter might also call for the abbot to remit specified sins or reduce the penances that a sinning benefactor owed the church.¹⁷ Women also played a substantial role on both sides of the altar. Among the nobility, wives and daughters turned their dowries and inheritances into convent gifts and founding grants, they used the assets they controlled to inspire monastic reform, or converted to monasticism as a viable alternative to marriage and family life.¹⁸ Agnes of Burgundy, for example, was a major eleventh-century patron of monasticism, having founded two religious houses, rebuilt a third, co-founded two abbeys, and donated to other religious houses.¹⁹

In what is known as the "bookkeeping of the hereafter," benefactors imagined

¹⁵ On securing a monastic mausoleum, see Rasmussen, "Monastic Benefactors in England and Denmark," 79.

¹⁶ Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Holy Entrepreneurs: Cistercians, Knights, and Economic Exchange in Twelfth-Century Burgundy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 76.

¹⁷ Bernhard Jussen points out how medieval penitential piety was threefold, involving: "(1) The imposing of tariffs on sins, that is, fixed penances for each sin; (2) the conversion of extensive into intensive forms of penance, that is, prayers into psalms, psalms into masses; and (3) the possibility of penance by proxy, that is, by clerics, monks, or surviving spouses"; "Religious Discourses of the Gift in the Middle Ages: Semantic Evidences (Second to Twelfth Centuries)," in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, eds. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, and Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 182.

¹⁸ As Chiara Frugoni observes, "the only place a woman was allowed to have 'a room of her own,' in Virginia Woolf's words, was in a convent"; "The Imagined Woman," trans. Clarissa Botsford, in *Silence of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, vol. 2 of *A History of Women in the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 407.

¹⁹ Penelope D. Johnson, "Agnes of Burgundy: An Eleventh-Century Woman as Monastic Patron," *Journal of Medieval History* 15, no. 2 (1989), 95, 99. Susan Fonay Wemple: "Wealthy widows, doting parents, and bishops devoted to their mothers and sisters" were the founders of small proprietary nunneries during the Middle Ages, which were then administered by these women; *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 163. Erin Jordan notes that "in the counties of Flanders and Hainaut alone, women were responsible for seventeen of the 30 houses of Cistercian nuns"; "Female Founders: Exercising Authority in Thirteenth-century Flanders and Hainaut," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88, no. 4 (2008), 536.

that they were “putting God in their debt,” which is how Pope Gregory disapprovingly put it on two occasions in letters at the turn of the sixth century.²⁰ Patronage could involve the benefactor having a say in the election of prioress or abbot, perhaps involving a family member.²¹ For the good of his soul, a lord, a baron, or an earl might also assume the monastic office of *advocatus*, which meant assisting in collecting a monastery’s revenues and defending it against claims made on its possessions and properties.²² Still, these gifts often became, over the years, subject to disputes over property transfer, neglect, and misuse, which could be grounds for retracting the gift. Records show that by the twelfth century, monastic learning was being directed toward producing and marshalling the paperwork needed to defend and reclaim what was originally bequeathed.²³ Monasticism’s donor economy developed over the course of the Middle Ages, making the commonwealth of learning a thing, from the outset, of institutional patronage.

The Patronage of Learning

My argument for the learned developing and utilizing in their work with texts a

²⁰ Cited by Valentin Groebner and Bernhard Jussen, *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 176.

²¹ Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 247. Norman Cantor: “Bastard sons and younger brothers of the local lords became bishops or abbots of local churches and monasteries”; *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 22. “In addition to the need for eternal life,” Southern reminds us, “the economy of a great family required a monastic outlet for its members.” *Western Society and the Church*, 228. Southern adds, “the nobility were not easily thwarted in their endless search for a noble and dignified life for their landless children”; *ibid.*, 235.

²² Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister*, 125, 131.

²³ Steven Vanderputten: “With the creation of a detailed overview of what the abbey’s estate should have looked like in 1160-1120, Abbot Amand proposed an agenda... [in which] the *Poleticum* and its ‘satellite documents’ comprised the first step in changing disputed and vague territorial and financial claims into manageable parts of a monastic economy”; “Monastic Literate Practices in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Northern France,” in *Reform, Conflict and the Shaping of Corporate Identities: Collected Studies on Benedictine Monasticism, 1050-1150* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), 247-281.

concept roughly approximating and deeply influencing our notion of intellectual property is based on text and context, word and economy. Intellectual property arises out of something as simple as stringing together words of some consequence, but property systems require an order and economy to operate on the scale that the learned achieved within monasticism during the Middle Ages. To appreciate what this monastic economy brought to the institutionalization of learning, one has only to consider the role played by personal patronage in sponsoring the arts, politics, and learning. In antiquity, the scholars who lacked the family wealth to finance their studies had to find patrons willing to help underwrite their work, often in exchange for counsel and instruction.

The patron relationship was, at once, personal, asymmetrical, and just plain fickle. It could also be treacherous. Plato, for example, was clearly attracted by the prospect of offering counsel to kings, despite the wealth that he had inherited. In Syracuse, he advised the kings Dionysius I and II, in turn, only to lose favor with both of them. When the first Dionysius turned against Plato, he sold the philosopher into slavery, hoping perhaps to recoup the original cost of his patronage. Fortunately for Plato, yet another patron redeemed him from this indenture and returned him to Athens, a free if not a wiser man. Plato then dared to return to Syracuse, this time to tutor Dionysius II. It led to another narrow escape from the perils of patronage and a hasty retreat back to Athens.

Plato also led one of the great schools of the classical era, but one that operated without what we would recognize today as a sustainable business model. What little is known of the financing of Plato's Academy suggests that it kept overhead down by

having participants meet in a public garden outside of Athens (which happened to be named after a mythical hero, not known for his studiousness, by the name of Academus or Hecademus). There is no indication of any endowment or fees to sustain the continuing seminar or symposium led by Plato and attended by colleagues and students, although the master is known to have accepted gifts on occasion.²⁴

On the other hand, Plato held the Sophists, who collected fees for instruction in rhetoric, in great contempt. In the *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates inquire of Hippocrates: “Is not a Sophist, Hippocrates, one who deals wholesale or retail in the food of the soul?”²⁵ He warns his friend that “there is far greater peril in buying knowledge than in buying meat and drink.”²⁶ Suffice it to say that the classical age did not, among its many learned accomplishments, develop particularly robust institutions to support learning beyond that of personal patronage.

During the early Middle Ages, Boethius is the great tragic figure of learned patronage. Born the same year as Benedict of Nursia and a contemporary of Cassiodorus, Boethius also received a Roman liberal arts education and entered the service of Theodoric of the Ostrogoths, ruler of Italy in the early sixth century. Under Theodoric’s patronage, Boethius translated Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* and *Categories* into Latin and provided commentaries. These two works were intended to be only the beginning of his scholarly contribution: “I shall translate into Latin every work of Aristotle’s that comes into my hands, and I shall write commentaries on all of

²⁴ Harold F. Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 61.

²⁵ Plato, “Protagoras” in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875), 126.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

them,” Boethius had promised as a young man, adding, “I shall also translate and comment upon all Plato’s dialogues.”²⁷ Such an achievement might have transformed learning in the Latin West. But, alas, what his patron had afforded him, he also put to an end. In 523, Boethius was charged by Theodoric with conspiring against him with the Byzantine Emperor Justin I. He was stripped of his position as Master of Offices and placed under house arrest, during which time he composed his most magnificent work *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which went on to serve the Middle Ages as a standard grammar text, as well as a major meditative work. The king then had Boethius executed the following year at about the age of forty-four.

Medieval monasticism introduced a new element into the patronage of learning. It established a stable and sustainable model of *institutional endowment* that supported a lifetime of learning for generation after generation of monastics. Rather than a lord sponsoring the studies of this brilliant poet or that outstanding scholar in the ancient tradition, he endowed a monastery in perpetuity with a substantial gift of property. Through the accumulation of such bequeathals, monasteries afforded those with an interest in learning a secure position in a relatively well-endowed institution in which to pursue their studies.²⁸ Combined with the papal privileges and canonical exemptions bestowed on monasteries, the cloisters proved a quiet, seldom-disturbed place in which to pray and pursue one’s studies. Benefactors were known to interfere on occasion in the life of the monastery, to be sure, but there was more autonomy than could

²⁷ Cited by Seth Lerer, “Introduction,” in *Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), xiii.

²⁸ After accumulating considerable wealth, the Cluny monasteries, for example, were able to play the role of “patron of the arts on a massive scale, not only in fields of architecture and sculpture, but in mural painting, music, manuscript illumination, and all aspects of the decorative arts”; Edwin Mullins, *Cluny: In Search of God’s Lost Empire* (New York: Bluebridge, 2006), 167.

otherwise be hoped for during that volatile and warring period. The learned were able to develop their studies comfortably within the monastic spirit of humility, selflessness, and devotion, without having to compete for the attention of patrons.

As learning fell within the disciplined and regulated life of the monastery, it made its own contribution to the house's reputation for piety. This only encouraged abbess and abbot to support such work by acquiring, for example, additional books, as Bede chronicles in the history of his monastery. The support for learning might also involve the nun and monk employing secretaries – as did Hildegard of Bingen and Bernard of Clairvaux – or include a further staffing of the scriptoria with scribes, correctors, illuminators, binders, and rubricators (who used red ink to accentuate titles and other portions of the texts) along with the stocking of pens, ink, vermillion, bottles, and gold foil.²⁹ By the same token, the flocks of sheep raised on the monastery's pasturelands were tapped to provide scribes with parchment, while the binders turned to the roebuck and boar hunted in its forests for the leather used to bind and cover the books.³⁰

Given the part played by the church altar at the beginning of this chapter, we might consider the parallels between what this gift of land means for learning and the

²⁹ For the economics of manuscript production at the end of the era, see Joanne Filippone Overy, "The Cost of Doing Scribal Business: Prices of Manuscript Books in England, 1300-1483," *Book History* 11, (2008), 1-32.

³⁰ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. C. Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 122-123. Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries: A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain before 1850* (London: Library Association, 1966), 14. For the Abbey of the Trinity at Vendôme, the Countess Agnes of Burgundy purchased a book of homilies, as part of her monastic patronage and oversight, noting that its "steep price," was valued at 200 sheep; Johnson, "Agnes of Burgundy," 97. More generally, the cost of a book by the fifteenth century, as the era of the manuscript book was about to end, was equivalent to two cows, a tolerable horse, or ten barrels of beer.

transubstantiation of the Eucharist.³¹ The benefactor's donation was turned, through an act of Holy Communion, into the words and works of learned nuns and monks.³² The transfer – from tangible land tract to intangible intellectual property – also has a circle-of-gifts quality to it. The land was originally a gift from God to humankind and not only was some portion returned by landholders to its Maker through monastic endowment, but in that form, it went on to generate works of great piety and learning. This learning, in turn, spread word of God's gift, creating a greater understanding and benefit for the larger community. The benefactor's charter often specified that God or one of the Apostles was the intended recipient of the gift of land: "I fear the pains of hell," writes a Spanish countess at the beginning of a medieval Cistercian foundation charter, "and I desire to come to the joys of paradise, and for the love of God and his glorious Mother, and for the salvation of my soul and those of my parents, I give to God, St. Mary, and all the saints my whole inheritance in Retoria."³³

Further to this circle, knowledge was understood to be a gift of God within the medieval tradition. As such, it was not to be sold, but enjoyed in common, much as the world was in its original state.³⁴ This made the monastery the right sort of place for the

³¹ The Christian doctrine of transubstantiation has its roots in Saint Ambrose, and while a source of controversy from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, the Lateran Council IV of 1215 made it doctrinal. See James F. McCue, "The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar through Trent: The Point at Issue." *Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 3 (1968): 385-430.

³² In another example of the transfer between tangible and intangible properties of semantic reference, in Middle English, *tenure* referred solely to rights and obligations associated with the legal holding of property, where it is now used to refer to the protection of the academic freedom and autonomy of university faculty.

³³ Cited by Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 263.

³⁴ Gaines Post, Kimon Giocarnis and Richard Kay, "The Medieval Heritage of a Humanistic Ideal: *Scientia donum dei est, unde vendi non potest*," *Traditio* 11, 220. When Pope Alexander III made provision in the twelfth century for the appointment in the cathedral schools of grammar teachers for poor students, he reiterated the medieval principle that knowledge is a gift of God and cannot be sold; John W. Baldwin, *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages, 1000-1300* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 1971), 55. Natalie Zemon Davis refers to the idea that "knowledge is a gift of God and cannot be sold"

cultivation of knowledge, given everything there was held in common. And the fruits of learning were among the most widely distributed, with manuscripts loaned and copied, leading them to be circulated among sister monasteries, as well as across the larger world of the Latin West.

It is true that monasteries would typically lend a book only when another book was provided as a *pledge*. It was not so much the manuscript but the intellectual property of the text that was held in common across the monasteries. The assumed right to copy the works held by other monasteries created a learning network among them.

Augustine had noted in the opening of *On Christian Teaching*, how learning stands as the public good that keeps on giving: “For all the things which do not give out when given away are not properly possessed when they are possessed but not given away.”³⁵ Learning’s full value is realized by sharing it with others, as such sharing is rewarded by further learning. Or as Augustine says of God’s part in the getting of wisdom: “The material which God had already supplied to me for starting this work [on Christian teaching] will be multiplied, through his own provision, when discussion of it begins. So in this act of service I will not only experience no shortage of material, but in fact enjoy an astonishing abundance of it.”³⁶

was “still believed in the thirteenth century” in the universities; “Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 33 (1983), 71. “Virtually all medieval thinkers adhered to the common Stoic-Patristic tradition which described ‘the common possession of all things’ as a tenet of natural law”; Brian Tierney, “Public Expediency and Natural Law: A Fourteenth-Century Discussion on the Origins of Government and Property,” in *Authority and Power*, eds. Brian Tierney and Peter Lineham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 176.

³⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

As part of that expansion, the gift of learning made possible by monastic patronage carried with it certain responsibilities for sharing this knowledge with others, given that learning was a path to salvation. The poet and likely abbess Marie de France composed a verse in the late twelfth century that touched on the fruitfulness of this approach to learning:

To Whom God has given science
And the eloquence of good speech
Must not be silent or conceal it
But willingly show it.
When a great good is heard by many
Then it begins to seed
And when it is praised by many
Then it bursts into flower.³⁷

The historian Natalie Zemon Davis at the University of Toronto cites this verse of Marie de France in her analysis of how books served as gifts during the medieval period, reflecting a sense of knowledge following the “Greek ideal, fortified by Christ’s injunction ‘Freely ye have received, freely give’” (Matt. 10:8).³⁸

³⁷ Cited by Davis, “Beyond the Market,” 71.

³⁸ Ibid. This element of canon law in the late Middle Ages was “applied not only to professors, who were to take no fees for their teaching,” Davis notes, “but even to the sale of notarial and scribal productions”; *ibid.* In the seventeenth century, for example, Milton uses the phrase “the divine gift of learning” in his 1641 pamphlet *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant’s Defense against Smectymnuus*; *The Works of John Milton, Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous*, vol. 1 (London: Millar, 1753), 102.

Excess Renounced and Disciplined

The endowed economy of medieval monasticism enabled Christianity to deal with two vexing problems of excess – *excess wealth* and *excess learning*. These were distinctly Christian dilemmas, and monasticism offered a way to reduce these two threats to salvation. Consider wealth. The Bible could not be more forthright about its spiritual risks: “The love of gold will not be free from sin, for he who pursues wealth is led astray by it” (Ecc. 31:5).³⁹ And then there was the oft-repeated caution that “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25, Matt 19:24, and Luke 18:25). In the face of this gospel, the wealthy appear to have welcomed the opportunity to publicly demonstrate their love of God over gold by founding monasteries. Saint Jerome advises the wealthy that, “when they have laid aside their heavy burden of sins, and the crookedness of their whole body [a feature he ascribes to camels], they can enter through the narrow and straight road that leads to life.”⁴⁰ As some monastic charters made all too clear, such gifts were intended to compensate for the sins of the benefactor. To devote a parcel of land to the founding of a religious house is to renounce some small part of one’s worldly excess, and do so by returning that land to its original state and owner.

Then there was learning, which offered its own danger of excess. There was Saint Paul’s admonitions – “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (1 Cor. 8:1) and “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6) – to which can be added

³⁹ Jacques Le Goff cites this passage in pointing out how “Christianity traditionally placed God in opposition to money”; *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 10.

⁴⁰ Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 3. 19.24-26, 220. Jerome goes on to respond to the disciples, who “marvel at the severity of these words,” question who then will be saved, as “things that are impossible with men are possible with God”; *ibid.*, 221.

“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection” (1 Tim. 2:11). This excess of learning was identified by Saint Benedict, Gregory the Great, and others as everywhere present in the liberal arts of Late Antiquity. As noted earlier, Augustine had denounced the temptations of curiosity (*vitium curiositas*), holding more broadly to the motto “nothing to excess,” itself an example of pagan appropriation (from Terence’s play *Andria*).⁴¹ The monastery was that much more “the house of discipline,” as Augustine referred to the church.⁴² The Benedictine Rule focused on “the efforts of obedience,” which originally offered little place for the advancement of learning.⁴³ It was only Aristotle’s emphasis on the disciplined application of the liberal arts – particularly *grammatica* trimmed of its excessive literary and rhetorical interests – to the study of God’s word that redeemed such learning. This study was dedicated solely to God’s glory, and not to that of the (excessively) learned, much as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederic Handel signed off their musical scores with “S. D. G.” for *Soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).⁴⁴

Beneficent Coda

To recap, monasticism brought about an intellectual property *transaction* that involved

⁴¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.39.58–74.

⁴² Augustine, “Sermon 399, On Christian Discipline,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. 10, *Sermons 341–400*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1995), 458. Augustine points out in this context that “‘discipline’ comes from *disco*, I learn...what is learned is how to live a good life; how to live a good life is learned to enable you to live forever”; *ibid.*

⁴³ *The Rule of Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin, 2008), 7.

⁴⁴ Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 15. Irvine summarizes the concerns of *grammatica*: “‘Correct’ written Latin, the element of language, texts, and literary genres, normative rules of style, the meanings and value of texts”; *ibid.* *Grammatica* is “the discipline that produced the culture of the text in Western societies,” and that “all of Western society is thus post-medieval in a significant sense: the grammatical archive continues to shape the understanding of texts, writing, the literary canon, and literacy”; *ibid.*, 21.

three steps. First, the nobility *transferred* deeds of property to the monastery to enable monastics to devote their lives to prayer. Second, monastics *transformed* these lands, through skilled management and husbandry, into a source of sufficient wealth for some to devote their time to learning, as well as for the necessary parchment, inks, and quills. Third, as learning was gradually acknowledged and accepted as a pious practice, the monastery's production of learned texts could be thought of as reconstituting the original gift of property. It was one form of property giving rise to another, and in ways that would be increasingly valued over the course of the Middle Ages. The institutional endowment of the monastery proved vital to the development of learning in the Latin West but it did not put an end to instances of the learned finding personal patrons, although such patrons tended to favor artists, musicians, and literary talents over learned writers.⁴⁵ Still, the monastic support for learning later became the model for the endowment of the colleges of the medieval universities.

On the other hand, the very success of this monastic gift economy brought about this institution's eventual undoing. The monasteries of the West gradually accumulated a significant proportion of the arable land of Europe and they enjoyed great prosperity and prominence.⁴⁶ Religious houses were accumulating the very worldliness they had vowed to renounce and turn away from. What then of their humility and piety? Among those raising such questions was the Venerable Bede. Although he was full of praise, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, of the eighth-century

⁴⁵ Peter J. Lucas describes the later role of the patron in fifteenth-century manuscript production, naming it the eighth step in a ten-step process: "When the work was received by the *destinataire* or patron it was effectively published"; *From Author to Audience: John Capgrave and Medieval Publication* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1997), 2.

⁴⁶ Silber, "Monasticism and the 'Protestant Ethic,'" 110.

royal foundations for new monasteries, he held otherwise in his private correspondence. In a letter to his former pupil, Bishop Egbert, he decried the abuse of monastic privileges: “There are many such places, as we all know, that only in the most foolish way deserve the name of monastery, having absolutely nothing of real monastic life to them.”⁴⁷ He called for an authoritative council to turn wayward monasteries “from luxury to chastity, from vanity to verity, from indulgence of the stomach and gullet to continence and heartfelt piety.”⁴⁸ He was particularly outraged by those “who commit the graver crime by giving money to the kings and obtaining lands under the pretext of building monasteries in which they can give freer rein to their libidinous tastes; these lands they have assigned to them in hereditary right through written royal edicts, and these charters, as if to make them really worthy in the sight of God.”⁴⁹ By these means, Bede insists, “they have gained unjust rights over fields and villages, free from both divine and human legal obligations; as laymen ruling over monks, they serve only their own wishes.”⁵⁰

The dissipation and irregularity, as well as accumulation of wealth, among monasteries was met by various monastic reform movements. The Cistercian order, founded in 1098, was foremost among them in restoring monasticism to its ascetic roots, establishing monasteries in the remoter regions of the West.⁵¹ In the twelfth

⁴⁷ Bede, “Letter to Egbert” in *Ecclesiastical History*, 349-50. Ian N. Wood refers to this as the “seamy underside” of this “gift culture”; The Gifts of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, 93, 91.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 350.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 351

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Van Engen, “The ‘Crisis of Cenobitism’ Reconsidered,” 302. J. A. Raftis points to the economic withdrawal, as merchants and entrepreneurs began to lead in the commercial exploitation of land and other resources; “Western Monasticism and Economic Organization,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3, no. 4 (1961): 469.

century, Bernard of Clairvaux was among those Cistercians who sought to return monasticism to its austere glories: “As a monk I ask my fellow monks the question a pagan poet put to pagans: ‘Tell me, O priests, why is there gold in the holy place?’...The walls of the church are ablaze with light and color, while the poor of the Church go hungry.... Ah Lord! If the folly of it all does not shame us, surely the expense might stick in our throats?”⁵² It may seem, from our perspective today, that the nobility had at times founded monasteries on their lands as extended-stay spiritual spas, time-shares, and retirement homes for the benefit of parents, daughters, sons, brothers, wives, and widows, not to mention themselves, while reserving the right to gain permanent admittance to the abbey, and for all eternity, by crypt and mausoleum. However, by the late Middle Ages, many of the families that had long stood behind the monasteries began to shift their spiritual sponsorship away from religious houses, to the building of cathedrals, hospitals, grammar schools, and university colleges, as well as toward supporting artists.⁵³

Not only wealth, but learning also accumulated within monasticism over the course of the Middle Ages, until this intellectual wealth overran its place within monasticism, leading to new institutional formations, including the glorious cathedral schools of the tenth to twelfth centuries and the medieval universities of the thirteenth. The elaborate provisions of institutional sponsorship described in this chapter enabled the preparation of editions, compilations, glosses, and commentaries, involving

⁵² Bernard of Clairvaux, “An Apologia for Abbot William,” in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Pauline Matarasso (London: Penguin, 1993), 56-57.

⁵³ On the introduction of “disinterested” giving, see Ilana F. Silber, “Gift-Giving in the Great Traditions: The Case of Donations to Monasteries in the Medieval West,” *European Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 2 (1995), 234-35.

correction, restoration, and standardization, supported by the crafts of transcription, translation, illumination, and bookmaking. The work was paid for in advance. It was paid without expectations of outcomes apart from piety and discipline. The intellectual autonomy was limited, hemmed in by heresy charges, but it was not insignificant, judging by Radegund's anti-war poetry and Bede's natural history.

The pace and scope of this learning were decidedly modest compared to what was going on during the same period not so very far away in the Islamic Golden Age with similar forms of institutional sponsorship (see Chapter 6 below). The pattern of monastic endowment during the Middle Ages worked for learning and the learned; it demonstrated how well learning was served by this spirit of sponsorship, communality, and autonomy. It has meant that learning's intellectual properties have long borne the watermark of institutional sponsorship. Still, the relationship between world and learning was beset by occasional breaches and breaks. At times, sponsorship dries up and at others, autonomy is compromised. Yet on the whole and over the long term, the sponsorship of learning reflects a longer-term, external, and worldly faith in learning, a respect for its standing as its own commonwealth.