

Narratives of a New Order

MEDIEVAL CHURCH STUDIES

Narratives of a New Order

Cistercian Historical Writing in England,
1150–1220

by

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History, University of Melbourne, 1997), pp. 78–102 (reprinted with permission); ‘Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Bello Standardii*: Cistercian Historiography and the Creation of Community Memories’, *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 49 (1998), 5–28 (reprinted with permission of the editors of *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*); ‘The Many Functions of Cistercian Histories, using Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Relatio de Standardo* as a Case Study’, in *The Medieval Chronicle*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 124–32 (reprinted with permission); ‘Meaning and Multi-Centeredness in (Postmodern) Medieval Historiography: The Foundation History of Fountains Abbey’, *Parergon*, n.s., 16 (1999), 43–84 (reprinted with permission); ‘Wonders, Prodigies and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall’s *Chronicon Anglicanum*’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 26.2 (June 2000), 127–43 (copyright Elsevier Science and reprinted with permission); and ‘Beautiful Lands and Wastelands: Medieval Monastic Communities and the Correct Use of Space’, *Lateral: A Journal of Textual and Cultural Studies*, 3 (2001), at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/english/lateral/index.html> (reprinted with permission).

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations apply throughout this work:

<i>An Cist</i>	<i>Analecta Cisterciensia</i> (formerly <i>Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis</i>)
<i>A-NS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
<i>ASOC</i>	<i>Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis</i>
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971–)
CF	Cistercian Fathers Series
<i>Cîteaux</i>	<i>Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses</i>
<i>COCR</i>	<i>Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum</i>
<i>Coll Cist</i>	<i>Collectanea Cisterciensia</i> (formerly <i>Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum</i>)
CS	<i>Cistercian Studies</i>
<i>CSQ</i>	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i> (formerly <i>Cistercian Studies</i>)
CSS	Cistercian Studies Series
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>HSJ</i>	<i>Haskins Society Journal</i>

- NLT* *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, ed. by Chrysogonus Waddell, *Studia et Documenta*, 9 (Brecht: *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 1999)
- PL* *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64)
- RS* The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls ('Rolls Series'), 99 vols (London: Longman and Co., 1844–95)
- SCH* Studies in Church History
- Statuta* *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, ed. by D. Josephus-M^{ia} Canivez, 8 vols, *Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire Ecclésiastique*, fasc. 9–14 B (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1933–41)
- TRHS* *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

Introduction

This book is a chronological survey of selected historical writings produced by Cistercian monks in England from their first compositions in the 1150s through to the 1220s. The Cistercian order is best known for its distinctive spiritual writings and, as a result, most scholarly attention has been directed at the monks' sermons, treatises, vision literature, and so on. Since there has been no comprehensive treatment of the English Cistercians' historical writings it is timely to draw attention to this important component of the Cistercians' literary tradition. At the most basic level, this book can be appreciated as a series of close readings of certain Cistercian histories that have been understudied in past scholarship.

But, in the spirit of medieval exegesis, there are more meanings to be drawn here than simply the immediate. Besides the chronological studies of individual histories, three further levels of analysis inform this study. The first is the question of Cistercian corporate life and how it developed during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The first hundred years or so of the Cistercian order is recognized as a time of enormous change, a medieval change which is rivalled today by the swiftness with which old scholarly certainties concerning this first Cistercian century are themselves altering. It is no exaggeration to state that scholarly debate, interpretation, and reinterpretation in relation to Cistercian corporate history is one of the most vibrant fields of medieval religious scholarship at present.¹ Most participants in this debate investigate devotional and legislative sources, but this

¹ See, for example, the most recent contribution to the debate, Constance H. Berman's controversial reassessment of the order's first century, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

book argues that chronicles can also provide helpful evidence concerning the order's changing institutional and spiritual activities.

A second area worth investigating is the wide field of English historical writing in the mid-twelfth to thirteenth centuries and, more than this, the dependence of historical writing on, and its contribution to, the politics of the period. We already know a great deal about this topic for the earlier part of the twelfth century. We know, for instance, that it was the specific need to define, name, and characterize the English nation that was the driving force behind the revival of historical writing following the Norman Conquest. Both cause and consequence of this was the fact that 'the nation' represented an extremely potent site of historical meaning. And this was not just any nation. In the early to mid-twelfth century, writers and readers of history invested their greatest hopes and energy in the English nation in its particular Anglo-Saxon incarnation. Here the flexibility of the Anglo-Saxon past was critical. A given textual community could describe the Anglo-Saxon past in order to embrace political and social changes, as the Anglo-Norman nobles did who suddenly started commissioning English histories. On the other hand, totally different textual communities could describe the nation precisely in order to resist change, as the old Benedictine monastic hierarchy did, well before the Cistercians had even arrived in England. Thus, the nation itself was the dominant personality in historical writing in twelfth-century England; it could be harnessed to so many disparate ideologies with the minimum of rearrangement. And this was its greatest strength—'England' itself was an historiographical agent.

All of this is simply to point out that commentators have already detected a relationship between history writing in medieval England and broader national imperatives. And I will follow in this path. At the same time, however, I need to emphasize that there were other political and social orders besides the national which prompted medieval communities to write about their pasts or, indeed, prompted them to write about the pasts of others. Many of these imperatives have been well studied. Thanks to several generations of scholarship, commentators today have a good understanding of the major changes and developments in ways of representing the past that occurred in English monastic, lay, canonical, and bureaucratic milieux in the Middle Ages.² But the role of the Cistercians in all this has been overlooked. The second level of this study is therefore an interrogation of how Cistercian historical writing confirms or denies the picture of English history writing (and its national and local political bases) that past commentators have developed.

The third and final level is the broad area of current issues in historiographical theory. This refers to some of the methodological and theoretical questions occupying commentators on historiography more broadly, not

² The classic study, from which all further studies derive, is Antonia Gransden's comprehensive work *Historical Writing in England c.550 to c.1307* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

simply commentators on historiography from the medieval world. To say that significant changes have occurred in this field in the last thirty years is an understatement. The impetus for change has come from the consequences of the linguistic turn, most notably with the change of focus from event to means of representation. This redirection of scholarship has affected all areas within medieval studies, but it has been particularly noticeable in the field of historiography.³ Given that the written history was long defined as a text providing a more or less true account of events that had really happened, any attention to the ways in which ideas and truths are inextricably tied up with the means of representation was always going to necessitate a change of scholarly direction. Scholars of medieval historical writing have risen to this challenge by moving away from studying histories as quarries of information to accepting that so-called documentary histories are primarily literary texts in which the conventions and peculiarities of, for example, genre, language use, and format determine the types of meanings that we today can hope to retrieve from these texts.

This book will respond to some of the more pressing questions resulting from this reassessment of narrative and its constitutive powers, questions especially relevant for commentators on historical writings. One such issue is the relative usefulness of intention-based, reception-based, and manuscript diffusion-based studies. Another is the degree to which reading practices derived from exegetical models can help readers to distinguish between a given history's 'facts' and its 'meanings', a distinction which carries particular relevance to contemporary debates on invented traditions. Yet another perennial issue is the question of historical genres, such as the differences between chronicles and annals—why the distinction is important in the first place, and whether chronicles and annals suggest meaning in the same ways. By studying how Cistercian histories inform our understanding of these contemporary themes, this book contributes to debates relevant not just to scholars of the medieval Cistercians or of medieval England but also to scholars of medieval and modern narrativity and historiography more broadly.

Before proceeding I need to establish just what kind of historiography is being investigated here. At the moment there is strong scholarly interest in the many non-written ways in which medieval communities remembered their pasts.⁴ For example, oral family genealogies, tombs and funerary laments, and the weaving of family legends on tapestries all reflect the desires of certain communities to articulate and disseminate their histories using a range of

³ See the thorough discussion in Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁴ See Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), and Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900–1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

media besides the amplified written narrative. According to this expanded, non-written, definition of what constitutes a community history, the medieval Cistercians were without question deeply committed historians. As followers of the Benedictine Rule, Cistercians kept history alive by maintaining the customs lived by thousands of medieval monks before them. They looked to the historical events of the Bible as pointers for their personal spiritual journeys. They honoured saints from past centuries. And, of course, the liturgy itself was a cycle of repetition and reverence for the past.

But if medieval Cistercians embraced the past in non-literary ways, their attitude towards written histories is another matter entirely, a matter which has drawn contradictory assessments in the modern scholarship. The implications of this scholarship are such that it is timely to investigate the relationship between the Cistercian monastic order and written histories. Thus, this book is not an investigation of the Cistercians' many non-written forms of historical awareness but, rather, an investigation of what may be called the traditional history, the written account of the past.

Even within the written format there were many different expressions of historical consciousness. Indeed, defining the written *historia* in the medieval context is an undertaking fraught with complexities, exceptions, and uncertainties.⁵ The first point to make is that different definitions apply in different written discourses. According to the definition drawn from poetics, *historia* was the narration of things that have occurred. According to a hermeneutic approach, it was the first, literal, level of meaning, which was itself the first step granting access to higher truth. Following a definition drawn from academic disciplines, *historia* had no independent status at all; in this instance history was linked to grammar.

Given these brief points, it is clear that defining the medieval *historia* is a book in itself, beyond the limits of this study. On the other hand, there is good reason to believe that concentrating too closely on the (contradictory) medieval definitions of *historia*, *chronicon*, and *annales* may be a counterproductive strategy in any case. We risk missing out on much of the richness of medieval historical writings if we confine our studies solely to those texts corresponding to the authoritative definitions of, for example,

⁵ The scholarship is enormous. For a good brief commentary on the complexity of the term *historia*, see Roger D. Ray, 'Historiography', in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by Frank A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 639–49. Other recent discussions of the umbrella term *historia* appear in Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), pp. 19–25; Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, *Local and Regional Chronicles*, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 74 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 13–14; and, in another context, Päivi Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics: 'Historia', 'Argumentum' and 'Fabula' in the Twelfth- and Early Thirteenth-Century Latin Poetics of Fiction* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), chap. 3 (p. 64).

Cicero or Isidore of Seville. Although these authors' theoretical definitions of history were often invoked in the Middle Ages, there is a difference between invocation and emulation and it has been noted that such definitions were generally honoured only in the breach.⁶ In fact, the classical definitions of history were always unsatisfactory for medieval compositional practices and they were often invoked simply because they were the most obvious authorized definitions to hand. This never meant, however, that medieval historiography was confined to styles that fell within these frameworks. Rather, a range of works, formats, and styles was always accepted as historical in nature.

In light of these points, in the following investigation I will refer to 'medieval history writing' and 'medieval historical writing' as broad terms which contain within them such different sub-genres as histories, chronicles, and annals. Roger Ray's sensible definition will be followed. This is one in which historiography is confined to 'Latin prose narratives that claim or seem to treat real events of primarily non-saintly experience over some stretch of time'.⁷ The key aspect here is the truth claim. That is, the claim to veracity, and the expectations prompted in a given text's readers as a result, is what most distinguishes the history from other forms of prose writing. Ray's exclusion of saintly narratives is also endorsed, although not without some regrets. There have been some strong calls for studying saints' lives according to the same criteria as histories,⁸ and there is certainly scope for more investigation into Cistercian *vitae* and the ways in which they promote their own versions of Cistercian truth. But this is not a study of hagiography. The English Cistercians wrote a great deal of history even without including their *vitae*, and attempting to include even more texts would necessitate brief and partial discussions which would compromise my principle of thorough readings.

As mentioned already, there have been no synthetic studies of the English Cistercians and their production of written histories. Instead, the field has been characterized by a small number of case studies, either of individual histories or of the *œuvres* of individual writers. The former field includes Derek Baker's excellent investigations into the foundation history from Fountains abbey in Yorkshire while the latter includes examinations of Aelred of

⁶ Roger D. Ray, 'Medieval Historiography through the Twelfth Century: Problems and Progress of Research', *Viator*, 5 (1974), 33–59 (pp. 35–42), and Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, 'Veraces Historiae aut Fallaces Fabulae?', in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 25–39.

⁷ Ray, 'Historiography', p. 639. Although, in principle, I see no reason to focus solely on Latin works, this Latin emphasis happens to apply well to the Cistercian examples of this study.

⁸ Felice Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: "Hagiographical" Texts as Historical Narrative', *Viator*, 25 (1994), 95–113.

Rievaulx's histories.⁹ Although these studies have provided many insights, Cistercian historiography in England still awaits the broad kind of study that English Benedictine historiography has received and, more recently, that continental Franciscan and Dominican histories have also received.¹⁰

Interestingly, despite (or, perhaps, because of) the lack of a survey work, there has still been a tendency for scholars to posit generalizations about Cistercian historical writing in England. These generalizations are important since they contain an inherent contradiction which has influenced all subsequent scholarship on Cistercian history writing, both in England and on the continent. The contradiction is that some commentators credit the Cistercians as committed writers of histories while others argue precisely the opposite. The most common view is that Cistercians in both England and continental Europe were infrequent and uninterested historians. The standard evidence for this assessment is a piece of legislation from the order's General Chapter which forbade unauthorized literary composition. This sole piece of evidence was invoked in Antonia Gransden's classic survey of English historical writing and, through this survey, it has become something of a standard argument.¹¹ Other influential arguments have been the claim that the Cistercian order in general was anti-intellectual and, in the specifically English context, that Cistercian historical writing was characterized by manuscripts of poor quality and poor handwriting.¹²

But other scholars have produced tentative qualifications to this approach. Bernard Guenée, for example, introduces his discussion of Cistercian historical culture by invoking Gransden's reference to the allegedly

⁹ Derek Baker, 'The Genesis of English Cistercian Chronicles. The Foundation History of Fountains Abbey I', *An Cist*, 25 (1969), 14–41, and 'The Genesis of English Cistercian Chronicles. The Foundation History of Fountains Abbey II', *An Cist*, 31 (1975), 179–212. The most insightful commentator on Aelred is Marsha L. Dutton; see 'Aelred, Historian: Two Portraits in Plantagenet Myth', *CSQ*, 28 (1993), 113–43.

¹⁰ On Franciscans, see Bert Roest, *Reading the Book of History: Intellectual Contexts and Educational Functions of Franciscan Historiography 1226–ca. 1350* (Groningen: Regenboog for Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1996). Dominican historiography was discussed by Simon Tugwell, 'Early Dominican Chronicles Between Fantasy and Chronology', unpublished paper delivered at The Medieval Chronicle Conference, Utrecht, 13–16 July 1996.

¹¹ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 263, 287. The proscription and its influence on Cistercian scholarship will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹² For references to the anti-intellectual allegation, see Marie-Anselme Dimier, 'Les premiers cisterciens étaient-ils ennemis des études?', *Studia Monastica*, 4 (1962), 69–91. On English historical manuscripts, see Christopher Holdsworth, 'Learning and Literature of English Cistercians, 1167–1214, With Special Reference to John of Ford' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Clare College, Cambridge, 1960), p. 24.

prohibitive legislation.¹³ Interestingly, however, Guenée proceeds to point out a contradiction: whereas the proscription should have worked against the creation of an historiographical culture, the opposite situation obtained and Cistercians composed histories quite often. Another commentator, Christopher Cheney, has turned away from official legislation and has looked instead at the books the English Cistercians actually kept in their libraries.¹⁴ Cheney concedes that twelfth-century Cistercians were predominantly interested in building up their liturgical and devotional collections and that, therefore, most literary activity was directed to this end. He points out, however, that there was a smaller but still significant interest in history. Cheney's views concerning the English Cistercians have been accepted by David Dumville, who talks of the 'Cistercian appetite for history'.¹⁵ Finally, some commentators have kept their options open and have argued from both sides. John Taylor is one of these, mentioning both that the 'Cistercian settlement constituted a major influence behind twelfth-century historical writing [in England]' and that 'in view of official Cistercian policy' historical writing at the English Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx was curbed by the end of the twelfth century.¹⁶

The preceding points indicate that modern scholars have assessed Cistercian historical writing differently according to the sources they have used. Those favouring theoretical rules and legislation have argued against a dedicated Cistercian historiographical culture, both in England and on the continent, while those favouring manuscript studies have argued that, if not outstanding historians, the Cistercians in England and on the continent nonetheless produced a decent number and variety of written histories. This contradiction between theoretical rules and practical denial of those rules lies at the heart of scholarly approaches to Cistercian historical writing, although it has never been identified as such.

Perhaps the reason this contradiction has persisted so long is due to the general disregard of Cistercian histories. That is, while those scholars who have discussed English Cistercian historiography have done so in an inconsistent manner, it has in fact been much more common for commentators to overlook the Cistercian histories entirely. This is because histories written by English Cistercians have appealed neither to scholars interested in English historiography nor to scholars interested in English Cistercians.

¹³ Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980), p. 47.

¹⁴ Christopher R. Cheney, 'English Cistercian Libraries: The First Century', in his *Medieval Texts and Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 328–45.

¹⁵ David N. Dumville, 'Celtic-Latin Texts in Northern England, c.1150–c.1250', *Celtica*, 12 (1977), 19–49 (p. 48).

¹⁶ John Taylor, *Medieval Historical Writing in Yorkshire* (York: St Anthony's Press, 1961), pp. 7, 10.

To begin, commentators on English history writing have had other priorities besides the Cistercians. It is common to refer to the twelfth century as England's century of historiographical reawakening. This is the century of Eadmer, William of Malmesbury, John of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at Peterborough, and the Durham historians. Perhaps understandably, the very strength of this predominantly Benedictine historiographical culture has made it all the easier to pass over the Cistercian histories. Following the influence of Richard Southern, the early twelfth century in particular is defined as the great era of Benedictine histories.¹⁷ Recent projects culminating in new editions of texts by William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester simply confirm the critical role these early-twelfth-century texts will always play in our understanding of historical writing in medieval England. While I do not deny the importance of these histories, my aim here is simply to point out that when there is such a weight of attention focussed on one part of a century then textual productions from later years in the given century do not always gain the attention they deserve, and are not always studied on their own terms. This is particularly so in reference to the twelfth century, given the dominating influence of the so-called 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance' and the resultant focus on classic (that is, non-Cistercian) texts which allegedly represent this intellectual movement at its peak. Moreover, in addition to the Benedictine focus, another parallel trend has arisen more recently and this too deflects attention from the Cistercians' writings. Currently in chronicle studies there is significant interest in the non-monastic historians of the 1120s through to the 1150s, including most famously the secular clerks Henry of Huntingdon and Geffrei Gaimar, and, of course, Geoffrey of Monmouth.¹⁸

Both these approaches carry with them strong ideological projects. The long-standing attention to Benedictine histories is premised on the view that

¹⁷ For one of Southern's many formulations of this argument, see Richard W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 4. The Sense of the Past', *TRHS*, 5th series, 23 (1973), 243–63.

¹⁸ See, for example, Diana Greenway, 'Authority, Convention and Observation in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*', *A-NS*, 18 (1996), 105–21; John Gillingham 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation', in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan Murray, Leeds Texts and Monographs New Series, 14 (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1995), pp. 75–101; John Gillingham, 'Gaimar, the Prose *Brut* and the Making of English History', in *L'histoire et les nouveaux publics dans l'Europe médiévale (XIII^e–XV^e siècles)*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997), pp. 165–76; Ian Short, 'Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber vetustissimus*', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 323–43; and sections of Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), for Geoffrey of Monmouth. Some aspects of Peter Damian-Grint's work on vernacular historians also fall into this category: *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999).

post-Conquest historiography was an essentially nostalgic and backward-looking undertaking, engaged in by besieged Benedictine monks feeling simultaneously defensive and wistful for their lost past and thus ossifying an idealized version of the pre-1066 past in their monastic histories. The more recent attention to secular histories also proceeds from the premise that historiography is a powerful weapon in the campaign to create and maintain community identities. But this school of thought argues that history writing was undergoing a crucial change in England in the second quarter of the twelfth century—the argument is that, by this period, history was being created confidently and almost greedily by a whole new range of communities who extended far beyond the Benedictine monastery. Laymen and laywomen, French readers and Latin readers, Anglo-Norman families who had only been in England a couple of generations—these people were all taking the initiative to call the history of England their own and to possess their own written versions of it. Now history was used in a more optimistic, forward-looking fashion, rather than as the intellectual solace it had been to the Benedictine monks.

Although neither of these trends deals with histories written after approximately 1155, still the effect has been to overshadow the historical productions of the following forty-five years. With two such important areas of English historiography demanding study, historical writings of the second half of the twelfth century have not gained anywhere near the same degree of attention. This is not to suggest a total lack of scholarship but, rather, to point out that no equivalent attempt has been made to establish any broader frameworks for histories of this later period. Gransden's survey, for example, does discuss Cistercian productions but, in contrast to its excellent treatment of the Benedictine texts, the study does not question whether there might be common features to the Cistercian histories or even an overall corporate motivation behind the production of Cistercian historiography in twelfth-century England.

The same applies with histories from around 1200 and the early decades of the thirteenth century. The most popular thirteenth-century histories have always been those by Matthew Paris, Roger Wendover, and, indeed, historiographical investigations have concentrated strongly on the St Albans school in general.¹⁹ In other studies, William of Newburgh and Richard of Devizes have been examined in detail, generally in so far as they anticipate what have been termed the more scientific and less monastic historiographical views of the thirteenth century.²⁰ The degree to which Cistercian

¹⁹ Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and, more recently, Rebecca Reader, 'Matthew Paris and Anglo-Saxon England: A Thirteenth-Century Vision of the Distant Past' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1994).

²⁰ Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments. The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977). See too Monika Otter,

histories from the first two decades of the thirteenth century confirm or modify the conclusions drawn from these studies has not been pursued. There is still scope, then, to investigate how Cistercian histories fit into the models of English historiography proposed by Gransden and others.

Scholars explicitly interested in the Cistercians have proceeded with a similar hesitation when it comes to examining the historical writings of Cistercian monks. For a good part of the twentieth century Cistercian scholars were preoccupied with arguing about the existence and characteristics of the so-called ‘medieval Cistercian degeneration’. This view posited a decrease in spirituality around the start of the thirteenth century and, although now discredited, the argument has cast a long shadow over Cistercian scholarship.²¹ Following this argument, participating in and writing about worldly history were considered unfortunate manifestations of an allegedly excessive contact with the outside world. Hence, Cistercian historiographical culture was ignored, dismissed, or, most often, simply not studied in any depth. Following another logic, modern Cistercians have always paid their greatest attention to sermons, biblical commentaries, and, in general, to treatises which display the order’s unique affective theology. This is considered the most fruitful area in which to detect the Cistercian *mentalité* and it clearly carries direct relevance to the many religious men and women who form a large proportion of commentators on medieval Cisterciana. In the light of this imperative, it is understandable that Cistercian histories have not been at the forefront of modern investigations.

It is clear then that Cistercian histories have fallen into the gap between two areas of research, research into English historiography and research into Cistercian life. Bringing these two fields together via the study of Cistercian historiography is one of my aims here. However, there is more at stake than simply filling a scholarly gap. My further contention is that neither of these areas of research can be argued to its fullest potential unless it incorporates elements of the other.

As mentioned already, most academic attention concerning English historiography has been directed at Benedictine histories from the early twelfth century and, more recently, at histories by secular clerks from the slightly later period of the 1120s to the 1150s. Although the point has not been made in so many words, there is a strong similarity in the themes discussed and conclusions arrived at in both these debates, a similarity which warrants attention here. In both contexts historiography was clearly

Inventiones: Fictions and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²¹ The theory of decline is clearly evident in the title given to the standard survey of the Cistercian order; Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians — Ideals and Reality* ([n.p.]: Kent State University Press, 1977). For a survey and debunking of the degeneration theory, see Constance Brittain Bouchard, ‘Cistercian Ideals versus Reality: 1134 Reconsidered’, *Cîteaux*, 39 (1988), 217–31. Berman’s recent reassessment also rejects the degeneration premise.