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Phillip Adamo, *New Monks in Old Habits: The Formation of the Caulite Monastic Order, 1193-1267*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2014. xiv + 260 pp. \$85.00 (cl.) ISBN 978-0-88844-189-8.

Review by Scott G. Bruce, University of Colorado at Boulder.

The rapid rise and enduring popularity of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century has largely eclipsed the study of Benedictine monasticism after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). Modern histories of important abbeys like Cluny tend to portray the later Middle Ages as a period of irrevocable decline in their authority and influence. With this new book, Phillip Adamo draws attention to a little known order of Benedictine monks whose modest successes provide vivid evidence of the inadequacy of this narrative of decay. Known as the Caulites, these monks took their name from the site of their motherhouse at Val-des-Choux (Latin *uallis caulium*; “Valley of Cabbages”), which they founded in 1193 in a remote valley in northwestern Burgundy. The Caulites received approval from the papacy in 1205 and expanded slowly throughout the thirteenth century until they numbered over twenty dependent houses (seventeen in France, three in Scotland, and one in the modern Netherlands). The reconstruction of the history of this order is no small task. There are no surviving *vitae* of the founder of the order or any of its members. While Pope Innocent III and Jacques de Vitry make reference to the Caulites, other medieval evidence for their ideals and practices is thin on the ground. Undaunted by this challenge, Adamo reconstructs the history of the Caulites over the course of eight thematic chapters, with an emphasis on the early history of the order in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The result is an informative, though sometimes impressionistic, portrait of a “new” monastic order that beat the odds to find a measure of success in a very competitive religious environment.

Chapter one (“The Sources”) lays out the sources for the book and their limitations. The Caulites compiled a collection of customary legislation that survives in two manuscripts, both of which date from the thirteenth century with later additions. Adamo also relies on dozens of medieval charters preserved in five Caulite cartularies copied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While he makes a brief nod to visual evidence like charter seals, funerary reliefs, and the architecture of Caulite churches, these sources do not play a substantive role in his arguments. The biggest handicap for the historian is the absence of narrative material related to the history of the order, including hagiography and chronicles, and the lack of evidence for the holdings of any Caulite libraries, either specific manuscripts or book catalogues.

Chapters two (“The Spiritual Founder”) and three (“The Other Founder?”) clear up conflicting interpretations about the founding of the first Caulite community put forward by previous scholars. Adamo argues convincingly that the founder of Val-des-Choux was a priest and *conversus* named Viard from a neighboring Carthusian abbey called Lugny, who set out to organize hermits living in the forest of Villiers-le-Duc into a sustainable monastic community. Lugny seems to have exercised oversight of the new abbey for at least a decade or so after its foundation. Viard’s vision for the community mingled traditional elements with innovations. Caulite communities could never exceed more than twenty members, including both monks and *conversi*. The latter were treated very much like the choir monks, in no small part because the earliest Caulites owned no properties for them to work. Instead, they derived

their income solely from rents donated by their supporters. According to Adamo, the secular founder of Val-des-Choux was probably Duke Hugh III of Burgundy, who died on the Third Crusade in 1192. The founding of the first Caulite house in 1193 may well have been the fulfillment of a vow of Hugh III by his son and successor Odo III.

Chapter four (“The Caulite Ideal, Economic Realities, and Social Relations”) demonstrates how the economic policies of the Caulites changed over the course of the thirteenth century from a model of dependence and detachment based on living from donated rents to the wholesale purchase and exploitation of urban and rural properties by the order. Adamo treats this topic thematically, exploring Caulite economic activity in five categories: rents in kind and money, donations of which fell off rapidly after 1225; donations of rents in kind, including wheat, wine, and salt, which remained strong throughout the thirteenth century; monetary donations paid in installments (so-called “money rents”), usually made for spiritual purposes, like the celebration of anniversary masses; donations of immovable property, primarily meadows and vineyards, but also houses, manses, orchards, and mills; and moveable property, namely livestock and human beings. Adamo argues that, by the mid-thirteenth century, the monks of Val-des-Choux had “certainly moved away from simply receiving property as gifts to acquiring property on their own initiative, apparently with an eye toward economic gain” (p. 84). Unsurprisingly, most of these donations came from noble benefactors. How the monks reconciled this dramatic shift from their original ideals to the new status quo is impossible to know.

Chapter five (“Caulite Foundations”) investigates the spread of Caulite filial priories in France, Scotland, and the Holy Roman Empire with an eye to the motivations of their founders. Adamo shows that some new foundations were the result of noble travelers who were impressed by the Caulite communities they had encountered. Others, he maintains, were constructed to fulfill the vows of crusaders who promised to found religious houses upon their departure, return, or death. Political motivations could also play a role, as may have been the case in the founding of Épeau in Auxerre. For some unexplained reason, the heyday of Caulite expansion ebbed with the establishment of Val-Dieu in Troyes in 1267, after which the foundation of new houses dried up completely.

Chapter six (“The Caulite Customary”) examines the religious practices of the Caulites as expressed in their customary. The early Caulites braided this text together from a number of different sources and traditions: a *prima institutio* (perhaps Viard’s earliest directives for the community); a bull of Pope Innocent III from 1205; the *Rule of Benedict*, which the Caulites seem to have adopted in the early thirteenth century (ca. 1216-1224); as well as borrowings from Carthusian practices and Cistercian texts, like the *Ecclesiastica officia*, the *Usus conversorum*, and statutes of the Cistercian general chapters. This chapter is successful in complicating our understanding of what kind of the monks the Caulites believed themselves to be (reformed Carthusians? Cistercians? Benedictines?) and how inadequate and inaccurate our own labels become when confronted by the creative appropriation of texts from so many different monastic traditions.

Chapters seven (“Organization of the Caulite Order”) and eight (“The Monastery at Val-des-Choux”) are more descriptive than argumentative. Both chapters use the Caulite customary to reconstruct the governmental organization and physical space of these monastic communities. Chapter seven surveys the duties of monastic officials in Caulite abbeys and explains the workings of the daily chapter meeting, the filial relationship between Caulite communities, rights of visitation, and the general chapter meeting. One unusual holdover from the Carthusian origins of the Caulites was their abandonment of the term “abbot” for the spiritual leaders of their communities in favor of the term “prior.” Chapter eight provides an imaginative reconstruction of the original Caulite foundation at Val-des-Choux based on a plan of the abbey published by Prosper Mignard in 1864. In this chapter, Adamo walks the reader from the forest to the abbey gates and through the various parts of the abbey (the church, the cloister, etc.), elucidating as he goes the activities that the monks would have performed there. Continuing in this vein, the book ends with a short “reverie” that imagines a monk’s entry into the monastery in the later thirteenth

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century. There follow two appendices, one of which contains very useful English translations of early thirteenth-century texts that describe the Caulite way of life.

*New Monks in Old Habits* is a helpful introduction to the elusive sources for a little-known order of late medieval Benedictine monks. Like many books on monastic history, however, the focus on a particular order creates a very narrow picture of the life and times of the Caulites. As a result, the vibrant religious landscape in which they lived appears in very low relief. One wonders, for instance, how these monks managed to find their initial foothold in Burgundy, the heartland of Cluniac and Cistercian monasticism, and how their donors negotiated the distribution of their resources among these different, yet not so different, religious communities. Similarly, Adamo barely touches upon the religious and political context that accounted for the appeal of the Caulites to patrons on the rural fringes of thirteenth-century Scotland (pp. 103-104). Even so, scholars of medieval monasticism should be grateful to Adamo for calling our attention to the “cabbage valley monks,” whose mingling of Carthusian, Benedictine, and Cistercian traditions created a new monastic ideal that, for all of its modesty, endured until the French Revolution.

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