

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED THIRTY

*The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 2  
Abbot Vitalis of Savigny,  
Abbot Godfrey of Savigny,  
Peter of Avranches,  
and Blessed Hamo*



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*Introduced, translated, and edited by*

Hugh Feiss, OSB  
Maureen M. O'Brien  
Ronald Pepin



Cistercian Publications  
[www.cistercianpublications.org](http://www.cistercianpublications.org)

LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota  
[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press

**Cistercian Publications**

Editorial Offices

161 Grosvenor Street

Athens, Ohio 54701

www.cistercianpublications.org

All four of these lives are translated from editions of E. P. Sauvage, the *Vitae* of Vitalis and Godfrey from “*Vitae* BB. Vitalis et Gaufridi, primi et secundi abbatum Saviniacensium in Normannia,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 1 (1882): 355–410, and the *Vitae* of Peter of Avranches and Hamo from “*Vitae* B. Petri Abrincensis et B. Hamonis monachorum coenobii saviniacensis,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 2 (1883): 475–560.

Biblical quotations are translated from the Latin.

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1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Abbot Vitalis of Savigny, Abbot Godfrey of Savigny, Peter of Avranches, and Blessed Hamo / introduced, translated and edited by Hugh Feiss, OSB, Maureen M. O’Brien, Ronald Pepin.

pages    cm — (The lives of monastic reformers ; 2) (Cistercian studies ; 230)

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Summary: “This volume offers translations of the twelfth-century Latin *vitae* of four monks of the Monastery of Savigny: Abbot Vitalis, Abbot Godfrey, Peter of Avranches, and Blessed Hamo. Founded in 1113 by Vitalis of Mortain, an influential hermit-preacher, Savigny expanded to a congregation of thirty monasteries under his successor Godfrey (1122–1138). In 1147, the entire congregation joined the Cistercian Order. Around 1172, two monks of Savigny, Peter of Avranches and Hamo, friends but very different personalities, died. Their stories were told in two further *vitae*. The *vitae* of these four men exemplify the variety of people and movements found in the monastic ferment of the twelfth century.”—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-87907-230-8 (paperback) — ISBN 978-0-87907-693-1 (ebook)

1. Cistercians—France—Savigny (Manche)—Biography. 2. Vitalis, of Savigny, Saint, –1122. 3. Godfrey, of Savigny, Abbot, active 1122–1138. 4. Peter, of Avranches. 5. Hamo, Blessed. 6. Benedictines—France—Savigny (Manche)—Biography. I. Feiss, Hugh. II. O’Brien, Maureen M. III. Pepin, Ronald. IV. Sauvage, E. P. *Vitae* BB. Vitalis et Gaufridi, primi et secundi abbatum Saviniacensium. V. Sauvage, E. P. *Vitae* B. Petri Abrincensis et B. Hamonis monachorum coenobii saviniacensis.

BX3455.A33 2014

271'.1202244—dc23

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2014016177

To Anna Minore and Joanne Draper,  
Amy Jaskowiak, Ami Brogdon, and Dory Hammersley,  
teachers whose *vitae* inspire their friends and students



# Contents

Foreword ix

List of Abbreviations xiii

Introduction 1

*The Life of Blessed Vitalis of Savigny* 41

Introduction 43

Life 51

*The Life of Holy Godfrey, the Second Abbot of Savigny* 95

Introduction 97

Life 103

*The Life of Blessed Peter of Avranches, Monk of Savigny* 131

Introduction 133

Life 137

*The Life of Blessed Hamo, Monk of the Monastery of Savigny* 163

Introduction 165

Life 169



## Foreword

THE PERIOD OF 1050–1150 was a time of monastic experimentation and expansion. Monastics as different as Bruno the Carthusian and Stephen Harding, Gilbert of Sempringham and Hildegard of Bingen, Norbert of Xanten and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu left behind their old lives, began new lives, and sometimes created new forms of monastic living. One of the centers of experimentation was at the borders of Normandy, Brittany, and Maine. There Robert of Arbrissel, Bernard of Tiron, and Vitalis of Savigny embraced the life of hermit-preachers and attracted disciples, male and female, for whom they eventually had to provide a home and a rule. The three men devised different solutions for the rule to be followed by their disciples. At Savigny, Vitalis chose the Benedictine Rule. Under Godfrey, his successor, Savigny expanded to become a congregation of monasteries under the authority of the abbot of Savigny. In 1147 and 1148, when that authority was challenged during the English Civil War between King Stephen and Empress Matilda, Abbot Serlo committed Savigny and all its dependencies to the Cistercian Order. This incorporation of Savigny into the Cistercian Order is clear evidence of the vitality, the prestige, and the organizational strength of the Order of Cîteaux.

We know the first century of Savigny through four *vitae*, those of the first two abbots, Vitalis and Godfrey, and those of two monks of the generation following Godfrey, Hamo and Peter of Avranches. These *vitae* are here translated together into English for the first time. They were written to plant models of monastic sanctity in the memories of the Savigniacs. They were also written—or at least

employed—in an unsuccessful effort to secure official, papal canonization of these four saints of Savigny. Because of their didactic and political nature, these *vitae* cannot be approached as straightforward, accurate historical accounts, even though they are major sources for the lives of the first two abbots and almost the exclusive sources of our knowledge of Hamo and Peter.

When one looks at a painting of monks, all dressed the same, occupying identical seats in a monastic choir—or when one attends services in a monastery today—it is tempting to imagine such a thing as a typical monk. These four *vitae* caution against such imagining. They present four very different people and four very different kinds of holiness. These different kinds of holiness presumably reflect both the uniqueness of the four saints and the different notions of sanctity that the different authors of the *vitae* espoused and wished to convey.

The portraits of the two abbots could not be more different: Vitalis, a man of humble background, became the chaplain to Robert of Mortain and a canon of a collegiate church that Robert founded at Evroult. Then, converted to the austere life of a forest-dwelling hermit, Vitalis became a powerful, peripatetic preacher who was tireless and fearless in calling people of all classes and conditions to reform their ways. Well connected with the powerful before his conversion, he was well connected afterward with other hermit-preachers. His wisdom, eloquence, and kindness won over many; for them he established Savigny and an associated women's monastery. He was the abbot, but he does not seem to have ceased his preaching and travels. This preaching was hardly characteristic of the Cistercian observance that Savigny had embraced a quarter of a century before Bishop Stephen of Fougères wrote Vitalis's *Vita* in the 1170s. It seems likely that dedicated preaching was both a fact of Vitalis's life and a concern of Bishop Stephen's.

By contrast, Godfrey preached only within the monasteries of the Order, whose form of life he made more strict, as several contemporary observers noted. He is presented as a man who valued order, who had been a monk even before he came to Savigny and became Vitalis's assistant. Godfrey must have had charisma, because he presided over a phenomenal expansion of the Savigny congregation, which directly or indirectly founded over twenty monasteries during his eighteen years as abbot. Some of this expansion may

have been facilitated by his aristocratic background, which made it easier for him to interact with potential benefactors.

Hamo, the subject of the next life, is portrayed as a very vigorous, gregarious man who traveled a great deal, was the confidant of royalty, and ministered to monasteries of women. Early in his monastic career he had ambitions to become a prelate, but some time spent serving lepers cured him of that, and later in life he turned down several appointments. He was a very successful fundraiser. The funds he raised sometimes went for good causes outside of the Savigniac congregation. He was also an enthusiastic collector and distributor of relics. He promoted the construction of a new church at Savigny. He seems to have tended toward worry about his own spiritual state and that of others. He had a knack for discerning others' spiritual condition and urged those he perceived to be in sin to repent and confess their sins. Perhaps to give balance to the account of Hamo's many activities and involvements, the author of this *vita* includes some chapters emphasizing Hamo's commitment to prayer and meditation, which led him to the summits of contemplation and ecstasy. Hamo thought a great deal about the afterlife and made his peace with death before it came to him.

The *Vita* of Peter of Avranches is also noteworthy for a vision of the afterlife in which a knight saw Peter at the side of Christ. Though Peter was a friend of Hamo, who sometimes served as his confessor, he was utterly different in personality. Peter was very serious, withdrawn from the world, and solitary. He had been interested in music as a young man, but once he became a monk his life took on a very penitential cast. After his entry into Savigny, he was never known to laugh. He did not allow himself to take an interest in nature or affairs outside the monastery. He was irked when Hamo brought him greetings from King Henry II. One of the aims of Peter's *Vita* is to show the contrasting forms of holiness found in Hamo and Peter. To this end, the author includes a ditty: "Peter of Avranches, who sheared sins like a sword; / Hamo, dovelike, pious and patient, and like a sheep." At Hamo's request, after Peter died he appeared to Hamo and told him that God had prepared many dwellings in heaven, and Hamo's would be greater than Peter's.

Thus these four *vitae* present at twelfth-century Savigny a diverse group of men who were able to live together in service of Christ.

Vitalis's fidelity to his unusual vocation to be a hermit, preacher, and monastic founder unpredictably led to the founding of a traditional but vital monastery and congregation, which before long was absorbed into the Cistercian Order. In the end, Savigny did not create something radically new, except insofar as each saint, canonized or not, is a new and unique way of following Christ. That may be the lesson of Savigny: whatever institutional innovations or failures do or do not occur, the most important thing is that there be saints.

These four *vitae* are translated here into English for the first time. As in *The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 1: Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine* (2010), three of us have collaborated on the project. Hugh Feiss translated the *Vitae* of Vitalis and Godfrey and wrote the introduction, using materials researched by Maureen O'Brien. Ronald Pepin translated the lives of Hamo and Peter of Avranches. Ronald and Hugh then vetted each other's translations before turning the entire manuscript over to Maureen for a thorough editing before she submitted it to Fr. Mark Scott, OCSO, executive editor of Cistercian Publications, and more recently to his successor, Marsha Dutton. We are grateful to them for offering us the opportunity to contribute to the Cistercian Studies Series and for the help given us.

## Abbreviations

AA SS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , ed. Ioannes Bollandus, et al. Antwerp, Bruxelles, Paris, 1643–1894.
ABR	<i>The American Benedictine Review</i> , ed. Terrence Kardong, Richardton, ND.
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers Series. Westminster, MD, and New York: Newman/Paulist, 1946– .
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954– .
CF	Cistercian Fathers Series. Kalamazoo, MI, and Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications.
CS	Cistercian Studies Series. Kalamazoo, MI, and Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1866–2011.
PL	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> . 221 volumes. Paris, 1844–64.
RB	<i>Rule of Saint Benedict</i> .
SBOP	<i>Sancti Bernardi Opera</i> , 8 volumes, ed. Jean Leclercq, H. M. Rochais, and C. H. Talbot. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–1977.
SCh	Sources chrétiennes series. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1942– .



## Introduction

THE ABBEY OF SAVIGNY existed for almost seven hundred years, from 1112 until the French Revolution. The abbey began with the preaching of Vitalis, a court chaplain turned hermit, who settled his numerous followers in the newly founded monastery at Savigny, in northwestern France on the border of Normandy, Brittany, and Maine, southeast of Avranches and Mont Saint-Michel. Under Vitalis's immediate successors, Savigny grew to be a congregation of over thirty monasteries. In 1147, the abbey and all its dependencies were incorporated into the Order of Cîteaux.<sup>1</sup>

There is no comprehensive, modern history of the monastery and congregation of Savigny, even during the period 1112–1243, which is of concern here. Sometime after 1712, Claude Auvry, who served as prior at Savigny from about 1698 to 1712, wrote a lengthy history of Savigny from its beginnings to the mid-thirteenth century. Auvry's sources were the four lives translated here, the mortuary roll of Saint Vitalis, the *Chronicle* and cartulary of Savigny, the

1. For the period 1122–47, the text below refers to Savigny and its dependencies as a congregation but calls Cîteaux and the monasteries deriving from it the Order of Cîteaux. This approach is somewhat arbitrary on both accounts. As is indicated below, it is difficult to determine the relationship that existed between Savigny and its daughter and granddaughter houses, though the monastery of Savigny certainly exercised considerable sway over those other monasteries. Constance Berman, in *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), has challenged, unsuccessfully it seems, the consensus that there was a Cistercian Order at the time when Savigny petitioned to join it in 1147.

*Book of Miracles* of Savigny, and passing references to Savigny in medieval and later historians.

Auvry's work, which runs to over a thousand pages in the edition published by Louis Laveille, has its limitations.<sup>2</sup> Much of Auvry's work concerns donations recorded in the abbey cartulary, and Auvry discusses them chronologically in connection with the time in office of each abbot. He describes all the abbots as devout men and in many cases learned as well. Many of the charters describe legal conflicts, which seem almost always to be settled in Savigny's favor. Useful as such information is for the history of families who were donors, it gives a somewhat mercenary cast to the story. Auvry, who was a devout Cistercian monk, seems at times to read Cistercian practices back into the period before Savigny joined the

2. Claude Auvry, *Histoire de la Congrégation de Savigny*, ed. Auguste Laveille, 3 vols. (Rouen: A. Lestringant; Paris: A. Picard, 1896–98). Laveille's edition of Auvry's three volumes is divided into six books, each of which is divided into chapters. In these notes, this work will be referenced by book (bk.) and chapter (chap.) rather than by volume and pages. At Vaux-de-Cernay in 1680, Auvry was sacristan, monk in charge of the granary, and acting superior when the prior and subprior were absent. He then spent over a decade as a confessor to communities of nuns before being appointed prior of Savigny. He retired to Vaux-de-Cernay, where he wrote all or part of his history.

Some influential sources for the early history of Savigny are found in a manuscript from Savigny, Paris MS Bibliothèque nationale fonds lat. 4862. One item in the manuscript is a version of the first revision of the *Chronicon* of Robert of Torigni, revised to include information about Savigny. Léopold Delisle recovered the interpolations about Savigny and published them as *Auctarium Savigneiense* in *Chronique de Robert de Torigni*, ed. Léopold Delisle, 2 vols. (Rouen: A. Le Brument, 1872–73), 2:156–63. Also in this manuscript is a miscellany of historical notes about Savigny. Étienne Baluze combined these notes with other historical entries he found in another Savigniac manuscript and with a history of the abbots of Savigny (*Indiculus abbatum*) up to 1243 and printed the three texts as *Chronicon Savigniacense: Miscellaneorum liber secundus* (Paris, 1679), 314–23. In “‘Et inter abbates de majoribus unus’: The Abbot of Savigny in the Cistercian Constitution, 1147–1243,” in *Truth as Gift: Studies in Honor of John R. Sommerfeldt*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, Daniel M. La Corte, and Paul Lockey, CS 204 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004), 113–18, Francis R. Swietek and Terrence M. Deneen show that these texts are heavily dependent on other sources such as Robert of Torigni's *De immutatione ordinis monachorum*, the history of Fontaines-les-Blanches written by Peregrinus of Vendôme about 1200, and papal bulls. Another source for the early history of Savigny is the entry on Vitalis in Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, bk. 8, chap. 27.

Cistercian Order, mentioning, for example, the practice of never starting a new monastery with less than an abbot and twelve monks.<sup>3</sup> At times, when more information is available, Auvry pauses to discuss a particular event in detail; for example, Vitalis's career, the building of the abbey's churches, the translation of the relics of Savigny's saints,<sup>4</sup> and the founding of new monasteries.

The only other fairly comprehensive effort to study the early history of Savigny is that of Victor de Buck in the *Acta Sanctorum*. He devotes a great deal of effort to sorting out the number and filiation of the monasteries founded directly or indirectly from Savigny.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars, using much the same body of sources as was available to Auvry and de Buck, have studied particular episodes or questions concerning Savigny.

The goal of this general introduction is to provide a context in which to read the four lives translated in this volume. Because more information is available about the first two abbots, Vitalis and Godfrey,<sup>6</sup> they will receive more attention. The treatment of some of the abbots begins with an excerpt in which the brief *Chronicle of Savigny* or another contemporary document epitomizes their contribution. We have placed these quotations in italics.

### *Reformer Monks: The New Monasticism*

As this book is being prepared for the press in 2014, there is great ferment and uneasiness in monastic and other intentional religious communities. On the one hand, many existing Roman Catholic religious orders cope with declining numbers and the need to amalgamate houses, provinces, and even entire orders. The decline of many Roman Catholic religious communities does not seem to be the result of criticism or disdain but rather of lack of interest

3. Capitulum 9, in Chrysogonus Waddell, ed., *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, *Studia et documenta 9 (Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses, 1999)*, 408.

4. Throughout we will refer to Vitalis, Godfrey, Hamo, Peter of Avranches, and William Niobé as the saints of Savigny, even though no pope ever canonized them.

5. Victor de Buck, "De BB. Gaufrido et Serlone, abbatibus, Guilelmo, novitio, et Adelina abbatissa, Saviniaci in Normannia," *Acta Sanctorum*, October 8 (Brussels: A. Greuse, 1853), 1019–41.

6. Vitalis's successor will always be referred to as Godfrey to distinguish him from others of the same name, to whom we will refer as Geoffrey.

among Catholics.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, in the United States and elsewhere a movement that is sometimes called “the New Monasticism” is leading to the creation of new intentional communities. These communities are Protestant, Catholic, and ecumenical. They often draw inspiration and guidance not only from the Bible but also from the Rule of Saint Benedict, the example of Saint Francis, and Roman Catholic religious orders. There is great diversity in these experimental communities: some are returning to traditional practices that were generally abandoned forty or fifty years ago, some are open to innovation, some are austere, some live with the poor in the inner city, and many have a mixed membership of men and women, clergy and laity, celibate and married.<sup>8</sup>

7. Near the end of *God in Proof: The Story of a Search from the Ancients to the Internet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 224, Nathan Schneider gives a poignant example: “My first day there I noticed, out for perusal in the chapter room, a photocopy of the annual ‘House Report’: a one-page, rather dour document describing the state of things at the abbey. It said that there were ‘twenty (20)’ members, of whom only ‘eight (8)’ were able to live the full monastic life. No one was in formation. There were no new vocations. They had commissioned a major plan for environmental sustainability, but someone would have to be around to implement it. The report ended by declaring their total dependence on God, their determination to live out God’s call, and the intimation that nothing short of a miracle could keep this place going for much longer.”

8. For the history of Catholic religious orders and a sense of their present precarity, see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord Is Their Portion: The Story of the Religious Orders and How They Shaped Our World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). “The New Monasticism” and the “ecclesial movements” are discussed in many books and articles. Here is a sampling: *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, ed. Members of Rutba House, The New Monastic Library 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Jon R. Stock, Tim Otto, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting the Church: Biblical Wisdom for a New Monasticism*, The New Monastic Library 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Jonathan A. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World, Second Edition: From After Virtue to a New Monasticism*, The New Monastic Library 6 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010); John Michael Talbot, *The Universal Monk: The Way of the New Monastics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011); Mary Forman, ed., *One Heart, One Soul: Many Communities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009); Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011); Ivan J. Kauffman, “*Follow Me*”: *A History of Christian Intentionality*, The New Monastic Library 4 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009); Gerald W. Schlabach, *Unlearning Protestantism: Sustaining Christian Community in an Unstable Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker/Brazos, 2010).

The phrase “the New Monasticism” figures in the title of Henrietta Leyser’s classic study, *Hermits and the New Monasticism*.<sup>9</sup> Like our own times, that era within which Vitalis and the other saints of Savigny lived was a time of ferment and experimentation in monasticism. Although existing communities continued to thrive, new kinds of monasticism sprang up, first in Italy with Saint Romuald and Saint Peter Damian,<sup>10</sup> and then in what is today France. In the French Alps, Saint Bruno established the Grand Chartreuse in 1084. In Burgundy, in 1098, what would become the Cistercian Order began with the migration of a group of monks from one monastery, Molesme, to a new one, Cîteaux, though Molesme itself had eremitical connections. At Premontre, Norbert of Xanten (d. 1134), a canon turned hermit, established an enduring order of canons regular. In the Auvergne and Limousin, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu (d. 1067), Stephen of Obazine (d. 1159), and Stephen of Muret (d. 1124), and near the borders of Normandy, Brittany, and Maine, Vitalis of Savigny (d. 1122), Bernard of Tiron (d. 1116), and Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116) withdrew into solitude, drew followers by their way of life (and in many cases their preaching),<sup>11</sup> and became founders of monastic communities.<sup>12</sup>

These founders and their associates struggled with complex issues: how to provide for and order the relationships among the men and women who became their disciples, how to make the

9. Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000–1150* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984).

10. On these two pioneers, see Jacques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin, and Salvation in the Middle Ages*, trans. Bruce L. Venarde (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 24–26.

11. Leyser, *Hermits*, 69–77. Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, 33–34, points out the partial complementarity of this new eremitism and preaching: the personal asceticism of the hermit makes his call for repentance credible; as Jesus required of the seventy(-two), the hermit traveled without baggage and often with a companion.

12. On the adoption of an order and customs among the new movements of the first half of the twelfth century, see Leyser, *Hermits*, 87–96; *The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 1: Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, trans. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O’Brien, and Ronald Pepin, CS 222 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010): “The Tripartite Life of Robert, Abbot of La Chaise-Dieu,” 1.1 (*Lives*, 1, 73); “The Life of St. Stephen of Obazine,” 1.24–26, 2.1–2, 2.11–13 (*Lives*, 1, 153–56, 163–64, 172–77); Carole A. Hutchison, *The Hermit Monks of Grandmont*, CS 118 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 17–22.

transition from a band of disciples gathered around a hermit or hermit-preacher to an organized community under a succession of leaders, how to relate to bishops and other clergy, and how to connect the communities that they founded into a federation.<sup>13</sup> As these hermitages developed into institutionalized communities, some took untraditional forms, such as Stephen of Muret's Grandmont and Robert of Arbrissel's Fontevraud; others assimilated to Benedictine models or were absorbed into the Cistercian Order. Others became canons regular.<sup>14</sup>

One can detect in the lives and foundations of some of these reformer monks an effort to return to pristine beginnings—to the Rule of Saint Benedict in its integrity, to the example of the Desert Fathers, to the *vita apostolica* of the church of Jerusalem as described in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and to the teachings of Jesus. In this sense they aimed to recover a golden age. For these new hermits, however, solitude meant something different than it had for the hermits who went into the Egyptian desert in the fourth century or even for Saint Benedict. The new hermits did not settle into places far removed from human habitation; for the most part they welcomed companions. What they wanted to leave behind was soft living and financial, legal, and social entanglements, so that they could live as “poor men of Christ and contribute to their own support and to meet the needs of the poor by the work of their hands.”<sup>15</sup>

The titles of both this book, *The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 2*, and its predecessor, *The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 1*, are somewhat problematic.<sup>16</sup> Hermit-preachers like Vitalis did not aim to reform

13. According to Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, xii, Robert pioneered the centralized organization of later orders by making the abess of Fontevraud superior over all the other monasteries in the congregation, whose superiors were prioresses answerable to her.

14. Leyser, *Hermits*, 87–96.

15. Leyser, *Hermits*, 18–28.

16. This discussion of “reform” is informed by Patrick Henriët, “Les trois voies de la réforme dans l’hagiographie érémitique du xii<sup>e</sup> siècle. Enquête sur la *Vita Bernardi Tironensis* (BHL 1251),” *Médiévales* 62 (2012): 105–22; Patrick Henriët, *La Parole et la prière au Moyen Âge* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 2000), 256–63; Christopher M. Bellito and David Zachariah Flanagan, eds., *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012); Martha Newman, “Reformed Monasticism

religious life or the church as a whole. Their aim was to convert hearts, to set people on a path of continuing conversion and growth that would lead them toward ever-greater perfection in the Christian life; theirs was a reform that was forward looking (*reformatio in melius*), even eschatological.

That some of those who responded to the preaching of these men wanted to become their followers and perhaps to enter religious life prompted Vitalis and some other preachers to found monastic or canonical communities for them, but Vitalis does not seem to have intended to reform existing monastic life. It is true that Marbod of Rennes wrote to Vitalis asking him to find a place in his congregation for a young woman who could not find a place in a traditional aristocratic community of nuns, so on this point Marbod did see Savigny as innovative.<sup>17</sup> Godfrey, his successor, opted for a stricter form of monastic life and was in that sense a reformer of the community Vitalis founded. There is no reason to think, however, that Savigny under Vitalis was “deformed,” so that it needed moral or spiritual re-formation by Godfrey.

As it turned out, Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Muret’s followers did form new institutional arrangements, but one might wonder to what extent they intended these new forms either to reform existing monasticism or to critique it. Bernard of Tiron certainly fought for the independence of Saint-Cyprien from Cluny, but it was to Cluny’s politics, not its monastic observance, that he objected. The congregations of Obazine and Savigny joined the Cistercians in 1147–48, indicating that by then the two groups felt an affinity with the particular monastic form championed by Cîteaux, whose founders had undertaken an “enterprise of renewal and reform.”<sup>18</sup> In their beginnings, however, Obazine, La Chaise-Dieu, and Savigny were informal communities that, when they needed a rule, chose the Rule of Saint Benedict.

There is another ambiguity about the idea of reform, which in medieval times usually meant embracing a life that was austere,

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and the Narrative of Cistercian Beginnings,” a paper delivered at the 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, May 11, 2013); and very helpful conversations with Robyn Parker of the University of Sheffield, who alerted me to Henriët’s article.

17. PL 171:1474D–1475B; Henriët, *Parole*, 281.

18. Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, 6.

withdrawn from the world, or devoted primarily to prayer, on an assumption (it can be called “the austerity assumption”) that these ways of living are better than alternative forms that are moderate and missionary. This “austerity assumption” seems to have encouraged a drift toward traditional enclosure and disengagement in congregations like that of La Chaise-Dieu, which in its beginnings Marbod of Rennes had to defend against critics who argued that Casadeans had gone from better to worse when they went from being hermits to helping people in need. Was the imposition of a more enclosed way of life on the congregation of Savigny by Vitalis’s successor, Godfrey, a de-forming of what Vitalis had envisioned, as well as a re-forming according to the “austerity assumption”? What about the thirteenth-century women’s communities that cared for the sick, lepers, and women in difficulties—was their transformation into cloistered communities a reform?<sup>19</sup>

If reform is a complex and difficult idea, monasticism need not be. In Stephen of Muret’s words, “Any Christians who have come together to live as one can claim the right to be called monks, even if the name is more particularly given to those who, like the apostles, kept a greater distance from the business of the world, giving their minds to the thought of God alone.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Vitalis: Court Chaplain, Hermit, Traveling Preacher, Monastic Founder**

*This father was educated in the liberal disciplines from an early age. When he reached manhood he began to love poverty and put before his eyes the gospel saying, “Whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple” [Luke 14:33], just as it is said of Blessed Benedict that he*

19. Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women’s Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

20. Carole Hutchison, introduction to Stephen of Muret, *Maxims*, trans. Deborah van Doel, CS 177 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2002), xii. It is curious that Stephen of Muret thought that “the apostolic life” meant greater distance from the business of the world and single-minded concentration on God. On the definition of monasticism, see Hugh Feiss, “Monasticism, Definitions of: Christian Perspectives,” in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. William M. Johnston, 2 vols. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 2:871–74, and criticisms in a review of the book by Bennett Hill in *Catholic Historical Quarterly* 87 (2001): 707–9.

despised the arid world with its flowers.<sup>21</sup> So, having been snatched by the hand of divine mercy from the ruin of this falling world,<sup>22</sup> he led a strenuous eremitical life at a place called “The Lord’s Rock” for almost seventeen years. While he did so, he had frequent visits from proven and upright people of his time, namely, Lord Robert of Arbrissel (who built the monastery that is called Fontevraud), Lord Bernard, and other renowned persons professing the same way of life. In the manner of the Holy Fathers they held very frequent colloquies at The Lord’s Rock, discussing the state of holy church and what is useful for souls.

How holy was the manner in which he conducted himself in his professed state of life, how much he disdained the world and loved poverty, how stingy he was with himself and how generous to those in need, how intent he was on fasts, vigils, prayers, and other holy activities the close and frequent gatherings of the people just mentioned indicates, for as the prophet says, “You will be holy with the holy one” [Ps 17:26].<sup>23</sup>

How faithfully and indefatigably he spread the divine word is attested by the unbearable labor and resulting exhaustion of those brothers of his who accompanied him, when while they sat and took turns in serving him, he never sat while he was preaching, and even when his hearers were worn out, they never saw him tired out. If someone wishes to capture in words how many plots of wicked men, how many indignities of thirst and hunger, how much heat and other bad weather he suffered, such a one will be exhausted with the futile effort. Wanting nothing earthly, he sought “not the things that are his” [1 Cor 13:5] but the things of Jesus Christ, working only to restore peace among those in discord and to provide food and clothing for the needy, hospitality for the wanderers, pardon for the guilty, lawful marriages for prostitutes, and houses and other necessities for lepers. The Lord conferred such grace on him that although he undertook difficult and impossible things, with God’s help he never failed to accomplish them.

Therefore, when he had served zealously in these and other holy works of this kind for seventeen years, finally, forced by the entreaties of the large

21. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 2. Prol. 1, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, SCh 260 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 126; *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary*, trans. Terrence Kardong (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 1.

22. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, ed. M. Simonetti and C. Moreschini, CCSL 3A.2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976); cited and trans. Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99: *inter ipsas saeculi labentis ruinas* (“in the midst of the very ruins of a decaying age”).

23. This text is also cited by William Langland, *Piers Plowman, B-Text*, Passus V, ed. Walter K. Skeat, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1:154, line 285.

*multitude of brothers who had come to him because of his holiness, he became the father of more than 140 people of both sexes, judging it better, as Gregory wrote, to profit many than to live for himself alone.<sup>24</sup> Once he was put in charge, however, he did not abandon his earlier poverty. He kept preaching just as much. He was a great founder of churches, a completely steadfast defender of the poor, a fierce denouncer of tyrants, and a just and humble pastor and most loving provider for the flock committed to him.<sup>25</sup>*

The founder of the monastery of Savigny was a remarkable man of rare talent, broad experience, boundless energy, and deep faith. He was born in Tierceville, about twelve kilometers from the episcopal see of Bayeux.<sup>26</sup> He may have been born or baptized on September 22, the feast of a saint named Vitalis. As an adult, this later Vitalis was chaplain to Robert of Mortain, who died in about 1095, so Vitalis must have been born by 1060. His parents, Rainfredus and Rohes, were dead by 1107, though in 1243 villagers in Tierce-

24. Mendicant orders have often cited the maxim *non sibi soli vivere, sed et aliis proficere*. The duty to serve incumbent on those who have the ability and call is a frequent theme in the writings of Gregory the Great. For example, in his *Pastoral Rule* 1.5 (PL 77:18CD), Gregory writes that when those blessed with gifts from God refuse positions of leadership in the church, “they lose the gifts, which they have received not just for themselves but also for others. Because they are thinking about their own profit and not that of others, they deprive themselves of the goods that they seek to have just for themselves” (*dona admittunt, quae non pro se tantummodo, sed etiam pro aliis acceperunt. Cumque sua et non aliorum lucra cogitant, ipsis se quae privata habere quaerunt, bonis privant*). See Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (London: Constable, 1967), 176–88. For a similar statement about Robert of Arbrissel, see Baudri of Dol, “First Life of Robert of Arbrissel,” par. 12, in *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, trans. Bruce Venarde (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 13.

25. Léopold Delisle, ed., *Rouleaux des morts du ix<sup>e</sup> au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Renouard, 1866), 282–84. The translation is by Hugh Feiss. Because the Latin text of this lengthy quotation is easily accessed on line (<http://www.archive.org/details/rouleauxdesmorts00deliuoft> [accessed November 28, 2013]), it is not included here. This brief biographical sketch was composed just after Vitalis’s death and circulated to 208 monasteries, so it seems likely to be reliable. Stephen of Fougères quoted it in his *Vita* of Vitalis, and scholars since have relied on it.

26. What follows is a summary of the very careful reconstruction of the story of Vitalis’s life in Jaap van Moolenbroek, *Vital l’ermite, prédicateur itinérant, fondateur de l’abbaye normande de Savigny*, trans. Anne-Marie Nambot (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990), 148–211.

ville confidently pointed out their home, where Vitalis was born.<sup>27</sup> They had other children, including Osbert, who, the *Vita* 2.15 reports, fell off a roof at Savigny. Vitalis was sent to study when still a young boy. The most likely school would have been at the Benedictine monastery of Grestain,<sup>28</sup> the family monastery of the noble family of Conteville, lords of the area. After studying at Grestain, or perhaps directly from Tierceville, Vitalis probably went to study at the cathedral school of Bayeux, where he would have lived with the canons, whose number and dwellings the redoubtable Bishop Odo (bishop 1049–97) augmented.<sup>29</sup> From Bayeux, Vitalis may then have been sent elsewhere to gain the knowledge of rhetoric and law that Stephen of Fougères (d. 1178) attributes to him. Liège was a likely locale for such an education.

Having finished his education, Vitalis entered into the service of Robert of Mortain, who may have been the patron of his education. Count Robert, Bishop Odo's full brother, had many chaplains, traveled a great deal, and was often in the entourage of his half brother, Duke William of Normandy, known in England as the Conqueror. Traveling with Robert, Vitalis would have learned much about the world. Robert also paid his chaplains well. He wanted to make Mortain an important secular and religious center, and to that end in 1082 he had the collegiate Church of Saint-Evrault<sup>30</sup> and the monastic Church of Notre Dame consecrated in the presence of Duke William and five bishops. Once made a canon of Saint-Evrault, where Saint Firmat (William Firmatus) was buried, Vitalis was assured of an ample income.

Vitalis was now a wealthy and well-connected man. In 1095–96 he withdrew to become a hermit. He did so in a time of turmoil,

27. *Liber de miraculis*, referenced by Van Moolenboek, 352n3.

28. Grestain was a Benedictine Abbey founded by Herluin de Conteville (d. 1066) and his wife Ariette, mother of Duke William of Normandy. Herluin's son, Robert of Mortain, half brother of William and brother of Odo of Bayeux, was a principal benefactor.

29. John Marshall Carter, "'Fire and Brimstone' in Anglo-Norman Society: The Preaching Career of Vital of Mortain and Its Impact on the Abbey of Savigny," *ABR* 34 (1983): 169–72.

30. There are photographs of this beautiful church in Lindy Grant, *Architecture and Society in Normandy, 1120–1270* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 153, 158–59. The church was rebuilt early in the thirteenth century. The church at Savigny probably had much in common architecturally with Saint-Evrault.

when Robert Curthose, the duke of Normandy, had little control over his nobility, a council at Rouen declared a Truce of God, and there was a serious famine. While all this was happening, the hermit life was thriving in the forests of western France, and the ideal of voluntary poverty was exerting a strong attraction.

The letter attached to Vitalis's mortuary roll reports that Vitalis embraced the life of solitude and poverty at a place called *Domini Petra* (*Dompierre*, "Rock of the Lord"),<sup>31</sup> somewhere in or near the triangle delineated by Fougères, Savigny, and Passais-la-Conception, near the border of Maine and Normandy and not far from the border with Brittany. Living austerely, like one of the Desert Fathers, he held conversations with like-minded men, over some of whom he exercised authority. It was an apostolic life, thought to replicate the life of Jesus and his disciples, but apostolic also in that it imitated the life of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, where possessions were shared and the apostles gave themselves to preaching.

Vitalis was an indefatigable preacher before and after he founded Savigny. His manifest voluntary poverty enhanced his credibility. According to Ordericus Vitalis, his preaching and his example were an urgent call to interior conversion addressed to men and women of all classes, urging them to abandon sin and lead disciplined, simple lives. Preaching this message brought him both physical discomfort and opposition from knights and churchmen. One of the purposes of his preaching was to bring peace and reconciliation and put an end to the armed conflicts that brought misery to the poor. In his preaching missions, he showed concern for the needy and particularly for prostitutes, whom he called to conversion and for whom he provided means to enter into lawful marriages.<sup>32</sup>

Around 1105, Count William of Mortain underwrote the establishment of a religious community just outside Mortain. He and other secular and religious figures endowed it with lands and rights. The community, of which Vitalis was the prime mover, may have

31. Hippolyte Sauvage, *Saint Vital et l'Abbaye de Savigny*, 3rd ed. (Mortain: Armand Leroy, 1895), 42–43, described what he believed were the site and ruins of Dompierre.

32. On Vitalis's preaching see Carter, "Fire and Brimstone," 176–85; Hugh Feiss, "Seminiverbius: Preaching in the Vita of Vitalis of Savigny," *ABR* 63 (2012): 257–66; Henriët, *Parole*, 268–82, 407–11.

been for women, for canons regular, or for brothers dedicated to care of the poor. But this new foundation was placed in jeopardy when in 1105 King Henry I of England (1068–35) invaded Normandy, poised to battle with his older brother, Duke Robert Curthose (1054–34), and his supporter, Count William of Mortain (ca. 1084–p. 1140). Vitalis sought to help negotiate a peace, but the effort failed, and Duke Robert and Count William lost the battle.<sup>33</sup> The donations to the new monastery were thus annulled; it seems to have ceased to exist, and its goods were transferred to the Abbey of Saint-Étienne in Caen.

Vitalis and his followers then withdrew to a hermitage in a wooded area twenty kilometers southwest of Mortain. Bernard of Abbeville (1046–1116) was nearby, but by 1109 he and his followers had departed to their monastery at Tiron and had erected wooden buildings there. Vitalis himself may have been reluctant to start another monastery, but the growing number of his disciples and their need for a more stable life and religious discipline evidently persuaded him of the need. By 1113, with donations from Raoul de Fougères (ca. 1070–ca. 1120) and other magnates and the approval of Henry I, the monastery of Savigny was a reality.<sup>34</sup>

So from about 1113 to his death in 1122, Vitalis was abbot of the men's monastery at Savigny, to which was joined before long a women's priory, although in later centuries it was known as

33. H. Sauvage, *Saint Vital*, 36–37.

34. For the relevant charters, see Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 257–63. Jacqueline Buhot, “L’abbaye normande de Savigny, chef d’ordre et fille de Cîteaux,” *Le moyen âge* 46 (1936): 7–8, evokes the setting of the new monastery. The lords of Fougères and their families remained devoted supporters of Savigny throughout the period here under consideration (1112–1244). Auvry, *Histoire*, makes frequent references to their generosity toward the abbey; e.g., bk. 3, chap. 4; bk. 4, chap. 4; bk. 4, chap. 25; bk. 5, chaps. 4, 12, 15; bk. 6, chaps. 10, 18, 27, 28, 33. Bennett Hill, “The Beginnings of the First French Foundations of the Norman Abbey of Savigny,” *ABR* 31 (1980): 132, reached a similar conclusion about the counts of Mortain: “In the course of the twelfth century every generation of the family supported the abbey and the Congregation of Savigny.” He explores the contributions of both the Counts of Mortain and the Fougères lineage in “The Counts of Mortain and the Origins of the Norman Congregation of Savigny,” in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages*, ed. William C. Jordan, Bruce McNab, and Teofilo Ruiz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 237–53.

“l’Abbaye Blanche.”<sup>35</sup> Vitalis did not cease preaching, but during these years he devoted a great deal of attention to putting Savigny on a sound political, economic, and religious footing. It seems that the community grew beyond its financial means, a fact that prompted Vitalis to recover from the Abbey of Saint-Étienne at Caen the original donations made around 1105 by William of Fougères.<sup>36</sup> In 1119 he obtained support and a privilege from Pope Calixtus II.<sup>37</sup> At the time of his death the monks were working to support themselves by the work of their own hands as much as they could, but they also relied on other sources of income of the kind that monasteries had traditionally depended on. After Vitalis’s death, Godfrey and later abbots at Savigny alleviated the economic stress of the community by sending out colonies of monks to make new foundations, but those foundations in their turn also often experienced great financial need.<sup>38</sup>

The new monastery at Savigny followed the Rule of Saint Benedict. The brothers owed obedience to their abbot, their vows were permanent, and they were required to celebrate the divine office.<sup>39</sup> They wore habits of undyed wool. Lay benefactors received from the monks of Savigny and from the monks of other monasteries

35. Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 198–99, writes that it is incorrect to say that the superior of this women’s monastery was Adeline, sister of Vitalis. He says there was an Abbess Amerline, mentioned in Vitalis’s mortuary roll, who was a member of his family and was deceased by 1122. This relative of Vitalis is not to be confused with another woman named Adeline, who had a reputation for sanctity, died before 1181–86, and was buried at Savigny. She and the hermit-become-novice William Niobé were counted among the six saints of Savigny. When the relics of the other five were moved into the new church in 1243, hers remained in the chapel of Saint Katherine. Her relics may have been moved into the church after a fire in 1705. See H. Sauvage, *Saint Vital*, 48–52. On other early women’s foundations from Savigny, see Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 5; bk. 6, chap. 29.

36. See E. P. Sauvage, ed., *Vita Vitalis* 1.15, in “Vitae BB. Vitalis et Gaufridi, primi et secundi abbatum Saviniacensium in Normannia,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 1 (1882): 355–410 (hereafter *Vita Vitalis*), and the documents in Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 140–44, 266–67, and also Mary Suydam, “Origins of the Savigniac Order: Savigny’s Role within Twelfth-Century Monastic Reform,” *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976): 101–6.

37. See Sauvage, *Vita Vitalis* 2.12; Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 189–90, 267–68.

38. Cf. de Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1014.

39. Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 267.

with which Savigny had prayer confraternities prayers for themselves and their families as well as the possibility of burial at the monastery. The monks of Savigny also prayed for the whole world while at the same time offering practical charity to their neighbors.

Vitalis dedicated the monastery of Savigny, like the earlier failed foundation near Mortain, to the Trinity at a time when new monastic groups were dedicating their churches to Mary. We know, however, that Vitalis died during Matins of the Blessed Virgin, so devotion to Mary was not lacking at Savigny.<sup>40</sup>

According to the mortuary roll, at the time of death Vitalis was abbot of 140 religious, both men and women. Some members were certainly from aristocratic backgrounds. We know no details of the makeup of the community of women during his lifetime. In these early days Savigny was an original creation. Although founded in a remote forest, it seems during Vitalis's life to have been more involved in preaching and charitable work than were most monasteries. The emergent community existed because of its founder's positive and persistent character. He was fearless in calling people to conversion, and he was equally accessible to the poor and the powerful. His combination of rigorous zeal and deep compassion for all made him a sympathetic figure then as it does now.

### **Godfrey (1122–38): Founder of Abbeys and of a Congregation**

*He built many monasteries and imposed customs that were stricter than heretofore.*<sup>41</sup>

No one has done for Godfrey, the second abbot of Savigny, what Van Moolenbroek has done for Vitalis—collected and analyzed

40. Janet Burton, ed. and trans., *The Foundation History of the Abbeys of Byland and Jervaulx*, Borthwick Texts & Studies 35 (York: Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York, 2006), xxxiv–xxxvi.

41. Baluze, “Chronicon Savigniacense,” 310: *Hic multa monasteria aedificavit et consuetudines prioribus altiores imposuit*. *Altiores* usually means “higher” or “more noble.” Since other contemporaries report that Godfrey's customs were stricter or harsher, here *altiores* has been interpreted accordingly.

every shred of evidence about the man.<sup>42</sup> The *Chronicle* of Savigny sets the parameters of his abbacy:

1122: Our father Dom Vitalis, abbot and founder of this holy monastery, died on the sixteenth of the Calends of October. [September 16]

1138: Dom Godfrey, the second abbot of this monastery, died the eighth of the Ides of July.<sup>43</sup> [July 7]

Godfrey's *Vita* does not provide many details about his life before or during his abbacy, and what it says may not be completely accurate. According to his *Vita*, Godfrey was from a noble family who lived in Bayeux. He was well educated and studied at Paris before joining the Abbey of Cerisy-la-Forêt, where he remained for some time. He then transferred to Savigny, to which he was drawn by the zeal of Vitalis, whose assistant he became. He was highly esteemed by King Henry I of England. He founded many monasteries, acted as their *visitor* (though not, perhaps, in a formally determined way), and according to chapter 114 of his *Vita* began a General Chapter for all abbots of the Savigniac congregation, held for three days annually at Savigny on the feast of the Holy Trinity. It is generally thought that this General Chapter was established in 1132.<sup>44</sup>

Several sources report that when Godfrey became abbot, he imposed stricter observances on the monks of Savigny. Robert of Torigni wrote,

42. See Van Moolenbroek, *Vital l'ermite*. The most protracted study of Godfrey's life is that found in bks. 3 and 4 of Claude Auvry, *Histoire*. For a summary of Godfrey's life and contribution to Savigny's history, see Buhot, "L'abbaye normande," 11–17. Not without reason, she calls him "Geoffrey le fondateur de l'Ordre Savignacien" (17).

43. Baluze, *Chronicon Savigniacense*, 314.

44. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 16, thinks the General Chapter was established at least by 1132. He reports that in that year a group of hermits from Fontaine in the archdiocese of Tours asked to join the congregation of Savigny. Godfrey sent Odo to be their first abbot. Their leader Geoffrey and some of the other hermits continued to live as hermits. Their second abbot, Gilbert, was also a religious from Savigny. The seventh or eighth abbot, Peregrin, wrote a history of the community, whence Auvry derived this information.

Vitalis, the hermit, an outstanding sower of the word, built a monastery on the border of Normandy and Brittany, in the settlement of Savigny; he imposed modern observances on his monks, somewhat like those of the Cistercians. Godfrey of Bayeux, a monk of Cerisy, a well-educated and devout religious, succeeded him. He built many monasteries and imposed customs on the Savigniacs that were stricter than what they had had before.<sup>45</sup>

Ordericus Vitalis also reports Godfrey's imposition of stricter discipline: "When he [Vitalis] died, Godfrey of Bayeux succeeded him. He was zealous for immoderate innovations and imposed a heavy yoke on the neck of his disciples."<sup>46</sup>

Ordericus and Robert do not report what these new and stricter observances were. One may conjecture that Vitalis, who continued his itinerant preaching after Savigny was founded, may have permitted some of his followers to accompany him on his journeys or to

45. *Chronique de Robert de Torigni, abbé du Mont-Saint-Michel: Suivie de divers opuscles historiques*, ed. Léopold Delisle (Rouen: Librairie de la Société de l'Histoire de Normandie, 1873), 2:189: *Vitalis heremita, optimus seminiverbius, in confinio Normanniae et minoris Britanniae, in vico Savinneio, monasterium aedificans, modernas institutiones, in aliquibus Cisterciensibus similes, monachis suis imposuit. Huic successit Baiocensis Gaufridus, Cerasiensis monachus, vir admodum litteratus et in religione fervens. Hic multa monasteria aedificavit, et consuetudines prioribus arciore Savinniensibus imposuit.* Bruce Venarde, in a note to his translation of Dalarun's *Robert of Arbrissel*, 37, and in another note to his translation of documents pertaining to Robert, *Robert of Arbrissel, A Medieval Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 120–21, comments that *seminiverbius* is a rare word applied to Paul in the Vulgate version of Acts 17:18 (Greek: *spermologus*), where, he says, it means "chatterbox." Venarde says that in Christian documents the word has a positive meaning and was usually applied to teaching to pagans. The word is applied to Robert of Arbrissel in three places, twice in Baudri of Dol's *Vita* of Robert and once in the *Vita* by Andrew, a religious of Fontevraud.

46. *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.26 (PL 188:644B); *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, trans. Thomas Forester, 4 vols. (London: Bohn, 1854), 51–53: *Quo defuncto, Bajocensis Goisfredus, ac Cersiacensis monachus, successit; qui et ipse immoderatis adinventionibus studuit, durumque jugum super cervices discipulorum aggregavit.* This text is cited by the editor of the *Vitae* of Vitalis and Geoffrey (Sauvage, *Vita Vitalis*, 404n2); Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 3, chap. 2, discusses Godfrey's intensification of austerities and Ordericus Vitalis's reaction to them.

make preaching expeditions of their own.<sup>47</sup> It is also possible that during his lifetime the new monastery offered some of the scope for individual choice and idiosyncrasy that eremitical life permits. As Vitalis's assistant, Godfrey may have been partly responsible for maintaining discipline when Vitalis was away. In any case, he had time to think about how he would like observance to be at Savigny if and when he was in charge. His vision for Savigny may have been influenced by the observances in the Order of Cîteaux and other monastic reform movements.

Godfrey did indeed found many monasteries. When he succeeded Vitalis as abbot in 1122, Savigny was a single abbey, to which two priories were subject.<sup>48</sup> When he died in 1138, Savigny was head of a congregation of twenty-four abbeys, twenty-three of which had been founded during his abbacy, eighteen of them directly from Savigny.<sup>49</sup> These abbeys included

Furness, founded in 1124 at Tulketh; moved in 1127 to Furness, which founded Rushen (1134), Swineshead (1134–35), Calder (1135 and 1142–43), Holy Cross (1169), and Fermoy (1170)<sup>50</sup>

Beaubec, 1127, which founded Lannoy (Briostel) in 1135–37, and Bival (1128–54), a woman's community that founded a number of daughter houses

47. On the presence of active ministry and contemplative withdrawal at Savigny in the twelfth century, see Kathryn L. Reyerson, "The Way of Mary or That of Martha: Conceptions of Monastic Life at Savigny, 1112–1180," in *The Medieval Monastery*, ed. Andrew MacLeish, Medieval Studies at Minnesota, 2 (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1988), 34–42.

48. De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1024, adds a third: Villers-Canivet, a women's community that he argues was established by 1127.

49. This list is based on de Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1014–30. Included here are monasteries founded before 1138 and their foundations before 1200. Auvry, *Histoire*, bks. 3–4, also details the founding of monasteries during Godfrey's abbacy. The total of eighteen foundations from Savigny does not include women's monasteries. Founding a monastery was often a protracted process, involving donations, sending a founding community under an abbot, sometimes moving to a new site when the original site proved unsuitable, and building and blessing a church.

50. According to Janet Burton, "English Monasteries and the Continent in the Reign of King Stephen," in *King Stephen's Reign, 1135–1154*, ed. Paul Dalton and Graeme J. White (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 98–114, by 1147

Vaux-de-Cernay (1127),<sup>51</sup> which founded Breuil-Benoît (1137)  
 Inch-Courcy (1127–30, 1180)<sup>52</sup>  
 Chaloché (1128)  
 Fourcamont (1129), which founded Lieu-Dieu (1191)  
 Saint-André en Goffern (1130), which founded Tironnel (1149–51)  
 Neath (1130)  
 La Boissière (1131)  
 Aulnay (1131), which founded Croxden (1170–79)  
 Quarr (1131–32), which founded Stanley (1151–54)  
 Fontaine-les-Blanches (1132)<sup>53</sup>  
 Basingwerk (1131–33)  
 Combermere (1133), which founded Dieulacres (1146–1214), Whalley  
 (1172–1206), Jervaulx (1145–50)

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there were thirteen Savigniac abbeys in England and Wales and one on the Isle of Man. Savigny founded Neath (1130), Basingwerk (1131), Quarr (1132), Combermere (1133), Stratford Langthorne (1135), Buildwas (1135), Buckfast (1136), and Coggeshall (1140). From Furness were founded Rushen on the Isle of Man (1134), Swineshead (1134–35), and Calder/Byland (1135). The story of Calder/Byland is recounted below.

51. According to Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 7, and Hill, “Beginnings,” 142–43, Arraud, the first abbot, had been a member of a Benedictine monastery before joining Savigny under Vitalis. Arraud died in 1145 and was buried in the chapter room. During his abbacy, Vaux-de-Cernay founded Breuil-Benoît.

52. According to Colmán Ó Clabaigh, “The Benedictines in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland,” in *The Irish Benedictines: A History*, ed. Martin Browne and Colmán Ó Clabaigh (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 90–91, this, the first Savigniac house in Ireland, was founded at Erenagh (Carrig) in County Down, perhaps at the urging of Saint Malachy. The first monks seem to have come from Tulketh (Furness). Reportedly the first abbot (Evodius) had a premonition that the monastery would be destroyed and replaced by a foundation at Inch. The monastery was destroyed by John de Courcy when he conquered Ulster. In 1180–87, he founded a Cistercian house at Inch in reparation. The other Irish Savigniac Monastery, Saint Mary’s, Dublin, was founded from Savigny in 1139. After the Savigniac congregation was merged with the Cistercians, it was affiliated with Combermere Abbey and then, in 1156–57, with Buildwas.

53. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 19.

Calder I (from Furness) (1134–40); made daughter of Savigny after moving to Hood (1138), then Old Byland (1142), then Byland (1177); Calder II (resettled from Furness, 1142–43)

Rushen (Isle of Man) (1134), which founded Mirescog (1176)

Swineshead/Hoyland (1134–35)

Longvilliers (1135)

Stratford (1135)

Buildwas (1135), which founded Strata Marcella (1179–1230)

Lannoy (Briostel) (1135–37)

Buckfast (1134–36)

Breuil-Benoît (1137), which founded La Trappe (1140).

This is an impressive list of foundations. Savigny's growth was not as rapid as that of the Cistercian Order, but if compared, for example, to Engelberg, which did not make a foundation from the time it was established in 1120 until the nineteenth century, it is noteworthy. If, however, when Vitalis founded Savigny he had with him 140 disciples, both men and women, and the number of religious at Savigny was 140 or more when Godfrey became abbot, the founding of so many monasteries is not so astounding.

In 1124, two years into Godfrey's abbacy, the church begun by Vitalis was dedicated. Five bishops presided at the dedication: Turgisus of Avranches, Richard of Coutances, Richard of Bayeux, John of Séez, and Hildebert of Le Mans.<sup>54</sup>

The constitutional standing of Savigny under Vitalis and Godfrey in relation to its daughter houses and their daughter houses is not spelled out in the sources, nor is the relationship of Savigny and its progeny to their diocesan bishops. Auvry says that Godfrey visited the daughter houses of Savigny every year,<sup>55</sup> although he may be mistaken about the visitations being annual.<sup>56</sup> Scholars have different views of the question of Savigny's oversight of its daughter

54. Delisle, *Auctarium Savigneiense*, 2:160; Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 3, chap. 4.

55. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 15.

56. Bennett Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1968), 96–97.

houses, but it may be that Savigny's relationship to its daughter and granddaughter houses was more immediate and comprehensive than that between Cistercian houses.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the evidence suggests that Savigny and its daughter houses, like the Cistercians, were not fully exempt from diocesan control until after the congregation was amalgamated into the Cistercian Order and Cistercians themselves received papal exemption from diocesan control.<sup>58</sup> Savigny accepted revenues from churches, tithes, and mills, while the early Cistercians did not. When they joined the Cistercian Order the Savigniacs were allowed to keep these revenues. This fact may not have weakened the Cistercian Order, but it did require allowing differences of observance.<sup>59</sup>

John of Coutances, a churchman, wrote a book titled *De computo ecclesiastico* that studied in detail the ways in which to compute the date of Easter and make other calculations. He sent it with a covering letter addressed "To Abbot Godfrey, Prior Richard and the Monks of Savigny." He indicates that the monks had requested that he write such a compendium. He tells them,

If you, my blessed lords and true philosophers, whose true philosophy spreads far and wide in things human and divine, see anything useless in this little work, correct it or notify me to correct it. I know your holy and venerable community has many upright and erudite men, who if it had pleased you could have completed this undertaking more adequately and who can correct it where needed.<sup>60</sup>

57. Suydam, "Origins," 94–108. Against Buhot and others, Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, 85–97, argues strongly that there was very limited Cistercian influence on the customs of Savigny during the abbacies of Vitalis and Godfrey. Perhaps with reference to the question of exemption from episcopal control, Hill writes in "Beginnings," 131n2, that Suydam "unsuccessfully attempts to assess the Congregation's administrative and spiritual role in the twelfth-century reform movement."

58. Francis R. Swietek and Terrence M. Deneen, "The Episcopal Exemption of Savigny, 1112–1184," *Church History* 52 (1983): 285–98.

59. Anselme Didier, "Savigny et son affiliation à l'ordre de Cîteaux," *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum* 9 (1947): 358.

60. Joannes Constantiensis, "Epistula ad Gaufridum," PL 163:1479–82. J.-P. Migne reprinted the book from Martène's *Anecdota*, 1:362, and assigned it to the year 1137. Auvry describes the contents of the book in *Histoire*, bk. 4, chaps. 23–24.

Such flattering prose need not be taken too literally, but the book is complex enough to indicate that there were learned monks at Savigny.

At the time of Godfrey's death in 1138, there was tension between Savigny and Furness. Furness had established a foundation at Calder in 1135 under an abbot named Gerald, but the foundation was destroyed by Scottish armies sent into northern England by King David of Scotland after the death of Henry I in 1135. In 1138 when the monks returned from Calder to Furness, the monks there would not receive them back. Various reasons, all of them speculative, have been adduced to account for this inhospitable refusal: Gerald may have been unwilling to resign his abbacy, and the presence of two abbots in one place might not have been workable; the monks of Furness may have thought that the vow of stability required that Gerald and his companions stay at Calder and rebuild there; Furness may not have felt able to support additional monks; and the original reason for the foundation at Calder may have been some sort of tension or schism at Savigny.

In any case, with the help of Archbishop Thurstan of York, the monks from Calder settled later in 1138 first at a hermitage at Hood, near Thirsk, then in 1142 at Old Byland, which turned out to be too close to Rievaulx Abbey, and finally, in 1177, at Stocking, where they built Byland Abbey, whose ruins remain to this day. In the General Chapter of 1141, they successfully petitioned to be removed from the filiation of Furness and put under that of Savigny. When Abbot Gerald died in 1142, Abbot Roger replaced him, remaining in office until 1196. Meanwhile, in 1142–43 Furness colonized Calder a second time. In 1149–50, Hardred, abbot of Calder II, strove to have Calder II recognized as the motherhouse of Byland, but when Abbot Serlo came to England in 1150, Hardred renounced this claim. After Serlo resigned, Furness appealed unsuccessfully to his second successor as abbot of Savigny, Richard (1153/54–58), to have Byland placed in its filiation.<sup>61</sup>

61. Burton, *Foundation History*, xviii–xxiv; Burton, “English Monasteries,” 98–114; Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 21; Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, 98–101, sees in this troubled history a symptom of the lack of constitutional clarity in the Savigniac congregation. For the dating of the various events, we have followed those given in Burton's introduction to *The Foundation History*.

Summing up Godfrey's life and contribution to Savigny, Claude Auvry wrote,

Saint Godfrey did not follow in everything the pattern that Saint Vitalis, his predecessor, had set. As this saintly founder had had a special vocation to preach the word of God and received from the pope a plenary power of doing so everywhere, he devoted himself particularly to the conversion of souls in various provinces of Christendom, and God confirmed his words with a great many miracles. For his part, Godfrey stayed within the enclosure of his monasteries, where he governed in the spirit of the Rule of Benedict, so we see no hint in his story that he or any of his religious had preached publicly.<sup>62</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate Godfrey's contribution to the polity of the Savigniac congregation. Under him the Order expanded rapidly, and he is credited with having established structures for governance: annual General Chapters and visitations. Neither of these institutions seems to have worked very well, however, perhaps because it fell to the abbot of Savigny to visit all the houses of the congregation each year—an impossible task. Furthermore, all the abbots in the British Isles were expected to come to Savigny each year, a task which though not impossible was impractical because such a journey was often dangerous, time consuming, and expensive, especially during the civil war that broke out in England at around the time of Godfrey's death. Savigniac houses both in England and on the continent were to be found in the territories of both contenders for the English throne—King Stephen and Empress Matilda, whose husband Geoffrey of Anjou was conquering Stephen's territories

62. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 28: "S. Geofroy ne suivit pas tout à fait la conduite que St. Vital, son prédécesseur, avoit tenue de son temps. Comme ce saint fondateur avoit eu une vocation particulière pour prêcher la parole de Dieu, et reçu des papes un plein pouvoir de la répandue partout, il s'appliqua particulièrement à la conversion des âmes en diverses provinces de la chrétienté, et Dieu confirma ses paroles par un grand nombre de miracles; au lieu que S. Geofroy se renferma, pour ainsi dire, dans l'enceinte de ses monastères, qu'il gouverna selon l'esprit de la règle de S. Benoît aussi ne voyons-nous en aucun endroit de son histoire que ni lui, ni ses religieux aient prêché publiquement" (2:298–99).

on the continent—a situation that undermined the cohesion of the Savigniac congregation.

### *Royal and Baronial Patrons*

After the 1106 Battle of Tinchebray, William, count of Mortain, forfeited his position for having supported the unsuccessful revolt of Duke Robert Curthose. King Henry I then made his nephew, Stephen of Blois (1096–1154), count of Mortain. Hence as a young man Stephen may have had occasion to meet Vitalis. In 1125, Stephen was married to Matilda of Boulogne (d. 1152), heiress to the county of Boulogne. The couple became important benefactors of Savigny, which was located in Stephen's county of Mortain. Stephen then negotiated the founding of a monastery by monks from Savigny in his English territory of Lancaster; in 1127 the community settled at Furness.<sup>63</sup> Stephen went on to found the Savigniac abbeys of Buckfast (Devon) and Longvilliers (Boulogne), and his queen founded Coggeshall on land she inherited in Essex.<sup>64</sup> Stephen seems to have been more than conventionally pious. His conduct, writes David Crouch, shows him “to have been one of the most prominent early propagators of the Christian and ethical knight-hood preached in the next reign by Stephen de Fougères, bishop of Rennes,”<sup>65</sup> author of the *Vita* of Vitalis. An important Anglo-Norman baron, Earl Ranulf I of Chester, was a notable patron of Savigniac monasteries in his vast territory. According to Bennett Hill, he contributed to the founding of Basingwerk, Combemere, and Dieulacres.<sup>66</sup>

Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, and Stephen's rival for the throne, was benefactor of two Savigniac nunneries, Saint-Saëns

63. David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135–1154* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000), 11–22; R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen* (London: Longmans, 1967), 8.

64. Crouch, *Reign*, 317.

65. Crouch, *Reign*, 319.

66. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, 30 (and the chart between 30 and 31). He also writes that Ranulf founded Calder, but we find no confirmation of this statement. On the founding of monasteries during Stephen's reign in England, the foundations of Stephen, Empress Matilda, and Ranulf of Chester, see Christopher Holdsworth, “The Church,” in *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 212–29.

and Bondeville.<sup>67</sup> Otherwise, she was not an important patron of Savigniac monasteries, though she was a generous patron of many religious houses. She withdrew in 1148–49 to Rouen in Normandy, where she often stayed at a priory of Bec, Notre-Dame-du-Pré, which her father, Henry I of England, had founded. After her death in 1167 she was buried at Bec.<sup>68</sup>

### Abbot Evan (1138–40)

Abbot Godfrey died in 1138 or possibly 1139.<sup>69</sup> His successor was Evan, who was elected to Savigny after being abbot of Furness from 1126 on. Henry I died in 1135, so by the time Evan became abbot at Savigny, the war for the throne of England between Stephen and Empress Matilda had been underway for several years. The war spilled over into the area where Savigny was located.<sup>70</sup> According to Auvry, Evan was a native of Normandy and had returned to Savigny in 1136.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps his experience in England and his first-hand knowledge of Furness and the conflict over Calder recommended him to the electors. By the time of his election the British Isles were particularly important to the Savigniac congregation, as ten of its twenty-four abbeys were there.

67. Grant, *Architecture and Society*, 23, 38. Other Savigniac monasteries of women included, besides l'Abbaye Blanche (founded by Vitalis), Villers-Canivet, Bival, and Gomerfontaine.

68. Grant, *Architecture and Society*, 631; Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 128–37, 177–90.

69. De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1011, gives evidence for the two dates and opts for 1138; Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 28.

70. Lindy Grant, "Savigny and its Saints," in *Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude: Essays on Cistercians, Art, and Architecture in Honour of Peter Fergusson*, ed. Terry Kinder (Brepols: Turnhout, 2005), 109, suggests that Savigny "suffered an eclipse in the mid-twelfth century when the Angevins took control of Normandy, for the order had become closely associated with King Stephen. But Henry II soon once more extended ducal patronage and protection to it and fell under the spell of Haimon, master of the *conversi* at Savigny, who was widely regarded as a holy man."

71. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 30; F. R. Swietek and T. M. Deneen, "The Date of the Merger of Savigny and Cîteaux Reconsidered," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 101 (2006): 567.

**Abbot Serlo (1139–53; d. 1158)**

*At Clairvaux . . . Serlo, who had been abbot of Savigny; a man outstanding in life, speech, and knowledge of the Scriptures.*<sup>72</sup>

Robert of Torigni gives this version of Serlo's life:

After Evan of England, who ruled the monastery for only a short time, Godfrey was succeeded by venerable Serlo . . . who had been a disciple of Godfrey in the world and had entered the monastic life with him first at the monastery of Cerisy and then, having left that monastery, sought a greater form of religious life at Savigny. Because the monasteries subject to him did not submit to him as he wished, by the authority of Eugene, the Roman Pontiff, he submitted himself and all his monasteries to the Cistercian Order, and then, after a few years, for the sake of being more free to spend time with God, he left behind care of the monasteries and secluded himself at Clairvaux, spending time with himself and with God. He was succeeded as head of Savigny by Richard de Courcy, who was prior of that monastery.<sup>73</sup>

Serlo is said to have been born near Bayeux and to have been a disciple of Godfrey. Serlo entered Cerisy-la-Forêt with Godfrey, then transferred with him to Savigny in 1113, one year after that monastery was founded by Vitalis. By the time he became abbot of Savigny, he had had over twenty-five years of experience in living in a monastery. In 1144 he obtained papal protection for Savigny.<sup>74</sup>

72. Baluze, "Chronicon Savigniacense," 314: *Anno Domini MCLVIII obiit apud Claramvallem V Idus Septembris Dominus Serlo, qui fuerat Abbas Savigneij, vir vita et sermone atque Scripturarum scientia conspicuus.*

73. Robert of Torigni, *De immutatione*, 189–90: *Cui, post Evanum Anglicum, qui parvo tempore eidem monasterio praefuit, successit venerabilis Serlo de Valle Badonis juxta Baiocas, qui fuerat praedicti Gaufridi in seculo discipulus et monachatum susceperat prius cum eo in monasterio Cerasiensi, sed relicto illo monasterio, pro majori religione expetierat Savinneium. Hic, quia pro velle suo non ei obtemperabant monasteria sibi subdita, auctoritate Eugenii Romani pontificis, subdidit se et omnia monasteria sua Cisterciensi ordini, et exinde post paucos annos, ut Deo liberius posset vacare, relicta cura monasteriorum, in monasterio Clare Vallis, Deo et sibi vacans, delituit. Cui successit in regimine Savinneii Ricardus de Curceio, prior ejusdem loci.* See Delisle, *Auctarium Savigneiense*, 2.161–62. On Evan see Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 4.

74. The confirmation is in the bull *Desiderium quod*, issued by Pope Lucius II on December 5, 1144. A second bull, *Quia igitur (Habitanter in domo)*, which was as-

Serlo seems to have found it difficult to hold the Savigniac congregation together. Contemporary witnesses report that some English abbots had become lax about making the arduous and time-consuming trek to the annual General Chapter; others were restive under the authority of the abbot of Savigny. Only three English abbots attended the 1147 chapter at Savigny. Burdened with worry about this lack of cohesion, Serlo and Osmund of Beaubec<sup>75</sup> went to the Cistercian General Chapter of 1147 and asked in the presence of Saint Bernard and the Cistercian pope Eugene III (1145–53) that the Savigniac monasteries be incorporated into the Cistercian Order. At the same General Chapter, the congregation of Obazine (successfully) and the Gilbertines (unsuccessfully) also petitioned to join the Cistercian Order. The confirmation occurred in *Pax ecclesiae*, a privilege addressed by Pope Eugene to Serlo on September 19, 1147.<sup>76</sup> After the March 1148 council that met at Reims, Eugene III issued a more solemn document on April 10, 1148, *Apostolicae sedis*, specifying that all the Savigniac monasteries were now permanently Cistercian and were to obey Serlo and his successors.

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signed the same date, includes provisions for living under the Rule of Saint Benedict, disciplining abbots, monks, and *conversi*, and forbidding schisms. It seems to have been a forgery written between 1148 and 1153. Such are the conclusions of two studies by Francis R. Swietek and Terrence M. Deneen, “Pope Lucius II and Savigny,” *Analecta Cisterciensia* 9 (1983): 3–26; “A Savigniac Forgery Recovered: Lucius II’s Bull *Habitantes in Domo* of December 5, 1144,” in *Studiosorum Speculum: Studies in Honor of Louis J. Lekai, O. Cist.*, ed. Francis R. Swietek and John R. Sommerfeldt, CS 141 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 363–87. De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1012–13, and Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 5, chaps. 1–19, regarded *Quia igitur* as authentic.

75. Swietek and Deneen, “Date,” 553–55. This article considers the sequence of events in 1147–48 that led to the incorporation of the congregation of Savigny into the Cistercian Order. The authors examine the dates of the incorporation in light of the radical redating of the emergence of the Cistercian Order proposed by Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution* (see n. 1 above), with which they do not agree. Burton, *Foundation History*, xxv–xxvii, also provides evidence undermining Berman’s theory. According to Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 4, chap. 6, and Hill, “Beginnings,” Osmund was the first abbot of Beaubec (founded 1127–28) and remained in that office until 1156.

76. Swietek and Deneen, “Date,” 558–60. In the momentous year of 1147, William Niobé, a saintly hermit who seems to have asked to become a novice at Savigny, died (Delisle, *Auctarium Savigneiense*, 2.162).

Although Serlo placed Savigny and its congregation in Saint Bernard's hands, scholars dispute what role Bernard played in the union of Savigny and the Cistercians. R. H. C. Davis believed that Bernard was hostile to King Stephen because Stephen did not support Bernard's candidate for the archbishopric of York.<sup>77</sup> Davis also believed that Stephen had encouraged Furness to free itself from the control of Savigny. Jacqueline Buhot believed that it was because Serlo was so taken with Bernard that he asked for the merger. Francis R. Swietek, for his part, thinks that Bernard's role in the merger was only "peripheral."<sup>78</sup> Christopher Holdsworth, on the other hand, marshals evidence to show that from at least 1144 Bernard and Serlo were planning on a merger. He provides as evidence a possible visit of Bernard with Serlo at Savigny in 1144, the close and inconvenient proximity between some new Cistercian foundations and existing Savigniac houses, and shifting political alliances between the two monastic groups and their patrons on both sides of the English civil war. He agrees with Chrysogonus Waddell that expanded versions of the *Carta caritatis* and of the story of the beginnings of Cîteaux were prepared to facilitate the assimilation of the Savigniacs.<sup>79</sup> In any case, Savigny was assigned

77. The appointment of the archbishop of York was highly contested throughout the 1140s. Stephen's brother, Bishop Henry of Winchester, supported the candidacy of a relative, William Fitzherbert, to whom Saint Bernard was vehemently opposed. Bernard supported the candidacy of the eventual winner in the struggle, the Cistercian Henry Murdac. For a summary of this conflict see Crouch, *Reign*, 301–10.

78. Francis R. Swietek, "The Role of Bernard of Clairvaux in the Union of Savigny with Cîteaux: A Reconsideration," in *Bernardus Magister: Papers Presented at the Nonacentenary Celebration of the Birth of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, CS 135 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 289–302; Chrysogonus Waddell, "Toward a New Provisional Edition of the Statutes of the Cistercian General Chapters, ca. 1119–1189," in Swietek and Sommerfeldt, *Studiosorum*, 400–1.

79. Christopher Holdsworth, "The Affiliation of Savigny," in *Truth as Gift*, ed. Dutton et al., 43–88. It is difficult to unravel the political dimensions of the tensions that arose in the Savigniac congregation in the 1140s. R. H. C. Davis interprets the situation as follows. The founder of Byland, which applied in 1147 to be removed from the filiation of Furness and placed under Savigny, was a supporter of the Angevins (that is, of Empress Matilda and her husband, Geoffrey of Anjou). Western Normandy, including Savigny, had fallen to Geoffrey in 1142. Neath and Quarr, which with Byland were the only Savigniac monasteries represented at the

to the filiation of Clairvaux, and Bernard sent Thibaud from Clairvaux to be prior of Savigny to instruct the monks of Savigny in Cistercian observances.<sup>80</sup>

Whatever the cause for opposition, Peter of York, abbot of Furness, appealed to Eugene III, asking that Furness be allowed to remain in the same observance in which it was founded, even though Savigny itself had joined the Cistercians. Archbishop Hugh of Rouen and Bishop Arnulf of Lisieux settled this challenge, with Pope Eugene issuing a mandate, *Cum omnibus*, on October 10, 1149, that squelched the English Savigniac houses' attempt at independence. When Abbot Peter was forced to resign, Richard of Bayeux, who had been a monk of Savigny, succeeded him as abbot of Furness.<sup>81</sup>

After the union of 1147, some Cistercians wanted to prohibit adding new communities to the Order. A decree of the General Chapter of 1152 issued a prohibition against the founding or incorporation of new communities. Between 1147 and Serlo's resignation in 1152–53, eight new monasteries were added to the Savigniac filiation.<sup>82</sup> Some of the language of the forged bull *Quia igitur (Habitantes in domo)* may have been meant to protect Savigny's new foundations and its capacity to continue to grow. It seems deliberately to omit references to Cistercian norms and to encourage expansion when it declares, "First it is set down that you observe

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1147 chapter at Savigny, had as patrons Earl Robert of Gloucester and Baldwin de Redvers, earl of Devon, respectively, both of whom were prominent supporters of the Angevin cause. Davis conjectures that Stephen encouraged Furness and the other Savigniac monasteries in England to resist the hegemony of Savigny and incorporation into the Cistercian Order. Saint Bernard and Pope Eugene III were supporting the Angevins by the time of the merger, and this fact may have made the Empress Matilda and her supporters receptive to the Cistercian takeover of Savigny (Davis, *King Stephen*, 101–3; De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1015–18).

80. De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1015–18.

81. Swietek and Deneen, "Date," 562; de Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1018; Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, 101–15, traces the repercussions of the union of the Savigniac congregation with the Order of Cîteaux down to the end of the twelfth century and concludes that the union with the Savigniac monasteries brought no benefits to the Cistercians but instead introduced alien customs (e.g., accepting tithes) that led to corruption and dissension. His conclusion seems to go a considerable way beyond the available evidence.

82. De Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1030–40.

inviolately the monastic order according to the *Rule* of blessed Benedict and the relevant enactments of the rule, that in the future you not depart from the state of religion which is known to be thriving in your congregation through the grace of God, but by striving to become better you advance in the increase of your order and religious way of life.”<sup>83</sup>

Another sticky issue in the amalgamation of the congregation of Savigny with the Order of Cîteaux was the possession of *spiritualia*, that is, the ownership of churches and church revenues. The monasteries of Savigny had them; the Order of Cîteaux forbade them. It seems that the Savigniacs quietly kept possession of their *spiritualia*, and when asking for papal confirmation they discreetly left them out of their list of properties. At the same time, they renewed efforts to obtain confirmation and protection from secular lords. When, however, litigation at the papal court increased during the pontificate of Alexander III (1159–81), the Savigniac houses applied for papal confirmation of their *spiritualia*. Alexander III may have inadvertently approved such possessions early in his reign. Then he became adamantly opposed to such possessions, but finally in 1174–80 he allowed Savigniac houses an exception from the rule, provided that the *spiritualia* had been in their possession before the amalgamation with the Order of Cîteaux. Over the next two decades, this distinction between spiritual properties acquired before and after the merger dissolved, and Savigniac houses began to seek confirmation of recent acquisitions.<sup>84</sup>

Another issue was the status of the abbot of Savigny in the hierarchy of the Cistercian Order. Historians have long thought that at the amalgamation in 1147 Serlo obtained for the abbot of Savigny a place just after the abbots of the first four daughters of Cîteaux and a permanent position among the definitors—advisors to the

83. Swietek and Deneen, “A Savigniac Forgery,” 366–67 with commentary on 370–72: *In primis siquidem statuentes ut ordinem monasticum secundum beati Benedicti regulam et instituta regulae competentia inviolabiliter observetis, nec a statu religionis qui per Dei gratiam in vestra congregatione vigere cognoscitur in posterum declinetis, sed in melius proficiendo in ordinis ac religionis augmento proficere studeatis.*

84. Francis R. Swietek and Terrence M. Deneen, “‘Ab antiquo alterius ordinis fuerit’: Alexander III on the Reception of Savigny into the Cistercian Order,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 99 (1994): 1–28.

Abbot General who assumed an important place in the General Chapters. Swietek and Deneen have argued convincingly against both of these claims.<sup>85</sup>

After the 1147 General Chapter, Serlo stayed at Clairvaux in hope of being allowed to resign his abbacy. Bernard was inclined to allow this resignation if the monks of Savigny would agree. They preferred to keep Serlo, but fearing that they could not, they designated two possible successors, both of whom declined. Bernard then sent Serlo back to Savigny. In 1153, Serlo returned to Clairvaux and was succeeded at Savigny by William, who was abbot for less than a year. Serlo led an edifying and quiet life at Clairvaux until his death in 1158.<sup>86</sup> André Wilmart identified thirty-four of Serlo's sermons surviving in manuscripts and edited one of them. Lawrence Braceland edited and translated three more and pointed out the existence of a few more fragments of Serlo's writings.<sup>87</sup>

### **Abbot Richard de Courcy (1153–58) to Abbot Joscelin (1163–78)**

*He [Richard de Courcy] defended the rights of the church of Savigny steadfastly during the entire time of his abbacy. . . . He resigned, advancing no cause except his own insufficiency.*<sup>88</sup>

Richard had been prior under Serlo before the union with the Cistercians. Contemporary documents say he grew up in the abbey from his youth and was a wise and discerning person.<sup>89</sup> He resigned

85. "Et inter abbates," 89–118.

86. Delisle, *Auctarium Savignense*, 2.161–63; de Buck, *De BB. Gaufrido*, 1013–14.

87. André Wilmart, "Recueil des discours de Serlo, abbé de Savigni," *Revue Mabillon* 11 (1922): 26–38; Serlo of Savigny and Serlo of Wilton, *Seven Unpublished Works*, ed. and trans. Lawrence C. Braceland, CF 48 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988); Lorna E. M. Walker, "Hamo of Savigny," 49n14, gives references to a series of studies of Serlo's sermons by M. Pigeon.

88. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 311: *jura ecclesiae Savigniacensis toto suo tempore constanter defendit. . . . cessit, nullam praetendens causam nisi suam insufficientiam*. See Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 3, chap. 6, which says that Richard was prior for ten years under Godfrey, then again in 1150–51 under Serlo.

89. Swietek and Deneen, "Date," 569–70. On whether there was an abbot named William who held office briefly between Serlo and Richard, see the note to chap. 22

the abbacy after five years, pleading his own inadequacy. He was succeeded by Alexander of Cologne, who had been a monk of Clairvaux and had served as abbot of Grandselve.

In 1172, Henry II traveled from Ireland to England and then to Normandy, where he met with papal legates first at Savigny, then at Avranches, and finally at Caen regarding the assassination of Thomas Becket. The legates are reported to have written, “it pleased us to gather for the meeting at the monastery of Savigny, where we could be helped by the prayers of religious men.”<sup>90</sup> Henry II may have chosen Savigny for this consultation because of his family’s benefaction to Savigny and its foundations and because of his personal ties with Hamo, a monk of the community.<sup>91</sup>

*In the year of the Lord 1173 Blessed Hamo passed to the Lord and a new church was begun at Savigny.*<sup>92</sup>

In 1173 the old church begun by Vitalis and finished by Godfrey partially collapsed, and a new one was begun. As they so often did, the lords of Fougères contributed generously to the project.<sup>93</sup> This church was an avid wish of Hamo, one of Savigny’s saints. He had prayed to God, received a sign, and heard a heavenly voice assuring him that his wish would be granted (chap. 52).<sup>94</sup> In 1243, his relics would be moved to the new church for which he had prayed. Hamo and his friend Peter of Avranches, another of the saints, died in 1172–73.

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of the *Life of Hamo*, and Burton, *Foundation History*, xiii, xvii, xx, and especially 28 n. b and 56 n. c. The same note to chap. 22 of Hamo’s *Vita* also discusses whether Abbot William of Toulouse was abbot a first time (1161–64) between Abbots Alexander and Joscelin as well as in 1178–79.

90. The letter containing the papal delegates’ words is preserved by Roger of Hoveden and cited in *Chronique de Robert de Torigini*, 32n4.

91. Francis R. Swietek, “King Henry II and Savigny,” *Cîteaux* 38 (1987): 14–23.

92. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 311: *huius tempore, videlicet anno Domini MCLXXXIII, beatus Haino [sic] migravit ad Dominum et nova ecclesia Savigniacensis incepta est.*

93. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 6, chap. 18.

94. References in parentheses are to chapters to the lives of Hamo and Peter translated in this volume.

## Hamo

According to the author of his *Vita*, Hamo, a native of Brittany, was an attractive, kindly, and “simple” man (chaps. 36; 43; 46), who was a model of monastic virtue, particularly humility (chaps. 1; 18–19). He was in charge of the *conversi* at Savigny and often did ministerial service in convents. He was a skilled confessor and discerner of hearts (chaps. 2; 38–42; 46–48) and in that capacity was an advisor to royalty (chaps. 20–21; 41), particularly to King Henry II of England (chaps. 20–21; 27; 31–32). Hamo was an ardent collector of miracle-working relics (chaps. 11–15; 22–26; 42–45), the beneficiary of eucharistic miracles (chaps. 3–10),<sup>95</sup> a fundraiser, a builder of churches (chap. 52), and a champion of the poor (chaps. 16–17). Perhaps to keep the reader from drawing the conclusion that Hamo was too much on the road and too involved in the world, his hagiographer writes that he was “an indefatigable adherent to the contemplative life” (chap. 37), and several times he applies to Hamo the phrase “he returned to himself,” typically used with reference to contemplative experience (chaps. 3; 10).

## Peter of Avranches

Hamo was Peter of Avranches’s lifelong friend and one of his confessors (chaps. 4; 15). Peter, though, was a much more silent (chap. 5), solemn (chap. 6), and solitary (chap. 11) person, who had no use for Hamo’s familiarity with the powerful of this world (chap. 8). Peter had the gift of tears (chap. 14), avoided conversations, and sought to remain in the peace and routine of the cloister (chap. 9). Once a knight who had had a vivid vision of the afterlife came to Savigny to talk with the monk whom in his vision he had seen standing next to the throne of God. The knight had been assured

95. Both relics and eucharistic miracles appear prominently in accounts of the spiritual experience of other saintly people in the decades after Hamo’s death. See, for example, Marie d’Oignies (ca. 1177–1213): Vera von der Osten-Sacken, *Jakob von Vitrys “Vita Mariae Oigniacensis”: Zu Herkunft und Eigenart der ersten Beginen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2010), 54–61; Brenda Bolton, “Mary of Oignies: A Friend to the Saints,” in *Mary of Oignies, Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 199–220.

that the Lord heeded that monk's prayers. Peter, by then quite feeble, was living in the infirmary. The knight told him of his vision (chaps. 10–11).<sup>96</sup>

After his death, probably in 1172, Peter appeared to Hamo to assure him that a place was prepared for him in heaven, one that excelled in splendor the place that Peter occupied (chap. 15).<sup>97</sup> He was buried not in the common cemetery of the monks but in a more fitting place (chap. 15), from which his bones were moved to the new church at Savigny in 1243.

### **Building a Shrine to Savigny's Saints**

*In 1220, under Abbot Raoul (1208–21) occurred the dedication of the Church of the Holy Trinity and of Saint Mary of Savigny. It was done by five bishops and innumerable devout and holy people.*<sup>98</sup>

In 1181, midway in the abbacy of Simeon d'Evreux, "Richard, bishop of Avranches, dedicated the basilica of Saint Katherine."<sup>99</sup> The next year, the bodies of the saints of Savigny were moved from the old church to the new chapel of Saint Katherine, which stood to the south of the dormitory near the cemetery and had its own cloister. Peter, abbot of Clairvaux, and Ralph II of Fougères joined Abbot Simeon and a large crowd for the transferal. The remains of the saints were placed together in one carved stone sarcophagus.<sup>100</sup>

96. Ronald Pepin, "Visions of Heaven and Hell in the Life of Peter of Avranches, Monk of Savigny," *ABR* 63 (2012): 378–83.

97. Visions of the afterlife were also a feature of accounts of saintly lives around the time that Peter's *Vita* was written. See von der Osten-Sacken, *Jakob von Vitry*, 180–82; Thomas of Cantimpré, "Supplement to the Life of Mary of Oignies," in *Mary of Oignies*, 143, 149–50.

98. Baluze, "Chronicon Savigniacense," 318: *In hoc anno [1220] fuit dedicatio Ecclesiae sanctae Trinitatis sanctaeque Mariae de Savigneio. Facta fuit a quinque Episcopis et a populo innumerabili in devotione sancto, sexto Idus Maij.* The five bishops were the archbishop of Rouen and the bishops of Avranches, Bayeux, Coutances, and Sées.

99. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 315: *Anno Domini MCLXXXI, V Kal. Junii dedicata est basilica sanctae Katherinae a Domno Ricardo Abrincansi.*

100. Lindy Grant, "Savigny and its Saints," 110–12.

Simon's successor, William III de Douvres (1187–1205/8) was remembered as “a religious man and very energetic in temporal affairs.”<sup>101</sup> “In 1200 the community of Savigny entered for the first time into the new church on the day of the Assumption of Blessed Mary.”<sup>102</sup> The abbey church, many years in the building, was far enough advanced for the monks to begin using the choir. Hamo of Landécot had urged the building of a church where the monks would have more room and the abbey's relics would be kept and displayed. His death in 1173 meant that his relics could be displayed with those of the other saints of the Savigny congregation: Vitalis, Godfrey, Peter of Avranches, and William Niobé. Vitalis's *Vita* was written slightly before the church was begun. Hamo's was written just afterward.

Although all that remains of the church now are the lower courses of the radiating chapels on the east end, the south wall of the nave, and the west wall of the transepts, the church was in use in Auvry's time and up until the French Revolution, so several descriptions of it are extant. The church was patterned after the new church at Clairvaux, which, breaking with earlier Cistercian practice, had at the east end a rounded ambulatory with radiating chapels that made it possible for pilgrims to visit the remains of Saint Bernard and for priests to celebrate private masses. The church at Savigny was 247 feet long and 80 feet wide. Ten large cylindrical columns supported the nave. Like Clairvaux, Savigny had nine radiating chapels. They were trapezoidal, set into the polygonal wall of the east end. The east end did not align with the nave, so a space filled with a trapezoidal bay stood on the eastern end of the nave. Each transept held two chapels facing east. Over the crossing there was a tower (not usual in Cistercian churches, but perhaps present in the earlier church at Savigny), but there were no towers on the west end. A large rose window was in each transept. The central cloister lay on the south side of the church, with the dormitory on the east and the refectory on the west. By the mid-nineteenth century the only large masonry remnant still standing was the

101. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 311: *vir religiosus et in temporalibus strenuissimus*.

102. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 316: *Conventus Savigneij in Ecclesiam novam in die Assumptionis beatae Mariae primo intravit*.

doorway to the refectory, which had been built a decade or so before the church was begun.<sup>103</sup>

### Stephen of Lexington (1229–43)

*He did many good things both in this house and in its whole filiation, aroused religious fervor there very much, increased the monastery of Savigny to over forty monks and more, and adorned the abbey with many buildings. This good man, everywhere circumspect, led by the Holy Spirit, carried the bodies of the saints of the monastery from the chapel of Saint Katherine, where they had rested for a long time, to the greater church with much honor. On that occasion, the Lord deigned to make known many noteworthy miracles.*<sup>104</sup>

Stephen of Lexington was the brother of Henry, bishop of Lincoln. He studied at Paris and Oxford and was a student of Edmund of Abingdon. He entered Quarr Abbey in 1221 and was abbot of Stanley from 1223, in which capacity he was sent to reform the Cistercian houses in Ireland. When that mission was finished he assumed the abbacy of Savigny in 1229. After he later became abbot of Clairvaux, he was instrumental in founding the Collège de Saint-Bernard in Paris, a *studium* for Cistercians there. He was deposed by the abbot of Cîteaux for his role in that endeavor. He was appointed bishop of the Isle of Man but died before he received the news. He died at Ourscamp in 1257.<sup>105</sup>

103. Grant, *Architecture and Society*, 154–55; H. Sauvage, *Saint Vital*, 70–72. On page 76, H. Sauvage gives a drawing of the doorway into the refectory. There are photographs of it in Grant, *Architecture and Society*, 152–53, with the probable date of the refectory given as the 1150s or 1160s.

104. Baluze, *Chronicon*, 312–13: *hic multa bona tam in hac domo quam in tota generatione fecit, fervorem religionis ibidem amplius excitavit, conventum Savigniacensem usque ad quadraginta monachos et amplius augmentavit, ipsam abbatiam multis aedificiis decoravit. Hic bonus vir, undique circumspectus, corpora sanctorum, praesentis monasterii, Spiritu Sancto edocente, de capella beatae Katherine, ubi multo tempore quieverant, ad majorem Ecclesiam cum multo honore reportavit.*

105. Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 6, chap. 34; Maur Standaert, “Étienne de Lexington,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 4 (1961): 1502–4; Stephen of Lexington, *Letters from Ireland, 1228–1229*, trans. Barry W. O’Dwyer, CF 28 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 3–14.

In 1242 Stephen obtained permission from the Cistercian General Chapter to move the bodies of Savigny's saints to the new church. He also secured permission to have lamps always burning before them. When the tomb in the chapel of Saint Katherine was opened, the bodies of the saints were found interred in individual coffins with a name of a saint on each. They were displayed for veneration there in the chapel until their new resting place was ready. Even more than their translation fifty years before, this one was a very public celebration. While two abbots had presided over the earlier translation, this time an archbishop and five bishops presided.

The relics were placed in the new church in elevated gilded and enameled tomb chests. Vitalis and Hamo were placed on either side of the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the center of the ambulatory, and Peter of Avranches's relics were placed to the south, between the last pillar of the ambulatory and the first pillar of the nave. The relics of Godfrey and William of Niobé were placed opposite Peter on the north side of the ambulatory. It was customary thereafter to carry the relics in procession on the Tuesday after Easter and on May 1. A monk was commissioned to write an account of the translation and the miracles of healing and celestial fire that accompanied it.<sup>106</sup>

From accounts of the building and dedication of the church at Savigny, Lindy Grant draws several conclusions. Savigny remained an important and well-connected abbey after it joined the Cistercian Order. It was alert to developments within the Order. In embracing the public veneration of its saints in its church, Savigny was returning to its roots. Vitalis had gone among the people as a preacher, and crowds had come to listen. Now they came to venerate his relics.<sup>107</sup>

106. Grant, "Savigny," 112–13; Auvry, *Histoire*, bk. 6, chaps. 29, 31; H. Sauvage, *Saint Vital*, 47–50. H. Sauvage provides a diagram of the ambulatory and the tombs of the saints. Calvinists pillaged Savigny in 1562 and destroyed the tombs. After the destruction of the monastery following the French Revolution, the relics of the saints were divided between the nearby parish churches of Savigny-le-Vieux and Landivy.

107. Grant, "Savigny," 113.

Lorna E. M. Walker has discovered that there are two versions of Hamo's *Vita* and reconstructs their relationship as follows.<sup>108</sup> The earlier version, which is found only in British Library MS Cotton Nero A XVI, contains material not found in the other manuscripts of the *Vita* used by E. P. Sauvage in preparing his 1882 edition. The first version was written very soon after Hamo's death in 1173, the second some seventy years later. The first version emphasizes Hamo's *simplicitas*, his intelligent but self-doubting integrity of heart. It calls him a skilled "confessor and searcher of hearts," skills he exercised not just for England's Henry II but also for the *conversi* at Savigny, the nuns of the L'Abbaye Blanche, and the empress Matilda. The first version of the *Vita* might have been prepared soon after Hamo's death for Henry II, with the hopes of encouraging him to contribute to building the new church at Savigny, a project dear to Hamo's heart. The manuscript, however, does not have the décor of a presentation copy, and Henry II would probably have been unhappy with the intimate details it contains about himself and his mother.

It is easier to conjecture the reason for the preparation of the mid-thirteenth-century second edition of the life. The material left out of that version concerns Hamo's relations with Henry II. As the second version of Hamo's *Vita* was prepared under Stephen of Lexington with a view to Hamo's canonization, it was apparently thought desirable to eliminate references to Hamo's close connections with Henry II, since that relationship might not have endeared Hamo to Pope Innocent IV. Also eliminated was Hamo's criticism of some of his fellow monks' lack of devotion to the Eucharist.<sup>109</sup>

108. This and the next paragraph summarize the research and conclusions of Lorna E. M. Walker, "Hamo of Savigny and his Companions: Failed Saints?" *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 45–60. On a similar failed initial effort under the first abbot of Fontevraud to secure the canonization of Robert of Arbrissel, which led to a reworking of Robert's *Vita*, and on subsequent failed efforts, see Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel*, xv, xx. Dalarun thinks that Robert anticipated being revered as a saint (8, 141). The *Vita* of Bernard of Tiron may also have been written to secure Bernard's canonization: see Geoffrey Grossus, *The Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), xii–xiv.

109. The chapters that E. P. Sauvage indicates are found only in the Cotton manuscript are the last half of 10, 14, 16, 18–21, 23–25, 27–28, and 31–45.

In 1244, after Stephen of Lexington had departed to become abbot of Clairvaux, Raoul III of Fougères sent a request to Pope Innocent to ask for the canonization of the five saints of Savigny: Vitalis, Godfrey, William of Niobé, Hamo, and Peter of Avranches. Some or all of the lives of the first four of these men may have been written with a view to their canonization.<sup>110</sup> Raoul's postulation emphasizes the miracles worked through the saints, some of which he had witnessed himself. There is no evidence that the pope responded. Savigny had waited too long. They no longer had the patronage of the English crown. When Stephen of Lexington moved to Clairvaux, he seems to have given priority to the canonization of his former teacher, Edmund of Abingdon, who was canonized in 1247. The pope may have thought that the saints of Savigny were of merely local interest, and then the Cistercian Chapter of 1268 put a moratorium on seeking canonizations for its members.

Be that as it may, there is evidence of approved veneration of the saints at Savigny in the eighteenth century, though in the nineteenth century Hippolyte Sauvage was unable to find any churches dedicated to Savigny's saints or any mention of them in the lists of saints of the neighboring dioceses. He found, however, that *Vitalis* was a frequently given first name in the region.<sup>111</sup>

110. That the *Vitae* were written with a view toward canonization is a reasonable inference but not an incontrovertible fact. Henriet, *Parole*, 269–70, 8, 141, so cautions regarding the *Vita* of Vitalis, and similar caution is required regarding the *Vita* of Waltheof (Waldevus, d. 1159), written by Jocelin of Furness about the second abbot of the Cistercian community of Melrose. This life of a Cistercian by a member of the Savigniac filiation offers some interesting points of comparison with the lives of Savigny's four saints. For an account of the *Vita Waldevi* see Helen Birkett, *The Saints' Lives of Jocelin of Furness: Hagiography, Patronage, and Ecclesiastical Politics* (York: York Medieval Press, 2010), 12–21, 115–38, 201–25. Another possible reason for writing a saint's life was to supply readings for the divine office in honor of the saint.

111. H. Sauvage, *Saint Vital*, 50–59.



*The Life of Blessed Vitalis of Savigny*



## Introduction to *The Life of Blessed Vitalis of Savigny*

### The Author, Sources, Purpose, and Date

Stephen of Fougères (d. 1178) was an official at the court of Henry II of England<sup>1</sup> from 1156 and bishop of Rennes in Brittany from 1168. Robert of Torigni writes in his chronicle for 1178, “The death of Stephen, bishop of Rennes, an upright and well-educated man. . . . He wrote many poems and songs for fun and for human acclaim; and because the One who has mercy on men knew he was going to die soon, he warned him to refrain from such things and do penance. He wrote the *Vita* of Saint Firmat, the bishop, and the *Vita* of Saint Vitalis, the first abbot of Savigny.”<sup>2</sup> Stephen had also been a canon of the Church of Saint-Evroult in Mortain<sup>3</sup> from

1. T. A. M. Bishop, “A Chancery Scribe: Stephen of Fougères,” *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10, no. 1 (1950): 106–7.

2. *Obiit Stephanus, vir honestus et litteratus, episcopus Redonensis. . . . Ipse enim multa ritmico carmine et prosa jocunde et ad plausus hominum scripserat; et quia miserator hominum cum in proximo moriturum sciebat, monuit eum a talibus abstinere et poenitentiam ageret. Scripsit etiam vitam S. Firmati et vitam S. Vitalis primi abbatis Savignei.* (*Chronique de Robert de Torigni, abbé du Mont-Saint-Michel suivie de divers opuscules historiques*, ed. Léopold Delisle, 73–74 [Rouen: Librairie de la Société de l’Histoire de Normandie, 1873]; cited by E. P. Sauvage in “Vitae BB. Vitalis et Gaufridi, primi et secundi abbatum saviniacensium in Normannia, nunc primum editae studio et opere E. P. Sauvage,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 1 [1882]: 355–410, here 355) (hereafter cited as *Vita Vitalis*).

3. Count Robert of Mortain founded the collegiate Church of Saint-Evroult at Mortain in 1082. Ordericus Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969–80), 4:330–31; cited by Lorna E. M. Walker, “Hamo and His Companions: Failed Saints?” *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 45n1.

1165/66 to 1168, where Firmat, an eleventh-century hermit, was buried and honored as a saint and where Vitalis himself had been a canon. When Stephen became bishop of Rennes, he had a chapel constructed in his episcopal palace and dedicated to Mary and Saint Firmat.<sup>4</sup>

In his prologue to the *Vita* of Vitalis, and again in book 1, chapter 7, Stephen says that his sources include vernacular writings and the recollections of trustworthy men.<sup>5</sup> He also says he drew on Vitalis's mortuary roll, particularly the cover letter.<sup>6</sup> He knew the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Ordericus Vitalis and may have drawn on the written lives of Robert of Arbrissel and Bernard of Tiron (who, he mentions, met with Vitalis when they were all living as hermits) as well as on other contemporary documents and hagiographical accounts.<sup>7</sup> Jaap van Moolenbroek, however, thinks that Stephen's task in writing the *Vita* was limited to taking material that had been collected and then supplied to him by the monks of Savigny, giving it a proper literary form, and attaching edifying commentary.<sup>8</sup>

In the prologue to the first book on Blessed Vitalis, Stephen indicates that his motives for writing are to make known the life of a great man and to make sure that future generations will have a written record of that life. At the beginning of book 2 he says that he has been forced to write more than he had intended by some

4. Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 54–56. The *Vita* of Saint Firmat is found in the AA SS, April 2 (Antwerp, 1675): 334–41.

5. Sauvage, *Vita Vitalis*, 2.1, 2.6, 2.13.

6. Sauvage, *Vita Vitalis*, 2.13.1; *Rouleau des morts du ix<sup>e</sup> au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Léopold Delisle, Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris, 1866); *Rouleau mortuaire du B. Vital, abbé de Savigni*, éd. phototypique, ed. Léopold Delisle (Paris, 1909); Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 61.

7. Sauvage, ed., *Vita Vitalis* 2.13.2. See *Robert of Arbrissel, A Medieval Religious Life, Documents*, trans. and annotated Bruce L. Venarde, Medieval Texts in Translation (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003); Jacques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin; Geoffrey Grossus, The Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009). Compare, for example, the story about Vitalis's school companions calling him "the little abbot" with the incident in Geoffrey Grossus's *Vita* of Bernard of Tiron, chap. 7 (trans. Cline, 14), where other boys "jeered and called him a monk." The same *Vita*, chaps. 49–50 (trans. Cline, 56) contains a description of Bernard's preaching. See Patrick Henriët, *La Parole et la prière au Moyen Âge* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 2000), 270–71.

8. Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 66.

people who have inquired among Vitalis's surviving disciples and want Stephen to extend his text. That those persons are said to have inquired among Vitalis's disciples seems to indicate that they were not among those disciples, but that fact would not mean they were not monks of Savigny who came to the monastery after Vitalis's death. In fact, Van Moolenbroek believes that it is obvious that the monks of Savigny commissioned the life, because (1) right at the beginning Vitalis is introduced and praised as the first abbot of Savigny (Prol.1), a "devout religious house" (bk. 1.1.5), and (2) the life itself says little about the seventeen years he spent as a hermit, and that little is taken from the letter attached to Vitalis's mortuary roll (bk. 2.12–14).<sup>9</sup>

The monks may have wanted a *Vita* to provide readings for the divine office. They may also have commissioned Stephen to write a *Vita* of Vitalis to prove Vitalis's sanctity and provide evidence supporting Stephen's canonization.<sup>10</sup> In any case, the author's aims are hagiographic, as he makes clear in the prologue. His aim is to

9. Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 52.

10. According to Van Moolenbroek, *Vital*, 72–75, in favor of this hypothesis is the role played by hagiographic texts in the canonization of Saint Bernard in 1174. As Bernard was buried at Clairvaux, so Vitalis was buried at Savigny, which after the merger of the two orders was placed in the filiation of Clairvaux. It is even possible that readers are to think that the monk who had the vision of Vitalis being taken up into heaven (bk. 2.18) was Saint Bernard himself. Van Moolenbroek, however, thinks that the arguments against this hypothesis are stronger. For one thing, it was still possible for a canonization to occur locally with the concurrence of several bishops, as occurred for Saint Firmat at Mortain in 1156, though there do not seem to have been any further local canonizations in the archdiocese of Rouen. Second, Hamo, who died in 1173, had undertaken the construction of a grand monastery church, which would have left few funds for the expensive process of a papal canonization. Third, Savigny did not have the support at Rome for Vitalis's canonization that Clairvaux had for Bernard's; the priority of the Cistercians at that time was the canonization of Malachy of Armagh.

Walker, "Hamo of Savigny," 45–60, explores a possibility that Van Moolenbroek left open: that whatever the reasons for the writing of Stephen's *Vita* of Vitalis in the 1170s, in 1243 the monks of Savigny used it in a concerted effort to obtain papal canonization of four of their number: Vitalis, Geoffrey, Hamo, and Peter of Avranches. Their attempt failed. Walker suggests that one reason for the failure may have been that the priority of Stephen of Lexington, formerly abbot of Savigny and now abbot of Clairvaux, was the canonization of Edmund of Abingdon (canonized 1247), whose process may have been held up because of the questionable miracles attributed to him.

describe the virtues and charisms of a saint, the miracles he worked, the prophecies he uttered, and the veneration he received after his death. However improbable some of the things he recounts, he wants the reader to know that they really happened (bks. 1.11; 2.6, 2.7) while somewhat distancing himself by saying “this is what reliable people told me.”

Converging evidence indicates that Stephen wrote the *Vita* of Vitalis near the end of his own life. Why the monks of Savigny chose him to write it is not evident. Presumably the monk who wrote the *Vita* of Hamo could have written it, but perhaps the monks of Savigny thought that having a well-connected bishop write their founder’s life would give the *Vita* and them more prestige.

### **Outline and Style of the *Vita***

Stephen’s *Vita* of Vitalis has a discernible structure. It contains two books; the first seven chapters of book 1 tell of Stephen’s early life. Then, skipping over his seventeen years as a hermit, chapter eight concerns the founding of Savigny. The last seven chapters in this book tell of some of his religious ministries, in no obvious chronological order, though the last event is known to have taken place in 1118. Book 2 is longer, perhaps because other people who knew Vitalis provided new materials (bk. 2.1.1). An event that can be dated to 1119 appears in chapter 12 of book 2. Then come two chapters excerpted from his mortuary roll (bk. 2.13–14), with a final miracle in the chapter after that (bk. 2.15). The remaining chapters tell of his death, translation, burial, and miracles associated with those events.<sup>11</sup> The overall structure is as follows:

- 1.1 Prologue: Family and Birth
- 1.2–4 Childhood and Education
- 1.5–7 Chaplain to the Count of Mortain
- 1.8 Petition to Raoul de Fougères to Build Savigny
- 1.9 Converting Prostitutes

11. Van Moolenbroeck, *Vital*, 58.

- 1.10–12 Peacemaking among Feuding Nobility
- 1.13–14 Preaching
- 1.15 Dealing with Litigation
  
- 2.1 Transition to the Second Book
- 2.2–4 Love and Patience toward His Enemies
- 2.5 Freeing Condemned Men
- 2.6–11 Miracles
- 2.6 Raising a Dead Man
- 2.7 Eucharistic Miracle
- 2.8 Converting an Unfaithful Wife
- 2.9 Protecting Shepherds from Thieves
- 2.10 Healing the Sick
- 2.11 A New Pentecost<sup>12</sup>
- 2.12 Fearless Preaching; Support of the Pope
- 2.13 Summary and Transition
- 2.14 Tireless Preaching
- 2.15 Miracle for His Brother
- 2.16–18 Death and Burial
- 2.19–26 Miracles at His Tomb

In Vitalis's *Vita*, Stephen of Fougères does not flaunt his learning. He employs many biblical quotations and allusions but does not make much use of classical allusions. His style and vocabulary seem designed to make his work accessible to a wide spectrum of those who could read Latin. He does not use many complex rhetorical devices, though he does play on Vitalis's name in book 1.1.3, saying that Vitalis valued this life (*vitam*) little but animated many others

12. On this story of the way people in England who did not know Vitalis's language understood his preaching, see Henriët, *Parole*, 276–77.

toward better lives. He also in one place invokes the monastic *topos* of the desert wasteland (bk. 1.1.4). In an aside to the reader, he draws a rather forced comparison between Vitalis's run-in with the octopus and the efforts of Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew children and of Herod to kill the newborn Christ (bk. 1.3.3).

Stephen's favorite rhetorical device is apostrophe. Many times after a paragraph of narration he breaks out in enthusiastic exclamations (bks. 1.1.2, 1.3.2, 1.7.2, 1.10.2, 1.13.2, 1.14.2), some explicitly addressed to Christ (bks. 1.2, 1.15.2; 2.10.2), Vitalis himself (bk. 1.1.5), the monks of Savigny (bk. 1.1.3), or the reader (bk. 2.2.2). These passages are a way of drawing readers into the story and pointing out the moral that they should be drawing.

### **What the *Vita* Reveals about Vitalis**

Stephen's *Vita* is clearly a work of hagiography. It is not a biography. He wrote it fifty years after Vitalis died, under the auspices of the monastery Vitalis had founded. It aims to show Vitalis's sanctity: his voluntary poverty, his fearless dedication to preaching,<sup>13</sup> his concern to help the poor and sinners, and his readiness for martyrdom. Nevertheless, it does provide some important historical information. Twelve of the first twenty-seven chapters mention Vitalis's preaching. To depict Vitalis as a peripatetic preacher did not serve any immediate institutional goal of the enclosed monks at Savigny, but they wanted it included because it was true. Additionally, as the *Vita* includes four mentions of Vitalis's activity in England (three of which involve preaching), it seems clear that Vitalis had a special connection with England.

In the details of Stephen's account, a number of facts seem historically sound. Vitalis's parents' names were Reigfredus (Rainfredus) and Rohardis (Rohes), and Vitalis himself was born in Tierceville. His family was not of the nobility. It seems plausible that he was educated away from his home territory and then became chaplain at Mortain. Stephen does not mention that Vitalis, like him, was a canon at Mortain, though the fact is known from other sources.

13. Feiss, "*Seminiverbius*"; Carter, "Fire and Brimstone"; Henriët, *Parole*, 272–82, 407–11.

The story that Henry, the youngest son of Raoul de Fougères, resisted his father's wish to give Vitalis some of his inheritance to found a monastery may have come from Henry himself, who in 1150 retired to become a monk of Savigny. Vitalis's mortuary roll agrees that he helped prostitutes enter into lawful marriages. He is known to have been a peacemaker,<sup>14</sup> and independent evidence exists of the court case described in *Vita* 1.15.

The plots that Stephen describes against Vitalis's life seem less credible, but the letter attached to the mortuary roll corroborates (*reis veniam*) Vitalis's compassion for prisoners and the presence of his blood brother at Savigny. The story of the nun who used threads from his clothes to cure illnesses is evidence that a women's community already existed at Savigny during Vitalis's lifetime. Ordericus Vitalis's account of Vitalis's death, however, differs somewhat from Stephen's, and the presence of a monastic community at "the Rock of the Lord" by the time of Vitalis's death is doubtful.

## Translation

What follows is a translation of E. P. Sauvage's edition of the *Vita*. As his edition is accurate and well annotated, we have emended very seldom. The numbering and titles of the chapters come from his edition, but some longer chapters have been divided into numbered paragraphs. The aim throughout has been to create as literal a translation into smooth-flowing English as possible. In order to do so, it has sometimes been necessary to divide long, complicated sentences. Nevertheless, Anthony Esolen, a skilled translator, notes the danger of imposing such divisions: "when you break up those sentences into three or four separate sentences, the effect is disjointed; the essential relations between words and images and scriptural allusions are lost."<sup>15</sup> Every effort has been made to avoid these dangers.

14. Henriët, *Parole*, 277–80. The chaotic political situation in which Vitalis lived resembles the surroundings in which Stephen of Obazine and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu lived and ministered; see *The Lives of Monastic Reformers*, 1, trans. Feiss, O'Brien, and Pepin, 13–15, 121–22.

15. Interview with Kathleen Naab, [www.Zenit.org](http://www.Zenit.org), Sept. 29, 2011 (accessed September 30, 2011).

The author sometimes uses an odd sequence of tenses. So, for example, in book 1, chapter 10, Stephen writes, *Cum igitur vir Dei sermonem faceret, praefatus vir ad ejus pedes advolvitur* (“When the man of God finished his sermon [imperfect subjunctive], the man throws [present indicative] himself at his feet”). At other times when he is narrating a story, the author switches from past to present tense to give the story more immediacy. In instances of the first sort, we have smoothed out the sequence of tenses, and in cases of the second, we have sometimes put the story into the past tense. In other cases, however, as in book 1, chapter 14, we have left the tenses as Stephen wrote them.

In the text the author often uses the pronouns *he* and *him* or does not specify the subject of the verb. In some of these cases, the name of the subject has been inserted.