LIGHT AND LIGHTSCAPES IN LATIN MONASTICISM, *c.*950–*c.*1250

By KATHERINE ALLEN SMITH

As self-appointed guardians of light who performed many of their activities between sunset and sunrise, medieval monks and nuns had a special relationship with fire, light, and darkness. While medieval monastic authors wrote copiously about light, however, modern scholars have shown comparatively little interest in this topic. Using the concept of lightscape, this essay recreates the unique Latin monastic culture of light of the tenth to thirteenth centuries, considering how religious communities used natural and artificial light as well as darkness to reinforce spiritual lessons, heighten the sensory experience of liturgical life, and signal distinctions between orders in a reform-minded age. Evidence from material culture as well as several textual genres demonstrates that monastic uses of candles, oil lamps, and lanterns reflected the commitment to a strictly regulated life which foregrounded bonds of community and encouraged constant spiritual and physical vigilance. Contemporary understandings of fire and light as heavenly matter also conditioned religious to see everyday light-sources as ready conduits for the miraculous, as well as technologies by which earthly spaces could be made to approximate heavenly ones.

During the spiritual marathon of Nocturns, a few monks in the abbey church at Cluny would invariably begin to nod off. This was the cue for the light-bearer, who made the rounds of the chilly choir with a dark lantern (*absconsa*), to pause beside the drowsy brothers and direct the light toward their faces. If a monk was revealed to be awake, the light-bearer bowed respectfully before moving on, but if he discovered a brother who had fallen asleep, he held the lantern up in front of his face, "moving it first to the right, then back again, then further away, then to the left." If the offender remained asleep, the light-bearer would "shine the light directly into his eyes three times"; if he still did not wake, the light-bearer was permitted to rouse him by other, unspecified means. On awakening, the sleeper would pick up the lantern himself and take over the duties of patrolling the dark choir until he came upon another dozing brother, at which point the carefully

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choreographed ritual would begin again (Figure 1).[1] Even in the great abbey of Cluny, acclaimed by contemporaries as "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14; and John 8:12), monks had to work hard to keep the forces of darkness at bay.[2]

This detail from the eleventh-century customary by the monk Ulrich evokes how powerfully the contrast between light and darkness informed medieval monastic ritual life, much of which was carried out between sunset and sunrise, when medieval Christians believed they were most vulnerable to evil forces. Ulrich's account also hints at the practical and ritual functions of lighting technologies in monasteries as well as the distinctiveness of monastic lightscapes. More broadly, Cluny's dark lantern illuminates a world in which the sensory experience of light, and, necessarily, of darkness, was quite different from ours. Apart from living in environments that were simply darker, medieval religious understood fire and light to be heavenly matter; thus, a nocturnal lantern-bearer not only ensured adherence to the Rule but also enabled a kind of divine surveillance within the monastery. This spiritual association in turn informed how physical light-sources like lamps, lanterns, candles, and candlesticks were perceived and used in the cloister. Far more than merely conveniences that allowed one to see more clearly and move more confidently through the darkness, these objects were ready conduits for the miraculous, as well as technologies for transforming earthly spaces into heavenly ones.

Although Latin monastic authors had a good deal to say about light and lighting in their regulatory, hagiographical, exegetical, and liturgical works, few historians have shown a comparable interest in this topic.[3] Excellent recent surveys of

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[1] Ulrich of Cluny, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses* 2.8: "Quod si inter lectiones ille qui laternam ligneam circumfert ad eum venerit, et putans cum dormire, lumen contra faciem ejus intenderit, si vigilat, iterum reverenter inclinat; at si obdormivit et laterna posita fuerit ante cum, excitatus perlustrat primum cum ea dextrum chorum, et per medium rediens, chorum exteriorem, novissime sinistrum. Si quem offenderit obdormisse, tunc contra ejus oculos lumen ter intendit; si tertia vice non evigilaverit, ponit ante eum laternam, ut ab ipso quoque excitato similiter portetur." PL 149, col. 706; and compare similar instructions in the *Constitutions of Lanfranc* 3 and 86, ed. David Knowles and Christopher N. L. Brooke, 2nd ed. (New York, 2002), 10 and 118; and *Consuetudines Affligenienses* 4, ed. Robert J. Sullivan, in *Consuetudines benedictinae variae* (*saec. XI–saec. XIV*), ed. Giles Constable, CCM 6 (Siegburg, 1975), 125. On the history of Ulrich's text, see Isabelle Cochelin, "Discipline and the Problem of Cluny's Customaries," in *A Companion to the Abbey of Cluny in the Middle Ages*, ed. Scott G. Bruce and Steven Vanderputten (Leiden, 2022), 204–22. Nigel of Canterbury's reference to the lantern ritual suggests that it was still widely associated with Cluny in the twelfth century. See Nigel Longchamp, *Speculum stultorum*, line 2085, ed. Jill Mann (Oxford, 2023), 206.

[2] The phrase is from Pope Urban II's 1097 bull, quoted in Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000–1150*, trans. Graham Edwards (Ithaca, 2002), 79. Compare the description of Cîteaux in the *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense*, prol., ed. Bruno Greisser, CCCM 138 (Turnhout, 1994), 2.

[3] One exception is Terryl N. Kinder, *Cistercian Europe: Architecture of Contemplation* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 141–43, 172–74, 195–99, and 217–23, which includes a sensitive discussion of the ways in which building plans and lighting choices shaped monastic spirituality.

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Figure 1. As in many contemporary depictions of Christ's nighttime arrest, this example from a late twelfth-century psalter shows a dark lantern (*absconsa*) held aloft over Christ's head, alluding to his status as "the light of the world." © Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 76 F 13, fol. 21v. Creative Commons.

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the uses of lighting in medieval Christian worship by Paul Fouracre and Catherine Vincent, while not specifically focused on the monastic habitus, model how much materially-informed histories of light can add to our understanding of how medieval people experienced the world.[4] Increasingly sophisticated archaeological approaches to the material culture of light, so far mostly centered on the prehistoric and ancient past, also have much to offer medievalists.[5] Finally, anthropologists such as Mary Helms, Mikkel Bille, and Tim Flohr Sørensen provide a framework for studying the manipulation of luminosity as a social practice reflecting broader power dynamics and belief systems which attached specific cosmological meanings to light and darkness. Central to all of this scholarship is the recognition that for millennia human societies have created lightscapes by selectively using natural and artificial light to illuminate as well as obscure their environments.[6] As a closer engagement with medieval monastic lightscapes affirms, this sort of light-work reflects culturally specific ways of valuing luminosity. Within Latin monastic culture during the Central Middle Ages (defined here as c. 950–c. 1250), two factors worked in tandem to create a distinctive culture of light: first, the limitations and possibilities of available lighting technologies; and second, the belief that light, as a direct manifestation of the divine, should be celebrated but also carefully regulated. Belief and material reality combined to influence the lightscapes monks and nuns designed as well as their relationship with light-sources.

Background: The Material Culture of Light in an Age of Reform

While we take for granted the ability to adjust our lightscapes with the flip of a switch or a few words to a virtual assistant, this was a considerably more complicated proposition in the medieval past. The interior lighting

[4] See Paul Fouracre, *Eternal Light and Earthly Concerns: Belief and the Shaping of Medieval Society* (Manchester, 2021); Catherine Vincent, *Fiat lux: Lumière et luminaires dans la vie religieuse du XIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 2004); and now *Natural Light in Medieval Churches*, ed. Vladimir Ivanovici and Alice Isabella Sullivan (Leiden, 2022).

[5] Nancy Gonlin and Meghan E. Strong, "Archaeology of Night, Darkness, and Luminosity in Ancient Urban Environments," in *After Dark: The Nocturnal Urban Landscape and Lightscape of Ancient Cities*, ed. Nancy Gonlin and Meghan E. Strong (Boulder, 2022), 3–32; and for a discussion touching on medieval contexts, Marion Dowd, "Darkness and Light in the Archaeological Past: Sensory Perspectives," in *The Routledge Handbook of Sensory Archaeology*, ed. Robin Skeates and Jo Day (London, 2019), 193–209.

[6] Mary W. Helms, "Before the Dawn: Monks and the Night in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Europe," *Anthropos* 99 (2004): 177–91, at 177–79; and Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light," *Journal of Material Culture* 12 (2007): 263–84, esp. 264–67.

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technologies that shaped monastic men and women's experience of light and darkness and conditioned their perception of these as spiritual substances were very different from our own. These included oil-burning lamps, candlesticks, and lanterns of various designs made of pottery, metal, stone, and glass, whose care was often entrusted to sacrists and their assistants.[7] The use of different types of fuel and lighting equipment reflected religious communities' geographical locations and resources, as well as norms that varied over time and between orders. Prior to the fourteenth century, bowl-shaped oil lamps were more economical, and thus more commonly used than candles. The latter tended to be reserved for lighting the interiors of churches rather than domestic spaces, but it is clear that some churches also employed open-topped "cresset'" lamps which burned rendered animal fat (tallow) or other natural oils. Tallow candles were used more often than costlier beeswax, whose purity and sweetness were thought to reflect the chastity of its apian producers.[8] While deluxe gilded chandeliers (*coronae*) and enameled candlesticks (*candelabra*) have attracted the lion's share of attention from curators and art historians, the evidence of archaeology suggests that in this period

[7] Abelard, *Ep.* 8.52, ed. and trans. David Luscombe, in *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford, 2013), 414; *Consuetudines Floriacenses Antiquiores* 8, ed. Anselme Davril and Linus Donnat, in *Consuetudinum Saeculi X/XI/XII Monumenta non-Cluniacensia*, ed. Kassius Hallinger, CCCM 7.3 (Siegburg, 1984), 15; *Statuta Casinensia* 4, ed. Tommaso Leccisotti and Caroline Walker Bynum, in *Consuetudines benedictinae variae*, ed. Constable, 237–39; Ulrich of Cluny, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses* 3.12, PL 149, cols. 754–55; *Ecclesiastica officia* 114.11–14, ed. Danièle Choisselet and Placide Vernet, in *Les* Ecclesiastica officia *cisterciennes du XIIe siècle* (Turnhout, 1989), 320; and *Observancie Regulares* 15, ed. John Willis Clark, in *Observances in Use in the Augustinian Priory of S. Giles and S. Andrew at Barnwell, Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1897), 74–76. Monastic sign lexicons suggest the range of lighting equipment. See Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition, c. 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), 128–31, 136, and 140–41.

[8] While lamps were usually filled with olive oil in southern Europe, further north, fuel derived from animal fat, fish, nuts, and seeds was common. See Geoff Egan, *The Medieval Household: Daily Living, c.1150–c.1450* (London, 1998), 126–51; Katherine Barclay and Martin Biddle, "Stone and Pottery Lamps," in *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester*, ed. Martin Biddle, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1990), 2:983–1000; and Thomas Bitterli, "A Light is On in the Hut: Light and Lighting Equipment in Medieval Everyday Life," in *Glass, Wax, and Metal: Lighting Technologies in Late Antique, Byzantine and Medieval Times*, ed. Ioannis Motsianos and Karen S. Garnett (Oxford, 2019), 13–18. While religious sometimes mixed tallow and beeswax to produce a pleasanter-smelling but still economical fuel (Jacquelyn Frith et al., "Sweetness and Light: Chemical Evidence of Beeswax and Tallow Candles at Fountains Abbey, North Yorkshire," *Medieval Archaeology* 48 [2004]: 220–27), there is also evidence that even well-resourced communities like the abbey of St Peter, Gloucester, relied heavily on tallow. See Ruth Shaffrey et al., "A Stone Cresset from Dulverton House, Gloucester," *Medieval Archaeology* 66 (2022): 431–43.

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monastic lighting technologies were much more likely to be simply designed and made of humbler materials like fired clay and lead.[9]

Taken as a whole, the textual and material evidence suggests that in our period monastic interiors were generally dimly lit, mostly by oil-burning lamps and tallow candles which flickered, crackled, and sputtered. Such objects would have drawn attention to themselves visually, aurally, and olfactorily, filling the air with smells that might be pleasant (as with beeswax or fresh olive oil) or quite the opposite, in the case of animal fat-based fuels which smoked and gave off greasy odors.[10] All these light-sources required frequent attention from users in the form of refilling, relighting, and wick-trimming. Further, a typical cresset lamp had a diameter of just a few inches and might safely hold only an ounce or so of fuel, an amount which would give light for about an hour if the wick was kept trimmed (Figure 2).[11] It is hard to imagine how such lights could have been left unattended for the duration of the longer monastic offices. As we will see, the demanding nature of medieval lighting technologies, together with the relative darkness of interior spaces much of the time, shaped monastic users' relationship to fire and light, encouraging an attentiveness that shaded easily into contemplation.

When it came to the lighting of monastic churches, the eleventh and twelfth centuries were a period of experimentation and debate. While the expectation that a light would burn perpetually in every church was long established, the placing of lights upon altars is only attested from the end of the tenth century and may have been a monastic innovation.[12] The concerns with the placement and number of lamps and candlesticks around and especially upon altars, so pronounced in many early

[9] When a monastery acquired expensive lighting equipment, it was noteworthy enough to be recorded. See, for example, *The Chronicle and Historical Notes of Bernard Itier*, ed. Andrew W. Lewis (Oxford, 2012), 69 and 139; and Hugh of Poitiers, *Historia Vizeliacensis monasterii* 4, in *Monumenta Vizeliacensia: Textes relatifs à l'histoire de l'abbaye de Vézelay*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, CCCM 42 and 42 suppl., 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1976–80), 1:521.

[10] Tallow lights were a common subject of complaint down to the nineteenth century. In *Bleak House* Esther Summerson notes the "two great office candles in tin candlesticks which made the room taste strongly of hot tallow," phrasing which vividly evokes tallow's unpleasant sensory qualities. See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London, 1873), 20.

[11] Burn-time depends on several variables, including fuel type, wick material, and ambient room temperature. In my own experiments with a replica cresset lamp, one tablespoon of olive oil burned for about forty minutes in a well-ventilated indoor space room at 65°F, but required wick-trimming well before the oil was expended. Alexsei Vaiman has experimented extensively with different fuels and wicks, though using Roman-style ceramic lamps whose design is quite different from the kinds of lamps commonly used in medieval monasteries. See Vaiman, "Experiment with Kindling Oil Lamps," *EXARC Journal* 3 (2020), available at https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10527 (last accessed 18 July 2023). My thanks to Mario Zimmerman for sharing his perspective as an archaeologist and prompting me to think about these variables.

[12] D. R. Dendy, *The Use of Lights in Christian Worship* (London, 1959), 20–25; and Vincent, *Fiat lux* (n. 4 above), 216–21.

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Figure 2. A selection of early medieval "Thetford Ware" cresset lamps. © Norfolk Museums Service (Ancient House), Accessions NWHCM: 1950.12(4) and NWHCM: 1950.12(7). Reproduced with kind permission.

customaries, may reflect the practice's novelty as much as contemporary debates over the suitability of certain kinds of objects and materials for use in worship.[13] It is clear that the material culture of light was of particular concern to monastic reformers. For example, chandeliers, lamps, and candlesticks were among the furnishings most often singled out by the Cistercians in their treatises and statutes.[14] The first monks at Cîteaux timed their performance of the offices so as to avoid the need for artificial light altogether and while later leaders of the order permitted the use of lamps and candlesticks, they carefully regulated their numbers and materials.[15] The early Cistercian statutes strongly favor oil lamps, to be lit only during the evening hours on important feasts, over candles, which were regarded as a luxury. On the rare occasions when they were used, candlesticks were to be made of wood or iron rather than precious metals and could not be colorfully decorated (*non tinguatur*).[16]

[13] Vincent, *Fiat lux* (n. 4 above), 76–79.

[14] Jane Geddes, "Cistercian Metalwork in England," in *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, ed. Christopher Norton and David Park (Cambridge, 1986), 256–65.

[15] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 4.336, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thomson, and Michael Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–99), 1:580.

[16] See the *Twelfth-Century Statutes from the Cistercian General Chapter*, ed. Chrysogonus Waddell (Cîteaux, 2002), 180, 562, 619, and 640; and the excerpts from the *Exordium parvum* and 1152 statutes edited as an Appendix to *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, ed. Norton and Park, 323–25.

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Figure 3. Champlevé enamel candlesticks of this sort were shunned by contemporary monastic reformers. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession 17.190.345. Creative Commons.

In his *Apologia*, Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1154) railed against the proliferation of the "massive, tree-like structures, exquisitely wrought" of gold and silver, which had replaced simple candlesticks in monastic churches, as well as the "great jeweled wheels, each bearing a circle of lamps," which distracted from the sacrifice of the altar (Figure 3).[17] The abuse of these technologies, for Bernard and his fellow reformers, not only wasted material resources but also misappropriated the divine substances of fire and light for the purpose of vain display. For lamps, candles, and chandeliers were much more than practical aids to help one navigate the darkness, or aesthetic objects to adorn sacred spaces: they were channels for the heavenly and wondrous.

Divine and Miraculous Light

Monastic lightscapes were planned with an eye toward practical considerations — that is, balancing a need to contain fire safely while illuminating spaces sufficiently to allow for ease of movement, completion of daily routines, ritual performances, reading and scribal work — and anyone familiar with monastic chronicles knows they are animated by a healthy fear of fire.[18] But the

[17] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem* 12, ed. Jean Leclerq, Christopher H. Talbot, and Henry M. Rochais, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 8 vols. (Rome, 1957–77), 3:81-108, at 105; trans. Pauline Matarasso, *Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (London, 1993), 55.

[18] *Chronica Jocelini de Brakelond, de rebus gestis Samsonis abbatis monasterii Sancti Edmundi*, anno 1182, ed. John Gage Rokewode (London, 1840), 23.

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sources also reflect a deep appreciation of the spiritual dimensions of light. Monks and nuns were continually reminded of these as they performed the divine office, read the scriptures and theological works, and heard lectors recite the following words from the *Rule of Benedict*'s prologue in the refectory and chapter:

> Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and open our ears to the voice from heaven that calls out every day … And what does he say? *Come and listen to me, sons; I will teach you the fear of the Lord* (Ps. 33:12). *Run while you have the light* of life, *that the darkness* of death *may not overtake you* (John 12:35).[19]

Behind Benedict's words lay a rich scriptural tradition which identified light and light-giving fire as fundamental characteristics of the divine and visible indicators of God's will. In the Hebrew Bible the coming of light and its separation from darkness are key moments in the creation narrative (Gen. 1:3–4), and God and his ministers manifest as a heavenly flame (Exod. 3:2, 40:36; 2 Chron. 7:1; Ps. 103:4; compare Heb. 12:29), whose words are like fire, or as bright lamps that illuminate the souls of the righteous (Ps. 17:29, 118:105; Prov. 20:27; Job 29:3; and Jer. 23:29), while the lights of the wicked are extinguished (Prov. 24:20; Job 18:6). The coming of Christ as the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14; John 1:8–9 and 8:12; compare Luke 2:32) and the fiery illumination of the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) forever transformed the spiritual lightscape, a transformation that monastic communities regularly commemorated through liturgical prayer.[20]

Medieval commentators glossed the scriptural presentation of fire and light in a way that placed them at the heart of Christian symbolism and mystical experience. There were thought to be several types (*species*) of fire.[21] The highest of these, divine fire, was an attribute of the godhead — particularly of

[19] *Regula Benedicti*, prol.: "et apertis oculis nostris ad deificum lumen, attonitis auribus audiamus divina cotidie clamans … Et quid dicit? *Venite filii, audite me; timorem Domini docebo vos. Currite dum lumen vitae habetis, ne tenebrae mortis vos comprehendant*." ed. and trans. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN, 1981), 16. Medieval commentators viewed this passage as an exhortation to flee the path of damnation. See, for example, Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Expositio in Regulam S. Benedicti*, prol., ed. Alfred Spannagel and Pius Engelbert, CCM 8 (Siegburg, 1974), 28.

[20] John 8:12 ("Again therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world. He that followeth me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life") in particular was a mainstay of the feasts of All Saints, Nativity, Epiphany, Passion Week, and Saints Peter and Paul. See CANTUS: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant, University of Waterloo, IDs 001419, 002592, 005498, and g03565a, https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca (accessed 6 December 2022).

[21] Hugh of Saint Victor, *De naturis ignis et speciebus*, PL 177, cols. 567–72.

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the Holy Spirit — and of the angelic host, the very substance of heaven.[22] In communion with God, the soul was consumed by a fiery love (*caritas*) that burned away wickedness in a regenerative process that offered a foretaste of paradise.[23] At the other end of the spectrum was the hellfire (*ignis gehennae*) which inflicted suffering on the damned.[24] Accounts of actual fires in monastic chronicles demonstrate that such events were interpreted through this symbolic lens. The Petershausen Chronicler, for example, described the conflagration that destroyed his abbey just before Pentecost in 1159 as an inversion of that apostolic miracle: whereas "the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles of Christ in fire, not consuming, but illuminating — fire came down upon us, but just as we deserved, consuming and devouring" as punishment for the monks' sins.[25] The divine nature of fire also made it a fitting receptacle for sacramental substances, like leftover chrism, that could not be disposed of in an ordinary manner.[26] We can imagine, too, that fire's spiritual freight must have informed the myriad fire-related tasks necessary in religious houses: heating water for washing, shaving, and cooking; building fires for guests and the infirm; sweeping up ashes; lighting lamps and candles for the offices; and heating coals for censers.[27]

The medieval symbolism of light was similarly expansive, reflecting the long-standing Christian association of light with heaven and spiritual enlightenment and of darkness with evil and the demonic. Light was accorded a starring role in

[22] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.5–6, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 28.1 (Vienna, 1894), 67–68; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 7.3.23 and 7.5.15, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, 2006), 159 and 161; and Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus*, ed. N. Häring, in "The Creation and Creator of the World According to Thierry of Chartres and Clarenbaldus of Arras," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 22 (1955): 137–216, at 186.

[23] Ambrose, *De Isaac uel anima* 8.77–78, ed. Karl Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 (Vienna, 1897), 695–98; Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam*, 1.8.28, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 142 (Turnhout, 1971), 118; Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *Commentarius aureus in Psalmos et cantica ferialia* 6.1, PL 72, col. 711; Richard of Saint Victor, *Tractatus de quatuor gradibus violentae charitatis*, PL 196, cols. 1221–22; and for discussion of this trope, Michael D. Barbezat, *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2018), 12–23.

[24] Barbezat, *Burning Bodies*, 25–26.

[25] *Die Chronik des Klosters Petershausen* 5.43, ed. Otto Feger (Lindau, 1956), 236; trans. Alison I. Beach, Shannon M. T. Li, and Samuel S. Sutherland as *Monastic Experience in Twelfth-Century Germany: The Chronicle of Petershausen* (Manchester, 2020), 172. Compare Francis of Assisi's insistence that "Brother Fire" be permitted to burn his clothing, as discussed in Peter J. A. Jones, "Bones, Fire, and Falcons: Loving Things in Medieval Europe," *Journal of Material Culture* 26 (2021): 433–50, at 439–41.

[26] Frederick S. Paxton, *The Death Ritual at Cluny in the Central Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2013), 188.

[27] For example, *Consuetudines Affligenienses* 117, ed. Sullivan (n. 1 above), 179–80; and *Statuta Casinensia* 2–3 and 6, ed. Leccisotti and Bynum (n. 7 above), 236–39 and 245.

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sacred history: at the beginning of time, God's command "*fiat lux*" summoned the angels into existence; at the incarnation, Christ rose in the east like a new sun to illuminate the world.[28] Monastic writers linked the terms used for 'light' in the Vulgate — *lux*, *lucerna*, and *lumen* — to the three persons of the Trinity, appending a lengthy list of associations to them. One ninth-century Benedictine offered no fewer than seventeen synonyms for 'light,' including the church, the scriptures, the body of the faithful, preaching, justice, truth, good works, and miracles.[29] Religious communities were themselves understood to be sources of light, channeling celestial illumination through asceticism and prayer and thereby dispelling the darkness of a sinful world.[30] The reformer Stephen of Muret (d. 1124) described monastic conversion as a turning toward the inner light of faith which was nourished by good deeds.[31] The cultivation of *caritas*, the preeminent monastic virtue, was likened to the kindling of a divine fire in one's heart, or the filling of the heart with oil in the manner of a lamp.[32] Monks and nuns were also exhorted to imitate the five wise virgins (Matt. 25:1–12), keeping the lamps of their hearts well-trimmed and full of oil through good works.[33] Those who succeeded were eulogized as brightly burning lamps or candles who illuminated everything around them.[34] Odo of Cluny (d. 942), for instance, portrayed his forebear Benedict as "a twinkling refuge in this gloomy life," who, "like a lamp

[28] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 5.39 and 7.2.25–27, ed. Barney et al., 130 and 156; and Remigius of Auxerre, *Expositio super Genesim*, 1.3, ed. Burton Van Name Edwards, CCCM 136 (Turnhout, 1999), 9–10.

[29] (Pseudo-) Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in sacram scripturam*, PL 112, cols. 989–90.

[30] For example, William of Saint-Thierry's description of Mont Dieu in his *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, 1.1 and 3.2, PL 184, cols. 309 and 356; and Orderic Vitalis' description of the monks of Cîteaux as "lucernae lucentes in caliginoso loco" in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, 8.26, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1969–80), 4:324.

[31] *Liber de doctrina uel liber sententiarum*, prol. and 6, in *Scriptores ordinis Grandimontensis*, ed. Jean Becquet (Turnhout, 1968), 4 and 8–9.

[32] Hugh of Saint Victor, *De naturis ignis* 1.173, PL 177, col. 568; Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350–1250*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, 2010), 120, 175, and 225; and Barbezat, *Burning Bodies* (n. 23 above), 17–18.

[33] Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *Commentarius aureus in Psalmos et cantica ferialia* 1.6, PL 193, col. 711; Anselm, *Oratio* 13: *Ad sanctum Stephanum*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuarensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1946–49), 3:53–54; and for background, Jacqueline E. Jung, "Compassion as Moral Virtue: Another Look at the Wise and Foolish Virgins in Gothic Art," in *Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Martha Dana Rust (Leiden, 2018), 76–127, at 89–90.

[34] For example, Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita Antonii* 93, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, SC 400 (Paris, 1994), 374; Possidius, *Sancti Augustini vita scripta a Possidio episcopo* 5, ed. Herbert T. Weiskotten (Princeton, 1919), 50; Hincmar of Reims, *Vita Remigii* 3, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH, *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* 3 (Hanover, 1896), 263–64; and Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis libri duo* 2.14, ed. Denise Bouthillier, CCCM 83 (Turnhout, 1988), 123–24.

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burning and shining (John 5:35) atop a lamp-stand, lit up the house of God."[35] But light was not merely a potent symbol; it was also understood to be capable of effecting change in the material world by interacting with objects and living bodies. While medieval theologians debated its status as a substance (*substantia*) versus an accident (*accidens*), they concurred in defining light's transformative power in terms of its materiality.[36] As it shone from a candle, filtered through a window, or reflected off a gilded surface, light directly connected heavenly and earthly bodies and spaces.[37] As Hildebert of Lavardin (d. 1133) wrote, when the canons of Le Mans lit the candelabra in their church, "we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that the author of light is present."[38]

Light's divine nature made it a natural agent of the miraculous and conditioned medieval people to see objects like candlesticks and lamps as intermediaries through which God and the saints made their wishes known.[39] Miracles clustered around the tapers blessed at Candlemas, as well as the made-to-measure candles offered by pilgrims which filled monastic shrines.[40] The material culture of monastic lighting combined with the symbolic valences of light and darkness to condition religious to see interactions with light-sources as potentially miraculous. The forms of objects might advertise their association with the divine; for instance, the crown-shaped chandeliers that drove monastic reformers to distraction were meant to evoke the celestial crowns awaiting the just

[35] Odo of Cluny, *Sermo 3: De Sancto Benedicto abbate*, PL 133, cols. 721–29, at col. 725.

[36] A topic fully discussed in Dallas G. Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology, and Religious Life* (Cambridge, 2005).

[37] Augustine's theory of illumination was foundational here. See Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Chichester, 2011), 1–16. See also Christopher R. Lakey, "The Materiality of Light in Medieval Italian Painting," *English Language Notes* 53 (2015): 119–36, at 126; and Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "In Visible Presence: The Role of Light in Shaping Religious Atmospheres," in *The Oxford Handbook of Light in Archaeology*, ed. Costas Papadopoulos and Holley Moyes (Oxford, 2021), 303–24.

[38] Hildebert of Lavardin, *Epistolae* 1.9: "cum ibi luminaria praeparas, luminis ubi adesse auctorem et corde credimus et ore confitemur." PL 171, col. 161; quoted and discussed by Fiona J. Griffiths, "Like the Sister of Aaron: Medieval Religious Women as Makers and Donors of Liturgical Textiles," in *Female* 'vita religiosa' *Between Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments, and Spatial Contexts*, ed. Gert Melville and Anne Müller (Vienna, 2011), 343–74, at 344.

[39] Relying mostly on the *Acta Sanctorum*, C. Grant Loomis identified hundreds of miracles related to fire and light. See C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, MA, 1948), 27–32 and 143–51.

[40] Some of these were collected by Jacobus da Voragine in *Legenda aurea* 37, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2 vols. (Florence, 1998), 1:249–51. See also Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York, 1995), 95–96; and Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2011), 161–62 and 166.

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(compare Ps. 5:13) as well as the towers of the heavenly Jerusalem.[41] Other light-sources bore inscriptions or imagery which asserted their spiritual potency. The inscription on the famous Gloucester Candlestick, produced in an early twelfth-century Benedictine context, equates its light with "the work of virtue, bright with holy doctrine" which keeps the shadowy vices at bay, a message underscored by the struggling figures of men and beasts at the candlestick's base.[42] Even without such explicit framing, the light that danced, guttered, and cast moving shadows from candlesticks, lamps, and lanterns demanded attention and invited spiritual interaction, speaking to the worthy in a coded language of wonders.

The miraculous was often surrounded by an aura of ineffable brightness (*claritas*), and indeed it was this brightness — the un-dimmable brilliance of paradise — that signaled the presence of the divine. Mystical union might be characterized as a revelation of what Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) termed the "living light (*lux vivens*)."[43] Relics and consecrated hosts which emitted unearthly light were a mainstay of monastic hagiography.[44] Divine light revealed a whole visionary world normally invisible to mortal eyes, and a blinding light might serve as the overture of an otherworldly journey, or a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem lit by a thousand lamps.[45] In one twelfth-century monastic apocalypse, the holy city is illuminated by a triumphant *Agnus Dei*, its glow rendered tangible with silver leaf, accompanied by the inscription "the lamb is its lamp" (Rev. 21:23).[46] When they appeared to devotees, angels and saints were invariably surrounded by celestial light, so that they appeared to glow from within, or be surrounded by a host of invisible candles.[47] In one popular Marian miracle, the Virgin lit up her shrine at Arras as though "a thousand candles and a thousand torches were burning in it," and "it seemed that her bright face

[41] Sicard of Cremona, *Mitrale, sive de officiis ecclesiasticis summa* 1.13, PL 213, cols. 44–45.

[42] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession M.7649.1861. For a description, see George Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Art, 1066–1200* (London, 1984), 249.

[43] Hildegard's use of light imagery is discussed in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley, 1998), 20–21.

[44] G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden, 1995), 322–28.

[45] Gregory the Great's account of Saint Benedict's light-filled vision was hugely influential. See *Dialogues* 2.35, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé and Paul Antin, 3 vols. SC 251, 260, and 265 (Paris, 1978–80), 2:236–38.

[46] Adam R. Stead, "Eye Hath Not Seen … Which Things God Hath Prepared: Imagining Heaven and Hell in Medieval Art in Romanesque and Gothic Art," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Matthew Pollard (Cambridge, 2020), 204–205 and fig. 5.

[47] For example, *De quatuordecim partibus beatitudinis* 3, ed. Avril Henry and D. A. Trotter (Oxford, 1994), 135; *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis* 1.30, ed. Luca Robertini (Spoleto, 1994), 135; and Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum* 7.20, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1851), 2:25–28.

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illuminated the whole church better than any lamp."[48] Once judged worthy of admission to the heavenly city, the physical bodies of the blessed became almost too radiant to look upon, fulfilling the words of Matthew 13:43: "Then will the just shine as the sun."[49] The *vita* of Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167) described how, when the abbot's body was laid out to be washed, his monks "saw how the glory to come had been revealed in the father. His flesh was clearer than glass, whiter than snow," and "glowed like a burning coal" (*carbunculus*) in proof of his inner purity.[50]

Sometimes the bodies of living monks and nuns might be filled with the luminous matter of heaven, a fact betrayed by their shining eyes. Georgia Frank has shown this to be an ancient hagiographical trope which retained its power in later centuries, as the lives of the desert fathers and mothers continued to be touchstones of monastic culture.[51] For example, after Raynerius of Pisa (d. 1160) experienced an ecstatic vision while on pilgrimage, it was claimed that "Christ, the true light of eternity, illuminated him" from within, and "such brightness shone forth from his eyes that for three days any writing he looked upon seemed to be inscribed in gold rather than black letters."[52] A similar experience of divine illumination was said to have led the knight Poppo (d. 1048) to enter the monastery of Stavelot.[53] An encounter with an angel imparted the gift of luminosity to the Cistercian Ida of Nivelles (d. 1231), so that afterwards her face appeared "as though aflame, and her eyes radiant." Ida's hagiographer Goswin recalled her saying,

> From then on, whenever I have been in the pitch dark of night and lacked other illumination, I have been able to see with my bodily eyes, always having adequate light to read a book or do any task, since my hands and my face glow for me with rays quite as

[48] Gautier de Coincy, *Les miracles de Nostre Dame* 8, ed. V. Frederic Koenig, 4 vols. (Geneva, 1966–70), 4:295–320, at 305–306; trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York, 2000), 649.

[49] Christopher M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, 2006), 162–63.

[50] Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx* 58, ed. and trans. Maurice Powicke (Oxford, 1950), 62–63. Compare Adam of Eynsham, *Magna vita sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. Decima L. Douie and D. H. Farmer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), 2:218–29.

[51] Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000), 160–65. This trope also reflects the Neoplatonic theory of vision, which involved the emission of fire or light from a viewer's eyes towards an object under examination.

[52] *Vita sancti Raynerii Pisani* 3: "ab oculus eius fulgor exiit, nimius, ut per triduum quascumque inspiceret litteras, non viderentur atramento scriptae, sed auro omnes impressae. … Tunc illuminavit eum lux vera Christus de infinitis…." in AS, June, 4:433.

[53] *Vita sancti Popponis abbatis Stabulensis* 3, in AS, January, 3:254.

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> serviceable for my eyesight as the sunbeams of *the great luminary* (Gen. 1:16) itself.[54]

Ida identified the luminous matter that filled her as divine love and suggested that those who burned hottest (*ardentissimus*) with desire for God, shone most brightly (*clarissimus*).[55] The monastic hagiographer of Heribert of Cologne (d. 1021) made a similar connection: "his heart aflame, believing in the light as a *son of light* (Luke 16:8, John 12:36; and 1 Thess. 5:5), he moved through the night like a bright lamp, bathing everything in his path with rays of light," so that he had no need for artificial illumination.[56]

If saints glowed *like* candles and lamps, it is not surprising to find that actual lighting devices — which, after all, existed to channel the luminous matter of heaven — feature prominently in monastic hagiography. Because of their association with the divine, candles and lamps often drew the ire of demons. Guibert of Nogent (d. 1124) wrote of lying in bed, frozen by fear, as an unseen hand extinguished his lamp and a demon appeared amidst a "cloud of darkness."[57] The eleventh-century *vita* of Saint Gudula recounted how the "prince of shadows" waylaid the holy virgin en route to church and snuffed out her light, but, upon hearing Gudula's prayers, God rekindled it "with the light of his mercy."[58] The saints, who delighted in light as much as demons loathed it, were often credited with lighting candles and replenishing lamp oil at their shrines.[59] The sacrist of Conques reported that Saint Foy would "gently touch his cheek" and whisper to him "in a sweet voice, admonishing him to adjust the light" before her altar when it burned too low.[60] Saint Liudger was known to relight the candles at Werden Abbey when they were extinguished after Matins, the "very bright fiery

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[54] *Vita beatae Idae Nivellensis* 22, ed. Chrysostomus Henriquez, in *Quinque prudentes virgines* (Antwerp, 1630), 255–57; trans. Martinus Cawley, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut* (University Park, PA, 2005), 65–66.

[55] *Vita beatae Idae Nivellensis* 22, ed. Henriquez, 255.

[56] Lambert of Deutz, *Vita sancti Heriberti* 4: "credente in lucem et filio lucis, per noctem clara luminariat.... Contigit aliquando negligentia, ut casu eidem extingueretur lucerna...vir Dei in circuitu suo claritatis perfunderetur radiis...." in AS, March, 2:473.

[57] Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiae* 1.15, ed. E.-R. Labande, in *Guibert de Nogent, Autobiographie* (Paris, 1981), 116–18.

[58] *Vita sanctae Gudilae virginis prima* 7: "Exaudivit Deus preces virginis, quas pro receptione fudit luminis: et tenebras, quas ingessit princeps tenebrarum, disrupit luce misericordiarum suarum." in AS, January, 8:525.

[59] For example, Flodoard of Reims's story about oil-burning lamps in *Historiae ecclesiae Remensis libri quatuor* 4.53, PL 135, cols. 327–28. Compare the miracle of the lamp which burned above the tomb of Saint Omer in Vincent, *Fiat lux* (n. 4 above), 287.

[60] *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis* 1.26, ed. Robertini (n. 47 above), 130–31; trans. Pamela Sheingorn, *The Book of Sainte Foy* (Philadelphia, 1995), 96.

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light" serving as a reminder to the monks of their founder's presence.[61] Even while traveling, saints expected their light-related needs to be met, as the monks of Saint Ursmer discovered during their tour of Flanders in 1060. When a strong wind repeatedly extinguished the lamps in the tent the monks had set up as a makeshift shrine for his relics, Ursmer lit a candle with a wind-resistant fire which served the monks' needs for the divine office for several weeks.[62] The monks of Saint-Riquier preserved a similar story about the unquenchable lights which escorted the relics of their Irish saint, Maguil, on his *delatio*.[63]

Animated light-sources might also signal divine approval. The *vita* of Hamo of Savigny (d. 1173) described how when the holy man was separating some relics, the candles in the room began to burn low, causing the holy man to worry that God disapproved of his actions. In a sign that he was mistaken, "one of the candles, removing itself from the candlestick, settled on the wooden base made for it in the shape of a little wheel, and, casting very bright light, remained there … without any support, until Hamo finished his task."[64] In another tale from Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. 1240), a lighted candle floated through the monastery of Springiersbach, rekindling extinguished lights which the monks held in their hands, a marvel which foreshadowed the advent of Abbot Absalon and the spiritual revival of the house.[65] Other writers described how divine lights accompanied particularly virtuous superiors, even those too modest to be accompanied by mortal light-bearers. Bernard of Tiron (d. 1117) refused "to be preceded by a lamp, whether carried by himself or by another," at night on the grounds that he "knew perfectly well how to get to all the doors of the house." Nevertheless, a "great lantern" held by unseen hands was seen to accompany the holy man wherever he went within the abbey of Tiron, visibly asserting the connection between illumination and virtue.[66]

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[61] Altfrid, *Vita sancti Liudgeri episcopi Mimigardefordensis et miracula* 28, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH, *Scriptores* 2 (Hannover, 1829), 422–23. Compare Radbod, *Vita sanctae Godebertae virginis* 18, PL 150, cols. 1525–26; and *Miracula sancti Benedicti* 2.13, ed. and trans. Anselme Davril, Annie Dufour, and Gillette Labory, in *Les miracles de Saint Benoît, Miracula sancti Benedicti* (Paris, 2019), 226.

[62] *Miracula Sancti Ursmari in itinere per Flandriam facta* 11, in AS, April, 2:572–73.

[63] Hariulf of Saint-Riquier, *Vita Madelgisili*, PL 174, cols. 1448–49; and compare the similar story told by Arbeo of Freising about Emmeram's relics in *Vita sancti Emmerammi* 3, in "Arbeonis episcopi Frisingensis Vita sancti Emmerammi authentica," *Analecta Bollandiana* 8 (1889): 211–55, at 245–46.

[64] *Vita Hamonis monachi* 11, ed. E.-P. Sauvage, in "Vita beati Hamonis monachi Coenobii Saviniacensis," *Analecta Bollandiana* 2 (1883): 500–60, at 517; trans. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O'Brien, and Ronald Pepin, in *Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine* (Collegeville, MN, 2010), 187.

[65] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum* 4.89, ed. Strange (n. 47 above), 1:255.

[66] Geoffrey Grossus, *Vita beati Bernardi Tironiensis* 11, PL 172, col. 1421; trans. Ruth Harwood Cline, *The Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 97–98.

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Above all, stories of miraculous illumination affirmed fire and light's status as extensions of the divine. Light features in hagiography as an active agent of God's will, visibly filling holy spaces and bodies and offering glimpses of the heavenly city's glory to a chosen few. Similarly, hagiographers accorded lamps, candles, and candlesticks privileged status as conduits of heavenly matter. Far from being passive or sessile, such objects might at any moment act with volition and intention to warn, reassure, or astonish. Miracles about blessed candles that could not be extinguished, even when submerged in water, or that refused to burn the cloth coverings protecting relics, reminded monastic guardians that for all its destructive potential fire was also a means by which God communicated his favor.[67] As fire's byproduct, the light that shone from oil lamps and candles also drew its illuminatory power from heaven, and in turn directed the prayers of the faithful heavenward in an endless exchange of luminosity. This background can help us understand the great care taken in planning monastic lightscapes which mirrored the interior lightscape of the devout soul and anticipated the glory of heaven.

Spiritual Practices of Luminosity

Decisions about when, how, and to what extent monastic spaces were to be lit were shaped by the conviction that a monastery was, in Saint Benedict's words, "the house of God," which must be kept in a state of readiness to receive the heavenly host.[68] However, this was not simply a matter of indiscriminately lighting monastic interiors as brightly as possible, but rather of carefully regulating luminosity. Monks and nuns used a range of technologies to illuminate interiors in ways that encouraged attentiveness to the never-ending cycle of sacred time and religious communities' special role in the great drama of salvation. Customaries in particular make clear how much effort went into creating lightscapes suited to the functions of different claustral spaces as well as particular moments in the liturgical year. Lighting choices surely reflected available resources, especially in smaller and poorer communities, but they also demonstrated an awareness of how to manipulate light and darkness to produce a wide range of sensorial environments that heightened the spiritual experience of the divine office.

Underlying decisions behind how monastic interiors were to be lit were the longstanding associations of heaven with bright, pure light and of hell with gloom

Compare Caesarius of Heisterbach's story about Abbess Sophia of Hoven in *Dialogus miraculorum* 10.16, ed. Strange (n. 47 above), 2:229.

[67] *Vita sancti Wigberti presbyteri et confessoris* 2, in AS, August, 3:136; *Translatio sancti Stephani fundatoris ordinis Grandimontensis* 5, in AS, February, 2:210; *Vita sancti Meinulphi diaconi* 2, in AS, October, 3:214; and *Miracula sancti Uldalrici* 1, in AS, July, 2:125.

[68] *Regula Benedicti* 53, ed. and trans. Fry (n. 19 above), 259.

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and shadows. While sightings of demons and the damned emphasized their charred skin and ability to blend into the shadows, angelic visitors to earth were recognizable by their brightness.[69] On their feasts, saints sometimes set their shrines ablaze with unburning celestial fire to announce their homecoming.[70] Medieval architects sought to regulate the movement of God's light — what we would call natural light — within church interiors, creating transcendent spaces which blurred the boundary between heaven and earth. Just as *the* Church, *Ecclesia*, was understood allegorically to be the light-filled womb of the Virgin Mary, when God's light flooded through the windows of *a* church the miracle of the incarnation was symbolically reenacted there.[71] Monastic builders were keenly aware of the spiritual potency of light and the theology that undergirded it. Abbot Suger's (d. 1151) writing on the metaphysics of light at Saint-Denis is the best-known example, but humbler communities aspired to similar luminous effects, especially in their churches but also in refectories, chapter houses, and scriptoria.[72] Such planning is evidenced by the layout of claustral buildings, placement of windows, and the incorporation of wall niches and iron ceiling rings to accommodate standing and hanging lamps in set locations.[73] Tellingly, discussions of how to light not only churches but also chapter houses, cloisters, infirmaries, and even

[69] Recent work has shown how such imagery links blackness to sin and degradation while valorizing whiteness as the ideal spiritual/corporeal state. See, for example, Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2018), 181–256; and M. Lindsay Kaplan, *Figuring Racism in Medieval Christianity* (Oxford, 2019), 81–102.

[70] For example, *Miracula sancti Benedicti* 3.2 and 7.13–7.14, ed. Davril, Dufour, and Labory (n. 61 above), 240–42 and 410–12; *Les curieuses recherches du Mont Sainct Michel*, ed. Eugéne de Robillard de Beaurepaire and Thomas Le Roy, 2 vols. (Caen, 1878), 1:879; and *Miracula ecclesiae Constantiensis* 1, 3, 16, 21, and 32, ed. E.-A. Pigeon, in *Histoire de la cathédrale de Coutances* (Coutances, 1876), 368–69, 376, 378, and 383.

[71] While this idea was already current in late antiquity, it took on renewed significance in the twelfth century as stained glass came into widespread use in church interiors. See Herbert L. Kessler, "Consider the Glass, It Can Teach You: The Medium's Lesson," in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass: Materials, Methods, and Expressions*, ed. Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz and Elizabeth Pastan (Leiden, 2019), 143–72, at 146–47.

[72] On Suger, see Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia, 2000), 190–205; and Martin Büchsel, "Licht und Metaphysik in der Gotik: Noch einmal zu Suger von Saint-Denis," in *Licht und Farbe in der mittelalterlichen Backsteinarchitektur des südlichen Ostseeraums*, ed. Ernst Badstübner et al. (Berlin, 2005), 24–37. Compare the description of the church of Saint-Bénigne, Dijon, which seems to anticipate some of Suger's responses: Andrew Martindale, "The Romanesque Church of S. Bénigne at Dijon and ms. 591 in the Bibliothèque municipale," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 25 (1962): 21–56, at 49.

[73] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London, 1994), 129–33; Thomas Coomans, *Life Inside the Cloister: Understanding Monastic Architecture* (Leuven, 2018), 32 and 102; and Maximilian Sternberg, *Cistercian Architecture and Medieval Society* (Leiden, 2013), 63–69. For an exhaustive catalogue of lighting types, see Henry-René d'Allemagne, *Histoire du luminaire depuis l'époque romaine jusqu'au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1891), 1–134.

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lavatories appear in the context of liturgical instructions, suggesting the quasi-sacramental nature of *all* light-related obligations in the monastery.[74] The end result of this planning was a collection of interior spaces comprising multiple light zones, each of which experienced daily fluctuations in natural luminosity that varied with the weather and seasons. From dawn to dusk, the movement of light across monastic interiors materially connected inhabitants to the divine, while the onset of an equally tangible-feeling darkness could be rapid and dramatic.[75]

The monastery served as a stage for the performance of distinctive light-related practices. Beyond connecting religious men and women to the divine, lighting praxis underscored spiritual hierarchies and ensured the moral integrity of communities. As they moved about the cloister, abbots and abbesses were preceded by light-bearers who surrounded them with a heavenly glow.[76] Serving as a light-bearer was a privilege, and anyone who performed this duty poorly was bound to do penance.[77] Lights were also important props in the policing of communal life; lamps illuminated religious as they modestly entered their beds after Compline, shone through the night in the dormitory, and were lit for nighttime processions and visits to the privy alike.[78] In dark environments, lighting also facilitated the use of sign language and so promoted the virtue of silence.[79] Customaries assigned officials bearing lanterns to patrol the monastery at bedtime, ensuring everything was in conformity with the rule in the church,

[74] The Cistercian statutes are an excellent illustrative example: *Ecclesiastica officia* 4.2, 114.3, and 116.4, ed. Choisselet and Vernet (n. 7 above), 70, 318, and 326.

[75] Studies of light levels within extant monastic churches have added considerably to our knowledge of planned natural lightscapes, and demonstrate that the medieval builders used their understanding of astronomy to plan seasonal light-related effects; see Travis Yeager et al., "Modeling the Sunlight Illumination of the Church at Studenica Monastery," in *Natural Light in Medieval Churches*, ed. Ivanovici and Sullivan (n. 4 above), 253–77; Alice Isabella Sullivan and Vladimir Ivanovici, "Space, Image, Light: Toward an Understanding of Moldavian Architecture in the Fifteenth Century," *Gesta* 60 (2021): 81–100; and Ana M. T. Martins and Jorge Carlos, "Essence of Daylight in the Cistercian Monastic Church of S. Bento de Cástris, Évora, Portugal," *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* 245 (2017): 1–10.

[76] For example, Bernard of Cluny, *Ordo Cluniacensis sive consuetudines* 1.15, in *Vetus Disciplina Monastica*, ed. Marquard Hergott (Paris, 1726), 269–70. This custom is reminiscent of the practice of light-bearers accompanying the cross and sacramentals in liturgical procession.

[77] *Constitutions of Lanfranc* 99–100, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 146–47; and *Consuetudines Affligenienses* 24, ed. O'Sullivan (n. 1 above), 143. The story about the monk who did a poor job in his duty as Saint Benedict's candle-bearer would have been well-known; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 2.20, ed. de Vogüé and Antin (n. 45 above), 2:196.

[78] *Regula Benedicti* 22, ed. Fry (n. 19 above), 218; and *Constitutions of Lanfranc* 83–85, 91, 109, and 113, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 114, 116, 132, 170, and 186.

[79] *Regula magistri* 30.17, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, SC 105–107, 3 vols. (Paris, 1964), 2:164–66.

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cloister, chapter house, and infirmary before retiring.[80] Given that medieval people were accustomed to navigating poorly lit spaces, it is clear that religious — who would have been intimately familiar with their houses' layouts — could have performed their nighttime activities without consuming costly lighting fuel. The use of light in the regular life was as much a spiritual as a practical matter, however, and such customs reflected a commitment to living one's life without secrets, in full view of God and community. As Peter the Venerable (d. 1156) explained, monks committed to burn lights even as they slept in recognition that they aspired to be, like the first apostles, "sons of light" (Luke 16:8; John 12:36; and 1 Thess. 5:5). "Evildoers hate and avoid the light," he continued, "so that their deeds will not be revealed, while those who seek truth come to the light so that their works — which are done in God — will be revealed."[81]

Light played a crucial role in both the daily performance of the divine office and the more elaborate rituals which punctuated the liturgical year.[82] Liturgical provisions for lighting monastic churches could be quite complex, reflecting an awareness of how to create dramatic visual effects which complemented the themes of particular offices and feasts. The round of monastic offices "hinged on the daily transitions between light and darkness," and the rituals and prayers that filled the hours between Vespers at sunset and Lauds at daybreak positioned performers within a sacred narrative bookended by the dawn of creation and the anticipated return of Christ as the light of the world.[83] As daylight ebbed, the ceremonial lighting of lamps (*lucernarium*) in the church assured religious that their devotions were protected by God's light, while the words of Psalm 133, a mainstay of Compline, reminded them that those "who stand in the house of the lord" must "lift up [their] hands to the holy places and bless the lord by night."[84]

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[80] Scott G. Bruce, "Lurking with Spiritual Intent: A Note on the Origin and Function of the Monastic Roundsman (*Circator*)," *Revue bénédictine* 109 (1999): 75–89.

[81] Peter the Venerable, *Statuta* 49: "Causa instituti huius fuit ut filii lucis semper in luce etiam corporali conversentur.... *Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem, et non venit ad lucem, ut non arguantur opera eius; qui autem facit veritatem, venit ad lucem, ut manifestentur opera eius, quia in Deo sunt facta*." ed. Giles Constable, in *Consuetudines benedictinae variae* (n. 7 above), 80. Compare Hildemar of Corbie, *Expositio regulae* 22, ed. Rupert Mittermüller (Regensburg, 1880), 331.

[82] Fouracre, *Eternal Light and Earthly Concerns* (n. 4 above), 18–106; and Catherine Vincent, "Lumière et luminaires dans la vie religieuse en Occident au Moyen Âge," in *Glass, Wax and Metal*, ed. Motsianos and Garnett (n. 8 above), 28–31.

[83] Quoting Peter Jeffrey, "Psalmody and Prayer in Early Monasticism," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West, Volume 1: Origins to the Eleventh Century*, ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge, 2020), 115. See also James W. McKinnon, "The Origins of the Western Office," in *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies*, ed. Margot E. Fassler (Oxford, 2001), 63–73, at 65. On the obligation to pray at dawn in readiness for Christ's return, see Hildemar of Corbie, *Expositio* 9, ed. Mittermüller, 283.

[84] Vespers was known as *lucernarium* in the earliest rules. See Jonathan Black, "The Divine Office and Private Devotion in the Latin West," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval*

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One hymn meant to be sung during the *lucernarium* insisted that the fire used to light churches was of the same divine substance that had lit the burning bush and led the Israelites in exile, and had the power to hold back the night's "fearsome darkness (*chaos horridum*)."[85]

Given the strong association of darkness with spiritual danger, it is striking that from the evening offices of Vespers and Compline through Nocturns and Matins (when it was often still dark), churches were intentionally minimally lit, making the experience of near darkness an important experiential element. In some houses, as few as three lamps — at the sanctuary steps, the center of the choir, and the lectern — might burn at Matins, turning the oratory into a softly glowing island surrounded by inky blackness.[86] Such an environment undoubtedly heightened monks' and nuns' non-visual senses, attuning them to the sounds of psalmody and the turning pages of a lectionary, to the chilly air, the coolness of a tile floor, and the smells of oil, wax, and smoke.[87] While we know the matitudinal atmosphere could be soporific — hence the need for lantern-bearers — the intention was to encourage contemplation and remind religious of their special obligation of spiritual watchfulness, which entailed serving as buffers against the darkness of sin and unbelief while the rest of Christendom slept.[88] Matins psalmody, which traditionally anticipated the coming of dawn, also comforted performers by supplying a degree of spiritual illumination to alleviate their gloomy surroundings.[89]

The liturgical year tracked a longer cycle of waning and waxing luminosity, as the celebrations of Advent gave way to the darkening days of Lent before the light's dramatic return at Easter. On major feasts (typically Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption, and the feast of a house's patronal saint), many religious communities kindled every light in their churches at Vespers. In monasteries with sufficient resources lamps burned before each altar, light blazed from candles in hanging chandeliers and standing candlesticks, and monastic

Church, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), 41–64, at 47. For the place of Psalm 133 in the office, see Susan Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy and History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa* (Ithaca, 2006), 66–67 (Table 2.1).

[85] Prudentius, *Cathemerinon* 5, in *Carmina*, ed. Maurice P. Cunningham, CCSL 126 (Turnhout, 1966), 23–28, at 23.

[86] Kinder, *Cistercian Europe* (n. 3 above), 172. Special care was taken that the lectern be supplied with a lantern holding a candle that was easy to light and gave off sufficient light for readers. See *Redactio sancti Emmerammi dicta Einsidlensis* 23, ed. Maria Wegener and Candida Elvert, in *Consuetudines Saeculi X/XI/XII* (n. 7 above), 203–204.

[87] Dowd, "Darkness and Light," (n. 5 above) 197; and Kathryn Kamp and John Whittaker, "The Night Is Different: Sensescapes and Affordances in Ancient Arizona," in *Archaeology of the Night: Life after Dark in the Ancient World*, ed. Nancy Gonlin and April Nowell (Boulder, 2018), 77–94.

[88] Helms, "Before the Dawn" (n. 6 above).

[89] Hildemar of Corbie, *Expositio* 13, ed. Mittermüller (n. 81 above), 294.

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processions bore additional candles as they entered the choir.[90] At Montecassino in the mid-eleventh century, the great bronze beam which hung before the high altar was outfitted with no fewer than fifty candleholders and thirty-six oil lamps, all of which were lit on major feasts.[91] On the other end of the spectrum, even the self-consciously abstemious Cistercians and Carthusians lit a higher-than-usual number of lights — three and two, respectively — around their churches' altars on these occasions.[92] The eleventh-century customary of Canterbury describes a typical sliding scale of luminosity: on feasts of the second rank, fewer extra lights were lit but they were kept burning through the night, while on feasts of the third rank, fewer still were lit and these only allowed to burn until the close of Vespers.[93] Quadragesima ushered in the long Lenten darkness; along with the crucifix and images, the majority of a church's lights would be covered, leaving a bare minimum of illumination for the offices. The rite of *tenebrae* during the night offices of the Easter *triduum* evoked the spiritual gloom that had covered the world upon Christ's death.[94] Each evening, monastic celebrants lit a set number of candles in a special wooden board (*lignum*), then extinguished them one-by-one as the service progressed, until only a single candle, representing Christ, remained. The snuffing out of this last light at the final antiphon, *Traditor autem*, which evoked Judas's betrayal, left the community to finish the office in darkness.[95] As the sun set on Holy Saturday, a newly kindled fire (the *lumen Christi*)

[90] Lanfranc, *Constitutions* 62–65, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 84–89; Guido of Farfa, *Disciplina Farfensis et monasterii S. Pauli Romae*, 1.5 and 1.23, in *Vetus disciplina monastica*, ed. Hergott (n. 76 above), 47 and 66; and Peter the Venerable, *Statuta* 52, ed. Constable (n. 81 above), 82. Compare the self-conscious limitations on the number of lamps by the Cistercian statutes, even at major feasts, cited in n. 92, below.

[91] Leo of Ostia, *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* 3.32(33), PL 173, cols. 756–57.

[92] *Ecclesiastica officia*, 67.1–5, ed. Choisselet and Vernet (n. 7 above), 190; *Twelfth-Century Statutes*, ed. Waddell (n. 16 above), 323; and Guigues, *Consuetudines Cartusiae* 4.31 and 8.2, ed. un chartreux, in *Guigues Ier le Chartreux, Coutumes de Chartreuse*, SC 313 (Paris, 2001), 170 and 180.

[93] Lanfranc, *Constitutions* 66–67 and 73, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 88–91 and 96–99. Compare Bernard of Cluny, *Ordo Cluniacensis* 29, ed. Hergott (n. 76 above), 272; Ulrich of Cluny, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses* 1.11, PL 149, cols. 654–56; and *The Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury, and Saint Peter, Westminster*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson, 2 vols. (London, 1902–1904), 2:268-90 (Appendix).

[94] Lanfranc, *Constitutions* 28–31, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 42–45; and Guido of Farfa, *Disciplina Farfensis* 2, ed. Hergott (n. 76 above), 40.

[95] See Alastair J. MacGregory, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil* (Collegeville, MN, 1992), 34–123; and Catherine Gauthier, "L'encens et le luminaire dans le haut Moyen Âge occidental: Liturgie et pratiques dévotionnelles," (Ph.D. diss., Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2008). Compare the extinguishing of candles at the end of monastic burial services, as described by Paxton, *Death Ritual* (n. 26 above), 91, 127, and 163.

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was blessed and the paschal candle, followed by the remainder of lights in the church and cloister, was lit from it, in a joyous celebration of the resurrection.[96]

These liturgical practices charged lighting technologies with symbolic meaning, even as they drew upon longstanding connections between fire, light, and the sacred in Christianity. While every light-source offered a physical link to the divine, sweet beeswax candles were seen as especially efficacious liturgical agents of purification.[97] Blessed candles acquired additional sacramental significance. The paschal candle, which might be several feet tall and was blessed in a ritual involving incense and sometimes chrism, was a natural stand-in for the resurrected body of Christ, its three components of beeswax, wick, and fire corresponding to his flesh, soul, and divinity.[98] Like Easter, the feast of the Purification, or Candlemas, was a celebration of light in which candles played a key role. At Terce on this day candles were blessed with incense and holy water while monastic choirs chanted the antiphon *Lumen ad revelationem*, repeating Simeon's prophecy that Christ would be "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel" (Lk. 3:32). Once lit, the candles were distributed to each member of the house, who processed with them through the cloister before returning to church.[99] Throughout this ceremony, religious were encouraged to imagine themselves as Simeon receiving the Christ child (Lk. 2:28) in the form of a candle, "the word clothed in flesh just as the flame is cupped in wax," and so becoming illuminated from within by the everlasting light of heaven.[100] These instructions remind us that monastic interactions with light were understood, by default, to be potentially miraculous.

In conclusion, light was essential to how medieval religious experienced the divine in the world. The careful deployment of natural and artificial light in the cloister heightened the spiritual and sensory experience of prayer and the divine

[96] Lanfranc, *Constitutions* 46–49, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 64–71; Bernard of Cluny, *Ordo Cluniacensis* 2.15, ed. Hergott (n. 76 above), 310; *Ecclesiastica officia*, 23.3–24, ed. Choisselet and Vernet (n. 7 above), 110–112; and for commentary, Vincent, *Fiat Lux* (n. 4 above), 256–64.

[97] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012), 181.

[98] MacGregory, *Fire and Light*, 309–18, 339–59, and 407–409; and for summaries of the symbolism, see Honorius Augustodunensis, *Gemma Ecclesiae* 3.100-102, PL 172, col. 668; and Amalarius of Metz, *Liber officialis* 18, ed. and trans. Eric Knibbs, in Alamar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 1:192–96. Cistercian statutes place a three-pound limit on the candle: *Ecclesiastica officia* 23.3, ed. Choisselet and Vernet (n. 7 above), 109–10.

[99] Lanfranc, *Constitutions* 17, ed. Knowles and Brooke (n. 1 above), 24–27; *Ecclesiastica officia* 47.1–12, ed. Choisselet and Vernet (n. 7 above), 142–45; and a simplified rite in Guigues, *Consuetudines Cartusiae* 8.8, ed. un chartreux, 182.

[100] Guerric of Igny, *Sermo primus in purificatione* 5: "Verbum in carne tamquam lumen in cera …" ed. John Morson and Hilary Costello, in *Guerric d'Igny: Sermons*, ed. John Morson and Hilary Costello, SC 166 and 202, 2 vols. (Paris, 1970–73), 1:318–20.

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office and surrounded quotidian communal routines with a sacramental aura. Customaries reveal the considerable effort monastic communities invested in the creation of physical lightscapes meant to amplify the spiritual experience of the liturgical year and remind celebrants of their duties as the light-keepers of Christendom. The very stuff of heaven, fire and light demanded respect and required constant attention, but also eluded medieval religious houses' attempts at control; lamps that filled themselves, candles that re-lit on their own, and unburning celestial fires that filled shrines served as reminders that light belonged to the sphere of the miraculous as much as, or more than, the sphere of the practical.

Few things shape human beings' embodied experience of the world more than light and darkness, and yet, perhaps because we have largely brought these forces under our control, their importance to medieval life has often been overlooked. When we begin to ask what light meant and how it was manipulated within Latin monastic culture, it quickly becomes apparent that the study of light is inseparable from the study of material culture, built environments, and sensory experience. The medieval sources suggest that religious men and women's experience of light relied to a large degree on embodied knowledge, that is, on knowledge that is acquired through physical practice and expressed through bodily postures and actions, often involving specialized technologies, which become deeply internalized through repetition.[101] When they navigated a drafty cloister with a candle or held aloft a dark lantern during Nocturns, monks and nuns deployed a familiar set of physical actions which called to mind an equally familiar set of symbolic associations and reinforced the impression of fire and light as animate, communicative substances. In this way, the embodied use of objects like lamps and candles continually re-situated religious in a familiar ritual world and affirmed their status as the designated light-keepers of Christendom.

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[101] For a conceptual overview, see Marie Louise Stig Sørenson and Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, "Embodied Knowledge: Reflections on Belief and Technology," in *Embodied Knowledge Perspectives on Belief and Technology*, ed. Sørenson and Rebay-Salisbury (Oxford, 2013), 1–8.

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