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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Making and Breaking Bread in the Medieval Monastery

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Abstract

As both substance and symbol, bread played a foundational role in the domestic and spiritual culture of Latin monasticism. Early medieval monks and nuns were expected to bake for themselves as part of their commitment to humility and self-sufficiency, and monastic rules and hagiography demonstrate that this daily bread was, like sacramental bread, a conduit for divine intercession. Monks' participation in the eucharistic debates of the ninth to eleventh centuries reflected their spiritual formation in a Benedictine tradition that valued baking as spiritual labor and understood *all* bread to be potentially mutable and miraculous. From the eleventh century on, as the number of ordained monks grew and private masses proliferated in monastic churches, monastic customaries devoted considerable attention to the Eucharist's evolving materiality and emphasized the monk-priest's privileged status as a producer of holy matter. Regulatory texts also demonstrate that the rise of exacting new processes for confecting the host further eroded the fragile boundary between consecrated and unconsecrated bread in monasteries, with the latter becoming a focal point for concerns about purity, waste, and abuse that mirrored contemporary anxieties about the Eucharist.

Keywords: monasticism; Eucharist; sacraments; bread; baking

I. Introduction

When the monks of Saint-Hubert in the Ardennes became embroiled in a property dispute with a local lord, Goderan, they countered his angry threats with a conciliatory offer to break bread together. They brought him "loaves (*panes*) shaped by their own hands to the accompaniment of psalmody," but Goderan irritably threw their freshly baked "offerings" (*oblati*) to his hunting dogs. The horrified monks forbade the beasts to eat, and, to the wonder of all, none dared so much as to sniff at the food. As readers familiar with the rhythms of monastic hagiography will have anticipated, not long afterwards Goderan was struck by sharp pains in his bowels, which his retainers interpreted as divine vengeance for his impiety. As soon as Goderan vowed to return the lands he had seized from the abbey, he recovered; once restored to health, however, he reneged on his promise and was once again stricken, this time fatally. Hearing Goderan cry out that he was "choking to death on the monks' bread" (*eulogiae*), his kinsmen wasted no

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time reconciling with Saint-Hubert. It seemed that the monks' bread had settled the conflict after all.[1]

At once mundane and miraculous, bread was such a constant of life in medieval Europe that all other food might be lumped into the category of *companaticum*: that is, accompaniments to bread.[2] The cereal crops used to produce bread – wheat and rye, and, less often, barley and oats – filled the arable landscape, and most of the population participated in labor-intensive processes of cultivation, harvesting, and processing. While cooking whole grains into pottage could produce a nourishing meal much more quickly, rich and poor alike preferred to eat bread made from milled flour.[3] Bread was deeply woven into the economy as a form of payment for labor and a much-resented strand in the web of seigneurial obligations that burdened unfree peasants.[4] Laypeople also brought freshly baked bread to local churches as tithes or pious oblations.[5] Loaves' color and texture visually signaled consumers' wealth and privilege: from the snowy white crumb for the wealthy, to the coarser brown bread eaten by ordinary folk, all the way down to the stale crusts given to beggars.[6] An abundance of bread-related idioms in medieval Latin and contemporary vernaculars further attests to its centrality within daily life, as well as the ease with which it moved between the realms of substance and symbol.[7]

Wielding greater symbolic power than any other food, bread was life-giving in a double sense for medieval Christians: their daily bread provided bodily nourishment, while the eucharistic bread received from the priest's hand affirmed their membership in the *corpus Christi*, the body of Christ. While modern scholars have tended to approach bread's medieval history in relation to either eucharistic theology or diet and nutrition, the opening miracle from Saint-Hubert reminds us that the line between consecrated and unconsecrated bread was not always clear-cut.[8] This was especially true in religious

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Translations of medieval texts are my own except where noted. Biblical references are to the Latin Vulgate and the Douay-Rheims translation.

[1] *Miracula sancti Huberti episcopi, Liber secundus* 8, ed. L. De Heinemann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (hereafter MGH), Scriptores 15, part 2 (Hannover, 1888), 910–911. On the composition of the hagiographical dossier of Saint Hubert, see Ellen F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape: Monastic Identity and Environmental Imagination in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 204–209. While the story is set in the time of Louis the Pious (r. 814–840), in its present form it dates to the eleventh century.

[2] A.M. Bautier, "Pain et pâtisserie dans les textes médiévaux latin anterieurs au XIIIe siècle," in *Manger et boire au Moyen Âge: Actes du Colloque de Nice (15–17 octobre 1982)*, ed. Denis Menjot, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 1: 33.

[3] Christopher Dyer, "A Simple Food with Many Meanings: Bread in Late Medieval England," *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 5 (2023): 634–635.

[4] Françoise Desportes, *Le pain au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1987), 11–42; Shane Bobrycki, "*Trapa Frangetur*: The Cookware of Resistance in Twelfth-Century France," *Viator* 50, no. 2 (2019): 47–62; and Victor Magagna, "Food and Politics: The Power of Bread in European Culture." in *A Cultural History of Food*, vol. 4: *The Early Modern Age*, ed. Beat Kümin (London: Berg, 2012), 65–86.

[5] Jane Welch Williams, *Bread, Wine & Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 39–45.

[6] C. M. Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 159–160. On the practice of giving crusts to the poor, see the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman poet Walter de Bibbesworth, *Le Tretiz*, ed. W. Rothwell (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1990), lines 1055–1056.

[7] Bautier, "Pain et pâtisserie," 33. In a wonderful aside in Reginald of Durham's twelfth-century *vita* of Godric of Finchale, the holy man equates the good life to soft, white bread, and a life of hardship to a coarse oaten loaf; Reginald of Durham, *The Life and Miracles of Saint Godric, Hermit of Finchale* 2.101, ed. and trans. Margaret Coombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2022), 368–369.

[8] On bread as a cornerstone of the medieval diet, see Desportes, *Le pain au Moyen Âge*; Dyer, "A Simple Food;" D. J. Stone, "The Consumption of Field Crops in Late Medieval England," in *Food in Medieval England:*

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communities, where the same hands might manufacture the hosts for the altar and shape the loaves shared at meals in the refectory, and where daily practices of baking, serving, and consuming even "ordinary" bread were highly ritualized. The anonymous hagiographer from Saint-Hubert signals this slippage in his descriptions of the monks' bread not only as "loaves" of bread (*panes*) but also as "offerings" (*oblata*) and "blessings" (*eulogiae*), terms which might refer to bread offered in various ritual contexts, to unconsecrated hosts, or to the sacrament itself.[9] Prior to the ninth century, this confusion of categories may have reflected the lack of visual or gustatory difference between the daily bread served at the monastic table and the eucharistic bread blessed at the altar. Between the 830s, which saw the earliest debates over the nature of Christ's presence in the sacraments, and c.1200, by which time their miraculous transformation could be defined in terms of substances, accidents, and species, the eucharistic bread underwent a dramatic material transformation that paralleled its theological reappraisal.[10] While we might expect such a transformation to have sharpened the distinctions between the ordinary bread portioned out in the monastic refectory and the host elevated at the altar, the medieval sources tell a different story. This is a story that encourages us to consider how domestic practice may have shaped theology, and how, in turn, new ways of defining the Eucharist impacted premodern Christians' daily experiences of consumption.

As their own writings attest, medieval religious men and women not only consumed a great deal of bread but also thought about bread a great deal. To feed their households and produce alms for the poor, monks and nuns baked themselves or supervised the work of servants. They carefully regulated their own consumption, varying the types of loaves and portion sizes according to the liturgical calendar, and even weighing bread destined for the poor. The annual cycle of feasts and fasts brought an array of breads and cakes to the refectory table, each with its own hand sign that must be committed to memory so as to preserve the silence of the meal.[11] Even as they dreamed of honeyed cakes and snow-white loaves, they praised ascetics who subsisted on the stalest, coarsest fare, fulfilling the psalmist's admonition to "eat ashes like bread" (Ps. 101:10).[12] As exegetes, monks

Diet and Nutrition, ed. C. M. Woolgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12–26. For the archaeological evidence for bread consumption and production techniques, see Adam Izdebski et al., "Bread and Class in Medieval Society: Foodways in Anatolia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 48, no. 3 (2017): 335–357; and Carolyn Coulter, "Of Cakes and Kings: Bread-Making in Early Medieval England," in *Bread for the People: The Archaeology of Mills and Milling*, eds. D. F. Williams and David Peacock (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 179–191. There is a vast scholarship on the Eucharist. In addition to the more focused studies of the nature, appearance, manufacture, and vulnerabilities of the altar bread cited below, see the surveys by Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); David Grumett, *Material Eucharist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), esp. 144–159; and Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[9]Charles du Fresne, sieur du Cange, et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, 10 vols. (Niort: L. Favre, 1883–1887): 3:332b; 6:6c.

[10]For concise explanations of the evolution of sacramental theology and praxis, see Cecila Chazelle, "The Eucharist in Early Medieval Europe," and Gary Macy, "Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages," both in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, eds. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205–249 and 365–398; and Roger Gaïse, *Les signes sacramentels de l'Eucharistie dans l'Eglise latine* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 2001), 104–114.

[11]Kirk Ambrose, "A Medieval Food List from the Monastery of Cluny," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2006): 16–18.

[12]For example, Anselm's vision of receiving heavenly bread; Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury* 2, ed. and trans. R. W. Southern (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 4. The holy monk who

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reflected on the meaning of the dizzying variety of breads referenced in the Scriptures.[13] With its allusions to the "bread of angels," "heavenly bread," "sweetest bread," and "living bread," the divine office offered further spiritual nourishment.[14] And, of course, monastic communities confected, consecrated, and consumed the sacramental bread used in the Mass.

Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, the period covered here, various theological and institutional developments raised bread's profile in the spiritual landscape of Latin Christendom. Debates over the relationship between the eucharistic bread and Christ's body, initiated by Carolingian monks at the abbey of Corbie in the first half of the ninth century, reached a second peak of urgency with the Berengarian controversy of the eleventh century, and led in the twelfth century to the articulation of increasingly precise definitions of the sacramental bread's (and wine's) transformation at the moment of consecration.[15] Eucharistic debate encouraged and intersected with changing expectations about the manufacture and appearance of the altar bread, a dramatic increase in the numbers of monks ordained as priests and of votive Masses performed in monastic churches, and the placing of greater weight on the special authority and responsibility conferred by the ritual of ordination.[16] But while monastic thinkers' role in these developments is well known, little consideration has been given to how the meanings and practices associated with bread in early medieval monastic culture helped lay the groundwork for the eucharistic revolution, and how, in turn, the sacramental debates set in motion during the Carolingian period reshaped both the lived experience and spiritual meaning of monastic consumption. Drawing especially on Latin monastic rules and

mixes ashes with his bread is a common hagiographical trope; for example, Albert Poncelet, "La plus ancienne vie de S. Riquier," *Analecta Bollandiana* 22 (1903): 187.

[13]For commentary on biblical breads, see Peter of Celles, *Liber de panibus*, in *Patrologia cursus completus, series latina* (hereafter PL), 221 vols., ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier frères, 1841–1865), 202:927–1046. For the many possible exegetical meanings of bread, see the popular symbolic dictionary attributed to the Cistercian Garnier of Langres (d.aft. 1225), *Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam*, PL 112:1020–1021.

[14]For example, the antiphons "Panis vitae panis angelorum Jesu Christe" (id: D-KA Aug. LX), "Ego sum panis vivus qui" (id: A-Gu 30), and "Agnus paschae hic panis caelestis declaratur" (id: A07499), and the sequence for the mass "O panis dulcissime o fidelis anime" (id: ah54169), at https://cantusdatabase.org/, accessed February 15, 2026.

[15]On the Carolingian period, see Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209–238; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 41–59; and David Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1990), 83–89. For the eleventh-century debates, see Charles M. Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Eucharistic Controversy, 1078–1079: Alberic of Monte Cassino against Berengar of Tours* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion*, 118–141 and Jean de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger: La controverse eucharistique du XIe siècle* (Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1971). On the scholastic material, see Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999).

[16]Mayke de Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism: The Power of Prayer," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2: *c. 700–900*, ed. Rosamund McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 647–651; Macy, "Theology of the Eucharist," 366–370; Fiona J. Griffiths, "The Mass in Monastic Practice: Nuns and Ordained Monks, c.400–1200," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, eds. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 731–734; and Cyrille Vogel, "La multiplication des messes solitaires au moyen âge: Essai de statistique," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 55, no. 3 (1981): 206–213.

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customaries, sources which have largely escaped the attention of scholars of sacramental history and theology, this essay aims to show that many of the qualities that came to define the host in the later Middle Ages can be traced to early medieval monastic understandings of bread as a substance characterized by its unique transformative potential and ability to bridge the divide between heaven and earth. Prior to the twelfth century, most of the men who set the terms of eucharistic debate received their formation in this cultural world, which understood the baking and communal breaking of bread as devotional acts. Further, I argue that concerns with eucharistic purity and integrity that emerged in the Carolingian period came to be projected back onto the monastic culture of bread, giving rise to rituals which further eroded the distinctions between daily bread and consecrated bread, and between refectory table and altar. These rituals, which centered the relationship between Christ's broken body and the breaking of daily bread in the monastery, offer a new vantage point from which to appreciate monastic contributions to the increasingly affective, Christologically charged spirituality of the later Middle Ages.[17]

II. Bread in Early Medieval Monasticism

The story of how monks and nuns came to associate baking with humility and charity, and to understand bread as a multivalent, miraculously mutable substance, has deep roots in the Scriptures. The biblical books depict bread as the food of prophets and divine messengers (Gen. 14:8, 19:3; Ez. 4:9), as a charitable offering (1 Kgs. 17:13–16; Mt. 7:9), worthy sacrificial matter (Lev. 6:21; 7:9), a vehicle for the multiplication of divine grace (Mt. 15:29–30; Mk. 8:6; Lk. 9:12–17; Jn. 6:5–13), and an incitement to apostolic fellowship (Acts 2:46, 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:17). Above all, bread drew symbolic power from its equation with the revealed word of God (Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4; Jn. 6:35, 6:48) and the body of Christ (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Saint Augustine's description of the sacred texts as bread to be chewed and savored in the "mouth of one's heart" stands at the head of a long tradition that built on these scriptural associations, linking bodily and spiritual nourishment in a way particularly well-suited to the monastic habitus.[18] Additional food for thought could be found in the lives of the desert fathers and mothers, who were said to have struck off into the wilderness supplied with only coarse loaves and salt, and been sustained by regular deliveries of heavenly bread, like the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:4–6) and the exiled Israelites (Ex. 16).[19] The incorporation of these hagiographical works into communal mealtime reading would have kept such tales fresh in the minds of medieval monks.[20]

[17]See especially Lauren Mancia, *Emotional Monasticism: Affective Piety in the Eleventh-Century Monastery of John of Fécamp* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

[18]Augustine, *Confessions* 6.3, ed. and trans. Carolyn J.-B. Hammond, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:240; and for the longer associative tradition, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 202–212.

[19]On the desert fathers' ascetic diet, see Andrew Jotischky, *A Hermit's Cookbook: Monks, Food, and Fasting in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 53–58. The meal of Antony and Paul, as recounted by Jerome, is perhaps the most famous such story (*Vita Pauli primi eremitae* 10–11, PL 23:25–26); but also see Besa, *Life of Shenoute* 20, 27–29, 138–43, trans. David N. Bell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 48, 50–51, 80–82.

[20]Teresa Webber, "Monastic Space and the Use of Books in the Anglo-Norman Period," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 36 (2013): 236–240.

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In the earliest monastic centuries, bread production became an ascetic practice, and its rituals took on a paraliturgical character. Susanna Elm has shown that early Christians embraced the bakehouse as a site of mortification in a Roman context where the sweaty, exhausting work of bread-making was typically done by enslaved people.[21] Excavations of the first cenobitic foundations have shown that monastic bakers followed their example, laboring over mud-brick ovens.[22] Fourth-century Pachomian rules promote bread-making as humbling labor that was particularly well-suited to monks. Performed communally, to the accompaniment of prayer, the kneading, shaping, and baking of uniform loaves became a natural extension of the disciplinary and liturgical life of the Koinonia.[23] Benedict of Nursia's hugely influential sixth-century Rule assumes that monks will work in the bakery, and early medieval hagiographers similarly praised holy men and women for undertaking the servile work of hand-milling grain and baking bread.[24] In his *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great (d. 604) conjured a monastic baking scene in detail, by way of recounting a miracle attributed to the holy Martyrius:

> One day, when some of the monks were baking bread beneath ashes, they forgot to stamp the loaves with the sign of the cross…. Overhearing his fellow monks' conversation, Martyrius realized the loaves had not been marked. The bread was already in the embers, covered with ashes. Turning to his companions, he asked, 'Why did you not stamp this bread?' As he spoke, he made the sign of the cross over the embers. As he did so, a loud noise like the breaking of a jar came from the hot ashes where the bread was baking. When the loaves were taken from the fire, they were found to have been stamped with a cross, not through contact with any physical object, but by the power of faith.[25]

Here, the work of baking feels at once quotidian – we glimpse a routine of shaping dough into rounds, letting a fire burn down to the proper temperature, and nestling the bread in embers – and adjacent to the realm of the miraculous. The cruciform stamping of the uniform loaves and Gregory's emphasis on their transformative potential lend the miracle

[21]Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God : The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 46.

[22]Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, "Monks Baking Bread and Salting Fish: An Archaeology of Early Monastic Ascetic Taste," in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2017), 197–199.

[23]*Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2: *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, trans. Armand Veilleux (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 163, 210–217. Cf. *Vitae patrum* 5.8.7, PL 73:906.

[24]*The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English* 46.1, ed. and trans. Timothy Fry (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980), 246. Representative hagiographical texts include Constantius of Lyons, *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre* 1.3, ed. René Borius, Sources Chrétiennes (hereafter SC), 112 (Paris: Cerf, 1965), 126; Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita sanctae Radegundis* 1.16, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 2 (Hannover, 1888), 369–370 (where Radegund is said to have imitated Germanus's production of his own flour and bread); Gregory of Tours, *De beata Monegunde*, in *Liber vitae patrum* 19.1, ed. Luce Pietri (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2016), 262; and *Vita sancti Francovei monachi*, in *Acta sanctorum*, ed. Joannes Bollandus et al., 68 vols. (Antwerp and Brussels, 1643–1940) (hereafter AASS), III May (May 16), 624.

[25]Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* 1.11, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, 3 vols., SC 251, 260, 265 (Paris: Cerf, 1978–80), 2: 110–112; trans. based on Odo John Zimmerman, *Dialogues* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 49–50. What is described is the traditional Roman *panis quadratus*, the pre-stamped bread which was adopted by early Christians for sacramental use and daily consumption; see George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 30.

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a eucharistic air, while subtly affirming material instability as a defining quality of *all* bread.

Eighth- and ninth-century regulators reiterated the expectation that monks and nuns were to bake. A capitulary of Louis the Pious from 816 states that religious "ought to work with their own hands in the kitchen, bakery, and other workshops."[26] This directive is in keeping with early medieval hagiographers' celebration of abbots who baked for their brethren. Bede (d. 735), for example, cites Abbot Eosterwine's eagerness to work in the bakery at Wearmouth as a testament to his humility and charity.[27] Though the texts' framing makes it difficult to know whether this was actually the norm or merely an ideal upheld by reformers in an age when many religious houses had become increasingly dependent on servile labor, we know that baking – whether done by monks themselves or under their supervision – was being carried out on a large scale in monasteries, and was a valued type of spiritual labor.[28] A Carolingian collection of blessings from the abbey of Aniane – whose founding abbot garnered praise for his baking skills – identifies the bakery as a "consecrated" place which needed to be protected from the intrusions of unclean spirits, and seeks a special blessing on the brothers who work there.[29]

Equal care went into regulating bread consumption, which was understood to undergird individual virtue and communal harmony. Cassian (d.c. 435) attests that bread rations were carefully weighed in eastern houses from an early period.[30] Mindful that bread was their foundational food, Benedict's Rule specified each brother was to receive a daily serving equal to "one generous pound" (*libra*), which was to suffice for one or two daily meals, depending on the season.[31] The Life of Maurus, Benedict's first disciple, recounts how monks sent forth to found new communities were outfitted with measures for bread and wine, ensuring uniformity of consumption across the order.[32] The monks of Montecassino even claimed to have preserved Benedict's own bread-scale among the treasures they carried into exile during the Lombard invasion of Italy.[33] In the early ninth

[26]*Capitula monachorum: Hludowici I capitularia* 4, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH Libelli de lite 1 (Hannover, 1835), 201. These expectations were affirmed in the tenth-century *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* 64, ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 63.

[27]Bede, *Vita sanctorum abbatum* 8, in *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. J.E. King, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 2:410–411.

[28]Lorna Price, *The Plan of St. Gall in Brief* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 46–47, 57–58.

[29]Ardo, *Vita Sancti Benedicti abbatis Anianensis et Indensis* 5, 21, 30, 38, ed. G. Waitz, MGH Scriptores 15, part 1 (Hannover, 1887), 203, 208–09, 213, 216; and *Benedictiones locorum* 148, in *Le Sacramentaire Grégorien: ses principales formes d'après les plus anciens manuscrits*, 3 vols. ed. Jean Deshusses (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1971), 1:483.

[30]Cassian, *Institutions cénobitiques* 4.14, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, SC 109 (Paris: Cerf, 1965), 138; Cassian, *Conférences* 2.19, ed. Eugène Pichery, 3 vols., SC 42, 54, 64 (Paris: Cerf, 1955–1959), 1:133.

[31]*Rule of St. Benedict* 39, ed. and trans. Fry, 238–239. On the debated weight of Benedict's 'pound,' see Terence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 323–34. The Rule of the Master allotted half this amount, on the grounds that this was the divine ration supplied to the hermit Paul (*Vita Pauli* 10, PL 23: 252); *La Règle du Maître* 26, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, 3 vols., SC 105–107 (Paris: Cerf, 1964–1965), 2:136.

[32]Odo of Glanfeuil, *Vita sancti Mauri* 3.18, AASS, II January (January 15), 324. The measures given to Maurus by Benedict were preserved as relics at the monastery of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés; see *The Life and Miracles of Saint Maurus, Disciple of Benedict and Apostle to France*, ed. and trans. John B. Wickstrom (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 41n.

[33]Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 4.17, MGH Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum 1, eds. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz (Hannover, 1878), 122.

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century, this venerable contact relic was carted over the Alps to aid Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) in his administrative reform of Carolingian monasteries.[34] The deep concern with uniformity that permeated early monastic bread culture was, of course, to be a defining feature of later eucharistic production.

Rituals of blessing and breaking bread in the monastic refectory affirmed the oneness of the cenobium. Expressing a common sentiment, the Irish monk Sedulius Scottus (fl. 850) wrote that because a loaf of bread was necessarily "confected out of many individual grains," it was a fitting symbol of Christian community.[35] Morsels of bread blessed by abbots and abbesses not only nourished their communities but might also be dispensed to pilgrims or paupers.[36] The serving of bread in the refectory could be highly ritualized. In a rite that actualized Christ's words in John 6:51, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," the Rule of the Master specifies that loaves be heaped in a basket hung above the abbot's table, which was then lowered "to make it seem that the provisions of God's workmen are coming down from heaven." Next, "the abbot makes the sign of the cross over the bread, breaks it, and first takes his own portion, which, as he raises his hand, will be blessed by the Lord. He then sets out the portion for those standing before him at his table, who will eat with him, and distributes it to them. Upon receiving it, they kiss the abbot's hand and sit down in silence."[37] With its theatrical staging, this mealtime service is strongly reminiscent of the Mass: the abbot-as-priest performs the breaking of bread (*fractio panis*) at the table-altar before dispensing the blessed (if not actually sacramental) portions, while the breadbasket stands in for the vessel containing the Eucharist.[38] Like the sharing of the sacrament at the altar, the ritual distribution of bread in refectories bound religious communities in spiritual kinship and love. Thus, as Isabelle Rosé has shown, exclusion from the common table with its shared loaves was a dreaded monastic penance.[39]

The rituals surrounding the production and consumption of daily bread both reflected and further encouraged monks' predisposition to see it as a potentially miraculous substance. Beginning in late antiquity, hagiographers shared tales of heavenly bread that

[34]Paul the Deacon, *Epistola ad regum Karolum de monasterio sancti Benedicti* 5, ed. and trans. Bruce L. Venarde in *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 234 (Appendix A). A metal scale associated with Benedict survived at Montecassino until at least the nineteenth century; Adam Hamilton, "Ancient Benedictine Customs," *The Dublin Review* 3rd series, 17 (1887): 97.

[35]Sedulius Scottus, *In epistolam ad Corinthios I* 10.17, in *Sedulii Scotti Collectaneum in apostolum*, 2 vols., eds. Hermann Josef Frede and Herbert Stanjek (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 2:415; and cf. Hildebert of Lavardin, *Liber de expositione missae*, PL 171:1166.

[36]*The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles* 25, trans. Maria Caritas McCarthy (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1960), 178; Audoenus of Rouen, *Vita sancti Eulogii* 21, PL 87:498; and Martha Gail Jenks, *From Queen to Bishop: A Political Biography of Radegund of Poitiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 60, 149.

[37]*La Règle du Maître* 21, 23, ed. de Vogüé, 2:103, 110 (quote); trans. Luke Eberle as *The Rule of the Master* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 173–174. This ceremony recalls descriptions of the desert fathers storing bread in a similar fashion, as well as the lowering of a bread basket to St. Benedict at Subiaco; see Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 61; and Grumett, *Material Eucharist*, 99.

[38]For the evolution of the ciborium in the early Middle Ages, see G.J.C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 204–205.

[39]Isabelle Rosé, "Exclure dans un monde clos? L'*excommunicatio* dans les règles monastiques de l'Antiquité tardive et du haut Moyen Âge," in *Exclure de la communauté chrétienne: sens et pratiques sociales de l'anathème et de l'excommunication (IVe-XIIe siècle)*, eds. Geneviève Bührer-Thierry and Stéphane Gioanni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 119–137.

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mysteriously appeared in the cells of ascetics or was delivered by wild animals. Their impossibly soft, white crumb made clear that these loaves could not have been made by human hands; rather, such bread was the stuff of miracles and visions.[40] During a famine, the mother of Usmar of Lobbes (d. 713) was said to have been sustained by an angelic delivery of the "whitest bread" (*panis valde candidus*) during a famine, heralding her unborn son's holiness.[41] While serving in the guesthouse at Ripon, Bede tells us that the saintly Cuthbert (d. 687) ran short of bread to offer a mysterious pilgrim, only to discover three still-warm loaves which he immediately recognized as heaven-sent. Cuthbert declared these to be "such as the earth cannot produce; for they excel the lily in whiteness, the rose in fragrance, and honey in taste. Hence, it follows that they have not come from our world but rather from paradise."[42] Other writers told of the healing power of loaves shaped by the hands of holy ascetics, and of the wondrous multiplication of bread through monastic prayer.[43] Delicate and pure, a source of physical and spiritual nourishment and locus for the miraculous, the bread of early monastic hagiography anticipated the characteristics of the later medieval Eucharist, even as it underscored the potentially miraculous nature of *all* bread.

III. Baking the Sacred

As Carolingian monks affirmed the virtuousness of baking, they also instigated a reappraisal of the nature of the Eucharist that was to have far-reaching consequences. It is well known that monastic thinkers played leading roles in the debates over the nature of Christ's bodily presence in the eucharistic meal that played out in the ninth and eleventh centuries. These debates focused on the transformative potential of bread (and wine), which was, as we have seen, an issue of longstanding interest to early medieval monastic regulators and hagiographers.

As we have seen, in the centuries leading up to the eucharistic controversies, bread had come to occupy a privileged place in the domestic and ritual life of the monastery. Something modern scholars have not considered is that many leading sacramental theorists, including Paschasius Radbertus (d. 865), Ratramnus of Corbie (d.c. 868), Hincmar of Reims (d. 882), Alberic of Montecassino (d. 1088), Durand of Fécamp

[40]John Anson has surveyed the biblical precedents, as well as accounts of Christ appearing to martyrs in prison to feed them white bread; "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism," *Viator* 5 (1974): 25–27. Besides Jerome's *Vita Pauli* (10, PL 23:252), see *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers* N.85, ed. and trans. John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 70–71; and Paphnutius, *Vita sancti Onuphrii eremitae* 10, PL 93:216. The early medieval Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew's tale of Mary's angelic feeding in the Temple might also be located in this tradition; see *Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium* 6.2, ed. Jan Gijsel, in *Libri de nativitate Mariae*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphum 9 (Leiden: Brepols, 1997), 335.

[41]Rather of Verona, *Vita sancti Ursmari abbati Laubiensis* 2, *Acta sanctorum ordinis sancti Benedicti*, 9 vols. (Venice, 1668–1701), 3:246.

[42]Bede, *Vita sancti Cuthberti* 7, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 178–179; and cf. the terser account in the earlier anonymous *Vita sancti Cuthberti*, 2.2, *ibid.*, 78–79.

[43]Anon., *Vita sancti Cuthberti* 4.18, ed. and trans. Colgrave, 138–141; cf. Bede, *Vita Cuthberti* 31, *ibid.*, 254–56; Constantius of Lyons, *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre* 7.35, ed. Borius, 188; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* 3.37, ed. de Vogüé, 2: 414; *Vita sancti Lupicini* 69–70, ed. François Martine, *in Vie des Pères du Jura*, SC 142 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 314–316; and Reginald of Durham, *Life and Miracles of Saint Godric* 2.84, 2.154, ed. and trans. Coombe, 324–327, 500–501.

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(d. 1089), Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089), and Guitmond of Aversa (d.c. 1095), received their spiritual formation in Benedictine houses, and thus would have been deeply familiar with the distinctive ways of making and breaking bread which, as discussed above, took bread's miraculous nature for granted. Such experiences would naturally have formed part of the interpretive lens through which these men approached sacramental questions.

The ninth century marked the beginning of a transformation in the Eucharist's doctrinal meaning and visual appearance in the Latin West, as intense theological speculation on the sacrament foregrounded its substantial transformation and salvific power. The emergence by c. 1100 of a consensus that the body and blood of Christ were made corporeally present in the eucharistic bread and wine through the priestly act of consecration led to greater scrutiny of the moral lives of priests, but also of the raw materials employed in the Mass. For the first several centuries of the Church's history, bread used in the sacrament had been subject to few restrictions; provided it was made of fine flour, it was not required to be a particular shape, nor cooked in a particular manner by a particular kind of person. Sacramental bread was traditionally sourced from the offerings brought by lay parishioners and was often baked by women.[44] Baking for the altar seems also to have been especially meaningful for early medieval nuns.[45] The well-known story of the Mass of Saint Gregory, first reported by an eighth-century monk of Whitby, centers on a skeptical laywoman who questioned whether "loaves which I made with my own hands" could truly become "the Lord's body," only to be dramatically chastised when one consecrated morsel took on the form of a bloody finger.[46] Significantly, this story began circulating just as ecclesiastical councils were beginning to place new restrictions on the sacramental bread: henceforth, hosts were to be made of specially baked loaves, of a standard size and perfect roundness, with a pure white crumb.[47] This was the bread of heaven come to earth, and as such, its production could be entrusted only to the pure hands of clerical men. As a result, nuns and laywomen were deprived of an important form of parasacramental labor.[48] Arguments against the use of leavening gained momentum among Latin thinkers in the ninth century, leading to a final material transformation of the host into a coin-like wafer, made from a thin flour-and-water batter cooked in a metal mold.[49] The reimagined host was a conspicuously anomalous object

[44]Gerald Ellard, "Bread in the Form of a Penny," *Theological Studies* 4, no. 4 (1943): 320–330; Josef A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, 2 vols. (New York: Benzinger, 1951–1955), 1:32–34; and Grumett, *Material Eucharist*, 50–51; Chazelle, "The Eucharist in Early Medieval Europe," 213–214.

[45]Gisela Muschiol, *Famula Dei: Zur Liturgie im merowingischen Frauenklöstern* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994), 195n.

[46]*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* 20, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (University of Kansas Press, 1968), 106–07. Discussed by Aden Kumler, "Manufacturing the Sacred in the Middle Ages: The Eucharist and Other Medieval Works of Ars," *English Language Notes* 53, no. 2 (2015): 9–12.

[47]Ellard, "Bread in the Form of a Penny," 329–331; and Arnold Angenendt, "Das Offertorium," in *Zeichen, Rituale, Werte: Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs*, ed. Gerd Althoff (Münster: Rhema, 2004), 82–83.

[48]Angenendt, "Das Offertorium," 83–86; and for broader efforts to distance women from the sacramentals, see Michel Lauwers, "Les femmes et l'eucharistie dans l'Occident médiéval: interdits, transgressions, devotions," in *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les églises d'Orient et d'Occident*, eds. Nicole Beriou, Beatrice Caseau, and Dominique Rigaux (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2009), 446–455.

[49]A. Edward Siecienski, *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory: The Other Issues that Divided East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 112–114; Aden Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species: Eucharistic Morphology in the Middle Ages," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (2011): 184–186;

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within its medieval material context; in Aden Kumler's words, it was "a serially produced monochrome multiple in a world filled with handcrafted *unica*," or one-offs, its form designed to conceal the fact of its fabrication by human hands.[50]

The appearance of the earliest detailed recipes for eucharistic wafers in monastic customaries by c.1000 demonstrates that religious communities were not only responding to, but actively contributing to the sacrament's material transformation.[51] While acknowledging that such sources may be, as Isabelle Cochelin reminds us, more "inspirational" than pragmatic, they nonetheless offer clues about how monks staked out a special relationship to the host at this transitional moment.[52] Building on the longstanding acceptance of baking as fitting monastic labor, eleventh-century regulators developed elaborate practices designed to guarantee the absolute purity of the Eucharist while bolstering the spiritual authority of monks – and monk-priests in particular – as producers of holy matter.[53] It is also noteworthy that while host-making rites in the customaries share common concerns with precisely how and by whom the altar bread could be made, the authors' divergence on particulars suggests a process of adaptation and innovation by individual religious communities in an era when sacramental theory, like praxis, remained in flux.[54]

The customs describe a production process requiring so much advance planning and concentrated effort that it could hardly have been incorporated into the weekly routine of communal baking. Indeed, it is clear that monks took pains to set host-making apart as a special type of labor that demanded not only domestic skill but spiritual purity and theological expertise and thus should not be entrusted to servants. The eleventh-century Cluniac customaries emphasized that large numbers of hosts needed to be produced several times a year to ensure a continual supply for the altar; ideally, fresh batches would be made in anticipation of Easter and Christmas, and care was taken lest hosts become discolored through prolonged storage.[55] In token of its sacramental character, the process was typically

and Gaïse, *Les signes sacramentels*, 115–118. For a medieval explanation of this transformation, see Honorius Augustodunensis, *Jewel of the Soul* 1.35, 1.66, ed. and trans. Zachary Thomas and Gerhard Eger, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 1:72–73, 126–129.

[50]Ellard, "Bread in the Form of a Penny," 340–342; Roger E. Reynolds, "Christ's Money: Eucharistic Azyme Hosts in the Ninth Century According to Bishop Eldefonsus of Spain: Observations on the Origin, Meaning, and Context of A Mysterious Revelation," *Peregrinations* 4 (2013): 1–19; and Aden Kumler, "Multiplication of the Species," 187.

[51]Kumler, "Multiplication of the Species," 186, notes the influence of the Cluniac customaries on later conciliar legislation.

[52]Isabelle Cochelin, "Customaries as Inspirational Sources," in *Consuetudines et Regulae: Sources for Monastic Life in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, eds. Carolyn Marino Malone and Clark Maines (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 27–72.

[53]For a survey of these sources see Anselme Dimier, "Observances monastiques," *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* fasc. 3–4 (1955): 190–191. It is noteworthy that this assertion was made in the context of debates over the legitimacy of monks' ordination to the priesthood; see Ryan P. Freeburn, *Hugh of Amiens and the Twelfth Century Renaissance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 88–93.

[54]These commonalities reflect many of the authors' ties to Cluny. On the dating and relationships between these sources, see Cochelin, "Customaries as Inspirational Sources."

[55]Ulrich of Zell, *Consuetudines cluniacenses* (hereafter UZ), 3.13, PL 149:757; Bernard of Cluny, *Ordo cluniacensis sive consuetudines* (hereafter BC) 1.53, in *Vetus Disciplina Monastica*, ed. Marquard Herrgott (Paris, 1726), 249; and *Consuetudines Fructuarienses-Sanblasianae* (hereafter FS) 3.372, eds. Luchesius G. Spätling and Peter Dinter, 2 vols., Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum (hereafter CCM) 12 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1985–1987), 2:30 (quote) and 2:167. A biweekly schedule for host-making is suggested in the earlier *Consuetudines Floriacensis Antiquiores* (hereafter FA) 1.8, eds. Anselme Davril and Linus Donnat, in

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overseen by sacrists, aided by two or three handpicked monks, no more than one of whom could be a *conversus* (i.e., an adult convert who did not participate fully in the offices).[56]

To begin, the grain used to make the hosts was meticulously inspected to ensure its worthiness of becoming the *corpus Christi*. A supply of good wheat was picked over "grain by grain" and then washed by the monks, or, as at the abbey of Hirsau, by boy-novices.[57] Before the grain could be milled, the millstones must be washed, dried, and draped with curtains to contain stray specks of flour, which had already become precious, if not sacred.[58] Lanfranc of Bec suggested streamlining this process by milling a test batch of flour to purge the stones of any lingering "filth."[59] Meanwhile, the chosen team of monks set up a special workplace, whether in a dedicated building – the customs of Fruttuaria speak of a "house where hosts are made"– or in another space with a hearth, such as the kitchen.[60] The floor was swept, and a new fire lit. Fresh water, cold to ensure the wafers' whiteness, was brought in the same vessel used to carry water for the Mass, and a wide-rimmed table was set up and enclosed with curtains. After washing their faces and hands and donning albs and humerals, the brothers measured and mixed flour and water – a step reserved for those in holy orders – and then cooked the hosts in hot irons, carefully inspecting the finished products for impurities.[61] Throughout the process, no sound but psalmody was to be heard, and singers were to take care lest saliva fall upon the hosts; for this reason, some writers recommended that only those brothers tasked with stoking the fire or holding the irons should sing, while the others kept silent to avoid so much as breathing on the sacred mixture.[62]

Such elaborate procedures affirmed the changes in sacramental thinking and praxis put in train by Carolingian thinkers and reflected evolving attitudes toward clerical mediation and christocentric devotion in the customaries' eleventh-century moment. In their insistence that only the consecrated hands of celibate male clerics could shape hosts, and that even those merely tasked with processing raw materials must be chaste, the

Consuetudinum saeculi X/XI/XII monumenta non-Cluniacensia, CCM 7, part 3, ed. Kassius Hallinger (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1984), 15.

[56]UZ 3.13, col.757; BC 1.53, p. 249; FS 3.844, p.167; FA 1.8, p.15; William of Hirsau, *Constitutiones Hirsaugienses* (hereafter WH) 2.27, eds. Candida Elvert and Pius Engelbert, 2 vols., CCM 15 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 2010), 1:157; *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc* (hereafter MCL), 2nd edn., eds. and trans. David Knowles and C.N.L. Brookes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 124; and *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire* (hereafter EO) 16.7, ed. Antonia Gransden, CCM 2 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1963), 178. On the *conversi*, see Giles Constable, "*Famuli* and *Conversi* at Cluny: A Note on Statute 24 of Peter the Venerable," in *The Abbey of Cluny: A Collection of Essays to Mark the Eleven-Hundredth Anniversary of Its Foundation* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010), 392–395.

[57]UZ 3.13, col.747; BC 1.53, p.249; WH 2.27, 1:156; MCL 87, p.124. The Hirsau provision reflects contemporary belief in the purity of boy oblates, who, as adults, were sought-after celebrants for masses; see Mayke De Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 137–141.

[58]UZ 3.13, col.757; BC 1.53, p.249; WH 2.27, 1:156.

[59]MCL, p.124.

[60]FS 3.844, 2:167. FA 1.8, p.15 speaks of altar bread being made "in a secret place." For cooking arrangements in religious houses, see Isabelle Cochelin, "Deux cuisines pour les moines: *coquinae* dans les coutumiers du XIe siècle," in *Enfermements*, vol. 2: *Règles et dérèglements en milieu clos (IVe–XIXe siècle)*, eds. Isabelle Heullant-Donat, Julie Claustre, Élisabeth Lusset, and Falk Bretschneider (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2020), 89–113.

[61]UZ 3.13, col.757; BC 1.53, p.249; WH 2.27, 1:157–158; MCL, p.124; FS 3.844, 2:167–168.

[62]UZ 3.13, col.758; BC 1.53, p.249; WH 2.27, 1:157; MCL, p.124; FS 3.372, 2:30; FA 1.8, p.15.

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customaries echo contemporary campaigns to bar married priests from the altar.[63] The care taken to protect the sacramental ingredients' purity and avoid waste or loss also reflects the increasingly urgent desire to safeguard the surrogate body of Christ that permeates later medieval *sententiae* and miracles.[64]

It is also important to remember that the Eucharist's material transformation proceeded more slowly than many reformers would have wished; in the last decades of the eleventh century, when many of these customaries were composed, some clerics could still express dismay at changes that rendered the sacramental bread disconcertingly un-bread-like.[65] From this perspective, Benedictine monks appear as enthusiastic early adopters of the newly standardized eucharistic wafers. We might understand their position in light of the proliferation of private Masses – requiring large numbers of hosts – as an increasingly important manifestation of lay patronage of monasteries, as well as reformist rhetoric which identified the regular clergy as guardians of Christendom's purity, thus positioning them as ideal producers of the sacred.[66] In this new domestic economy of the holy, religious women might consume, but not create Christ's body. At the same time, it is clear that nuns and canonesses continued to engage in various forms of cultural production that granted them access to the altar.[67] There are also hints that some clerical men surreptitiously delegated the work of host-baking to women.[68] It is certain, at any rate, that the Eucharist's doctrinal and material transformations added a new layer of complexity to monastic communities' relationship to their daily bread.

IV. Lest Any Crumb Be Lost

One day, as the canons of York Minster were breaking bread in their refectory with their holy father Oswald, a mouse crept among their feet and began to nibble the crumbs which fell from the table. But, as Oswald's hagiographer Eadmer (d.c. 1126) tells us, no sooner had the creature ingested "the remains (*reliquiae*) of the blessed bread" than it was struck

[63]Helen Parrish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West, c.1100–1700* (London: Routledge, 2010), 93–95, 122; and Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066–1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 39–40.

[64]Gaïse, *Les signes sacramentels*, 118–121; and Thomas M. Izbicki, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 157–158.

[65]Gaïse, *Les signes sacramentels*, 117; and Ellard, "Bread in the Form of a Penny," 343.

[66]On sacramental purity and the monastic priesthood, see Phyllis G. Jestice, "Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Morality," in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Garland, 1998), 81–115. For broader anxieties about the purity of clerical men's bodies and minds, see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and Dyan Elliott, *The Corruptor of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 17–36.

[67]Griffiths, "The Mass in Monastic Practice," 743–745; Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, *The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England during the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 65–88, 192–197; Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 63–65; and Chazelle, "Eucharist in Early Medieval Europe," 223–224.

[68]Martha G. Newman, "Ritual Exclusion and Sacramental Transformation: Women's Work at the Edges of the Mass," in *Medieval Work, Worship, and Power: Persuasive and Silenced Voices*, eds. Abigail Paige Dowling, Nancy McLoughlin, and Tanya Stabler Miller (New York: Routledge, 2025), 121.

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dead for its sacrilegious theft.[69] This story is suggestive of how the advent of a new understanding of the Eucharist and exacting new processes for confecting the host further eroded the already fragile boundary between consecrated and unconsecrated bread in monastic culture, with the latter becoming a focal point for concerns about purity, waste, and abuse that mirrored contemporary anxieties about the altar bread. The daily loaves served in monastic refectories also came to demand greater attention, in the form of rituals which invested even the tiniest fragments with spiritual significance.

The eucharistic revolution coincided with architectural and ritual developments that made refectories into increasingly church-like spaces and emphasized the apostolic origins of monastic life.[70] Monastic builders sought to evoke the shrine of the Cenaculum at Jerusalem, believed to be the site where the disciples had gathered to break bread at the Last Supper and Pentecost.[71] This association might be made via a refectory's physical plan, location in the cloister, or decoration, which typically included a painted or sculpted representation of the crucifixion. As Irene Kabala argues, such images provided visual commentary on monastic consumption practices, affirming the penitential value of dietary austerity and promoting Christ as the ultimate source of spiritual nourishment.[72] Monks were taught to enter the refectory silently, in the same order they entered the choir, pausing to bow to the abbot, whose seat was often beneath a representation of Christ.[73] A blessing for the refectory from the eleventh-century Missal of Robert of Jumièges surrounds the ritual of breaking bread with a sacramental aura: "Almighty and merciful God, may your servants in this house give thanks as they receive the carnal refreshment of food and drink blessed by you, and may they merit to partake joyfully of the joys of eternal glory at the heavenly table."[74] Thus sanctified, the refectory became a fitting setting for heavenly visions like that reported by an eleventh-century monk of Fonte Avellana, who beheld Christ acting as priest, serving the brethren his own flesh-made bread from the abbot's table.[75]

Such tales hint at a symbolic equivalence between refectory table and altar, one reinforced by the hand-signs taught to novice monks, which signified "altar" by

[69]Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* 30, in *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, eds. and trans. Bernard J. Muir and Andrew J. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 274–275. A similar theft is depicted on the Book of Kells's famous Chi Rho page (Trinity College, Dublin, MS 58, fol. 48r); see Heather Pulliam, *Word and Image in the Book of Kells* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 82–83. For theologians like Guitmond of Aversa, the consumption of the Eucharist by mice was a serious concern; see *De corporis et sanguinis Christi veritate in eucharistia* 2.1, PL 149:1448.

[70]Gabriela Signori, "The Refectory, *Memoria*, and Community," *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 11 (2022): 133–137; Jörg Sonntag, "Speisen des Himmels. Essgewohnheiten und ihre biblischen Konzeptionalisierungen im christlichen Kloster des Hochmittelalters zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit," *Saeculum* 60 (2010): 267–272.

[71]Peter Fergusson, "The Refectory at Easby Abbey: Form and Iconography," *Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989): 334–351; and Sheila Bonde and Clark Maines, *Saint-Jean-des-Vignes in Soissons: Approaches to Its Architecture, Archaeology and History* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 346.

[72]Irene Kabala, "Speaking Crosses, Silent Banquets: Crucifixes in Medieval Refectories," in *Image Makers and Image Breakers, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium at St. Michael's College*, ed. J.A. Harris (Ottawa: Legas Books, 2004), 15–26.

[73]Bonde and Maines, *Saint-Jean-des-Vignes*, 303–346.

[74]*Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. H.A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society 11 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896), 277.

[75]John of Lodi, *Vita beati Petri Damiani, Episcopus Cardinalis Ostiensis, Prior Eremi Sanctae Crucis Fontis Auellani* 8.44, AASS III February (February 23), 431–432.

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combining the signs for "table" and "Mass."[76] Like the dressing of altars, the setting of refectory tables became an increasingly elaborate affair from the Carolingian period on, with the tables' covering and uncovering synced to the liturgical calendar.[77] This work, along with the setting of tables with vessels and utensils, was carried out by refectorians, specialized monastic officers who first appear in the sources in the tenth century.[78] The preparation of bread for the table also took on a more ritualized character, as shown in the eleventh-century Customs of Fruttuaria:

> The refectorian goes to the storeroom, where the cellarer counts out the loaves of bread in his presence. When he has finished, they carry the breadbasket into the refectory, each holding one handle. … The refectorian has brought a knife and napkin for this work, and if he finds any bread to be blemished or unfit, he slices it away with the knife and wipes it clean with the napkin. After each piece of bread is made clean, he places it in one of the baskets he has brought.[79]

Carefully inspected for impurities, solemnly processed into the refectory, and deposited in a place of honor on the table, the monks' loaves insistently recalled the hosts consecrated on the altar. Unconsecrated wafers were sometimes brought to the refectory at the start of meals, so that the distribution of altar bread immediately preceded, and symbolically framed, that of the monks' daily bread.[80] Like the host, the refectory bread was covered with a clean white cloth to protect its purity. Loaves' uncovering as the weekly reader began to speak, and re-covering at the end of the mealtime lesson, underscored their complementarity to the spiritual "food" of devotional reading.[81] The blessing of the bread at the start of the meal further underscored its special character: "Lord, bless this bread, as you blessed the five loaves in the desert (cf. Mt. 15:35; Mk. 8:6; Lk. 9:16; Jn. 6:11), so that all who eat it will be nourished in body and soul."[82]

Perhaps it is not surprising that a medieval thought-world which so appreciated the synecdochic potential of fragments would pay special attention to the fate of bread-crumbs.[83] Christ had modeled this concern when he commanded the disciples to gather the remains of the loaves which miraculously fed thousands (Jn. 6:12–13; cf. Mt. 14:20;

[76]Robert A. Barakat, "Cistercian Sign Language," in *Monastic Sign Languages*, eds. Jean Umiker-Sebeok and Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 107.

[77]Thomas M. Izbicki, "*Linteamenta altaria:* The Care of Altar Linens in the Medieval Church," *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 12 (2016): 42–60.

[78]FA 1.15, pp.27–28; BC 1.30, p. 273; UZ 1.74.30, 273; MCL, pp.88–89, 112, 218; FS 3.12, 2:218–219; and for commentary, Gerd Zimmermann, *Ordensleben und Lebensstandard; die Cura Corporis in den Ordensvorschriften des abendländischen Hochmittelalters* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973), 72–73.

[79]FS 3.12, 2:217; cf. *Redactio Helmstadiana-Fuldensis*, c. 27, ed. Maria Wegener and Candida Elvert in *Consuetudinum saeculi X/XI/XII monumenta non-Cluniacensia*, ed. Hallinger, 339.

[80]Sonntag, "Speisen des Himmels," 271n.; and Edmund Martene, *De antiquis monachorum ritibus*, 2 vols. (Lyons, 1690), 1:90–91.

[81]EO 8.7, p.100; *Les* Ecclesiastica Officia *Cisterciens du XIIème siècle*, c. 76, eds. Danièle Choisselet and Placide Vernet (Reiningue: La documentation cistercienne,1989), 226; and Institutes of the Gilbertine Order 22, in *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. William Dugdale et al., 6 vols. (London, 1846), 6, part 2:xxxii–xxxiii.

[82]*Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. Wilson, 281.

[83]On medieval connoisseurship of scraps of things, bodies, and texts, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "In Praise of Fragments: History in the Comic Mode," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 11–26.

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Mk. 6:43; Lk. 9:17).[84] Since the early Middle Ages, in some religious houses, the communal meal had concluded with a reenactment of this Gospel moment. The Rule of the Master described how servers would "reverently gather up the crumbs of bread" from tables and deposit them in a special container kept by the cellarer. Once a week, the accumulated crumbs were cooked into a dish from which the abbot and brothers each took a spoonful.[85]

Eucharistic debate imbued crumbs with even greater importance. Concerns over the crumbling of the altar bread that would eventually lead later medieval churchmen to bake wafers in wax-coated irons are anticipated by earlier regulations on the collection of crumbs in monastic refectories.[86] The eleventh-century Customs of Saint-Bénigne, Dijon, present crumb-collecting as a communal social practice in which novice monks required instruction: "Crumbs are to be scraped from the table with a sharp knife, and so prepared for collection by a novice, who will sweep them into a dish using a wicker fan and carry them away to be distributed as alms. The brothers should also sweep any crumbs on their clothing onto the table, taking the greatest possible care lest the smallest bit *fall to the ground and perish*" (*cadat ad terram et pereat;* cf. John 12:24).[87] Virtually identical procedures are described in the eleventh-century Cluniac customaries by Ulrich of Zell and William of Hirsau, as well as in Benedictine texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[88] Dedicated alms-baskets or dishes used for this purpose were displayed during mealtimes, as at the English priory of Sempringham in the twelfth century, where "Lord Jesus's dish" occupied pride of place in the refectory.[89]

The gestural specificity and daily repetition of crumb-gathering, as well as its reliance on specialized paraphernalia, moved it into the realm of ritual and encouraged reflection on its spiritual significance.[90] Indeed, the language monastic regulators chose to describe this celebration of fragments is intentionally allusive, paraphrasing as it does Christ's words in John 12:24: "lest the grain of wheat falling to the ground should die" (*nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit*), which medieval exegetes related to the

[84]At least some of these leftovers were venerated as relics in medieval treasuries; Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 38, 101.

[85]*La Règle du Maître* 23 and 25, ed. de Vogüé, 2:118, 132–134; trans. Eberle, 176, 181–182. Cf. the Rule of Columbanus, which expresses similar concerns with crumb spillage but does not mandate re-cooking; *Regula coenobialis fratrum* 2–3, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 2, ed. G.S.M. Walker (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), 146–147.

[86]Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 42; Shaun Ross, *The Eucharist, Poetics, and Secularization from the Middle Ages to Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 195.

[87]*Statuta sive ordo monasterii sancti Benigni Divionensis* 39, ed. Louis Chomton in *Histoire de l'église Saint-Bénigne de Dijon* (Dijon: Jobard, 1900), 379. On this text, see Carolyn Marino Malone, "Architecture as Evidence for Liturgical Performance," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation*, eds. Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 212–213.

[88]UZ 2.23, p. 711; WH 1.34, 1:372. By the mid-twelfth century, Peter the Venerable could refer to the "ancient custom" of gathering leftover bread at Cluny; *Statuta Petri Venerabilis* 64, ed. Giles Constable, in *Consuetudines benedictinae variae (saec. XI – saec. XIV)*, ed. Giles Constable, CCM 6 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1975), 96. Cf. EO 3.6, p. 50 and 8.7, p.100; *Consuetudines Affligenienses* 15, ed. Robert J. Sullivan, *ibid.*, 131; *Redactio Vallumbrosa* 13, ed. Nicolaus Vasaturo, in *Consuetudines Cluniacensium Antiquiores cum Redactionibus Derivatis*, CCM 7 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1983), 324.

[89]*The Book of St Gilbert* 22, eds. Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 62. Cf. SPV 64, p.96, which mentions "a container for the collection of leftovers."

[90]Similar fans were used during mass to keep insects from landing on the eucharistic bread and wine; C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 42–43.

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Passion and Resurrection.[91] If each tiny breadcrumb was, in a spiritual sense, Christ's sacrificial body, it called out for special care, even contemplation. For this reason, one thirteenth-century Cistercian handbook for novices recommended crumbs as fitting aids for meditating on the Passion:

> Make a cross from five crumbs and say to yourself, 'Here are his feet, there are his hands nailed upon the cross, here lies his head, here is the wound in his side from which flows the water and blood of mercy and redemption in abundance. Sometimes you might set aside a third of the bread and say, 'What will you give me, Lord, in exchange for this portion? Let us make a bargain. What tears, what holy desires, what consolations of the Holy Spirit, what protections of your grace, what looks of your beloved eyes will you give me for this bread?'[92]

This guided visualization is reminiscent of contemporary eucharistic miracles in which celebrants or communicants witness broken hosts taking on Christ's bodily form.[93]

In monastic hagiography from the age of eucharistic debate, crumbs from the refectory table serve as tiny barometers of virtue. The Cluniac John of Salerno (fl. 950) contrasted two tales from the abbey of Baume, where it was customary for "each monk to carefully collect his breadcrumbs before the reading finished, and consume them giving thanks, for when the reading was finished no one might consume them or any other food." One brother, while scrupulously adhering to the Rule in other matters, chafed at this unappetizing custom, and for years simply brushed his leftovers onto the ground. On his deathbed, he was taunted by a demon bearing a huge sack of breadcrumbs as evidence of his disobedience and wastefulness.[94] Another brother fastidiously collected and ate his crumbs, until one day when "the abbot put a stop to the reading before he could consume them." Unsure of what to do, the monk held them tightly in his fist until he could beg forgiveness. "Prostrating himself at the abbot's feet," the man nervously opened his hand to find that "the crumbs had been turned to pearls," physical manifestations of his pure intentions.[95] When the Cistercian Conrad of Eberbach (d. 1221) recounted this story almost verbatim, belief persisted that crumbs – while seemingly "the least of things" – were potent conduits for divine power.[96] Crumbs were held to be "more sacred than other food," a status hinted at by monastic authors' labeling of morsels of bread as *reliquiae*, the same term used

[91]Petrus C. Boeren, "Un traité eucharistique inédit du XIIe siècle: Convenientibus vobis in unum (1 Cor. 11.20)," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 45 (1978): 198.

[92]Edmond Mikkers, ed., "Un *Speculum novitii* inédit d'Étienne de Sallai," *Collectanea Ordonis Cisterciensium Reformatorum* 8 (1946): 56–57. A similar meditation was practiced by later medieval lay people; Katherine L. French, *Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 181.

[93]Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000–1215* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 14–16; and Kristen Van Ausdall, "Art and Eucharist in the Late Middle Ages," in *A Companion to the Eucharist*, ed. Levy et al., 582–586.

[94]*Vita Odonis* 1.30, PL 133:56–57; trans. Gerard Sitwell in *St. Odo of Cluny; Being the Life of St. Odo of Cluny by John of Salerno, and the Life of St. Gerald of Aurillac by St. Odo* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 32–33.

[95]*Vita Odonis* 1.35, PL 133:58; trans. Sitwell, 36. The story's framing makes clear that the protagonist is the saintly Odo himself.

[96]Conrad of Eberbach, *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* 1.7, ed. Bruno Griesser, CCCM 138 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), 15–16; trans. Benedicta Ward and Paul Savage, *The Great Beginning of Cîteaux* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 61–62.

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for saints' relics.[97] The monastic identification of breadcrumbs as holy matter helps explain the fear of their loss or mistreatment, a fear akin to growing contemporary concerns lest even the smallest eucharistic fragment be crumbled on the ground, carried off by animals, or stolen by heretics or non-Christians.[98] From the end of the thirteenth century, with the emergence of the host desecration libel, such concerns would become deeply interwoven with what Miri Rubin has termed the "narrative assault on late medieval Jews."[99]

Elevated by the rituals of the refectory and its symbolic association with the host, the humble crumb became extremely good to think with. Monastic writers invoked the breaking of bread and gathering of crumbs as metaphors for preaching and the collection of edifying stories.[100] Exegetes also developed increasingly elaborate readings of the Gospel verses which featured crumbs: Matthew 15:27 (cf. Mk. 7:28), in which the Canaanite woman insists "even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters's table"; Luke 16:21, where Lazarus is denied crumbs from the rich man's table; and John 6:12 (cf. Mt. 14:20; Mk. 6:43; Lk. 9:17), where Christ orders the disciples to gather the crumbs of the loaves which fed thousands. Patristic writers had shown little interest in the symbolic resonance of these fragments, simply concluding, to quote Ambrose (d. 397), that "since bread is the word, and faith derives from the word, crumbs are certain teachings of faith."[101] Heightened scrutiny of bread's miraculous potential in the Carolingian period brought renewed attention to these passages. A monastic sermon attributed to Haimo of Auxerre (d.c. 865) equates the Gospel crumbs with the "spiritual meaning" of the Scriptures, as well as "the more obscure passages which simple people cannot comprehend," making them fitting nourishment for monks.[102] Similar sentiments were expressed by the Benedictines Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) and Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel (d.c. 840).[103] By the twelfth century, the image of the humble monk begging crumbs, Lazarus-like, from Christ's heavenly table had long since become a homiletic commonplace.[104]

[97] *Vita Odonis* 1.30, PL 133:56; du Cange, *Glossarium*, 7:113b; on this point, see Bonde and Maines, *Saint-Jean-des-Vignes*, 346.

[98] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 43, 336–339; Ross, *The Eucharist, Poetics, and Secularization*, 195.

[99] Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). See also Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (1998): 11–28.

[100] Guibert of Nogent, *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat*, PL 156:25; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum* 1.4–5, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, eds. Jean Leclercq, C.H. Talbot, and H.M Rochais, 8 vols. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–1977), 1:4–5; Caesarius of Heisterbach, Preface to *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1851), 1:1–2.

[101] Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 8.15–16, ed. M. Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), 303. Origen mused that such 'crumbs' were given to simple folk not ready for the entire 'loaf' of faith; *Commentarius in Matthaeum* 11.17, ed. Robert Girod, SC 162 (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 368.

[102] Haimo of Auxerre, *Homiliae de tempore* 35 and 49, PL 118:230, 293. On the audience of this text, see Christoph Galle, "Preaching in Early Frankish Monasteries: The Auxerre Homily Assigned to Haimo," *The Downside Review* 137, no. 4 (2019): 153–165.

[103] Hrabanus Maurus, *De rerum naturis* 8.1, PL 111:224–225; Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Collectiones in epistolas et evangelia de tempore et de sanctis*, Mt. 15.27, PL 102:131–132. Cf. the Carolingian noblewoman Dhuoda's presentation of pious lay people daring to gather crumbs alongside priests; *Manuel pour mon fils* 1.2.13. ed. Pierre Riché, SC 225bis (Paris: Cerf, 1975), 100.

[104] Aelred of Rievaulx, Sermon 74.68, in *Aelredi Rievallensis opera omnia*, vol. 2B: *Sermones XLVII-LXXXIV*, ed. Gaetano Raciti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 264; Guigo II of La Chartreuse, *Scala claustralium* 6, in *Lettre sur la vie contemplative. Douze meditations*, eds. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, SC 163 (Paris:

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Working on the affective vanguard of later medieval piety, monastic exegetes began to envision ritualized heavenly meals at which Christ, presiding over the common table in the abbot's place, "broke himself" (*ipse fregit*) and shared out fragments of his consecrated body.[105] The Cistercian Baldwin of Ford (d. 1190) encouraged brethren to hold this image in their minds as they sat at table, knowing "there will come a time when we no longer hunger nor thirst, but in the meantime we break our bread daily, and today, as everyday, we collect the crumbs," each of which holds the promise of grace.[106] The Benedictine abbot Geoffrey of Admont (d. 1165) conjured similar scenes in his *Homilies*, imagining monks sharing bread at the Lord's table "with a humble and contrite heart," and sweeping up the crumbs which "are the five wounds of Christ's body." He continues, "Let us gather the crumbs of his bread in our baskets – that is, let us carry him in our hearts – doing inwardly what is customarily done outwardly."[107] Twelfth-century artists rendered these exegetical connections visible through a new iconography of Christ-as-priest, who was portrayed breaking and offering himself in host form on the capitals, doorways, and walls of monastic churches.[108] A French manuscript of c.1175 associated with the abbey of Corbie depicts Christ holding a host and chalice aloft in a scene which simultaneously evokes the Last Supper, the miracle of the Mass, and the humble refectory meal.[109] Such tableaux are suggestive of the powerful influence that daily ritual and theological messaging exerted upon one another in medieval culture.

V. Conclusion

In the medieval monastery, bread occupied a privileged place in the embodied imagination, at the intersection of sensory experience and theological abstraction.[110] When religious men and women baked and broke their daily bread in community, they lived out the virtues of humility and charity and pondered the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.[111] As leaders in the debates surrounding the Eucharist, monks drew on their spiritual formation in the unique domestic environment of the cloister, in which the boundaries between consecrated and unconsecrated bread had always been blurred and the transformative power of bread taken for granted. While heightened concerns with the purity

Cerf, 2001), 94; Isaac of Stella, Sermon 37.9–11, in *Sermons*, eds. Anselm Hoste, Gaston Salet, and Gaetano Raciti, 3 vols., SC 130, 207, 339 (Paris: Cerf, 1967–1987), 2:290; and Conrad of Eberbach, *Exordium magnum* 4.35, ed. Greisser, 300–301.

[105]The language is intentionally allusive to the mass, with its *fractio panis*. Baldwin of Forde, *De sacramento altaris* 2.1, eds. J. Morson, E. de Solms, and J. Leclercq, 2 vols., SC 93–94 (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 1: 130–132. The contemporary Cistercian Amadeus of Lausanne imagined the Virgin presiding over a meal where she serves monks the "bread of life;" *Huit homélies mariales* 6.1, ed. G. Vabaud, SC 72 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 158–160.

[106]Baldwin of Ford, *De sacramento altaris*, 1:132.

[107]Geoffrey of Admont, *Homiliae dominicales* 29, 35, PL 174:196–197, 243–244.

[108]Elizabeth Saxon, *The Eucharist in Romanesque France* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 153–160.

[109]New York, Morgan Library, MS M.44, fol. 6v; reproduced and discussed in Roger S. Wieck, *Illuminating Faith: The Eucharist in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: Scala Arts, 2014), 10 (fig. 2).

[110]On the concept of embodied imagination, see Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History," *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 3 (2016): 861–887.

[111]Thus Bernard of Clairvaux could encourage monks to imagine themselves seated at table with the personified virtues of Humility, Truth, and Contemplation, partaking of "the bread of sorrow" and "bread of wisdom" (Ps. 126:2; Prov. 9:5); *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* 2.4, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, eds. Leclercq et al., 3:19.

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and integrity of ordinary refectory bread emerged in the wake of the first eucharistic debates in the Carolingian period, it might be argued that there was never any "ordinary" bread in the medieval monastery. Painstakingly weighed and served, reverently eaten to the accompaniment of sacred reading, and consumed down to the tiniest crumb, the monks' daily loaves prompted meditative reflection and worked wonders.

The slippage between the two kinds of bread, which is so common in medieval monastic writing, reflects a world of practice in which the symbolic similarities between daily bread and eucharistic bread insistently announced themselves, even as their visual differences became more pronounced over time. By the twelfth century, the frequent celebration of Masses in monastic churches, and the complementary embodied experience of making and consuming (both kinds of) bread had inspired a proliferation of monastic writing which applied homely metaphors of bread-making to the Incarnation and Passion. In an age when monks were increasingly likely to be priests, many of the twelfth-century writers who presented the Virgin Mary's womb as an oven in which the life-giving "bread" of Christ's body was baked,[112] or likened the events of the Passion to the successive stages of bread-making, must have been influenced by their experiences of both baking and consecrating bread. The Cistercian abbot and priest Isaac of Stella (d. 1178) presented Christ being "harvested and threshed at the time of his arrest and flogging, then finely milled between the Jews and Gentiles by a thousand interrogations, until this bread *that descends from heaven and gives life to the world* (Jn. 6:33) was finally cooked by the fire of the Passion in the oven of the cross."[113] While we might expect such imagery to be a by-product of the vibrantly affective lay Christianity of the later Middle Ages, the foregoing discussions allow us to discern its origins in a Latin monastic culture in which the spiritual and the domestic had always been deeply intertwined.[114]

As Miri Rubin has noted, "There is a truly 'domestic' aspect to the enactment of the ritual of the Mass," marked as it is by the celebrant's uncovering, breaking, and eating of the host, as well as the tidying up and washing of the vessels at the ritual's end.[115] Equally striking is the monastic ritualization of the seemingly mundane domestic activities of baking and breaking bread, which attached a particular set of symbolic associations to this very special substance. Recall that monastic sign language rendered "altar" as a portmanteau of "table" and "Mass." To signify the Eucharist, monks combined the signs for "bread" and "altar," manually glossing the relationships between these objects and their salvific roles.[116] This detail speaks to how eucharistic theology was embedded in the lived experience of medieval monasticism as something not only believed but "done" with, and through, the bodies of individual believers as they moved through time and space. Recent

[112]Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 145–146; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 25; Wendy Love Anderson, "The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Belief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France," *Church History* 75, no. 4 (2006): 751–752; and Carra Ferguson O'Meara, "'In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb:' The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art," *Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 75–88.

[113]Isaac of Stella, Sermon 44.6, in *Sermons*, ed. Hoste and Raciti, 3:84–86. Cf. Peter of Celle, Sermon 56, PL 202:807; Honorius Augustodunensis, *Elucidarium*, PL 172:1129.

[114]On the popularity of the Virgin-as-oven motif in later medieval lay Christianity, see Williams, *Bread, Wine & Money*, 55–56; Elina Gertsman, "Performing Birth, Enacting Death: Unstable Bodies in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 92; and Andrew M. Beresford and Lesley K. Twomey, eds., Introduction to *Christ, Mary, and the Saints: Reading Religious Subjects in Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 7.

[115]Miri Rubin, "Popular Attitudes to the Eucharist," in *A Companion to the Eucharist*, eds. Levy et al., 458.

[116]Barakat, "Cistercian Sign Language," 107.

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work in embodied cognition provides a framework for understanding how the habitual rehearsal of specific gestures, like hand-signing, but also weighing and slicing loaves, covering and uncovering breadbaskets, sweeping up crumbs, and, of course, performing the actions of the Mass, served to crystallize and reinforce patterns of thought, making them second nature. We can thus speak of the medieval monastic belief in the sacral nature and transformative possibilities of all bread as something that was literally internalized – or, to use a metaphor medieval monks would have recognized – inscribed on the heart.[117]

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[117]For a helpful survey of this interpretive lens, see Miranda Anderson, "Distributed Cognition in Medieval and Renaisance Studies," in *Distributed Cognition in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Miranda Anderson and Michael Wheeler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 18–43 (esp. 22–27). On the metaphor of the inscribed heart, see Barbara Newman, *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 135–144.

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