

Social Groups, Personal Relations, and the Making of Communities in Medieval *vita monastica*

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To entitle a volume *Making sense as a cultural practice*, means to stress the dynamic, process-related and performative aspects of symbolic constructions of meaning – a key topic in cultural history and analysis during the last decades.¹ It suggests a critical reflexion on static concepts of coherent meanings to be found in cultural phenomena, texts and artefacts, and the alleged possibilities of hermeneutically “reading” them from a text as a representative for a given cultural setting. Drawing on this idea of “deciphering” meanings, cultural historians tended to quite reductively appropriate much more nuanced anthropological models such as the *Interpretation of Culture*, proposed by Clifford Geertz.² In

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- 1 Cf. editors’ introduction. This text was written in the frame of the special research programme *Visions of Community* (SFB 42 VISCOM, funded by the Austrian Science Fund, FWF) which aims at relating historical perspectives to approaches developed in social and cultural anthropology and thus connects to some of the strands in cultural history the concept of “making sense as a cultural practice” is committed to (cf. http://www.univie.ac.at/viscom/index_viscom.php?seite=home, 28.02.2013). At this interface I try to sketch some conceptual thoughts and test them on a few model cases. Given the limitations of space, references to the different bodies of research drawn upon will be kept brief and shall rather serve as “sign posts” than as a comprehensive documentation. I am grateful to the members of VISCOM for comments and criticism.
 - 2 GEERTZ, 1975; influential criticism of this reductionism e.g. in HUNT, 1989. On the theoretical paradigms underlying recent German *Kulturgeschichte* see e.g. DANIEL, 2001.

the introduction to her seminal anthology on what had come to be called *New Cultural History*, Lynn Hunt pointed out that the question is much less what a text means than how it works: “The point of the endeavour was to examine the ways in which linguistic practice, rather than simply reflect social reality, could actively be an instrument of (or constitute) power. [...] Words did not just reflect social reality; they were instruments for transforming reality.”³ With this approach as a starting point, I want to explore some questions raised by the editors and relate them to aspects of my current research: How do social groups and constructions as well as practices of community relate to one another?

This question thus addresses the general subject of the volume – making sense as cultural practice – connecting it to the broader framework of the research program *Visions of Community* that aims at analysing how religious identities shape the construction of particular communities in order to explore the interaction between religious and political visions of community.⁴

Conceiving of the construction of meaning as a process that evolves by means of cultural repertoires and practices, I now want to consider vocabularies and other indicators of “community” using some prominent early medieval mo-

- 3 HUNT, 1989, p. 17. The constructionist paradigm underlying most of the theoretical considerations connected to this shift of focus from “text” to “practice” was e.g. articulated by BERGER/LUCKMAN, 1966, and has been widely adopted in the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies. Here, I will draw on concepts reflecting on the relations between cultural representations and social practices, as developed by BOURDIEU, 1985. For a historical perspective e.g. CHARTIER, 1988, and BURKE, 2005; introductions to performative approaches from different disciplinary perspectives provide WIRTH, 2002; MARTSCHUKAT/PATZOLD, 2003; FISCHER-LICHTE, 2012; KOROM, 2013.
- 4 My own project concentrates on processes of community building and their political significance between the mid-13th and the 15th centuries in Central Europe. Here, social affiliations resting upon kinship and personal networks of different kinds can mostly be assessed in local and regional contexts. We therefore focus on those social spaces where the sources allow grasping forms of often ambivalent identification and belonging: monasteries, cities and courtly/noble environments. They are constituted within social relations and interactions and thus provide the framework for groups becoming communities. Which models of identification can be traced in sources originating from these milieus? And in how far is “community” a means to make sense of people’s social attachments within these environments? Cf. POHL et al., 2012; LUTTER, 2010; on the concept of social space cf. BOURDIEU, 1985; Löw, 2001.

nastic rules and an exemplary didactic text from the 13th century that reflects both pastoral theory and practice. I will take them as a starting point to discuss community both enacted in regulated religious community practice, including personal relations within monastic space, and connecting it to the world “outside”. I will argue that visions of community not only bestow meaning on social groups but also that they in turn confirm, and also change them in and through social practice. Thus, community shall not only be defined as a symbolic construction, but also and significantly as a social practice. Monastic *vita communis* is a particularly strong case in point as it is *per se* characterised by regularity and discipline to train community in a performative way in order to achieve specific spiritual goals with important social effects, among them to strengthen the unity within a group, whose members are trained on a daily basis to feel attached to it.⁵

Analytical differentiations between the two concepts *group* and *community* and the phenomena they refer to, or attempts at relating them to each other, have been rare.⁶ Often, the terms are used synonymously. Roughly speaking, social historians, esp. in German medieval studies, draw rather on the concept of *groups*, as systematically developed by Otto Gerhard Oexle, whereas prominent Anglo-American representatives of cultural history and cultural anthropology tend to work with the concept of *community*, perhaps most prominently represented in the phrase *imagined communities* coined by the political scientist Benedict Anderson. For preliminary working definitions the work of Anthony Cohen and of Otto Gerhard Oexle proved particularly useful.⁷ Oexle developed his concept of social groups to overcome rigid analytical categories in traditional historical research, such as estates, strata, or classes.⁸ Comparably, Cohen’s title *The Symbolic Construction of Community* was programmatically opposed

5 DERDA, 1992; seminal is Klaus Schreiner’s work, part of it reprinted in ID., 2013. Literature on the significance of monastic regulation is abundant: See the *vita regularis* series, ed. by GERT MELVILLE, at <http://www.fovog.de/vitaregdt.html>, 27.02.2013, and ID., 2012.

6 Pioneering is O.G. Oexle’s work, cf. his essays (re)printed in OEXLE 2011, section *Soziale Gruppen in der Gesellschaft*, p. 441-687; most helpful for the approach presented here is ID., 2011a. I am grateful to Stefan Esders for pointing me to this recent article. The relative dearth of the discussion of groups as related to communities is opposed to the vast debate on the relations between “individual” and “community”, e.g. the seminal article by BYNUM, 1982, at p. 59-81; and the contributions in MELVILLE, 2002.

7 ANDERSON, 1983; COHEN, 1985; cf. also BURKE, 2004; OEXLE, 1998.

8 IBID., p. 38.

to functionalistic and structural approaches in social anthropology.⁹ According to him, community as a symbolic construction is an expression of belonging to a social group. Yet, community also refers to social practices resulting in the construction of social relationships. This set of definitions contains an explicit, if vague, conception of the relation between groups and communities: Community derives from the situational perception of a boundary which marks off one social group from another, but also from the feeling of belonging to a social group. To define this relationship in greater detail, Oexle's approach offers important help. He conceives of social groups as modules of society. Individuals form groups in conflict and consensus and sustainably connect to them to realise their values and goals. These groups are based on specific group cultures including norms, concepts and mentalities as well as forms of social practice that eventually may lead to institutionalisation. Simultaneously, groups are social actors.¹⁰

Both definitions explicitly link representations or symbolic constructions of belonging on one hand to practices of social relationships on the other. Relating the two models to each other, I shall refer to groups both as a category of classification which can be marked and identified within contemporary texts, and as a category of social actors. By contrast, communities are here conceived of as symbolic representations of belonging that are imagined, narrated, enacted and felt. Community, thus, refers not least to an affective category. Successful constructions of community, though, have effects on groups, as the latter eventually adopt the quality of community themselves. Thus, community can be defined as a group with specific qualities, forms and practices of belonging, togetherness and solidarity.¹¹ Visions of community, expressions of belonging and practices of community interact and affect the coherence of social groups, their norms, institutions and models of thinking and acting – their ways of making sense of the world.

But what were contemporary notions of belonging? In which ways were community and belonging narrated and enacted? How did strategies of representation operate, e.g., forms of emotional imagery and its moral-political significance? More simply put: How do we find “markers” of groups and symbolic constructions or enactments of community in our sources? Whereas *group* is not a term we will find in medieval texts, either Latin or vernacular, the vocabulary

9 A good orientation in the field provides KOROM, 2013. For a recent synopsis cf. RAPPORT, 2010.

10 OEXLE, 1998, p. 38, 40 and 43, and OEXLE, 2011 (see also note 6).

11 BURKE, 2004, p. 5.

and imagery of *community* refers to one of the key concepts of Christianity.¹² Thus, one might first approach written sources exploring *community* as a term, as well as the specific vocabulary of *community* in its semantic environment. Second, one can look for indicators of belonging, specific uses of personal pronouns such as “we”, as well as markers of “others” and their attributions to groups, and finally trace hints at social practices constituting social relations.¹³

The Christian key concept of *vita communis* draws on the model of the biblical *vita apostolica* as described in the Acts of the Apostles: The crowd of the believers was one heart and one soul and had all things in common (*erat cor unum et anima una [...] erant illis omnia communia*, Ac 4, 32ff). They were equal [...] and shared everything according to their individual demands (Ac 2, 44). According to Giles Constable, this description “set the standard for Christian community life.”¹⁴ Its most important conceptual elements are a sense of unity, commonality and equality as well as shared instead of individual property. At the end of the 4th century, Augustine (†430) drawing on the biblical model coined the idea of a *vita communis* as a theological reason for monasticism as a form of people sharing their life in groups.¹⁵ The first sentence of Augustine’s *Praecepta* thus reads: *Primum, propter quod in unum estis congregati, ut unanimes habitetis in domo et sit vobis anima una et cor unum in Deum*.¹⁶ The key idea of his rule – the concept of community – became normative for monasticism, its key symbols “one heart and one soul” stressing the intimacy of community life. Elements of this “living together unanimously” are a common, structured space, the shared maintenance of property including food and clothes and a common daily routine including prayer and liturgy, eating, learning and sleeping.

About the same time, this way of life is called *coenobiotarum disciplina* in John Cassian’s (360-435) Rule; and in the earliest known monastic rule by Pa-

12 On etymology cf. DERDA, 1992, p. 6-10; semantic approaches e.g. in BLICKE, 1996; MÜNKLER/BLUHM, 2001. In this text I will confine myself to textual sources; on images and material culture e.g. BYNUM, 2011; SCHMITT, 2002; WENZEL, 2009.

13 Following this model several case studies drawing on different types of source material (charters, historiographic and hagiographic accounts, pictorial representations such as in wall paintings, etc.) are undertaken in the project sketched above (cf. note 1 and 4), e.g. Maria Mair’s PhD thesis on narrations of community in 13th c. Austrian historiography.

14 CONSTABLE, 1996, p. 125. The following synopsis draws on DERDA, 1992; SCHREINER, 2002; OEXLE, 2011a.

15 OEXLE, 2011a, p. 482.

16 VERHEIJEN, 1967, vol. 1, p. 417.

chomius (292-348) the term is *ordo disciplinae*. Pachomius' concept draws on commonality, its key terms being *koinonia/communio* and *koinos bios*, but nevertheless it is based on discipline. For example, *ordo disciplinae*, a methodological conduct of life, stresses the regulated and disciplined way of life, the trained habitual commonality of working and eating, prayer and liturgy. If all early rules prefer a coenobitic life to individual asceticism as a model way to spiritual perfection, they also share a sense of *ordo disciplinae*, highlighting obedience and control necessary for constituting and stabilising community.¹⁷ Thus, common to all three rules are the significance of *vita communis* according to the Acts of the Apostles, shared property and a common "disciplined" way of life. As Oexle stresses, the common ground of the early monastic rules was their group-based concept of community. This explains their at first glance paradoxical inclusion of relations to the world outside as opposed to a total withdrawal from the world. *Vita communis*, Oexle argues, was both theoretically and practically related to urban culture in late Antiquity: How would all the long-lasting achievements of medieval monasticism in the world have been possible, if it were rooted in the principle of a total withdrawal from the world? Drawing on Max Weber, he posits that its long term success is rather grounded in a specific way of life, a norm of people living together in groups. This explanatory model of how medieval groups make sense of their social organisation through constructions and practices of monastic community, connecting it to the world outside the monastic walls, is applicable to other periods and regions during the Christian Middle Ages.¹⁸

However, Augustine's Rule has a special focus on the foundation of community life in the spirit of love and fraternity.¹⁹ It became one of the most influential models of coenobitic life. In the comparatively open organisational framework of his *Praecepta*, the ideal of biblical *vita apostolica* was adopted in the statutes and constitutions of quite different spiritual reform movements and religious orders, ranging from regular canons to Dominicans, for many centuries to come. It provided an exemplary normative, yet adjustable instrument for adaptations to diverse specific contexts, spiritual values and practical demands of religious communities in their making. The guiding principle of community as articulation and enactment of true apostolic life is thus represented in the vocabulary and metaphorical imagery of numerous foundational texts of religious reform movements, at once reflecting parts of their institutionalisation. In these texts

17 OEXLE, 2011a, p. 488f.; DERDA, 1992, p. 86-92.

18 OEXLE, 2011a, esp. at p. 479f.; cf. BROWN, 1996; WEINFURTER, 2013.

19 See the contributions in MELVILLE/MÜLLER, 2002; MELVILLE, 2010.

community is variably, but constantly, conceived of as *societas sancta*, their *vita communis* held together by unity of concord (*unitas concordiae*) and unanimity (*unanimitas*), love (*caritas*) and fraternity (*fraternitas*), socially articulated by sharing everything (*omnia communia*) and symbolically by being one heart and one soul (*cor unum et anima una*).²⁰

If we compare these terms and metaphors to those in the *Regula St. Benedicti*, which had a comparable impact on visions of monastic community in medieval Europe, it turns out that the explicit discussion of community is much less an issue. Benedict (†547) also stresses the importance of community life as opposed to individual asceticism, but within the coenobitical frame he clearly focusses on the spiritual progress of the individual soul. The training of the “inner self” became a fundamental task in medieval monastic life: discipline constitutes *ordo*.²¹ Accordingly, *ordo* and *disciplina* in the said sense of a regulated, disciplined and habitualized performance – *disciplina regularis* – are among the key terms of Benedict’s Rule. Its seventh chapter connects the twelve grades of humility with exercises of practical ascesis leading from fear of God to love for God. Asceticism again is a means of mastering the tasks of individual human existence within the community of one’s order.

But otherwise, Benedict does not discuss *vita communis* as such: In his *regula* the term is never used at all. In c. 33 there is one single reference to the biblical demand of shared property, and at times the text refers to the liturgical meaning of *communio*. By contrast, the vocabulary of *excommunicatio* – the exclusion from the shared table (c. 24,3-7) or the monastic body (*corpus monasterii*) referred to as a whole (c. 44,5) – is frequently used. Above all, community is expressed by communal life, i.e. via concrete instructions for common daily routines, for *disciplina regularis*. Regular practices of repeated and shared daily routine – prayer and liturgy, learning and joint meals – affect that people having come together in a monastery and subscribed to specific concepts of communitarian life, thus forming a social group, eventually by regularly and performatively adopting a specific *habitus*, become an imagined community.²²

But what is more: If Benedict talks about individual progress within the environment of the monastery, he rarely raises questions of concrete personal interactions between its members. For instance, edification by mutual example

20 Detailed examples provides SCHREINER, 2002, for a comparative assessment see *IBID.*, at p. 14f. and 43.

21 BYNUM, 1982, esp. p. 59 and 76f. *Regula St. Benedicti* (RB), ed. by HANSLIK, 1960.

22 Cf. DERDA, 1992, p. 86-93, 120-123, 171-178 on social control with reference to E. Durkheim and G. Simmel; cf. BOURDIEU, e.g. 1985 on *habitus*.

is not an issue. No examples are given how pride and humility work in daily community life. As Caroline Bynum argued, the abbot in his eminent hierarchical function is the sole teacher *verbo et exemplo*; and accordingly community is “a school for the service of God” (prol. 45), but not a space for learning from one’s neighbour or by compassion with him or her. In her work on monastic treatises from the 11th and 12th centuries, Bynum showed how religious reform movements connected to broader societal changes are reflected in shifts of perception of community, most particularly in concepts developed by regular canons drawing on Augustine’s *Praecepta* and Cistercians drawing on Benedict’s rule.²³ For both, an increased focus on pastoral practice affected on a conceptual level an integration of monastic withdrawal from the world to serve God with the service for one’s neighbour. Thus, personal growth in virtue is achieved not only via obedience, but also through service and the practice of imitating the good example of others. Personal relationships, love and compassion become important for the learning of humility. Particularly Cistercian thought stresses the importance of examples to stimulate desire to learn not just from books, considering learning by sensual and affective experience to be more effective than intellectual learning.²⁴ Still, Bynum holds that these new affective aspects of monastic theory were less integrated into the very concept of community, as most monastic thinkers of different orders kept highlighting the individual spiritual progress within the community as the utmost goal. In fact, differences and similarities cutting across the borders of orders are manifold.²⁵

But the lack of emphasis on interpersonal relations is also a question of genre. Rules and learned treatises written in monastic environments necessarily concentrate on unity as a primary issue and thus do not allow for many glimpses at concrete human relations, even if they stress love and service of one’s neighbour as a moral and pastoral issue. As much as religious reform writing was concerned with the progress of the individual soul within community, as little it enlightens personal relationships between religious women and men.²⁶ Yet, they were there. During the last decades, research on medieval monasticism has started to explore them by taking into account a wider range of source material that

23 BYNUM, 1982, p. 22-81; cf. CONSTABLE 1996 and 2004; SCHNEIDMÜLLER/WEINFURTER, 2006; WEINFURTER, 2013.

24 LECLERCQ, 1957. These issues are currently discussed in attempts to write a history of emotions: ROSENWEIN, 2006 and 2012; BOQUET/NAGY, 2009; more specifically BOQUET, 2005.

25 BYNUM, 1982, esp. p. 69-77.

26 This point was also made by BRIAN P. MCGUIRE, 2010, and ID., 2002.

was produced in and by pastoral practice: hagiographic texts of all sorts, above all exemplary stories told by teachers and preachers inside monasteries, but also and increasingly directed at larger audiences from the 13th century onwards.²⁷ What is more, some of the collections of this huge body of edifying, but also entertaining moral *exempla* allow to trace at least part of their sources not only to the key texts – the Bible, monastic rules, the writings of the church fathers and other ecclesiastical authorities – but also to oral sources who left their traces in exemplary stories in sermons and liturgy, didactic manuals for spiritual advice and miracle collections.²⁸

Brian P. McGuire was one of the first to reconstruct written and oral sources in the so-called *Dialogus miraculorum*. This work, penned by the Cistercian monk and teacher Caesarius of Heisterbach in the 1220s, reflects on the community practice in his monastery.²⁹ It will serve as my final model case for narrations of monastic community and the relations of its members within it, but also to social groups outside the monastery. Caesarius' text was a popular and widely spread didactic guideline for a good spiritual life. It presented itself in the form of a dialogue between his *alter ego* and a novice and was written in close relation to Caesarius' pastoral preaching and to daily monastic life within the community. 746 miracle stories organised in 12 *distinctiones* are meant, as Caesarius puts it, to instruct "more by means of examples than by words". He thus draws not only on exegetical explanations, but also on lived experience.³⁰ Most protagonists of his stories are people who chose a religious life, most of them in a Cistercian community. Still, Caesarius' examples represent a broad social spectrum reflecting the profound change of religious as well as secular institutions at the beginning of c. 13th.³¹

The fourth book on temptation (*de tentatione*) provides interesting insights into spiritual, but also social ways to make sense of monastic life. It is dedi-

27 ID., 2002; BREMOND et al., 1996; HEINZELMANN, 2002; BYNUM, 2011.

28 On the relations between written and oral communication see e.g. Utrecht studies in Medieval literacy, ed. by MARCO MOSTERT, at <http://www2.hum.uu.nl/Solis/ogc/medievalliteracy/>, 28.02.2013, e.g. VANDERPUTTEN, 2011.

29 MCGUIRE's seminal articles from 1979 and 1980 are reprinted in ID., 2002. A recent bilingual (Latin-German) issue of the *Dialogus miraculorum* (DM), ed. by NÖSGES/SCHNEIDER, 2009, provides a comprehensive introduction and bibliography.

30 DM 5,7, vol. 3, p. 984, and 8,1, vol. 4, p. 1506; cf. recently BREITENSTEIN, 2011, on oral education, at p. 220-224 on the DM. BYNUM, 2011 on the mutual relations between theological theory and spiritual practice.

31 FELTEN/RÖSENER, 2009; more general CONSTABLE, 2004.

cated to the discussion of the human battle against the vices. Vices in turn are represented with a number of similarities to passions.³² Thus, Caesarius explains and assesses passions, at the same time deliberately emotionalising by means of dramatic narrations, and he stresses the importance of community: On one hand, the community of one's religious fellows in a monastery is one of the most effective disciplinary means against dangerous passions, whereas separation from the community is defined as one of the most important reasons for spiritual failure, as also the early medieval rules repeatedly point out. On the other hand, as we have seen, Cistercian theology made a particularly strong case of affect being a constitutive element of community building and maintenance. Caesarius' work displays these related aspects in differentiated terminological, narrative, and rhetoric ways.

The importance of common daily liturgy, of praying and singing together, of a life in shared simplicity of eating, drinking and clothing is a recurrent theme throughout the fourth book and the Dialogue at large. Thus, religious people fail by falling asleep during prayers due to physical weakness, but also, if – driven by unduly ambition – they replace the common ascetic discipline by exaggerated “private” exercises, until their brains wither and they fall either mad or desperate (4,45). Even a monk referred to as “holy” suffers from not being able to participate in the common prayers due to his severe illness: “When I am standing outside the choir and am hearing the others sing the psalms, I am hurt in my heart not to be able to join them knowing the joys with which God delights my soul when among the others.”³³ Even more: Separation from the community deprives him of the visions of Jesus and the angels that he had in the choir when singing the psalms.³⁴ Thus, even in this case of advanced spiritual progress, individual spiritual achievements are not conceived of as separate from the community, but as an integral part of it; it is community that enables the monk's visionary experiences. Eventually and importantly, it is common prayer that raises individual chances of redemption, as in the dramatic account of a recluse who, in danger of losing her faith, is finally saved by the intense special prayers of the members of the Cistercian monastery responsible for her spiritual salvation.³⁵

Such connections between the spiritual consolations of and within the community on one hand and the social aspects of living together on the other are drawn by many examples bearing on the “socially motivated” vices of anger and

32 NEWHAUSER, 1993.

33 DM 4,30, vol. 2, p. 742-753, at p. 746f.

34 IBID.

35 DM 4,39, vol. 2, p. 766-771.

envy, greed and avarice. Caesarius presents a then current metaphor of the positive affective connotation of the monastic community as a family. The *familia* in a socio-economic sense simultaneously builds and stabilises emotionally defined bonds: Not only is the abbot imagined as father, but also the prior as mother. Both are responsible for “carrying, holding together and supporting the convent representing the *corpus Christi*.” They should carry it by means of prayer, hold it together by means of discipline and support it by means of consolation.³⁶ If Benedict stressed the prior’s subordinate position in terms of hierarchical relations and was concerned with avoiding conflicts over authority and subsequent discord within the community, Caesarius’ use of the family metaphor seems rather to be an extension of the imagery of family relations outside the monastery. Religious people remained integrated in their network of kinship and friendship while in the process of becoming members of their new spiritual communities. Their physical separation did not cut off these relations, did not even intend to do so, but redefined them, most importantly as members of the religious *ordo* of both genders were, by definition specialists of memory and prayer for those men and women, they were connected to inside and outside the monastery’s walls.³⁷

Avarice and greed is another case in point to show the interrelations between spiritual and social aspects of Caesarius’ understanding of community and the connections between the monastic environment and its surroundings. Avarice was held to be the root of all evils (1 Tim 6, 10), thus competing with pride for the first place in the hierarchy of vices. Therefore, Caesarius explains, not only secular, but also religious persons are tempted by it. Immediately, the novice raises the question why secular people blame the Cistercians for being avaricious.³⁸ This is an ambiguous issue, and in his answer Caesarius argues that what some call avarice has to be understood in fact rather as provision for the community’s obligation to hospitality. In the following fifteen stories Caesarius gives a wide range of examples for conflicts of interests between different aspects of community: May those responsible for the economic well-being of a monastery cheat on secular people to appropriate property? In chapter 61 Caesarius argues against this, and he takes a similar position in the case of a cellarer who cheated on a widow (4,59). In another example, the righteous provost of a Premonstratensian community even reproaches the lay brother in charge of the monastery’s administration who is too successful in augmenting its property that he should better spend his time bemoaning his sins. Even he, the provost, would rather

36 DM 4,18, vol. 2, p. 718-721.

37 RB, c. 65; DERDA, 1992, p. 146-148; cf. SCHREINER, 1989; GEARY, 1994.

38 DM 4,57, vol. 2., at p. 812-815.

care for the souls of the community's members than for its possessions (4,62). On the other hand, asked if it is right to drive peasants out of their land to build a monastery on it – which was quite common for early Cistercian practice – Caesarius argues for the just cause of displacing impious people in favour of pious ones (4,63). Still, charitable acts and alms for the poor as well as hospitality even or particularly in times of economic shortage are a prime commandment of *caritas*. Thus, Caesarius gives a number of examples of religious communities being punished for not living up to this demand of extending the principle of love to one's brothers and sisters beyond the monastery's walls to the community of Christians (4,60; 65-72).³⁹

Hence, the communities addressed by Caesarius are heterogeneous. They comprise his immediate environment, the monastic family and the community of the Cistercian order, but beyond it the community of all religious people, i.e. those leading a monastic life and eventually the community of all Christians and saints with God. These communities can be characterised by shared values and affective expressions, comparable forms of belonging and attachment, similar social and spiritual practices – but they can also be differentiated against each other by these means. The cultural repertoires Caesarius' examples draw on to make a practical sense of complex theological matters were at least partly shared beyond the environment of monastic communities; models were mutually communicated orally and transmitted in script and thus confirmed as well as changed. In these processes existing repertoires of norms and concepts, as well as practical routines, were negotiated in the very practice of living together.⁴⁰

Visions of communities hold social groups together. They are symbolic representations of belonging, binding together sets of norms and values, orientations and practices, used by people and groups to make sense of their lives. Representations of belonging in texts can be differentiated in terms of their conceptual and metaphorical specification (*cor unum, animam unam; corpus monasterii*), but more often via narrations of performative enactments of community, such as the family model or stories of personal relations and conflicts. Concepts of community provide social groups with meaning, who in turn confirm, but also change them in and through social practice. Monastic *vita communis* is realised by concrete persons coming together at defined places, affiliate (*congregatio, societas*) and together enact normative ideals of religious life. In that, regularity and discipline play an important role: Community is constituted performatively, trained in habitual practice; *doing community* strengthens the ties within the

39 ROESENER, 2009 on Cistercian economic practice; MELVILLE, 2010 on charity.

40 VANDERPUTTEN, 2011; LUTTER, 2012 on emotional repertoires.

group one decides to belong to, but also provides means to differentiate it from others.

Religious communities were deeply embedded in medieval society, as they were formed out of its constitutive social groups, and less resulting from prescriptions of the ecclesiastical hierarchies.⁴¹ The tension between “vertical” and “horizontal” models of *vita communis* was also genuine to community building, e.g. through kinship, friendship and urban corporate bonds in the world outside these communities. Even more: at least in medieval Europe, members of social groups entering a monastery from “the world” outside brought hierarchical as well as egalitarian concepts of social *ordo* into this specific social space, most significantly via the enactment of memorial, donation and property practices. Thus, a clear-cut separation between community inside and world outside does not make sense. On the contrary: The relations between religious communities and the groups (per)forming them seem to have been as constitutive for their lasting, as were their internal rules for and reflections about living together. Meanings of community were permanently reconstituted within discourses and power relations cutting across defined social spaces. Thus, representations of belonging that seem most obvious may rely on especially deep cultural constructions, constantly trained in social practice.

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