Article

The Historiography of Medieval Monasticism: Perspectives from Northern Europe

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Abstract: The article provides a thematized discussion of the development of the historiography of European monasticism in northern Europe (north Atlantic, North Sea to the Baltic). Whilst it does not offer a comprehensive overview of the field, it discusses the significance of major currents and models for the development of monastic history to the present day. From focusing on the heritage of history writing "from within"—produced by the members of religious communities in past and modern contexts—it examines key features of the historiography of the history of orders and monastic history paradigms in the context of national and confessional frameworks. The final section of the article provides an overview of the processes or musealization of monastic heritage and the significance of monastic material culture in historical interpretations, both academic and popular.

Keywords: medieval Latin monasticism; medieval religious history; historiography; medieval northern Europe; interdisciplinarity; monastic heritage

1. Introduction

The historiography of medieval Latin monasticism in the Benedictine tradition is a large area, which encompasses history as well as archaeology and other fields that focus on material evidence, such as architectural history, art history, and manuscript studies. Whilst there have been various forms of interdisciplinary approaches, these fields also remain distinct and separate in their methodology. The aim of this article is to provide perspectives on the historiography of medieval monastic history with particular focus on northern Europe. The institutional focus is the Benedictine tradition, which encompasses both individual communities following the Rule of St Benedict and the Cistercian order that emerged in the twelfth century. The geographical focus of this article reflects the span of the present volume—from the north Atlantic, North Sea to the Baltic. The areas discussed comprise Scandinavia, northern German territories from Ostfriesland to Mecklenburg, and then further along the southern shore of the Baltic from western Pomerania to Livonia. The medieval territorial divisions and political structures are also fundamentally different from modern (post-1918 and post-1945) states, and these political shifts had a significant impact on the historical interpretations. To keep to the scope of the present volume and to bring in dialogue with Anglophone literature, which had a major impact in the twentieth century in shaping narratives of monastic history, I will also refer to evidence from another North Sea area, the British Isles. An important facet of the development of the historiography of monasticism, in the area under discussion here, is the fact that the southern shores of the Baltic Sea are also parts of the east-central European historical framework, and this has important bearing on the analysis in terms of the conceptualization of monasticism on the frontiers of Latin Christendom. In other ways, Scandinavia has historically also been a frontier of western Europe and this has bearing on the history of monasticism there and its interpretation.

What is considered here through historiographical interpretations is a large and diverse area with both a longer history of Christianization, in particular the British Isles (7th century), but also a much later entry into Christendom by Iceland (11th c.), Scandinavia

(11–13th centuries), and the southern shores of the Baltic (11–13th centuries). This means that Latin monasticism became established in the regions of northern Europe at different points of its development and by means of support from different types of founders—territorial rulers, bishops, lay magnates but also following the process of crusade and conquest (Berend 2007; Murray 2014). What these large areas share is the experience of Reformation in the sixteenth century that destroyed monastic life and decimated archives, libraries, and material culture. It is significant because its modern historiography—from the nineteenth century onwards—developed in the context of monasticism being only a past phenomenon rather than living tradition. The research agenda has also been shaped by the accessibility of particular categories of sources—especially those associated with landed property—and the disappearance of others—related to the intercessory, devotional, and spiritual functions of monastic communities.

The objective of this article is to historiographically frame specific discussions within this special issue of *Religions*, as well as to provide a distinct contribution to the wider debate about the history of historiography of Latin monasticism in the pre-modern period in Europe. This debate focuses both on the identification of the inheritances that shaped the present understating of monastic history as well as processes of deconstruction of grand narratives of the development of monastic forms and interpretation of divergent evidence across medieval Latin Christendom. It comes after the publication of two survey volumes in 2020, which explicitly engaged with the state of the field. Both publications—one a large collective endeavor within *The Cambridge History of* series and the other a single-authored work—assert how the legacy of the linear model of monastic history that presents the succession of ever more developed forms of monastic and then mendicant orders have been challenged by a vast body of regional, local, and thematic studies that a present much more complex picture. However, the dominance of traditional meta-narratives continues and both the editors and contributors of the CUP volume and Stephen Vanderputten in his textbook call for the development of new, less linear approaches that better reflect the plurality of forms of monasticism in the medieval western-European context (Beach and Cochelin 2020; Vanderputten 2020). The authors and editors do not provide a definition of what that new framework should be, but these publications make a really important step in exploring deep historiographical inheritances that continue to circulate explicitly and implicitly. Without understanding how they came about and how they intersect within past and present historiography, it is not possible to leave behind the limitations that they impose on research agendas. This is indicative of the fact that we are at a particular moment in the reappraisal of a vast accumulation of studies of both specific institutions and regional histories but even more so, the accumulation of different thematic works on medieval monastic institutions. The importance of historiographical reappraisal is compounded by the realization of how fragmented the debates within this vast area are—by linguistic barriers, but also methodological approaches. The present article focuses on a selected area of historiographical inheritances that had a particular impact in shaping monastic history perspectives in the regions under consideration to explain how they formed interpretations and what the consequences of their, at least partial, continuing presence are.

Whilst the discussion will take a fairly broad chronological time-span from the seventeenth century onwards, it focuses on a number of key themes that, I will argue, have been fundamental in shaping interpretations of monasticism in northern Europe—the inheritance of the history writing by the monks, the historical context of national and confessional paradigms, and recent developments in the approaches to monastic material culture and process of heritage making. Reflection on these subjects, especially when adopting a trans-regional approach that focuses on areas across northern Europe, can be instrumental in finding solutions to the fragmentation of the field and can aid in creating a more productive dialogue between different linguistic traditions.

2. Monastic Constructions of Historical Time and "History from Within"

Writing about monastic history began in the monastic communities well before Christianity came to northern Europe. The inheritance of Late Antiquity, that western Latin monasticism took as the center of its identity, was really complex with a variety of textual genres in a broad range of languages, traditions, and forms from across the eastern and southern Mediterranean world. Whilst the vocabulary, imagery, and concept of cenobitic and eremitic practices of the desert were foundational for both western and eastern monasticism (Orthodox, including various Slavic rites), the Latin monasticism and its historiography came to essentialize the primacy of Benedictine Rule for western monasticism (Helvétius et al. 2020).

The models and methodologies for describing the monastic past were created originally "from within" by the members of the monastic communities themselves, by monks and nuns, who were actively reflecting on, shaping, and preserving different aspects of the recent and deep past as a living tradition. The process of building the Latin western monastic tradition, as Helvétius argues, already by the seventh century, collapsed diversity into a streamlined concept of coenobitic practice (Helvétius et al. 2020). The term "writing from within" is used here to indicate that texts and approaches were created by the insiders of monastic culture in the medieval period and beyond, who were reflecting on the past of their own lived experience. This means that historical material is considered a part of the writer's identity and not only an external artefact of analysis.

Whilst the notion of history was deeply exegetic within monastic tradition, there were two main modes of dealing with the past in medieval monastic culture—non-historicized and historicized. The latter, for example chronicles or gesta abbatum, presented past events in chronological order, often with dates and in temporal relation to various markers of passing time. They have received intense scrutiny from scholars not only in terms of their production within monastic culture itself and their development as a genre, but also as sources for political, social and economic history (Sot 1981; Wolf and Ott 2016). Their significance in the context of the history of memory, identity, and the uses of the past by the monastic authors have been particularly significant in the last few decades, as historians have begun to read 'internal' narratives more critically (Jäkel 2013). At the same time, the non-historicized engagement with the past formed a very important aspect of monastic culture in relationship to the liturgy, commemoration, and expressions of corporate identity. Essentially, these approaches placed the past of monasticism in general, as well as particular traditions and houses, into Christian models. In these, origin stories of Desert Fathers and Mothers defined the whole monastic tradition. In the histories of foundation, the present and linear narratives disappeared into perennial cycles of renewal and reform. Non-historicized past was accessible from the present of those reading foundational narratives because they contained monastic ideals and validation of the monastic form of life. The monastic origins were the source of imagery of a "desert" community and solitude, asceticism, sanctification, and overcoming difficulties and the miraculous. It has been fundamental to all processes of renewal, change, and reform in the institutional and devotional-spiritual dimensions, including observant movement (Davies 2014; More 2015; Burton 2006). The monastic rules, including the Rule of St Benedict, were central to the practice of monasticisms at every level, individually and communally. As such, they were outside time—ever present in the processes of copying, commenting, developing, and adopting (Diem 2019; Pansters 2020).

In the Christian tradition, as in Judaism, remembering the past is a religious duty. The cyclical nature of liturgy recalling Biblical events was a central form of direct connection to the past in the non-historicized form that monastic communities performed (Kubieniec 2018). Moreover, monastic communities "transcended death"—through cyclical time of liturgical commemorations, in the form of necrology notations of community members as well as patrons and benefactors (O'Donnell 2019; Jamroziak 2013). All this meant that non-historicized foundation narratives of the individual communities were a

key source of validation precisely because they were not located in the historicized past but had a continuing presence (Diem and Rapp 2020).

Whilst living tradition and non-historicized modes of engaging with the monastic past continued to be central to monastic practice in the post-medieval period too, new forms developed, driven by the structures of religious orders and their identities in the post-Trent context (Oberste 2014; Breitenstein 2019). Some of these developments were a continuation of medieval "catalogues" of saints that were, from the fourteenth century onwards, produced by many orders, monastic and mendicant, with the aim to celebrate the collective identity and harness the power of these saints against external threats. Typical examples of such collections were the works of Chrysostomus Henriquez (1595–1632) who was a Cistercian monk, vicar general of the Spanish congregation and historian of the order and cataloguer of its saints (Henriquez 1624). Another of his contemporaries, Gaspar Jongelinus (1605–1669), the abbot of Disibodenberg, doctor of theology and author of histories and descriptions of the monasteries belonging to the order, provides another example of this type of early "monastic history from within" celebrating and harnessing the past as a resource for the present (Jongelinus 1640).

Whilst the most important early modern critical editorial project of hagiography, the *Acta Sanctorum*, initiated by Jesuit Jean Bolland (1596–1665) and his successors, focused on the entire corpus of saints, rather than those belonging to a specific order, the role of Bollandists cemented the authoritative position of religious orders in research and writing about the history of monasticism. Benedictine monk Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) often celebrated as the "inventor" of diplomats as Hilfswissenschaft, produced, in cooperation with another Benedictine monk, a very extensive hagiographical collection of the lives of Benedictine saints (Mabillon 1668–1701). He was also an author of a narrative history of Benedictine communities (Mabillon 1703–1739). Whilst his work is very significant for the development of European historical methods of source criticism, he was also part of the highly intellectually productive community of the Congregation of St. Maur (Hurel 2007). All this shaped the histories of the orders (Ordensgeschichte) as the dominant mode of understanding the history of monasticism and grounded the predominance of members of religious orders as historians of their respective organizations until the mid-twentieth century (Schieffer 2016). This legacy was important for Catholic Europe and was also exported to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas (Breitenstein 2019). Whilst the monasteries in the regions under discussion here were suppressed in the sixteenth century, there were also examples of English Benedictine communities in exile in continental Europe producing texts about the past and their identity (Kelly 2020). In the context of Protestant culture in northern Europe, Catholic historiography was the "other" in the polemics, and the history of early Christianity was a particular battleground (Bauer 2021). Some of the most influential survey monographs of Cistercian and other Benedictine traditions in the post-WWII period were written by monks for whom the monastic past was also an important arena in which to argue about the present state of religious life, especially the works of David Knowles and Louis Lekai, which dominated English-language historiography for most of the twentieth century (Knowles 1948–1959; Lekai 1953; Burton 2014; Jamroziak 2017). The set of concepts associated with the defining character of the origins, especially the significance of normative documents, impacted the intensity of debates around the emergence of Cistercian order and the chronology and nature of that process (Berman 2000; Waddell 2000).

The distinct format that this inheritance gave to the history of the orders contributed to the linear narrative of monastic history, driven by institutional developments. It reinforced the importance of normative texts in historical research on the history of different orders as well as the primacy of clear institutional structures over less definable phenomena, for example heterogeneous origins. The place of the origins in the historicized form has been central to most subsequent study of the orders up to the present day. It has not remained just a key feature of "monastic history from within" but has spread outwards to shape histories produced by academic historians who would not view themselves as writing

confessional histories. This modern form of Ordensgeschichte is different from a regional (or case study) approach, which has been very popular across the twentieth century. The latter examines the specific context of monastic history—social, political, or economic—within the wider environment of regional history and other religious and secular actors. In that model, the way in which monasteries operated in their local environment became the prime focus of examination rather than their belonging to the large structures of the order and the development of the order itself. The non-confessional version of the Ordensgeschichte tends to engage with institutional perspectives and structures in the context of the wider process of the development of medieval forms of governance, processes of decision making, and record keeping. A comparison between different orders helped to further create a sense of progressive development of more complex organization, especially in terms of government and control from the reform movements of the twelfth century to the mendicant orders hundred years later (Melville 2012).

The growth of the history of monasticism away from the order-centered approach and its turn to social and cultural history methodologies across many European historiographies meant a greater interest in the heterogeneous character of monastic history. This shift has also enabled new perspectives on the cycles of reform in the monastic communities and monastic orders. Research has moved away from the paradigm of development and decline, towards the conceptualization of reform as operating within shared cultures of monasticism and mendicancy; and as non-linear and heterogeneous processes (Vanderputten 2013; Duval et al. 2018). So far, the accumulation of these new historiographical approaches has not produced a new master-narrative, but the chronological approach has been fundamentally challenged by thematic perspectives (Vanderputten 2020). Whilst "writing from within" continues, it is within very changed contexts. The academic-historical journal belonging to the OSB, OCist, and OCSO—several published by different Benedictine abbeys, *Analecta Cisterciensia*, and *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* (for a comprehensive list see: http://archive.osb.org/acad/serials.html (accessed on 1 May 2021))—are peer-reviewed with editorial boards that frequently include scholars not connected to the orders or even the Catholic church. Whilst contemporary monastic life is not a living museum and Benedictine and Cistercian communities reflect on historical-spiritual and devotional texts not as historical documents but living tradition, there is nevertheless an important and continuing dialogue between "history written from within" and "from outside". This dialogue between past and living realities is also important in the context of monastic heritage and its interpretations will be discussed in the final section.

3. Monastic Histories as Histories of the Secular Nation-State

With the development and professionalization of academic history in Europe during the nineteenth century, monastic history, like most other histories, was brought into the conceptual structures of the nation state. While members of monastic orders and lay Catholic historians continued to write histories that served confessional ends, historians writing to valorize the nation-state offered very different interpretations. Monasticism became a crucial element in narratives of modernization, secularization, and the advance of "civilization" as Christianity was carried by missionaries into northern and eastern regions. After WWII, the Cold War, and the formation of the European Union, histories continued to draw on aspects of these frameworks.

The history of monasticism spans the entirety of the European continent, running across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Yet, in the nineteenth century, all aspects of the discipline of history were being shaped by the emerging paradigm that organized the processes of historicization in the context of nation-states (Hunt 2014; Berger and Lorenz 2008). The nation-state history model placed histories of individual monastic communities into the frameworks offered by the political history of European states and their regions. This process undermined the forms to which internal histories of the orders had tended to conform. Histories of monastic houses instead had to reflect ideas about the linear development of medieval populations as predecessors of modern nations and therefore they

stressed the political functions of foundation in the consolidation of political power. This framework was well-established by the second half of the nineteenth century and lasted into the mid-twentieth century in various modified forms that reflected changed socio-political conditions. It has been much exploited in the Germanic-Slavonic fronter along the Baltic coast, with studies of monastic foundations and settlement advancing the agenda of German-speaking territorial rulers. Whilst the historical scholarship and political context changed vastly between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, what the studies by Winter and Kuhn have in common is the perception of religious foundation as primarily territorial and political enterprises (Winter 1868–1871; Kuhn 1962).

This broad tendency was sharpened by the "invention" of secularization in western Europe in the 1840s. Secularization was understood as a core element of modernity. This new conceptualization of the markers of a people's or a nation's "progress" required that "religion" be relegated into another invented category: the "medieval". Indeed, it served as the principal indication of the backwardness that preceded modernity. This strengthened the linearity of the historical narrative that located church history in premodernity (Borutta 2010). Moreover, its development in the context of the Kulturkampf against the Catholic Church and ethnic minorities in the post-1871 unified German state specifically supported such framings. Yet with the "religion" stripped out, aspects of monastic history proved useful to national narratives. Monastic institutions became a valid subject of study in the context of landholdings, economic practices, and issues of secular power, rather than a "problematic" Catholic tradition. We can see this in the case of Pomeranian abbeys, which were given the role of vectors of transmission of cultural and economic norms that were vested with German "national characteristics" and contrasted with a backwards Slavonic background (Winter 1868–1871; Jamroziak 2011). In more extreme cases, monastic foundations were even interpreted as agents of a civilizing process that was equated with the "Germanization" of the southern shores of the Baltic (Wehrmann 1905). Fundamentally, this understanding of the political and economic role of monasticism in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries was connected with the narratives of Germanic colonization of the east, including the Baltic.

In this context, the role of monastic communities in this process of the making of Europe made its way into Anglophone scholarship already in the early twentieth century. (Thompson 1920). After the Second World War, the history of monasticism in east-central Europe, including the southern shores of the Baltic, continued as a part of implicit and explicit debates about the nature of Europe and the West in the pre-modern period. The religious orders, in particular, beginning with Cistercians, were vested with an important role in the process of occidentalizing, but without an explicit nationalistic agenda. The process of occidentalization has been understood as a process of socio-cultural change rather than a political process with a linear connection to modern states. For example, Cistercians have been interpreted as a force bringing Scandinavia into the "mainstream of western Christianity" (France 1992). The political-territorial expansion of Sweden and Denmark towards Finland and Estonia in the second half of the twelfth century had Christianization-missionary dimensions, and Cistercians also played a role in it, but no longer reduced to political agents. Similarly, the German expansion towards the northern Baltic was marked by monastic foundations. Whilst the role of monastic networks in political structures continues to be emphasized in recent scholarship, it is no longer presented as a civilizing process (Krötzl 2003). The role of trans-European networks of religious orders in the transmission of ideas, information, and objects has become central in exploring their role on the "peripheries", for example, in Livonia (Strenga 2020; Tamm 2016). Because of much of the history of medieval monasticism within the Benedictine tradition, including the formation of the Cistercian order in the twelfth century focused on western Europe within the areas of post-Carolingian polities, this has been what defined the focus and norm of monastic history, whilst areas in the very north and east—including Scandinavia and the Baltic—have been examined as frontiers of Latin monasticism and thus part of the debates on practices, strategies, and connections to the surrounding society (Jamroziak and

Stöber 2013). The role of local elites wanting to be associated with the cultural capital of the new monastic foundations shifted discussion by the later twentieth century away from predominantly external political frameworks, without undermining the agency of political figures who were founders. This type of interpretation can be seen in the perspectives of the foundation of Kołbacz in 1174 by the dukes of western Pomerania from Esrum Abbey at the time of Danish influence towards the southern shores of the Baltic. It enabled further foundations along the Baltic coast because of the strength of Esrum as a mother house rather than primarily Danish political enterprise (Kłoczowski 2010). This type of interpretation helped the discussion to diverge further from the rigid understanding of the core, in the western origins of religious orders, where the "norm" was located and the periphery in east-central Europe where "divergence" occurred. It was also important for the recent ramifications of monastic history of Scandinavia as evident in the present volume. The transition towards understating what characterizes each monastic phenomenon as a sum of differing practices without assigning them value-status is paralleled by similar shifts in current approaches to mendicant orders and particular interpretation of divergent practices within observant movements (Jamroziak 2020; Romhányi 2018).

It is important to understand that throughout the period under discussion, monastic histories produced within nationalist narratives of civilization and secularization both drew on and were integrated into confessional histories. This is exemplified by the multiple "national" Reformation paradigms entangled with the different confessional versions. The German, English, or Czech narratives of Reformation relied on creating genealogies of "proto-Reformations" that required borrowings from other "nationalized" stories of proto-Protestant figures but re-telling them within a different national and linguistic framework (Corbellini and Steckel 2019). Northern-European Protestant perspectives in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century needed to accommodate within the narratives of its medieval history the seemingly alien church history including monastic history that was not part of the genealogy of Protestant narratives. Whilst marginalization of Catholic perspectives lasted in the Protestant-majority countries of northern Europe into the mid-twentieth century, there were different strategies in which the history of monasticism could be accommodated and made part of the core narrative (Kennedy 2008). The most frequent strategy of accommodation has been through examining monasteries as landholders, through charter evidence. and other types of legal documents that survived in disproportionally larger quantities than manuscripts and incunabula connected to liturgy and devotional life. A monastery as a landowner, agent, or tool of territorial and political control can be examined with little reference to its religious functions. This is exemplified by the early twentieth-century German-language scholarship on monastic houses in Pomerania (Hoogeweg 1916, 1924–1925).

These approaches were also bound with the interpretation of monasteries as playing an early "civilizing" role, before secularizing forces took over that role and left monasticism in the medieval past. This was expressed by Max Weber, who laid the foundation of this interpretation and placed medieval monasticism as a precursor of the "modern" rationality of capitalism. He described its progressive development as a chain from the rule of St Benedict to Cluny and then Cistercian and finally post-medieval Jesuits (Weber 1920), the "rationality" of monastic organizations prefiguring Puritan foundations of capitalism and protestant culture. By making western monasticism an element in the progressive chain leading to the protestant world of superior culture, medieval Latin monasticism was "rescued" from the contemporary Catholicism of Weber's time. This was also deeply Eurocentric. The Cistercian practice was contrasted by Weber with the "oriental" asceticism that was irrational and lacked organizational framework (Asad 1993). It is important to stress that Weber, unlike many later historians who applied his model, were not looking for rationality and design in a narrowly economic sense.

The 1960s and 1970s produced an approach to medieval monasticism, especially Cistercian history, that could be described, without any exaggeration as "monasticism without religion". It built, sometimes without acknowledgment, on Weber's ideas of rationality

and routinization of charisma. These works focused particularly on Cistercian economic history and even business history and some attempted to model it rather than simply provide a description and analysis of the available evidence. At the center of these studies is the idea that Cistercians represented a conscious program of rational economic choices aimed at maximizing profit. These approaches assumed that Cistercian uniformity of practice applied not to the liturgy and observance—belonging to the problematic religious sphere—but meant uniformity of the monastic organization in terms of economic design: the self-contained farms, cost-effective workforce of the lay brothers, and high quality surplus destined for the open market generating cash income. At the core, there was the assumption that standardization was a key contributing factor in the white monks' economic success. The normative regulations of the order were seen as a cause behind the developing aggressive economic behavior aimed at relentless growth and expansion. In this way, Cistercians become something of forerunners of capitalism (Madden 1963; Roehl 1969; Wollenberg 1984). These studies were primarily focused on Cistercian monasteries in the core areas of western Europe, but more holistic approaches that nevertheless placed monastic economy at the center of investigations have been developed in relation to the so-called *Germania Slavica* (a territory between Elba and Oder encompassing the entire southern coast of the Baltic from Lübeck to western Pomerania (Brather and Kratzke 2005). The economic activities of Cistercians in Pomerania and regions south of it, examined by Schich, were, in his interpretation, a very important facet of shaping the landscape, human environment, and society with a complex ethnic and linguistic make-up. Monastic houses were both active agents of change, but also important elements of economic networks (Schich 2016; Schich 1998).

In terms of creating an endpoint to monasticism in the regions under discussion, both the narratives of secularization and overtly Protestant perspectives were vested in presenting late medieval monasticism as corrupt (Heale 2009). The termination of monastic life in Scandinavia, the British Isles, and in German speaking territories along the North Sea and Baltic shore in the Reformation of the sixteenth century created a perfect teleological end point to a narrative of ultimately a failing form of religious practice. The secularized and dissolved monasteries were passive objects in the hands of secular agents. One of the most significant shifts in the writing of monastic history after the middle of the twentieth century was the challenge to these interpretations, both in terms of the nature of early sixteenth-century monasticism as well as processes of secularization and dissolution. In recent decades, they have been systematically deconstructed, both regionally and nationally, and build on the new approaches to the long fifteenth century too (Steckel 2019; Bertson 2003; Jürgensmeier and Schwerdtfeger 2005; Willmott 2020). In many respects, much of the work of monastic historians in the twenty-first century has been to free the field from these entangled paradigms and consider the past with fresh eyes.

4. Archaeology and Material Culture and Processes of Musealization

The wider field of monastic studies encompasses not only history, but also archaeology. Throughout the period under discussion, scholarly engagement with the material remains of monasteries in the regions under discussion shaped not just historical interpretations but also processes of musealization and public interpretation of the monastic sites. The importance of archaeology for new interpretations of history of individual abbeys cannot be overstated, whilst the development of new techniques within archaeological sciences opened up a new avenue of research into the human experience of monastic life especially diet, health, illness, and gender. New archaeological approaches allowed exploration of the relationship of monastic structures to the surrounding environment as well as the dynamics of change within the built environment of monastic precincts and the wider landscape (Kristjánsdóttir 2021; Wrathmell 2018; Stocker and Everson 2011; Keevill et al. 2001; Gilchrist 1994). Another aspect of monastic material culture—the interior decorations, devotional objects, and furnishings—survived in extremely diminished quantities from the regions under investigation, and this has remained a relatively small field of

research in comparison to documentary studies. However, in recent decades there have been important shifts in methodology and interdisciplinarity within archaeology, art history, and history that enabled late medieval monastic devotional culture to be explored in the context of ritualism, spirituality, and materiality especially in the 1300–1500 timeframe (Walker Bynum 2016; Luxford 2005). A very important manifestation of these new approaches is studies of late medieval Cistercian devotional materiality in North Sea-Baltic areas and northern England (Laabs 2000; Carter 2019).

Because of the suppression and dissolution of monastic houses in northern Europe, what constitutes surviving structures are mostly ruins or reused buildings with completely different functions. The processes of musealization began already in the nineteenth century with celebrations of romantic ruins in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (Eldena) or William Turner (Kirkstall Abbey). In England, placing the majority of monastic ruins into the care of the state in the first decades of the twentieth century created a very distinct appearance of monastic ruins as places to visit and experience. The process of "clearing" the sites to be accessible and visually attractive obliterated a huge amount of archaeological evidence but also exposed the ground plans of claustral ranges. This is often credited with the stimulation of research on Cistercian ground-plans in England (Thurley 2013). In the regions discussed in this article, several former monastic sites also became museums in which remaining buildings or parts of buildings provide exhibition spaces for the interpretation of monastic life, for example Esrum Abbey https://www.esrum.dk/en/ (accessed on 1 May 2021). This shows how in the second half of the twentieth century, the place of monastic history as somehow alien to the predominantly Protestant narratives of national past lost its significance and the former monastic site became much more integrated in the public presentation of history.

Another peculiarity of heritage creation has been introduced by the fact that in northern German, Denmark, and Sweden, many post-monastic churches became Protestant parish churches that now combine religious function with interpretation of medieval monastic history and its architectural heritage, for example Doberan https://www.muenster-doberan.de/index.php/de/ or Vreta https://www.vretaklosterforening.se/ (accessed on 1 May 2021). The heritage element in the presentation of these buildings remains secondary to their protestant cult functions, but explicit acknowledgment of medieval monastic past of these buildings is a visual equivalent of accommodating divergent confessional narratives. It is even more complex on the southern coast of the Baltic, where a formerly Protestant parish church in the chancel of the former monastic church in Kołbacz became a Catholic parish church in the process of Polonization after 1945 within the new political borders http://www.parafiawkolbaczu.com/opactwo-w-kolbaczu/ (accessed on 1 May 2021). In this case, the binary of Catholic (medieval) and Protestant (post-medieval) intersects with national narratives of Catholic (Polish) and Protestant (German), which does not clearly map onto the past or more recent historiographical constructs of medieval history of Kołbacz (Jamroziak 2011).

Public presentations of monastic heritage can be ambivalent for the living monastic institutions, who frequently resent attempts to musealize their lived experience. At the same time, historic monastic heritage can be seen as irrelevant and marginal in the deeply secularized contemporary context. In recent years, several transnational initiatives provided further impulse to the heritization of monastic sites held in mostly secular ownership (Coomans 2013). The *Charte européenne des Abbayes et Sites Cisterciens* https://www.cister.net (accessed on 1 May 2021) is an association of owners of post-monastic sites, including six in Sweden, two in Denmark, two in the Polish southern Baltic coast, and two in Mecklenburg. Whilst the network is an important vehicle for the practical concern of the care of historic buildings and their substance, it is also a forum that brings together different forms of attachment to monastic heritage as a part of local history, local identity in different European societies, and practical legal and economic frameworks. Two itineraries in the collection of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe focus on monastic sites: Clumiac sites of Europe https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-cluniac-sites-in-europe

(established in 2005) (accessed on 1 May 2021) and the European Route of Cistercian Abbeys https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-european-route-of-cistercian-abbeys (founded in 2010) (accessed on 1 May 2021). The design of these routes has no connection to location of medieval monastic networks, but nevertheless make a link to the connectiveness of medieval monastic institutions across political and linguistic boundaries, as a cultural and political statement about the shared heritage of Europe present in medieval monasteries is yet another dimension of possible public history. This type of initiative is also intended to boost tourism and has a further impact on the interpretation of sites and popular publications devoted to specific regions (Thomsen and Madsen 2019; Kaczyńska and Kaczyński 2010). Finally, a complex relationship between monastic heritage and new monastic foundations is exemplified by a recent foundation in northern Norway https://www.tautra.org/ (accessed on 1 May 2021). The foundation of the new Tautra Abbey, as a nunnery of the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance in 1999, near the side of the medieval Cistercian Abbey, is not a continuation of medieval monastic life, but one that builds its identity on the concept of monastic origins, spirituality developed in the twelfth century, and active dialogue with tradition in its observance. Architecturally, the new Tautra Abbey is strikingly modern and integrated into the landscape, it is not a neo-Gothic edifice, yet it is a continuation of a historically developed tradition of monastic life.

5. Conclusions

The historiography of monasticism in northern Europe has been shaped by the tradition of the history of monasticism within the paradigm of religious orders that was ultimately the product of "history from within", the history of monastic institutions written by members of these institutions and reflecting tensions between living tradition and historicized presentations of the monastic past. The greatest impact in the development of the historiography of northern European monasticism has been the development of a national history framework that not only pushed aside the Ordensgeschichte model, but also placed the history of individual monasteries and networks within the dominant structure of the development of political structure, linear development of the state, power, and control narratives. The nation-state history was also closely connected with a confessional perspective—in the context of the regions under discussion in this volume—it was a dominant Protestant current until the mid-twentieth century. Recent approaches to monastic material culture that greatly benefit from interdisciplinary possibilities, but also the reflection on the contemporary process of *heritagization of medieval monasticism, are important for building new models of interpretation.*

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