

THE LIFE OF BLESSED
BERNARD OF TIRON



GEOFFREY GROSSUS

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BERNARD OF TIRON



Translated with an introduction and notes by

RUTH HARWOOD CLINE

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*To my youngest grandchildren:
Joseph William Francis, Annemarie Rose Thérèse,
and Geoffrey Nathanael John le Grelle*



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Introduction



Bernard of Tiron (ca. 1046–1116) and Robert of Arbrissel (ca. 1045–1116), founder of Fontevraud (1101), were among the most influential monastic reformers of their time, but Bernard has drawn less scholarly attention. Bernard of Tiron, founder of Tiron Abbey (1107) (diocese of Chartres, 12.8 kilometers, or 7.7 miles, east of Nogent-le-Rotrou in Perche) and of distant priories in Beaujolais and the British Isles, remains largely unknown even to historians of Western monasticism. Bernard’s life as a monk was both typical and exceptional. He was a scholar of Scripture and trained in canon law, but also skilled in woodworking and ironwork and engaged in trade. A charismatic leader, a renegade, a sympathetic confessor, a healer, and a visionary, he was strongly supported by Henry I, king of England, and his extensive noble kinship group, and was once venerated throughout modern France.¹ He strictly observed the *Rule of Saint Benedict*² as a prior and abbot, but during unauthorized absences from the cloister he was also a hermit and traveling preacher who was embroiled in numerous conflicts

1. Andreas of Fontevraud, *Vita Altera* of Robert of Arbrissel, 15, *Acta Sanctorum* (hereafter AASS), Feb. 3: 0611A, describes “Abbot Bernard, of worthy memory of all good persons, praised continuously today [before 1120] by all the religious establishments of Gaul.” “*Abbas Bernardus bonorum omnium memoria dignus, cuius laus usque hodie per omnes Galliae Ecclesias.*” (Hereafter AASS citations, and the Latin text of the *vita*, are from the Acta Sanctorum Database 1999–2006 ProQuest Information and Learning Company.)

2. Benedict of Monte Cassino, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981) (hereafter *RB*).

related to the religious reform movements of the late eleventh century. After his death, Tiron Abbey became the mother house of a monastic order consisting of eight abbeys in France, four in Scotland, one in Wales, and more than one hundred priories. The congregation of Tiron survived almost seven centuries, until the French Revolution, and has since passed into obscurity.³

The *Vita*

The *Vita B. Bernardi Tironiensis* was commissioned by, and in turn dedicated to, Geoffrey II of Lèves, bishop of Chartres, who had known Bernard at least since 1114 and may have intended to promote his canonization in Rome. The author of the *vita*, Geoffrey Grossus,⁴ far from being “least of all monks,” as he modestly wrote, perhaps served as Tiron’s chancellor.⁵ The *vita*, written around 1147, is known today through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies of a late thirteenth-century version.⁶ Jean-Baptiste Souchet, a canon of the cathedral of Chartres, first printed an annotated edition in 1649.⁷ In 1675, the Bollandist

3. Ruth Harwood Cline, “The Congregation of Tiron in the Twelfth Century: Foundation and Expansion” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2000), 520. The evidence is available in this doctoral dissertation and will be presented in greater detail in a forthcoming monograph.

4. See Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 300–303. The Grossi were the lords of Uxelles and also lords of Brancion, a family that had two brothers who were successively claustral priors at Cluny. Since Bouchard found no connection between Geoffrey and Walter Grossus, monks of Tiron, and this Burgundian family, whether Grossus is a family name or a nickname meaning “big” or “fat” is uncertain.

5. Lucien Merlet, ed., *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de la Sainte-Trinité de Tiron* (Chartres: Imprimerie Garnier, 1883), 1:99, no. 79.

6. Geoffrey’s autograph manuscript was copied by Jean Pignore de Vallea at the order of John of Chartres, abbot of Tiron (1290–1297). Additional handwritten copies were made of this thirteenth-century copy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when they were combined with other literature about Bernard of Tiron: the Synopsis, Sermon, and Prayer. See Bernard Beck, *Saint-Bernard de Tiron, l'ermite, le moine et le monde* (Cormelles-le-Royal: La Mandragore, 1998), 35–39. Two surviving manuscripts are Paris: BNF Fonds Latin 13788, ca. 1630, and Rome: Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. 526, fols. 1–86, dated 1656.

7. Geoffroy le Gros, *B. Bernardi, fundatoris et primi abbatiss SS Trinitatis de*

Geoffrey Henskens reprinted it in a new format with notes in *Acta Sanctorum*, and in 1854 Jacques-Paul Migne published the *vita* in *Patrologia Latina*.⁸

In a flowery prologue, Geoffrey described his sources. He explained that he was writing up his eyewitness notes on the founder of Tiron and incorporating other material from reliable correspondents. Although the *vita* is written in the first person, the inconsistencies, including in names, suggest a tendency on Geoffrey's part to incorporate materials without substantive change. The sources incorporated may have included a member of the hermit community headed by Vital of Savigny and a provider of inaccurate material concerning Bernard's years at Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers and its daughter abbey of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe.⁹ The *vita* contains extensive borrowings from St. Jerome's epitaph letter praising St. Paula (d. 404) and mourning her death,¹⁰ with Bernard's name substituted for that of the Roman widow and mother. Difficulties in dating some of this fragmented information are in part due to the fact that Geoffrey organized the entire *vita* in a classical pedimental composition, a harmonious literary arrangement.¹¹ The double episodes are most apparent at the cen-

Tironio Vita, ed. Jean-Baptiste Souchet (Paris: Billaine, 1649, 1680), 35, n. 1, and 473.

8. Geoffrey Grossus, *Vita beati Bernardi Tironiensis auctore Gaufrido Grosso*, eds. Godefroy Henskens and Daniel Papebroch, AASS, Apr. 2 (Antwerp: Joannem Mevrsium, 1643, 1675), 0222C–0255A. Grossus, *Vita beati Bernardi Fundatoris Congregationis de Tironio in Gallia auctore Gaufrido Grosso*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, in *Patrologia Latina* 172 (Paris: Garnier, 1854), 1362–1446D. (Hereafter PL; citations are from the Patrologia Latina Database 1996–2007 ProQuest Information and Learning Company.)

9. For inaccuracies in the early years, see the notes to the text.

10. Jerome, "Ad Eustochium Virginem Epitaphium Paulae Matris," in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae, Pars II, Epistulae LXXI–CXX*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (hereafter CSEL), vol. 55 (Vienna: 1996), 306–51, no. 108.

11. Chiasmus is an ancient rhetorical device defined in the Random House Unabridged Dictionary as "a reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases"; (§11): "an opponent of injustice and of justice a proponent." Similar parallelism of events leading up to and away from the central event is present in pedimental composition. See Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles, An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), xii–xiv, who credits John L. Myres for the term, in *Herodotus, Father of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

ter of the structure, where a single journey to Rome is described as two trips. While esthetically pleasing, this structure causes difficulties in dating some of this fragmented information.

Bernard's birth

Schooling

Monastic life

Hermit life (Saint-Médard)

Chausey Island, pirates

Return to monastic life

Abbot (Saint-Cyprien)

Preaching (Normandy)

Trip to Rome

Private audience with Pope Paschal II

Trip to Rome

Address to curia

Abbot (Saint-Cyprien)

Departure from monastic life

Chausey Island, pirates

Hermit life (Chennedet)

Tiron Abbey founded

School at Tiron

Bernard's death

Whether or not Bishop Geoffrey II requested Bernard's *vita* as part of a canonization process, Geoffrey Grossus presented Bernard as destined for sainthood. According to Geoffrey, Bernard was a soldier and imitator of Christ. He was a bloodless martyr by virtue of his chastity, abstinence, and generosity. As an abbot, he was a worthy successor of St. Benedict of Monte Cassino and St. Benedict of Aniane by both the example of his life and his strict observance of the *Rule*. His spirituality, healings, efficacious prayers, prophetic spirit, and visions were remarkable and more than compensated for the relatively few miracles attributed to him.¹²

12. Cline, "Congregation of Tiron," 221–77.

Although this remarkable *vita* is frequently used as a primary source, its historical accuracy should not be accepted unquestioningly. The *vita* is inaccurate in important ways, particularly with regard to material for Poitiers. While the *vita* states that Bernard professed as a monk at Saint-Cyprien, as shown in the chronology c. 1073, his earliest spiritual mentors, Hildebert and Garnier, from Montmorillon near Poitiers, were monks of Chaise-Dieu.¹³ Thus Bernard may have professed as a monk at Chaise-Dieu and accompanied Renaud to Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers in 1073. Although an unnamed abbot of Saint-Savin was convicted of simony in 1080 and fled,¹⁴ as indicated in the chronology, the *vita*'s assertion that he was Gervais is doubtful, for Gervais was prior of Saint-Cyprien as late as 1081. Gervais witnessed local charters as abbot of Saint-Savin from 1082 until his departure for the Holy Land after 1095, disproving the *vita*'s description of his abandonment of the abbey to Bernard, the claustral prior.¹⁵ The description of the Council of Poitiers is borrowed from the Chronicle of Hugh of Flavigny (c. 1103) and William of Malmesbury's (d. 1143) *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (1120), and Bernard is given the role actually played by the papal legates. The *vita*'s claim that the pope restored Bernard as abbot of Saint-Cyprien is disproved by an abbey charter.¹⁶ Saint-Cyprien recovered its independence at a later date, but the abbot was not Bernard.¹⁷ In contrast, the *vita*'s de-

13. Robert Favreau et al., *Saint-Savin, l'Abbaye et ses Peintures Murales* (Poitiers: Connaissance et promotion du patrimoine de Poitou-Charentes, 1999), 17, n. 60. The only source placing them at Saint-Cyprien is the *vita* itself.

14. *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. Michel-Jean-Joseph Brial, new edition (Paris: Palmé, 1877), 14:670–71. Letter from Amatus of Oloron, papal legate, directing Ralph, archbishop of Tours, who had just convened the Council of Bordeaux in October 1080, to take the abbot captive and return him with the stolen property to the bishop of Poitiers.

15. Favreau, *Saint-Savin*, 16–17.

16. The abbey's cartulary states that Bernard pled his case in Rome without results, returned, and soon departed for the wilderness (Louis Rédet, ed., *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Cyprien de Poitiers*, Archives Historiques du Poitou [Poitiers: Oudin, 1874], 3: 46, no. 43).

17. As early as 1004, Abbo, abbot of Fleury, wrote to Odilon, abbot of Cluny, regarding Cluny's oversight of Saint-Cyprien (PL, 139, 0438C–049B). Stephen IX

scription of the foundation and expansion of Tiron with support from many benefactors is corroborated by the cartulary of Tiron and the correspondence of Ivo, bishop of Chartres.

In addition to inaccuracies, the *vita* also has important inconsistencies and omissions. Geoffrey both vilified William, duke of Aquitaine, as “the enemy of all decency and holiness” (§48) and praised him as a benefactor (§98). Although Geoffrey devoted one chapter to Bernard’s prayerful battle with the Devil for the souls of the merchants and pirates and two chapters to Bernard’s pious death, he played down important events, such as Bernard’s meeting with Henry I, in order to focus on Bernard’s holiness. Geoffrey also omitted information about Bernard contained in two contemporary saints’ lives: his travels with Robert of Arbrissel shortly before their deaths and the miraculous release of the crusader St. Adjutor through Bernard’s posthumous intercession.¹⁸ The *vita*’s combination of realistic description and echoes of earlier saints’ lives makes it a skillfully presented hagiography of an abbot who deserved canonization because of his spiritual gifts and holy life. Nonetheless, absolute truthfulness and completeness were not necessarily standards for hagiography, an inspirational rather than historical genre, and the *vita* must be cited selectively as a primary source.

Monastic Reform

The foundation of Tiron Abbey by Bernard of Abbeville was part of wider movements of monastic reform in Europe in the

and Gregory VII referred vaguely to such a right in 1058 and 1075 (*Bullarium Cluniacense*, 16.1, 19.1). Pascal II listed Saint-Cyprien as an abbey subject to Cluny on November 20, 1100 (*Bullarium Cluniacense* 32.2). Dietrich W. Poeck, *Cluniacensis Ecclesia, Der cluniacensische Klosterverband (10.–12. Jahrhundert)*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, vol. 71 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1998), 91, notes that the papal privilege issued by Honorius II (1124–1130) on April 2, 1125, (*Bullarium Cluniacense* 42), is the last Cluniac claim to authority over Saint-Cyprien. The abbey regained its liberty, but the abbot was not Bernard of Tiron.

18. Hugh of Amiens, archbishop of Rouen, *Vita Sancti Adjutoris, Monachi Tironensis* (AASS Apr. 3: o823F–o825D).

eleventh and twelfth centuries. The form of monasticism established by St. Benedict of Monte Cassino (c. 480–550) had been prevalent since Carolingian times. The Benedictine *Rule* provides for a balance of manual labor and religious offices. The wealthy and celebrated abbey of Cluny, founded in 910 near Mâcon, was the embodiment of institutionalized Benedictine monasticism. Its customs were widely admired and adopted, and through new foundations and annexations of existing foundations through papal bulls, particularly between 1049 and 1109, it provided spiritual leadership for a large network of European abbeys and priories.¹⁹ At Cluny the liturgy of prayer and masses was expanded at the expense of manual labor, in the belief that the prayers and masses of a community of pious monks could atone for the sins of the living and the dead and would afford protection against evil powers.²⁰ The “lordly grandeur and liturgical splendor” of “life at Cluny”²¹ was a generous interpretation of the *Rule* and attracted wealthy patrons, but it engendered a reaction toward austerity and reform. A new type of monk, the hermit (eremite), attacked the wealth of established monasticism and advocated a stricter interpretation of the *Rule*. This reaction between 1050 and 1150, sometimes termed the “Crisis of Cenobitism,”²² actually led to the foundation of new Benedictine monasteries. This movement toward a more primitive and austere monastic life as a

19. Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1150)*, trans. Graham Robert Edwards (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 28–29 and 55–57, describes Hugh of Semur’s abbacy (1049–1109) as a period of expansion and institutionalization of jurisdiction through papal bulls and charters over religious foundations that were members of an informal network known as the *Ecclesia cluniacensis*.

20. C. H. Lawrence discusses the role of assumptions such as that reparation for sin could be made not only by the penance and good works of the sinner but also by the vicarious merit of others, in *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3d ed. (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 69.

21. Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion*, 30.

22. John van Engen, “The ‘Crisis of Cenobitism’ Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050–1150,” *Speculum* 61 (1986): 269–304.

way to personal salvation, which traced its origins to the lives of the apostles and the desert fathers, emphasized abandonment of material goods and worldly position, trust in Divine Providence, strictest abstinence, continual prayer, contemplation, and withdrawal from the world.²³

During this period, a number of important reformed monastic and eremitical foundations were established and flourished, among them Vallombrosa (founded eleventh century), Chaise-Dieu (ca. 1050), La Grande Chartreuse (1084), Cîteaux (1098), Fontevraud (1101), Tiron (1108), and Savigny (1112). These reformed monastic foundations placed greater emphasis on manual labor and a simpler liturgy. Often they allowed certain monks to live in seclusion as hermits, and eremitical houses had some hermits living in company with one another, solitary in the sense that as a group they were living apart from secular society.²⁴ At the same time, the papacy authorized some of the monks to preach because of their holiness of life and willingness to travel. Hermits, who sometimes lived by selling their crafts and were often on the move, also had more local interaction than cloistered monks. While some hermits remained individual, wandering ascetics, others settled down and established stable communities for themselves and their disciples, clearing wastelands and relying on patrons for support.²⁵ Older monasteries were sometimes hostile toward the new reformed or eremitical houses, but pious laymen who wished to endow religious houses began to support the new austere monasticism.

Bernard of Tiron and His Abbey

Bernard of Tiron fit the profile of a hermit founding a community. As a hermit, he supported himself by woodworking and ironwork, wore rags, and became an itinerant preacher. His first

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

24. *Ibid.*, 19.

25. *Ibid.*, 40.

foundation at Thiron-Brunelles was in a wilderness on land donated by the pious count of Perche. His disciples cleared this wasteland and supported themselves by farming and by selling their crafts. The hostility of the older Cluniac monastery of Saint-Denis of Nogent-le-Rotrou drove him out of the parish to contiguous Thiron-Gardais and gave rise to property disputes. Because his foundation was in a strategic border region, Bernard had to deal with donors who were powerful secular leaders.

Tiron Abbey was founded in Blois near the borders of Normandy and Anjou, with donors on all sides of this troubled region. Bernard was fairly successful in his dealings with the leaders of these power centers. He met Henry I, king of England, and Louis VI, king of France, to obtain royal support for his monastery. He interacted with the local rulers: Adela, countess of Blois and Chartres; Rotrou II, count of Perche; Ralph, count of Fougères; and William IX, duke of Aquitaine. He appeared before Pope Paschal II and the papal curia. He knew the great local bishops: Ivo and Geoffrey of Chartres, Peter II of Poitiers, and Hildebert of Le Mans. He served as prior under the celebrated Abbot Renaud and Abbot Gervais. He disputed the claims of the powerful Abbot Hugh of Cluny to appoint the abbot of Saint-Cyprien and exercise oversight as an archabbot. He enjoyed some successes and suffered a few resounding defeats. Bernard could be confrontational, but he usually walked the corridors of power with humility, often in a hermit's rags.

In its descriptions of Bernard's sojourns in modern western France, the *vita* portrays an era of warfare, banditry, and piracy. Leaders were often corrupt, adulterous, violent, and cruel.²⁶

26. Thomas N. Bisson, "Hallucinations of Power: Climates of Fright in the Early Twelfth Century," the Hollister Lecture, delivered on November 5, 2004, at the Twenty-third International Conference of the Charles Homer Haskins Society, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. Bisson describes the "climates of fright" in five texts written 1090–1130, reflecting the "self-aggrandizing bad lordship" and recourse to "armed power and violence" by aggressive men in search of nobility, throughout twelfth-century Europe and particularly in Normandy after the death of William the Conqueror.

Robert of Bellême was notoriously sadistic; William IX, duke of Aquitaine, was notoriously lecherous; and there were many others whose crimes made Bernard weep when he served as confessor. Implementing the monastic reform movement was difficult when certain lay rulers violently asserted their own authority to counter religious authority, imprisoning bishops and unleashing mobs to disband church councils.²⁷ Tensions ran high as religious and secular leaders defined their spheres of influence. Even in the cloister, reforming priors endured invective from recalcitrant monks. Abbots purchased their offices and defied the new rules against owning profitable churches. The papacy subordinated independent monasteries that were not decadent to Cluny. The *vita* enables the modern reader to experience the diverse realities of the reform.

The *vita* also portrays an era of natural disasters and serious illness. During the years of famine, Tiron endured great poverty and became a refugee camp and soup kitchen. Those who were desperate for food and shelter were not only the usual vagrant, maimed, and handicapped persons but also people who were ordinarily employed and protected: families, wards and orphans, and local craftsmen. Communities of monks were decimated by sudden fatal illnesses that resembled epidemics. Cîteaux, an austere monastery founded in 1098 in Burgundy near Dijon by St. Robert of Molesme, nearly failed during the famine. It was rescued by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (ca. 1090–1153), who joined the monastery along with thirty friends and relatives (1112–1113),

27. In 1092 Philip I imprisoned Ivo, bishop of Chartres (1090–1115), for refusing to accept his repudiation of his wife and the legitimacy of his second union. In 1100 William IX, duke of Aquitaine, unleashed a violent mob to prevent the papal legates in a church council from excommunicating the French king. In 1112, when Hildebert, bishop of Le Mans and papal legate, delivered the imprisoned Rotrou's directive to his mother, she took the bishop hostage. In 1113 the duke of Aquitaine imprisoned Peter II, bishop of Poitiers, for excommunicating him because of his adulterous liaison. In 1116, when the canons of Chartres elected Geoffrey II of Lèves as Bishop Ivo's successor without consulting their secular overlord, Thibaut, count of Blois and Chartres, ransacked the canons' residences and drove Geoffrey out of town.

and expanded rapidly.²⁸ Bernard of Tiron himself probably died from ergot poisoning and/or erysipelas, diseases both known as St. Anthony's Fire.²⁹ Malnutrition and disease made sudden death at any age a realistic expectation in such hard times, heightening concern about the afterlife.

As a reformer, Bernard was deeply concerned about salvation, which he believed was available to all, but granted to few. Bernard's spiritual world was a vivid place. Heaven and Hell were so real that he could describe their delights and torments. He talked with God, saw the Virgin Mary, and struggled with the Devil, whose minions, demons, and phantoms were visible to him. For Bernard, living one's life in a monastery or hermitage, emulating Christ in poverty and humility, was the surest way to achieve salvation. As prior, he disciplined monks who sought security without observing their vows or the rules of the order. He threatened constantly that disobedient monks would die suddenly and go straight to Hell. He preached constantly about personal salvation.

Another of Bernard's concerns was clerical celibacy, which he courageously preached to the hostile clergy of Normandy. He did not, however, buttress his arguments with antifeminism. He

28. Constance Hoffman Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe*, The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 6.

29. Ergot poisoning would account for Bernard's preliminary symptoms, collapse resulting from a convulsion, severe illness and loss of appetite, and burning pain. But the evidence points to erysipelas, a group A streptococcal infection of the skin accompanied by fever. The bacteria are transmissible by skin contact and can cause scarlet fever and streptococcal pneumonia. Thus Bernard's physicians isolated him in a small house, not the infirmary, and recommended deep warm baths, which he rejected as a luxury. The death of the young nun a few days after Bernard's death suggests that she contracted a fatal streptococcal infection upon her entry into Tiron Abbey, perhaps from exposure to Bernard during her clothing (§118). According to John Symington, M.D., a specialist in infectious diseases in Washington, D.C., streptococcal pneumonia would have killed a healthy young woman far more swiftly than ergot poisoning. See John Walton et al., eds., *The Oxford Companion to Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1:360; and Carol Hart, "Forged in St. Anthony's Fire: Drugs for Migraine," *Modern Drug Discovery* 2, no. 2 (1999): 20–21, 23–24, 28, 31.

was an early participant in the increasing cult of the Virgin Mary in the twelfth century, by instituting a daily mass in her honor at his abbey. His veneration of the Mother of God extended to showing respect for women. When he met an attractive lady during his travels, he kept his vows by averting his eyes. At Tiron he was helpful to women, from his overlord, Adela, countess of Blois and Chartres, to his local friend Mary of Nogent-le-Rotrou, who endeared herself to him by her good works. During the famine of 1109–1111 he sheltered whole families, including nursing mothers. On his deathbed, he tried to establish a nunnery. The *vita* emphasizes that women of every condition, including matrons and anchorites, flocked to his funeral. Geoffrey's multiple citations from St. Jerome attributing Paula's abbatial qualities to Bernard are consistent with mid-twelfth-century portrayals in Cistercian literature of Jesus and abbots as nurturing mothers.³⁰

Yet Bernard emulated the fathers of the Church in his cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice, as well as in his virtues of zeal, faith, chastity, obedience, perseverance, resistance to demonic temptation, and avoidance of the sin of spiritual sloth. His many spiritual gifts included tears, healing, and prophecy. He was noted for his hospitality, especially to the poor, and was especially successful in obtaining the release of prisoners in fetters. He was venerated for his holiness, dedication, simplicity of life, and work with the poor. At his death, he had no more to leave his impoverished abbey than his body and his promise to plead a case for his monks' prosperity in the heavenly court.

30. Ruth Harwood Cline, "*Mutatis Mutandis*: Literary Borrowing in the *Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron* by Geoffrey Grossus." Paper delivered on November 4, 2007, at the 26th International Conference of the Charles Homer Haskins Society, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Bernard's Legacy and the Congregation of Tiron

Nonetheless Bernard left a greater legacy in his foresightedness. The *vita* indicates that Bernard made some exceptional decisions about the administrative structure of Tiron. One was to admit artisans and encourage them to produce goods for sale. Another was to place his monastery under the protection of another religious group, the cathedral canons of Chartres, instead of a secular overlord, so that Tiron was protected and affected by the decisions of a corporate religious body. Another decision, made on his deathbed, was to include the lay workers, *illiterati* in the sense that they could not read or understand Latin, in the monastic offices and chapter meetings, so that they appear as witnesses to charters alongside the monks. Bernard was not contemptuous of persons of lower status, and Tiron benefited from the stability afforded by corporate decision making.

Moreover, Bernard's personality left its stamp on the order. Bernard was well educated; Tiron ran a school. Bernard was a trained woodworker and ironsmith; Tiron had craftsmen and workrooms. Bernard encouraged trade as a means of survival; the congregation of Tiron developed along trade routes. Bernard knew many local rulers from his extensive travels who established Tironian priories in Beaujolais, on the Southampton Water, and in Scotland and Wales. Bernard was friendly to women: after his death, Tiron Abbey built houses so that lay women could reside within its walls under the care and protection of the monks. They included Beatrix, countess of Perche, and her daughter Juliana, who were the regents of Perche when Rotrou II was abroad. Tiron Abbey was poor but reformed and structured for growth.

Bernard was succeeded by Hugh, an interim abbot, and by Ralph, abbot of Selkirk, who soon died. William of Poitiers, Ralph's successor at Selkirk, was then recalled to Tiron as abbot. Abbot William (1119–ca. 1160), “a learned and quite religious man,” was an excellent administrator with no record of

public life.³¹ During his tenure Tiron engaged in practices attributed to the Cistercians but not copied from Cîteaux: a centralized administrative structure that evolved into annual general chapters to enforce discipline; landholdings in granges run by a few monks, to avoid economic dependence on the labor of peasants and to improve agricultural efficiency; and entrepreneurship based on international trade that brought much wealth to the abbey. During William's tenure, Tiron established abbeys and priories along the north-south trade routes from Chartres to the navigable Seine and Loire rivers, and along the English Channel from Saint Dogmael, Wales, to Caldey Island, the Isle of Wight, and the Southampton Water.³² Geoffrey's description of Tiron's one hundred priories in §100 is supported by a papal bull and accurately reflects the expansion of the congregation.

Tiron extended reformed Benedictine monasticism to the British Isles ca. 1114, preceding Cîteaux by fifteen years.³³ When Henry I placed the Welsh church under the authority of the archbishop of Canterbury, he confirmed Tiron's authority over its "priory of Wales" founded by gifts of property from Robert FitzMartin, which was elevated to the abbey of Saint Dogmael in Pembroke.³⁴ Abbot William obtained Henry I's confirmations of FitzMartin's gifts for the priory around 1119.³⁵ Another charter dated 1120 (but more likely from the mid-twelfth century) that recounts events at Saint Dogmael's describes a centralized system

31. Robert of Torigni, *Tractatus de immutatione ordinis monachorum* (PL 202:1312A–C and *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, 14:382).

32. Cline, "Congregation of Tiron," 297–391.

33. Louis Julius Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977), 38. Waverley was settled in 1129 from L'Aumône, a daughter house of Cîteaux, followed by Rievaulx in 1132 and Fountains in 1135.

34. F. G. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales 1066–1349*, *Studies in Welsh History*, 1 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), 19–20.

35. Copies of the two charters were preserved in the cartulary of Tiron (Merlet, *Cartulaire de Tiron*, 1:41–42, nos. 25 and 26). A copy of the second charter is also preserved in Sheila Himsworth, comp., *Winchester College Muniments* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1984), 2:208, no. 4268a.

of strong government.³⁶ The Tironian organizational structure resembled that of Cluny, which had downgraded many daughter abbeys to priories in 1100. Although Tiron allowed some of its foundations to be elevated to abbeys, it provided for an annual general chapter to which the daughter abbots and priors were summoned to Tiron at Pentecost. That chapter was responsible for the appointment of abbots and priors and for dealing with disciplinary problems. Abbots of overseas abbeys were allowed to attend every three years. This centralized administrative organization accommodated the congregation's increased holdings and interests and ensured that its abbots and priors were approved by the mother house.

Abbot William was one of the first abbots of the reformed orders to consolidate his holdings into granges run by lay brothers, which he did as early as ca. 1130.³⁷ Under him, the abbey

36. Merlet, *Cartulaire de Tiron*, 1:49, no. 31. See Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*. Tiron's simpler structure is consistent with Berman's proposal that the Cistercian foundations coalesced gradually into a religious order over the course of at least the first two-thirds of the twelfth century. The *Exordium Cisterciensis Cenobii* and *Carta Caritas*, traditionally dated ca. 1118, create a more sophisticated administrative model, with checks and balances on the authority of the abbot of Cîteaux, and may have been backdated. Berman considers no. 31 to be an "acte-notice," a statement about the history of the abbey and the manner in which it was supposed to be governed, written later in the century and backdated inaccurately to 1120. A royal charter dated September 10, 1121, witnessed by Henry I, given in the presence of Abbot William of Tiron and bearing the seal of Henry I, confirms the abbey's property at the time of the installation of the first abbot, Fulchard, who was chosen by Abbot William and the monks of Tiron (William Dugdale, ed., *Monasticon Anglicanum* [London: Longman, 1823], 4:130, no. 2). The description ca. 1147 of Tiron's administrative structure in the *vita* (§98) is independent confirmation of Tiron's oversight.

37. Giles Constable discusses granges, isolated estates that produced food for the mother house, in *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 220, nn. 62 and 64, and 221. Prémontré had twenty-six granges in 1138, and fifteen Cistercian granges were established north of the Beauvaisis between 1140 and 1150. Berman (*Cistercian Evolution*, 21) states that the institution of grange agriculture on Cistercian lands cannot be documented earlier than the late 1140s. A Tironian charter dated 1130 refers to a barn at Puerthes (Merlet, *Cartulaire de Tiron*, 1:143, no. 121), and land for granges at Villandon (ibid., 1:152–54, no. 128) and Augerville-la-Rivière (ibid., 1:158, no. 132) was acquired ca. 1130. A papal confirmation by Eugenius III dated May 30, 1147, specifically lists twelve Tironian granges (ibid., 2:61, no. 291).

owned at least one ship that traded in Scotland and Northumberland.³⁸ By 1132 the financial position of Tiron had greatly improved. During the early twelfth century, then, the congregation of Tiron was an important network of communication between France and the British Isles. Some of its Scottish abbots were statesmen and ran law courts, markets, and an international harbor. Its craftsmen brought needed skills to isolated areas. Tironian monks acquired a reputation as builders, educators, physicians, livestock breeders, and horticulturalists.³⁹ The Tironian congregation endured over seven centuries, and the *vita* of its founder is a key to its history.⁴⁰ Bernard of Tiron merits greater recognition in the study of medieval monasticism.

38. Merlet, *Cartulaire de Tiron*, 1:80–81, no. 60. King David, giving a ship free of cain or rent to Kelso Abbey, officially gave the ship to Tiron Abbey, which supports Tiron's oversight of Kelso. G. W. S. Barrow, "From Queen Margaret to David I. Benedictines and Tironians," *Innes Review* 11 (1960): 36–37, dates this charter ca. 1140 and notes that during the reign of Malcolm IV (1153–1165) the monks of Tiron had it commuted to an annual grant of three merks from the customs of Perth (37, n. 56, refers to *The Acts of Malcolm IV*, no. 223). "In 1267, King Alexander III told his provosts of Perth to pay these three merks to Kelso Abbey as proctors for Tiron, and even as late as 1302 John de Soules, guardian of Scotland on behalf of John Baliol, commanded the sheriff and bailies of Perth to make up two years' arrears of this annual payment." (37, n. 57, refers to *Liber de Calchou*, 310–11, nos. 397, 398.)

39. Cline, "Congregation of Tiron," 449–85, 524–30.

40. Studies of the *vita* include the following articles and books: Jean Von Walter, "Bernard de Thiron par J. von Walter," trans. J. Cahour, *Bulletin de la Commission historique et archéologique de la Mayenne*, 2nd series, 24 (1908): 385–410 and 25 (1909): 17–44; Jacques de Bascher, "La 'Vita' de Saint Bernard d'Abbeville, Abbé de Saint-Cyprien de Poitiers et de Tiron," in *Revue Mabillon* 59 (1975–1980): 411–50; M. Cabanes and J. Y. LaGrange, *Tiron et Molineuf* (Dourdan: H. Vial, 1982); Beck, *Saint-Bernard*; and Denis Guillemin, *Thiron, Abbaye Médiévale* (Montrouge, 1999).

Note on the Translation



My translation of the *vita* is based on the version edited by Godefroy Henskens in the *Acta Sanctorum*. The Latin texts of the Sermon, Prayer to Blessed Bernard, and Synopsis of the Life of Holy Bernard, Abbot of Tiron Abbey, are published in Bernard Beck, *Saint-Bernard de Tiron, l'ermite, le moine et le monde* (Cormelles-le-Royal: La Mandragore, 1998). The Latin biblical citations, which Geoffrey quoted from memory, are located in F. P. Dutripou, *Bibliorum Sacrorum Concordantiae* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1986), reprint of *Vulgatae Editionis Bibliorum Sacrorum Concordantiae*, 8th ed. (Paris: Bloud et Barral, 1880); and in Roger Gryson, ed., *Biblia Sacra juxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969, 1994). The corresponding English citations are taken from the Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, 1952, 1946, 1972), and, for the Apocrypha, from Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 1994), New Revised Standard Version. Citations from the *Rule (RB)* are taken from Benedict of Monte Cassino, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981). Citations from St. Jerome's Letter 108 "To Eustochium" are based on the New Advent English translation, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001108.htm>.

Chronology of the *Vita*



ca. 1046–1053. Bernard is born at Abbeville.¹ §6.

ca. 1065–1073. Bernard studies until age nineteen as a secular student at an unspecified school. §7.

ca. 1073. Bernard travels south with companions and spends a decade in a monastery famed for its strictness, which the *vita* identifies as Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers. §§9–12.

1073, November 4. Renaud becomes abbot of Saint-Cyprien. §13.

ca. 1080, October. Abbot, identified as Gervais, of Saint-Savin, daughter abbey of Saint-Cyprien, convicted of simony. Bernard, as claustral prior, assumes authority ca. 1082–1096. §§13–16.

1087. Peter II elected bishop of Poitiers.

1095, November 27. Urban II preaches the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont. §16.

1096, July. Council of Nimes. Urban II authorizes monks to preach.

1096, August–September. Gervais joins the First Crusade. §16.

ca. 1097. Bernard flees to hermit Peter of l’Etoile, to Vital of Savigny’s earlier hermit community at Dompierre near Passais, to Saint-Médard, and to the Chausey Island, then builds a cell at Fontaine-Géhard near Châtillon-sur-Colmont before returning to Poitiers.

§§19–42, 55.

1. The *vita* is sometimes inaccurate; see text notes for corrections to this chronology. Estimated dates based on cartulary evidence have been assigned to the *vita* chronology.

- 1099, June 7–July 15. Bernard learns of Gervais's death through prophetic spirit. §16.
- 1100, May 23. Abbot Renaud dies; Bernard is elected abbot. §44.
- 1100, November 18. Council of Poitiers: men of William IX, duke of Aquitaine, attack the participants. Prepared to endure martyrdom, Bernard and Robert of Arbrissel excommunicate Philip I, king of the Franks. §48.
- 1100, November 20. Paschal II subordinates Saint-Cyprien to Cluny. §49.
- ca. 1101. Bernard, Robert of Arbrissel, and Vital of Savigny preach in Normandy. §49–54.
- ca. 1101. Robert of Arbrissel founds Fontevraud. §82.
- ca. 1102. Bernard travels to Rome twice (§§55–58), where the *vita* claims he is restored to his abbacy. §59.
- 1102–1105. Bernard returns briefly to Chausey Island (§60), then forms a hermit community at Chenne-det, which separates from Vital of Savigny's earlier community. §§61–62.
1107. Bernard founds his first monastery at Tiron-Brunelles on land given by Rotrou II, count of Perche. §§63–65, 69–76.
1109. The first mass is said at Tiron's church on Easter Sunday. §69.
- ca. 1109. War between Mortagne-au-Perche and Bellême. §§66–68.
- 1109–1111. During a famine, William II, count of Nevers, sends a gold vase which Bernard's monks sell to buy food. §70.
- 1112, ca. October–November 4. Rotrou imprisoned by Robert of Bellême. Bernard prophesies Rotrou's release. §§79–80.
- 1113, May 1. Rotrou acquires the castle of Bellême and gives the monks property and gifts. §81.
- 1112–1115. Ralph of la Futaye founds Saint-Sulpice-des-Bois and Vital founds Savigny, which later merges with Cîteaux. §82.
- 1113/1114, February. The Cluniac monks of Saint-Denis of Nogent-le-Rotrou claim tithes and burial fees from Tiron. Bernard refounds his monastery on adjacent land in Thiron-Gardais owned

- by the cathedral of Chartres. §§77–78. Bernard’s holiness brings prosperity to a knight (§85) and his touch heals a child. §86.
- 1113, May–July. Bernard visits Henry I of England in Normandy; the king gives Tiron fifteen silver marks annually and pays for the construction of a dormitory. §96.
- 1113–1116. Tiron founds priories in distant regions. §§95, 98.
1114. David, earl of Northumberland, founds a Tironian priory at Selkirk, the future abbey of Kelso in Scotland. §99.
1114. Robert FitzMartin founds the priory in Wales that becomes Saint Dogmael’s Abbey in Cemaes, Pembrokeshire. §99.
- ca. 1115. A priory is founded in Beaujolais, the future abbey of Joug-Dieu. §§95, 125.
1115. Louis VI gives Tiron Abbey property at Saintry, and Thibaut, count of Blois and Chartres, founds two priories. §97.
- 1115, December 23. Death of Ivo, bishop of Chartres.
- 1116, February 25. Death of Robert of Arbrissel.
- 1116, April 2, Easter Day. Geoffrey II of Lèves consecrated bishop of Chartres.
- 1116, Wednesday, April 12. Bernard’s premonition of death. §105.
- 1116, Sunday, April 16. Bernard collapses. §105.
- 1116, Friday, April 21. Bernard receives the viaticum. §§112–115.
- 1116, Sunday, April 23. Bernard clothes a nun. §§117–118.
- 1116, Tuesday, April 25. Death of Bernard of Tiron. §§123–124.
- 1116, Saturday, April 29. Bernard’s burial. §§125–126.
- 1116, May. Hugh succeeds as abbot pro tempore.
- ca. 1116, September. Bernard’s successor Hugh baptizes a son of Louis VI. §97.
- ca. 1117–1118. Ralph, abbot of Selkirk, succeeds Hugh as abbot of Tiron. William of Poitiers, a Tironian monk, becomes abbot of Selkirk.

- ca. 1119. William of Poitiers becomes abbot of Tiron.
1120. Abbot William baptizes a son of Louis VI. §97.
1128. Selkirk is refounded as Kelso Abbey.
1147. William II, count of Nevers, abdicates shortly before his death
at the monastery of Grande Chartreuse.
- 1149, January 24. Geoffrey II, bishop of Chartres, dies.

Bernard of Tiron's France



KEY: ■ cities and towns show Bernard of Tiron's travels and sojourns, his distant abbeys, and the towns of his patrons. His distant abbeys are listed below.

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| ■ Beaugency
[Saintry] | ■ Fougères
Savigny
Chennedet | ■ Mayenne
Passais (Vital's earlier community)
Châtillon-sur-Colmont, Fontaine-Gébard |
| ■ Beaune
Cîteaux | ■ Issoire
Chaise-Dieu | ■ Poitiers
Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers
Saint-Savin
Fontgombaud |
| ■ Chauvigny
Etoile | ■ Mâcon
Cluny | ■ Villefranche-sur-Saône
Joug-Dieu
Beaujeu |

Perche

