

Constitutionalism and the Cloister: Matthew Paris and the Crisis of Royal Monastic Patronage in Thirteenth Century England

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Introduction

On May 14, 1264, the armies of King Henry III of England lined up near a castle named Lewes to face the forces of the Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort. On the high ground were Simon and other English barons, who were in open rebellion against King Henry. Henry III was the fourth Plantagenet king of England, a line begun by his grandfather, Henry II (r.1154-1189), who had established a great empire on the Continent.¹ Henry III's barons took arms against him because of the King's refusal to uphold Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford, two agreements reached between the Crown and the barons to place limits on royal power. Led by the Crown Prince, Edward Longshanks, the royal forces outnumbered the barons significantly. On the side of the rebellious magnates – at least in spirit – were the monks of the abbey of St Albans, a heretofore royal establishment. In a matter of two decades, the monastery had gone from total identification with the monarchy to supporting a rebellion against the Crown. How could such a change have come about? What could have led the monks to oppose the King? Before attempting to answer these questions, it is first necessary to understand something of the history of the Benedictine monastic tradition to which St Albans belonged.

From the seventh century to the twelfth, the Black Monks of Saint Benedict (so called because of the dark color of their robes) and their offshoots were undoubtedly the dominant force in Western Christian monasticism and also one of the central influences behind the spiritual and intellectual development of society. Across the Continent and the British Isles, the Benedictines founded abbeys and lived together – at least theoretically – under the guidance of the famous *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Their great houses were home to hundreds of religious men and women, and their wealth was exceeded only by

the wealthiest of barons. Naturally, the Benedictines did not simply arise from a vacuum. They evolved out of what began as an Eastern way of holiness in the third century of the Common Era.

The word “monk” comes from the Greek *monos* , which means “alone.”² Traditionally, the first Christian to earn the appellation of *monachos* , the “one who is alone,” was Antony , an Egyptian ascetic (c. 252 – 357). Spurred on by Christ's injunction to “sell what you possess and give to the poor...and come, follow me,” he gave up his possessions, sent his sister into a community of virgins, and retreated from the world, into the Egyptian desert.³

Many faithful could not abide the life of total withdrawal in the desert. However, they still desired to dedicate themselves to the religious life. For this reason, a monk named Pachomius (d. 346) pioneered another type of monasticism: the cenobitic. Under Pachomius, cenobites lived together in large communities called *koinobia* (from the Greek *koinos* , “common”.) Each *koinobion* was organized under a head monk, the abbot, with a hierarchy and rules of communal living. These sorts of monasteries quickly became popular in Egypt in the 4th century. For a century and a half after the deaths of Antony and Pachomius, cenobitism became increasingly popular and monasteries began to spring up in the East.

Meanwhile, the turbulent political situation in the West and the growing hold of Christianity made taking monastic vows a more acceptable choice for many whom the old Roman system seemed to be failing . By the end of the fifth century, the last Roman Emperor in the West had been formally deposed, and Italy was under Ostrogothic rule. Economic and governmental structures which had endured for hundreds of years were transitioning into Germanic hands, and there was little certainty in the future for the bureaucrats and the landed class who had depended on the Roman patronage system for their status and power. Some Romans simply adapted: they brought their Roman culture and government to the new rulers of the West. Others instead chose to opt out of the new order and become monks.

The newfound popularity of cenobitic monasticism in the West did not imply a uniformity of practice among its adherents. That was to change with the work of Benedict of Nursia. Our sole roughly contemporary source on Benedict is the *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict*, book two of the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory I. According to Gregory, Benedict was born around 480 in a small town called Nursia about fifty miles north of Rome. At the time, Italy was in a state of turmoil. Odoacer had finally deprived Rome of the nominal rule of a Roman Emperor in 476. Many were joining monasteries to withdraw from the world and to seek God, and around 500 Benedict decided to join them. First, he followed the example of Antony and sought solitude in a cave near Subiaco. Soon other ascetics gathered around him, and he organized them into small groups of twelve, each with its own abbot. Eventually, Benedict saw the need to establish a larger and more permanent monastic community, and so he founded a monastery at Monte Cassino, halfway between Naples and Rome. The monastery was built in the mountains at the site of an old pagan shrine where people still “went on offering superstitious and idolatrous sacrifices” to Apollo.⁴ Benedict abolished the pagan site and established a shrine to St. Martin of Tours, and the local populace soon came around to the new faith.

It was likely at Monte Cassino, after 535, that Benedict wrote his influential *Rule* for monks.⁵ A practical guide for those who wished to live the monastic life, the *Rule* provided structure for the average person who wished to dedicate himself to God without entirely leaving human society. Benedict provided for a well-regulated communal life that was governed by an abbot to whom the monks gave absolute obedience. Benedict's monks were to spend their days occupied by manual labor, prayer, and church services. The *Rule* was structured, but moderate: no heroic feats of asceticism were expected of its adherents. Like most writers of the time, Benedict borrowed much of his work from other sources, especially the anonymous *Rule of the Master*.⁶ Benedict implemented his *Rule* at Monte Cassino, but he could not have expected what was to come.

After Benedict's death, his *Rule* was slowly adopted across Europe. The patronage of Pope Gregory I was invaluable. The *Rule* eventually became so nearly ubiquitous that a ruler as well informed as Charlemagne could ask his advisors “if any other rule was in use, and others could wonder if there had been monks at all in Europe before Benedict.”⁷

What David Knowles called the “Benedictine Centuries” had begun, and for almost six hundred years after Benedict's death, it seemed that Benedictinism would flourish forever unchallenged.⁸

Cenobitic monasticism took hold first on the continent. It was first introduced to England by the missionary party sent to England by Pope Gregory I in 597. The head of the mission, a monk named Augustine, oversaw the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples of England to Christianity. The monastery Augustine founded at Canterbury was likely not based on Benedict's *Rule*.⁹ Only about sixty years later did the *Rule* gain a hold on English monastic discipline. Monasteries flourished in England for perhaps two centuries, until widespread Viking raids and colonization brought about a “general decline.”¹⁰ By the end of the ninth century, the number of monks in England was minimal. Although the situation looked dire for England 's monks, two separate revivals ensured that, by the eleventh century, monasticism once again flourished in England .

The first revival was led by Dunstan of Glastonbury in the mid-950s. Dunstan was Archbishop of Canterbury under King Edgar (r. 959-975). He brought the practices of Cluny , a reformed Benedictine house, to the abbey at Glastonbury in Wessex . Under Dunstan's leadership of the English Church , a code of monastic practice called the *Regularis Concordia Angliae* was affirmed by the abbots of many English abbeys. Besides prescribing manners of liturgy and monastic work, the *Regularis Concordia* also affirmed the King and Queen as “patrons and guardians of the whole monastic institute.”¹¹ During Dunstan's tenure, monastic learning and discipline in England revived and monks began to be strongly linked with the Anglo-Saxon kings.

At the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, thirty-five Benedictine abbeys existed in England .¹² The Normans brought with them across the Channel their own brand of monasticism, one that had a greater emphasis on grand buildings and Latin language than had the monasticism of Dunstan. The influence of Lanfranc of Bec, Archbishop of Canterbury under William the Conqueror, was felt throughout the “Normanization” of England 's monasteries. Lanfranc had been prior of Bec, the most influential of monasteries in Normandy in the mid-tenth century. He is credited with swelling the

numbers of English monks in both the pre-Conquest houses and in many new foundations.¹³ In the late eleventh and early twelfth century, we may speak of a vital and popular monastic culture in England .

The twelfth century was an era of change that brought many challenges to the traditional roles of Benedictine monasteries. Cathedral schools and universities supplanted monasteries as the premiere intellectual centers in Europe . New movements in monasticism brought diversity: Bernard of Clairvaux led the austere Cistercian Order to the height of influence in the Church, and the Carthusians became the new exemplars of Christian asceticism in the West. By the end of the twelfth century, while the Benedictine houses were still important to society, they no longer held a monopoly on European monasticism.

Monastic Patronage

Through the centuries, monasteries became increasingly involved in land ownership because many aristocrats donated property to them. For their gifts, donors received both spiritual and temporal compensation. Monastic benefactors were included in the monks' liturgy: prayers were to be said for their souls in perpetuity after their death as a reward for their pious generosity during life. The monks' intercession could also be extended to the donor's family, thus ensuring the salvation of his progeny. Monasteries also became a popular place for wealthy families to place their surplus children. A son or daughter who would divide the family property too drastically if given an inheritance could be made to take monastic vows instead. Often, a gift of a certain amount of land or wealth would accompany these child "oblates."¹⁴ In other cases, magnates founded entire monasteries but retained the rights to dispose of the monks' newly tax-exempt property as they wished, thus creating for themselves a monastic tax shelter. Ultimately, the combination of such spiritual and secular benefits encouraged tremendous growth in monastic endowments.

However, the relationship between benefactor and monk was in reality much more complicated. In a landmark study of the monks at Cluny and their neighbors, Barbara Rosenwein shows why those in the secular world patronized the monastery. Rather than focusing on the rewards patronage of Cluny had for benefactors, Rosenwein examines the social relationships arising from this system. She finds that by entering into transactions with the monastery, people in the tenth and early eleventh centuries formed a “social glue” that held together a society that lacked a strong central authority.¹⁵ For example, to give a villa to the monastery at Cluny was not only to transfer ownership of the land to the monastery, but also to become connected in a reciprocal relationship with the monks and with Cluny's patron saint, Saint Peter. The souls of the donor and his or her heirs were to benefit in perpetuity from the gift, which would always be attached to the family name. For this system to work, donations of land necessarily were not intended simply to be merged with Cluny's endowment and forgotten. Indeed, as Rosenwein points out, “Land in Cluny's charters was usually referred to not as *proprietates*, which would have stressed the control that the holder had over it, but rather as *hereditates*, which stressed ancestral and social links.”¹⁶ Donors were to become what Rosenwein calls the “neighbors of Saint Peter,” and thus gain the Apostle's protection and aid. Donations to monasteries also had other social meanings: for example, they could express friendship or seek forgiveness for crimes – tasks very important in any society.

Through such donations, Benedictine abbeys acquired immense wealth and extensive social networks. Monastic communities became closely linked to local economies and their abbots were often powerful political figures. By the 13th century, the period studied in this thesis, the great Benedictine houses should no longer be thought of as isolated communities of poor ascetics, but as the ecclesiastical equivalents of the manors of powerful laypeople. St Albans was one such monastery. Located approximately twenty miles north of London, the Benedictine house there was, according to tradition, founded in 793 by King Offa of Mercia.¹⁷

St Albans

The town of St Albans is situated approximately on the site of the old Roman town of Verulamium . It was at Verulamium, either in 303 or 305, that the Diocletianic persecution claimed Saint Alban as a martyr. He had sheltered a Christian in his home, converted to the prohibited faith, and refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods. Bede records the story in his *Ecclesiastical History*:

Here, therefore, the head of most courageous martyr was struck off, and here he received the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him...the blessed Alban suffered death on the twenty-second day of June, near the city of Verulam...where afterwards, when peaceable Christian times were restored, a church of wonderful workmanship, and suitable to his martyrdom, was erected. In which place, there ceases not to this day the cure of sick persons, and the frequent working of wonders.¹⁸

Alban picked an excellent location to be martyred: the church that was built in his name was located less than 25 miles north of London (soon to become the most important commercial center in England).¹⁹ In later times, this placed it within the political and economic orbit of the greatest city in England . Matthew Paris credits King Offa of Mercia with the foundation of the monastery there in 793. It is more likely that Offa reorganized an existing community under the Rule of St. Benedict, rather than establishing something completely new.²⁰ Matthew had political motives for giving Offa sole credit, which are explored in chapter three of this thesis. Regardless of the degree of Offa's involvement, from the 8 th century the expansion of St Albans continued apace. In 948, abbot Ulsinus built three new churches and a market, testifying to the prosperity of the monastery and the town that was growing up around it. After the Norman Conquest, Lanfranc appointed his kinsman Paul de Caen abbot of St Albans . Paul expanded the monastery, building a scriptorium and many other new buildings. He also began to acquire daughter-houses for St Albans outside its immediate neighborhood, such as the cell at Tynemouth , in Northumberland.²¹ The monastery continued to expand throughout the twelfth century, and its influence grew concomitantly. The abbot of St Albans took precedence over all other present English abbots at the Council of Tours in

1163, and King Henry II gave to St Albans “all liberties which kingly power can bestow on any church.”²²

By the early 13th century, the Benedictine house at St Albans had become one of the largest and most prosperous in England . Centuries of monastic devotion supported by powerful benefactors must have created an interesting atmosphere of aristocratic holiness: one that valued both wealth and faith, which indeed pervades the writing of Matthew Paris, the most famous monk ever to live at St Albans .

Matthew Paris

Matthew Paris was responsible for keeping the great chronicle of his monastery, the *Chronica Majora*. It was by no means his only work, however. Matthew's literary output was immense: his historical output includes the *Chronica Majora*, *Gesta Abbatum Sancti Albani* (Deeds of the Abbots of St Albans) , and the *Historia Anglorum* (History of the English – essentially an abridged *Chronica Majora*), in addition to other minor works. In medieval English historiography, he is perhaps second in importance only to Bede. Matthew also wrote biography, including the *Vitae Duorum Offarum* (Lives of the Two Offas) and a verse life of Saint Edward the Confessor.

Despite the breadth of Matthew's writing, we know extremely little about the monk himself. The most thorough scholarship on the subject of Matthew's personality and work to date is that of Richard Vaughan. Even Vaughan , however, can give us but a few details about Matthew's life and background. One of the few reliable details we have is that Matthew took the monk's habit on January 21, 1217: he records this date in the *Historia Anglorum* .²³ Vaughan believes that, because most novices at this time began to wear the habit immediately (instead of after Benedict's prescribed waiting period of a year), Matthew likely actually joined the community as a fully-fledged monk a year or two later.²⁴ We also know that Matthew likely died in 1259, as his scribe wrote, “at this time died Matthew Paris” after his entry for that year.²⁵ Since sixty was “ripe old age”

for a monk, it seems probable that Matthew was born around 1200.²⁶ The difficulty scholars have simply in establishing when Matthew Paris was born is a result of the sheer paucity of information left to us about him.

The meaning of his surname, Paris, is obscure as well. It is not likely that Matthew was French, or that he studied at or spent significant time in Paris: he considers himself English, and he does not write like a university man, schooled in theology and scholasticism.²⁷ Most likely, Paris was simply a family name. However, as with most of the particulars of Matthew's life, there is no way to be certain.

Scholars can, however, establish a few events in the life of Matthew Paris besides his birth, cloistering, and death. Doing so helps us to discern a rough image of his standing within the monastic community. There is nothing certain about Matthew's life at St Albans between 1217 and 1246, although Vaughan attempts a conjecture of his activities during that period.²⁸ We read in the *Chronica*'s annal for 1246 that the King of Norway asked Matthew to intercede with the Cahorsian moneylenders at London on the behalf of the Norwegian monastery of St. Benet Holm. Perhaps because of his efficacy in this matter, Matthew was later invited to visit St. Benet and reform the observation of the Benedictine Rule there.²⁹ It is indicative of Matthew's eminence that he was chosen for such an important overseas mission to another monastery, and that the King of Norway himself would be familiar with an English monk.

Further evidence points to Matthew's high stature not just in the monastic community but at court as well. He knew both King Henry III and Queen Eleanor personally: he spoke to the King in person several times, and wrote his *Life of Edward the Confessor* for the Queen.³⁰ Although monastic social networks were extensive, to be personally acquainted with two different kings was certainly atypical of a monk. Thus we should suppose that Matthew was no ordinary Benedictine, but a monk with significant influence at least at St Albans, and likely in the outside world as well.

Consequently, Matthew's works should not be read as writings without an audience. As a monk with *gravitas*, what he wrote must have had significant authority for his readers.

Those reading the *Chronica* would have been more likely to accept Matthew's point of view because of his authority. Indeed, his work was not ignored after he died: the *Chronica* was continued up to the fifteenth century, and the historical school at St Albans was singularly influential after his death.

It should be noted that Matthew's outlook was naturally focused on St Albans , for despite the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Benedictines were largely independent and parochial. However, the *Chronica Majora* does not reflect David Knowles' statement that “the history and outlook of the great monasteries.... became wholly individual,” thoroughly unconnected to each other.³¹ Rather, as Chapter 2 will show, Matthew was quite conscious of the situation of the other Benedictine houses in England , and he believed that their fates were intertwined with that of St Albans .

Matthew's attitudes have often been called “constitutional”: that is, he has a tendency to take the side of the aristocrats against the Crown or other figures of monarchical power, such as the Pope. Although he admits the influence of Benedictinism on the chronicler, the great Matthew Paris scholar Richard Vaughan tends to ascribe Matthew's constitutionalism to his nationality. He calls Matthew's prejudice against authority “typically English.”³² The argument that Matthew's “constitutional” attitudes are due primarily to his being English is an easy way out, and demonstrably incorrect.³³ It is also not true that Matthew “does not understand the significance of the struggle for power which was going on during his lifetime between the barons and the king,” as Vaughan tells us.³⁴ Rather, as this thesis will argue, Matthew is attempting to address what he sees as a breakdown in ideal social order by pointing out and rectifying the failures of those in power.

Vaughan also believes that Matthew is shortsighted and blinded by his own beliefs. This assertion is not without grounds: the *Chronica Majora*, in particular, is filled with bile directed towards foreigners, the King, tax collectors, bishops – essentially anyone who could possibly have laid a claim to the wealth of St Albans or other Benedictine houses. However, Matthew is not possessed of a total “inability to grasp the real significance of events.”³⁵ Rather, he has significant insight into the central problem facing St Albans

and other wealthy monastic establishments: he sees social changes occurring that threaten the wealth and power of the Benedictines. Barbara Rosenwein wrote in her analysis of Cluny that, as the centuries wore on, eventually the social uses of property exchange between the monastery and the community broke down. “The set of assumptions that permitted lay people to donate their land...[to] monks went out of favor as an ideal, even if it continued to be practiced without cessation.”³⁶ An increasingly pluralistic Christianity now offered new ways of holiness, particularly the mendicant orders and other, more ascetic forms of monasticism like that of the Cistercians. Universities began to eclipse monasteries as centers of learning. Thus, the monks lost their centrality in the medieval social imagination. It is a return to this ideological significance of cenobitic monasticism that Matthew constantly seeks. Matthew fears the gradual decline in fortune of his fellow monks in England and is constantly complaining about their financial situation.³⁷ He believes that there is a direct causal link between the ideological shift and St Albans' financial difficulties, one which must be remedied. The solution he finds is his own brand of constitutionalism.

Therefore, Matthew's constitutionalism must be understood in the context of the predicament of his monastery. Matthew believes that the source of the problems is that the right order of society is falling apart. King Henry III has failed to fulfill his role as patron and protector of monks, and thus in his *Life of King Edward the Confessor* Matthew attempts to admonish Henry back into proper behavior. As the years progress in the *Chronica*, we can see Matthew growing increasingly pessimistic about the King. As he grows impatient with Henry, Matthew becomes more sympathetic toward Simon de Montfort, the leader of the baronial resistance against the King. He portrays de Montfort as a hero and protector of the crown, not as its enemy. Simon de Montfort claimed to be warring against Henry in order to make the King obey the ancient custom of the realm, and Matthew eventually came to agree that such a revolt was in the monks' interest as well.

Matthew is always conscious of matters of audience in his writing. His *Life of Edward the Confessor* is dedicated to the Queen and, through her, likely meant for the King as well. It is therefore rather panegyric of the good King Edward, via whom it portrays the

correct behavior of kings. The *Lives of the Two Offas* and the *Gesta Abbatum* survive in the volume called the *Liber Addimentorum* , and were likely read mainly in monastic circles . Matthew uses both works to inform his fellow monks about the (supposed) antiquity of their royal connections. The *Chronica*, unlikely to leave the monastery, is instead sharply critical of King Henry. Even here, though, Matthew is very sensitive to his audience: as will be discussed below, evidence points to an attempt on his part to create an expurgated version of the *Chronica Majora* for the Crown without the most negative passages about King Henry. Matthew customizes his message for the tastes of different audiences, but, as we will see, it is the same message throughout.

After Matthew's death in 1259, St Albans followed the path he had suggested. When the baronial resistance finally turned to armed combat in 1264 the monks of St Albans chose the side of the rebels. What led them to make such a seemingly radical and dangerous move? What pessimism had crept into the monks' opinion of the Crown, making rebellion appealing? In the following chapters, this thesis will examine how Matthew Paris uses the *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, *Chronica Majora*, *Gesta Abbatum*, and *Vitae Duorum Offarum* to describe the crisis situation he believed faced St Albans and other abbeys, and how he attempts to arrive at a solution by advising the King on proper behavior. Along the way, it shall observe how Matthew customizes his writing for different audiences. Finally, it will demonstrate that Matthew's so-called “constitutionalism” is not simply a product of his nationality or aristocratic sympathies, but is his response to what he believes to be a catastrophic collapse of right social order in thirteenth century England.

Chapter 1: The Royal Hagiography of Matthew Paris

Though Matthew Paris is best known for writing the *Chronica Majora* , he also wrote saints' lives. An example is his *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*. This biography is much more than a narrative of the deeds of the eponymous saint, and for our purposes represents Matthew's views on the proper relationship between monks and kings. Retelling the famous story of the saint becomes an opportunity for Matthew to teach his

royal audience how it ought to behave.

Our knowledge of Matthew Paris's *Life of Saint Edward* rests on a single copy, housed at Cambridge . Henry Luard, editor and translator of the Rolls series edition of the manuscript, was unable to determine the authorship of the text, but later scholarship has determined the author to be Matthew, which is consistent with Luard's dating.³⁸ All quotations in the following analysis are Luard's translation of the extant Anglo-Norman copy, totaling 4,684 lines and decorated with illuminations and pen and wash drawings. Based on the style of some of the illustrations, Paul Binski believed that the present copy was made at London by court illuminators in the mid-1250s from an original of the late 1230s or early 1240s. ³⁹

In the beginning of his work, Matthew tells us that he is simply translating a Latin life of Edward:

I write and for you translate
Without falsehood and without deceit
The history in Latin into French,
To revive his memory... ⁴⁰

The final sentence of the above dedication reveals Matthew's objective in writing this *Life*: he wishes to revive the memory of Saint Edward. By inference, Matthew believes Edward's example, two centuries old, to have been forgotten by his audience.

Much of the text of the *Life* that follows is the work of Aelred of Rievaulx, the author of the Latin work Matthew claims to be translating. It is significant that Matthew chose to translate this particular version of Edward's life, and it follows that it was the one which best imbued the Saint with the traits Matthew wanted his audience to come to appreciate. However, to call it simply a translation would be inaccurate: various changes, small and large, have been introduced from the Latin version.⁴¹ Matthew alters Aelred's text while translating it, "changing its narrative thrust in substantive ways."⁴² Matthew provides instructive examples of proper kingly behavior and occasionally even breaks the narrative to speak directly to his audience. Although it is only partially his own work, the *Life of*

Saint Edward is thus still relevant to this study of Matthew Paris's monarchical ideology.

Indeed, his audience is a royal one. The work is dedicated to Queen Eleanor, wife of Henry III.⁴³ Matthew undertakes here a strategic manipulation of audience: through Eleanor, and what Paul Binski called her “neglected, but doubtless influential, court of royal women,” Matthew undoubtedly hopes to attract prestigious patrons to his work. However, Eleanor and her court are not Matthew's ultimate target audience.⁴⁴ Particularly after 1230, King Henry III made an effort to model himself on Edward the Confessor in order to make himself seem less autocratic than his father King John had been.⁴⁵ Since Edward the Confessor was a particular interest of Henry III, the *Life* is almost certainly, “a male concoction catering as much to the interests of the King as the Queen, and reaching the former by means of the latter.”⁴⁶ Eleanor is but a gateway to Henry, to whom Matthew really directs his pen. Before we can approach the message Henry was meant to absorb from the text, however, we must first examine the events of its narrative.

The Story

The *Life* describes Edward's life, proceeding from birth to death. Matthew's portrait of Edward as King begins with his description of what might be called the first coronation of Edward. Edward, a direct descendant of King Alfred (r. 871 – 899) is named heir to the throne as an infant, but flees the invasion of the Danish King Cnut with his mother and siblings while he is still a child. Years later, Cnut's successor, Hardeknut, dies suddenly. Edward then returns to England to restore the Anglo-Saxon line of kings. In a miraculous episode, Edward is crowned King by Saint Peter himself, who proclaims “He has not a better from here to Rome .”⁴⁷ Edward begs the protection of Peter against the Danes, who still had considerable power in England in the early eleventh century. In return, he promises to make a pilgrimage to Rome .⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, a messenger comes to Edward with news of his election to the throne, and the King is crowned again by his people.

The next important event in Edward's life is his marriage to Edith Godwin. The barons wish him to marry for the good of the kingdom, but Edward is distressed because he wishes to abstain from sex. Devout man that he is, he offers a prayer for guidance to Jesus:

Comfort my heart which is sad;
Well know you all my intention,
I wish to be chaste all my life;
How then can I marry a wife
And live with her chaste and perfect?⁴⁹

Edward marries Edith, but he and his new queen secretly vow chastity. They “live in marriage as in a monastick [sic] order.”⁵⁰ Matthew praises Edward for conquering the world, the devil, and his own flesh, but his successful asceticism rather circumvents the intent of the barons, who desire a legitimate heir from the King.

After he becomes King, Edward wishes to fulfill the vow he made to Saint Peter that he would go on a pilgrimage to Rome . However, his subjects beg him not to go, lamenting, “We cannot suffer it; rather we would all die.”⁵¹ England needs a monarch, and thus the King's piety comes into conflict with the good of the realm once again. This time, Edward cannot escape his responsibility to his people: he cannot deny his worldly responsibilities as a pilgrim because he has been anointed England 's protector. In lieu of the pilgrimage, the barons and bishops of England suggest to Edward that he build a great church, where:

People of religion
Who shall have nothing to do but to pray,
Who so long as the world lasts
Shall of serving God undertake the duty,
Who to the souls of your ancestors
Who are dead, shall bring great aid;
For kings present, for kings future,
And for the estate of the kingdom and peace,

In purity of life without wickedness
Shall offer to God service
In masses and matins
Fasts and disciplines,
Singing and reading and chanting in alternate verses,
Giving alms to the poor,
And shelter to travellers,
And living a chaste life.
Many are worth much more than one,
Especially good is a community...[52](#)

The community is, of course, a monastic one: Westminster Abbey. It had been founded centuries before, but had fallen into ruin.[53](#) In the *Life*, all that is required for the king to rebuild it is for the Pope to release Edward from the vow he made to St. Peter. This happens in a miraculous way. Edward sends two bishops to Rome to seek a papal indulgence. Before he returns, a hermit receives a vision from Saint Peter, who tells him to inform Edward that his request is granted, “On the agreement and condition / That to me he make a house / Where he may have a convent of monks / Taught according to the order of Saint Benedict.”[54](#) Afterward, the bishops return to court with the letter from Pope Leo to the same effect. Thus, Westminster Abbey is reborn, and the King of England is to be its “especial patron.”[55](#) The *Life* then re-emphasizes that the monks living there are to be organized under the Benedictine *Rule*.[56](#)

Edward's kingdom enters on a new period of prosperity after the foundation of the new abbey. Society is well ordered and religion flourishes. Matthew tells us that King Edward “Had not in his country a house / Of order and of religion / Which had not from him a royal gift / Which owed him not a blessing.”[57](#) This vision of a division of Earthly labor among God's people depicts the religious receiving gifts of patronage from the King in return for the blessings their monastic liturgy brings to the kingdom. Significantly, it includes monks who are maintained as befits their great social worth. The next few hundred lines of the poem tell the reader of the miracles Edward worked and of his prophetic ability. He cures several of his subjects, including a scrofulous girl, a blind

man, and a crippled man.⁵⁸ The last of these Edward himself carries to his new monastery, and upon his arrival, the man is able to walk again. This section of the *Life* ties the prosperity of Edward's reign closely to his generous monastic patronage.

The scene of Edward's death is melancholy, yet transcendent. As he is lying on his deathbed, comforting his people with the knowledge that he will soon be in Heaven, Earl Harold Godwinson comes to discuss the royal succession. He swears that he will not lay claim to the throne of England, but will allow it to pass peacefully into the hands of Edward's chosen successor, Duke William of Normandy.⁵⁹ Edward says nothing to Harold, perhaps because he has foreseen the Earl's true intentions. He then passes on to Heaven, conducted by a chorus of angels singing the *Te Deum*.⁶⁰

Before and after his death, Edward demonstrates his prophetic abilities. He warns Earl Godwin that his young sons, Harold and Tostin (Tostig), will quarrel and bring defeat to the Anglo-Saxons. King Edward then foresees the course of English history. Before his death, he relates a strange prophecy to his court, where he predicts God's punishment of England's sins. An end to the country's woes will come only when:

The green tree which springs from the trunk
When thence it shall be severed
And removed to a distance of three acres
By no engine or hand (of man)
Shall return to its original trunk,
And shall join itself to its root,
Whence first it had origin;
The head shall receive again its verdure,
It shall bear fruit after its flower...⁶¹

Matthew Paris explains the meaning of the prophecy. The tree is the lordship of England, which has been severed from its trunk by King Harold, who succeeded Edward. It remained so for three reigns (acres): those of Harold, William I and his son, William Rufus. The tree joined itself to its root with the reign of Henry I. The fruit of the tree is King Henry III, descended from Henry I via his daughter Matilda.⁶² Matthew Paris thus

pays an elaborate compliment to the King via Edward's prophecy, one that no reader could fail to understand. This explanation is original to Matthew's version of the *Life*.⁶³

The prophecy sets the stage for a portrait of King Harold, who takes the throne when Edward dies. Harold is cast as a foil to Edward: he is impious, greedy, and unconcerned with maintaining proper religious observance in England . A typical passage about his conduct reveals that King Harold:

Directs all his intention

To seize lands and obtain their income,

To count and know the amounts

Of escheats from men of gentle birth;

Gardens he destroys, and the poor despoils...

Women of gentle blood he violates...

To the bad he clings, and injures the good;

Holy Church he despoils and destroys,

The countships and baronies,

Bishopricks [sic] and abbeys,

And all other property escheated

He keeps so long that they are destroyed...

He could not hold his office did not God suffer

That such a tyrant should have the kingdom.⁶⁴

Harold's evil deeds are many, but most are centered on issues relating to the improper seizure of property. Most dramatically, he swears not to contest the claim to the throne of Duke William of Normandy , and then makes a volte-face upon Edward's death. This is the worst deed of Harold, and even it is portrayed in terms of property: Harold promises Edward that he has no desire "to possess [his] heritage."⁶⁵ Harold's avarice is to be the ruin of Anglo-Saxon rule in England . When the peril of war with the Danes confronts King Harold, Edward's spirit returns to Earth to advise him. Edward appears to the Abbot of Ramsey with a message for the King:

Go tell King Harold

To be active, courageous, and bold,
Nor to be in fear of his enemies,
Nor to delay to attack them.
This time I will not fail him
So that he should not have victory at his desire;
And let him afterwards do what he has promised...
Amendment of his sins.⁶⁶

Harold's greatest sin is breaking his vow to Edward by making himself King. Here, Edward offers him the opportunity to repent by turning to God. Impious man that he is, Harold instead becomes greedier. The *Life* tells us that he “went from bad to worse.”⁶⁷ A list of Harold's terrible acts follows: he “despoils and imprisons,” “robs the good,” “gives to felons,” “roots up woods and burns houses,” and “does nothing but mock.”⁶⁸ One wonders at the unbounded energy the King must have had to do all this evil between defeating Tostig at Stamford Bridge (September 25) and his confrontation with William at Hastings (October 14.) The emphasis on Harold's sin is apparently more important in the *Life* than is faithfulness to historical time. Regardless, Harold's punishment comes quickly when William's avenging army slays him at Hastings in 1066. He was an impious King, and we are to see that he received his due punishment, in fulfillment of the prophecy.

The final episode in the *Life* describes the opening of King Edward's tomb so that his corpse can be examined and moved, many years after the Conquest. His body is found to be undecayed: a standard *topos* in saints' lives.⁶⁹ The extant manuscript also contains a drawing which shows Henry II (Henry III's grandfather, r. 1154 – 1189) kissing the body of the Saint as it is translated to its new resting place.([Figure 1](#)) The drawing reinforces the link between the success of the Plantagenet line and the Confessor. The image of the famously powerful King Henry II paying homage to the Saint is a visual argument to Henry III that, if he wishes to be successful as King, he too ought to venerate and emulate St. Edward.

Matthew ends the *Life* with an admonishment, whose target must have been Henry III:

He ought not to fail the Church,
Who is King, on the contrary he ought to maintain it;
And whatever belongs to the house,
For he is the true patron.⁷⁰

These four very direct lines with which Matthew finishes are not to be found in the Latin version of Aelred. They are the closest approximation we can find to hearing the writer speaking directly to King Henry. Even if the King had not learned what he was supposed to learn from Edward's story, he could not have missed the lesson in the conclusion.

The Ideal of Kingship in the *Life of Saint Edward*

Matthew Paris certainly wrote the *Life of Saint Edward*, to some degree, out of genuine reverence for the saint. However, as always, Matthew is very conscious of his audience and Benedictine agenda. At the time, King Henry III was making a conscious effort to model himself on Edward the Confessor, perhaps to improve his public image. From the 1230's on, Henry became more devoted to the Confessor and used the saint's iconography to bolster his own royal dignity.⁷¹ Therefore, he would have been especially interested in and perhaps also influenced by the *Life*. Henry's devotion gave Matthew an opportunity to try to influence him with his pro-monastic agenda: the *Life* thoroughly monasticizes King Edward, Henry's chosen model. In so doing Matthew upholds an ideal of kingship based on the values of the cloister, not the court.

The first way in which the *Life* makes Edward seem monkish is his marriage. It is an accepted element of the Edward story that the King remained chaste his entire life, despite marrying Edith. However, as seen above, the *Life* is more particular: it tells us that he lived in marriage "as in a monastick [sic] order."⁷² After the Gregorian reform, priests were also required to remain celibate, and life-long virginity was a trait lauded in many non-monastic saints. Either of these groups would have made for an equally valid simile. However, Edward is not compared to secular clergy or other saints. The choice to characterize his lifestyle as monastic is deliberate. The statement of Edward's conquest of

worldliness, which follows shortly thereafter, is a further attempt to give him traits associated with monks.

Edward exhibits another hallmark of Benedictine monastic discipline in his attitude toward money. Although he does not observe total poverty as prescribed in the Rule, he studiously avoids avarice and misuse of funds. Edward abolishes the Danegeld, a defense tax from earlier centuries that was now simply used to line the royal pockets.⁷³ More dramatically, the *Life* tells us what Edward did with the wealth of the crown:

Who clothed the naked poor
But Edward the holy, the gentle?
Who fed the hungry
But Edward the glorious?
...Nor allowed himself to be conquered by avarice,
But held it as a very great vice...
Of gold and silver no account he made.⁷⁴

When Edward does concern himself with money, he does so for the public good. Therefore, in Matthew's biography, Edward's royal treasury is spent by the king, but does not truly belong to him. This is analogous to the attitude of the large Benedictine houses, which (at least in principle) held wealth corporately, not individually, and spent much of it in charity.

Matthew makes a deliberate distinction between Edward and Harold in fiscal matters. Whereas Edward takes no delight in money, Harold is extremely greedy. The contrast between Harold and Edward is also meant to instruct King Henry in the proper role of Kings in cases of inheritance. Matthew accuses Harold of abusing lands that had escheated to the crown after their owners (or in the case of Church lands, the ecclesiastical officials managing them) had died, keeping the lands and their incomes for himself so long that they were ruined.⁷⁵ Matthew's portrayal of Harold is a thinly veiled jab at the behavior of King Henry: Matthew similarly accuses him of abusing his own ecclesiastical escheats in the *Chronica Majora*.⁷⁶

It is important to note that the descriptions of the greed of Harold and the abolition of the Danegeld are new to Matthew's version of the *Life*.⁷⁷ They do not exist in Aelred's Latin version. They are deliberate insertions that are key to his message: King Henry must not be avaricious, unless he wants to end like his avaricious predecessor Harold.

The third way the Confessor is made into a monk is his obedience to his superior, Saint Peter. As King, Edward has no superior in England. The apostle, however, serves as more than his connection to God: Peter is a sort of abbot figure to Edward, and the king vows to be forever in Peter's service.⁷⁸ The vow itself sounds like a feudal oath: Matthew believes that the King holds his kingdom from God. As seen above, Edward takes very seriously his vow to Peter that he will make a pilgrimage to Rome. Edward could have broken his vow once he had become king, but instead he was obedient to Peter, not abandoning his pilgrimage vow until absolved from it. Edward's obedience to his superior is the least fully developed of the three monastic virtues Matthew gives the Confessor – one would not want to make a king seem too subservient – but it is nevertheless evident in the text.

The ideal of kingship thus presented in the *Life* is somewhat freely based on the traditional Benedictine monastic vows: chastity, poverty, and obedience. King Henry, however, may have believed that it would be very difficult for him to be both an amateur monk and an effective king, as Edward had been, especially if he were to father an heir. The *Life* anticipates this. It provides the King with another path to God's favor, one that is deeply conservative, even anachronistic. It describes Edward's relationship with the monks and monasteries in his kingdom, hoping that Henry will follow suit. From his childhood, we read, Edward loved monks. The Confessor begins his vision about the future of England with reminiscence from his youth:

When I was young in Normandy,
Much I loved the holy company
Of people of religion
Who loved only all that was good,
Especially a monk who led

A high and heavenly life...[79](#)

From the beginning, Edward favored monks, according to the *Life*. His love turns into patronage and protection once he becomes King. This is proper according to the social scheme called trifunctionalism, in which each of three social orders supports the functions of the other two. The good King ought to patronize and protect the clergy so that they may pray effectively and win God's favor for the kingdom.

Georges Duby showed that medieval trifunctional ideology was articulated in the early eleventh century in response to changes in society. As cities began to rise and the monastic scene exploded in reform, confusing traditional “feudal” social positions, conservative bishops put forth their vision of a traditional society with three clearly delineated social roles. The three “orders” (today often called “estates”) of this imagined society were the *oratores* (those who pray), *pugnatores* (those who fight), and *laboratores* (those who work), and each had their own distinct role in society.[80](#) While in the background the *laboratores* tilled the fields of the other two orders, the King and other *pugnatores* were to wage Christian war, against the enemies of the Church, thereby protecting monasteries and churches from harm. The warriors and laborers were also to support ecclesiastical institutions with gifts of land and wealth. The *oratores* had perhaps the most important responsibilities. The secular clergy would run the Church and administer the sacraments necessary for salvation, and monks would bring the blessings of God to the world and pray for the souls of the departed. Monastic work was no token recompense. The intercessionary powers of the monks were paramount in what has been described by Barbara Rosenwein and Lester Little as “a theology of redemption that pitted God against the Devil in a battle for the souls of men” where the monks and their prayers were “in the thick of the fray.”[81](#) If the knight's chain mail was his armor for the earthly battle, the monk's armor was his habit, donned for spiritual combat.

Like the bishops who first articulated trifunctionalism, Matthew Paris is himself deeply conservative. It is the trifunctional vision of monasticism's social role that Matthew promotes in the *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*. Knowing that Henry was modeling himself on Edward, Matthew reveals the Confessor to be the flawless patron of England's monks. Edward makes himself into the greatest benefactor of monks in England when

he commissions the building of Westminster Abbey. The monks are indebted to him for his generosity. Fortunately, according to Matthew they will have “nothing to do but pray” for the good of the King and his subjects. They will be fulfilling the traditional role of “those who pray,” making sure the King and his followers – “those who fight” – are right with God. This is a classic statement of trifunctionalism. King Henry need not be a monk himself, as Edward had nearly been, so long as he sponsors monasticism in his kingdom.

Matthew adds another aspect to trifunctionalism's reciprocal relationship between kings and monks. Several events in the *Life* establish monks in another role: the king's advisors. Monks instructed Edward in youth, and his two best friends in adulthood are monks.⁸² When the Confessor's spirit appears on Earth to guide Harold, it does not visit the king directly. Instead, the apparition speaks to Harold through Abbot Ramsey. Thus, Matthew wishes to instruct King Henry that the wisdom of the good king of the past will not come to him directly. Rather, Edward speaks through those whom he loved, and who maintain his memory: the monks of England. As those who are in direct contact with the saint, the monks have the wisdom to advise the monarch. This contact is manifested via visions such as Abbot Ramsey's. More tangibly, monks also commune with the saints through the possession of their relics, as the *Life*'s description and drawing ([Figure 1](#)) of the translation of Edward's body to Westminster Abbey demonstrate to the reader. Matthew thinks that advising the King is the right and duty of monks, who are a conduit to the holy wisdom of the saints. The *Life of Edward* itself is a case in point: Matthew rebukes Henry directly or indirectly several times during the *Life*. Matthew would not have confronted King Henry if he had not believed that doing so was his right as the King's counselor. Monks, according to Matthew, have access to a special wisdom beneficial to secular leaders.

Antonia Gransden wrote that *The Life of Saint Edward* was “of no historical value.”⁸³ As this chapter has shown, Gransden was quite wrong. The *Life* is Matthew Paris' paradigm of the relationship between king and monk, meant for the digestion of Henry III. It establishes the saintly ideal of kingship by monasticizing King Edward, but acknowledges that it would be difficult for contemporary kings to follow his model completely. An alternative path to pious kingship is offered, based on the classic

trifunctional model of a rightly ordered Christian society. The king is to be the patron and protector of England's monasteries, and in return, the monks will give him prosperity in life and a place in Heaven after death. Matthew fawns over Henry in prophecy, but is not afraid to subtly rebuke his abuse of escheats. He adds to the *Life* of the good King Edward the portrait of Harold as everything a good king must eschew. Ultimately, it is apparent that for Matthew Paris the *Life* is an explanation of right order, of the correct conduct of human relations on Earth, and an instructive meditation on the duties of kings within this order. The *Life of Edward* is not the only biographical work Matthew composed, however. Two of his other works in the genre are ideologically complementary to the *Life*, although intended for a different audience.

The Ancient Tradition of Royal Monastic Patronage in Matthew Paris's *Gesta Abbatum* and *Vitae Duorum Offarum*

As we have seen, Matthew Paris uses the *Life of Edward the Confessor* to explain his conception of the ideal relationship between the King of England and the English Benedictines. Matthew adds ancient precedent to his argument about royal patronage through the story of King Offa of Mercia (r. 757-796), the legendary founder of St Albans abbey. Matthew wrote two works that deal extensively with the Offa story, the *Vitae Duorum Offarum* (*Lives of the Two Offas*) and the *Gesta Abbatum Sancti Albani* (*Deeds of the Abbots of Saint Albans*). Together, the two construct an image of Offa as the progenitor of an ancient tradition of royal patronage of St Albans. Although not hagiographical in the strictest sense – Offa was never canonized a saint – nevertheless Offa's life as Matthew writes it is an ideological compliment to the *Life of Saint Edward*.

The *Gesta Abbatum* is a history of the abbots of St Albans from its foundation to the fifteenth century, meant for the perusal of the monks at St Albans. It survives in the *Liber Addimentorum*.⁸⁴ Matthew Paris is responsible for the first portion, to 1255.⁸⁵ The *Gesta* begins in 793, when King Offa appoints Willegod to be the first abbot of St Albans. Willegod is said to have reigned “supported by the assistance of” King Offa.⁸⁶

Offa gives the body of Saint Alban and “many possessions and liberties” to the new monastery. He also gained exemption from Papal taxation for St Albans . Offa dies soon after, and the abbot Willegod neglects to have the King buried at St Albans.⁸⁷ His remains are instead lost forever.

The loss of Offa's tomb allows Matthew to identify Offa with an Old Testament counterpart: Moses. In the *Gesta* , Matthew Paris explicitly compares the loss of Offa's body to the unknown burial site of the Biblical patriarch.⁸⁸ The parallel is reasonable: as Moses was the great lawgiver and leader of the Jews, Offa is portrayed as the original patron of the monks at St Albans . Without Moses, there would have been no Jewish people. Matthew's comparison implies that, without Offa's and his patronage, there would have been no monastic community at St Albans.

In Deuteronomy, God buries the body of Moses in an unknown tomb. For this reason, it cannot become a focus of religious veneration. Thus, Moses' legacy to his people is the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Similarly, Offa's lost tomb cannot be venerated. Following Matthew's logic, the Mercian King's sole bequest to posterity is St Albans.⁸⁹ As Moses' name is inextricably linked with Torah, Matthew Paris wishes to attach Offa's name firmly to his monastery.

For the same reason, Matthew also wrote the *Vitae Duorum Offarum*, which is likewise found in the *Liber Addimentorum* . The “two Offas” of the title are two early British kings: Offa of Angel (c. 400) and the aforementioned Offa of Mercia. The work was likely written about 1250, and its purpose, like the account of Offa of Mercia in the *Gesta Abbatum* , is “to describe and account for the foundation of St Albans ; to emphasize its antiquity and connection with royalty; and to whitewash the character of the founder, Offa of Mercia.”⁹⁰ The *Vitae* describes the vow of the earlier Offa “to found a monastery...in which God may be worthily and perpetually served.”⁹¹ The first Offa dies before fulfilling his promise, and the second Offa takes it up four centuries later. From this point, the story follows the same lines as that in the *Gesta* , except in much greater detail. After many military and political victories, and the death of his scheming wife, Offa of Mercia brings the relics of Alban to Hereford and there founds St Albans .

He dies shortly thereafter, and is buried near the Ouse River, “where...today, the residents of the place, bathing in that very place in the summertime...see the tomb submerged in the depth of the water. And however much one may try...it cannot be reached.”⁹² The tale of the unreachable underwater tomb represents the now unattainable prestige that Offa's tomb would have granted St Albans.

Matthew's versions of the Offa story are, like the *Life of Saint Edward*, efforts to associate St Albans with royal patronage. Lacking the body of Offa as a tangible connection to the royal past, Matthew realizes that a literary link will have to suffice. Therefore, he goes to great pains to emphasize the role of King Offa in the foundation and endowment of St Albans in the *Gesta* and *Vitae*. Both works on Offa are written for the monks of St Albans, who would have found in them considerable historical ‘evidence’ for their royal roots. Perhaps they were convinced of the authenticity of the Offa story: on June 22, 1256, the monks of St Albans began to say perpetual prayers for King Offa's soul.⁹³

This chapter has shown how Matthew Paris uses the *Life of Saint Edward* to explain to King Henry III the proper way to treat monks based on the trifunctional model of social order. It has also examined Matthew's efforts to establish an ancient precedent for royal monastic patronage: the life of Offa of Mercia. Together, the stories of Edward and Offa allow Matthew to inform both monks and the King how they ought to behave toward each other. The next chapter will follow Matthew's greatest work, the *Chronica Majora*, as it records a near total breakdown of the king-monk relationship with which Matthew is so concerned.

Chapter 2: The *Chronica Majora*

The greatest achievement of Matthew Paris is undoubtedly his massive record of English history, the *Chronica Majora*. The chronicle relates events from Creation to 1259, when Matthew died. It was begun by Matthew's predecessor, Roger of Wendover, who died in 1236. Matthew edited Wendover's chronicle up to the mid-1230s and began to write from

where Wendover's work ended. In all, Matthew's original effort amounts to approximately 300,000 words, in Latin.⁹⁴ It includes 350 supporting documents, including charters, letters, and papal bulls. We are fortunate to possess the two manuscripts which Richard Vaughan has shown to be Matthew's original working copies of the Chronicle.⁹⁵ The manuscripts present evidence for a serial mode of composition, one in which Matthew likely took notes on a year's events and then composed its annals. Some entries were composed immediately, while in a few cases Matthew seems to have lagged perhaps a year in his writing.⁹⁶ The fact that Matthew did not write his chronicle *en bloc* is significant: it means that we can follow his opinions as they developed over time.

Essentially, Matthew set out to write down everything he thought important about the history he experienced or heard about while a monk at St Albans.⁹⁷ Matthew's history is vivid, detailed, and multifaceted. It is also often quite myopic. Matthew is very conscious of his audience and thus aware of the criticisms that would be leveled at him both by his contemporaries and in the future. In one entry, he explains the difficulty of his situation, lamenting:

The condition of historians is indeed difficult; because, if they speak truly, men are provoked; if they decide to write falsely God, who separates the truthful from the sycophants, does not accept it.⁹⁸

Matthew shows that he does not conceive of his work as a private journal, but as a history to be made public (insofar as medieval manuscripts could be publicized.) Otherwise, there would have been no one to be provoked, and he could tell the whole truth for the pleasure of God. Matthew knows that his opinions might stir up trouble for him if the wrong people come across them – he estimates highly the power the *Chronica* would have to affect its readers. Therefore, as we will examine in detail later, Matthew carefully adjusts his writing to his audience, producing different versions for different readers.

Due to the abundance and variety of material contained within, it is impossible to distill the *Chronica* into a single main idea. Nevertheless, as in Matthew's hagiography, one major theme that can be traced in the *Chronica* is that of the proper relationship between

kings and monks. The *Chronica* shows most clearly Matthew's view on what happens when that relationship goes wrong. From the annals Matthew wrote early in his career to passages written near the end of his life, the *Chronica* grows more cynical about King Henry's behavior. Matthew's anti-royal negativity is not just the ranting of an old monk. Rather, he sees the decline in royal patronage of the English Benedictine houses as representative of a shift in social order that would have dire consequences for England. Matthew becomes more and more frustrated with the situation as time passes, and eventually comes to endorse a rather desperate solution: revolt against a legitimate monarch. The *Chronica Majora*, by 1259, comes to fully endorse the baronial movement against the King led by Simon de Montfort. By examining Matthew's changing depiction of King Henry III, this chapter will trace the transition on the part of Matthew Paris and the entire Benedictine community of St Albans from supporting the crown to siding with the rebellion.

The *Chronica*'s earliest depictions of King Henry, those from the period of the regency, are relatively sympathetic. The nine-year-old King's coronation in 1216 is described in some detail, and his oath, in which he swears to make generous payments to churches and monasteries, "for as long as he might hold the kingdom," is recorded.⁹⁹ Henry's father, King John, had been particularly loathed by the Church, and Henry and his advisors evidently wished to make reparations.¹⁰⁰ In 1226, John's ghost returns to Earth to visit a monk at St Albans. John wishes to inform the monk that, "through the clemency of God ...and my son's lavish distribution of gifts for churches...I hope to gain mercy."¹⁰¹ These early passages show a promising start for the relationship between the King and the Church. They also serve to record for posterity Henry's sworn obligation to be an ecclesiastical patron. Roger of Wendover wrote the entry, but as Matthew Paris made no changes to it, he must have approved of its inclusion: his many other changes to Wendover's work show no hesitance to revise.¹⁰²

The relationship between the court and the cloister does not immediately turn sour after the king's minority ends. In 1227, having come of age, Henry declares himself able to govern in his own name.¹⁰³ The *Chronica* does not look on Henry kindly during the first decade of his reign proper, but most of its criticism leveled at the king centers around his

disputes with the nobility and the favor he shows to the French. A typical passage complains that “Henry, King of the English, in the seventh year of his reign, held his Christmas court at Worcester ; where... he removed from their offices all the natural ministers of his court, and substituted Poitevin [French] foreigners in their offices.”¹⁰⁴ Matthew's criticism focuses on the King's ignoring his “natural ministers” in favor of “foreigners,” an act which deeply offends him. The narrative of the anti-French baronial uprising of 1233 that follows is somewhat sympathetic to the barons' cause, but the *Chronica* is not nearly as anti-royal as it becomes in later years. The issue of the King's mistreatment of monasteries does not receive significant treatment in this first section of the chronicle.

It is approximately at this point that Matthew Paris's job transitions from editor of Wendover's work to the original writer of the *Chronica* . The work immediately becomes more long-winded and more critical of the King. In the year 1239, Matthew relates the story of the King's mistreatment of the monks at Winchester cathedral. In an entry with the heading “How the King intruded a prior from Brittany into the convent of the church of Winchester ,” Matthew writes:

Around this time the king vigorously oppressed the church of Winchester , and intruded a certain foreigner violently into it, against the will of the whole monastery...[the new prior] subverted all, and perverted all; and wasting the treasure of the church, he only wished to please the King.¹⁰⁵

Here the issue is the right of the abbot of a monastery to choose its prior (the abbot's immediate subordinate), as is prescribed in the Benedictine *Rule* .¹⁰⁶ For the King to presume to appoint a prior, and a foreign one no less, runs contrary to Matthew's understanding of right order. Matthew's comments in the first decade or so of his work on the *Chronica* are, however, not strictly anti-royal. Rather, he approves of certain royal behaviors and lambastes others. An illustrative microcosm of Matthew's fluctuating attitude toward Henry through the mid- to late-1240s is his portrayal of the king's dealings with the Papacy.

The Pope and the King

Matthew Paris is consistently anti-papal.¹⁰⁷ He does not deny Papal authority in the Church – this is not yet the age of Luther and Calvin. However, he greatly resents the demands for money that Popes Gregory IX (r. 1227 – 1241) and Innocent IV (r. 1243 – 1254) make on English monasteries. Papal avarice gives Henry opportunities to be a good monastic patron. For example, in 1240, the Pope's legate, Pietro Rosso, comes to England to collect money.¹⁰⁸ He makes demands for money from the English abbots, who turn to Henry for his protection, begging:

Lord King, we are humiliated, and it is not permitted for us to cry out, our throats are slashed, and we cannot lament. Impossible things are imposed upon us by the Lord Pope...to the defense of your patronage we run back, begging advice and aid against these desolations.¹⁰⁹

Instead of providing shelter, the King becomes angry, calls out to the legate, who is hiding nearby, and then threatens to imprison the abbots in one of his castles. Henry is not acting as the patron and protector of monks, but rather he is taking the side of the Papacy against them. Matthew shows his disapproval through the nuances and vocabulary of the story: the use of the Latin verb “jugulare” (to kill by cutting the throat) lends plaintive force to the abbot's plea.¹¹⁰ The monks are portrayed like Henry's children, running back to his fatherly defense for protection, while in actuality he has laid a trap for them. In this case, the King has not acted according to Matthew's sense of right order.

Later that same year, Matthew's chronicle reports the death of Edmund Abingdon, the Archbishop of Canterbury and an opponent of the King. Matthew fears that without the Archbishop to prevent their collusion, the legate and the King will grow even more oppressive: “Now I know well, that when the shepherd and the wolf enter into a treaty of friendship, violent slaughter threatens the sheep,” warns a court satirist in the *Chronica*.¹¹¹ The wolf is Pope Innocent IV, whom Matthew consistently sees as an adversary. Rather than entering into league with Innocent, the King ought to be the advocate and protector – the shepherd – of the monks.

An occasion when Matthew believes Henry has behaved properly is to be found in 1245. When the Papal legate demands even more money from the English Church, the clerics of the kingdom again plead to Henry for royal intervention, this time making an appeal to historical precedent:

If the lord Pope considered the primitive state of the Church in England, its more recent past, and its present state, he would not harass churches and ecclesiastics...[at that time there were] clerics and priests, and monks, with lands and possessions sufficient for their sustenance assigned to them by special inheritance, monks to whom he assigned only to this responsibility: that in their assigned place they might glorify the divine, and might give prayers and deeds of thanks to God day and night, and practicing alms and other works of piety, they might hold out hospitality for the poor according to their means.¹¹² According to this passage, Henry must realize that the Pope is ignoring the legacy and importance of English monasticism. The King, however, can still be on the right side of history. He need only allow the old order to continue by protecting it from the Papacy, and his kingdom will reap its benefits. This time, Henry is represented as paying attention to the clergy. The next entry in the *Chronica* is the King's letter to the Pope asking for a reprieve from his exactions. The letter is, unfortunately, ineffectual.¹¹³ King Henry continues his intervention again in 1246, when he forbids St Albans from paying a tallage to the Pope.¹¹⁴ In these cases, Matthew approves of Henry's actions toward the monks: the King should be their advocate, even against the highest ecclesiastical authority.

As a further proof of the worth of monks to the Crown, Matthew tells the story of Prince Edward's illness in 1247. The young firstborn of Henry seems to be on his deathbed, and the King asks the monks of St Albans to pray for him. The boy's health is miraculously restored. Immediately thereafter, Matthew tells us that the people wondered why the Pope did not pray for Prince Edward and bring about his healing.¹¹⁵ Monks are thus shown to be more effective divine intercessors than the Roman pontiff is: their prayers have guaranteed the royal succession. Matthew presents his audience with proof of the divine power that can be harnessed when kings and monks operate together in proper harmony.

The Breakdown

The deterioration of Henry's financial situation in the 1240's is duly noted in the *Chronica*. By the late 1240's, the King's military conflicts with the Welsh and the French have left the treasury in bad shape. Matthew notes his poverty and indebtedness on several occasions from 1242-1245.¹¹⁶ Growing debt requires Henry to request additional payments from the magnates and the Church, and tensions begin to erupt. In 1248, the King is taken to task by the Great Council for misgovernment. In Matthew's narrative, the barons accuse him of wastefully distributing the wealth of the kingdom and marrying the nobles of the realm off to ignoble foreigners.¹¹⁷ Matthew also inserts a complaint about the King holding abbacies vacant too long, a source of revenue for the Crown. By forbidding an abbot to be appointed when one had died, the King could control the revenue of the monastery's lands, which escheated to him in such a case until the appointment of a new abbot. In the narrative of the *Chronica*, the period from the late 1240's onward marks a turning point in Matthew's portrayal of the King. This shift correlates with the rise in Matthew's respect for a new figure: Simon de Montfort.

The history of Simon de Montfort is one of a meteoric rise to prominence. Simon was born about 1208 in France. His father, also named Simon, held territory in both France and England and had gained notoriety in the Albigensian Crusade. The younger Simon quickly became an able military leader. In 1229, Simon became Earl of Leicester, ceding the claim to his late father's territory in France to his elder brother. Simon married well; he took Eleanor, King Henry's sister, as his wife in 1238. This put him into an excellent position to be influential with Henry, and they were allies for a time. However, as Matthew relates, their friendship did not last.

In 1252, the *Chronica* records that Henry and Simon come into conflict because the King refuses to reimburse the Earl for the military service he had rendered to the King in France. "Lord King," he begs in Matthew's theatrical account, "...hold to the agreement which you promised me...restore the expenses which I poured out in your service; it is infamous indeed that I rendered my retinue irredeemably destitute on behalf of your honor."¹¹⁸ It should be noted that the Latin verbs Matthew uses for Simon here are in the

imperative, not in a more polite formulation, such as the jussive subjunctive. This lends a righteous and defiant air to Simon's words – one with which Matthew likely intends his audience to sympathize. Henry is accused of breaking an oath, a significant offense in feudal society. Instead of replying justly to his brother-in-law, Henry tells Simon that he is allowed to abandon an agreement in order, “to openly oppress the wicked.”¹¹⁹ Thus insulted – and reminded of the ongoing dispute over Magna Carta – the Earl nearly comes to blows with the King and their friends are forced to break them apart. From this point in the *Chronica* on, the relationship between Simon de Montfort and King Henry deteriorates.

From 1250 on, it is possible to chart Matthew's loss of faith in the King simultaneously with his intensifying sympathy for the cause of Simon de Montfort. Matthew represents Henry's treatment of monasteries as ever greedier. For example, in 1250, he demands 50 silver marks apiece from various monasteries including St Albans . Henry, according to the *Chronica*, “held a certain hope, that none of the abbots or priors would resist him.”¹²⁰ Such extortion is mentioned earlier, but Matthew here raises for the first time the idea of resistance. Considering the significant effort Matthew makes in the earlier portion of the *Chronica* and also in the *Life of Saint Edward* to connect St Albans with the person of the King, even to imply subtly that monks ought to resist the Crown is a major departure for Matthew's narrative. Henry is furthermore accused again of manipulating vacant abbacies for profit.¹²¹ Matthew also repeatedly mentions the King's violations of Magna Carta in this period.¹²² Matthew appears to be accumulating evidence against the King in the first few years of the 1250s.

What little is left of Matthew's hope for change disappears from the text after 1254. In this year, we know from sources outside the *Chronica* , the army of Pope Innocent IV tried to reclaim Sicily from the Hohenstaufen Emperor, Manfred, but the Papal forces were defeated in battle at Foggia . Innocent offered Henry the “opportunity” to invade Sicily , and Henry accepted – agreeing to pay the Pope the huge sum of £90,000.¹²³ The King had to find a way to pay his debt, and he turned first to heavy taxation of monasteries and churches, which were forced to pay over £40,000.¹²⁴ It is not surprising, given these circumstances, that Matthew's portrayal of King Henry shifts from

critical to loathing. Into the Chronica's description of the events of late 1254, a royal writ is inserted. It orders each monastery to give the Crown a description of its customs and a detailed census of its property.¹²⁵ The obvious implication is that Henry is now endeavoring to determine exactly how much wealth he can exact from each religious house. He takes advantage of such information on many occasions. In 1255, returning from political negotiations in Scotland, Henry travels south “on the way visiting abbeys and priories, and fattened from feeding off the money of their prelates, he commended himself to their prayers.”¹²⁶ The final clause, where Henry expects the monks to pray for him, is a glaring act of neglect for what Matthew believes to be proper social order.

In a dialogue following shortly after this episode, Matthew gives more detail to his opposition of monastic taxation. Visiting the Abbot of Buildwas, a Cistercian house, the King asks for money, saying, “Why is it, abbot, that you refuse to pay an aid to me, needfully and humbly asking? Am I not your patron?” The abbot replies, “If only you were our patron, father, and defender. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate for you to injure us by extortion of money, but better to devoutly seek glory by the aid of prayers.” The abbot believes, with Matthew Paris, the right relationship exists when kings ask for spiritual, not material aid from monks. However, Henry informs the abbot, “I value each equally, money and prayers.” The abbot answers, “I do not believe that this can be. It is proper that you lack one or the other. If indeed you violently extort our wealth from us, how may we devoutly and with sincere hearts pray for you? Truly, prayer without devotion has little or no power to be useful.”¹²⁷ The King recognizes the eloquence of the abbot's argument, but nevertheless continues to extort money from monasteries. In 1256, he laments that he did not leave the abbacy of Abingdon (a Benedictine abbey) vacant longer so that he might have kept more of its revenues.¹²⁸ The following year, Matthew compares the king to “a wolf hungry for the lamb” – a description that takes him far from the hopeful image of the young Henry, who had promised to be the patron of all religious houses for his entire reign.¹²⁹ The King has gone from being the potential shepherd seen above to being a greedy wolf. This demonstrates that after the expensive but futile Sicilian affair and its aftermath, Matthew lost all faith in Henry as a monastic patron.

Matthew's solution to the problem is radical: he supports the rebellious barons against the King. The movement is personified by Simon de Montfort, whose portrayal in the later years of the *Chronica Majora* is far more positive than the King's. The episode above, in which a righteous Simon confronts the King and they nearly come to a brawl, is only one such example. The most striking encounter between Simon and Henry comes nearly at the end of Matthew's work, in the entry for July 1258. While the King is on a boat trip down the Thames to Westminster, a sudden thunderstorm rises up, and, Matthew reports:

The King, fearing this type of storm more than all things, ordered on the spot that [the ship] be put ashore immediately. The small ship was then before the noble palace of the bishop of Durham, which in those days was the lodging of [Simon de Montfort,] the Earl of Leicester. When the Earl realized [that the ship had landed at his palace], he ran happily up to it, greeting the King reverently, as was fitting; and consoling him he said: "What are you afraid of? The storm will soon pass." To which the King not jokingly, but with a serious and severe face, responded: "I fear the thunder and lightning excessively, but by the Godhead, I fear you more than all the thunder and lightning in the world." To which the Earl benevolently responded: "My lord, it is incredible and unjust that you are frightened of me, your steadfast friend, always faithful to you and to yours and to the kingdom of England; but rather you ought to fear your enemies, the destroyers and liars."¹³⁰

Simon de Montfort is portrayed as the noble protector of the realm, not as an insurgent baron. Matthew deliberately makes the character of the King's "steadfast friend," who responds "benevolently" and treats Henry "reverently," a sympathetic one.

This passage cannot be understood outside of the political context of 1259. In June 1258, Simon de Montfort and the barons of England had forced King Henry to agree to the Provisions of Oxford, which took most of his power and placed it in the hands of a council of fifteen magnates, whose leader Simon soon became. The Great Council, an ancestor of Parliament, was to meet three times a year, regardless of a royal summons. The Council would have control over taxation, among other powers. It should not be thought that Simon and the baronial movement were trying to abolish the English monarchy. Treharne argued, instead, that they were reforming it as they saw fit, so that

England would become “a better governed and more just society for all its members.”¹³¹ This may not have been the whole truth, but Simon never made a move to eliminate the monarchy. From 1258 to 1265, Simon de Montfort was instead the *de facto* ruler of England. Matthew shows his agreement with the Provisions by portraying the Earl as the earnest protector of the realm, and thus he takes a radical stand for limited monarchy.

Matthew Paris did not have the opportunity to see the outcome of the struggle between the barons and the monarchy. His final entry, dated June 1259, follows the story of the stormy encounter between Henry and Simon by only a few pages. At the entry's conclusion, a hand not Matthew's own reports, “At this point, Matthew Paris died.”¹³² It is impossible to state the exact date of his death, but the summer of 1259 has received the greatest scholarly support.¹³³ He ended his great chronicle on a note much less enthusiastic toward King Henry than that with which he had started it. Matthew eventually lost all hope for a return to royal monastic patronage. He sided with the baronial reformers in an effort to return the realm to right order. The question remains, however, to whom did he address his discourse on social order?

The Audience and Purpose of the *Chronica Majora*

As discussed above, Matthew Paris wrote his *Life of Saint Edward* with King Henry in mind.¹³⁴ However, the *Chronica Majora* was not written for Henry to read, at least unexpurgated. Matthew realized that his opinions about the King could have brought him trouble. The most direct evidence that Matthew did not wish for the King to read his original work is a system of notes that he left in the margins of the autograph manuscript of the *Chronica*. (Fortunately, both Matthew's autograph and the revised version survive almost entirely.) These marginalia were Matthew's notes to the scribe who was copying his autograph manuscript into a fair copy. They instruct the scribe on forming an expurgated version of the chronicle: the notes label certain passages with phrases like “cause of offense,” “erase this,” or, “beware because offensive.” Seventeen of the twenty passages that are marked as such in Matthew's autograph, but are altered or omitted from

the scribe's version, concern King Henry.¹³⁵ In some cases, the new passage directly contradicts the old one. For example, a passage in the autograph manuscript reports that the King had a man put to death without cause, while the altered version in the fair copy informs the reader that the King knew nothing about the execution.¹³⁶ The original version of the *Chronica* – the one examined here – relates Matthew Paris's uncensored reactions to events. It was clearly not meant for royal eyes.

It is simple to establish that Matthew did not write the *Chronica* for King Henry to read, but it is more difficult to ascertain his true audience. The most accessible, literate, and sympathetic readers that Matthew had were, of course, the monks of St Albans and other nearby monasteries. Indeed, Vaughan finds that the *Chronica* “never seems to have passed into general circulation” outside the monastic community.¹³⁷ Gransden agrees: Matthew's history was “intended for monks” at St Albans and other English houses.¹³⁸ Matthew wrote to inform and instruct his audience, other monks.

The *Chronica Majora* presents an ideology of kingly monastic patronage to the monks who made up its core audience, and it documents the failure of King Henry III to observe proper behavior toward monks. For this reason, it supports the rebellion of the barons against the king. The monks who read it were presumably meant to digest the *Chronica*'s evidence and agree with its views, even to support Simon de Montfort. Thus to state with Vaughan that Matthew “did not understand the significance of the struggle for power which was going on during his lifetime between the barons and the king” would be to disregard Matthew's true agenda: the preservation of the correct, harmonious reciprocal relationship between monarchs and monks as he saw it by any means necessary.¹³⁹ He chronicled Henry's misdeeds so that his fellow Benedictines might understand how their ancient rights and property had been violated. Perhaps Matthew did not fully grasp the significance of the barons' revolt insofar as the laity was concerned, but he had a crystal-clear conception of what it could mean for the English Benedictines.

Conclusion

As we have seen in the preceding analysis, Matthew Paris's mentality as it emerges from his historical works is that of a monk under siege: the assailant is a King who fails to understand the proper role of monasteries in his kingdom. Hence, one of Matthew's primary purposes in writing is to defend what he sees as the beleaguered association between Benedictines and their royal patrons. Matthew carefully tuned his arguments about the proper relationship between kings and monks to his audiences, directing the *Life of Saint Edward* to King Henry and his court and the *Chronica Majora*, *Gesta Abbatum*, and *Vitae Duorum Offarum* to the monks at St Albans . Certainly his address to Henry III did not have the desired effect. It is impossible to say from these texts alone whether Matthew's writings led his monastery to side with Simon de Montfort or whether Matthew himself was a product of a prevailing anti-royal feeling at St Albans . Most likely the interaction between chronicler and community was more complex than a simple one-sided relationship. Regardless, we can see in Matthew's work a crisis mindset that ultimately justifies a revolt against the king in the name of re-establishing proper social order. Matthew sees the King's behavior as a major threat both to St Albans and to other English monasteries. Did such a predicament truly exist in 13 th century England , or was it merely Matthew's literary creation?

Modern scholarship has addressed the question of the Benedictine situation in the high to late medieval period, and although there is not universal agreement on the subject, it seems that Matthew was at least somewhat justified in his fears. Nearly all scholars agree that the monks faced a difficult situation: the greatest disagreement is on the timing and degree of the decline in Benedictine fortunes.

Norman Cantor argued in the 1960s that as the social usefulness of Benedictine monasteries declined in the eleventh century, it created a crisis situation for the monks.¹⁴⁰ A diversifying society set aside the multipurpose social instrument that was the monastery and replaced it with more specialized institutions. The first important role that the monks lost in this process was that of education: society had diversified to a point where the monastic schools, which supported “the preservation of a basic literacy,” were no longer sufficient to promote Europe 's intellectual activity, and thus universities became necessary.¹⁴¹ The universities graduated a new class of trained bureaucrats for

governmental positions, and thus monks lost their role of administrators. Meanwhile, reform movements like the Cistercians, under the leadership of St. Bernard, withdrew further from the world and made it seem that the Benedictines “fell short of the monastic ideal.”¹⁴² Bernard's criticisms of the wealth of the Benedictines at Cluny are quite scathing, and they make clear what Cantor believes to be “a sharp division within the Western European monastic order.”¹⁴³ Division was concomitant, in Cantor's view, with a major decay in the quality of monastic recruits during this period. There was no question for Cantor that a crisis occurred: he goes so far as to state, “perhaps it would also be true that the tragedy of the monastic order was the tragedy of the medieval world.”¹⁴⁴

This statement is rather overdramatic. John Van Engen, writing twenty-six years later, responded directly to Cantor. He took issue with the idea that Benedictine monasticism was undergoing a major crisis between 1050 and 1130. Van Engen found that the evidence did not point to a decline in the fortune of Benedictine monasteries until at least fifty years after Cantor's period. The monks' numbers, he pointed out, continued to grow throughout the 1100s, not leveling off until the early thirteenth century. In England, the populations of Benedictine houses peaked between 1100 and 1135. The quality of the recruits also was still quite high: for every non-Benedictine cleric of importance in the twelfth century there was a Benedictine counterpart. As Cantor argued, it was the age of Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Damian, but it was also the age of Anselm, Abelard, and Peter the Venerable; surely, despite Cantor's view, “...Benedictines continued to draw a fair share of talented monks.”¹⁴⁵ If there was a recruitment decline for the Benedictines, it happened long after they were supposed to have lost their centrality to the West¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Black Monk revenues were showing some signs of trouble, but were still relatively healthy, and building activity continued uninterrupted. Given Van Engen's evidence, it is hard to argue that there was a general crisis of Benedictine monasticism in the twelfth century, as both Cantor and Knowles believed.

However, even Van Engen admitted that the situation had changed by the time Matthew Paris took his orders at St Albans. There may not have been a sudden crisis, but “from the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century... [the monks] assumed a position ever

less central to medieval religious life.”¹⁴⁷ The decline did not happen to the same degree or at the same rate at all monasteries: Benedictine monastic communities were primarily local entities, and thus change happened differently from house to house. The momentum had been with monastic movements such as the Cistercians and the Franciscans, and indeed even the Benedictines, in the twelfth and early thirteenth century. However, by the mid-1200s, the situation had changed. According to Andre Vauchez, it would be wrong to speak of a total crisis in all religious orders. However, he argues:

It is also undeniable that these movements, especially after 1230, were losing momentum and...no longer played the fundamental role that had been theirs in the past, either in the Church or in Western society.¹⁴⁸

In England, the Benedictines felt the impact of the change in social order more than the other monastic orders, such as the Cistercians or the Franciscans, because they were so heavily dependent on the patronage system. Although patronage did continue throughout the period, “in many regions, financial contributions from the aristocracy...diminished or ceased altogether.”¹⁴⁹ It might seem that the monasteries could have survived unperturbed on the extensive estates they already owned. However, the expanding European economy of the period led to inflation of both prices and wages. The great Benedictine abbeys had revenues which “consisted most often in rents or other charges on the land whose total amount was fixed and whose real value continued to diminish.”¹⁵⁰ The Benedictine houses, dependent on their landed endowments, were therefore hit harder than other orders. In fact, some of the most prominent English monasteries, such as Bury St. Edmunds and Battle Abbey, were put “on the verge of bankruptcy.”¹⁵¹ The economic difficulties of the monasteries were exacerbated by King Henry's fiscal policy.

English monasteries were also under considerable financial pressure from the Crown, as Matthew never ceases to tell us. While it is true that Carpenter finds relatively low overall tax impositions during the reign of Henry III, his evidence only applies to the laity.¹⁵²

The exceptions to the rule were the monastic houses: Henry “weighed the monasteries down with taxes.”¹⁵³ He did not do so out of hatred for the Church. Henry was a very religious man, as Matthew Paris well knew.¹⁵⁴ Rather, Henry had made a plainly idiotic decision to pay Pope Innocent IV for the “right” to invade Sicily and take it from Manfred (r. 1254-1266) – a logistically difficult task at which the Pope had previously failed. Henry robbed Peter to pay Peter's big brother, so to speak: he levied over £40,000 in taxes on the churches and monasteries of England between 1254 and 1259.¹⁵⁵ To put this in perspective, the annual income of St Albans – one of the wealthiest English abbeys at the time - was about £600.¹⁵⁶ Since St Albans was one of the largest ecclesiastical corporations in England , it must have been expected to bear a significant part of this burden, perhaps greater than its entire annual income. Given the inherently fixed revenues of the Benedictine houses, the King's demands must have seemed a true crisis to Matthew.

It is reasonable to conclude that, from the Benedictine point of view, the thirteenth century English monarchy's patronage of monasteries was outweighed by its monastic taxation. What historians have failed to realize is that Matthew Paris's anti-royal sentiments cannot be understood outside the context of this difficult situation. Antonia Gransden correctly acknowledges Matthew's “constitutional” attitude. “From beginning to end Matthew has a consistent attitude to centralized authority in church and state. He opposes it,” Gransden writes. Gransden then argues that Matthew “must have developed his ideas primarily under the provocation of contemporary politics, and he must certainly have been influenced by the climate of opinion which had grown up in the late twelfth century and in King John's reign.”¹⁵⁷ Gransden thus ascribes Matthew's attitudes mainly to the struggle between the barons and the Crown over Magna Carta and its related political causes, but never considers that Matthew could also be writing from a self-consciously monastic perspective. It is true that Matthew sides with the barons against the King, but for his own reasons: he would not have composed a work about the proper king-monk relationship like the *Life of Saint Edward* if he were not concerned with how the Crown was treating English monks. Matthew sees a widening gulf between King Henry and Benedictine monasteries, and he adopts uncompromising constitutionalism in

the *Chronica Majora* in response to the situation. Since Matthew wishes his audience to believe that King Henry is violating ancient royal custom toward monasteries, it is necessary for him to establish that this custom was genuinely ancient: it existed not only during the reign of the Confessor, but also centuries earlier. Matthew uses the Offa story in the *Vitae Duorum Offarum* and *Gesta Abbatum* to demonstrate St Albans' long history of being a kingly house. The common ideology of these four works makes clear that we cannot understand Matthew's constitutionalism outside of its Benedictine context.

Richard Vaughan is nearer to the mark than Gransden when he writes that Matthew's constitutionalism appears “to be based on his own material interests and those of his house.”¹⁵⁸ Vaughan's statement gives us an opportunity to evaluate another dimension of Matthew's work. Are his ideas about social order based solely, or even primarily, on “material interests?” Matthew constantly informs us of the taxation and financial woes of monasteries. It is therefore attractive to presume that he was simply a greedy monk who was unwilling to give up a single comfort or privilege. However, while wealth is undeniably important to Matthew, for him it is ultimately a symbol of the importance lay society attributed to monks. The Benedictine financial decline is, for Matthew, a product of a culture forgetting the importance of monasticism for its prosperity and salvation. Matthew wrote in a tradition where the important economy was the economy of salvation, and the account keeping that mattered was that of the next world. In the trifunctional model of right order to which Matthew adheres in his hagiography and historical writing, lay society patronized the clergy in return for their intercession with God. Thus, a breakdown in monastic patronage in England meant more to Matthew than the impoverishment of the English monasteries: it signified an impending collapse of Christian society in the realm.

Epilogue

Though this thesis has not relied on it, evidence exists outside the writings of Matthew Paris that St Albans attempted to link itself closely to royal patronage during the reign of Henry III. I obtained from the library of the Dukes of Devonshire at Chatsworth ,

England, a microfilm of a manuscript from St Albans composed sometime after 1393. In this cartulary, I found various previously unpublished charters ranging in date from around 1180 to the end of the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁹ These legal documents are records of donations of land, money, or other goods to St Albans from lay benefactors, created in the presence of sworn witnesses. Of the five charters pertaining to the period from the beginning of Henry's reign to the time before the end of the Barons' Wars in 1264, four are stated to have been made in the court of the King at Westminster.¹⁶⁰ The other charter was made at St Albans on one of the occasions when the King had his itinerant court at the abbey.¹⁶¹ The royal court was not the only place to conduct business, but St Albans deliberately chose to draw up its charters under King Henry's auspices, at least in the charters included by the cartulary's scribe.

After 1264, I found a dramatic shift occurring in the cartulary. None of the remaining charters for the reign of Henry were created at the King's court, but rather were finalized at St Albans in the presence of the Abbot. The trend away from conducting business at court continues almost completely without exception for the remainder of the approximately 50 charters in the rest of the cartulary, with two exceptions: one in the reign of Edward I, and one in the reign of Edward II. ([Figure 2](#))

This evidence is not conclusive – we do not know enough about the compiler's intentions to understand his methodology for including or excluding material. However, what we do know strongly suggests that before the period when Matthew Paris finally sided unequivocally with Simon de Montfort – that is, the middle to late 1250's – St Albans sought to conduct its business under the aegis of the King. This, it seems likely, was an effort consonant with Matthew's attempt to link the monastery with the monarch. The lack of a single charter made at the royal court during the last eight years of Henry's reign (1264-1272), after the barons had been defeated, suggests that St Albans conducted its affairs at a distance from the Crown after 1264. Provided that the cartulary accurately reflects the business of St Albans in the mid 1200s, this development could have transpired for two possible reasons: either the monastery lost favor with the King after 1264 for siding with de Montfort, or the monks finally gave up on seeking royal backing, just as Matthew Paris had in the *Chronica Majora*. Either way, the St Albans cartulary

shows that Matthew was not writing in a vacuum. His monastery also desired to secure a royal connection, and chose to seek it out at Court. Despite the best effort of the monks, it seems that the King's support simply was not to come. The “Benedictine Centuries” were drawing to a close.

End Notes

1. The Plantagenets were so called because of the *plante genet*, the plant depicted on their coat of arms. They are also known as the Angevins, as they were descended from rulers of Anjou in France.
2. Lawrence , C.H., *Medieval Monasticism* (New York : Longman, 2001), 1.
3. *Mt 19.21, Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Trans. Robert C. Gregg (Mahwah , NJ : Paulist Press, 1980, 30.
4. Gregory I, Pope, *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict*, Trans. Odo J. Zimmerman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1980), 27.
5. Lawrence 23.
6. Ibid., 24.
7. Knowles, David, *Christian Monasticism* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 40.
8. Ibid., 37
9. Knowles, David, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 22.
10. Ibid., 28.
11. Ibid., 45.
12. Ibid., 100.
13. Ibid., 126.
14. Lawrence , 72.
1. Rosenwein, Barbara, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 202.

2. Ibid., 139.
3. See Ch. 3 for more on the Offa story.
4. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, (New York E.P. Dutton, 1910), Internet version in Fordham Medieval Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.html>
5. Elsie Toms, *The Story of St Albans* (St Albans: Abbey Mill Press, 1962), 10-11. According to Toms, the evidence points to a holy site venerating Alban no later than the 5 th century.
6. Toms, 12.
7. Ibid., 22.
8. Ibid., 27.
9. Vaughan, Richard, *Matthew Paris* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9
10. RB 58. The professed monk was to be given the clothes of his monastery in the oratory when he made his profession before the monastic community; Vaughan , 2.
11. “Hic obiit Matthei Parisiensis.”
12. Vaughan , 2.
13. Ibid, 1.
14. Ibid, 2.
15. See Vaughan, 4-6; also Paris, Matthew, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry Luard (London: Longman and Co, 1872-3.) Vol. v, 244.
16. See chapter one.
17. Knowles, *Monastic Order*, 300.
18. Vaughan , 142.
19. See Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2002), for an accessible explanation of medieval ethnogenesis. Geary shows that the very concept of the English nation, upon which Vaughan relies, was not a medieval entity.

20. Vaughan , 140.
21. Ibid., 151.
22. Rosenwein, 37.
23. For more on the existence of a monastic “crisis,” see conclusion below.

Chapter 1: The Royal Hagiography of Matthew Paris

38. Luard, Henry, *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (London: Longman, Brown Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858). (Henceforth “*Edward*”); Binski, Paul, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 57-58.
39. Ibid.
40. *Edward* , 1. 35-39.
41. Luard determined Matthew's work to be based on the *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* and *Vita Edwardi Regis* of Aelred of Rievaulx. See Ibid, xxiii.
42. Binski 57.
43. *Edward*, 1. 52-54
44. Binski, 60.
45. Carpenter, David, “The Plantagenet Kings.” In *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 333.
46. Binski, 61.
47. *Edward*, 1. 868.
48. Ibid., 810.
49. Ibid., 1098 – 1102.
50. Ibid., 1250
51. Ibid., 1498-99.
52. Ibid., 1535 - 52.
53. Ibid., 2043 ff.

54. Ibid., 1762-5.
55. Ibid., 1711.
56. Ibid., 2320.
57. Ibid., 1911-14.
58. A degenerative skin disease related to tuberculosis. Ibid., 2660.; Ibid., 2700.;
Ibid., 1955.
59. Ibid., 3895-3922.
60. Ibid., 3927-3932.
61. Ibid., 3766 - 3774.
62. Ibid., 3805 – 3868.
63. Binski, 59.
64. Ibid., 4451-4472.
65. Ibid., 3623.
66. Ibid., 4189 – 4202.
67. Ibid., 4289.
68. Ibid., 4295-4310.
69. Ibid., 4640.
70. Edward, 4677 – 4680.
71. Carpenter, 333.
72. Edward, 1250.
73. Ibid., 930.
74. Ibid., 1895-1904.
75. See p.8 above.

76. In medieval England , feudal lands held directly from the crown were sometimes escheated – returned – to the crown on the death of their tenants. Escheats could thus be used by the monarchy as a form of taxation. On Henry III's mishandling of church escheats, see *CM III*, 113, V, 567
77. Binski, 59-60.
78. *Edward* , 810.
79. *Ibid.*, 3171-3176.
80. Georges Duby's classic study of the emergence of trifunctionalism as an idea, *The Three Orders* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), traces the beginnings of this system of thought to the writings of Adalbero of Laon and Gerard of Cambrai, writing in France in the early 11 th century. Duby would likely have pointed out that Matthew Paris thoroughly ignores the *laboratores* in his writings.
81. Rosenwein, Barbara and Lester K. Little. “Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities.” *Past and Present* no. 63 (May, 1974), 4-32. p.8.
82. See page 13 above.; *Edward*, 970.
83. Gransden, Antonia. *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 358.
84. See Chapter One for more information on the relationship between these texts.
85. *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani* , Ed. Henry T. Riley (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965 reprint), 7.
86. “...adjutorio regis fultus, rexit.” *Gesta*, 4.
87. *Gesta*, 6.
88. *Deut* 34.6.
89. *Besides, of course, a certain dyke...*
90. *Vaughan* , 189-190.
91. “...coenobium quoddam fundare...in quo digne et laudabiliter Deo in perpetuum serviatur...” *Vitae Duorum Offarum* , in *Matthaei Paris Chronica Maior* , ed. William Wats (London , 1684), 9.

92. “Unde...in praesens, sepulchrum illud ab incolis loci tempore aestivo ibidem balneantibus...in aquae profunditate videtur esse consumptum. Et quamvis, licet deiligentissime quaeratur...non invenitur.” *Vitae*, 32.
93. Paris, Matthew. *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry Luard (London: Kraus 1964), Vol. 5.562.

Chapter 2: The *Chronica Majora*

94. Vaughan , 125.
95. See Ibid., 49-77 for a technical discussion of the manuscripts and their various recensions.
96. Ibid., 60.
97. That Matthew wrote what concerned him is true in the most literal sense, as the earliest recension of the *Chronica* is largely in Matthew's own hand, at least the portion original to him. See the chapter “The Handwriting and Authorship of the Historical Manuscripts” in Vaughn, 35 ff.
98. “Dura enim est conditio historiographorum; quia, si vera dicantur, homines provocantur; si falsa scripturis commendantur, Deus, qui veridicos ab adulatoribus sequestrat, non acceptat.” *CM* v, 469-70.
99. *CM* iii, 2: “Deinde fecit homagium sacrosanctae Romanae ecclesiae et Innocentio Papae de regnis Angliae et Hyberniae; et juravit quod mille marcas, quas pater eius Romanae contulerat ecclesiae, fideliter persolveret, quamdiu praedicta regna teneret.”
100. W.L. Warren attempts to rehabilitate John's reputation, with limited success, in *King John* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.)
101. “Sed tamen per Dei clementiam spero et gratiam ineffabilem, et filli mei Henrici largam elemosinarum distributionem, necnon servitti divini honorem quem Deo devotus impendit, me quandoque misericordiam adepturum.” *CM* iii, 113.
102. See Vaughan , 32-34.
103. *CM* iii, 122.
104. “Rex Anglorum H, anno regni sui decimo septimo, tenuit curiam suam ad Natale apud Wigorniam; ubi...omnes naturales curiae suae ministros a suis removit officiis, et Pictavenses extraneos in eorum ministeriis subrogavit.” *CM* iii, 240.

105. “Quomodo rex quendam priorem natione Britonem intrusit in conventum Wintoniensem ecclesiae. Circa idem tempus rex vehementer oppressit ecclesiam Wintoniensem, et quendam alienigenam, [alienigena, alienigenae is masculine although it appears feminine] contra voluntatem totius in eandem violenter intrusit...omnia subvertit, omnes pervertit; et thesaurum ecclesiae dilapidando, soli regi placere cupiebat.” *CM iii, 622.*
106. *RB 65.15*
107. See Vaughn, 140-141.
108. Another papal legate, Otto of Montferratto, was in England as from 1237-1240.
109. “Domine rex, suggilamur, nec licet nobis clamitare; jugulamur, nec possumus ejulare. Injungitur nobis a domino Papa impossibilitas...ad sinum vestri patrocini recurrimus, super his desolationibus consilium et auxilium postulantes.” *CM iv, 35-36.*
110. Latin has an impressively specific variety of verbs meaning “to kill.”
111. “Eia, eia, nunc bene novi, quod, ex quo pastor et lupus foedus inierint concordiae, ovibus imminent strages truculenta.” *CM iv, 73.*
112. “Si mentis oculis intueretur dominus Papa statum primitivum ecclesiae in Anglia, medium, et praesentem, non concuteret ecclesias et ecclesiasticas personas...Hic clericos et sacerdotes, ibi monachos apponens, assignatis illis de speciali patrimonio suo terras et possessiones sufficientes ad sustentationem eorum, quos ad hoc solum deputavit, ut in locis sibi assignatis divina celebrarent, laudesque Deo die ac nocte et gratiarum exsolvent actiones, et elemosinas et alia pietatis opera exercentes, hospitalitatem pauperum sustentarent pro mensura facultatum.” *CM iv, 311-2.*
113. *CM iv, 315-316.*
114. *CM iv, 546.*
115. *CM iv, 639.*
116. See *CM iv, 233; 237; 395.*
117. “Reprehensus est insuper gravissime (nec mirum) super indiscreta vocatione alienigenarum; quibus omnia bona regni indiscrete, prodigaliter, et prodigaliter distribuit et dispersit, et nobiles regni ingobiligus extraneis maritavit.” *CM iv 6-7.*

118. “Domine rex...Tene mihi pactum, vel, quod mihi promisisti...expensas meas in servitio tuo fusas mihi restitue; notum est enim quod comitatum meum irrestaurabiliter pro tuo honore depauperavi.” *CM v, 290.*
119. “Licet enim a pactis recedenti a pactis resilire, et palam malignanti protervire.” *Ibid.*
120. Videns igitur dominus rex...spem certam concepit, quod nullus ei resisteret abbatum vel priorum .” *CM v, 59.*
121. *CM v.381; 567; 611/*
122. For instance, see *CM v.361; 381.*
123. Carpenter, *Plantagenet Kings*, 335.
124. *Ibid.*
125. *CM v, 464.*
126. “obiter vistando abbatias et prioratus, praelatorum eorundem pecunia saginatus, eorum se precibus commendabat.” *CM v, 507.*
127. “Quid est, abbas, quod mihi indigenti et humiliter postulanti auxilium pecuniare denegasti? Nonne sum patronus vester?” Abbot: “Utinam patronus, pater, et defensor. Veruntamen non expedit vobis nos in extorsione pecuniae dampnificare, sed potius cum devotione orationum suffragia postulare, exemplo pii regis Francorum salubriter informatus.” King: “Utrumque exigo, pecuniam videlicet cum orationibus.” Abbot: “Non credo hoc posse contingere. Alterutro oportet te carere. Si enim substantiolas nostras a nobis violenter extorqueas, quomodo devote et sinceris cordibus pro te orabimus? Oratio nempe sine devotione parum vel nihil prodesse praevallebit.” Rex autem, licet satis eleganter respondisset abbas, tamen abbatibus Cisterciensibus tacitus insidiabatur universis. *CM v, 554.*
128. *CM v, 567.*
129. *CM v, 611.*
130. Rex autem huiusmodi tempestatem plus omnibus formidans, iussit ilico se poni ad terram. Erat autem navicula ante nobile palatium episcopi Dunelmensis, quod tunc erat hospitium comitis Legecestriae. Quod cum sciret comes, laetus occurrit et serenus, salutans eum reverenter, ut decuit; consolansque ait, “Quid est quod timetis? Jam tempestatem pertransiit.” Cui rex non jocosè sed serio respondit, vultuque severo: “Supra modum tonitrum et fulgur formido, sed per caput Dei, plus te quam totius mundi tonitrum et fulgur contremisco.” Cui comes benigne

- respondit: “Domine mi, injustum est et incredibile, ut me amicum vestrum stabilem, et semper vobis et vestris et regno Angliae fidelem, paveatis; sed inimicos vestros, destructores et fasidicos, timere debetis.” Haec autem verba stupenda suspicabantur omnes inde erupisse, quod scilicet comes Legrecestriae virilius persitit et ferventius in proseguenda provisione, ut scilicet regem et omnes adversantes suis astare consiliis cogent, et eius fratres totum regnum corrumpentes funditus exterminarent.” *CM* v, 706.
131. Treharne, R. F., *Simon de Montfort and Baronial Reform* (London: Hambeldon Press, 1986).
132. “Hic obit Mattheus Parisiensis” *CM* v, 748.
133. For the details and history of this debate, see Vaughan , 9-11.
134. See Chapter Two, 2-3.
135. Vaughan , 117.
136. Vaughan ,120.
137. Ibid., 153.
138. Gransden, 358.
139. Vaughan , 140.

Conclusion

140. Cantor, Norman , “The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130”, in *The American Historical Review*, Vol 66, No 1. (Oct 1960), 47-67.
141. Ibid., 52.
142. Cantor, 51.
143. Ibid., 52.
144. Ibid., 67.
145. Van Engen, John, “The Crisis of Cenobitism Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150”, in *Speculum* Vol. 61 No. 2 (April 1986), 281.
146. Ibid., 276.
147. Ibid., 304.

148. Vauchez, Andre, "The Religious Orders", in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 5. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 222.
149. Ibid., 223.
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid., 225.
152. Carpenter, 330.
153. Vauchez, 224.
154. See the discussion of Henry's public devotion to the Confessor in Chapter One.
155. Carpenter, 335.
156. Toms, 40.
157. Gransden, 367.; Ibid., 368.
158. Vaughan , 139.

Epilogue

159. The manuscript is in the collection of the Chatsworth Library at Devonshire, and was noted but not studied by V.H. Galbraith, *The St Albans Chronicle* (Oxford , 1937) xxxix.
160. That is, "in curia regis apud Westmonasterium."
161. The location is given as "in curia regis apud Sancti Albani."

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