From Martyr to Monument
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The history of Cluny is often treated as if it began with the foundation of the abbey in 910 and ended with the death in 1153 of its last great abbot, Peter the Venerable. Some scholars have recently begun to revise this approach and have given more attention both to ‘Cluny before Cluny’, on this basis of archaeological as well as documentary evidence, and to ‘Cluny after Cluny’, from the twelfth century to the dissolution of the monastery at the time of the French Revolution. The present book extends this view, beyond the Revolution, through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It is not simply a history of the town of Cluny or of the remains of the abbey. The author describes the book at different places as a study of Cluny as cultural patrimony, of ‘the factors contributing to the rise of a heritage site at the ruins of the monastery’, and of how ‘the ruined abbey began its new life as a memorial site and Burgundian tourist destination within the context of its “glorious” medieval past’. It is thus a study in the history of religious, national, and regional attitudes as well as in the history of taste, and it shows how over the years the remains of the abbey were used both as a revolutionary justification and as a source of romantic regret. The townsmen of Cluny were not invariably hostile to the abbey and its remains, as it is sometimes said, and they were not motivated exclusively by practical and pecuniary interests. The author studies in particular the shift in sentiment about 1820, when efforts began to save the ruins, the reverse of the ‘downward spiral’ in the 1830s, and the first serious efforts to finance the preservation in the 1880s. Later milestones were the elaborate anniversary ceremonies in 1898, 1910 – the millennium of the foundation of Cluny – and in 1949, which were not only, or perhaps even principally, scholarly celebrations of the history of Cluny but also significant events in the history of French nationalism and Catholicism. Along the way many important writers and scholars, including Lamartine, Michelet, and Guizot, contributed to the development of the myth of Cluny and its remains. Particular attention is given here to Kenneth John Conant, the American architect and archaeologist whose years of work at Cluny and many publications helped to bring the abbey to life and to put Cluny on the modern tourist map.

Giles Constable
Institute for Advanced Study
Pour un médiéviste, le nom de Cluny résonne de façon si vive, si particulière, car l’abbaye bourguignonne, on le sait bien, compte parmi les hauts lieux du christianisme médiéval. Le livre que ici Janet Marquardt fera date à bien des égards d’abord et avant tout car il n’est en aucun cas un “livre de plus” sur l’abbaye de Cluny, sur son histoire ou l’importante production artistique de l’âge roman. Le lecteur s’apercevra dès le premier chapitre de ce beau livre qu’il s’agit d’un, ouvrage sur l’histoire intellectuelle, sociale et politique de la France du XIXe siècle jusqu’à nos jours vue à travers le prisme de la vie et de la recherche d’un architecte américain, véritable pionnier de l’archéologie moderne aussi, qui a vécu une véritable passion avec l’abbaye de Cluny, Kenneth John Conant. A n’en pas douter, le livre par plusieurs aspects si neuf et si original de Janet Marquardt devrait permettre de développer le dialogue entre médiévistes français et médiévistes américains dont la tendance est parfois – et on ne peut que profondément regretter cette situation – de s’ignorer mutuellement et réciproquement. Dans un certain sens, le livre de Janet Marquardt traite d’un sujet d’actualité : la notion de patrimoine et son histoire à partir du regard porté sur un monument phare du Moyen Age “français”, l’abbaye de Cluny. Une grande part de l’originalité de ce livre réside dans le choix du monument. En effet, l’abbaye de Cluny n’est pas seulement un véritable symbole d’une certaine période du Moyen Age – ce que l’on a coutume d’appeler l’époque romane -, mais c’est aussi l’exemple parfait du “fantasme” moderne pour le Moyen Age. Car, comme chacun sait, l’abbaye de Cluny et son église ont pour une large part été détruites dans les suites néfastes de la révolution française, du moins pour le patrimoine médiéval en général.

Dans ce sens, on peut dire que la construction de la vision patrimoniale de l’abbaye bourguignonne s’est faite à partir du rêve de monuments disparus à jamais et nourrie par ce qu’il en reste aujourd’hui : une petite partie de l’un des transepts, quelques vestiges des bâtiments monastiques et une multitude de fragments sculptés. Dans les trois premiers chapitres de son livre, Janet Marquardt retrace avec une grande précision et une érudition sans faille le XIXe siècle mouvementé pour l’abbaye bourguignonne. Dans ces pages, Janet Marquardt offre au lecteur une magnifique vue d’ensemble de la sociologie du patrimoine en France et ses multiples implications et imbrications avec le monde politique au moment même où la notion fait véritablement son apparition, à une époque cruciale pour l’émergence de sciences historiques telle
Avant-Propos

que l’archéologie. Le chapitre quatre du livre constitue l’articulation majeure de la pensée de Janet Marquardt. Dans ces pages, elle procède à une analyse fort pertinente des premières manifestations commémoratives de Cluny et de son patrimoine. Ici, il est fortement question de la structuration et de la mise en place du patrimoine clunisien à travers non seulement les diverses commémorations en tout genre reflétant la vie politique locale et nationale en même temps, tout autant que la mise en place d’une sociologie du patrimoine à l’échelle régionale, mais aussi du relais important dans ce processus pris par le monde savant des chercheurs universitaires et des recherches archéologiques naissantes.

Les chapitres cinq et six ainsi que, d’une certaine manière, la conclusion du livre proposent un enquête fort riche et inédite de la carrière de Kenneth John Conant et de ses travaux sur l’abbaye de Cluny. Dans ces pages, tout aussi savantes et très bien documentées que celles des chapitres précédents, Janet Marquardt retrace avec précision et une grand méticulosité la carrière du savant architecte et archéologue américain, ses origines intellectuelles et ses relations avec les milieux académiques de l’histoire de l’art médiéval dans la première moitié du XXe siècle, plus particulièrement avec les savants allemands exilés aux États-Unis au moment de la montée du fascisme en Allemagne. Janet Marquardt démontre avec beaucoup de pertinence et de façon convaincante le lien très étroit entre le contexte sociologique qui a vu naître et fait émerger la notion de patrimoine médiéval en France et les recherches archéologiques menées par Kenneth John Conant à l’abbaye de Cluny.

A tous égards donc, le beau livre de Janet Marquardt fera date non seulement dans le monde des spécialistes de l’abbaye de Cluny et, de façon plus générale, dans celui des médiévistes, mais aussi dans les cercles plus larges de la sociologie historique et de l’histoire culturelle.

Eric PALAZZO
Professeur à l’université de Poitiers
Directeur du Centre d’études supérieures de civilisation médiévale
Most of us who have taken or taught medieval art history classes study the abbey church of Cluny in the course of Romanesque architecture. We confront the remaining piece of the southeastern transept as a relic of the golden period of the abbey under St. Hugh and Peter the Venerable. Its vast size and decoration serve as a testament to Cluniac art and international patronage. Within such study, the current fragmentary condition of the abbey church is briefly attributed to its near total destruction caused by the French Revolution. Such an association conjures images of angry mobs, sans-culottes with pikes and torches, setting upon the monks and their possessions, smashing and burning the buildings. From our twentieth-century perspective, we poignantly try to imagine how the undestroyed portion would have fit into the overall form of the abbey church. We inevitably feel some form of regret that such a magnificent example of eleventh- and twelfth-century architecture was demolished. We secretly harbor a bit of righteous indignation at the ignorance of the revolutionary French.

Yet this version of events, when set against the facts of Cluny III’s demise, reads like an ideal propaganda rendition of the affair, as if it had been disseminated by a guilty Restoration government. How convenient, to imagine the culpability of the general French populace, even specifically the very townspeople of Cluny, rather than the much more complex politics of multiple governments over a period of thirty years. I asked myself: Did such a polarization of town and abbey exist? Was the abbey actually destroyed during the Revolution? How, exactly, could they get this huge building down? Clearly, anyone thinking about it in technical terms cannot imagine that anything less than dynamite and wrecking balls could effect such a leveling today. So unless the French army was involved with cannons and mines, or employed a team of masons comparable to those employed in the leveling of the Bastille, I couldn’t conceive of a revolutionary action—especially not spontaneous—which brought down the stone vaults and iron rebars.

What I found was a fascinating story of just such demolition, only long after the Revolution, and hotly contested by many local residents. I was also drawn into the politics of nineteenth-century historians and conservationists. All this led inexorably to Cluny’s “resurrection” during the excavations sponsored by the Mediaeval Academy of America under Kenneth Conant in the twentieth
century. The archival material he amassed presented a rich and unending source of study.

In this book I am concerned with ideas rather than the nuts and bolts of Cluny’s “afterlife”. I do not attempt to scrutinize the excavation programs, or do a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature on medieval Cluny or analyze Conant’s architectural reconstructions. Rather, I try to follow larger trends and determine themes in the history of Cluny’s development as a heritage site and as a modern touchstone for French notions of medieval monasticism. Anne Baud has made scientific measure of Conant’s methods and conclusions in her analysis of the findings from the recent excavations at Cluny. I only wish to complement that scientific work with one of historiography.

Those larger trends raise broad questions about so many things: views on Romanesque art in the nineteenth century, the way that French identity is bound up with heritage and patrimony, the role of provincial scholarly societies, the decisions of the various patrimonial institutions established by the July Monarchy, the political shaping of medieval history, the relationship of cultural heritage to tourism, American philanthropy in France, the changing standards of archaeology, let alone the explosion of studies into the function of memory and memorials or my temptation to launch into a full biography of Conant’s fascinating personal life! It seemed that the more I looked the greater the project became. Thus I have simply tried to introduce these issues as they arose within my specific investigation, then either send readers to those scholars who have made thorough studies of the questions or save it for a later work.

I am sure I missed things I should have read, resources I should have consulted, people I should have met. But in the end, one simply has to stop and get something out as grist for the mill. I welcome responses and look forward to critiques (within the spirit of scholarly advancement of course!) at: jtmárquardt@eiu.edu.

I am immensely grateful to the many people who have already assisted in some way with this project. Again, I’m probably missing someone along the way, but if so, know that you are thanked as well. Working for eight years on such a wide-ranging project, one finds some colleagues grow into friends. I feel I have been enriched many times over, first by strictly professional advice but also by the convivial meals where ideas were initiated in spirited discussions or in the conversations over tea that helped me retain some sanity after long hours in dusty archives. I hope that the final form of this book is not a disappointment to anyone.
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Preliminary portions of this work have appeared in the *Cahiers de la civilisation médiévale* (volume 48) and in the Medieval Academy of America newsletter and website. I appreciate these institutions’ permission to incorporate that material into this larger study. The Medieval Academy’s name was originally spelled as “Mediaeval” and this was in effect during most of the years concerned in this study. I have kept that spelling except for references that specifically designate the current organization.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

**Dedications**

This work is dedicated to my husband of twenty-six years, John Walter Cherry, who has been the epitome of patience and support and whose initial question in 1998 while standing at Cluny surveying the results of the 1988 nave floor excavation (“Just how DID they knock this building down, anyway?”) sparked the entire investigation that led to this book.

In memory of my parents: Jacqueline Theresa (Paquin) Marquardt (1922-1996) and Wallace William Marquardt (1920-2004)
CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND:
AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

Tanta basilica...quam si centies videris, toties ejus majestatem obstupesces...
—Jean Mabillon on Cluny, 1682

Dans ces lieux imprégnés d’histoire, la vue de telles reliques ne peut manquer de
laisser une impression profonde.
—Émile Montégut, after 1840

Cluny c’est ceci, et rien que ceci.
—Albert Thibaudet, 1928

Imagining Space: An Introduction

The Greek temple Segesta stands stark against the sky, offering an
open investigation of the outer wall construction and inner dimensions of a
sacred precinct from the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BCE [fig. 1.1]. On first viewing, it is hard to
tell whether these walls represent the demolished remains of a former complete
monument or the vestiges of an unfinished project.

1.1 Postcard of Ancient Greek temple at Segesta, Italy (Author)
Partial buildings lead the imagination in many directions, especially after the romantic cult of ruins that swept Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Whether unfinished or unkempt, our view of them has been shaped to include nostalgia, regret, awe, and curiosity. Decaying remains of medieval architecture, once considered an annoying blight, much as we now regard deteriorating international-style concrete buildings, are recast in the light of beauty and mystery.

![Image](image_url)

1.2 Toni Hambleton, *Spaces to Meditate In/On*  
(21.5” x 7” x 9”), 2001 (Toni Hambleton)

It is certainly easy to invoke these sensations; one does not need to visit a genuine Greek temple. An artwork from 2001 by ceramic artist Toni Hambleton, entitled *Spaces to Meditate In/On*, is a loose assemblage of white stoneware slabs up to two feet high in the form of walls—some have windows, doors, and gables [fig. 1.2]. As movable pieces, the little walls create new inner/outer spaces even as they suggest the history, secrets, and safety of old buildings. Both personal associations and social expectations are piqued for viewers, whose imaginations can wander between the walls like Alice through her mirror. The visual reading suggests the real experience of visiting ruins: sounds of silence, smells of decay, sensations of crumbling or coolness. Viewers increase their associations of mystery when the ruin they imagine is not from a passé ancient religion or a secular monument, but is that of a former temple, church, or monastery. The concept of sacred space is reinforced, especially for believers, and the imagined life of the building includes vague notions of symbolic furnishings, ritual movement, costume, and music.
An even deeper layer is created if the ruin is in England or France, where visitors know that many religious buildings were deliberately destroyed en masse in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. But was the destruction of buildings so surprising? Certainly the original inhabitants of religious institutions had as actively pulled down and rebuilt buildings on their properties over the centuries past. Just as Cluny, the largest church on the European continent before the rebuilding of St. Peter’s in Rome, eventually became a quarry for local builders, so too Abbot Odilo and his contemporaries had turned to Roman ruins for authentic, premium building elements in preparation for its construction.  

Many of the medieval monuments destroyed were as large, as ambitious, and as accomplished as architecture had been for quite a few centuries. For those who demolished them, the concept of the historic monument had not yet gained usage. These structures were still functional shelters or stages loaded with unpopular political associations. It was only in England during the eighteenth century (aftermath of the Dissolution) and France in the nineteenth century (aftermath of the Revolution) that the notion of buildings as monuments with historical value grew. The study and conservation of the outdated and/or damaged buildings began in the purview of the intelligentsia who revised stylistic prejudices and fought for recognition of regional architecture. Later, conservation and restoration moved into government politics with the rise of cultural heritage in the service of nationalism. Here the problem of the quality of intervention has been highly controversial. In the twentieth century nationalism shifted to cultural tourism and an industry developed that allowed the economic survival of numerous small communities throughout the world.  

Francoise Choay, in her study The Invention of the Historic Monument (L’Allegorie du patrimoine, 1992), makes a case for Alois Reigl’s distinction between monuments (designed with a memorial purpose) and historic monuments (inadvertently memorialized by time). Yet in a way, the great church at Cluny can be seen in both roles. Cluny III began life as a monument to the success and power of the Cluniac order in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Though the church was built for religious functions, it also stood as a symbol of strength, wealth, and artistic eminence [fig. 1.3]. This is especially evident when one examines the size compared to usage—it was designed to top the dimensions of the largest contemporary churches on the Continent (St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and Speyer Cathedral), a preview of the “world-record mentality” which would drive Gothic builders to ever greater heights. After its near total destruction and subsequent conservation, the entire abbey but especially the fragment of the church became an historic monument, recalling the former glory of pre-Revolutionary Church and State as well as representing
the Romanesque style—a style only truly appreciated in the early twentieth century with the rise of modern abstraction and minimalism.

In this book, I begin by outlining some of the issues that surround the study of Cluny’s legacy and give a brief introduction to the abbey and its destruction from the 1790s to the early 1820s. In the second and third chapters, I explore the responses to the ruins and the initiation of conservation measures during the nineteenth century. It was in this period that the first modern histories of the institution were written. They established a “memory” of Cluny that influenced all later understandings of Cluny. Proceeding chronologically, Chapter Three ends with the first commemorative event hosted by the town, which grew out of the new historical awareness spreading across France at the end of the century. Chapter Four addresses the most elaborate of these festivals, held in 1910 to commemorate the founding of the abbey, and covers the growing scholarship on Cluny. In Chapters Five and Six, Cluny becomes the academic subject of Kenneth John Conant (1894-1984), the architect from Harvard who excavated the site and made detailed reconstructive drawings of the abbey his life work. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I summarize my observations about the construction of Cluny’s past and its role as a key historic monument in French patrimony.

The destruction and subsequent conservation of the Abbey of Cluny was intrinsic to the development of the historic monument. Policies during the French Revolution removed the caretakers of the abbey thus initiating Cluny’s demise. The loss of so many major monuments during and after this period engendered the creation of national awareness of the historic monument as well
as desperate preservation measures. By the time the buildings came down at Cluny (1798-1824), decisions about the abbey were tangled between its role both as the ultimate symbol of repression destroyed and a place on the list of French national historic monuments. Since so much was gone, the church appeared on the list more as a token lieu de mémoire than a whole site and none of the government’s inspector generals were interested in designating it for renovation or even conservation, In fact, the building was only formally declared off-limits to pillferers in 1887 when the Monuments historiques outlawed any modification of their classed sites.\(^8\) Besides having little to work with, there was also little interest in the Romanesque style and even less knowledge about how to preserve such a large open relic. As Choay has written:

> It is one thing to wish to "list" monuments, and to know how to do so. To know how to conserve them physically and to restore them is another matter, which depends upon other realms of knowledge. They call for a specific praxis and specialized practitioners, the "architects of historic monuments" that it fell to the nineteenth century to invent.\(^9\)

If one were to only conserve the ruin at Cluny, it would remain heritage.\(^10\) It was by giving into the need to restore some portions of the abbey structures, as well as create a discourse about its original purpose and contemporary relevance, that it became part of national patrimony. Patrimony looks to the future, to the presentation of what is in-herit-ed from the past for national consumption.\(^11\) Patrimony is the direct link between culture and tourism, between history and economics. The inherent changes necessary to the move from heritage to patrimony also re-imagine a site according to contemporary standards and thus change its collective memory, make it into a new monument that only remembers the past, but no longer houses it. More on this point appears in my conclusion.

Visitors feel conflicted about Cluny not only due to Revolutionary ideology or later renovation decisions, they also partake in a long tradition of aesthetic responses to the Picturesque coming out of the Romantic movement. The scars on these damaged buildings are real enough, but they also are evocative and affective. That is their attraction even as they cause angst. And the incomplete condition of the abbey church at Cluny lends itself to this effect better than buildings that could, and often were, renovated out of their ruined state. As I will show in the following chapters, those who studied Cluny during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply affected by this angst.

Comparable to the poignant remains of other abbeys such as Jumièges or Tintern [fig. 1.4] where the essential shape remains, the fragment at Cluny is all the more evocative for the exercise it demands of the visitor to try to comprehend its original vastness. So much of the contemporary town lies within its original precinct, rather than a yawning ruin open to sky and imagination.
Cluny is a puzzle of pieces hidden within the new town which heavily markets the remains to tourists today. Although the former Romanesque abbey church is at the center of this industry, a Gothic chapel is attached and Renaissance structures serve as town hall and museum, while the eighteenth-century conventual buildings are now the École des arts et métiers, a national engineering school. Though the construction of these buildings may have been essential commerce for the little town when it lived in the abbey’s shadow, the sumptuous late medieval palaces of the aristocratic abbots, appointed by the king and residing primarily in Paris, sharply contrasted with the humble lifestyles of the townspeople. One could easily conjure the resentment and spread of revolutionary furor suggested by Wolfgang Braunfels, who wrote in 1969:

The townsfolk of Cluny began to break up the huge church immediately after the secularization in 1790. Their gall was roused by these witnesses to an archaic power... And though French archaeology has ever since laid stress on the grandeur of the original achievement that was so destroyed, the French public has up till now always sided with the Revolution.12

Braunfels was dramatic, but inaccurate. He applied unfounded Romantic notions to place blame for a destruction he mourned. In fact I will show in the second half of this chapter that the townsfolk did all they could to find a use for this
giant complex of buildings in order to save the abbey from demolition. They were ultimately unsuccessful and in chapters two and three, I will describe the efforts made throughout the nineteenth century to conserve and revive interest in the ruins that remained.

These attempts concerned more than just the material condition of the remaining structures. Cluny also figured in the philosophical and political debates about the power of the Catholic Church in France. During the first half of the nineteenth century, an alliance between those who valued medieval art of the Church and those who supported the return of Christian ritual worked with historians and politicians who wanted to base the notion of a French national heritage upon an idealized Middle Ages. Later in the nineteenth century, French government politics and Church goals diverged. By the 1870s, Catholicism was embattled against Comte’s positivism (personified most strongly by Jules Ferry), echoes of revolutionary dechristianizing, liberal Protestantism, and materialist or Kantian philosophy. Ultramontane politicians and papal advisors instigated a revival of pilgrimage to sacred locations throughout France. They hoped to draw the French back to the Church, build resistance to the laicization campaigns of the Third Republic, and even replace the Bourbons on the throne. However, although nearby Paray-le-Monial drew vast crowds for the cult of the Sacred Heart, Cluny had nothing to offer in the way of devotion. After the 1897 jubilee at Lourdes, which included pilgrimage and a festival of religious observations including elaborate processions, Cluny devised a similar event in 1898. But this was only a one-time event; the commemoration was of the creation of the Feast of All Souls by Abbot Odilo in the eleventh century. This was hardly the stuff of ongoing popular religiosity like innocent visionaries or miracle cures. In fact, everything about Cluny went against the currents of popular Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Cluny was neither a rural backwater, offering a pure and childish peasant spiritualism, nor an urbanized “religious resort” like Lourdes had become. Cluny had always represented ecclesiastical power, not popular faith, so it could never be turned into a simple, pious place and the only poignant draw, casting the abbey as a “victim” of republican politics, implicated the local community and regional bishop. There was also no rich historical narrative, essential to the fate of religious sites. For a second time in her history, Cluny was unable to gain a foothold in the pilgrimage economy. Nevertheless, local authors wrote books on Cluny’s history, trying to create a legendary presence and incorporate techniques found in Henri Lassere’s wildly successful 1869 book on Lourdes such as evocative engraved...
illustrations and picturesque prose descriptions of the location. Writers also tried to highlight use of primary historical documents, in an attempt to align themselves with positivist thinking, but they were unmasked by German scientific scholarship in the form of Ernst Sackur who, in 1892, showed the unreliability of their source cartularies and letters. The town cultivated the cult of local memories, encouraged by governments throughout the nineteenth century, with ever grander commemorative events that included a historical pageant in 1910, fully documented by the popular new print medium, the postcard.

Cluny forged ahead in historical preservation during the twentieth century when Kenneth Conant’s excavations for the Mediaeval Academy of America served to support his detailed reconstructive drawings. His architectural training and his vision of the medieval monastic contributions to architecture led him to produce numberless plans and elevations for churches and conventual buildings from the Early Christian Period through the Romanesque. The discipline of historic monument conservation was still new and developing so that a trained architect, who was concentrating on excavation and drawn reconstruction rather than physical conservation and restoration, offered a fresh viewpoint while his Ecole de Beaux Arts-derived training at Harvard made his credentials acceptable to the French. Likewise, Conant’s strong background in the history of architecture and his recent degree in the history of art gave him an edge in comparative analysis and imaginative breadth. At the same time, he returned to an earlier period’s Romantic aesthetic conception of the religious past which, added to his American awe of ruins, made him venerate the fabric on which he worked more than many local practitioners.

Like the builders at the Holy Sepulchre during the Middle Ages, the original stones at Cluny came to be seen as sacred relics to be conserved and then preserved—but only after its demise, not by the eighteenth-century remodeling monks. Although no additional religious building occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the town itself grew around the fragmentary ruins like the Kariye Camii around the central Chora church or Nara around its pagoda and kondo. Conant contributed to this situation with his reverential and evocative drawings, making the parts whole again, resurrecting the buried body of the church from its stony grave.

He began his work at Cluny in 1927, at a time when the provincial landscape was strongly back in vogue as one of the results of the devastation of France during the first World War. Interest in decentralization and an appreciation of la petite patrie grew from what Romy Golan has characterized as the retour à l’homme movement between 1918 and the 1930s. French painters increasingly portrayed the French landscape during this time, even moving away from some of the stronger avant-garde styles of the previous two
decades towards more academic compositions. Although their works did not privilege the local ruin within that landscape, I would suggest that nevertheless the work of mid-nineteenth century artists, whose picturesque scenes of ruins were published as lithographs, underlay the reception of modern nationalist landscapes. Furthermore, beyond the general outgrowth of the maintenance work of the French historic monuments commission, the retour à l’homme awareness preconditioned sympathy for Conant’s project. In particular, the fact that he was wounded on the battlefield in France in 1917 would have made him particularly welcome as a friend of the French countryside.

Much like the notion of France created after 1918, the third abbey church of Cluny always had to be imagined. Even when visiting in the Middle Ages, it was hard to see in its entirety all at once so that there was an element of envisioning the other parts necessary to all experiences of the building. In addition, most medievals were unable to travel to the site and resorted to the descriptions of awed visitors who waxed eloquent about its size and decoration. By the eighteenth century, the Romanesque style was often called “Greek Gothic” and its similarity to monumental classical structures stimulated other imagined comparisons.23

The term was not inapt. Romanesque could be called the Doric of Europe. Easily recognizable by their relative simplicity, solidity, and straightforwardness compared to later styles, neither Doric nor Romanesque is as monolithic in design as first appearances might suggest. Every building had its own problems and solutions; each application of the style was adapted and unique. One can find no “original” Greek temple with the template for all later buildings. Yet there was a conviction among early art and architectural historians that an early medieval ur-church existed, that one place applied the principles of Romanesque in the purest manner, forming a prototype by which both earlier and later buildings could be measured. With so little of the abbey church of Cluny remaining, it was easy for Conant to impose his dreams of finding this ideal application of Romanesque at the motherhouse of the largest monastic organization in Europe. His claims sparked debate that has kept the fragmentary ruin alive and whole in the academic mind ever since.

**From Powerful Church to Plundered Ruin**

Like any history of nineteenth-century France, the story of the remains of the abbey of Cluny during the nineteenth century must also begin with the first Revolution in 1789. However, although many authors have offhandedly referred to the abbey’s demolition as coming during the Revolution, in fact the process was only begun with the dissolution of the monasteries and subsequent stripping of valuable materials to pay for the revolutionary wars. Auctioning of
the buildings and their deliberate destruction for materials did not begin until 1798 and lasted until 1824.

Yet one could argue that the third church of the Abbey of Cluny was doomed from the start. An overly ambitious project, even as the largest basilica for the largest monastic institution in Europe was being finished in the early twelfth century, Abbot Peter the Venerable was fighting detractors and creditors. The story of medieval Cluny has been told many times, but I briefly summarize the essence here for readers new to the subject. Peter’s famous predecessor, Abbot Hugh “the Great”, had a vision, according to the chronicles a miraculous holy vision through the dream of an elderly dying monk named Gunzo, of an abbey church that would project his powerful place within the Church and European affairs. Under no Bishops or local lords, answerable only to the Pope, as abbot of Cluny for sixty years he not only controlled land holdings across much of contemporary Europe, he was a prime politician, diplomat, and advisor. He saw substantial annual gifts of gold, land, and other offerings in return for the intercessory prayer that Cluny made its primary business. If medieval society was divided, as Georges Duby has suggested, into those who worked, fought, and prayed, then the Abbot of Cluny was the European leader of the essential spiritual activity required for everlasting salvation. There was no reason to imagine this role would ever change, for who could suggest the end of heaven and hell?

So Hugh, with the help of contributors as distant and desperate as the kings of Leon and Navarre fighting the Islamic rulers of Spain, planned his enormous edifice as a new Rome dedicated to saints Peter and Paul and filled with various saints’ relics distributed over twenty-five altars. Rents were collected all over Cluniac lands on their feast day, June 29. Hundreds of provincial abbots came home to the motherhouse in Burgundy on that day with stories of yet more monasteries being offered to Cluniac rule by local lords. Battles fought over key pilgrimage locations were seen as holy wars to place their revenue under the protection of the “best” Benedictine monks. The largest extension of Cluny’s domain fell between the years 1080 and 1150, a time when the Church in general was benefiting from the accumulation of property donations. In addition, being untouched by the tradition to divide land among heirs, religious institutions found their domains increasing during the eleventh century as secular families’ holdings weakened.

The last abbey church was begun in 1088. Pope Urban II came to Cluny in 1095 to participate in the dedication ceremony of the main altar on his tour throughout France making similar dedications in other regions as he preached the first crusade. The east end, the choir, was large enough to hold the entire ruling council of Cluniac abbots for meetings and services. To balance it, the nave stretched towards the west another 100 meters, making the original overall length nearly 150 meters. The nave was covered by a sophisticated form