

MONASTIC HOSPICES IN SOUTHERN FRANCE AND  
COLLEGES IN MONTPELLIER, TOULOUSE, PARIS, AND  
OXFORD: THE CISTERCIAN URBAN PRESENCE (1)

French historian Philippe Wolff pointed out long ago that the actual contrast between urban and rural in the central Middle Ages is less well-marked than is often assumed by medievalists. (2) Nonetheless, we still tend to divide ourselves into those who concentrate on urban or those who concentrate on rural history. This is so even when our major topic is medieval religion, for we treat the history of “monasticism” from antiquity to the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a primarily rural phenomenon; this is then followed by the urban charism of the mendicants in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and later. (3) Nowhere is the emphasis on monasticism as a rural phenomenon more deeply embedded than in the history of the Cistercians, who have long been associated with rural solitude and the medieval frontiers. As I have shown elsewhere, however, although the Cistercians did practice a new frugality, the “embarrassment of riches” that faced the Order by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century came from their reorganization of land already under cultivation, rather than from “frontier” activities. Tithe and toll exemptions privileged their sales in growing towns, where demand for the products of Cistercian agri-

(1) This paper draws on material from the archives of A.D. Hérault in Montpellier, A. D. Gard in Nîmes, and in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. Parts of it have been presented at a Medieval Academy of America annual meeting in Atlanta and to the history department at the University of Kentucky. Support has come from an American Philosophical Society Penrose fund grant, American Council of Learned Societies Grant-in-Aid, and from the University of Iowa and its Obermann Center for Advanced Study. I would like to thank all these institutions, as well as Bernard Barbiche, Thomas Bisson, Robert Burns, Abigail Firey, Anthony Grafton, Daniel LaCorte, Thomas Sullivan, and Richard Unger, for interesting observations. None of them is responsible for my conclusions.

(2) Philip WOLFF, *Villes et campagnes dans le Midi français médiéval*, in *France méridionale et pays ibériques. Mélanges géographiques offerts en hommage à M. Daniel Faucher*, Toulouse, Privat, 1949, vol. 2, p. 677-85.

(3) See C. H. LAWRENCE, *Medieval Monasticism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., London, Longman, 2001, p. 199-206.