While there are a number of international journals dealing with monastic studies, the *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* (*JMMS*) represents an exciting new English-language publication which was hitherto absent from the current journal provision. The first volume of the *JMMS* sets out to provide a platform for the dissemination of current research in monastic studies from a variety of disciplines, including history, archaeology, art history, theology, and literature. The publication aspires to be as comprehensive as possible, featuring contributions on all of the religious orders (both male and female communities) throughout medieval Europe across as wide a chronology as possible. While the focus of the work will undoubtedly be Christian, contributions on other religions are also welcome. The editorial board reflects this diversity, compromising of leading experts in a variety of fields of religious studies from across Europe and America.

This first volume consists of six articles by leading experts on a variety of subjects, including sixth-century Irish penitentials, Merovingian patronage, Cluniac studies, Benedictine reform, royal intervention in Iberian religious disputes, and late medieval Cistercian building projects. The subjects reflect the diversity of the *JMMS*’s aspiration and the essays are relatively concise (between fifteen and thirty pages in length). In the first essay, Giles Constable explores ‘The Future of Cluniac Studies’, a thought-provoking exploration of the current state of Cluniac studies and discussion of avenues of future research. While art, archaeology and architecture provide a great deal of information about Cluny, Constable leaves them out of his discussion. Instead, he argues for a greater focus on other areas, including a variety of source material such as necrologies that might provide much greater
understanding of what Cluny was and why it was so significant. He identifies five key considerations for future research in Cluniac studies: (1) what was Cluny and who were the Cluniacs?; (2) the community of Cluny; (3) the monks’ occupations; (4) the order of Cluny and its governance; (5) why Cluny?

Cluny represented the highest standards of religious life and served as an exemplar that others wished to emulate. Constable argues that it was Cluny’s confidence in its own ability to win salvation that led to its substantial power, wealth and expansion, rather than the other way around. While the art and architecture of Cluny tends to get more attention, Constable contends that religious life was the focus of Cluny and should be the focus of future Cluniac studies.

Marilyn Dunn presents a cognitive approach to examination of penance and penitentials in the second article, entitled ‘Paradigms of Penance’. Dunn explores the concept of penance and how it developed from an act of public repentance, often carried out on one’s deathbed to avoid humiliation, to a device that both allowed the remedy of sin and inspired religious devotion. As a key source in this discussion Dunn looks to the Penitential of Finnian (Uuinniau), a text by a sixth-century British monk in Ireland and one of the major sources for Columbanus’s own influential Penitential (a handbook of penance). Traditional episcopally-administered public penance resulted in public humiliation and lifelong disabilities and sanctions that left people less inclined to seek confession until their deathbed. In the sixth century, Irish monks presented ‘private penance’ which could be administered by a priest instead of a bishop. This facility allowed people to use penance as part of their daily religious life, rather than a once-in-a-lifetime event to have major sins absolved. All sins, great and small, had an appropriate predetermined penance. This ‘tariffed penance’ was a feature of penitential books.
Turning to Columbanus, Dunn maintains that Ireland experienced a paradigm shift in penance prior to his arrival on the Continent and that it was the monk himself whose *Penitential* became very popular in the seventh and eighth centuries. Dunn’s argument expands beyond the accepted concept of sin, reparation and the difference between one-off and iterative tariffed penance. She argues that the new form of penance, which emanated from sixth-century Ireland, not only remedied sin but also stimulated belief in God. The penitentials, for which Columbanus is famous, became tools of pastoral care, an exemplar of monastic standards, a tool for clerical reform and means to strengthen the faith of the laity.

The difficulties faced by historians examining the distant past are not merely a modern concern. As argued by Constance Bouchard, medieval scholars were faced with similar difficulties with detachment from historical material when studying Late Antiquity. In her piece, ‘High Medieval Monks Contemplate Their Merovingian Past’, Bouchard seeks to explore how eleventh- and twelfth-century Benedictine authors in Burgundy and Champagne attempted to place their own histories within the context of the distant Merovingian past. Due to the importance, but poor survival, of founding charters and documentation associated with the early history and administration of religious houses, scribes sought to understand and explain, if not revise, unclear or badly surviving documentation. Through the reimagining, or in some cases fabrication, of links between the monastic houses and royal Frankish history, these monks attempted to present their foundations as older and more prestigious than they in fact might have been by means of the creation of a propagandist narrative history. These forgeries have often been discounted by scholars but Bouchard argues that, while they do not reveal a great deal about the sixth, seventh or eighth centuries when they
were allegedly composed, they do in fact uncover the concerns and agendas of monastic scribes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

In response to the rise of the Cistercian houses in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the older houses were forced to bolster their pedigree and spiritual strength in an effort to ensure continued aristocratic patronage. In addition to this, owing to the influence of Cluny, the maintenance and organization of records became a key part of monastic administration. The creation of cartularies represented the reworking and reconsidering of the archival histories of the monasteries, rather than a recreation of church history. It facilitated a personal connection to their history, whilst ensuring positive propaganda for the monastic house through direct links to the first Christian Frankish kings.

In her essay, ‘Benedictine Influence in Ireland in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries: A Reflection’, Edel Bhreathnach examines the influence of English- and Scottish-trained Benedictines on the development of diocesan centres (sedes episcopalis) in Ireland, before exploring the role of Irish Benedictines on the continent, viewing their writings in light of continental ecclesiastical politics. She discusses the role of zealous kings and bishops in the establishment of episcopal towns in Ireland, especially that of Cashel and the Ua Briain kings, regarding the development of ecclesiastical centres in Ireland as indicative of a wider British and continental movement. While the commentary on the development of the Rock of Cashel has long been the preserve of art and architectural historians, Bhreathnach argues that the transformation from a royal ceremonial residence to an archbishopric thanks to the benefaction of Muirchertach Ua Briain is more evident in contemporary sources, including the writings of the influential reformers Anselm and Lanfranc of Canterbury and the Ua Briain kings in the late eleventh century.
Bhreathnach argues that Irishmen who had been part of British Benedictine communities were chosen to implement reform in Ireland, both structural and liturgical. She regards Máel Ísu Ua hAinmire, the Winchester-trained Irish Benedictine, as a forgotten champion of reform of the twelfth-century Irish church. Walkelin of Winchester and Godfrey of Cambrai were keen reformers in England and were patrons of Máel Ísu, whose appointment as bishop of Waterford they supported. Later archbishop of Cashel, Máel Ísu was no doubt influenced greatly by those English reformers when faced with the need for reform in Ireland in the early twelfth century. Despite his success, that Máel Ísu is a largely forgotten figure is attributed largely to the short-lived Benedictine influence in Cashel. They were replaced after a generation or two in the mid twelfth century when the reform movement of Malachy of Armagh showed a preference for Arrouasian customs over Benedictine.

In the latter part of her article, Bhreathnach also argues that the texts from the Schottenklöster (Irish monastic foundations established on the Continent) have been misunderstood and should in fact be read from the perspective of Benedictine historical narratives, thus revealing the successful preservation of a link between Ireland and the continental houses.

Jill R. Webster’s contribution, ‘The Monastery of Val de Cristo in the Kingdom of Valencia’, explores royal intervention in a dispute over lands, benefices and rights in Castellón de la Plana between two Carthusian monasteries, the charterhouse of Val de Cristo and its ally Portacoeli, and the diocese of Tortosa. The two monasteries played a key role in providing the crown with papal emissaries, politically experienced ambassadors without aspirations to power to threaten the Crown’s influence. In return, the royal house itself intervened on behalf of the monasteries, especially on economic matters such as this dispute with the bishop of Tortosa over the parish of Castellón. The details of the royal
intervention are evident in the documentary appendix at the end of the essay. In it, Webster provides transcriptions of a dozen letters written by Queen Maria of Castile on behalf of the charterhouses, dated between 1441–6.

In the final essay, ‘Abbot William Marshall (1509–28) and the Architectural Development of Kirkstall Abbey, Yorkshire, in the Late Middle Ages’, Michael Carter examines the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey in Yorkshire, regarded as among the best preserved monastic ruins in Britain. Famed for its twelfth-century architecture, Carter instead concentrates on the largely ignored later medieval buildings, focusing specifically on the raising of the bell tower by Abbot William Marshall in the early sixteenth-century and setting this within the wider movement of Cistercian architectural rebuilding in northern England at that time. Challenging the perception that later medieval additions to Cistercian foundations, such as sixteenth-century bell-towers, were in fact ‘un-Cistercian’, he argues that, far from a period of decline of Cistercian standards, this is in fact a period of vibrant renewal.

Carter examines the early architecture of Kirkstall before delving into the extensive later-medieval modifications, providing comprehensive photographs and drawings to illustrate his arguments throughout. Significantly, Carter asserts that the changes during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century mirror those at its mother church, Fountains Abbey, and reflect the relaxation of monastic rule by this point in time, evident in the ornamentation and stylistic developments that would have been regarded as too ostentatious in the Early Middle Ages.

In addition to these six thought-provoking articles, the JMMS also features nine reviews on a variety of subjects, ranging from war and the making of medieval monastic culture to feminine sanctity and spirituality in Medieval Wales. While the JMMS is an English language publication, the inclusion of a review of a Catalan-language book on the Poor Clares
of Pedralbes near Barcelona is an important reminder of the excellent scholarship taking place outside of the English-speaking sphere.

Given the modern propensity to publish new journals in digital format to avoid excessive costs, it is commendable that the editors of the *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* have published it as a printed journal, especially given the dearth of English-language alternatives on the subject. However, in light of publishing costs, the journal must remain as relevant and engaging to as wide a range of people as possible. While the scope of the editorial aspirations is indeed admirable, there is a danger that the material could become too esoteric if the case studies are overly specialised, especially for a publication of this size. A combination of general discussions of broad monastic themes, coupled with a number of related specialist studies together with an appropriate historiographical piece would offer a more balanced and useful resource than a number of excellent but disparate specialist case studies. However, given the strength of the contributors’ essays, the reviews and the overall work of the editors, the first volume of the *JMMS* can be rightly regarded as a success. Janet Burton, Karen Stöber and the extended editorial board deserve credit for a wonderful new publication that holds enormous potential for students and scholars of medieval monastic studies.

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