The calendar and litany of Reading Abbey

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The Calendar and Litany of Reading Abbey

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Before concentrating on the Calendar and Litany a general assessment of the evidence for the liturgical practices of Reading Abbey has to be considered. Compared with some of the other English Benedictine houses such as Durham and St Albans the survival of liturgical texts is very small. No Missal, Breviary or any choir book has survived, and of complete liturgical books there are only one mid-thirteenth-century Psalter, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 103, and a part Martyrology (Dec. 25th-Feb. 27th, July 15th-Dec. 24th) of the last quarter of the twelfth century, London, British Library MS Harley 82.¹ There are also two prayer books, Oxford, Worcester College MS 213/213* (3.16 A) of the second half of the thirteenth century, given to the abbey by Prior Alan, and one of the late fifteenth century in a private collection in the United States (Sotheby Dec. 7th 1964, lot 149) which contains a Reading calendar.² Other texts not in liturgical books exist of the calendar and they will shortly be discussed (a list is also provided in the Appendix to this paper). The conclusion has to be made that apart from these texts of the calendar, and the single text of the litany in the Psalter in New York, very little is known about the liturgy of Reading.

The first abbot of Henry I’s foundation was Hugh de Boves (Hugh of Amiens), a Cluniac.³ He had been a monk of Cluny from 1099 to 1115, prior of St Martial at Limoges from 1115 to 1120, prior of Lewes, the first Cluniac foundation in England from 1120 to 1123, and finally first abbot of Reading from 1123 to 1130. Hugh brought with him some monks from Lewes and some from Cluny itself, all of them presumably equipped with Cluniac liturgical books and well trained in its practices. Henry I, who had founded Reading in June 1121, was a patron of both Lewes and Cluny, and must have intended the new abbey as a Cluniac foundation, although as it turned out it never became directly dependent

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on Cluny itself, as was also the case for King Stephen’s slightly later foundation of Faversham. Indeed, even before Hugh de Boves was appointed in April 1123 monks from both Cluny and Lewes, led by ‘Prior Peter’ had come to Reading, following Henry I’s request to Abbot Pons of Cluny, at the time of the building of the abbey from 1121 onwards.

Hugh de Boves was only abbot for eight years, and it is uncertain exactly how much of the building of the new abbey church had been completed before he left to become archbishop of Rouen in 1130. During his time at Reading the liturgical practices of the monks there must have followed that of Lewes or Cluny itself, probably a combination of the two, but essentially Cluniac use which only varies to a small extent between the daughter houses of the mother house. The Breviary-Missal of Lewes of the last quarter of the thirteenth century, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 369, for example, is very close indeed to the texts used at Cluny itself. This Breviary-Missal has been studied in detail by the great liturgist Victor Leroquais, by several musicologists, particularly exhaustively described by Bryan Gillingham, and in the lengthy chapter on the liturgy of Lewes by Graham Mayhew in his recent book on the abbey. Cluniac liturgy was extremely complex, with many accretions added to the Office which were introduced in the eleventh century, even more complex than that of other Benedictines, and has been memorably described by Barbara Rosenwein as ‘ritual aggression’ in her Viator article. Very probably patrons of new monastic foundations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as Henry I, favoured Cluniac monks whom they saw as the most intensively active “power houses of prayer” among the religious orders of their time.

The information from the Fitzwilliam Breviary-Missal on the liturgy of Lewes is of major importance in considering the liturgy of Reading as several of its first monks and its first abbot came from Lewes. However, the Breviary-Missal is of the last quarter of the thirteenth century and the only liturgical book relatively close to the period of the early liturgy of Reading is the post-1173 Harley 82 martyrology which gives some information on the special saints venerated by the Cluniacs. Other than this martyrology the calendar and litany texts of Reading are of the mid and second half of the thirteenth century, contemporary with the Lewes Breviary-Missal. As Reading never formally became part of the congregation of Cluny by this time it probably no longer had much
contact with either Lewes or Cluny itself, and its Cluniac liturgy must have been essentially established during the twelfth century. By the middle of the thirteenth century Reading had come to be termed a Benedictine abbey with no specific reference to it as a Cluniac house, but during the twelfth century links with Cluny were maintained. When Hugh de Boves resigned the abbacy in 1130 and became archbishop of Rouen, his successor as abbot was another Cluniac monk, formerly prior of Lewes, Ansger (Anker), abbot from 1130 to 1135. Later in the century Hugh, abbot of Reading 1186-1199, had formerly been prior of Lewes, and in 1199 moved from Reading to become abbot of Cluny itself. He was the last bona fide Cluniac to be an abbot of Reading, but at the time of his election in 1186 it seems the abbey was essentially a Cluniac house even if not directly dependent on Cluny itself. The abbots from the thirteenth century to the Reformation almost all came from the monks of Reading or its cell, Leominster founded in 1123, and rarely from other English or French Benedictine houses - this suggests that Reading always understood its special distinction from the other English Benedictines. As regards the liturgy at Reading throughout the twelfth century from its foundation in 1121 to the end of the century there seems little doubt that it developed entirely in a Cluniac context.

Now to turn to the texts of the Reading calendar. There is a good text of c. 1250 in the New York Psalter ff. 4r-8v but lacking May and June, one of a similar date but lacking December in a Cartulary, London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian E. V, ff. 11v-16v, the months of January and February only in a volume of miscellaneous texts, London, British Library MS Harley 978, ff. 15v-16r, and finally one of the late fifteenth century (a fortunate survival because all the others are of almost exactly the same date) in the prayer book now in a private collection (Sotheby’s Sale 1964). The British Library manuscripts contain the obits of the abbots of Reading which enables some precision in the dating of these texts which otherwise could only be dated approximately on the basis of script or minor ornament. In the Cotton calendar the last abbot obit in the hand of the original scribe is Abbot Adam who died in 1238. The first added obit is of Abbot Richard of Chichester who died in March 1261, so this text can be dated in the period between 1238 and c. 1261, but Taylor and Coates argue for a more precise 1239-1240 dating. The Cotton manuscript is a Reading
Abbey cartulary, whereas the Harley manuscript contains a miscellany of texts most famously including the text and music of “Sumer is icumen in”. The Psalter in the Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 103, must be after 1246 because St Edmund of Abingdon, who was canonised in that year, is in the text in the original hand. It is illuminated and on the basis of that is unlikely to be later than c. 1260, so these three calendar texts are exactly contemporary, falling in the broad range c. 1238 - c. 1261. The ornamental initials of the Morgan Psalter are close to those by the illuminator, William de Brailes, who is documented as working in Oxford c. 1235 - c. 1255. It may have been produced in Oxford rather than at Reading itself, whereas the other two manuscripts could possibly have been made in house at the abbey, but of course professional illuminators and scribes could have come to work on book production there. Other than the obits of the abbots in the Cotton and Harley calendars, the Morgan calendar has two obits in the hand of the original scribe: Dec. 2nd, that of the founder, Henry I; May 24th, King David of Scotland who joined Henry I as a benefactor of Reading. It should be noted that other than Leominster in Herefordshire, founded in 1123 as dependent on Reading, it had other dependent priories in Scotland as foundations of King David - the priories of May and Ridalgros. Perhaps an obvious reason for David’s interest in Reading was that his sister had married Henry I, and David in his early life had spent much time at Henry’s court. The occurrence of the obit of David in the calendar makes clear his importance to the monks of Reading Abbey.

Now to consider the characteristic feasts in the calendar (listed in the Appendix). The first category are saints not connected with the Cluniac content. The most important relic at Reading was the hand of St James the Great given by Henry I, around which an important cult arose; this has been admirably documented by Brian Kemp. James’s main feast day on July 25th as one of the apostles was of course in all medieval calendars, but at Reading it was celebrated with an Octave whose final day was July 31st (not as it should have been on Aug. 1st because this would have clashed with the great feast of St Peter’s Chains on that day). The other rare St James feast in the Reading calendar is the Translation of James on Dec. 30th. The origin of this feast is a mystery and certainly does not refer to any translation of the relics of James at the abbey itself. In the rare cases where this feast on Dec. 30th occurs in calendars it is sometimes called the Ordination of James and
is of early medieval origin found in both the Ambrosian and Mozarabic rites, and also in several martyrologies. Possibly the monks of Reading picked it up from a martyrology and added it to their calendar to boost their devotion to St James. The only other occurrences of this Dec. 30th feast that I have found in English Benedictine calendars are at Cranborne in Dorset and its mother house, Tewkesbury, but with no obvious explanation. Reading also celebrated the feast of St James the Less (May 1st) with an Octave on May 8th. It is hard to believe that they confused him with James the Great, but it may just be another attempt to add additional feasts for saints named James.

Other than James, another non-Cluniac cult at Reading as evidenced by the calendar is that of Modwenna on July 5th. This is probably explained as a result of a Reading monk, William Melburne, becoming abbot of Burton-on-Trent 1200-1213. That was the place in England where her main relics were located. William Melburne, on becoming abbot there, probably encouraged his mother house to take her into their calendar. Another British saint in the calendar, David of Wales on Mar 1st, should be mentioned. Before the fifteenth century, when he was introduced into the calendar of Sarum, he is very rarely found in the Midlands, southern or eastern parts of England, but only in the West Country and West Midlands. Another West Country saint, Petroc on June 4th, cannot be easily explained in the Reading calendar. Finally among non-Cluniac entries is the most unusual feast of the Invention of Mary Salome on May 25th, seemingly unique in England. It is explained by Reading’s cult of James because Mary Salome, the wife of Zebedee, was the mother of James the Great!

Following this group of special entries in the Reading calendar the remaining unusual feasts are all explained by the early association of the abbey with Cluny and Lewes. Although these feasts occur in calendars of the other English Cluniacs hardly any occur in those of the other English Benedictines. Indeed, apart from the special feasts at Reading previously discussed, and a few of the most famous British saints, its calendar is completely Cluniac. It understandably compares best with that of Lewes from where Hugh de Boves came as first abbot. There are two very unusual feasts of Pancras, the dedicatory saint of Lewes, on Oct. 10th with the Octave on Oct. 17th. Other than Lewes and Reading only the calendar of Bromholm has these. Bromholm was founded
from Castle Acre which was founded from Lewes - no calendar survives from Castle Acre to confirm whether this was a feature of its calendar.\textsuperscript{22} The reason for the Oct. 10th date for the feast of St Pancras is that Lewes received the relics of the saint on that day. In the Lewes calendar Oct 10th is designated as ‘\textit{Receptio reliquiarium sancti Pancratii}’.\textsuperscript{25}

Aside from this specific feast of Lewes, the other feasts at Reading are saints of Cluny itself, its own abbots and major saints of Burgundy, Central and Western France, the Western France ones mainly coming to Cluny from the great Abbey of St Martial, Limoges, which had entered the congregation of Cluny: Eutropius, Philibert, Radegund, Martial, Marcellus of Châlons-sur-Saône, Andoch, Exuperius, Gerald of Aurillac, Iunianus. Cluny possessed relics of Gregory Nazianzus, Irenaeus, Marcellus the pope, Florentia and Consortia. The only English saint found in Cluniac calendars is Milburga whose relics belonged to the Cluniac priory of Much Wenlock in Shropshire. The saint-abbots of Cluny in the calendar are Maiolus, Odo, Odilo and Hugh of Cluny. John of Réome on Jan. 28th, a sixth-century saint originating from Dijon, was an important figure in early monasticism in France. Finally, a feature of the Cluny calendar was the celebration of All Saints Day with an Octave on Nov. 8th.

The third list given in the Appendix is of a number of minor feast days, mainly Italian saints which are in the Cluny calendar and hardly ever in those of the English Benedictine houses, but some are in the calendar of Reading and other English Cluniac houses. To conclude on the contents of the calendar of Reading it is completely Cluniac down to the last detail, but English Cluniac because it in addition contains a number of English saints as is also the case in calendars of the other English Cluniac houses.

Now to consider the litany of Reading which will be discussed more briefly because it is presented in an edition with commentary in my volumes of \textit{English Monastic Litanies after 1100}, published by the Henry Bradshaw Society (the final volume forthcoming in 2017) where it is compared with other English Cluniac litanies.\textsuperscript{24} The Reading litany exists only as a single text in the Pierpont Morgan Psalter. Litanies contain fewer saints than calendars but most of the characteristic Reading/Cluniac ones are there. Of course, as in the calendar, the litany contains major English saints like Cuthbert, Alban, Oswald the Martyr, Edmund the Martyr, Swithun and Aldhelm. In addition the litany has
David of Wales and Modwenna, the two unusual British saints in the calendar. Other special saints in the Reading litany are Cluniac and are also found in the litanies of the other English Cluniac houses. As for the petitions the ‘ut’ petition ‘Ut locum istum et omnes habitantes in eo’ found in nearly every English Benedictine calendar, but not in the Cluny litany, is likewise not in that of Reading (but it is in Pontefract). So the conclusion for the Reading litany, as for the calendar, is that it is basically Cluniac.

Thus from the time of its foundation in 1121 until certainly the abbacy of Hugh (1186-1199), formerly prior of Lewes, who left Reading to become abbot of Cluny 1199-1207, the liturgical practices of Reading were established, probably with some input from Cluny itself. The liturgical texts from Reading which I have discussed are all of the middle years of the thirteenth century, by which time the abbey had become only very loosely linked to Cluny and was considered Benedictine, but not specifically Cluniac. Abbots of Reading would attend the convocations of the English Black Monks and not those of the Cluniacs. However, the calendars and litany discussed are completely Cluniac in character. It seems highly likely that Reading continued to practice this Cluniac liturgy throughout the later centuries of the Middle Ages (the private collection calendar of the late fifteenth century confirms this conclusion) because they had been established there in the twelfth century. On the evidence of calendars and the litany this Cluniac liturgy continued in the middle years of the thirteenth century, and doubtless by then it would have been impracticable and senseless to change it.
APPENDIX

Calendar Texts:
All three manuscripts are lacking one or more months, although between them the complete year is covered, and for nine months of the year, that is excepting May, June and December, there are two or more texts to compare.

London, British Library MS Harley 978 (Jan. - Feb.), ff. 15v-16r.
New York, Pierpont Morgan MS M. 103 (Jan. - Apr., July - Dec.), ff. 4r-8v.
Private Collection (USA).

Unusual non-Cluniac feasts seldom found in Calendars of the English Benedictines:
David of Wales (Mar. 1st), Octave of Philip and James the Less (May 8th); Invention of Mary Salome (May 25th); Petroc (June 4th); Modwenna (July 5th); Octave of James the Great (July 31st); Translation of James the Great (Dec. 30th).

Major feasts of the Cluny/Lewes/Reading Calendar:\textsuperscript{26}
Odilo (Jan. 2nd); Marinus (Jan. 3rd); John of Réome (Jan. 28th); Milburga (Feb. 23rd); Hugh of Cluny (Apr. 29th); Eutropius (Apr. 30th); Gregory Nazianzus (May 9th); Maiolus (May 11th); Pancras (May 12th); Florentia (June 20th); Consortia (June 22nd); Irenaeus (June 27th); Transl. Martial (July 3rd); Radegund (Aug. 13th); Philibert (Aug. 20th); Justus (Sept. 2nd); Marcellus of Châlons-sur-Sâone (Sept. 4th); Andoch (Sept. 24th); Exuperius (Sept. 28th); Pancras (Oct. 10th); Gerald of Aurillac (Oct. 13th); Oct. Pancras (Oct. 17th); Ianianus (Oct. 16th); Aquilinus (Oct. 19th); Cirilla (Oct. 29th); Octave of All Saints (Nov. 8th); Odo (Nov. 17th).
**Minor feasts of the Cluny/Lewes/Reading Calendar**

Julian and Maximian (Jan. 8th); Eleusippus, Meleusippus and Speusippus (Jan. 7th); Orontius and Victoris (Jan. 22nd); Achilleus, Felix and Fortunatus (Apr. 23rd); Orientius (May 2nd); Donatian and Rogatian (May 24th); Reverian (June 1st); Nazarius and Celsius (July 28th); Symphorian (Aug. 23rd); Azedius and Genesius (Aug. 25th); Cesarius (Aug. 27th); Dorothy (Sept. 9th); Felix and Tyrsus (Sept. 24th); Ursus and Victor (Sept. 30th); Leochadius and Theodoritus (Oct. 23rd); Theuderius (Oct. 29th); Benignus, Cesarius and Lautenus (Nov. 2nd/3rd); Hilarius, Quentin and Valentinus (Nov. 3rd); Eucherius (Nov. 16th); Gregory (Nov. 17th); Peter of Alexandria (Nov. 25th); Agricola and Vitalis (Nov. 27th); Sirus (Dec. 9th); Eulalia (Dec. 10th).

**Litany Text:**

The litany of Reading survives in a unique text:

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 103, ff. 132v-135r.


**Apostles**

In view of the important relic of the Hand of St James the Great at Reading it would be expected to find James with a double invocation among the apostles in the litany, but in this text that is not the case. St Martial is ranked as *discipulus Domini* immediately after the invocations to the apostles, as is usual in Cluniac litanies. The claim for the apostolicity of Martial originated at Limoges abbey, one of the greatest of the Cluniac houses of France.

**Martyrs**
Among the martyrs the following Cluniac saints very seldom found in litanies of the other English Benedictines: Pancras, Marinus, Marcellus of Châlons-sur-Sâone, Irenaeus.

**Confessors**

Among the confessors the following Cluniac saints very seldom found in litanies of the other English Benedictines: Aquilinus, Philibert, Odo, Maiolus, Hugh of Cluny, Odilo, Gerald of Aurillac.

**Virgins**

Among the virgins the following Cluniac saints very seldom found in litanies of the other English Benedictines: Cirilla, Radegund, Florentia, Consortia, Milburga.

**English Saints rarely found in litanies of the other English Benedictines**

David of Wales (rare before the fifteenth century); Modwenna.

**Notes**


4 Baxter, *Royal Abbey of Reading*, pp. 16-17.


7 Thomas of Canterbury, canonised in 1173, on Dec. 29th is in the original scribal hand.


10 I am expecting to obtain photographs of this calendar from the owner, but this has not been possible before finalising this text. The 1964 Sotheby catalogue entry makes few comments on the calendar which contains the Reading Feast of the Relics on Oct. 10th.


15 On David of Scotland see G. W. S. Barrow, ‘David I (c. 1085-1153), king of Scots’, *ODNB*, 15 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 285-8. In Scotland, although he was never canonised he was revered as a saint, but does not seem to have been so considered at Reading.


18 Knowles, Brooke and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 31. In the late-twelfth-century Reading martyrology, British Library Harley MS 82, the Translation of Modwenna has been added on Sept. 9th.

19 In the Reading martyrology she is named among the saints for the Feast of the Relics at Reading which has been added to the text, implying that they possessed a relic of her.


23 In the calendar of Cluny the ‘receptio’ of a relic there is recorded as a feast on the day when the relic was received, and Lewes evidently followed that tradition.

24 For the litany of Cluny see de Valous, *Le monachisme clunisien*, pp. 418-21.


26 These major saints are those whose relics were either at Cluny or its dependencies. With the exception of Milburga (Feb. 23rd) most of these also occur in calendars of the English dependencies of Cluny, and not in other English Benedictine calendars, save for that of Reading. The major feast of Martial in Cluniac calendars was on July 7th, coinciding with the Translation of Thomas of Canterbury, resulting in the English Cluniacs transferring it to July 2nd, 3rd or 5th. The feasts of Pancras (Oct. 10th, 17th) were not in the Cluny calendar, and come from Lewes.
