ADVENTUS – CISTERCIANS OF THE WESTERN EDGE, NOTES ON PORTUGUESE ORIGINS

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Abstract

In addressing the problem of Cistercian origins in Portugal, the dearth of surviving documentation relating to the earliest settlements of the order in the region leaves the historical sleuth with little option but to sift through fragmentary information often contained in sources of doubtful provenance. Nevertheless, although thrust into a world of uncertainty, at least one clear constant emerges, the obvious centrality of the mysterious holy man known as João Cirita, who appears to have been instrumental in the establishment of the order in the Iberian Far West. In contrast to some cautiously narrow twentieth century approaches, this paper takes a broad view of the evidential landscape and contemplates the legendary and the mythical alongside the documentary clues to investigate what can be known about this individual whose activities would have such profound impact on Portuguese Ecclesiastical History.

> The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. (Isaiah, 35: 1)

Embroiled in notorious and long-standing controversies, the introduction of the first Cistercian communities into Portugal is undoubtedly one of the most fraught topics in the region's Ecclesiastical History.[1] At the root of the problem lurks one of those

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[1] See inter alia, Maria Alegria Marques, "A introdução da Ordem de Cister em Portugal", *in Estudos Sobre a Ordem de Cister em Portugal*, (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2008), 29-33. Miguel de Oliveira, 'Origens da Ordem de Cister em Portugal,' *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 5 (1951), 317-53. Maur Cocheril, 'Abadias Cistercienses Portuguesas,' *Lusitania Sacra*, 1a série, 1 (1956), 51-64. Saul António Gomes, "Revisitação a um velho tema: a fundação do Mosterio de Alcobaça," *Actas. Cister. Espaços, Territórios, Paisagens. Colóquio Internacional* (16-20 de Junho de 1998, Mosteiro de Alcobaça) (2 vols.) vol. 1 (Lisboa: IPPA, 2000), 27-72.

dark and calamitous events that have, through the ages, wrought irreparable damage and loss to the nation's documental reserves laying a perennial curse over those investigating its early evolution. Among a plethora of cataclysms including the great 1755 earthquake which, in addition to bringing death and misery to thousands, saw the disappearance of almost the entire archive of Lisbon Cathedral,[2] and alongside the passage of Napoleon's troops who happily cooked their meals over fires stoked with the priceless contents of ancient monastic libraries,[3] thus we must reckon the setting ablaze of the Seminary of Viseu in 1841. Here, in just a few fateful hours, the irreplaceable records of centuries turned to smoke and ashes as the flames consumed almost the totality of the documents and cartularies belonging to the earliest known Cistercian monasteries in the kingdom; a cluster of houses in the Beira Alta region comprising São João de Tarouca, São Cristovão de Lafões, São Pedro de Águias, and Santa Maria de Salzeda.[4]

It is doubtless because of this evidential catastrophe, and somewhat as a reaction to the fanciful and tendentious histories of certain authors of times past, notably Bernardo de Brito writing in the early seventeenth century,[5] that during a revival of Cistercian studies in the 1950s and 1960s, scholars were excessively cautious in their approach to the subject. This was most notable perhaps in the case of one of the leading Portuguese Ecclesiastical Historians of his day, Miguel de Oliveira, who would only recognise a monastery as Cistercian when he found express reference in the documentation to the adoption of the Cistercian Reform. On this basis, the first Cistercian community to be established in Portugal was São João de Tarouca in 1144.[6]

Yet, despite the application of this decidedly restrictive methodology, it is this view that has tended to prevail in the historiography ever since, with most scholars (especially those working outside Portugal) still accepting Oliveira's dating to the early 1140s for the first Cistercian presence in Portugal, whilst overlooking, or remaining blissfully unconscious of, the fact that such a conclusion was arrived at by something closely akin to artifice.[7] Indeed, it could be said that Oliveira's rationale somewhat resembles a Legal Fiction, for example whereas somebody is officially pronounced "dead" when there has been no sighting or news from them for (typically) seven years. Opportunely, it produces a convenient juridical fact (for the

[2] Lúcia Lima Rodrigues and Russell Craig, "Recovery amid Destruction: Manoel da Maya and the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755," *Libraries & Cultural Record*, vol. 43, No. 4 (2008), 397-410.

[3] See, inter alia, *Memória breve dos estragos causados em Coimbra pelo exercito francez, comandado pelo general Massena, etc., "resultado das informações colhidas dos diferentes parochos do respectivo bispado"* (Lisbon, Impressão Régia, 1812); Simão José da Luz Soriano*, História da Guerra Civil e do Estabelecimento do Governo Parlimentar em Portugal*, 2ª época, tomo 5, part 2 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1893).

[4] Alexandre Herculano, *Opusculas, Questões Publicas*, Tomo 1, (Lisbon: Libraria Bertrand, 1897), 242; Cf, Marques, "A introdução da Ordem", 33.

[5] Fr. Bernardo de Brito, *Primeyra parte da Chronica de Cister; onde se contam as cousas principais desta religiam com muytas antiguidades, assi do Reyno de Portugal como de outros muytos da christandade; composta por Frey Bernardo de Brito* (Lisbon: Pedro Crasbeek, 1602).

[6] Miguel de Oliveira, "Origens" esp. 327-30.

[7] See for example, Adeline Rucquoi, "Les Cisterciens dans la Pèninsule ibérique", in *Unanimité et diversité cisterciennes* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2000), 487-523, 488.

purposes of Probate and so on), but it in no way tells you the "real-world" situation, nor what actually happened.[8]

The point is important because when this, arguably misplaced, "Legal Fiction" is discarded, questions swiftly arise over the possibility of a substantially earlier arrival of the Cistercian Order to those lands soon to be the autonomous kingdom of Portugal ruled over by (eventual generous Cistercian patron) Afonso Henriques, Portugal's first sovereign, his regal position secured in an agreement with his cousin and rival, "King-Emperor" Alfonso VII of Leon Castile whereby the latter recognised the former as "King" in 1143, although Afonso Henriques's subjects had in fact been calling him "King" since 1139-1140 (even if the royal title did not receive official papal sanction until 1179). Yet it is crucial to remember that this historic achievement was the culmination of machinations that had begun substantially earlier in the land of the county of Portucale, put in motion by the vaulting ambition of Afonso Henriques's parents: his mother, Countess Teresa of Portugal, who commonly styled herself "Queen" highlighting her royal descent as daughter (however illegitimate) of "Emperor of the Spains" Alfonso VI (c. 1040-1109), and his father the Burgundian aristocrat warrior, Count Henry who had received the county of Portugal as a species of "dowry" on marrying the old Emperor's daughter. When Afonso VI died in 1109 without a male heir, much of Christian Iberia notoriously erupted into dynastic turmoil and civil war as various contenders rushed to fill the power vacuum. Amid this tumult the various quarrelling parties looked to the Church for support both in the disputed land and also in Rome. Importantly, at this time, the clever and powerful monks of Cluny prodigious supporters of Alfonso VI, had begun to lose their renowned influence with the pope, for various reasons, not least the financial crisis caused to them by the drying up of tribute in African gold sent them by the Iberian Christian princes, the supply choked off by the Almoravid conquest of Al-Andalus from the late 1090s stymying the lucrative Christian "protection racket" of *parias* to which the former princelings of Al-Andalus, the so-called "*taifa* kings", had been subjected.

Meanwhile, even as the Almoravids were tightening their grip on the peninsula, the Cistercian Order was building its first community on marshland near Dijon and,

[8] National laws vary. Portuguese law requires a period of ten years: artigo 114º de *Código Civil*. In the Law of England and Wales, Lord Ellenborough, C. J., traced the origin of the presumption of death to seventeenth century legislation in *Doe d. George v. Jessen*, 6 East 80 (K. B. 1805), 851. For a general outline see, inter alia, D. Stone, "The Presumption of Death; a redundant concept", *Modern Law Review*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (Sep. 1981), 516-525. Cf, *Presumption of Death Act (Scotland) 1977* and *Presumption of Death Act 2013*, (UK Public Legislation) *The Gazette, Official Public Record*; https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/103382 accessed 27 November 2022 With direct reference to Miguel de Oliveira, the sporadically acerbic Armando de Almeida Fernandes commented in 1967, "Our historical authors and critics suffer from a rather pernicious evil, which is that they only consider a case or historical situation from the year in which it first appears, which is made much worse by the fact that they precede their constructions as if this case or circumstance were not possible before, that is to say, as if the loss of earlier documents were not a commonplace." "O Abade João Cirita e a introdução da Ordem de Cister (Lafões, Tarouca, S. Pedro das Aguias, Salzeda)", in *Esparsos de História Dúrio-Beirense*, ano XVI / No. 6, junho 1967, Separata do *Boletim da Casa Regional da Beira-Douro*, anos 15-19, 1966-1970, Porto, 1970, 65-80, at 68. All English translations herein from the original languages are my own, save for where otherwise indicated.

following the arrival of nobleman Bernard of Fontaine (St Bernard) in 1113, the Order burgeoned powerfully in popularity and reputation, its houses proliferating across Europe. As we shall see below, it is likely "Queen Teresa" and her Galician consort Fernan Peres de Trava (Count Henry having perished in combat in 1112) had appealed for support to this new Order whose influence in Rome was growing exponentially. Although geographically positioned on Europe's Western edge, the political players took by no means a peripheral stance and sought to secure their legitimacy, power, and influence by allying themselves to the institutional movers and shakers in the very heartlands of Christendom. With the Order of the Temple, closely tied to the Cistercians, arriving to Portugal in the 1120s, and immediately richly endowed by Teresa, it is possible, even likely, that the Cistercians had also arrived at this time, although unequivocal documentary proof of this is lacking – and of course, "therein lies the rub!"

Thus, given the sorry state of the evidential landscape, and uncomfortable as it may be for the die-hard empiricist, investigation into what happened regarding Cistercian origins in Portugal forces considerations far beyond the merely explicit and pristinely documental, and a willingness to entertain data from a broad range of sources, inevitably some more reliable than others, in a brave quest for correlating factors and hopeful corroboration. Further, whilst the blaze in the Viseu Seminary leaves scant alternative, there is, as things stand today, considerable encouragement in this direction in so far as the inferno, although of painful contemplation, turns out to have been by no means the complete disaster it had appeared at the time to justifiably horrified onlookers such as Alexandre Herculano.[9]

In the first place this is so because there came to light in the 1950s a thirteenth century codex comprising a cartulary of the monastery of São João de Tarouca that, for reasons unknown, had remained in the possession of a private individual and thus had not passed along with the remainder of the archive to be stored in Viseu. Sadly, for scholars of Oliveira's generation this cartulary known as *Livro das Doaçoes de Tarouca* (Book of the Donations of Tarouca) was not to be published and made available generally for scholarly examination until 1991.[10]

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[9] Alexandre Herculano, *Opusculas, Questões Publicas*, Tomo 1, 242.

[10] The title by which it is today usually known, *Livro das Doações de Tarouca* was attributed to the volume by Joaquim de Santa Rosa Viterbo who had examined it apparently whilst it was still in the monastery of Sao João de Tarouca. He cites it explicitly here and there, occasionally transcribing documents and passages from it, in order to support his interpretation of several words and expressions (*abbade-conego*, *familiar*, *herdade*, *rebora*, *tempeiros*) featuring in his monumental glossary of archaic terms, *Elucidário das palavras, termos e frases que em Portugal antigamente se usaram e que hoje regularmente se ignoram : obra indispensável para entender sem erro os documentos mais raros e preciosos que entre nós se conservam*, published in 1798. Miguel de Oliveira noted that the codex must have remained in Tarouca until the nineteenth century suppression of the monasteries since an official inventory compiled on 21 July 1834 and kept in the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Finance recorded "Another book of parchment folios bound in a calf skin cover with the title *Livro das Doações e Inquerições.*" Although the existence of the *Livro das Doações* had come to Oliveira's attention, he explains that he was permitted by the private owner of the codex to examine it only briefly, without ever managing to study it in depth.
"Origens," 327, note 26. The *Livro das Doações* was also known to Rui de Azevedo, who likewise apparently was unable to examine the codex in any detail, limiting himself merely to commenting in 1962 that it was of "real interest for [Portuguese] History;" Rui de Azevedo, *Documentos Regios*, (hereafter "DR") vol. 1, Tom. 2, 645. See generally, Armando Almeida Fernandes's "Introduction" to his 1991

In the second place, during principally the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a handful of more-or-less careful scholars had occasion to note or transcribe the contents of various items when visiting monastic archives in situ in the repositories of the various monasteries concerned, sometimes seizing the opportunity to include physical descriptions of the documents as they handled them. Among these early pioneers we can list António Brandão (1584-1637),[11] Rodrigo da Cunha (1517-1643),[12] Baltasar dos Reis (d. 1621),[13] and Joaquim de Santa Rosa de Viterbo (1744-1822).[14] Although their works are from a bygone age of historical writing and obviously must be used with caution, it is hard to disagree with Maria Alegria Marques, one of the pathfinding scholars who in recent years has begun to probe this material, that their inclusions possess a high degree of accuracy and that here we have indeed "copies whose value cannot and must not be doubted."[15]

Accordingly, it was Marques who, in the 1980s and 1990s, put forward a persuasive case for the first Cistercian community in Portugal being established from Clairvaux in about 1138 in the monastery of São Cristovão de Lafões, at that time headed by a certain João Cirita, a mysterious figure who, as we shall see, is nevertheless likely to prove crucial.[16] Indeed, following Marques's appraisal, the balance of the evidence indicates it was he who presided over the introduction of the Cistercian Reform in the previously mentioned cluster of monasteries in the Beira Alta between about 1138 and his death in 1164.[17]

Crucially, Marques arrived at her conclusions principally by giving due probative weight to information supplied by the seventeenth century historian, Rodrigo da Cunha, especially his report of a Cistercian foundation party, sent out from Clairvaux by Abbot (St) Bernard being found present in the Portuguese royal Augustinian

edition of the *Livro das Doações*; A. de Almeida Fernandes, *Tarucae Monumenta Historica*, 3 vols (Tarouca: Camara Municipal de Tarouca, 1991-1993), vol. 1, 7-11. Reading between the lines, perhaps one could be forgiven for speculating that the reason for the delay in making the codex available to the generality of scholars might have been a certain exclusory, even "dog in the manger", approach to the precious find adopted by certain parties close to the private owner.

[11] António Brandão, *Monarquia Lusitana* 4th ed. (Lisbon: Casa da Moeda, facsimile repr. 1974), Parts 3 and 4.

[12] Inter alia, Rodrigo da Cunha, *Catalógo dos bispos do Porto*, Porto, 1623, idem, *História eclesiástica dos arcebispos de Braga, II*, Braga, 1635.

[13] Baltazar dos Reis produced two manuscript histories of Salzedas in the early seventeenth century, edited and published respectively as follows, *Livro da Fundação do Mosteiro de Salzezdas*, (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1934), and *Breve Relação da Fundação e Antiguidade do Mosteiro de Santa Maria De Salzedas*, (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1936).

[14] Joaquim de Santa Rosa Viterbo, *Elucidário.*

[15] *Significa, pois, que nos encontramos perante cópias cujo valor não pode, nem deve ser colocado em dúvida*, Maria Alegria Marques, "O Cister ibérico e as suas peculiaridades: o Reino de Portugal. Três rostos para uma obra," in *Monasterio de Piedra, un legado de 800 años. Historia, arte, naturaleza y jardín*, ed by Herbert González Zymla and Diego Prieto López (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico (Excma. Diputación de Zaragoza), 2019), 83-110, at 89.

[16] Maria Alegria Marques, "A introdução da Ordem de Cister em Portugal," in *La introducción del Cister en España y Portugal*: [Actas do coloquio organizado por la Fundación Santa María de Bujedo en Burgos, el año 1986], Antonio Linaje Conde, et al. (Madrid: Editorial La Olmeda, 1991), 163-94; later published in idem, *Estudos sobre a Ordem de Cister em Portugal,* (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, Universidade de Coimbra, Universidade de Coimbra, 1998 – second impression, 2008), 29-73.

[17] Maria Alegria Marques, "O Cister Ibérico e as Suas Peculiaridades", 83-108.

monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra in 1138.[18] At the same time, in conjunction with this intriguing nugget, Marques was careful to mine a curious narrative text, the so-called *Exordium of the Monastery of São João de Tarouca*,[19] transmitted to us uniquely owed to the efforts of António Brandão who included his transcription of a primitive manuscript copy, now long lost, in his contribution to the monumental multi-volume History of Portugal, *Monarquia Lusitana.*[20] The *Exordium*, as its name suggests,[21] is an early foundation chronicle, possibly of the thirteenth century, recounting events leading to the establishment of Tarouca. The story features João Cirita centrally cast in the role of renowned holy man and religious leader. Further, and importantly, besides the episodes of the improbable and the miraculous characteristic of works of this nature, the *Exordium* includes several transcribed documents that are not so easily dismissed.

Nevertheless, although on Maria Marques's reading, the first Cistercian community was established in Lafões in the late 1130s, it appears there may be evidence for the Cistercians, or more specifically Cistercian influence from the Abbey of Clairvaux under Abbot Bernard, in circulation in (proto-)Portuguese lands a good deal earlier, and here again the figure of João Cirita looms large inviting an investigation into what can be known about him from the few titbits that can be shifted from the threadbare sources.

João Cirita*, clara vita*?

Thought at one time by some to be an entirely fictional character[22], the existence of the historical personage, João Cirita is today not in doubt. He is mentioned frequently enough in both royal and private documentation and appears no less than 12 times between 1140 and 1148 in the *Livro das Doacões* of the Monastery of São João de Tarouca.[23] His epitaph, supposedly at one time extant in the church of São Cristovão de Lafões but whose authenticity has divided scholars especially since it had disappeared by 1602 when the notoriously unreliable Bernardo de Brito first published it in his *Chronica de Cister,*[24] imparts the information that Cirita had been

[18] Rodrigo da Cunha, *Catálogo dos bispos do Porto*, first published in 1623 (Porto: Officina Prototypa, 1742), 17; idem, Rodrigo da Cunha, *História eclesiástica dos arcebispos de Braga*, II (Braga, 1635 - Reprinted -Braga: Barbosa & Xavier, 1989), 62.

[19] "Exordium Monasterii S. Joannis de Tarouca", *Portugaliæ Monumenta Historica*, *Scriptores*, Lisboa, 1856, 88-90.

[20] António Brandão, *Monarquia Lusitana*, III, (Lisbon: Pedro Craesbeck, 1632), fols. 284-285v.

[21] Drawing irresistible comparisons with the *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium Parvum*. See *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, ed. and trans. by C. Waddell, Cîteaux: Commentarii Cisterciensies, Studia et documenta, 9 (Cîteaux, 1999).

[22] See for example Manuel Gonçalves da Costa, "Frei João Cirita, Fundador Cisterciense. Mito Histórico?" in *Anais da Academia Portuguesa da História*, Série II, vol. 24, 101-120. Also, Luís Gonzaga de Azevedo, *História de Portugal*, 6 vols. (Lisbon: Edições Bíblion, 1944), vol. IV, 220-29.

[23] Cf, Marques, "O Cister Ibérico…", 93. That he is often referred to simply as "Abbot João" in the documentation has long been shown to be no obstacle to his identification as João Cirita. See on the point Rui de Azevedo, DR 1, tombo 2, 660. See also the useful if brief resumé of the historiography by Mario Barroca, *Epigrafia*, Vol. 2, tombo 1, 194 (No. 75) and 307, (No. 118).

[24] JOANNES ABBAS CIRIT. REXIT MONAST. / S. JOANNIS. S. CHRISTOPHORI. SALZEDAE. S. PETRI / CLARA VITA. CLARUS MERITIS. CLARUS / MIRACULIS CLARET IN CAELIS.

successively at the head of the monasteries of São Cristóvão de Lafões, São João de Tarouca, São Pedro de Távora (São Pedro das Águias) and Santa Maria de Salzeda, where in each case he appears to have inducted the resident community into the Cistercian Observance of the Rule of Benedict. Despite the uncertainties surrounding this funerary memento, the brief curriculum vitae therein conveyed has raised only minor quibbles and the year of 1164, there given for his death, raises no incongruity.[25]

Yet, beyond this, his ostensibly bland portrayal in the *Exordium* (further discussed below), and the perfunctory mentions of him in various donations and other documentation as the leader of one religious community or another, almost nothing is known about the person of João Cirita that can be stated with any certainty. Propelled, therefore, onto the thin ice of inference, inuendo, and conjecture, there is little left open for the historical detective but to turn to what is known of the tradition surrounding this enigmatic figure, in the knowledge that often myths "though they contain error, reflect a splintered fragment of the true light".[26]

In the first place, despite all the misgivings over Bernardo de Brito, it is necessary to acknowledge what this author has to say of João Cirita, since it is he who gives the earliest and most detailed account of his activities. In a winding tale, much in the style of a *Vita*, where, typically of Brito, it is hard to differentiate what may be the author's own invention from what has been genuinely handed down by tradition, Cirita's career is traced from just before his entry into the religious life up to his death. Alongside more difficult supernatural passages, the yarn undoubtedly contains several plausible elements which may be turned to profit through a little exploration.

Legend of João Cirita

In brief the story is as follows.[27] In the time of the king-emperor of León-Castile, Alfonso VI,[28] numerous foreign military adventurers arrived to Hispania, "desirous of gaining glory" through aiding the indigenous Catholic princes in their wars on the

OBIIT / X. KAL. JANUARII ERA M. CC. II, Brito, *Chronica de Cister*, 620; Barroca, *Epigrafia*, Vol. 2, tombo 1, No. 118, 307-310. Maur Cocheril was of the opinion the epitaph was an invention of Brito; Maur Cocheril, Routier des Abbayes Cisterciennes du Portugal (Paris/Lisbon: Fondation Calouste Gumbenkian, 1978), 128, However, Almeida Fernandes makes a persuasive argument for its authenticity, see "Os primeiros documentos…" *Revista de Guimarães*, No. 95, 39. The epitaph was subsequently re-published by various others including Fr. António Brandão, who also reports a later epitaph, apparently executed in the modern period, that was visible at the time he was writing in 1632 in the church of São Cristóvão and which can still be seen today comprising the somewhat less elaborate text: AQUI IAS O CORPO DO SANTO / ABAD. F. R. IAO SIRITA P. F. / DESTE MOSTEIRO; Barroca, *Epigrafia*, Vol 2 tombo 1, 308 (No. 118) Brandão, *Monarquia Lusitana* 1632, 213 v. See also, Viterbo, (1966 edition), 104-104.

[25] A. de Almeida Fernandes, "Os primeiros documentos…" *Revista de Guimarães*, (Part 2) no. 95, p. 39. Maria Alegria Marques has doubted that João Cirita was abbot of Sta Maria de Salzeda, but rather thinks he was instrumental in the introduction of the Cistercian Reform in the community; Marques, "Introdução da Ordem…", 57.

[26] J. R. R. Tolkein, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends* (New York: Ballantine, 1978), 45-48.

[27] Distilled with occasional quotations from Livro 2 and Livro 5 of *Chronica de Cister*.

[28] (d. 1109).

Muslims. Among their number was one João Cirita, Brito observing that his foreign origins are belied by his peculiar appellation which is "little-used-in Portugal".

Gravely wounded in combat, Cirita was virtually given up for dead, an experience that shook him so profoundly he retired from the military life and withdrew to Galicia where he was given lodging by a "priest of a very holy life and well instructed in the lesson of the sacred Scripture". The kindly cleric nursed Cirita back to health and at the same time converted him from a worldly soldier to a spiritual soldier engaged in "fighting against his own appetite and launching glorious victories against the enemies of the soul". A few months later, having first schooled Cirita in human and divine letters, the priest died and Cirita took himself off to live in solitude among some inhospitable mountains in the Entre Douro e Minho region, "where from the beginning he joined great battles with the Devil." In one of these, the Devil brought to Cirita's cell at night a noblewoman who had fled from her husband in fear of her life. Sheltering her in his modest dwelling until her situation could be resolved on the following day, as the evening drew on, Cirita found himself "so inflamed with concupiscence that it was going take very little before he was completely overcome." Calling upon God to help him, he re-kindled the fire in his hearth and thrust his arm into the flames scorching the flesh whereupon his ardour wilted, the Devil was defeated, and his injured arm ceased to burn.

Sometime later, Cirita went to live near the River Vouga with two renowned holy hermits. He so impressed them with his devotion that, despite his youth, they entrusted to him the training of the many disciples who came to them seeking out their doctrines. When the hermits died, Cirita became head of the community that had by now come into being, and at length he moved it to a location at the top of a fertile hill surrounded by mountains and near the River Barroso (apparently the site of the monastery of São Cristóvão de Lafões, although Brito is a little obscure on the point). From here the fame of the sanctity of the community reached the court of Henry, Count of Portucale,[29] who visited João Cirita and asked him to intercede with God so that his wife, (Queen) D. Teresa, would conceive an heir. Cirita duly promised to entreat God accordingly and prophesied that the Count would have "such a son in peace and war that would be an example to the princes of his time and an astonishment and destruction to the enemies of Jesus Christ." When the Count returned to Guimarães, Teresa conceived and gave birth to Afonso Henriques, "honour and glory of the Portuguese nation and foundation of the royal name of Lusitania". Thereafter, on Count Heny's death in 1112, Afonso Henriques inherited not only his father's lands but also his father's piety, and accordingly Cirita became his spiritual guide and intercessor.

After some time, in France, Abbot (St) Bernard of Clairvaux was praying following Matins in the choir of his abbey church when he received a vision of St John the Baptist. The divine visitor instructed the abbot to send some of his monks "to the most remote parts of Hispania" in order to found a monastery, under his own invocation (i.e., St John/S. João) at a location that would be revealed to them. Furthermore, the monks, on their arrival in Portuguese lands, would find a holy

[29] (d. 1112).

hermit (i.e., João Cirita) who would help them and guide them in their mission. The legend then continues to detail the foundation of the monastery of São João de Tarouca, much as is recounted in the *Exordium* including the sending of eight monks out from Clairvaux, Cirita's reception of them and the help he rendered them, especially in liaising with Prince Afonso Henriques, and further that Cirita eventually accepted the Cistercian habit from the hands of one of the newcomers from Clairvaux, one Aldeberto, who had been elected abbot of Tarouca. Cirita then converted his brother hermits to the Cistercian Reform and gathered them together on their hill location in the monastery of São Cristóvão de Lafões.

Brito goes on to recount that, on Aldeberto's death, Cirita was elected abbot of Tarouca and lived there a life of consummate saintliness, with his fame for piety and, importantly, divine prophesy becoming so prodigious that he was much visited by Prince Afonso and members of his court, especially by one of his chief courtiers, Egas Moniz and his wife Dona Teresa who would found the monastery of Salzeda and place it under the tutelage of Cirita.

Having introduced the Cistercian rule into Salzeda, Cirita goes to São Pedro das Águias, a house of black monks, whom he also ushers into the Cistercian Reform. Meanwhile his holy reputation attracts a torrent of donations and favours for São João de Tarouca and for the Cistercian Order in Portugal bestowed by Afonso Henriques and others. Finally, "when the saint reached an almost decrepit age and seeing that he lacked the strength to govern the abbacy (of Tarouca? – Brito is unclear) as was fitting, he determined to renounce it and to got to finish the few years that remained to him of life in the monastery of São Cristovão de Lafões where he had first lived." There, some three and a half years later, on 23 December 1164, "the Lord was served to call him to himself" and Cirita breathed his last, to the profound grief and lamentations of all.

The same story, substantially abridged, was included by António Brandão in *Monarchia Lusitana* and was reproduced by Viterbo, among others, thereafter.

Correlations and Associations

Initial puzzlement has been caused by the appellative "Cirita" which is, as Brito highlights, virtually unheard-of in the Portuguese setting. Although there has been speculation by various authors as to whether it may refer to the quality of being a particular type of hermit, the arguments advanced in this direction tend to be somewhat circular and wholly inconclusive and need not detain us.[30] Of more interest is the notion that the strangeness of the name may be an indication of foreign origin. Indeed, Maria Marques has suggested, however with little elaboration, that it

[30] See especially Viterbo, "Cirita", *Elucidario*…, vol. 11, 192 et seq., followed, apparently, by Maur Cocheril, 'Abadias Cistercienses Portuguesas,' 74. Viterbo's interpretation has been dismissed by José Saraiva as fantasy (*fantasiosa*), an observation included in Rui de Azevedo's exposition of Viterbo's errors in DR, tombo 2, 8-659, where Azevedo concludes with caution only that "Cirita" is a nickname of obscure meaning (*alcunha de sentido obscuro*), ibid, 569. A. de Almeida Fernandes makes further observations on the subject involving various toponyms in idem, *Taraucae monumenta histórica*, *leitura, sumários e notas de A. de Almeida Fernandes*, (Tarouca: Câmara Municipal de Tarouca, 1991-1992), Vol. 1, Tombo 2, the footnote at page 240. Cf., Mario Barroca, *Epigrafia*, vol. 2, Tombo 1, 309.

might be of French origin perhaps linked to "cire" (meaning "wax" in English), although the significance of the sobriquet (if it be such) remains a mystery.[31] Be that as it may, the possibility that in João Cirita we are dealing with a person coming from outside Portugal, or indeed Hispania, is at least cogent, since nothing has emerged to contradict the notion and there is nothing in the sources containing any reference to João Cirita possessing family members in the Peninsular region (or anywhere else for that matter). Further, under the prevailing military conditions persisting in early twelfth century Iberia, it is not hard to imagine João Cirita arriving in one of the waves of French, or Burgundian, knights that came in aid of Alfonso VI as he confronted a highly aggressive and expansionist Berber Islam in the shape of the Almoravids. Certainly, there appears to have been no shortage of opportunities for a young adventurer, perhaps fired by *chansons de geste* such as the hugely popular *Song of Roland*, to join a military enterprise that would bring him south over the Pyrenees to the war zone on the Andalusi fronter.

Nor is the figure of the warrior turned monk or hermit unusual for the early twelfth century, a phenomenon strongly reflected in the literature of the time. Aside from the enduring popularity in the central Middle Ages of the Roman "warrior-saints", including Maurice (commander of the Theban Legion), George, Sebastian, Julian, Eustace, Demetrius and, of course, Martin, variously perceived as exemplars to be emulated, or as divine intercessors,[32] there were plentiful examples of more recent memory of conversion from the military to the religious life. An early example is St Guthlac (d. 714), of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, whose cult was still enjoying a prodigious currency in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[33] According to his biographer, a certain monk named Felix writing in East Anglia sometime before 749, Guthlac, having been a warrior for some nine years, one night during a lull in campaigning had an epiphany during which he "contemplated the wretched deaths and the shameful ends of the kings of his race in the course of the past ages … then in imagination the form of his own death revealed itself to him… and prompted by divine majesty he vowed that, if he lived until the next day, he himself would become a servant of Christ."[34] Following a stint in the monastery of Repton, Guthlac went to live as a hermit on the Isle of Crowland and thereafter was consulted by kings on account of his reputation for piety and prophesy.

Importantly, underlying Guthlac's conversion as told by Felix, whatever the historical facts may have been, is the unmistakable proposition that a warrior's proximity to death could and did inspire religious sentiment so profoundly that it could drive him out of the military profession altogether. Indeed, often it was no mere contemplative or reflective process, as with Felix's Guthlac, that prompted the conversion, but rather a psychological jolt, the emotional impact of a sudden and directly felt experience, perhaps a serious wound, or some other horrifying visceral

[31] Marques, "O Cister Ibérico", 98.
[32] See generally, Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Also, James B. MacGregor, "Negotiating Knightly Piety: The Cult of the Warrior-Saints in the West, ca. 1070-ca. 1200", *Church History*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (June, 2004), 317-45.
[33] Betram Colgrave, "Introduction" in *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac, Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes* by idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 9-14
[34] *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, 81-83.

moment lived on the battlefield. As Alexander Murray has suggested, a "large," if often obscured, fact in Church History is that "a substantial proportion of the main religious movements of the [Central Middle Ages] can trace their historical point of departure to a military man's revulsion from killing".[35]

Many of these conversions retain more or less close parallels with the tradition of João Cirita. Among these examples, Saint Romuald of Ravenna (d. 1027), his life famously penned by the great eleventh century reformer Peter Damien for whom he was a role model, was driven from the military life by his presence at a duel in which his father killed his own cousin.[36] Thus, disgusted by war, Romuald became a hermit and religious mover-and-shaker and ultimately founded the Camoldolensians. Further north, in Normandy, Herluin (d.1078) founder of the monastery of Bec had followed a distinguished military career in the service of the Norman nobleman Gilbert of Brionne. According to Orderic Vitalis, who had the utmost respect for the monastery of Bec and its resident monks, his conversion came about when, during a battle in which he was in immediate danger of being killed, he vowed that if divine providence permitted him to survive, "he would never again devote himself to any other service than that of God."[37]

Meanwhile, in the Empire, various chronicles chart the rise of the Cluniac abbeys of Hersau and St Grogen in the Black Forest, attributing their prodigious recruitment from the military class during the 1070s and 1080s to the widespread rejection of militarism within that group prompted by shocking personal experiences during the Investiture wars.[38] Some decades later, also in Imperial lands, Eberhard, younger brother of Count Adolf IV of Berg participated in the Battle of Wilderen on 7 August 1129 as part of the combined forces of Count Arnold of Loon, Théoger Bishop of Metz, Alexander I of Julich, Bishop of Liege, and Walleran II, Duke of Lower Lorraine. In the combat, the forces of Giselbert Count of Duras, Geoffrey the Bearded Count of Louvain, and Thierry of Alcase, Count of Flanders, were defeated, amid scenes of butchery that left over 800 men dead. Eberhad was so troubled by the experience that, on his return home, he escaped in disguise in order to do penance *perpetue se exilio religare*.[39] He went on pilgrimage to Rome, Santiago de Compostela,

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[35] Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 376.

[36] *Vita Sancti Romualdi* (Peter Damien), PL, 144; 953-1008.

[37] *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis,* ed. by Mary Chibnall (Oxford 1969-) 2, 12. The episode is omitted from the *Vita Domni Herluini*, of Gilbert Crispin, abbot of Westminster since Gilbert may have felt uncomfortable with a conversion made under the constraints of duress. Vitalis had no such qualms, considering such entry into the religious life as entirely honourable, being concerned only that vows once taken were faithfully observed thereafter; Christopher Harper-Bill, "Herluin, Abbot of Bec and his Biographer", *Studies in Church History*, Volume 15: *Religious Motivation Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, 1978, 15-25, 17. See also, *Vita Domni Herluini Abbatis Beccerensis*, ed. by J. Armitage Robinson, in *Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster, A study of the Abbey under Norman Rule*, by idem, 87-110.

[38] Wolfger of Prüfening *Vita Theogeri* (1084) MGH, SS 12, 452, 28-32; *Casus Monasterii Petrishusensis*, ii, c. 48 SS 20, 648.24-9; *Historia Hirsaugiensis Monasterii*, c. 3 MGH SS 14,256.44-50; Bernold of Saint Blasien (of Constance), *Chronicon* (1083)) MGH SS 5.439.20-4: Klaus Schreiner, *Sozial- und standesgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Benediktinerkonventen im östlichen Schwarzwald* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg Reihe B, Forschungen), (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), n. 130. See also Murray, *Reason and Society*, 377.

[39] Levold von Noirhoi, Chronica comiium de Marka, ed. F. Zschaeck, MGH, SS N. S. 6 (1929, Xcudrudi 1955), 19; Herbert Grundmann, *"Adelsbekehrungen im Hochmittelalter,* Conversi und nutriti im Kloster," in

and to Saint Gilles,[40] before hiring himself out as a swineherd for years in the vicinity of the Cistercian abbey of Morimond. It was only when knights from his homeland passed by on the pilgrimage to Saint Gilles that they recognised him and spoke about him to the abbot of Morimond. The abbot invited Eberhard to join his monastery and Eberhard, supposedly already literate, became such an enthusiastic Cistercian that after a while he became an ambassador for the expansion of the order. He returned to his brother Adolf in 1133 and induced him to convert their ancestral castle of Berg, northeast of Cologne, into a Cistercian monastery and to endow it generously, the establishment thereafter becoming known as Altenberg. The count moved his seat to the castle of Burg on the Wupper, but, at his request, he was buried in Altenberg when he died in 1152, being followed in this funerial practice by other members of the family. Eberhard, meanwhile, moved on to his brother-in-law, Sizzo, Count of Schwarzburg, in Thuringia and persuaded him to found the Cistercian monastery of Georgenthal near Gotha in 1142, where Eberhard became abbot and where he died in about 1150.[41]

Indeed, whilst the Cistercians counted many former warriors among their number and are well-known for the use of military imagery in their literature, it is often overlooked that St Bernard himself experienced his final crisis of conversion whilst travelling to participate in a siege.[42]

Cirita the convert

With precedents proliferating for the conversion of João Cirita, the traumatised warrior, to the religious life, and with little else to inform us, a brief examination of the experience of analogues elsewhere can suggest some of the possible contents of his new mode of existence. Notably, Cirita first spends some time convalescing with a learned priest in Galicia who, besides nursing him, teaches him literature and the scriptures. Clearly education is important, and whatever the truth of this episode, it is a necessary component in the character of João Cirita as a credible and effective religious leader. In this respect we can note that several of the warrior-saint figures quit the battlefield initially to go to experience life in an established monastery – Guthlac goes for two years to Repton (Benedictine), Romuald goes to St Apollinare in Classe (Benedictine/Cluniac), Herluin once leaving the service of Gilbert of Brionne, visited nearby monasteries in order to learn how to live a religious life. Whether this is reflected in João Cirita's sojourn with the priest is uncertain, however,

Adel und Kirche: *Gerd Tellenbach zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. by Josef Flekenstein and Karel Schmid, (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 325-45, 341.

[40] For some, who were yet undecided as to their future path, one method for focussing the mind was to undertake pilgrimage which, although it involved visiting shrines, had as a principal objective the process of renunciation. Pilgrims were required to take leave of home and family and to become strangers in foreign lands (like Abraham). Such self-exile not only encouraged the desired mental "liminality", but, importantly, was a physical representation of man's exclusion from heavenly bliss; Cf, Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism, A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 23.

[41] Grundmann, *"Adelsbekehrungen im Hochmittelalter",* 341-43.

[42] Watkin Williams, *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), 10-11.

underlying these episodes is the theme that religious life as experienced in these institutions, is found to be in various ways inadequate to the spiritual requirements of the protagonist in question. Seeking a closer walk with God, the subject thus embarks upon the eremitical pathway.

At the time of the florescence of João Cirita, there were recluses to be found in almost every region all over Western Christendom following a mushrooming during the tenth and eleventh centuries of an interpretation of the religious life that sought its ends beyond the inherited monastic community (usually some form of Benedictinism) which, according to this view, had by now become tainted and degraded.[43] During the Carolingian period the monasteries had thrived and grown rich as they fulfilled the role of local powerbrokers and royal intermediaries, however when the old order progressively disintegrated during the ninth and tenth centuries under Charlamagne's faltering successors, numerous esteemed houses revealed the rot within, riddled with lay influence and sorrowfully lax in discipline.[44] Concerns spread that the established Benedictine communities no longer offered the way to genuine spiritual growth in Christ.

Simultaneously, the world was changing swiftly and from around 1000, the European countryside and towns experienced the beginning of an agricultural and commercial revival that would transform the material and cultural circumstances of Western Christendom. Pressure from external raiders including Vikings, Magyars and Muslims eased and, whilst some had feared the end of the world, most greeted survival into the new millennium as signalling the beginning of a new era, with the period of relative peace during the first decades of the eleventh century (in some areas more prolonged), allowing the development of heightened religious sentiment among the general populous. For a growing number of spiritual searchers, these circumstances highlighted the gaping chasm between apostolic ideals rooted in ascetic austerity and the opulence of many Church institutions increasingly involved in the worldly affairs of litigation and the grubby business of buying and selling. Indeed, many monasteries, perhaps most visibly Cluny and its congregation, heavily supported and protected by the landowning elites, were quick to become embroiled in the burgeoning monetary economy and, usually handsomely endowed with agricultural estates, their wealth grew even more.[45] Thus, in a mood of dissatisfaction

[43] For an overview of the eremitical movement in Portugal see José Mattoso, 'Eremitas Portugueses no Século XII', in idem, *Reilgião e Cultura na Idade Média portuguesa* (Lisbon: Casa da Moeda, 1982), 103-45.
[44] Gert Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism, its History and Forms of Life*, Trans. by James D. Mixson, (Collegeville, MN, Cistercian Publications, 2016), 38-49.
[45] In Hispania, following the fall of the Caliphate in about 1030 there followed a prolonged period of political fragmentation in al-Andalus which dissolved into a collection of autonomous principalities, or petty kingdoms, known as *taifas*. The situation was duly exploited by the Christian princes in the form of tribute or *parias*, essentially protection money paid by "client" *taifa* states, in return for a suspension of Christian aggression. Most famously Alfonso VI channelled enormous sums in gold from these payments to Cluny, enabling Hugh the Great to build a splendid new abbey Church. When, the payments were finally choked off thanks to the rise of the Almoravids towards the end of the eleventh century, Cluny, by now an enormous concern with hundreds of monks to feed and clothe, was plunged into deep financial crisis. Noreen Hunt, *Cluny under Saint Hugh: 1049-1109*, (London: E. Arnold, 1967), 78-82; Charles Julian Bishko, 'Fernando I and the Origins of the Leonese-Castilian Alliance with Cluny', in idem., *Studies in Medieval Spanish Frontier History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), II, 36-42; Richard

with the established organs of religion, numerous thirsty souls, inspired by the writings of the Desert Fathers, struck out alone in the spirit of experimentation seeking a return to perceived pure forms of Christian devotion amid a broad reforming drive that was to produce so many new orders during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Yet there was a significant difference between the traditional anchorites of late antiquity and the *fuga mundi*[46] as exhibited by this new wave of hermits. For the old spiritual champions of the deserts beyond the banks of the Nile, dwellers in the trackless wastes around Nitria or on the parched, stony slopes of Pispir, for such as Paul of Thebes, or the inspirational St Antony (c.251-365) and those that followed in their wake leaving shards of their wisdom lodged in the *Apophthegmata patrum*, the eremitical life was an end in itself, a definitive state of being.[47] This was emphatically not so for the new hermits of the age of João Cirita. Their *fuga mundi* was very much a beginning. Initial steps were usually tentative, for this was religious pioneering with the ever-present danger of being led into error by inexperience, isolation, and consequent delusion. It was a hazard that had been identified in the patristic age by St Basil the Great (330-379), archbishop of Caesarea, who had spent the year of 357 travelling around Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia investigating ascetics and monasticism. Although he came to admire some aspects of eremitical practice, he was ultimately suspicious of it and pronounced the following warning:

"…the fashion of the love of Christ does not allow us to look each at his own good. For "love" we read "seeketh not its own" (1 Corr, xiii, 5). Now the solitary life has one aim, the service of the needs of the individual. But this is plainly in conflict with the law of love, which the apostle fulfilled when he sought not his own advantage but that of the many, that they might be saved. Secondly, in such separation the man will not even recognise his defects readily, not having anyone to reprove him and to set him right with kindness and compassion…There happens to him in consequence what has been said: "Woe to the solitary man, since if he fall there is none to raise him up". (Eccl. iv. 10).[48]

Indeed, many new hermits appear to have been likewise wary of isolation sticto sensu, and examples of it are comparatively rare. Frequently, a hermit had initially at least one companion, (e.g., Steven of Obazine travelled with his friend and fellow priest, Peter) and we observe that Brito reports João Cirita, following a period of lonely seclusion, going to dwell with two hermits established close to the River Vouga. Whilst the new hermits, in common with the antique anchorites, chose to

Fletcher, *The Episcopate in the kingdom of León in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 8-9. On the economy of Cluny see Hunt, *Cluny*, 67-82; also, George Duby, 'Le budget de l'abbaye de Cluny entre 1080 et 1155', *Annales*, VII (1952): 155-71.

[46] flight from the world.

[47] Lucien Regnault, *Les pères du desert à travers leurs apophtheegmes* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre, 1987); John Wortley, ed., *The anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also the seminal article by Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 61 (1971): 80-101.

[48] W. K. Lowther Clarke, *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil, Translated into English with Introduction and Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1925), 163-164. (Longer Rules VII, R.3 "That it is necessary, with a view to pleasing God, to live with like-minded persons, and that solitude is difficult and dangerous.")

live in wild and remote areas, the real or figurative "desert" or "wilderness" mentioned so frequently in the literature, unlike the hermits of old, ascetics of Cirita's generation were welcoming of disciples who sought to join with them. In such cases, solitude was not defined as the absence of company, but rather removal from secular society in order to be subjected uniquely to the dominion of God. Accordingly, we learn that the hermits of Vouga are joined by would-be companions eager to share in their life and doctrines, and further that the hermits are so impressed with Cirita, despite his tender years,[49] that he is entrusted with the training of novices. Thus, very swiftly we apprehend the formation of a community. Indeed, sometimes a situation arose where several hermits living within the same area were brought together into a single community, which is what on one reading of the accumulated sources, might well have happened under Cirita's influence, leading to the establishment of the house that came to be known as S. Cristóvão de Lafões in the 1120s. A century or so earlier, such an arrangement had led to the foundation of the monastery of Santa Maria de Monserrat in Catalonia, involving the joining together of anchorites living on the mountain of Montserrat at the urging of Abbot Oliba of Ripoll and the Bishop of Vic in 1025. Nevertheless, most communities relied on no such hierarchical involvement and instead grew organically from a nucleus of acolytes surrounding a particular charismatic figure. It is in harmony with this scenario that, on the death of the two original hermits of Vouga, Cirita takes charge of the de facto community that has by now formed around him and organises them into a single united body.

Importantly, the new eremitical movement, although in many ways revolutionary, was not at all anarchistic.[50] Obedience was perceived to be a cardinal principle of their religious life, as Peter Damien was careful to emphasise in his *Vita Romualdi*. Romuald, in conversation with the hermit Venerius who had left coenobitism, since his extreme devotional practices had led his fellow monks to ill-treat him, shows great respect for Venerius's devotion and ascetic life, however, he is compelled to correct him on the all-important subject of obedience:

> [When] asked under whose regime he lived, or to whose judgment he showed obedience in his conversation, [Venerius] replied that, having been released from [anyone] else's command, he followed [the course] which seemed most expedient to him. Romuald said to him: "If you bear the cross of Christ, above all you must not abandon the obedience of Christ. Go, therefore, and [when you] have received the consent of your own abbot, return and live humbly under his jurisdiction, for the edifice of sacred work, which a good will builds, humility raises up, and the virtue of obedience lifts on high."[51]

[49] We cannot know the age of Cirita, but Guthlac entered the military profession at the age of 15, which would still not be unusual in the twelfth century. Afonso Henriques of Portugal appears to have armed himself as a knight in Zamora at about 18 years of age; Mattoso, *D. Afonso Henriques* (Rio de Mouro: Circulo dos Leitores, 2006), 38-40.

[50] Cf, Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism*, 22.

[51] *Saint Peter Damien's Vita Beati Romualdi, Introduction, Translation and Analysis* by Colin Ralph Philips, (King's College London, Doctoral Dissertation, 1988), (*Vita*, Chap 24), 188-189.

Of course, not all new eremitical communities survived, but those that did were organised firmly under the authority of a leader who, although not beyond reproach, was to be obeyed. Whilst the canonic hours and time-honoured practices of Christian ritual were observed, their austerity, ascetism, and especially their undertaking of manual labour (often a necessity for survival) set them apart from the mainstream. This was troubling to many new hermits who felt vulnerable at occupying an ambiguous position within the Church, the suspicion of heresy was often not far away,[52] and, at the same time, they feared for the longevity of their communities if they were to continue merely to rely on the wisdom, admonitions, and prescriptions handed down orally by their leader. Stephen of Obazine's biographer encapsulated the sentiment as follows:

> …they wanted to belong to an order authorised by the Church, so that, in the absence of their masters there would remain to them the unfailing authority of a written law.[53]

Accordingly, the stipulations and practices of the leader came to be written down. However, there was also the option to adopt an already existing rule, usually the Rule of Benedict or the Rule of Augustine, however adjusted by the application of a certain observance contained in specifically tailored normative writings, or *Consuetudines*. Certainly, one of the best known examples of such a combination is the Cistercian Observance with the *Carta Caritatis* being compiled to supplement the Rule of Benedict which, if followed exactly to the letter, proved impossible in practice, turning out to be, as Leyser put it, "a reformers illusion."[54]

Cirita and the Search for a Rule

There is little in the sources that may illuminate any discussions within Cirita's community over which Rule to adopt, although of course we know that ultimately the choice fell on the Rule of Benedict under the Cistercian observance, and that, once it had been introduced into São Cristovão de Lafões, in about 1138, following Maria Marques's analysis, Cirita was a key figure in bringing the Cistercian Reform to the grouping of monasteries mentioned earlier in the Beira Alta, beginning with São João de Tarouca. However, it is to Santa Maria de Salzeda, the last of these monasteries chronologically to receive the reforming attentions of João Cirita, that we must look for the next clue as to his trajectory and the possible fortunes of the first White Monks in the land.

Surviving in a transcription produced in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century by one Baltazar dos Reis, a monk of Salzeda, is a document that has been dated to May 1156.[55] It details a solemn undertaking given by João Cirita to the

[52] Leyser, *The New Hermits*, 81.
[53] Leyser, *The New Hermits*, 87*; Vita Sancti Stephani Obazinensis (Vie de Saint Étienne d'Obazine)*, ed. Michel Aubrun (Clermont–Ferrand, 1970) Bk. 11, Ch. 1, 96.
[54] Leyser, *The New Hermits*, 89. See also Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism,* 91.
[55] Fr. Baltasar dos Reis, *Breve relacao da fundacao e antiguidade do mosteiro e antiguidadede Santa Maria da Salzeda*, (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, Lisboa, 1936), 40-41; A. De Almeida Fernandes, "Os Primeiros Documentos de Santa Maria da Salzeda, até a morte da Fundadora Comentários e defesa", (Part 2)

founder of Salzeda, D. Teresa Afonso (c. 1100-1171), scion of the Galician high nobility and widow of Egas Moniz de Riba Douro, a prominent royal knight and courtier.[56] The text reads in the first person as if it had been written or dictated by João Cirita himself and sets out that, in response to the insistence of Teresa Afonso, and further at the solicitation of the king and queen of Portugal, he makes oath to introduce the Cistercian observance into the monastery of Salzeda. Importantly, in so doing, he states that Teresa Afonso wishes him to come to Salzeda to introduce the

> rule and the order of the church of Clairvaux, brought by me already a long time ago from transalpine parts that was enlightening these lands.[57]

Considering that "transalpine" (*transalpinis*) is most likely at this time a term used generically, as in the *Historia Compostelana*, to indicate simply mountains, in this case probably the Pyrenees,[58] here we have a suggestion that João Cirita may have gone to Clairvaux for a spell to be instructed in the Cistercian observance, much as, for example, Gaucher of Aureil had travelled from the Limousin to Avignon, where he stayed for two years with the canons of St Ruf, in order to be instructed in their customs.[59] Informative also is the relationship between the religious of Yorkshire and Clairvaux leading to Abbot Bernard sending a foundation party to the north of England in 1131. The region was already known to Bernard because the Yorkshireman, William, who led the foundation party and became first Abbot of Rievaulx, had joined the community of Clairvaux as a monk sometime before 1119 and had served for a time as Bernard's secretary. Richard was another religious from Yorkshire who had joined the community at Clairvaux, later becoming abbot of

Revista de Guimarães, 1985, No. 95, 30 et seq. As described by Baltasar dos Reis, the document exhibited the characteristic indication that it is one copy of an instrument drafted in duplicate on one sheet of parchment, the copies being separated by the legend, *fiat pax et veritas*, which was then cut in half so as to enable a copy to be kept by each of the two contracting parties. That the copies once belonged to the same sheet of parchment was guaranteed by the cutting of the parchment in an irregular zig-zag, like shark's teeth, hence *indenture,* a term for such documentation still in use today, which bisects the legend *fiat pax et veritas* – the copies could thereafter be verified as genuine through the fact that they could be readily seen to be reunited in a "perfect fit." The *indenture* device is a reasonably common feature of such agreements, many examples of which are to be found for the twelfth century in the Torre do Tombo.

[56] D. Teresa Afonso, sometimes appearing with the title "Minhana," apparently an affectionate term applied to the daughters of nobles or *ricos-homens*, was daughter of Galician aristocrat, D. Afonso Nunes de Celanova. She was the second wife of Egaz Moniz "o Aio" (c. 1080-1146), who was tutor and guardian (hence "Aio") to future first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques. In turn, Afonso Henriques would entrust the education of his children, Urraca, Mafalda, and Sancho to her; see generally Maria João Branco, *D. Sancho I* (Rio de Mouro, Circulo de Leitores, 2006), 39-41.

[57] …*haec regula et ordo Claravelis ecclesiae a me jam dudum a transalpinis partibus aductus terras istas illustrabat*…; Almeida Fernandes, "Os Pirmeiros Documentos", (Part 1) *Revista de Guimarães*, No.94, p. 92 (Doc. 3)

[58] *Historia Compostellana*, ed. by E. Falque Rey, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, vol. 70 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), 183, note 479, and 205, note 542. See also Marques, "O Cister Ibérico", 98, note 47.

[59] Resonances here are also to be found in the various sojourns of the early canons of Santa Cruz de Coimbra in St Ruf during the 1130s; E. Austin O'Malley, F.S.C., *Tello and Theotonio, the Twelfth Century Founders of the Monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1954).

Fountains, as was the school master Henry Murdac.[60] Whilst a letter presented by William's foundation party from Bernard to Henry I of England is the unique contemporary source for the arrival of the Cistercians to Yorkshire, it likely represents merely one of a series of preparatory and negotiatory communications during the preceding years, conducted at the highest state and ecclesiastical levels, a situation apparently finding ready parallel in King Afonso Henriques's own links with the great abbot of Clairvaux.[61]

Further, it is in the context of this curious reference in Cirita's oath to an apparent direct and personal connection with Clairvaux that an element of the previously mentioned *Exordium of the monastery of São João de Tarouca* is thrown into relief. Although the *Exordium* is likely to have been composed or interpolated in order to give Tarouca seniority and therefore authority over São Cristovão de Lafões, the documents therein reproduced, some five in total, have not been shown to be fabrications and at least one, the charter of "couto" (endowment charter) granted to Tarouca by Afonso Henriques in 1140, is certainly a faithful copy of the original. Whilst discussion of the questions surrounding the *Exordium* is beyond the scope of this article, what commands attention here is the transcription of a letter supposedly from Bernard addressed to João Cirita and brought to him by a foundation party sent out by the abbot of Clairvaux with the mission to establish a community in Tarouca. Whilst it is possible, even likely, the letter has been modified to suit the needs of the compilers of the *Exordium*, the greeting of the letter, at least, has a ring of authenticity and, in particular, contains the curiously precise description by Bernard of Cirita as "our companion on this road of worldliness."[62] If this is a genuine greeting, then of course Bernard and Crita were known to each other. The reference to "worldliness" might then suggest Cirita had accompanied Bernard on some mission outside the cloister – something that had made Bernard famously uncomfortable, his incongruous life as a monk and yet international statesman, leading him to describe himself ruefully as "the chimera of my age."[63] In this respect, Bernard's greeting in the letter could be an oblique indication that the two Cistercians, Bernard and Cirita (perhaps at the time a "novice" Cistercian), had been travelling companions into the world and that both had felt uncomfortable with it and had consoled each other as they strove to overcome their uneasiness.[64]

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[60] Janet Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069-1215* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99. I am grateful to Janet Burton for her helpful suggestions in the preparation of this article.

[61] PL, 182, 224-225 (letter No. 92); *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, translated by Bruno Scott James, Introduction by Bervely Mayne Kienzle, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998) No. 95, 141-142, Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, 99, and her observation, "it is this prehistory of monastic foundations which is the most difficult phase to recover." Cf, Jonathan Wilson, "The Filthy Animal and St Bernard of Clairvaux; Reassessing the Case for Letter 308 and the Conquest of Lisbon, 1147", *Al-Masaq*, (2020) 32.3, 332-352 (possible parallels with Afonso Henriques?).

[62] …*in via saeculi huius comilitoni nostro*… Marques*, Estudos sobre a Ordem*, 66.

[63] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera ad Fidem Codicum Recensuerunt*, ed. by J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais, 8 vols. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-77), vol. 8, No. 250, 147.

[64] The Cistercian ideal of isolated contemplative life in communion with God and nature whilst praying for the welfare of mankind and the world (*vita contemplativa*) could not always be achieved whilst the world outside remained a lamentably imperfect place. God would thus call upon individual Cistercian monks to set aside (temporarily) this enclosed existence (the "life of Mary") and propel well-educated,

A long time ago

Whilst the details of the relationship, if any, between Bernard and Cirita, will likely never be known, there remains the issue of when Cirita may have brought the customs of Clairvaux to Portugal. As set out above in his oath to Teresa Afonso, he merely mentions having done this "a long time ago." Whilst, Marques, has persuasively placed the introduction of the Cistercian Reform to 1138 in Lafões, there is a document that places João Cirita at the head of São Cristovão de Lafões in 1125. It is a donation made to Lafões and Abbot João Cirita, by Countess (Queen) D. Teresa of Portucale which has been, for the most part, regarded as genuine.[65] Although there is no mention of the Cistercian Reform in the document, it places João Cirita at the head of a community that would soon enough become Cistercian at around the time of the arrival to Portugal (or more correctly the county of Portucale) of another important group with famously close links to the Cistercians and St Bernard of Clairvaux, the Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem. If, as occasionally happened, Cirita's community of hermits was one of those that copied the observances of a particular order for some years before officially becoming affiliated, then the picture becomes considerably more nuanced.[66]

As is well known, the Christian Iberian Far-west during the 1120s was one of turmoil and civil war. The death in 1109 of King-Emperor Alfonso VI of Léon-Castile had precipitated a succession struggle involving a bewildering array of factions all pursuing their own interests. With only minimal effort it is possible to list at least eight competing parties[67]:

- Urraca, daughter of Alfonso VI who became ruler of Leon-Castile on the death of her father.
- D. Teresa, Countess of Portugal, half-sister of Urraca.

talented, Cistercians beyond the seclusion of their monasteries and into the noise and bustle (the "life of Martha), to supply the dire need for good bishops, good diplomats, and even good popes. See generally Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity, Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[65] João Pedro Ribeiro, *Dissertações chronologicas e críticas sobre a historia a jurisprudência ecclesiastica e civil de Portugal,* 5 tomos, Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa (1810-1836), III (1), 82; José Luís Lopez Sangil, *A nobreza altomedieval galega. A familia Froilaz-Traba* (Noia: Editorial Toxosoutos, 2005), 56. The document was included by Brito in Chronica de Cister, see the ed. of 1729 at p. 68r, and was considered a forgery by Rui de Azevedo in DR, vol.1, tombo 2, 496-497. Nevertheless, it was accepted in the *Memorial del Monsterio de Sobrado* (page 186) and accepted by López Sangil, op. cit., who, as Maria Marques has highlighted, possibly in the wake of the *Memorial* identifies João Cirita as abbot of S. Cristovão de Lafões, which Brito's reproduction fails to do. Marques has opined that there is nothing that intrinsically invalidates the document; Marques, "O Cister Iberico," 90, note 16. Further the document was accepted as genuine by Mario Barroca and Luís Carlos Amaral in their biography of D. Teresa, *A Condessa-rainha Teresa*, (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2012), 70-71.

[66] Mattoso, *D. Afonso Henriques*, p. 93; Leyser, *The New Hermits*, 87-96

[67] For the following see generally, inter alia, Barroca and Amaral, *A Condessa-rainha Teresa*, Maria João Branco and Isabel de Barros Dias, "Metamorfoses de Urraca de Castela-Leão e de Teresa de Portugal: Construções e Deconstruções das imagens de Duas Reinhas", *Actas del XI Congreso Internacioal de La Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval*, (León: Universidade de León, 2005), 335-347; Bernard F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Queen Urraca, 1109-1126* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

- Alfonso I, the Battler, of Aragon – whom Afonso VI, (fearful of the rulership of a woman) before his death, pushed into marriage with his daughter Urraca – a disastrous union from the outset and the cause a of armed conflict between Leon and Aragon.
- Count Henry of Portugal, wife to Teresa, the ambitious Burgundian nobleman appointed by Afonso VI to protect the southwestern frontier from the Muslims.
- The supporters of Afonso Henriques, son of Teresa and Henry of Burgundy – an essentially independently minded Portuguese noble party opposed to Galician influence.
- Diego Gelmírez – Bishop/Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela
- The Supporters of the claims of Urraca's son Alfonso Raimundez (in fact future Alfonso VII of Leon Castile)
- Archbishop of Toledo – Primate of the Spains.

In a fast-moving and often confounding melee of tangled alliances, betrayals, swapping of sides, war and general mayhem, each individual or group scrambled to achieve their objectives. Count Henry (the Burgundian) of Portucale had exploited the death of Alfonso VI (his father-in-law) to make himself de facto ruler of a great swathe of the Iberian Northwest, so that, by the time of his own death from wounds (somewhat unsurprisingly) in 1112, he controlled Salamanca, Zamora, Astorga and probably Avila, along with vast areas of today's Spanish Extremadura.

His wife, Countess Teresa, now a widow, took up with the powerful Galician noble house of Trava, with the knight Fernando Peres de Trava famously becoming her consort. Teresa was no less ambitious than her dead husband and appears to have wanted to make herself ruler of an independent state, welding together Portucale and Galicia. Indeed, her opting to be entombed in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, instead of next to husband Henry in Braga, is some strong indication of this.[68]

In the dash for power in 1120s North-western Iberia, increasingly it was becoming clear that support from Rome was likely to be decisive in advancing a particular party's claims. However, although Teresa and Fernando Peres made overtures to the formerly influential monks of Cluny, their star was now definitely on the wane in Hispania and in Rome, thanks to the financial crisis caused within the Order once the flow of African gold into their coffers from tribute payments from the Muslims states of the Iberian South had dried up thanks to the Almoravids taking control in al-Andalus.[69]

Further, there could be no appeal to the ecclesiastical magnates for privileged access to the papacy because, in what Erdmann described as "the lamentable

[68] On these matters, see, inter alia, Maria João Branco, "Nobles Eclesiásticos y Reyes en las Cortes Leonesa y Portuguesa: Escenas de la Vida Cotidiana, (1109-1157), in *Monarquía y Sociedad en el Reino de León de Alfonso III a Alfonso VII*, (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 2007), 733-761; Amaral and Barroca, *A condessa-rainha, Teresa*.

[69] Hunt, *Cluny*, 78-82, and see footnote 45 herein.

decomposition of the Portuguese Church",[70] the bishops at that time were increasingly aligned with, and faithful to, the Archbishop of Toledo as Primate of the Spains.

Thus, for winning influence in Rome it appears that Teresa and Fernando looked to the new and rapidly rising institutions of Latin Christian spirituality that were taking Europe by storm – to the Cistercians and, perhaps through them, to the Templars. Although documentation is scarce, tradition has it that the Travas had been concerned with the establishment of the Templars in Galicia, ceding large estates to the Order on the coast of Corunna. Furthermore, the Travas were later to prove generous supporters of the Cistercians and largely responsible for the first explicit mention of a Cistercian house present in the whole of Hispania, according to the traditionally held view, which concerned the transition of the monastery of Sobrado to the Cistercian Reform in affiliation to Bernard's Clairvaux in 1142. Indeed, Sobrado belonged to a group of monasteries that had for generations been under the control of the Travas. (a good example of the eleventh century Proprietary Church in all its aristocratic glory).[71]

Quite how, and to what extent, all these connections in fact played out in 1120s Portucale and later in the kingdom of Portugal is certainly a subject for further investigation. Indeed, many things have, of necessity in a short essay, been left unexplored herein including the relationship between Archbishop of Braga, João Peculiar, himself of French origin or education, and João Cirita who between them in the sources dispute the title of founder of São Cristóvão de Lafões, and the possibility that Peculiar was notably in sympathy with the Cistercians although he did not take the habit himself, opting for a career as a leading diplomat and ambassador in the forefront of Portuguese international relations. Something of this may be read into a rambling complaint to Pope Hadrian IV made by a disgruntled Bishop João Anaia of Coimbra.[72] Did João Cirita and João Peculiar, who were undoubtedly acquainted, represent two sides of the same coin, or indeed, two sides of the religious life, one the contemplative Mary, the other tasked with the chores of Martha? These questions and others must be reserved for future exploration. Ultimately what has been presented here are a few vincula amid a complex scenario of documental lacunae and a furore of breathless political and ecclesiastical manoeuvring. However, there is at least one thing of which we can be sure – João Cirita and the Cistercians of the Iberian western edge are not giving up their secrets, just yet.

[70] Carl Erdmann, *Das Papsttum und Portugal im ersten Jahrhundert der portugiesischen Geschichte* (Berlin: Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1928); trans. by J.A. da Providência Costa, as *O Papado e Portugal no Primeiro Século da História Portuguesa* (Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1935), 34; Stephen Ley, *Reconquest Kings of Portugal*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009), 67.

[71] J. Ferreiro Alemparte, *Temple, Santo Sepulcro y Císter en su fase inicial gallega*, in Actas del II Congreso sobre el Císter, I, cit., 341-68; Francisco Rennzi, "Da Clairvaux alla Galizia. I cisterciensi nel nord della Spagna tra XII e XIII secolo", *Quaderni del M.AE.S.*, XIV (2011), 135-65.

[72] Erdmann, *O Papado e Portugal*, 82-83.

Documental Appendix

Oath of João Cirita
"Os Primerios Documentos de Santa Maria da Salzeda, até à Morte da fundadora. Comentários e Defesa". A. de Almeida Fernandes, *Revista de Guimarães*, (1985) No. 95, p. 5-95, p. 90 Doc.3.

Mos est eorum qui volunt a via veritatis recedere res suo in tempore bene gestas literarum memoriae tradere. Quod ego Johannes Dei gratia quanvis immeritus vocatus abbas animadvertens omnibus Sanctae Dei ecclesiae filiis tam praesentibus quem futuris notificare volo quid meis gestum sit temporibus. Quaedam namque Deo devota ac religiosa mulier nomine Tharasea quanvis in saeculari habito constituta curam habens sanctorum ministrans ut Martha, Deo volente sociabitur cum Maria, haec igitur quam praefati sumus quandam sui-iuris haereditatem quae Salzeda vocatur Deo ofere studuit et ut illic monasterium construeretur sub norma almi patris Benedicti totis nixibus, elaborare coepit. Porro haec regula ordo Clarevalis ecclesiae a me jam dudum a transalpinis partibus adductus terras istas illustrabat, quod illa mente pertractans omnibus me coepit exorare precibus quatenus relicto eo quem tenebam loco cum fratribus qui mecum regulariter commorabantur ad domum preamemorantam profiscici deberem cuiús precibus tandem acquiescens et insuper hortatu regi set reginae locum illum ad regendum suscepi ne ergo monasstica religio et cistercienses ordo ab illo deperiret loco et ut omnem dubitationem ab illus mulieris corde auferrem quae me constrixerat ut cartulam .super altare positam securitatem et stabilitatem ipso in loco firmare debuissem. Acquievi eius petitionibus per hec igitur nostrae authoritatis praesentia scripta cum consilio bonorum virorum facta non coactos sed spontaneus voto meo ac juramento constringo ut quandiu haec vita miho comes fuerit cum filiis atque fratribus qui Deo inspirante sub jugo legislatoris beatissimi Benedicti promissa obedientia cum vera humilitate omnipotente deliberaverint deservire. Hoc ita Deo Promitto et cartulam super imposita propria manu firmo. Fiat pax et veritas.

English Translation

It is the custom of those who wish [not] to depart from the path of truth to bequeath their good deeds in time to the memory of writing. Accordingly, I John by the grace of God although undeservedly called abbot, observing to all the sons of the Holy Church both present and future, wish to notify what has happened in my time. For there was a certain woman devoted to God and religious named Tharasea although she was established in a secular habit, having the care of the saints, serving as Martha, by the will of God she will be associated with Mary, therefore, the aforesaid [woman] purposed to offer to God a certain inheritance of hers called Salzeda, and she began to arrange that a monastery should be built there under the nurturing rule of Father Benedict with all her effort. Moreover, this rule of the order of the church of Clairvaux, brought by me already a long time ago from the transalpine parts enlightened these lands, with that in mind she began to exhort me with many prayers,

so that I would leave the place where I was with the brothers who regularly dwelt with me, [and that] I should proceed to the aforesaid house, and to whose entreaties I finally yielded, and moreover, at the urging of the king and queen, I accepted to govern that place, lest the monastic religion and the order of the Cistercians should perish in that place, and in order to remove all doubt from the heart of that woman who had constrained me, with this letter placed on the altar, I have duly established security and stability in the place itself. I acceded to her petitions, therefore, in the presence of our authority, written with the counsel of good men, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, by my vow and by my oath, so that as long as this life may be mine, with the sons and brothers who, under the inspiration of God, under the yoke of the most blessed Benedict, I have resolved to serve the Almighty with the promised obedience with true humility. This I promise to God, and I firmly place the letter upon [the altar] with my own hand. Let there be peace and truth.

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