

**“MORE AKIN TO A BRICK-KILN THAN A MONASTERY”:  
THE MATERIAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF THE GERMAN  
PEASANTS’ WAR (1524-1526) ON CISTERCIAN NUNS AND MONKS**

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On 16 August 1869, a large crowd gathered on the fairground in Berlin-Moabit to observe a high-wire cyclist, at the same time as a meeting of the *Berliner Arbeitsverein* (*Berlin Workers’ Union*) had assembled to debate questions of church and religion. The situation was tense and when the high-wire cyclist failed to appear, a crowd of over 3,000 people, armed with cudgels and poles, marched towards a chapel and orphanage in Moabit which had been established by the Franciscan order and was now served by two Dominican monks. The crowd tore down fences, smashed windows and doors, and hurled cobble stones. The monks were forced to flee with their habits removed, wearing secular clothes, as girls spat at them. Threats were made against them that they would soon be hanging from lanterns. The event, subsequently known as the *Moabiter Klostersturm* (*The Storming of the Monastery in Moabit*), took place against the backdrop of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, in which speeches were being made in parliament against the “grotesque vows” sworn by monks and nuns, whose conventual life belonged to a “long-past era” and went against the “spirit of freedom”. Street ballads and stories were circulating about the sexual perversion of nuns and monks, as well as cases of infanticide, suicide, and the burying alive of nuns in convents.<sup>1</sup>

At nightfall one day in March 1525, a crowd of women gathered before the Swabian Cistercian convent of Heggbach (Baden-Württemberg). Accusations were circulating that the nuns had secretly had children with the convent’s confessors

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AGBM** *Akten zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Mitteleuropa*, 2 vol. in 3 parts, ed. Otto MERX, Walter Peter FUCHS, Günther FRANZ, Leipzig 1923-1942.
- Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster** *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster der Zisterzienser in Hessen und Thüringen*, ed. Friedhelm JÜRGENSMEIER, Regina E. SCHWERDTFEGGER (*Germania Benedictina*; 4/1), St. Ottilien 2011.
- QGBÖ** *Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Oberschwaben*, ed. Franz Ludwig BAUMANN, (Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart; 129), Tübingen 1876.

\* I would like to thank the *Cîteaux* Editorial Board and Thomas Müller for their helpful comments and suggestions. Researching and writing this article has been supported by the University of Oxford John Fell Fund, St Edmund Hall and St Benet’s Hall research funds, and a research scholarship at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel.

<sup>1</sup> Manuel BORUTTA, “Enemies at the Gate: The Moabit *Klostersturm* and the *Kulturkampf*: Germany”, in *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher CLARK and Wolfram KAISER, Cambridge 2003, p. 227-254 (p. 231-243).

and the *Hofmeister* (a high administrative official and district supervisor), and that the latter had helped the nuns to hide them. The crowd threatened to murder one of the confessors, Matthäus Fünffli, forcing him to escape to the abbey of Salem (Baden-Württemberg), while the convent's chaplain, Johannes Precht (later abbot of Salem between 1543 and 1553), was forced to flee to the priest's house in Biberach.<sup>2</sup> In the Bavarian convent of Oberschönenfeld, such threats were carried out and a band of peasants captured the two confessors and chaplain, monks of the abbey of Kaisheim, and physically assaulted the chaplain "severely".<sup>3</sup> Back in Heggbach, the crowd of women threatened to gouge out the nuns' eyes unless they handed over grain to their husbands, and to drive them out of the convent, with their dresses tied up over their heads, forcing them to have children.<sup>4</sup> Heggbach avoided destruction, as the nuns were able to negotiate with the peasants and hand over provisions, but across the Holy Roman Empire numerous other convents and monasteries were stormed, pillaged, desecrated, and in some cases even burned to the ground. On 3 August 1525, Nikolaus Ellenbog (1481-1534) wrote to his sister Barbara, abbess of Heggbach, informing her of the destruction that had taken place in his own Benedictine abbey of Ottobeuren (Bavaria): "all the altars except for three have been violated and broken into pieces, all the tables smashed... the relics of the saints have been scattered and disgraced all over the floor. I fear that not even the Turks, open enemies of the Christian faith, could be so savage and impious."<sup>5</sup>

Even accounting for the differences in time and place, the parallels between the *Moabiter Klostersturm* and the storming of the monasteries and convents in the German Peasants' War of 1524-1526 are striking. In both cases, we can detect the sense of difference which those outside the monastic space felt about those within it, marked by dress, physical appearance, and sexual practice. This sense of difference helps to explain the anger which those attacking such institutions felt. Violence – both in its physical form and as threat – played a key role in both instances. Yet, for the most part the violence was symbolic, as the crowds targeted the material signs of monasticism, the liminal points of the doors, fences, and windows in Moabit and the sacred space of Ottobeuren. While the Moabit crowd spat at the monks and the Oberschönenfeld peasants beat a chaplain, they did not set out to kill but rather, it seems, to humiliate, emasculate, and shock. Such violence was moreover gendered, as sexual threats were directed solely against nuns and not monks, while in both cases we see the active involvement of female participants. For the monks and nuns themselves, confronted by large, angry, and violent crowds, physically threatened, and forced to flee, it must have been deeply traumatic and unsettling.

<sup>2</sup> *QGBO*, p. 282-283.

<sup>3</sup> *Die Chronik des Klosters Kaisheim, verfasst vom Cistercienser Johann Knebel im Jahre 1531*, ed. Franz HÜTTNER, (Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 226), Tübingen 1902, p. 432.

<sup>4</sup> Ulinka RUBLACK, "Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany", *Past & Present* 150 (1996), p. 84-110 (p. 87).

<sup>5</sup> *Nikolaus Ellenbog. Briefwechsel*, vol. 4, ed. Friedrich ZOEPPFEL (Corpus Catholicorum. Werke katholischer Schriftsteller im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung 21), Münster 1938, n° 25, p. 201-203.

Drawing on published and unpublished material from across the Holy Roman Empire, from Alsace to Thuringia, this article offers the first wide-ranging overview of the fate of Cistercian nuns and monks and their convents and monasteries in the Peasants' War, the largest popular uprising in Western Europe before the French Revolution. Despite the extraordinary scale and intensity of the assault on monasticism, with some 350 monastic houses targeted, the topic has not been sufficiently addressed in either the broader historiography of the Peasants' War or the more specific historiography of the Cistercian order. As a first step, this article establishes why this might be the case and how such a history might be written. Secondly, the article gives some sense of the scale of the material destruction of the convents and monasteries and questions why it was that some houses were spared, while others were destroyed. The article reflects on the sources which describe this destruction and suggests the differing perspectives of the monks and nuns, for whom the peasants were an out-of-control mob, and the peasants themselves, who saw their violent actions as legitimate and strategic. Finally, the article considers how an historic event such as the Peasants' War has two lives: on the one hand, how those living through it experienced it and, on the other hand, how it was subsequently remembered.<sup>6</sup> The Peasants' War was an incredibly fast-moving and uncertain sequence of events, and the surviving letters of nuns and monks give a remarkable insight into how they made decisions in such a febrile atmosphere, how they experienced such turmoil, and how this experience was gendered. In the longer term, monastic chronicle writing in the aftermath of the war shows how monks and nuns came to terms with such a traumatic event, and how they used writing as a means of re-establishing their power and control. For too long, monastic institutions have simply been regarded as a target of the peasants. But by seeking out the voices and experiences of nuns and monks, and viewing these in relation to the motivations of the peasants, we can go some way in writing a more complete history of a revolt which left the monastic world in the Holy Roman Empire scarred.

#### I. CONVENTS AND MONASTERIES IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PEASANTS' WAR AND THE CISTERCIAN ORDER

Gerd Schwerhoff has recently published a comprehensive survey of the state of scholarship on the Peasants' War as the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uprising approaches. Schwerhoff identifies two central trends. First, he argues that the dominant paradigm of research into the Peasants' War on both sides of a divided Germany was what he labels a "heroic narrative". These approaches were more interested in structures rather than events, in political ideology rather than emotion, and sought above all to understand the Peasants' War in terms of its objectives; in other words, they were written from the perspective of the peasants.<sup>7</sup> In the monumental collection

<sup>6</sup> Blair WORDEN, *The English Civil Wars, 1640-1660*, London 2009, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> Gerd SCHWERHOFF, "Beyond the Heroic Narrative: Towards the Quincentenary of the German Peasants' War, 1525", *German History* 41/1 (2023), p. 103-126 (p. 106-117).

of essays to mark the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolt in the German Democratic Republic, for instance, there are just three references to nuns and convents in nearly 650 pages of text.<sup>8</sup> In the Federal Republic of Germany, in the last major interpretation of the revolt, Peter Blickle recognised that the “Klostersturm” formed part of the appearance of the revolt, but he was primarily interested in understanding the legal and agricultural structures of monastic territories, rather than the consequences of the revolt for monastic institutions and their inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>

The second trend identified by Schwerhoff is the development of research into the revolt since the 1990s in light of the new cultural history. He argues that histories of the revolt need to be “praxeological” and “actor-centred”.<sup>10</sup> Two of the central actors – nuns and monks – are, however, missing from his analysis and are each mentioned just once, despite the fact that reams of sources survive that are written from their perspective. Those who have more recently regarded the revolt from a different perspective, including Blickle, have turned their attention to the reaction of secular lords, but not monastic ones.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the few but important instances when the role of women in the revolt is explored, nuns are by and large surprisingly absent given the sources which survive.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, much of the attention on nuns’ reactions to and experiences of the early Reformation has centred on the Mendicant orders in the urban settings of towns such as Strasbourg or Nuremberg, for whom the Peasants’ War was far less important. If Cistercian women do feature, it is those more prominent examples, such as Florentina von Oberweimar, who fled her convent and whose story found its way into print.<sup>13</sup>

In turn, a praxeological approach demands an attention to events, rather than structures, to think about the way people, with often conflicting emotions and interests, made decisions. Thinking about the interactions between peasants, monks, and

<sup>8</sup> *Der Bauer im Klassenkampf. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernkrieges und der bäuerlichen Klassenkämpfe im Spätféudalismus*, ed. Gerhard HEITZ, Adolf LAUBE, Max STEINMETZ, and Günter VÖGLER, Berlin 1975, p. 124, 233, 235.

<sup>9</sup> Peter BLICKLE, *Unruhen in der städtischen Gesellschaft 1300-1800*, Berlin 2012<sup>3</sup>, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> SCHWERHOFF, “Heroic Narrative” (see n. 7), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Peter BLICKLE, *Der Bauernjörg. Feldherr im Bauernkrieg. Georg Truchsess von Waldburg 1488-1531*, Munich 2015; Thomas F. SEA, “The German Princes’ Responses to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525”, *Central European History* 40/2 (2007), p. 219-240.

<sup>12</sup> Franizska NEUMANN, “Der selektive Blick. Frauen im Bauernkrieg zwischen Frauen und Geschlechtergeschichte”, in *Frauen und Reformation. Handlungsfelder, Rollenmuster, Engagement*, ed. Martina SCHATTKOWSKY, Leipzig 2016, p. 153-170; Tom SCOTT, “The Collective Response of Women to Early Reformation Preaching: Four Small Communities and their Preachers Compared,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 102 (2011), p. 7-32; Marion KOBELT-GROCH, “Von ‘arme frowen’ und ‘bösen wibern’: Frauen im Bauernkrieg zwischen Anpassung und Auflehnung”, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 79 (1988), p. 103-137. One recent exception is Marjorie Plummer, *Stripping the Veil: Convent Reform, Protestant Nuns, and Female Devotional Life in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, (German History Series), Oxford 2022, ch. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Amy LEONARD, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany*, Chicago 2005; Barbara STEINKE, *Paradiesgarten oder Gefängnis? Das Nürnberger Katharinenkloster zwischen Klosterreform und Reformation*, (Spätmittelalter und Reformation; n. s. 30), Tübingen 2006; Antje RÜTTGARDT, *Klosteraustritte in der frühen Reformation. Studien zu Flugschriften der Jahre 1522 bis 1524*, (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 79), Gütersloh 2007, p. 256-315.

nuns, often in localised situations, demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of what happened. Why and how it was that the situation could turn violent and what that violence meant is also an integral part of this new history. Paying closer attention to the role of emotions in the revolt, both of those rising up as well as those on the receiving end, is an important step in understanding the nature and meaning of violence.<sup>14</sup> For Schwerhoff, the central challenge facing historians is to write a comprehensive history of a revolt which was characterised by both spatial breadth and temporal intensity.<sup>15</sup> This article suggests that a comparative history of monastic institutions from the same order across the Empire can be a possible fruitful approach. Through this, we must always be attuned to local contexts, but at the same time try to place what happened on a local level within a wider, comparative context, and understand how what happened in one area related to events in another.

From a monastic perspective, where the Peasants' War appears, albeit often cursorily, is in individual accounts of monasteries and convents. These will usually mention that the institution "was affected" (*in Mitleidenschaft gezogen*), often as part of a larger sequence of destructive events, including the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).<sup>16</sup> More detail is sometimes provided in individual studies within book series or journals dedicated to the study of *Landesgeschichte* (regional history).<sup>17</sup> These are mostly inaccessible to English-speaking audiences, although Katherine Brun's study of the relation between the abbey of Salem and its peasants over the *longue durée* is a notable exception.<sup>18</sup> It is only recently that regional studies, focusing on Thuringia, have appeared which have addressed the fate of monastic institutions in any comparative, broader perspective.<sup>19</sup>

Within the literature dedicated specifically to the Cistercian order, the revolt is granted little prominence, a situation reflected in the historiography of other

<sup>14</sup> Lyndal ROPER, "Emotions and the German Peasants' War of 1524-6", *History Workshop Journal* 92 (2021), p. 1-32.

<sup>15</sup> Schwerhoff, "Heroic Narrative" (see n. 7), p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> The database *Klöster in Baden-Württemberg* includes references to the Peasants' War in thirteen accounts of Cistercian institutions [<https://www.kloester-bw.de/>] (30 March 2022). Twelve of these refer to some form of damage, while one, Gnadental, notes that the convent was spared.

<sup>17</sup> Sigrid HIRBODIAN, "Research on Monasticism in the German Tradition", trans. Alison I. BEACH, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism*, ed. Alison I. BEACH and Isabelle COCHELIN, Cambridge 2020, p. 1140-1153; Johannes MÖTSCH, "Die Abfindung von Nonnen des Klosters Allendorf nach dem Bauernkrieg", *Archiv für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 62 (2010), p. 129-137.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine BRUN, *The Abbot and his Peasants. Territorial Formation in Salem from the Later Middle Ages to the Thirty Years War*, (Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte 56), Stuttgart 2013, p. 81-160.

<sup>19</sup> Manfred STRAUBE, "Reformation, Bauernkrieg, und "Klosterstürme"", in *Bauernkrieg zwischen Harz und Thüringer Wald*, ed. Günter VOGLER, (Historische Mitteilungen im Auftrage der Ranke-Gesellschaft; 69), Stuttgart 2008, p. 381-395; Thomas T. MÜLLER, "Rezession und Klostersturm. Die Eichsfelder Monasterien in vor- und frühreformatorischer Zeit", in *Thüringische Klöster und Stifte in vor- und frühreformatorischer Zeit*, ed. Enno BÜNZ, Werner GREILING, and Uwe SCHIRMER, (Quellen und Forschungen zu Thüringen im Zeitalter der Reformation; 6), Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 2017, p. 245-260.

monastic orders.<sup>20</sup> Louis Lekai dedicates just a single, short paragraph to the revolt, recognising that “many Cistercian abbeys were sacked and burned”, but only explicitly mentioning one example, that of Ebrach in Bavaria. For Lekai “there was no general pattern of procedure”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, within the German literature, Immo Eberl notes that the revolt took on “a particular line of attack” against the monasteries, but then proceeds to note their destruction in Lower Saxony, Thuringia, Saxony, Silesia, the archbishopric of Magdeburg, Prussia, and Poland.<sup>22</sup> Numerous Cistercian houses were indeed destroyed in Thuringia and Saxony during the revolt, but just a single institution in Lower Saxony (Walkenried) was affected and it did not affect Silesia, Prussia or Poland: this is not immediately clear from Eberl’s narrative. Nicolaus Heutger is more precise, and includes a number of colourful details, including the peasants in Walkenried using the abbey’s charters as horse litter. Heutger asserts explicitly that the Cistercians suffered in the revolt more than other orders, and he draws on evidence from across Germany, mentioning nine abbeys or priories which were affected.<sup>23</sup> What is nevertheless striking about all three accounts is that Cistercian convents are not mentioned at all, a reflection of the way the general literature on the order has been written for so long, in which the experiences of nuns are often relegated to a distinct chapter and not included in the main narrative.

Manfred Eder goes some way to correcting this, in his overview on Cistercian nuns in the period after the Reformation.<sup>24</sup> Eder argues that while the Reformation shattered the “spiritual foundations” of the monastic life, the Peasants’ War accelerated their material collapse, as nuns were forced to flee and convents razed to the ground. In the companion piece on Cistercian monks in the same volume, Hermann Roth sets out how the Peasants’ War marked the end for some institutions, while others were able to survive, and he gives particular prominence to the role played by territorial rulers. For Roth, the peasants were not just politically and religiously motivated, but driven by “greed”, a highly emotional and pejorative term which needs greater nuance and is symptomatic of an approach written from the perspective of the order and not of those revolting.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Thomas T. MÜLLER, “Frühreformation, Bauernkrieg und Deutscher Orden – das Beispiel Mühlhausen in Thüringen”, in *Der deutsche Orden und Thüringen. Aspekte einer 800-jährigen Geschichte*, ed. Thomas T. MÜLLER, Petersberg 2014, p. 91-102 (p. 91).

<sup>21</sup> Louis J. LEKAI, *The Cistercians. Ideal and Reality*, Kent, Ohio 1977, p. 117-118.

<sup>22</sup> Immo EBERL, *Die Zisterzienser. Geschichte eines europäischen Ordens*, Ulm 2002, p. 417.

<sup>23</sup> Nicolaus HEUTGER, “Zisterzienserklöster in der Zeit der Reformation”, *Die Zisterzienser. Ordensleben zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Landschaftsverbandes Rheinland, Rheines Museum Brauweiler*, Cologne 1981, p. 255-266 (p. 255).

<sup>24</sup> Manfred EDER, “Die Zisterzienserinnen”, in *Orden und Klöster im Zeitalter von Reformation und Katholischer Reform 1500-1700*, vol. 1, ed. Friedhelm JÜRGENSMEIER, and Regina Elisabeth SCHWERDTFEGGER, (Katholisches Leben und Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung 65), Münster 2005, p. 99-124 (p. 115-118).

<sup>25</sup> Hermann Josef ROTH, “Die Zisterzienser”, *Orden und Klöster* (see n. 24), p. 73-97 (p. 85-86).



As is already evident, there are several issues in the way this literature has been set up. First, we must recognise that destruction and dissolution are part of the Cistercian story, and we need to acknowledge this. The role of figures such as Hans Wirth, who set alight the brandy wine he found in the Cistercian monastery of Tennenbach in May 1525, leading it to resemble a brick-kiln rather than a monastery, should not be erased. Destruction is furthermore quite distinct from the notion of “decline” that dominated earlier scholarship, in which everything was judged against a supposedly lost core eleventh- and twelfth-century Cistercian ideal. We need to understand the situation in the early sixteenth century on its own terms and explore how institutions adapted to and negotiated the challenges which they faced.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, and interrelated to this, are issues of chronology and geography. Research is still heavily weighted towards the earlier period of the order’s foundation, at the expense of the later Middle Ages and, above all, the post-Reformation period.<sup>27</sup> The situation in German-speaking Europe, meanwhile, is rarely acknowledged in the English-language scholarship. Finally, histories written from the perspective of the General Chapter and Cîteaux will have little space in them for an event such as the Peasants’ War. Instead, as Roth has observed, “the history of the Cistercians is foremost that of its monasteries”.<sup>28</sup> It is to their histories – and in particular those who inhabited them and served them – that we now turn.

## II. THE SCALE OF DESTRUCTION OF CISTERCIAN HOUSES IN THE PEASANTS’ WAR

Cistercian communities were no strangers to the destructive effects of warfare. Several French monks and nuns had had to flee from their houses during the Hundred Years’ War (1328-1453).<sup>29</sup> Almost thirty Cistercian abbeys claimed war damages during the Hussite Wars (1419-1439), including communities such as the abbey of Waldsassen, which would be stormed again during the Peasants’ War and whose fortified defences can still be seen today.<sup>30</sup> In the south west of the Empire, the conflict between the Old Swiss Confederacy and Armagnac mercenaries in 1444 also affected Cistercian houses: the abbey of Tennenbach (Baden-Württemberg) was plundered and the nuns of Günterstal (Baden-Württemberg) fled to their *Stadthof* in nearby Freiburg im Breisgau and were permitted to bring a portable altar with them to conduct Mass.<sup>31</sup> Both the monks of Tennenbach and nuns of Günterstal fled again to Freiburg in 1525. In Bavaria, meanwhile, the abbess of

<sup>26</sup> Anne E. LESTER, “The Cistercians”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism*, ed. Bernice M. KACZYNSKI, Oxford 2020, p. 232-247 (p. 240-242).

<sup>27</sup> Emilia JAMROZIAK, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe: 1090-1500*, Abingdon 2016, which gives due space to the later Middle Ages.

<sup>28</sup> ROTH, “Zisterzienser” (see n. 25), p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> LESTER, “Cistercians” (see n. 26), p. 242.

<sup>30</sup> ROTH, “Zisterzienser” (see n. 25), p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> Anton SCHNEIDER, *Die ehemalige Zisterzienser-Abtei Tennenbach im Breisgau*, Wönshofen 1904, p. 54; Karl RIEDER ed. *Regesta Episcoporum Constantiensium*, vol. 4, Innsbruck 1941, n° 10860, p. 115.

Niederschönenfeld, Barbara Gantner, when demanded to contribute 500 florins as contribution to the Bavarian dukes during the Peasants' War, reminded them that her convent had been so badly damaged during the War of the Succession of Landshut (1503-1505) that it was not in a position to pay.<sup>32</sup> In most of these instances, with the notable exception of the Hussite War, monks and nuns were victims of circumstances, caught up in conflict beyond their control. What made the Peasants' War unique was its breadth and scale, a violent attack not just on individual institutions, but the very concept of monasticism itself, in multiple different jurisdictions at the same time.

Until now, there has been no systematic overview of the fate of monastic institutions in the revolt. Peter Blickle speculated that "dozens, if not hundreds of religious houses were occupied and sacked by the peasants."<sup>33</sup> Thanks to research carried out by Louisa Bergold, Marjorie Plummer, Lyndal Roper and myself, we can now be more precise about the numbers. In total, at least 349 monasteries and convents were affected in some way during the revolt, of which 208 were male houses and 141 female. Heutger's assertion that the Cistercian order was affected more than other orders is born out by the figures: in total ninety-two Cistercian houses were targeted, whether forced to hand over provisions to peasant bands, plundered, destroyed or sequestered by authorities. Of these, twenty-eight were male houses and sixty-four female houses. Their rural locations, rich landholdings, and plentiful grain stores and wine cellars made Cistercian houses attractive to peasants, and it was the order with the second highest number of houses affected, behind only the Benedictines (ninety-seven houses affected). Fifty-five Augustinian houses and twenty-six Premonstratensian houses were targeted, but only, by contrast, twenty Dominican houses, pointing to the importance of location inside or outside town walls in whether a monastery or convent was affected or not. The list below provides an overview of the Cistercian houses which were affected.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Josef BAADER, *Geschichte des Frauenklosters Nieder-Schönenfeld, Cistercienser-Ordens. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Donauthales und Leehraines*, vol. 2 (Archiv für die Geschichte des Bisthums Augsburg; 1), Augsburg 1856, p. 302.

<sup>33</sup> Peter BLICKLE, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought; 65), Leiden, Boston 1998, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> BW: Baden-Württemberg; BA: Bavaria; HE: Hesse; LS: Lower Saxony; RP: Rhineland-Palatinate; SL: Saarland; SA: Saxony-Anhalt; TH: Thuringia.



*Cistercian Male Monasteries*

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Baumgarten, Bernardvillé (FRA-Bas-Rhin) | 15. Waldsassen (BA)    |
| 2. Ingweiler (FRA-Bas-Rhin)                | 16. Eberbach (HE)      |
| 3. Orbey (Pairis) (FRA-Bas-Rhin)           | 17. Walkenried (LS)    |
| 4. Bebenhausen (BW)                        | 18. Eußerthal (RP)     |
| 5. Bronnbach (BW)                          | 19. Grünhain (SL)      |
| 6. Herrenalb (BW)                          | 20. Michaelstein (SA)  |
| 7. Maulbronn (BW)                          | 21. Sittichenbach (SA) |
| 8. Salem (BW)                              | 22. Eisenach (TH)      |
| 9. Schöntal an der Jagst (BW)              | 23. Georgenthal (TH)   |
| 10. Tennenbach (BW)                        | 24. Georgenzell (TH)   |
| 11. Bildhausen, Münnerstadt (BW)           | 25. Johannisthal (TH)  |
| 12. Ebrach (BA)                            | 26. Reifenstein (TH)   |
| 13. Heilsbronn (BA)                        | 27. Volkenroda (TH)    |
| 14. Langheim (BA)                          | 28. Schönau (BW)       |

*Cistercian Female Monasteries*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Olsberg (CHE-Aargau)                   | 33. Crimmitschau (SL)                  |
| 2. Engental (CHE-Basel)                   | 34. Adersleben (SA)                    |
| 3. Koenigsbrück (FRA-Bas-Rhin)            | 35. Aschersleben (SA)                  |
| 4. Baintdt (BW)                           | 36. Eisleben (Neuenhelfta) (SA)        |
| 5. Billigheim (BW)                        | 37. Halberstadt (SA)                   |
| 6. Frauental (BW)                         | 38. Hedersleben (SA)                   |
| 7. Günterstal (Freiburg i. B.) (BW)       | 39. Kelbra (SA)                        |
| 8. Gutenzell (BW)                         | 40. Mehringen (SA)                     |
| 9. Heggbach (BW)                          | 41. Naundorf (SA)                      |
| 10. Lichtenstern (BW)                     | 42. Rohrbach (SA)                      |
| 11. Marienau, Breisach (BW)               | 43. Sangerhausen (SA)                  |
| 12. Rechentshofen (BW)                    | 44. Wasserleben (SA)                   |
| 13. Wonnental (BW)                        | 45. Berka (TH)                         |
| 14. Burkardroth (BA)                      | 46. Beuren (TH)                        |
| 15. Frauenroth (BA)                       | 47. Bickenriede, Anrode (TH)           |
| 16. Großgründlach (Himmelthron) (BA)      | 48. Blankenburg (TH)                   |
| 17. Heiligenthal, Schwanfeld (BA)         | 49. Döllstädt (TH)                     |
| 18. Himmelkron (BA)                       | 50. Eisenach, St. Katharinen (TH)      |
| 19. Maidbronn (BA)                        | 51. Frankenhausen (TH)                 |
| 20. Mariaburghausen, Kreuztal (BA)        | 52. Frauensee (TH)                     |
| 21. Neustadt a. d. Aish, Birkenfeld (BA)  | 53. Gotha (TH)                         |
| 22. Oberschönenfeld (BA)                  | 54. Großfurra (TH)                     |
| 23. Schlüsselau (BA)                      | 55. Ichttershausen (TH)                |
| 24. Schwantall (BA)                       | 56. Kapellendorf (TH)                  |
| 25. St. Johanniszelle unter Wildberg (BA) | 57. Nordhausen (TH)                    |
| 26. Wechterswinkel (BA)                   | 58. Roda (TH)                          |
| 27. Heydau (HE)                           | 59. Salzungen (TH)                     |
| 28. Tiefenthal (HE)                       | 60. Stadtilm (TH)                      |
| 29. Isenhagen (LS)                        | 61. Teistungenburg (TH)                |
| 30. Daimbach (RP)                         | 62. Worbis (TH)                        |
| 31. Heilsbruck (RP)                       | 63. Himmelthal (BA)                    |
| 32. Rosenthal, Kerzenheim (RP)            | 64. Bamberg St. Maria/St. Theodor (BA) |

Within specific regions, the effects of the uprising were clear, with a clear concentration in present-day Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt, Baden-Württemberg, northern Bavaria, and Alsace/Moselle. Within Thuringia nearly every single Cistercian house was plundered or destroyed.<sup>35</sup> Of the nineteen Cistercian convents in the bishopric of Würzburg, twelve were plundered or destroyed (Wechterswinkel, Frauenroth, Johanniszell, Heiligenthal, Mariaburghausen, Bamberg St. Maria/St. Theodor, Himmelthal, Schlüssellau, Frauental, Birkenfeld, Billigheim, Lichtenstern), while every monastery (Schönau, Georgenthal, Bildhausen, Langheim, Ebrach, Bronnbach, Schöntal an der Jägst, Heilsbronn) and priory (Georgenzell) was affected.<sup>36</sup>

The vocabulary used to describe what befell monastic institutions reveals the often quite different levels of destruction.<sup>37</sup> While some houses survived unscathed (*unversehrt*), many were captured (*eingenomen*), plundered (*geplindert*), raided (*uberfallen*), torn apart (*zerrussen*), or burned to the ground (*in grund verbrent*). We need to recognise that there was a great deal of variation in the levels of destruction between individual houses. Compare, for example, the experiences of the abbeys of Salem and Tennenbach. Writing on 28 April 1525 the abbot of Salem, Jodokus Necker, while acknowledging that it was “a worrisome time”, informed his procurator in Nuremberg “that all remains well in the monastery; not a heller’s worth of damage has been done, beyond wine and bread, which continues to be dispensed to them [the peasants]. Praise God for peace.”<sup>38</sup> By contrast, Tennenbach Abbey, from 1182 a daughter house of Salem, was not just “plundered and spoiled, but also set alight, so that it burned for two whole months, and that the monks lament that it ultimately more resembled a brick-kiln than a monastery.”<sup>39</sup> Explaining those differences remains a key challenge for future research into monastic institutions and the Peasants’ War.

Peasant bands saw monasteries and convents primarily but not solely in terms of the provisions and resources they could offer. Fish ponds, grain stores, wine cellars and even the lead from stained glass windows for shot were all attractive targets for peasant bands needing feeding and arming. At Schöntal on the Jagst (Baden-Württemberg), the Odenwald rebels led by the innkeeper Georg Metzler from Ballenberg plundered the “very rich” abbey of “clothes, grain, wine and other

<sup>35</sup> Friedhelm JÜRGENSMEIER, “Einleitung: Zisterziensisches Mönchtum im Raum der Länder Hessen und Thüringen”, in *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster der Zisterzienser in Hessen und Thüringen*, ed. Friedhelm JÜRGENSMEIER and Regina E. SCHWERTFEGGER (*Germania Benedictina*; 4/1), St. Ottilien 2011, p. 15-52 (p. 46).

<sup>36</sup> *Zisterzienser in Franken. Das alte Bistum Würzburg und seine einstigen Zisterzen*, ed. Wolfgang BRÜCKNER and Jürgen LENSSEN, (*Kirche, Kunst und Kultur in Franken* 2), Würzburg 1991, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Peter BLICKLE, *Die Revolution von 1525*, Munich 2004<sup>4</sup>, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Hildegard KUHN-OECHSELE and Elmar L. KUHN, ed., *Der Seehaufen im Bauernkrieg: Eine Quellensammlung*, vol. 2/2, p. 227; translation quoted in BRUN, *Abbot* (see n. 18), p. 114-115.

<sup>39</sup> Karl HARTFELDER, *Zur Geschichte des Bauernkreises in Südwestdeutschland*, Stuttgart 1884, p. 414-415.

provisions"<sup>40</sup>, while in the convent of Dietenborn (Thuringia) the peasants took away 500 sheep, 120 cows and bulls, and 120 pigs and piglets.<sup>41</sup> Those involved were acutely aware that logistical breakdown could prove fatal to the movement. On 18 April the Strasbourg reformers Wolfgang Capito, Matthäus Zell, and Martin Bucer wrote to the Alsatian peasant leader, Erasmus Gerber, warning him of "division and discord" as the peasant band grew larger and the supplies from the convents began to run dry.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth emphasising that the relationship between peasants and monks and nuns or their officials was not necessarily immediately one of physical confrontation. Indeed, there was often a process of negotiation and accommodation between peasants and monks or nuns which could see destruction avoided, as was proven by the convent of Stadtilm (Thuringia), whose provost provided provisions, and saw the convent spared.<sup>43</sup> A particularly detailed account comes from a Salem monk and illustrates how violence could be avoided.<sup>44</sup> The leader of the Bermatingen band, Eithelhans Ziegelmüller, a landowner, miller, village headman (*Amtmann*), and judge, initially established a chain of command at the band's headquarters at Salem's *Hof* in Bermatingen. He came to the abbey with twenty supporters, where he received a gift of bread, wine, and fish from the monks, and asked them to swear two articles: to observe godly law and to do nothing against the peasants. On 1 April he again came to the abbey, this time with 300 men, where he was given food and drink in the guesthouse and was then invited into the abbey itself. On the following day, on his return from gathering more support, he asked the entire convent to swear an oath in support of the peasant cause, granting the monks time to consider. The convent assembled, with advice sought from the abbot who was taking refuge in Überlingen, and it was unanimously agreed to swear the oath. As Ziegelmüller was too busy to attend in person, two councillors came to the abbey to receive the oath, including Benedict Aigen, the village headman of Bermatingen. Three soldiers were left in charge of the abbey's gates and bells. By Easter Sunday, Aigen had returned to requisition further supplies, which the abbey provided in the form of bread and wine, but their two wagons were intercepted on Easter Monday on the road to Ravensburg and never reached their intended destination. On 17 April the Treaty of Weingarten was agreed between the Swabian League and the peasants – Salem had been spared the worst.

<sup>40</sup> Letter of Jakob Sturm to the city of Strasbourg, 22 April 1525: *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau. Der deutsche Bauernkrieg Jahr 1524*, ed. Heinrich SCHREIBER, Freiburg im Breisgau 1863, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> *AGBM* II, n° 1710, p. 517.

<sup>42</sup> Tom SCOTT and Robert W. SCRIBNER, ed. and trans., *The German Peasants' War. A History in Documents*, Amherst N. Y. 1991, n° 21, p. 109-111; *Politische Correspondenz der Stadt Strassburg*, vol. 1, ed. Hans VIRCK, (Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg 2), Strassburg 1882, n° 201, p. 114-116.

<sup>43</sup> Christian PLATH, "Saalfeld/Stadtilm", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 1391-1408 (p. 1395-1396).

<sup>44</sup> Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe 65/111; BRUN, *Abbot* (see n. 18), p. 102-121.

In most cases, however, negotiation broke down or was not entered into at all and it was at this point the situation turned violent. On 26 April, for instance, the provost of Anrode, Luckart, had brought treasures, documents, and the convent seal to safety in the tower of St Martin's church in Heiligenstadt. The following day the peasants appeared before the convent, where the nuns tried to appease them with provisions. This was in vain, and on the night of 27 April they were forced to flee with the provost, before the peasants seized the convent and set it alight.<sup>45</sup> While peasants targeted provisions, they also sought in many instances to desecrate the religious spaces and objects of the monastery or convent. In the Thuringian monastery of Volkenroda, for instance, the crowd from Mühlhausen attacked the monastery at six in the morning. In addition to seizing wine, beer, and 2,000 sheep, they attacked the sacrament, set alight the relics of the 11,000 Virgins, smashed twenty-eight altars, ripped up twenty-six parchment missals, tore apart the organ and stained glass, and set fire to the church.<sup>46</sup> Across the Empire, the situation was similar. In the abbey of Herrenalb (Baden-Württemberg) the peasants broke apart the altars, stools, and the sacrament, tearing up and strewing on the ground so many books, letters, and registers that it was not possible to walk without stepping on them.<sup>47</sup> In Kaisheim, the monks who remained in the monastery, came out to discover the damage which had been inflicted: lights, bedding and cushions had all been robbed; curtains, corporals and chests ripped open in the church, with everything taken "which was pleasing to them", even a Netherlandish tapestry, which hung above the abbot's table in his quarters and was valued at fourteen guilders.<sup>48</sup> This was material and iconoclastic destruction on a widespread scale, with library and archival records obliterated, altar pieces destroyed, and buildings set alight.

### III. INTERPRETING THE VIOLENCE AGAINST THE MONASTERIES AND CONVENTS

It would be easy to get an impression from both contemporary and subsequent accounts of the complete abandon of the peasant bands who, out of control, destroyed everything in their wake. Elite accounts, including by monks and nuns, universally adopted a hostile tone to describe the actions of the peasants. The damage register of Volkenroda, written in the aftermath of the revolt, for instance described the peasants as a "godless band of blinded people" who acted "tyrannically", "ferociously", "wretchedly" and "without mercy", and "violated" the monastic space.<sup>49</sup> The peasants in Herrenalb were described as acting "despicably" and "in an unchristian manner", while on 13 June 1525 the Outer Austrian government wrote to the town of Basel informing them how "the poor monastery of Lucelle"

<sup>45</sup> Anna EGLER, "Anrode", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 62-112 (p. 67).

<sup>46</sup> *AGBM* II, n° 1710a, p. 523-524.

<sup>47</sup> *Quellensammlung der badischen Landesgeschichte*, vol. 2, ed. F. J. MONE, Karlsruhe 1854, p. 23-24.

<sup>48</sup> *Chronik des Klosters* (see n. 3), p. 452.

<sup>49</sup> *AGBM* II, n° 1710a, p. 523-524.

(Alsace) had been “shamefully spoiled, broken apart, and robbed”.<sup>50</sup> For the Cistercian chronicler Knebel, the peasants were nothing more than “raging wild pigs”.<sup>51</sup> Knebel makes it clear that Martin Luther was responsible for inciting the peasants, but it is striking that both sides – Catholics as well as Evangelicals – made use of the same vocabulary. For Luther the peasants were “robbing and raging like mad dogs”.<sup>52</sup> This universal condemnation and use of dehumanising and animalistic language was carried into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and has done much to shape understandings of the revolt.<sup>53</sup> In his 1884 description of Tennenbach Karl Hartfelder, for example, contrasted “the wild band” with “the peaceful monastery”, as the peasants, in the hope of finding money and treasures, ripped open the graves of the margraves of Hachberg who were buried “in the peace of the monastery”.<sup>54</sup>

It is of course in many respects unsurprising that elite actors such as monks and nuns saw the peasants, who were breaking their oaths, acting violently, and turning the world on its head, in such terms. Yet, the monastic sources demand a great deal of sensitivity in their interpretation. First, monastic writers were using a common language to describe violent incursions into monastic space. Compare, for example, the following two accounts:

All the altars except for three have been violated and broken into pieces... the images of the saints wretchedly cut into pieces and wounded. I hardly dare mention to you the wickedness. The relics of the saints have been scattered and disgraced all over the floor. I fear that not even the Turks, open enemies of the Christian faith, could be so savage and impious.<sup>55</sup>

And when they were finished there, they came into the sisters' choir, and smashed beautiful pieces and many books, and they took away all the cloths and veils and gowns, and where they saw images of our blessed Lord, they attacked them more fiercely than the other figures, yet they particularly hated the sight of a crucifix. Oh, Jews and Turks would barely do as they have done.<sup>56</sup>

The first account, quoted at the beginning of the article, was written by the Benedictine monk of Ottobeuren, Nikolaus Ellenbog, to his sister Barbara, abbess of Heggbach. Ellenbog describes the destruction of his own monastery of Ottobeuren, not as he himself witnessed it, but from accounts sent to him at the Benedictine monastery of Isny to where he had fled for safety. The second account, meanwhile, was written by the nuns of the tertiary convent of Marienburg in the Brabant town

<sup>50</sup> *Quellensammlung*, ed. MONE (see n. 47), p. 23-24; *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg* (see n. 40), n° 329, p. 202.

<sup>51</sup> *Chronik des Klosters Kaisheim* (see n. 3), p. 257.

<sup>52</sup> *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. Helmut T. LEHMANN, vol. 46: *The Christian in Society*, Saint Louis, MO 1967, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> SCHWERHOFF, “Heroic Narrative” (see n. 7), p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> HARTFELDER, *Geschichte* (see n. 39), p. 286.

<sup>55</sup> *Ellenbog. Briefwechsel* (see n. 5), p. 201-203.

<sup>56</sup> Erika KUIJPERS, “‘O, Lord, save us from shame’: Narratives of Emotions in Convent Chronicles by Female Authors during the Dutch Revolt, 1566-1635”, in *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order; Structuring Disorder*, ed. Susan BROOMHALL, Farnham 2015, p. 127-146 (p. 127).

of 's-Hertogenbosch in August 1566 during the Dutch Revolt. Both accounts – written forty years apart, one by a monk, the other by a nun – make use of the same emotional language (“wretchedly”, “wickedness”, “fiercely”, “hated”) and adopt the same clichés to make sense of what happened, in both instances describing the peasants’ actions as worse than anything that the Turks could have done.<sup>57</sup> It is a salutary reminder that monastic writers were drawing on a sharpened repository and vocabulary and that this could be prone to exaggeration. Indeed, in the case of Volkenroda, it was determined in a later evaluation that the abbot had overclaimed in his estimations of the damages.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, we need to think about the actions of the peasants from their own perspective. In studies ranging from Mamluk Egypt to Niklashausen in Southern Germany, historians are now demonstrating that pre-modern revolts were not the actions of the unstable masses, but calculated and strategic; that they used emotions and popular religiosity tactically; and that they were a fundamental part of political interaction, a particularly intense end-point to an ongoing process of political negotiation between rulers and ruled.<sup>59</sup> This can lead to a more nuanced reading of events which can look beyond the negative discourse presented in elite, monastic sources.

There is plenty of evidence that the peasants were strategic and pragmatic in their targeting of the monasteries and convents. As we have seen, stores and provisions were crucial for the logistics of peasant armies and the Field Ordinances of the Franconian Peasantry (24-27 April 1525) made clear that no one was to attack any ecclesiastical institution without the explicit instruction of the supreme commander and councillors.<sup>60</sup> As highly fortified places with high walls and gates, there could often be strategic-military reasons for seizing convents and monasteries and even burning them to the ground.<sup>61</sup> Monastic buildings were often used as headquarters and logistical hubs for peasant armies, while burning buildings acted as a warning and deterrent to other bodies, particularly towns, about the potential consequences if demands were not met.

Above all, the peasants recognised the importance of symbolic control and power. As Brun has argued in relation to Salem, the peasants seized control over symbols of lordship: “Salem’s peasants turned lordship upside-down but did not throw it out altogether.”<sup>62</sup> Food and drink which the peasants had previously supplied to the abbey were now being handed back to them, while the bells which

<sup>57</sup> KUIJPERS, “Narratives” (see n. 56), p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> Annette von BOETTICHER, “Volkenroda”, *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 1556-1576 (p. 1561-1562).

<sup>59</sup> Amina ELBENDARY, *Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, Cairo 2015; Patrick LANTSCHNER, “Revolts and the Political Order of Cities in the Later Middle Ages”, *Past & Present* 225/1 (2014), p. 3-46; John ARNOLD, “Religion and Popular Rebellion, from the Capuciati to Niklashausen”, *Cultural and Social History* 6 (2009), p. 149-169.

<sup>60</sup> *The German Peasants’ War* (see n. 42), n° 58, p. 163; *Die Geschichte des Bauernkrieges in Ostfranken von Lorenz Fries*, ed. August SCHÄFFLER and Theodor HENNER, vol. 1, Würzburg 1978, p. 144-149.

<sup>61</sup> *The German Peasants’ War* (see n. 42), p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> BRUN, *Abbot* (see n. 18), p. 120.



formerly had summoned them to labour were now in the hands of the peasants and called them to assembly.<sup>63</sup> While the peasants had previously been made to swear an oath, a solemn promise made in the presence of God, to the abbot, now the convent had to swear an oath to them. While the Salem peasants did not turn violent, in part because of the willingness of the monks to swear an oath, we can see the violent actions of peasants in other houses as an intensification of the desire for symbolic control and power. In their actions they were targeting both the worldly and spiritual power of the monasteries and convents, embodied in particular objects and spaces. Books such as cartularies and registers, for instance, were not just a means of control, but had a highly symbolic function, as a sign of the wealth, power, and reach of monastic institutions.<sup>64</sup> The peasants who plundered Herrenalb were highly aware of that when “they tore apart all the registers and letters and decorated their caps with them”.<sup>65</sup> Likewise the grain, altar cloths, and cushions which the peasants plundered from the nuns of Günterstal were not simply a random selection of goods and objects, but manifestations of the economic, religious and social power which a land-owning convent could hold.<sup>66</sup> This was an attack on the elite, exclusive status of the monks and nuns and the sensory manifestations of their power<sup>67</sup>: the peasants stole altar cloths which they may never have seen before; cut down bells which had previously called them to labour; consumed the food and drink which they had provided to the monks and nuns; touched the sacrament with their un-consecrated hands, and rather than worshipping the sweet smells of uncorrupted relics threw them between each other. Significantly, the peasants were far more interested in targeting the symbolic dimensions of monastic power than physically harming the monks and nuns themselves, and their actions, while certainly iconoclastic (a term until now rarely associated with the revolt) were not just limited to the visual and the sacred but extended to the entire sensory spectrum of a monastic institution, targeting the economic and social symbols of monastic life as much as the spiritual.<sup>68</sup> As Natalie Zemon Davis has argued in relation to religious riot in sixteenth-century Lyon, crowds were not acting in

<sup>63</sup> Daniela HACKE, “Hearing Cultures. Plädoyer für eine Klanggeschichte der Bauernkriege”, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 66 (2015), p. 650-662.

<sup>64</sup> Franziska CONRAD, *Reformation in der bäuerlichen Gesellschaft. Zur Rezeption reformatorischer Theologie im Elsaß*, (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung für abendländische Religionsgeschichte 116), Stuttgart 1984, p. 120-123; Duncan HARDY, *Associative Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire. Upper Germany, 1346-1521*, Oxford 2018, p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> *Quellensammlung*, (see n. 47), p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Stadtarchiv Freiburg im Breisgau, C1 Kirchensachen 124/4.

<sup>67</sup> *Virtuosos of Faith. Nuns, Canons, and Friars as Elites of Medieval Culture*, ed. Gert MELVILLE and James D. MIXSON, (Vita Regularis 77), Zurich 2020; Jacob M. BAUM, *Reformation of the Senses: The Paradox of Religious Belief and Practice in Germany*, Urbana, IL 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas T. MÜLLER, *Mörder ohne Opfer. Die Reichsstadt Mühlhausen und der Bauernkrieg in Thüringen*, (Schriftenreihe der Friedrich-Christian-Lesser-Stiftung 40), Petersberg 2021, p. 564; Thomas T. MÜLLER, “Geköpfte Heilige – Ikonolasmus im Kontext des Bauernkrieges. Eine Quellenkritische Betrachtung der Mühlhäuser Ereignisse”, *Reformation und Bauernkrieg*, ed. Werner GREILING, Thomas T. MÜLLER, and Uwe SCHIRMER, (Quellen und Forschungen zu Thüringen im Zeitalter der Reformation; 12), Cologne 2019, p. 91-113.

a mindless way but believed that what they were doing was legitimate and their violence was structured. The objects, spaces, and people that they attacked were targeted for their symbolic meaning, motivated by a desire to rid a community of pollution, purified from idolatrous statutes, inappropriate books or those people holding false status.<sup>69</sup>

Through their actions, the peasants drew new lines of exclusion and inclusion, based on a new language of brotherhood, which challenged the previous monopoly which monasticism had held on this term.<sup>70</sup> Writing to Strasbourg from their new base in the Alsatian Cistercian abbey of Neubourg, the peasants addressed their “dear brothers in Christ Jesus”, explaining how “we have begun a Christian assembly and entered the monastery of Neubourg, with the intention to elevate the Gospel in such a way.” Writing two days later to the community of Wilwisheim near Dettweiler, the “evangelical brothers in Christ” hoped “to awaken the Holy Gospel, the Word of God”.<sup>71</sup> Although only fleeting, the sense of power and control which the peasants held as they marched from one monastery or convent to another and occupied them must have been extraordinary and intoxicating. In his confession after the revolt, Jorg von Wimpffen admitted that he had gathered with others in the bathhouse, in taverns, and wherever they had come together to discuss marching towards the abbey of Bildhausen. On 9 April 1525, sitting over wine at the house of Hans von Darmstat, he, Sebolt and Jörg Weyßgerber, Peter Durman, Michel Schmid, and Clas Stegmuller “had formed a band to go to Bildhausen and to stand by one another like brothers”.<sup>72</sup> Far from losing control, Jorg, Hans, Sebolt, Jörg, Peter, Michel and Clas were for a moment in control. They were willing to risk their lives for what they believed in.

#### IV. THE EXPERIENCE OF MONKS AND NUNS DURING THE REVOLT AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Peasants’ War was an incredibly fast-moving set of events, played out in numerous different areas, in which the seizure or destruction of a monastery and convent might last only hours, but which had significant consequences for the monks and nuns who resided there. Having considered the scale of the destruction as well as the role of violence in it, the article will now explore, primarily on the basis of monastic correspondence, how monks and nuns experienced such turbulence both during and in the immediate aftermath of the revolt. The sources reveal the gendered distinctions between monks and nuns in how they experienced the

<sup>69</sup> Natalie Zemon DAVIS, “The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France”, *Past & Present* 59 (1973), 51-91.

<sup>70</sup> Kat HILL, “Brotherhood, Sisterhood, and the Language of Gender in the German Reformation”, *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 17/2 (2015), p. 181-195 (p. 186).

<sup>71</sup> *Correspondenz* (see n. 42), n° 205, p. 117; n° 210, p. 119-120.

<sup>72</sup> *AGBM* 1/2, n° 891, p. 555.

momentous uncertainty of revolt, how they made decisions during it, and how they initially began to come to terms with it.

For a relative few, the revolt was experienced alongside the peasants, as former monks and nuns rejected the monastic life, often violently, and joined the peasant bands. Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489-1525) served as confessor to the Cistercian convent of Beuditz, where he took "comfort from the fact that I am not impeded by the nuisance of the Jewish chants and observances [the Daily Office], and rejoice that ample time remains for my studies."<sup>73</sup> Marrying the former Cistercian nun Otilie in summer 1523, Müntzer decried monks and nuns as "godless" and "idolatrous people" whose "greed, usury and devious tricks" needed to be "torn out at the roots."<sup>74</sup> He carried that out as leader of the peasants who attacked institutions such as Marksußra (Thuringia), destroying its printed missals, hymn-books, and other manuscripts.<sup>75</sup> Müntzer was executed after the disastrous defeat of his peasant army at Frankenhausen, a fate which also befell his Mühlhausen companion, Heinrich Pfeiffer, who in 1521 had abandoned the Cistercian monastery of Reifenstein and in 1523 was reported to be preaching in the open air of Mühlhausen, wearing secular clothes, and berating priests, monks, and nuns.<sup>76</sup>

There is also evidence that nuns could be involved. The convent of Dietenborn, for example, claimed damages of six guilders and eleven schillings from "Grete Spigelis' daughter, the nun of Dietenborn."<sup>77</sup> In the convent of Heggbach, meanwhile, the chronicler recorded how it was Magdalena Galster, the sister of the colour sergeant Hans Galster, who incited the crowd of women against the convent's confessor. Magdalena's involvement was particularly striking. She had served for four years on the convent farm before, in 1524, being accepted into the convent as a novice, against the will of many sisters. In the convent, strange smells and curious knocking sounds were heard wherever Magdalena was present, and she was accused of being possessed by the devil and even suspected of bearing a child "in the sides and not in the womb."<sup>78</sup> Eventually expelled from the convent later in 1524, her involvement in the uprising was for the Heggbach nuns a sign of the devil at work.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, ed. and trans. Peter MATHESON, Edinburgh 1988, n° 7, p. 14: Müntzer to Franz Günther, 1 January 1520.

<sup>74</sup> *Collected Works* (see n. 73), n° 50, p. 81: The Council and Commons of Allstedt to Duke John of Saxony, 14 June 1524; "German Evangelical Mass" (1524), p. 182.

<sup>75</sup> Anna EGLER, "Marksussra", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 1087-1097 (p. 1089).

<sup>76</sup> Thomas T. MÜLLER, "Müntzers Werkzeug oder charismatischer Anführer? Heinrich Pfeiffers Rolle im Thüringer Aufstand von 1525", *Bauernkrieg*, ed. Vogler (see n. 19), p. 243-259 (p. 248-250); Thomas T. MÜLLER, "Vom Zisterzienser zum Prediger im Bauernkrieg. Heinrich Pfeiffers Beziehungen zum Kloster Reifenstein", *Cistercienser Chronik* 120.3 (2013), p. 381-388.

<sup>77</sup> Isa-Maria BETZ, "Dietenborn", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 333-358 (p. 345).

<sup>78</sup> Ludwig BAUMANN, "Eine Heggbacher Gespenstergeschichte 1524", *Freiburger-Diözesansarchiv* 9 (1875), p. 260-264.

<sup>79</sup> Claudia ULBRICH, "Die Heggbacher Chronik. Quellenkritisch zum Thema Frauen und Bauernkrieg", in *Gemeinde, Reformation und Widerstand. Festschrift für Peter Blickle*, ed. Heinrich R. SCHMIDT, André HOLENSTEIN, and Andreas WÜRGLER, Tübingen 1998, p. 391-399 (p. 396-397).

For the most part, nevertheless, nuns and monks experienced the revolt on the receiving end. The overriding emotion which appears in the sources was uncertainty, as monks and nuns were unsure what fate would befall them. The situation was fraught with danger, as armed groups roamed the countryside. On 13 April 1525, the bailiff Eyring von Rotenhan wrote to the Bishop of Würzburg, Konrad II. Von Thüngen, informing him that he had ridden to the Cistercian convent of Frauenroth (Bavaria) as he “wanted to see how the peasants were behaving there”. When he learned that they were slaughtering cattle, he invited them to come over to talk with him, but instead they rushed and shot at him.<sup>80</sup> Within the monasteries and convents themselves, nuns and monks were gripped by a similar sense of uncertainty and were reliant for information on trusted and faithful outsiders, often loyal monastic servants or family members. In the convent of Naundorf (Saxony-Anhalt) a messenger of Hans von Morüngen, a brother of one of the nuns, came at eight in the evening on 30 April 1525. The prioress asked what brought him to the convent at such a late hour and he answered that Hans had received a message that plans were afoot to storm the convent in the evening and drive out “the poor children”. In the letter which Abbess Sophie Schaffstedtin sent to Georg Spalatin (1484-1545), secretary of the Saxon Elector Frederick the Wise, she noted that her fellow sisters “did not want to believe such a thing”, giving some sense of the incredulity which was felt.<sup>81</sup> In Salem, the monks “secretly” received word on 31 March at seven in the evening that up to 7000 peasants of the Allgäu Band had gathered and were of the opinion that they wanted to see the monastery fall into ruin and take from it what was there. According to a contemporary monk chronicler who was likely present, the monks spent the night in great worry, with four of them ordered to take watch and stand guard.<sup>82</sup>

In particular, safeguarding valuable church goods and the various cartularies, registers and letters books which recorded an institution’s landholdings and rights proved a perilous and dangerous task. On 2 February 1525, for example, the “old, pious” Klainhans von Roth came to the convent of Heggbach and asked whether anything had been taken into safety, advising the nuns not to keep the account books, obligations, and interest letters in the convent but take them to Biberach or Ulm. For the Heggbach nun recalling the events in 1541, “the scare was so great” that the nuns placed the documents in a wooden case for document storage and sent them to Stoffel Gretteren, an employee of the convent, for safekeeping. But when they unloaded the case in Stoffel’s farm, the letter and account books fell out. Stoffel did not become angry, as he feared that two servants and men helping him might inform the peasants of the presence of the books and subsequently

<sup>80</sup> *AGBM* I/1, n° 52, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Gustav KAWERAU, “Zur Geschichte des Klosterstürmens im Bauernkriege”, *Zeitschrift des Harz-Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 13/1-2 (1880), p. 330-338 (p. 332).

<sup>82</sup> *Quellensammlung* (see n. 47), p. 122.

come and burn them and his house.<sup>83</sup> Nuns, monks, and monastic servants all had to decide whom to trust and were constantly aware that their actions could have serious repercussions.

While monks and nuns could successfully negotiate with the peasants and avoid storming, we should not downplay the emotional and psychological toll which such a threat could place on them. Such threats were above all gendered. In the sources, nuns wrote constantly of the fear of sexual violence. On 5 May 1525, Abbess Margarete and her convent in Sonnefeld (Bavaria) wrote to councillors in Coburg, requesting that six or ten men be sent for protection “so that wantonness and shame be prevented”.<sup>84</sup> Abbess Sophie of Naundorf expressed particular concern for her fellow nuns who did not have living relatives and chose to protect them by keeping them with her “so that they would not be shamed and punished by the immoral mass.”<sup>85</sup> On 28 April, Tham von Herda, the bailiff of Salzingen, wrote in alarm that his attempts to stop the peasants attacking the convent of Allendorf (Thuringia) had been in vain, but he had at least been able to prevent the nuns from going into the camp where the peasants “without doubt would have their way with them”.<sup>86</sup> Tham reported further that the peasants had twice, so he had heard, tipped out the Eucharist on to the ground, something also reported in the south west by Ulrich von Rappoltsein on 16 May to his father, Wilhelm, the upper Alsatian imperial steward (*Landvogt*). He added further that the peasants “were attacking nuns”.<sup>87</sup> In Thuringia, Thomas Müller has shown that there was only one recorded case of sexual violence against a noblewoman in Schlotheim and none against nuns.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the collective fear which bound together nuns across the Empire was acute and keenly felt in the moment. We now know in retrospect that nuns and monks were rarely physically harmed, but those living through the revolt feared for the worse.

The key decision which monks and nuns faced in the moment was whether to remain or flee and, if the latter option was chosen, when to flee and to where. There were for the most part three options available to them: to escape to another monastic institution; to flee to monastic property, often in towns; or to seek refuge with family. Some found safety within monastic houses of other orders, such as the monks of Georgenthal who escaped to the Augustinian monastery in Gotha.<sup>89</sup> Others fled to towns, where Cistercian houses often owned a *Stadthof*, urban property which provided extensive legal and economic privileges and could be used as a market access point and warehouse. The monks of Maulbronn, for example,

<sup>83</sup> *QGBO*, p. 279-280.

<sup>84</sup> *AGBM I/2*, n° 601, p. 413.

<sup>85</sup> KAWERAU, “Geschichte” (see n. 81), p. 333.

<sup>86</sup> *AGBM I/2*, n° 499, p. 351; MÖTSCH, “Abfindung” (see n. 17), p. 131.

<sup>87</sup> CONRAD, *Reformation* (see n. 64), p. 121-122.

<sup>88</sup> MÜLLER, *Mörder* (see n. 67), p. 564.

<sup>89</sup> Lutz UNBEHAUN, “Georgenthal”, *Die Mönchs- und Nonneklöster*, p. 757-802 (p. 772).

found safety at the *Maulbronner Hof* in Speyer.<sup>90</sup> Others sought refuge with their families. A series of letters from the abbess of Frauental (Baden-Württemberg) to Casimir, Margrave of Brandenburg-Kulbach (1481-1527), give some sense of the deeply traumatic process of flight and are a relatively rare example of the way women in pre-modern times coped in times of revolt.<sup>91</sup> On 25 April 1525, she recounted how more than one hundred peasants had come before the convent “in a horrible, impetuous manner”, threatening that the convent must be destroyed. The abbess pleaded to the Margrave that she and her convent wanted to stay “for the sake of God” and that they did not know where they should go. On 10 May the situation took a turn for the worse. The peasants broke in, spilling the convent’s wine on to the ground. In her desperation, the abbess asked if the peasants could at least spare “a little house” where she and her convent could stay, but instead she was met with threats that they would be locked up and burned alive. There was no other option than to flee from the convent by night, the perilous situation made worse by a storm. They fled to the home of one of the nun’s relatives, the Eckwerhoffen family, where they remained, as noted in a letter on 25 May, “with nothing more than our daily clothing”. Even accounting for the rhetorical strategies which the Frauental abbess was using to emphasise her plight in an attempt to seek help and protection from the Margrave, it is clear that such a hurried escape from imminent danger was deeply disturbing and traumatic, not least for a group of women whose lives were dictated by enclosure. Abbess Sophie of Naundorf expressed similar emotions when writing to Georg Spalatin. She and sixteen nuns, the majority of them “old [and] ill”, had fled to the relative safety of Halle: “how I should be able to feed them, only God knows”. Sophie lamented how “I have nothing more than a shirt and habit and veil, that is all that I have on my person”, adding in Latin, “it is not enough”.<sup>92</sup>

Monastic correspondence reveals the deeply felt desperation of monks and nuns as the world that they knew was being ripped apart in front of their eyes. Letters written during the height of the revolt had a practical function, as monks and nuns sought precious information on what was happening in order to reach decisions. They further reveal how, from the outset, they were seeking sympathy and support for their cause. Above all, however, letter-writing was an opportunity to try and create order out of disorder by verbalising experience and emotion in a deeply turbulent and traumatic situation.

Such uncertainty and fear continued in the period after the revolt, as monks and nuns who remained faithful to the monastic term sought to re-establish their lives. Several now found themselves homeless, unable to return to a monastery or convent which had been ransacked or even burned to the ground. In June 1525 the chaplain of Bildhausen, Valtin, together with his fellow monks, reminded Count Wilhelm

<sup>90</sup> Archiv der Reichstadt Speyer 001 A:415/2.

<sup>91</sup> Staatsarchiv Bamberg Geheimes Hausarchiv Plassenburg Nr. 9417; Geoff MORTIMER, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War, 1618-48*, Basingstoke 2002, ch. 8 on nuns’ accounts of warfare.

<sup>92</sup> KAWERAU, “Geschichte” (see n. 81), p. 334.



that they had “been wandering in the wilderness” for nine weeks and needed support.<sup>93</sup> In October 1525, in a reply to a request for money from the Swabian League, the monks of Schönau wrote in desperation “how we are wandering astray on account of hunger”.<sup>94</sup> In the same month Dorothea, abbess of St Johanniszell unter Wildberg (Bavaria) lamented to the bishop of Würzburg that “my virgins and I do not have sufficient rooms that we are able to sleep in the dry” and that they were unable to dry their corn supplies. The abbess complained that locals were taking tiles, wood, bricks, and doors from her own convent to rebuild the house of a Jewish man at Sulzfeld whose house they had destroyed and were required to rebuild. The abbess pleaded that appropriate accommodation be arranged for her convent before winter.<sup>95</sup>

Some would never return to see their monastic homes again. The abbess of Schüsselau, Ursula von Truppach, died in exile in the convent’s property on the Kaulberg in Bamberg.<sup>96</sup> A similar fate befell the long-standing abbess of Günterstal, Agnes von Tüsslingen, who had fled to Freiburg and was buried there, away from her own convent.<sup>97</sup> Others wished to remain as nuns or monks but could not do so in their monastic homes. In 1529 Ursula von Brunnpach, from the Cistercian convent of Wonntental, north of Freiburg, was accepted into the Dominican convent of Adelhausen as her convent had been burned to the ground “and the nuns can no longer serve God Almighty”.<sup>98</sup> There were numerous convent transfers in the period after the revolt, such as in November 1527 when Regina Truchsess and Barbara Hirschaiderin transferred from the destroyed house of Frauental to Himmelthal.<sup>99</sup> The last abbess of Stadtilm, Margaretha von Schwarzburg, initially found refuge with her father and then brother, Count Günther XL of Sonderhausen, before eventually transferring to Quedlinburg Abbey in 1533, a house of canonesses, where she died in 1540 as provost.<sup>100</sup>

For others, the Peasants’ War ushered in a new, semi-monastic state. In January 1534, Sophia Buchner, formerly a nun in Eisleben, explained that she had abandoned her convent in 1525 not through any desire to break her vow of celibacy, but rather to flee the danger posed to body and soul from the convent’s storming. Rescued by her brother, she continued to observe her vows, living a celibate life in Leipzig with her mother and a female servant, but no longer behind the walls of the convent.<sup>101</sup> For many, however, the Peasants’ War represented the final caesura with

<sup>93</sup> *AGBM* I/2, n° 895, p. 563-564.

<sup>94</sup> *AGBM* I/2, n° 601, p. 601.

<sup>95</sup> *AGBM* I/2, n° 1024, p. 638-639.

<sup>96</sup> Michael WIELAND, “Kloster Schlüsselau”, *Cistercienser-Chronik* 13 (1901), p. 33-41 (p. 34).

<sup>97</sup> Ernst DREHER, “Die Äbtissinnen des Zisterzienserinnenklosters Günterstal”, *Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv* 120 (2000), p. 5-51 (p. 29).

<sup>98</sup> Stadtarchiv Freiburg im Breisgau, Adelhausen C1 Kirchensachen 30 A.

<sup>99</sup> Stadtarchiv Würzburg, Jesuitenkolleg Aschaffenburg Urkunden 151.

<sup>100</sup> PLATH, “Saalfeld/Stadtilm” (see n. 43), p. 1396.

<sup>101</sup> Marjorie Elizabeth PLUMMER, *From Priest’s Whore to Pastor’s Wife. Clerical Marriage and the Process of Reform in the Early German Reformation*, (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Farnham 2012, p. 142.

the monastic life. Monks and nuns had of course abandoned their institutions as a result of the new Evangelical message, but the Peasants' War sometimes accelerated that process, as, forced to flee, they made the conscious decision not to return. Valentin Vannius (1475-1567), for instance, fled the monastery of Maulbronn in 1525. It was only in 1532 that he married and, after holding a number of positions for the Duke of Württemberg overseeing the introduction of the Reformation into the duchy, in 1557 he actually returned to Maulbronn as its first evangelical abbot, in its new guise as a school.<sup>102</sup> As Marjorie Plummer has shown, nuns faced acute problems. While three younger nuns who had fled from the convents of Petersberg and Eisenberg during the revolt were able to marry immediately, the remaining three older nuns were not able to find husbands, their families did not want them and they had to be supported by authorities.<sup>103</sup> While Catholic controversialists regarded Luther's marriage in June 1525 to Katharina von Bora as perjurious and linked it to the oath-breaking peasants, Evangelical supporters were by contrast keen to demonstrate that the institution of marriage had not fallen apart through its rejection of the vows of celibacy. In 1540, for instance, Jörg von Folge, administrator of the convent of Ichterhshausen (Thuringia), noted the case of Katharina Gebhardt who had fled during the Peasants' War with the permission of her parents and was supported by them. She had then married Johann Brettel from Erfurt and had five children with him, bringing them up faithfully.<sup>104</sup> The Peasants' War could be a life-changing event, forcing monks and nuns to make decisions about what sort of life they should lead going forward.

#### V. RE-BUILDING MONASTICISM AND REASSERTING CONTROL IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLT

In the medium to longer term, the revolt continued to cast a long shadow over individual Cistercian monasteries and convents, as well as the order as a whole. In 1529, the abbot of Cîteaux confirmed the appointment of Lukas Götz von Merstetten as abbot of Herrenalb and promised to pray indefatigably for a new flourishing of the destroyed monastery.<sup>105</sup> Institutions such as Herrenalb needed more than prayers, however, and faced challenges on multiple fronts. Recruitment presented real difficulties as monks and nuns abandoned the monastic life, and monasteries and convents struggled to recruit new members to institutions whose buildings lay in ruins. In Ebrach, for example, twelve new monks were admitted under Abbot Johann II. Leiterbach (1503-1529) before September 1524, but not a single person afterwards under his rule. It was only on 21 September 1532, under

<sup>102</sup> Karin Brinkmann BROWN, "Vannius, Valentin", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 4, ed. Hans J. HILLERBRAND, Oxford 1996, p. 219-220.

<sup>103</sup> PLUMMER, *Priest's Whore* (see n. 101), p. 234.

<sup>104</sup> PLUMMER, *Priest's Whore* (see n.101), p. 164-165; Ulrich SIMON, "Ichtershausen", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 976-1006 (p. 984).

<sup>105</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart A 489 Bü.

Abbot Johannes III. Lup (1529-1540) that six new members were accepted. A similar pattern can be observed in Bildhausen. The final new recruit before the Peasants' War was in April 1522, and there was then a hiatus until 19 September 1534.<sup>106</sup> Numerous convents, while not closed immediately, slowly died out in the years after the revolt. The nuns of Beuren (Thuringia) were able to return after two years to their convent after the most crucial buildings had been repaired primitively, but the death of Barbara von Knorr in 1555 signalled the end of the institution. At that point she was living in the convent with just two novices, one of whom abandoned her noviciate and the other died.<sup>107</sup>

More generally, the Peasants' War, particularly in Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, accelerated and intensified a process of secularisation which had already begun with the Reformation. The physical destruction of monastic complexes, the intervention of territorial rulers, the flight of monks and nuns from their monasteries and convents, and the safekeeping of goods and privileges all played a role in this process. The sheer destruction of the monastic complex sometimes made rebuilding unfeasible, and institutions were forced to close. In Alsace, the abbey of Baumgarten was dissolved in 1525, while in Thuringia it was not possible to restart life in the abbey of Georgenzell, whose ruins can still be visited today, and it was dissolved in 1527. Its daughter house of St. Johannisthal in Eisenach had already been dissolved in April 1525 after the so-called "Eisenach Priest's Storm" when monastic houses were looted and monks and nuns forced to flee, while the priory of Georgenzell was dissolved in 1531. Challenged from below by the peasants, institutions faced fresh challenges from above by territorial rulers for whom the revolt presented an opportunity. In 1525 the nuns of the Thuringian convent of Kapellendorf had fled and handed over their inventory of goods for safekeeping to officials of John, Elector of Saxony (1468-1532). Their convent was almost completely destroyed, but the nuns nevertheless sought in vain to return, appealing for help from the counts of Kirchberg and the abbot of Fulda. The convent was secularised in 1527 and the eight remaining nuns received a pension.<sup>108</sup> In convents such as Ichtshausen the process was more drawn out. In September 1525, officials of the Elector gave the twenty-five nuns the choice to either return to the convent or be provided with a pension for life. While several chose the latter option, a group of nuns chose to return, and the convent was only dissolved in 1544.<sup>109</sup>

A particular challenge for the nuns and monks loyal to the religious life lay in reclaiming the objects that had been handed over to territorial rulers for safekeeping, many of whom then held on to them as collateral for the expenses they had incurred in putting down the revolt. On 10 June 1527 the abbot, prior and convent

<sup>106</sup> Aug. AMRHEIN, "Verzeichnis der in den Jahren 1520-1803 in Würzburg ordinierten Professoren der fränkischen Cistercienser-Klöster Ebrach, Bildhausen, Bronnbach, Schönthal und Langheim", *Cistercienser Chronik* 15 (1903), p. 219-220, p. 247-248, p. 347-348.

<sup>107</sup> Anna EGLER, "Beuren", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster* p. 225-265 (p. 229).

<sup>108</sup> Johannes MÖTSCH, "Kapellendorf", *Die Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster*, p. 1045-1053 (p. 1046-1047).

<sup>109</sup> SIMON, "Ichtshausen" (see n. 104), p. 983.

of Bildhausen wrote to Count Wilhelm, informing him that they had been able to reconstruct a chapel but were unable properly to perform services as they did not have a chalice. They pleaded with the count to return to the monastery those possessions that he was holding in Schweinfurt. In August the count replied that he was unable to do so because of the considerable damage that he and his territory had suffered during the revolt.<sup>110</sup> In other places, nuns could become embroiled in the division unleashed by the Reformation and its effect on territorial politics. On 13 November 1526, Katharina von Watzdorf, abbess of Eisleben, together with Felicitas Tabelles, abbess of Zelle, appealed directly to Emperor Charles V with the complaint that their possessions had been taken into safekeeping at the castle in Mansfeld. While counts Ernst and Hoyer VI, who remained Catholic, were willing to return them, Albrecht VII and Gebhad VII, supporters of Luther, were unwilling to do so. Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg had been unable to succeed in their case and the nuns saw no choice but to seek help from the Emperor.<sup>111</sup>

The uncertainty which characterised the events and immediate aftermath of the Peasants' War was not easily shaken off, and it was against this backdrop that monks and nuns sought to rebuild the monastic life, to re-establish themselves as territorial lords, and also, significantly, to come to terms with what had befallen them. As Lyndal Roper has suggested, the Peasants' War left behind long-wasting wounds and traumatic, emotional scars which were not easily forgotten.<sup>112</sup> Writing could prove one way of coming to terms with what had happened. As Erika Kuijpers has argued in relation to chronicle accounts by nuns during the Dutch Revolt (1566-1635), the narrative structuring of experience "was an emotional practice in itself", a way of coping with memories and bringing about order.<sup>113</sup> While the anonymous Heggbach nun who wrote a chronicle account of the revolt in 1541 included details about the fear that she and her fellow nuns had felt, she was also able to reflect on moments of levity and laughter during the turbulence. Thus when peasants entered the convent of Heggbach to negotiate with the nuns, the captain of the peasant band, Ulrich Schmid of Sulmingen, spoke to the nuns about the suffering which Moses experienced under Pharaoh. The nun noted "we let him go on and laughed enough over it".<sup>114</sup> Later on in the chronicle, when Magdalena and the crowd of women were shouting outside the convent door, demanding that the nuns hand over their vats, the prioress, Waldburg Büterlin, took a light and held it under each bedframe, to check a peasant was not lurking underneath: "we all laughed from the bottom of our hearts".<sup>115</sup> Laughter in the moment was a copying strategy, a way of coming to terms with an uncertainty. Reflecting on laughter sixteen years after the moment was one way by which the

<sup>110</sup> *AGBM* I/2, n° 1076, p. 669.

<sup>111</sup> *AGBM* II, n° 2063, p. 857.

<sup>112</sup> ROPER, "Emotions" (see n. 14), p. 2, 21.

<sup>113</sup> Kuijpers, "Narratives" (see n. 56), p. 127-128.

<sup>114</sup> *The German Peasants' War* (see n. 42), n° 108, p. 233-234; *QGBO*, p. 281.

<sup>115</sup> *QGBO*, p. 283.

nuns could reassert their power and control and restore the right order after an extraordinary series of events in which peasants had preached to nuns and nuns had handed over goods to peasants.

## CONCLUSION

It is perhaps easy when writing a history of a revolt such as the Peasants' War to fall into the trap of taking sides. Until now, accounts of the revolt have been written from the perspective of the peasants, adopting a "heroic narrative" in Schwerhoff's phrase, but this article has suggested that any new "actor-centred" history of the revolt must also include the voices of monks and nuns. In turn, it has challenged the historiography of the Cistercian Order to acknowledge an episode in the order's past which has largely been forgotten or glossed over. Using the Cistercian Order as a case study, it has suggested a way of writing a more complete history of the revolt which stretches across territorial and geographical boundaries. What is extraordinary is that the storming of monasteries and convents happened simultaneously across several different jurisdictions without being coordinated. While local circumstance might dictate whether a monastery or convent was destroyed or not, this was a much broader phenomenon, in which logistical concerns could fuse with deep-seated anger at the power of monasticism to create its own energy. Violence against monastic institutions and monks and nuns themselves – whether in Heggbach in 1525 or Moabit in 1869 – took on its own specific forms and targeted in particular the symbolic dimensions of monastic power. The violence could be simultaneously brutal and strategic, and those monks and nuns who returned from safety found their worlds smashed to pieces and in ashes. For them, the Peasants' War was deeply disturbing and traumatic, a series of events hard to understand, which required them to make decisions quickly without ever being sure of what would happen next. The letters and chronicles of monks and nuns capture some sense of that confusion and uncertainty across the Empire, both as it happened and in the immediate aftermath, and furthermore show how nuns and monks navigated both material and emotional destruction. In 1555, a rhymed Latin poem was commissioned by the abbot of Ebrach to adorn the ceilings of his restored quarters: peasant fury had laid waste with iron and flame to this building, but out of it, dutiful love was being built and increased.<sup>116</sup> Cistercian monasticism survived the Peasants' War, wounded certainly, but not defeated.

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<sup>116</sup> Johannes JAEGER, *Klosterkirche zu Ebrach. Ein kunst- und kulturgeschichtliches Denkmal aus der Blütezeit des Cistercienser-Ordens*, Würzburg 1903, fig. 1.

*« Plus proche d'un four à briques que d'un monastère » : les conséquences matérielles et émotionnelles de la guerre des paysans en Allemagne (1524-1526) sur les moniales et les moines cisterciens*

Cet article examine les conséquences matérielles et émotionnelles de la guerre des paysans en Allemagne sur les moniales et les moines cisterciens. Il soutient qu'à la fois la littérature sur la révolte et celle consacrée à l'Ordre cistercien n'ont pas suffisamment reconnu l'effet destructeur de la révolte sur le monachisme et se demande pourquoi. L'article esquisse les niveaux de destruction matérielle et comment la violence dans la révolte pourrait être interprétée. L'article examine ensuite comment les moniales et les moines ont vécu de tels troubles et leurs conséquences immédiates, comment ils ont pris des décisions pendant et après, et comment ils ont commencé à leur donner un sens. L'article conclut en examinant brièvement les répercussions à long terme de la révolte et comment on a commencé à en faire mémoire.

*“More akin to a brick-kiln than a monastery”: The Material and Emotional Effects of the German Peasants' War (1524-1526) on Cistercian Nuns and Monks*

This article considers the material and emotional effects of the German Peasants' War on Cistercian nuns and monks. It argues that both the literature on the revolt and that dedicated to the Cistercian Order has not sufficiently recognised the destructive effect that the revolt had on monasticism, reflecting on why this might be the case. The article outlines the levels of material destruction and how violence in the revolt could be interpreted. It then considers how nuns and monks experienced living through such turbulence and its immediate aftermath, how they made decisions during and after it, and how they began to make sense of it, concluding by briefly considering the longer-term repercussions of the revolt and how it began to be remembered.

*„Mehr einem Ziegelofen als einem Kloster ähnlich“: Die materiellen und emotionalen Auswirkungen des deutschen Bauernkrieges (1524-1526) auf zisterziensische Nonnen und Mönche*

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit den materiellen und emotionalen Auswirkungen des deutschen Bauernkrieges auf die Nonnen und Mönche der Zisterzienser. Er legt dar, dass sowohl die Literatur, die sich mit der Revolte als auch diejenige, die sich mit dem Zisterzienserorden befasst, die zerstörerische Wirkung, die die Revolte auf das Mönchtum hatte, nicht hinlänglich gewürdigt hat, und fragt, was die Gründe dafür sein könnten. Der Artikel behandelt das Ausmaß der materiellen Zerstörung ebenso wie die Frage, wie die Gewalt in der Revolte interpretiert werden könnte. Er befasst sich anschließend damit, wie Nonnen und Mönche solche Turbulenzen und ihre unmittelbaren Folgen wahrnahmen, wie sie währenddessen und danach Entscheidungen trafen und wie sie begannen diesen einen Sinn zu unterlegen. Der Artikel schließt mit einem kurzen Blick auf die längerfristigen Auswirkungen der Revolte und damit, wie man sich an sie zu erinnern begann.