

Among These Authors are the Men of Bec:
Historical Writing among the Monks of Bec

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Looking back on the accomplishments of the monks of Bec about a century after the abbey's foundation in 1034-7, an anonymous author wrote a "Praefatio" to *Vita Herluini*,¹ the first of a whole set of biographies of Bec's abbots.² First, the "Praefatio" explained, it was customary among the ancients to "set up likenesses" and to commit to writing the outstanding deeds of their ancestors, thereby memorializing them for the instruction of future generations "as an example of virtue and an inducement to good living."³ Likewise, it continues, the (early) writers of the Church commemorated the lives of the saints in writing to preserve for their followers "a clear path of uprightness." But the "moderns" (of his own time) wrote for a different purpose: not, as the ancients, to capture the favor of the common people, but so that the readers might follow the example of good living put before them:

For this purpose therefore the vigorous acts and marvelous virtues of the saints are written and read, so that in them may be praise to God. . . . And let the descendants regard and follow the footprints of their ancestors, so that without stumbling they can run the life of salvation with the steps of good work towards glory and the prize of God's heavenly calling. This the ancients did, this many men of this age still do, not wishing to pass over in silence those whom they have thought of some importance. *Among these authors are the men of Bec, who have written about the first architects and builders of that place . . .* (cols. 695-96, emphasis added).

Thus, in this little "history" of the commemoration of great men by statues; by art; by biographical writing of ancient Rome; by the hagiography of the early Christian Fathers; and by the continuance of the custom with a new purpose in their own age, the anonymous monk of Bec puts his abbey and its authors in a historical context.

The author, possibly Milo Crispin of Bec, then lists the works he sees as attaining these historical goals: first, the *Vita Herluini* (written by Gilbert Crispin, a monk of Bec in 1109, when he was abbot of Westminster); then, perhaps his own work, the *Vitae* of the third abbot of Bec, "the noble William" of Beaumont, and of the fourth abbot Boso, "with his surpassing wisdom" (c. 1130-36). The life of St. Anselm (1124), the second abbot of Bec, he adds, was published by a man of Canterbury who was Anselm's close attendant and servant (Eadmer) after God had called Anselm to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury in England (cols. 695-96).

It thus appears that there may well have been a major concern for historical writing at Bec, and that a kind of philosophy of history had been worked out there. But this concern has gone largely unnoticed by modern scholars of Bec. The monumental work of A. A. Porée, *Histoire de L'Abbaye du Bec*, concerns land grants and the "factual" history of Bec as recounted by the *Vitae* of Bec's abbots mentioned above.⁴ Other authors treat Bec only tangentially, as lesser parts of a study of Bec's great men: Lanfranc, St. Anselm, and Theobald, all archbishops of Canterbury. Margaret Gibson, Lanfranc's biographer, argues that the school of Bec lasted only a few years, as a fund-raiser for the building of Bec's church.⁵ Interestingly, Gibson refutes the contentions of Lanfranc's previous biographer, A. J. MacDonald, that Lanfranc's talents lay in diplomacy and administration. She argues that Lanfranc should be seen in the model of his own student, St. Anselm, as an intellectual and scholar rather than a teacher and administrator. Hence her view of the school of Bec as short-lived.⁶ I have argued elsewhere that Bec's school flourished under Lanfranc's successor, Prior Anselm,⁷ whom most modern scholars know and admire for his theological writings, particularly his ground-breaking ontological argument proving God's existence by reason alone. Yet there are other, still-to-be-explored aspects of St. Anselm.

Sir Richard Southern, Anselm's modern biographer, considers the curriculum of Anselm's school at Bec to have been

focused largely on monastic conversation and ideals. Southern saw Anselm as engaged in meditation and philosophical or theological contemplation on a high intellectual level unsuited to most of the ordinary students of Bec. Although Southern discusses the historical works of Anselm's biographer Eadmer, he does not consider them as products of Bec, but rather as products of an English tradition; that is, he views Eadmer as primarily an Englishman rather than a student of Anselm.⁸ Moreover, like the vast majority of modern students of St. Anselm, Southern concentrates on Anselm's theological writings in the context of earlier and

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later medieval theologians, noticing, like others, that Anselm had no direct intellectual heirs in this tradition among his students at Bec.⁹ Southern views the school of Bec under Anselm as rather inconsequential, seeing Anselm's interests as lofty.

On the other hand, Avril Saltman, Archbishop Theobald's modern biographer, sees Theobald, who was also an abbot of Bec and archbishop of Canterbury, as a kind of successor to Lanfranc and Anselm, the pupil of their pupils at Bec. More interestingly, he praises Theobald primarily as an able administrator and a faithful servant of pope and king, a kind of bridge between Anselm and Becket.¹⁰ Thus the character of the school of Bec emerges as a riddle to be solved. What was its focus, what did its teachers teach, and how long did it last? No one has yet done a thorough analysis of all its possible components. This study will suggest that the historical interest implied in the *Vitae* of Bec abbots was at least a part of the curriculum of Bec and that it went far beyond the mere commemoration of Bec's abbots. For an examination of historical writing by men who studied at or derived from Bec reveals a both general historical interest of a most remarkable kind and an extraordinary production of historical manuscripts by men of Bec.

We first encounter the Bec historical impulse in St. Anselm's journey to England shortly after his February 1079 consecration as abbot of Bec.¹¹ In England, Anselm visited Bec's lands and monks, including Gilbert Crispin at Westminster and Archbishop Lanfranc at Canterbury. At Canterbury, a burning question was under debate: Should the new Norman episcopal regime recognize pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon saints? In a famous episode at Canterbury, Anselm argued *for* the recognition of St. Elphege, because, Eadmer explained, Lanfranc was still "somewhat green" as an Englishman, and "some of the customs which he found in England had not yet found acceptance with him." While Lanfranc was giving attention to changing some of these customs--a good ten years after his arrival in England--he confided to Anselm his doubts about the sanctity of some of their saints, in particular Elphege, the archbishop of Canterbury who had been murdered by the Danes in 1012 for refusing to pay them a huge ransom for his life. Anselm argued that since Elphege died rather than sin against God in a small matter, he would not have hesitated to die rather than anger God by committing some graver sin. Since it appears to be a graver sin to deny Christ than for any lord on earth to injure his men by taking away their money, much less would he have denied Christ if the Danes had tried to force him to do so. Therefore, like John the Baptist, Elphege had died for Christ and for Truth.¹²

But Eadmer, who recorded this incident, apparently was not satisfied with this answer. Perhaps it was too subtle for him. He commented that, "looking at the matter historically" (*intuentes historialiter*) we see that the more fundamental cause of St. Elphege's death was that "like a Christian freeman he stood out against his pagan persecutors, and tried to convert them from their infidel-

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ity" (rather implausibly, since they were in the process of burning down the city and church of Canterbury and putting innocent citizens to a horrible death; 51). Lanfranc, too, may have been somewhat dissatisfied with Anselm's logic. Although Eadmer reports that Lanfranc "approved and deeply respected the subtlety and insight" of Anselm's mind, and would henceforth venerate St. Elphege "with all my heart, as a truly great and glorious martyr of Christ" (53), the archbishop ordered a careful history of Elphege's life and passion to be written and chose the Canterbury monk Osbern for the task. Osbern subsequently wrote the history in plain prose for reading and also rhymed it and put it to music for singing. Lanfranc "gave [this history] the seal of his eminent approval, authorized it, [and] ordered it to be read and sung in the Church of God" (54). However Osbern's prose and rhymed history differed significantly from Anselm's logic, adding "more conventional attributes of the martyr for which [Eadmer's and Osbern's] sources seem to have provided no warrant: e.g. exposing himself to death by attempting to convert the heathen."¹³

This incident provides a glimpse of the process of writing and perhaps editing history. Clearly Anselm's logic was

decisive--but somehow it was not enough. What persuaded Osbern and Eadmer to invent a more acceptable account? The veil is lifted partially by Anselm's letters. There we discover that the monk Osbern was in fact sent to Bec to study, apparently long before Lanfranc assigned him to write St. Elphege's *vita*. In Epistle 39, Anselm reports to Lanfranc that "Your Dom Osbern daily develops admirably both in his fervor for prayer . . . and in his progress in knowledge through perseverance in study, coolness of thinking, and a tenacious memory."¹⁴ This letter of 1073-1077 places Osbern's studies at Bec well before Anselm's visit to Canterbury and the famous Elphege episode of 1079-1080.¹⁵ Indeed, the same Osbern is mentioned in a letter of 1071 as being in England with Anselm's close friend, Gundulf, a monk of Bec and Caen, where Osbern is described as "our brother."¹⁶ It may well be significant that in the letter of 1073-1077, which describes Osbern's rapid progress, Anselm expressed an interest in seeing St. Dunstan's *Vita* and *Institutes*, for Osbern later also wrote a revised life of St. Dunstan.¹⁷ It appears that, because of this course of study at Bec, Anselm considered Osbern a "brother" of Bec. Anselm refers to him as among "our beloved brothers," who include Dom Herluin, Henry, and Gundulf, both before and after he came to study with Anselm at Bec.¹⁸ Lanfranc sought Osbern's return to Canterbury in 1076, when Anselm describes the young monk as fully cleansed of his former perversity, and beseeches Lanfranc to treat him gently, with the milk of pure affections, so that his great new beginnings will not be sullied with reversion to his former bad habits.¹⁹ Whatever Anselm taught Osbern, he did so in the context of researching the life and teachings of another Archbishop of Can-

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terbury, St. Dunstan. Thus it is possible that Anselm had set Osbern to the task of historical research long before the Elphege incident of 1080-81.

A glimpse of the education Anselm instilled in Osbern arises in Osbern's lengthy letter to Anselm beseeching him to accept the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Osbern begins by acknowledging that Anselm is "erudite in all Truth." Osbern cannot understand how someone so learned can flee from the office for which God so obviously has intended him: God has humbled the King (William Rufus) and caused the bishops to force the pastoral staff into Anselm's clenched fist. "Right order" began returning at Anselm's election, when the new Archbishop was given the possessions of "everything according to the proper law." If these signs from God were not enough to persuade Anselm, Osbern calls up God's Plan for Canterbury: Anselm has been suckled and nurtured by God himself--enlightened by God's teaching, enriched by his virtues, raised up by his honors.²⁰ This statement precedes Anselm's comments correlating Jesus to a mother who suckles and cares for her children,²¹ suggesting Osbern's close acquaintance with Anselm's teaching.

Moreover, the passage calls on historical events to validate God's plans for Anselm. Osbern then recalls that God had founded Canterbury, His bride, through the zeal of Pope Gregory, with the blessing of his apostle Peter, and endowed it with the unique and lasting privileges of St. Boniface, Honorius, Vitalian, Agatho, and other orthodox fathers--clearly invoking Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.²² Interestingly, Osbern holds forth the example of St. Peter, the symbol of the papacy; St. Paul's missionary activities; and finally the examples of one of the first archbishops of Canterbury St. Lawrence, and the important Canterbury reformer St. Dunstan, citing the appearances to each by the same Apostle Peter.²³

Thus has Osbern been taught to view the Archbishopric of Canterbury as the special bride of Christ, a kind of second throne of St. Peter in its own right, validated through the historical grants of a succession of Popes beginning with the Apostle to the English, St. Gregory the Great; through successive papal grants; and through the precedents set by the successive archbishops of Canterbury, including especially St. Lawrence and St. Dunstan, to whom St. Peter had appeared. We here glimpse a reflection of the historical theory Anselm had taught to his student Osbern considering the status of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church of England, and the validity of the theory and its status through history. This theoretical construct of the Archbishop of Canterbury as Primate of Another World, a second and parallel Peter, also permeates the historical works of one of Anselm's other students, Eadmer of Canterbury,²⁴ who wrote his *Historia Novorum in Anglia* as a record of Anselm's public life--his pontificate. I have discussed this theory at length elsewhere.²⁵

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Osbern's penchant for historical thinking and writing may have been taught to him by Anselm at Bec, for Osbern took on the task of writing the *Vita Elphegi* immediately on his return to Canterbury. Indeed, Anselm may have

anticipated the question of historical writing and its usefulness. For Osbern went on to write a whole series of historical biographies, including lives of Dunstan, Aelfheah, Oda, Bregwine, Wilfrid, and Audoen, all of whose relics were enshrined in Canterbury. Osbern may well have written these biographies for the occasion of Lanfranc's completion and dedication of the new cathedral at Canterbury in 1077.²⁶

Anselm may have been teaching historical writing to a number of specially selected students, for another of Anselm's students, Guibert of Nogent, also exhibited a strong interest in history. Guibert states that Anselm had sought him out while still prior of Bec (1060-1079), even though Guibert was still a child. As Guibert studied at St. Germer de Fly from 1067-1105, Anselm must have taught him from 1067 to 1093, when Anselm was translated to Canterbury. Apparently Anselm visited St. Germer frequently, and sometimes it seemed to Guibert that he himself was the only reason for Anselm's visits. According to Guibert, Anselm taught him carefully how to conduct the inner self and how to use the laws of reason to govern his body. Anselm divided the mind into three or four parts: appetite, will, reason and intellect. Using these methods of analysis, Anselm taught Guibert to explicate the Gospels, and Guibert began to apply his reasoning to other commentaries. Guibert set himself to making a moral commentary on the opening text of *Genesis*. His abbot at St. Germer "noticed that I was writing a commentary on the first chapter of sacred *history*" (emphasis added), and ordered Guibert to stop the project, but Guibert continued in secret.²⁷ After his first fling with "sacred history," Guibert later turned to secular history. In 1108, he wrote his famous *Gesta Dei per Francos*, based on his reading of the anonymous eye-witness account, *Gesta Francorum*. Guibert's work is clearly a reinterpretation--his modern editor calls it "highly patriotic," and adds that it "shows Guibert's strong biases against the Greeks and Muslims."²⁸ This historical editing seems to recall the inventiveness that Eadmer and Osbern used in their rewriting of the story of Elphege to suit their own tastes, while still incorporating Anselm's logical explanation.

Moreover, even in Guibert's closely introspective and more famous autobiography of 1115, *Monodiae (Solitary Songs)*, Guibert displays an inordinate interest in history. In Book I, the most personal biography, Guibert inserts "digressive chapters" on monastic developments in eastern and northern France²⁹--a topic of some interest to Anselm. These include Chapter 9 of Book I, in which Guibert recounts the example of a secular count, Evrard, who had inspired others to follow his example by modeling his conduct on that of a monastic exemplar, Thibaud. Chapter

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10 also recounts the example of the son of a count, Simon, who rejected worldly wealth to seek out conversion to monasticism, as an exemplar who "inspired so many men and women that legions of both sexes rose up to follow in his footsteps during his lifetime."³⁰ Thus Guibert was concerned with writing just the kind of portraits of "role-models" as the authors of Bec. These two chapters are followed by Chapter 11, a detailed account of the founding of the abbey of Chartreuse by Bruno, "one of the learned" who "in the very same spirit, drew behind him a crowd of those in holy orders."³¹ Then he returns to an account of his own inner life and growth, much in the manner of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, interspersed with fervent prayers to God. Guibert, having been chosen as abbot of Nogent at that point in his life, feels that it is "fitting" to "recall some of the events I have heard of or witnessed there" (during his education at Fly). He then recounts some moral tales of monks fighting off the Devil, and illustrating the sins of simony and avarice; he tells a miraculous tale of lightning striking the abbey of St. Germer three times, and other "strange happenings" at Fly, Reims, and Caen. This last section of Book I seems to serve as a transition to Book II, for Guibert has abandoned his introspection and now, as abbot-elect of Nogent, fittingly turns his attention to worldly affairs, which he chronicles as he moves away from Fly and into the role of abbot at Nogent. Book II consists of "a serene history of Guibert's abbey of Nogent."³² Book III, which comprises some 45% of the whole, recounts the history of the bishopric of Laon, and the urban uprising of the Laon commune of 1112.³³ As abbot, Guibert had a role in the secular world, and he turned his eye upon its happenings and recorded them. Like the authors of Bec and Anselm's student Osbern, Anselm's student Guibert enjoyed an inordinate interest in history, and seems to have linked it to Anselm's teaching.

The famous Canterbury historian Eadmer also enjoyed a connection to Bed long before Anselm was translated to Canterbury, possibly as early as 1081 or 1082. His account of the Elphege incident certainly reads like an eye-witness account, and indeed it occurred on Anselm's first visit to Canterbury c 1080.. Anselm then went home to Bec, while Osbern began the lives of Elphege and Dunstan at Canterbury. There is some possibility that Eadmer accompanied Anselm to Bec in 1080 or joined him at the abbey well before Anselm's return to Canterbury in 1093, for Anselm, in an early archiepiscopal letter, twice refers to Eadmer as "a monk of Bec."³⁴ And indeed we know little of Eadmer's

whereabouts between 1081 and 1093, when Anselm returned to England and Eadmer *immediately* became his secretary and constant companion. Anselm was careful with words; he was unlikely to have carelessly forgotten that Eadmer was a monk of Canterbury, unless Eadmer had just recently returned from Bec with his mentor. Lanfranc habitually sent Canterbury monks to Bec--Osbern, Holvard, his own nephew Lanfranc, and Wido; and Anselm also

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sent many Bec monks to Canterbury--Henry, Gundulf, Maurice, Albert, Herluin, Hernost.³⁵ Moreover, in the *Vita Anselmi*, Eadmer describes Anselm's early life at Bec, his teaching and his priorate, in such rich detail that this too may be seen almost as an eyewitness account--researched on the spot, at Bec itself, with many sources and witnesses other than Anselm. Significantly, when Anselm saw this work in 1100, he ordered Eadmer to destroy it.³⁶ Like Anselm's other student Guibert, Eadmer kept a secret copy.

Let us pause in our consideration of Eadmer for a moment to note that other monks of Bec were also writing history. At one of the Bec foundations in England, St. Neots, which was founded by Anselm at the request of Richard fitz Gilbert of Clare c. 1081-82, there survive two *Vitae* of the Bec dependency's patron saint and namesake, St. Neot. The first life is Anglo-Saxon in origin, and was written either between 980 and 1004-13, or later in the eleventh century, but before 1080.³⁷ Of more concern to us is *Vita II*, also called "The Bec Life" of St. Neots, dated to after 1066 but before 1200. Composed by a Norman in Southwest England, near or in Glastonbury,³⁸ it survives in one single manuscript of about 1200; it was printed by Mabillon and the Bollandists.³⁹ Mabillon's exemplar may have been the *Vita S. Neoti*, found as item 80 of the mid-twelfth century Bec library-catalogue.⁴⁰ If so, *Vita II* would have been in existence by about 1150.⁴¹

St. Neots was established as a dependency of Bed and populated with monks of Bec. Its first abbot or prior would have been a monk of Bec, although no abbot is recorded until the reign of Martin of Bec, who died in 1132.⁴² The colonizing of St. Neot's may well have been directed from Glastonbury, which enjoyed the rule of a monk of Caen, Thurstan, at the time St. Neot's was founded as a colony of Bec, about 1081-82.⁴³ The monks of Bec regarded the monks of Caen as "sons of our sons," and many Caen monks were trained at Bec in the Bec tradition.⁴⁴ But Thurstan was driven out of Glastonbury in 1083, because he had tried to impose Norman and Flemish chants on the Anglo-Saxon monks. He fled to Caen, where he may have stayed until his death in 1096. Not until 1100 was another monk from Caen, Herluin, appointed to replace him.⁴⁵

Ruled by two successive monks of Bec and Caen, the monks of Glastonbury also exhibited an interest in history. They commissioned William of Malmesbury to write about their antiquities and histories, probably in the abbatiage of Herluin; William finished his account about 1120. Indeed, William agreed with Anselm's and Eadmer's visions of Canterbury as a second and parallel seat of St. Peter, and the Archbishop of Canterbury as Pope of Another World, for he reported that Pope Urban welcomed Anselm to Bari in 1097 as "pope of another world."⁴⁶ Interestingly, the monks of Glastonbury commissioned William's history and a Life of St. Dunstan as a counter-weight to Osbern's *Life of St. Dunstan*,

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which had a decided Canterbury bias.⁴⁷ A great propaganda war arose between the monks of Glastonbury and the monks of Canterbury, both of whom claimed to have the relics of St. Dunstan. Eadmer, who also wrote a *Vita* of St. Dunstan, wrote a blistering letter to the monks of Glastonbury, proving point by point, through historical evidence, that Dunstan's relics had never been taken from Canterbury to Glastonbury.⁴⁸ Richard Sharpe argues that this letter was so effectively written that it scotched the legends abounding at the time of its writing, 1120, so well that William of Malmesbury did not dare to include the Glastonbury claim to St. Dunstan's relics in his *Antiquities of Glastonbury*.⁴⁹ Only a generation later, in 1184, did the monks of Glastonbury dare to interpolate the story of the theft of Dunstan's relics from Canterbury in 1012 into Malmesbury's composition.⁵⁰

Malmesbury's histories for the Glastonbury monks were contemporary with the Bec life of St. Neot's and were almost contemporary with Eadmer's most well known histories, the *Vita Anselmi* and *Historia Novorum*. The *Vita Anselmi* is a biography of St. Anselm from his birth to about 1100 that lapses at that point into a series of miracles. The *Historia Novorum*, on the other hand, is a kind of "official" history of the Canterbury prelacy. It begins with a rather long account of the Canterbury primacy from the reforms of St. Dunstan, dwelling on the relationship between

Canterbury's kings and archbishops. Indeed, Eadmer seems to take up the story of Canterbury just at the point where Bede leaves off. The gist of the account is to show that from St. Dunstan's time England's king and Canterbury's archbishop ruled side by side, in a kind of co-rule of England, the ideal nature of the relationship between Lanfranc and the Conqueror, and its destruction by King William Rufus.⁵¹ The account establishes a firm historical base for the later statement put in Anselm's mouth, that Canterbury was "the very Mother of the whole of England, Scotland and Ireland and of the adjacent isles" (26). It continues, "You must think of the Church [of England] as a plough. . . . This plough in England is drawn by two oxen outstanding above the rest, the King and the Archbishop of Canterbury. These two drawing the plough rule the land, one by human justice and sovereignty, the other by divine teaching and authority" (36). Once more, we see reflected in Eadmer's writing, as in Osbern's and Guibert's, Anselm's teachings. For Anselm styled himself in his letters and documents as "Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of Great Britain and Ireland" and called the Church of Canterbury "the first of all the churches in all England."⁵² The rest of Eadmer's account shows Anselm restoring this status to Canterbury through Eadmer's testimony up to 1100, and after 1100 by including a series of Anselm's letters. The interruption of both the *Historia Novorum* and the *Vita Anselmi* at precisely 1100, and their substantial changes in character at

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this point, suggests that this is the date at which Anselm ordered Eadmer to destroy his writings. Thus he stopped writing and completed the copies he had saved after Anselm's death.

Yet another of Anselm's students was involved in the writing--and also the collecting--of history. Gundulf, Anselm's close and dear brother from Bec and Caen, accompanied Lanfranc to Canterbury and later became bishop of Rochester.⁵³ With him came at least one, and probably a lot more, monks of Bec. After Gundulf's death in 1108, an anonymous monk of Rochester wrote a *Vita* of his famous patron. Rodney Thomson was "inclined to see [the anonymous author] as one of several Bec monks who joined Gundulf at Rochester." Thomson finds a "Bec-centred, not a Canterbury-centred viewpoint" in the text, and writes that "more than anything else, Anselm is the main stylistic influence," drawn from Anselm's letters, prayers and meditations. Thomson believes the anonymous monk of Bec wrote *Vita Gundulfi* during the pontificate of Bishop Ernulf (1114-1124), himself also a monk of Bec.⁵⁴ Simultaneously, Thomson believes, the monks of Rochester collected "the earliest and main portion of the famous Rochester cartulary known as the *Textus Roffensis*." This collection of legal and historical documents, Thomson believes, was completed between 20 October 1122 and 18 February 1123. He sees "many and important connections between the *Vita* and the *Textus*" although clearly they were not by the same author. One purpose of both works seems eminently clear to Thomson: to render the alleged or disputed donations of lands and property to Rochester inviolate.⁵⁵ Thus, in the end, these works seem to have had a legal purpose.

Significantly, Lanfranc's first act on his translation to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1070 was to challenge Thomas archbishop of York, also a Bec student, for his refusal to render a profession of obedience to Archbishop Lanfranc.⁵⁶ Lanfranc rallied all his resources to defeat Thomas' claims that York had never professed obedience to Canterbury. He procured witnesses from among the old men of the kingdom to testify as to the customs of England, but first and foremost he called on the historical testimony of Bede, quoting the *Ecclesiastical History* chapter and verse to present as legal evidence first in the king's court, then in the papal court.⁵⁷ Clearly one of the components of interest in history at Bec was legal. Lanfranc himself wrote the *Scriptum Lanfranci de Primatu*, a detailed account of his efforts to secure a comprehensive profession of obedience from Thomas of York. It is followed by five relevant documents including Thomas's profession of 1072 and Lanfranc's letters to Pope Alexander II and Hildebert specifying the historical evidence.⁵⁸ The author of the A-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* appended to it a series of Latin annals of Lanfranc's archiepiscopate, "based on the records at Christ Church" and included the *Scriptum Lanfranci*⁵⁹

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in a document called *Acta Lanfranci* to ensure that the legal records of Lanfranc's archiepiscopate would be preserved for posterity. Lanfranc, at least, had a profound conviction that History offered legal evidence, whether in the oral testimony of eyewitnesses, or in the testimony of historians and historical documents.

It appears to be quite in the tradition of Bec, therefore, that the monks of Bec continued to write historical treatises in surprising numbers. Milo Crispin probably wrote his *Vitae Willelmi et Bosoni*, lives of the third and fourth abbots of Bec, in the 1130s, clearly following the example of Anselm's student and "adopted son" Gilbert Crispin,⁶⁰ who wrote

Vita Herluini in about 1109. Also in the 1120s, Eadmer completed the extraordinary series of histories and biographies he had begun in 1097. These include the *vitae* of the saints enshrined at Canterbury, Dunstan, Aelfheah, Oda, Bregwine; the *vitae* of Wilfrid and Audoen, works which update and revise Osbern's texts; his masterpieces, the *Vita Anselmi* and the *Historia Novorum*; and his tracts, *De excellentia Virginis Marie* (long thought to be a work of Anselm himself), *De Beatitudine Coelistis Patriae*, and *Sancti Anselmi Similitudinibus*.⁶¹ An anonymous author of Bec also completed a life of Lanfranc, drawing heavily on Gilbert's *Vita Lanfranci* but also adding much new information. Margaret Gibson believes it may have been written by Milo Crispin about 1139-56.⁶² Clearly it is a product of Bec, from whatever author. Gibson notes that Milo "had several contemporaries at Bec of a literary and historical turn of mind," namely Robert of Torigny, author of a major history of Normandy;⁶³ Stephen of Rouen; and the anonymous author of the *Miracula S. Nicholas*, which begins with a history of Lanfranc's arrival at Bec.⁶⁴ Only a few years later, 1160, Wace, an Englishman educated at Caen, wrote a romantic secular history of Normandy in the vernacular.⁶⁵

About this same time too, an anonymous author at Bec constructed the text *De Libertate Beccensis Monasterii*, which spells out the events that had led to Bec's possessing an extraordinary set of liberties--freedom from all secular and ecclesiastical control. The author begins with the reasons why he has written:

I think it is worth the effort to put in writing, for those who are here now and for those who will come after us, the status and privilege with which the church of Bec has stood from its beginning. For it seems reprehensible if, through our neglecting to transcribe those events of former times, any sort of disturbance should at some time befall this church. Knowledge of the past can often be very valuable.⁶⁶

He finds Bec's exclusive legal privileges firmly grounded in the historical precedents set by Bec's founder Herluin, and by Bec's successive priors and abbots as they fought both the duke and the archbishop of

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Rouen for the freedom to choose Bec's abbots, and for that abbot to render homage or profess obedience to no one. This tract seems to epitomize the goals of historical writing taught by Anselm at Bec. The past is not only profitable for its edification for "right living" and "right order" but also for the defense of one's legal rights and privileges. Knowledge of the past was indeed useful.

Anselm himself said as much in his correspondence. Running all through his correspondence is the concept that a precedent once established is unbreakable law. In 1095 he argued that "I am certain that the archbishopric will be given to no one after me except in the way I hold it on the day of my death, and that if another king should come to the throne during my lifetime, he will grant me nothing unless he finds that I already hold it."⁶⁷ His point was that any concessions he made to King William Rufus of the privileges of Canterbury would be permanent. Anselm also beseeched Pope Paschal not to command him to return to England from his [second] exile, because to do so under the king's terms would break the law of God--"otherwise I would make it appear that I put man before God and that I was justly despoiled for wanting to have recourse to the Apostolic See. It is quite obvious what an injurious and detestable *example* this would be for my successors."⁶⁸ To the monks of St. Evroul, he wrote that "nobody except those to whom God gave the power of binding or loosing can place anyone over souls for whom an abbot is named and appointed. That church is within my primacy and archbishopric, the consecrations performed in that church belong to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and you know perfectly well that I am he. For I have never surrendered to any of you any of the rights which belong to me, nor do I do so now."⁶⁹

To Gundulf bishop of Rochester Anselm ordered the monks of Canterbury not to give in to the king's demand for money: "You know that I ought not to give my assent to such an unheard-of and unusual case--and since I ought not I dare not. . . . For this reason it is not expedient for me or anybody else that this *custom* should be introduced into the Church of God by any assent [on my part]" (emphasis added).⁷⁰ Writing to Ernulf prior of Canterbury, Anselm explained why he could not return to England and communicate with those who had been excommunicated but were allowed to attend the king's court: to do so would mean "an intolerable diminution of our church would be *confirmed*" by Anselm's action. Confirming the king's evil practices would cause "detriment to the church entrusted to me." Moreover, "It seems better to me that during my absence tribulation should continue to rage in England if it cannot be avoided, than that *any evil custom should be confirmed for the future by my presence and toleration*" (emphasis added).⁷¹

Thus Anselm believed that by his actions, he confirmed or established the customs of Canterbury, and that any breach of the rights of his office as established by his predecessors would establish an evil custom and weaken the see of Canterbury. As Eadmer states, "Anselm followed with-

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out scruple his predecessor's practice."⁷² Anselm himself believed that if he tolerated things "which had not been customary to my predecessors" then he "would establish such evil usages for [his] successors to the damnation of my soul."⁷³ Customs, as they are exemplified by historical evidence and historical actions, Anselm believed, constituted the Law of God, and as such historical texts took on an extraordinary importance in Anselm's eyes. Indeed, Anselm himself collected the letters of his Bec abbatiade, and edited the collection at least once.⁷⁴ He may well have done the same for his archiepiscopate, for a collection of such documents would have established the customs of his office just as the collection of Lanfranc's letters had for Anselm.⁷⁵

Thus Anselm had a very strong reason for teaching historical writing at Bec, and the profusion of biographers and historians emanating from Bec suggest that the collection of historical texts and the production of historical treatises constituted a significant part of Anselm's curriculum at Bec. Anselm was always concerned to "set a good example" for his followers and the people under his care as archbishop of Canterbury, and much of the historical writing produced by Bec students was in the nature of explicating such "good examples" in both histories and biographies.. In other cases, the record of historical events served a vital legal function in the feudal courts of England and Normandy, and the historical writing of Bec was also a recognition and use of that fact. In the extraordinary explosion of historical writing that Southern describes as the great English contribution to the twelfth-century Renaissance, "among these authors were the Men of Bec." Indeed, among these authors the men of Bec loomed very prominently, writing to describe examples of virtue as an inducement to good living, so that the descendents might follow the footprints of their ancestors and run the life of salvation with the steps of good works.

1. For the most recent edition of *Vita Herluini* see Anna Sapir Abulafia and G. R. Evans, eds., *The Works of Gilbert Crispin* (London, 1986), pp. 185-212. There is also an excellent edition in J. A. Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster: A Study of the Abbey under Norman Rule, Notes and Documents Relating to Westminster Abbey*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1911), 3, 83-110. An older and less reliable edition appears in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844-1864), 150, cols. 697-714, hereafter *PL*.
2. "Praefatio ad vitam sancti Herluini," *PL*, 150, cols. 695-96. The editors think the preface may have been written by Milo Crispin, to whom they attribute the *vitae* of the later abbots William and Boson of Bec. See *PL*, 150, cols. 695-96, note 76.

3. "Praefatio ad vitam sancti Herluini," *PL* 150, cols 695-96. Subsequent references to this edition are given by column number in the text.
4. A. A. Porée, *Histoire de L'Abbaye du Bec*, 2 vols. (Evreux, 1901).
5. Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford, 1978), p. 34: "Herluin allowed Lanfranc to 'open' the school specifically as an expedient to attract gifts." She also claims that "It is not unlikely that Herluin's permission to 'open' the school ended when Lanfranc went to Caen" (p. 35).
6. A. J. MacDonal, *Lanfranc: A Study of His Life, Work and Writing* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 266-67: "If one feature more than another was specifically characteristic of him, it was a sound and practical common sense exercised in the fulfilment of duty. . . . Lanfranc has his place among the ablest of our administrators. . . . The Norman monasteries sheltered in those days the ablest men of executive and administrative capacity in Europe. . . . As an adviser of the King in the matters of State he was the first medieval ecclesiastic to show the power and efficiency of the Church in the sphere of practical politics as distinct from ecclesiastical theory, and to foreshadow . . . the high function of the English Prime Minister."
7. S. N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), pp. 68-70.
8. R. W. Southern, *St. Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c. 1130* (Cambridge, Eng., 1963, repr. 1966), p. 30: "[Anselm] seems to have made no attempt to rival Lanfranc in his fame as a teacher Anselm's only pupils appear to have been members of the community; it was probably only much later that strangers came to him for the solution of their problems. He seems to have abandoned, or only unwillingly given his mind to, formal teaching. We hear no more of the school of Bec in the form in which it had developed under Lanfranc. . . . Eadmer did not know him in those days. . . ." On Eadmer's Englishness, see pp. 274-87 and 309-13. See also R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990), p. 65: "After 1078, Anselm knew that he and Lanfranc had parted company in some fundamental way. Lanfranc had become increasingly the great organizer, devoted to the pursuit of order in all things, but more capable of bringing order into practical affairs than into a theoretical system. Anselm, by contrast had become the great creator of an ideal world of thought and interior experience."
9. For a comprehensive bibliography of works on Anselm's philosophy and theology up to 1972, see Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis, 1972), pp. 257-75.
10. Avril Saltman, *Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury* (New York, 1969), p. 7: "Although the great age of Lanfranc and Anselm had passed [at Bec], their pupils such as Boson remained to give instruction, and of course

the books were still there. On the legal side there were books entitled Theologians included Tertullian, Jerome," (p. 7). It is thus as a hard-working administrator that Theobald will probably be characterised in the textbooks yet to appear, but at the same time his sterling moral qualities should not be forgotten. As a faithful servant of pope and king" (Introduction, p. x). For connections to Becket, see Saltman, *Theobald*, p. 11.

11. There is some dispute about the date of this visit. I have argued elsewhere that the visit occurred in the period between summer 1080 and summer 1081; see Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, p. 63 and note 220.
12. Eadmer, *The Life of St. Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1972), pp. 50-55. Subsequent references to this edition are cited by page number in the text, also referred to as *Vita Anselmi*, below.
13. Southern, *The Life of St. Anselm*, p. 52, note 1. See also the superb article by Jay Rubenstein, "Liturgy Against History: The Competing Visions of Lanfranc and Eadmer of Canterbury," *Speculum* 74 (1999), 279-309.
14. Anselm, *Epistolae*, in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmit, 6 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 1963-68). All references are to this edition and are hereafter cited by epistle, Volume, and page number. Epistle 39 is quoted here, vol. 3, 149-51.
15. St. Anselm, *The Letters of St. Anselm*, tr. Walter Fröhlich, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo 1990-94), 1, 141.

16. Anselm, Epistle 4, vol. 3, 103-5.
17. D. Gabrielis Gerberon, ed., *S. Anselmi Beccensi Abbate Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia nec non Eadmeri Monachi Historia Novorum et alia Opuscula*, Book II (Paris, 1903), cols. 787-788, note 30.
18. Anselm, Epistle. 4, written in 1071 (vol. 3, 149-51); Epistle 17, written before 1074.
19. Epistles 66 and 67, written in 1076; vol. 3, 186-88.
20. Epistle 149, vol. 4, 6-10.
21. Epistle 205, vol. 4, 97-98; Epistle 288, vol. 4, 207-8. See also Anselm's Prayer 10 to St. Paul in Schmitt, *Opera Omnia*, 3, 33 and 39-41; Carolyn Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 110-17; and S. N. Vaughn, "St. Anselm and Women," *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), 83-93.
22. Epistle 149, vol. 4, 6-10; compare Fröhlich, *The Letters of St. Anselm*, 2:13; cf. note 6.
23. Epistle 149, vol. 4, 6-10; compare Fröhlich, *The Letters of St. Anselm*, 2, 15, notes 13 and 14.
24. Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. Martin Rule, Rolls Series (London, 1884); see pp. 11-12, where he calls Lanfranc the Father of that country [England], and Primate of All Britain; and p. 14, where he mentions the Mother Church of Canterbury. See also Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, p. 105, quoting Pope Urban II: "Et quasi comparem velut alterius orbis apostolocum et patriarcham jure venerandum censeamus." See also William of Malmesbury, *Gestis pontificum*, quoting Pope Urban II: "'includamus,' inquit, 'hunc in orbe nostro: quasi alterius orbis papem.'" William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, Rolls Series (London, 1870), p. 100.
25. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, pp. 152-53, and *passim*.
26. Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter to the Monks of Glastonbury," in *The Archeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey*, ed. Lesley Abrams and James P. Carley (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 205-15; pp. 207-8.
27. Guibert of Nogent, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, tr. Paul J. Archambault (University Park, Pa., 1996), pp. 61-63.
28. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, pp. xvii, xix.
29. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, p. xvi.
30. Guibert of Nogent, *A Monk's Confession*, pp. 25-28.
31. Guibert of Nogent, *A Monk's Confession*, pp. 29-34.
32. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, p. xvi
33. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, p. xvi
34. Epistle 209, vol. 4, 104-5: "Librum quem ego edidi, cuius titulus est *Cur Deus Homo*, domnus EDMERUS, carissimus filius meus et baculus senectutis meae, monachus Becci, cui tantum debent amici mei quantum me diligun, libenter ecclesiae Beccensi ut filius eius transcribit." "The book which I completed, whose title is *Why God became Man*, Dom EADMER, my dearest son and the staff of my old age, a monk of Bec, whom my friends ought to love as much as they love me, willingly will transcribe for the church of Bec as its son (my translation and emphasis). I must disagree here with the translation of Walter Frohlich, who argues that Anselm's statement that Eadmer was a monk of Bec is not true and is disproved by his own words in the sentence. Anselm was not a careless writer, nor are mistakes common in his letters. On something so important as a letter to the monk Boso, his close friend at Bec and often his companion on his travels, Anselm was unlikely to make such a mistake.
35. See Anselm's early letters, especially Epistles 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 16, 17, 24, 25, 30 and *passim*; vol. 3, 97-98; 103-5; 105-7, 108-10; 110; 111; 121-22; 122-24; 131; 132-33; and 137-39. Among the monks Lanfranc sent to Bec were Osbern, his nephew Lanfranc, his companion Wido (Epistle 31, vol. 3, 139), and Holvard (Epistle 33, vol. 3, 141). The Bec monks at Canterbury included Gundulf, Maurice, Henry, Albert, Herluin, Hernost, Maurice,
36. Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, 150-51. See Southern, *Vita Anselmi*, pp. ix-x, for the possible date. One wonders if Anselm ordered Eadmer to destroy his work not so much because of Anselm's humility, but because Eadmer revealed too much that should be kept secret. It is significant

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that in his fuller account of Anselm's pontificate after 1100, Eadmer resorts to quoting Anselm's letters, whereas before 1100 the story is told in his own words.

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37. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; A Collaborative Edition: The Annals of St. Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neot*, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, Eng., 1984), pp. xciv-xcvi. The editors still leave some doubt, stating that both the language and syntax are bizarre and difficult (see p. c). But they agree that *Vita I* was clearly from the Anglo-Saxon school of scholarship, and that the author was definitely not Norman (pp. cix-cx). They come to a hypothesis that the author might have been an English-educated native of Cornwall (p. cxi) and leave the matter at that.
38. Dumville and Lapidge, *The Annals of St. Neots*, pp. cxiv-cxv.
39. Mabillon, *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti* (Paris, 1668-1701) IV.2, pp. 323-36; and the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum* (Brussels, 1643), July, VII. 319-29.
40. This catalogue contains an inordinate number of historical works, prominently featuring the works of Bede and many Roman historians; see *PL* 150, col. 771.
41. Dumville and Lapidge, *The Annals of St. Neots*, p. cxii and note 97.
42. David Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke, and Vera London, eds., *Heads of Religious Houses in England and in Wales* (Cambridge, Eng., 1972), p. 108.
43. Thurstan was sent back to Caen after the famous riot of 1083, before which he had tried to impose "continental customs--according to Orderic, "an alien and novel chant from Flemings and Normans"--on the reluctant monks of Glastonbury. Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and tr. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1969-79), 2, 270.
44. See Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, pp. 70-77, and sources cited there.

45. Knowles, et al., *Heads of Religious Houses*, p. 51.
46. William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, ed. Hamilton, p. 100.
47. Richard Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter," p. 206.
48. Printed in *Anglia Sacra*, ed. H. Wharton (London, 1691), 2, 222-61, and also in *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series (London, 1874), pp. 412-22; translated in Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter," pp. 208-15.
49. Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter," p. 206.
50. Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter," p. 205.
51. Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, pp. 1-27. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.
52. *The Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pt. 1., ed. Barbara Dodwell, Pipe Roll Society (London, 1974), no. 260. In a charter to Norwich Cathedral Priory, Anselm refers to himself as "Cantuariensis archiepiscopus
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- et majoris Britannie atque Hybernie primas" and to Canterbury as the see "que omnium ecclesiarum totius Anglie prima est." Queen Edith-Matilda, in an effort to gain Anselm's favor, addresses him as "Archbishop of the Prime See of the English, Primate of the Irish and of all the Northern Islands which are called the Orkneys"; see Epistle 242, Schmitt, *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, 4: 150-52.
53. *The Life of Gundulf Bishop of Rochester*, ed. Rodney Thomson (Toronto, 1977), p. 29.
54. Thompson, *The Life of Gundulf*, pp. 5, 16. But see Knowles et al. *Heads of Religious Houses*, pp. 63-64, and p. 64 note 1, for a very different lineup of the Rochester succession.
55. Thompson, *The Life of Gundulf*, pp. 17, 10.
56. Hugh the Chantor, *The History of the Church of York 1066-1127*, ed. Charles Johnson (London, 1961), p. 2, citing Lanfranc as Thomas' master.
57. Lanfranc, *The Letters of Lanfranc archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and tr. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), Epistles 3, 4, and 7.
58. Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec*, (Oxford, 1978), p. 211.
59. Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec*, p. 213; see also *Acta Lanfranci* in Christopher Plummer, ed., *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892) 2, 287-92.
60. Epistles 84, vol. 3, 208-9; Epistle 103, vol. 3, 236; Epistle 106, vol. 3, 239.
61. Sharpe, "Eadmer's Letter", p. 208
62. Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec*, p. 196.
63. Robert of Torigny, *Chronicle*, in *Chronicles in the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett, Rolls Series (London, 1889), vol. 4.
64. Robert of Torigny, *Chronicle*, p. 197 and note 2. Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec*, p. 199.
65. Wace, *Roman de Rou de Wace*, ed. A. J. Holden. Société des Anciens Textes Francaise, 3 vols. (Paris, 1970) 2, iii, 5305-16. I am grateful to Priscilla Watkins for this reference.
66. *De Libertate Beccensis Monasterii*, in *Annales Ordinis Sancti Benedicti*, ed. J. Mabillon, 6 vols. (Paris, 1739-1745), 5, 601-5; translated in S. Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State* (Woodridge, 1981), pp. 134-43.
67. Anselm, Epistle 176, vol. 4, 57-60.
68. Anselm, Epistle 210, vol. 4, 105-7, my italics.
69. Anselm, Epistle 251, vol. 4, 162-63.
70. Anselm, Epistle 293, vol. 4, 213-14.
71. Anselm, Epistle 311, vol. 5, 235-38.
72. Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, p. 47.
73. Anselm, Epistle 206, vol. 4, 99-101.
74. Walter Fröhlich, *Letters of Saint Anselm*, introduction to Volume 1, 26-32.
75. Fröhlich, *Letters of Saint Anselm*, 1, 32-52.