TOWARD DATING CONSTRUCTION OF THE ABBEY CHURCH OF PONTIGNY

By TERRY L. KIN DER

Lack of precise dates for construction of the first great church at Pontigny Abbey has prevented scholars from assessing the proper role of this major Burgundian edifice in the evolution of early Gothic architecture. Dates have most frequently been estimated by comparing one aspect of the style, construction technique or building materials at Pontigny to those of other (often equally tenuously dated) regional buildings.

In this paper, style has been set aside in an effort to circumvent the circular reasoning that has prevented a clear assessment of the problem. Instead, the building has been dated contextually via documentary evidence for patronage, the role and interest of the abbot, pattern and numbers of vocations and other purely historic elements. The synthesis of these facts points to the late 1120s for the beginning of construction, under the abbacy of Guichard and the patronage of Count Thibaut the Great of Champagne. With abundant means and manpower, work appears to have been completed around or shortly after 1150.

The abbey of Pontigny lies on the border between Champagne and Burgundy, in the broad valley of the Serein river near the hillside vineyards of Chablis (Pl. V). The second of Citeaux's four elder daughters and one of the five governing abbeys of the Order,1 Pontigny has long been recognised for its ecclesiastical, political and historical prominence. Ten of Pontigny's abbots were elevated to the rank of bishop, archbishop, or cardinal; three archbishops of Canterbury — Thomas Becket, Stephen Langton, and Edmund of Abingdon — were granted sanctuary here; and when Saint Edmund died nearby, he was buried in the abbey church, where his tomb is still an object of pilgrimage.

Of the five mother-houses, Pontigny is the only one whose medieval church has survived. It is, in fact, the largest remaining Cistercian oratory in France and has been the object of many studies. Yet with its precociously rib-vaulted nave, early use of flying buttresses and expansively rebuilt choir, Pontigny stands apart from the vision of rectilinear tranquillity which usually comes to mind when Cistercian churches are mentioned.

The small chapel built when the abbey was founded2 was superseded by a monumental building which included the transepts, nave, aisles, and porch of the present edifice. At the end of the twelfth century the original flat-ended chevet was replaced by the early Gothic sanctuary with ambulatory and corona of radiating chapels seen today.3 Yet lack of a secure date for the first major rebuilding has prevented a fuller appreciation of its design, within the development both of early Cistercian architecture and that of Burgundy. This issue is the focus of the present article.

Of the four other governing houses, only the lay brothers' building at Clairvaux remains as witness to the architecture of the twelfth century. The best example in Burgundy — and one of the most complete surviving Cistercian complexes — is Fontenay (Côte-d'Or), second daughter of Clairvaux, much of which was apparently built between 1139 and 1147. It is here that we see the importance of establishing reliable dates for the construction of Pontigny: while the churches of Pontigny and Fontenay are very different

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in scale, vaulting system, architectural design, use of light, and general effect, they
nevertheless share a common plan, sense of restraint, and almost identical proportional
system. This raises interesting questions with regard to the origins of Cistercian design
and its interpretation at individual sites, and underlines the disturbing lack of a more
precise date for construction at Pontigny.4

The date most generally accepted for construction of the church is c. 1150, and this
suggestion first appears in the seventeenth-century histories of Pontigny by Dom Georges
Viole (1598–1669) and Dom Edme Robinet.5 Subsequent historians seem to have
accepted this date without further discussion,6 and architects and antiquaries of the
nineteenth century simply attempted to refine it from their own observations of archi-
tectural detail. Etienne Chaillou des Barres, for example, accepted the date 'vers 1150'
for the beginning of construction, although he noted '... dans le caractère de l'édifice des
signes qui indiquent déjà les approches de la fin du douzième siècle', and thus concluded
that work was not completed immediately. The signs to which he was referring were in the
rebuilt choir, for at the time he was writing its reconstruction in the late twelfth century
had not yet been identified, and it was considered to be part of the original structure.7 In
a similar way, Émile Amé, General Inspector for the Monuments historiques in the Yonne,
dated the nave and transepts from 1150 to the end of the twelfth century by capital styles.8
Viollet-le-Duc, who also believed the later Gothic choir to have been part of the original
structure, therefore dated the church 'vers la fin du XIIe siècle',9 and Georg Dehio simply
followed Gallia christiana in dating the beginning of construction of a new church and
cloister buildings at Pontigny to 1150.10

The same date reappears in the writings of twentieth-century historians,11 and
architects and art historians, while positing various dates based on their own interpreta-
tions of style and building materials, still appear to be hidebound by 'c. 1150'. André
Philippe, for example, an architect whose 1907 plan of Pontigny is the most accurate one
published to date, placed construction of the original choir and transepts between
1150–60, followed by the nave and façade from 1160–80. He also proposed that the north
side of the nave was built after the south side in order to explain the presence of flying
buttresses along the north flank only.12 Sigurd Curman, while making numerous
perspicacious insights from his own reading of the building, clung to the date of c. 1150 for
the beginning of work, with a terminus of 1180 on stylistic grounds.13 Hans Rose, likewise,
assumed that construction began around 1150, but that the choir and west façade
were rebuilt c. 1180 because of the pointed arcade applied to the façade above the round-arched openings.14 Ernst Gall believed that construction began in 1160 simulta-
neously in the nave, aisles, and transepts, the transepts being completed by 1170, nave and
aisles by 1180.15 Georges Fontaine, whose 1928 monograph on Pontigny remains the
modern reference work for the building, believed construction began at the end of
1150.16 His argument is based on a comparison of materials. He noted that the transept
cells of the nave and also the façade at Fontenay were both made of dressed rubble with
ashlar quoins, and suggested that since Fontenay was nearing completion toward the
middle of the twelfth century, Pontigny must have been started at about that time. The
façade of Pontigny, however, he dated fifty years later because of its ashlar surface.17

Other authors have assigned dates with less explanation: Marcel Aubert, for example,
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Hanno Hahn likewise believed the church started at the eastern end of the transepts; both of these
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construction of the nave and the nave at Pontigny was 1145 on, but apparently
only discuss the choir.

Such is the state of the theories which are by far the most satisfactory way of
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buildings.

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quarters at the abbey, a modest stone chapel with little time.27

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the nave vaults were built 1160–70, and the façade and porch by 1170, but gives no
arguments in support of his dates. In his encyclopedic collection of plans, Fr Anselme
Dimier suggested 1140–60 for the beginning of work and 1170 for the completion.
Hanno Hahn likewise dated construction between 1140–70, perhaps following Aubert,
but again without discussion or sources. Robert Branner suggested that work had
started at the eastern end c. 1145 despite the absence of dosserets and formerets in the
transepts; both of these elements, he thought, appeared around 1150 in the nave,
which was completed soon after 1155 with the first ribbed vault in the Yonne valley.
Anne Prache, on the other hand, did not believe that ribbed vaults were originally intended in
the nave, and felt they could not be dated before 1160–70. Jean Bony likewise dated
construction of the nave to c. 1160, but without discussion. In a recent overview of
French Gothic architecture, Dieter Kimpel and Robert Suckale cite R. Branner's date of
1145 on, but apparently did not consider the nave of Pontigny as Gothic at all, since they
only discuss the choir.

Such is the state of the question with regard to the dating of Pontigny. We have a variety
of theories which are based mostly on different individual elements, and this is hardly the
most satisfactory way of situating a major edifice standing at the dawn of a new stylistic
era. My own approach in this brief study will be significantly different. Instead of
concentrating on individual elements of style, I shall examine the economic circum-
cstances of the abbey and its early history, together with its alleged ties to Count Thibaut
the Great of Champagne, and thereby attempt to date the construction of Pontigny not by
its style, but by its own past. In this way, we may avoid that circular dating which all too
frequently occurs when a study is based on a comparison of structural or decorative
details of one building with other buildings which are presumed to be contemporary.

Pontigny was founded in 1114 as the second daughter of Citeaux. The first abbot, Hugh
of Mâcon, had been appointed by Abbot Stephen Harding of Citeaux, and under
Hugh's devout and capable management, the nascent abbey appears to have flourished.
New vocations entered in a steady stream, and six daughter-houses were founded
during his abbacy of twenty-two years (1114–36). Hugh himself, however, does not
appear to have been concerned with major architectural projects. The earliest living
quarters at the abbey were probably made of wood, but we know that Hugh built a
modest stone chapel which was large enough to serve the growing community for some
time. When Hugh left Pontigny in 1136 to become bishop of Auxerre, he was succeeded by
Guichard, a monk from Citeaux. During Guichard's twenty-nine years as abbot
(1136–65), the number of religious at Pontigny increased dramatically and nine more
daughter abbeys were founded. According to a rotulus mortuorum of 1157, there were at
least fifty priests at Pontigny and a much greater number of non-ordained monks, plus,
of course, lay brothers. How and where such a large population was accommodated is not
known. And if they all worshipped in Abbot Hugh's original stone chapel, it must have
been under very cramped conditions.

The pattern of daughter-foundations, however, suggests that Abbot Guichard's
priorities differed somewhat from those of his predecessor. Abbot Hugh had launched
Pontigny's filiation in 1119 with two abbeys, and continued with two subsequent pairs of
foundations in 1124 and 1132. This pattern was at first maintained by Guichard, with
additional foundations at regular intervals: two in 1137, two in 1141, and three in 1145. But after 1145 the established rhythm ceased. There was a single foundation eleven years later in 1156, then the attachment of a Benedictine house with its six daughters in 1160, and a last foundation, in Hungary, in the late 1170s. What was the cause of this abrupt cessation of paired foundations after 1145? I would suggest that one reason might well have been the completion of permanent quarters — including the church — at Pontigny itself.

Although construction at Pontigny is not mentioned in any extant medieval documents, they do permit us to follow the establishment of the abbey’s holdings, the widening of its influence, and the exertion of its authority. Pontigny was founded in 1141 and the first transactions recorded in the cartulary were land donations four years later. The founding of new abbeys began in 1119, and the monks received further donations of land, exemptions from tithes and tolls and other privileges, while they sometimes exchanged or sold property in order to consolidate their territory. By 1138 they possessed a nearby quarry — they may have had another even earlier — and in the same year Pope Innocent II placed lands held by Pontigny under his protection. Four years later he issued a bull which, among other things, prohibited the diocese from vexing the monks in any way or collecting tithes from their property. Pontigny had ten granges by 1156, the year in which they were placed under papal protection, and the pope banned building any closer than half a league from the monks’ houses and farms. Numerous other charters confirm gifts, exchanges of property, exemptions, rights of usage, and other privileges during this time from people of all stations — from popes and kings to faithful commoners. But although all this activity is clear evidence of industriousness, prosperity, and expansion, we still find no reference to construction at the abbey.

Post-medieval compendia are another resource, obviously more distant in time, but important in that they occasionally refer to earlier sources which are now lost. They also organise information in a way that may bring events into a different light. It is indeed here where we first find mention of actual building at Pontigny. In his De l’illustre et insigni abbaye de Pontigny, Dom Georges Viole (1598–1669) described a lavish mid-twelfth-century project, funded by the wealthiest noble in France, Count Thibaut of Champagne:

... l’abbaye de Pontigny... fut obligée d’accroître ses espaces réguliers et enfermer dans ses murailles cinquante arpens de terre ou environ pour y bastir une des grandes et belles Eglises de l’ordre; un dortoir de cent sept pas de longueur, large de douze, avec des cloîtres, un chapitre, un parloir, un réfectoire des Infirmières, chambres des Hostes, logis abbatial, et autres appartements à proportion: le tout, ou du moins une grande partie, par les immenses libéralités de Thibaut, surnommé le Grand, comte de Champagne, père de la Reine Adèle femme du Roy Louis VII, élu Jeune, ce qui advint environ l’an 1156.

Dom Edme Robinet (1643–1720), writing two generations later, concurred that Count Thibaut had indeed made a generous donation:

... l’Abbaye de Pontigny... fut obligé d’accroître ses espaces réguliers, et d’enfermer de murailles quarante deux arpens de terre. On y construisit une belle et grande Eglise, une tour de cent sept pas de longueur, large de douze avec des cloîtres, un Chapitre, un parloir qui fut dédié, depuis à Guillaume Religieux et Prieur de Pontigny, et un Réfectoire, des Infirmières, un Noviciat, Logis des Hôtes, Logis Abbatial, et autres appartements à proportion: le tout bâti, vers l’an 1156.

des libéralités de Louis VII, dit le Grand.

Two points arise in relation to the architectural context of Thibaut’s construction. Count Thibaut himself is not an architect. His work at Pontigny has long been attributed to his life and influence in the architectural. Thibaut was born in Meaux, and also held territories in his father’s territories and in the Damascus. His sister, brother, and relatives also seem to have had a deep interest in the church (he and her sister, the Abbess of Preuilly (Seine-et-Oise) were considered highly involved in the abbey of Aumône in the late twelfth century). Thibaut’s abbey is considered to be only Saint-Jean-des-Bois. Thibaut’s abbey was not a new one, but rather an expansion of the world than a great deal of expansion when his uncle, the abbey’s founder, died.

Twelve years after Thibaut’s death, the abbey was in a state of decline. Count Thibaut’s cousin, a monk named Norbert, tried to revive the monastery, but was unsuccessful because of his uncle’s death.

Unfortunately, the story of the Thibaut family doesn’t end with the destruction of the monastery. The family continued to own land in the area, and their influence continued to be felt for many years to come. The Thibaut name continued to be associated with the monastery, and their legacy lives on in the memories of the people who knew them. Today, the monastery is remembered as a symbol of the power and influence of the Thibaut family, and as a testament to the legacy of their commitment to the faith.
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des libéralités de Thibaud le Grand Comte de Champagne, père de la Reine Adèle épouse de Louis VII, dit le Jeune Roi de France. 41

Two points are of particular interest here: first, that the building of Pontigny’s church and cloister complex was accomplished ‘around the year 1150’, and secondly, that Count Thibaut the Great of Champagne was the donor. But while Thibaut’s connexion to Pontigny has long been acknowledged, it has never been investigated, and a brief glimpse of his life and involvement with the Cistercians may help to illuminate the role he played in the architectural history of Pontigny. 42

Thibaut was born about the year 1093 to Étienne-Henri, count of Blois, Chartres, and Meaux, and Adèle of England, daughter of William the Conqueror, and inherited his father’s territories in 1102 when Étienne-Henri was killed in the Holy Land. The death of his sister, brother-in-law, and four cousins in the wreck of the White Ship in 1120 seems to have had a deep effect upon him, for although he had already shown generosity to the church (he and his mother had donated land to Cîteaux in 1118 to found the abbey of Freuilly (Seine-et-Marne)), Thibaut’s interest in monasteries appears to have increased considerably after this tragedy. In 1121 he contributed to the foundation of the Cistercian abbey of Aumône near Blois, and in 1122 he made substantial donations to the church of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes in Soissons. 43 In the same year he helped establish an Augustinian abbey in Blois, and continued as intercessor for and protector of Peter Abelard. 44

Thibaut’s continued generosity toward religious institutions has often been credited to the influence of Saint Norbert. It is reported in the saint’s vita that in 1122 Thibaut went to see Norbert at Prémontré and offered him all his possessions in exchange for profession as a monk. Norbert apparently suggested to Thibaut that he could serve the church better in the world than in a monastery, and advised the young nobleman to find a wife. 45 He married Mathilda of Carinthia in 1123 or 1124, and became count of Champagne in 1125 when his uncle, Hugues of Champagne, named him as his successor.

Twelve years later, in 1137, Thibaut’s political power reached its apogee. It was in that year that Louis VII ascended the throne, and the young king was eager to accept Thibaut’s counsel. In 1138, the author of the Annales ordinis St. Benedicti could write that ‘count Thibaut set the whole kingdom of France in order as deputy for the king, a situation from which the church also appeared to benefit’. 46 It was also during this period that Thibaut was most generous to monasteries, even those far from his domain. 47

Unfortunately, the co-operative relationship between Thibaut and Louis did not last. After the King reached his majority in 1140 the two men fell into discord and eventually came to blows. 48 It is not surprising, perhaps, that the Count’s generosity toward monasteries diminished significantly during this period of strife. But when the King went to the Holy Land in 1147, Thibaut’s donations to monastic houses began to increase, and they remained considerable until his death in 1152. According to Arbois de Jubainville, Thibaut was professed as a Cistercian monk shortly before he died. 49 Some early Cistercian histories maintain, mistakenly, that he was buried at Pontigny. 50 In fact, he died and was buried at Lagny. 51

Thibaut’s generosity to monasteries was by no means limited to the Cistercians, but his patronage of the Order is undoubtedly worthy of notice. 52 In addition to the gifts to Preuilly in 1118 and Aumône in 1121 mentioned above, he provided the means for the construction of buildings at the new abbey of Jouy-en-Brie (Seine-et-Marne), the fourth
daughter of Pontigny, in 1124.53 Again, in the early 1130s when his nephew and vassal Count Ebal of Montfort, founded the abbey of Evau-en-Ornois (Meuse), he did so with Thibault's full support and generous participation.54 Thibault not only made a gift of land, but also donated 500 gold coins toward the construction of the monastery.55 A short time later, in the mid-1130s, when the site of Clairvaux was moved, new and larger quarters— including the great church—were constructed at Thibault's expense.56 So important was this donation that Thibault was sometimes called the 'founder' of Clairvaux.57 In 1136 the Count also built a church for the abbey of Signy (Ardenne), a direct daughter of Clairvaux,58 as well as contributing to the construction of Silvanès in the Rouergue (Aveyron) after its affiliation to Citeaux in 1136.59

Precisely how the means for construction were provided is rarely set out as clearly as at Evaux, but on at least one occasion Thibault had given jewels to monks as alms, for the way in which they were converted into cash was described gleefully by Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis. The jewels had come from the treasury of Thibault’s uncle, Henry I of England, who (according to Suger) ‘had amassed them throughout his life in wonderful vessels’.60 They had been given to Thibault in 1137 by his younger brother King Stephen.61 Suger, meanwhile, had been searching without success for glittering stones to adorn a golden crucifix, and his problem was providentially resolved when monks from Citeaux, a second (unnamed) Cistercian abbey, and Fontevraud came to Saint-Denis and ‘entered the little chamber adjacent to the church and offered us for sale an abundance of gems such as we had not hoped to find in ten years, hyacinths, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, topazes’, all received from Count Thibault as alms. Suger did not disguise his delight: ‘We, freed from the worry of searching for gems, thanked God and gave for hundreds of pounds for the lot though they were worth much more.’62

There can be no doubt, therefore, that Thibault of Champagne was an important patron of the Cistercians, but whether he was an important patron of Pontigny still remains to be determined. We know that sometime between 1125 and 1132 he confirmed the donation of a vineyard in neighbouring Saint-Florentin that his mother had made to the monks of Pontigny, while at the same time cancelling a debt of eight deniers’ rent which the monks owed him, and approving in advance all donations made to Pontigny in his fiefs.63 Again, in 1141 he witnessed an act wherein one of his vassals, Guerin de Venisy, exempted Pontigny from all customs on his lands,64 and eight years later, in 1149, he exempted the monks of Pontigny from all taxes on the buying and selling of goods for their own use within his domain.65 We are also told by Robinet and Viole that shortly after Thibault’s death in 1152, Thibault’s widow ‘légua encore un clos de vignes dans la Vicomté de Saint-Florentin’ to the monks of Pontigny.66

Such notices as these, however, are not especially impressive, and none of them implies that Thibault played any role at all in the construction of Pontigny. But if we turn to the Speculum of Vincent of Beauvais, we do find evidence which links Thibault to Pontigny in much more than a passing way. Vincent tells us that Queen Adèle, the mother of Philip Augustus, was buried at Pontigny, which her father, Count Thibault, is said to have founded.57 Vincent’s history, written around 1250, indicates clearly a close connexion between Thibault and the abbey, and later writers, from the seventeenth century onwards, frequently echo Vincent in speaking of Thibault as Pontigny’s founder.68 One is reminded of the similar situation at Clairvaux, discussed above: there too Thibault was sometimes referred to as ‘founder’ of the abbey in the 1130s. I made the construction of the church without his help, but the donation of land and gold was an important contribution. The other matter is that of the inheritance. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology’. The other matter is that of the inheritance. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology’. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology’. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology’. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology’. Thibault, who died in 1116, left his lands to his sons, but in 1180 he was buried at Pontigny, which had been founded in 1147 and was to be buried at Pontigny, as it was considered ‘necrology'.
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referred to as ‘founder’ after he had donated the means for construction of the second church in the 1130s. It is not difficult to see how the name of a person whose generosity made the construction of an imposing edifice possible would be remembered by those who used it — especially when it was a large and beautiful church, likely to provoke admiration from visitors. It is also obvious that a complex as immense and as homogeneous as the church and claustral buildings at Pontigny could not have been undertaken without financial help from the outside. Thus, while Vincent may have exaggerated Thibaut’s role in the history of Pontigny, it is unlikely that his mention of the Count was gratuitous. It is much more probable that he was reporting a contemporary tradition that Thibaut had indeed ‘founded’ the monastery, when, in fact, he had provided most of the means for its construction.

The other matter raised by Vincent is the burial of Thibaut’s daughter at Pontigny. Adèle of Champagne married her father’s former rival, King Louis VII, in 1160, and in 1165 gave birth to a long-awaited male heir to the French throne. When her husband died in 1180 he was buried at the Cistercian abbey of Barbeaux (Seine-et-Marne) which he had founded in 1147 and which he had intended as his mausoleum. Adèle, however, elected to be buried at Pontigny, although the reason why she chose this location is not immediately obvious. Pontigny is on the border of Champagne — Adèle’s native region where she founded and made donations to other monasteries — but this obscures rather than explains the choice. If, however, she held Pontigny in special reverence because her father had built it, her election of the abbey as her final resting place is easy to understand.

We must also remember that patronage could be intimately involved with politics, and the linkage here between the two has been examined by Michel Bur. Bur observes that by founding or rebuilding monasteries, Thibaut acquired the privileges of founder de facto, if not de jure, and, as a result, the prerogatives of guardian or avowry attached to this title. This acquisition of power became even more important from the late eleventh century on since many abbeys had been built in forests at the outer reaches of the county. By aiding them, therefore, Thibaut not only extended his presence and his influence out to the frontier, but also let it be known that anyone who wished to undertake a foundation could not do so without his consent. This is an important point and one of immediate relevance to Pontigny, for the abbey is located at the extreme north-eastern corner of the county of Auxerre at the juncture of the counties of Tonnerre (to the east), and Champagne (to the north). It was Count Guillaume II of Nevers, Auxerre, and Tonnerre who had approved Pontigny’s foundation in 1114 and within whose jurisdiction the cloister itself was located. But in Thibaut’s earlier battles with King Louis VI, Guillaume had been firmly on the side of the Crown, and had been imprisoned at Thibaut’s order for seven months in 1115, and again in 1130. Thibaut’s generosity toward Pontigny may not, therefore, have been without political considerations.

It is also possible that Thibaut’s generosity to Pontigny unwittingly created a link with the house of Blois that was to serve several decades later. Michel Bur raises another possible political consideration in recalling that Thomas Becket, during his battle with the (Angevin) king of England, Henry II Plantagenet, was to seek refuge at Pontigny in 1164, an event which has never been adequately explained. Bur has made the tempting suggestion that if indeed construction at Pontigny had been financed by King Henry’s
treasury (given to Thibaut by King Stephen in 1137), the sympathy existing between the houses of Normandy and Blois might have been extended to Pontigny, allowing the latter to emerge decades later as a welcome place where the archbishop, adversary of the Plantagenet king, could go for asylum.76

Let us now return to the central issue of this brief study: the date of Pontigny's construction. The date c. 1150, first mentioned by Viole and then reported by Robinet, Martene, and almost all subsequent authors, has usually been interpreted to mean that this monumental building project was undertaken in that year. But neither Viole nor Robinet were that precise; 'environ' or 'vers l'an 1150' is a round figure, not a terminus ad quo. Other evidence suggests that the church was actually begun earlier, and was well advanced, if not completed, by 1150.

The Bernardine plan, with its flat-ended chevet and one or more pairs of rectangular chapels off the eastern sides of each transept, was in its first stages of implementation in the 1130s. The church built at Pontigny at this time did indeed follow this plan, with three eastern chapels off each transept arm. 77 As we have seen, the construction of the church at Clairvaux was begun in 1133 or 1135 under Count Thibaut's patronage, and at Citeaux, where plans were under way in the 1130s, the actual building of the church had begun by 1140. It will be remembered that Guichard, the second abbot of Pontigny, had come from Citeaux in 1136. I would suggest that the most likely time for construction at Pontigny was at the beginning of Guichard's abbacy. Plans at Citeaux were well under way and would have been fresh in the mind of the new abbot, who arrived at Pontigny to find it flooded with large numbers of vocations requiring more spacious accommodation. This was the moment when enthusiasm for large-scale building would have been at its peak. We know that the abbey owned a quarry by 1138,78 and construction at Pontigny at this time may also be reflected in the number of charters, beginning in the mid-1130s, concerning the acquisition of forests, either by donation, sale, or usufruct.79 Timber was, of course, essential for building. As for Thibaut, receipt of his uncle's treasury in 1137 would have provided him with a timely source of revenue to support construction at Pontigny, as well as at Clairvaux.

The length of time needed to build the great church at Pontigny is another indication of the quality of financial support. While this subject has also been a source of speculation (with estimates ranging from ten to fifty or more years), meticulous analysis of the structure leaves no doubt but that it was built very rapidly. Alterations are present but there are no breaks in construction, and the way in which the changes were absorbed into the fabric is an argument for — not against — swift building, of the sort one would expect with a wealthy patron.80 A further indicator for early and rapid construction is the mysterious and abrupt cessation of new building after 1145. This coincides with the peak of Cistercian expansion when the largest number of vocations can be expected, suggesting that the monastery quarters were able by then to accommodate a significantly larger community.

It is apparent from the variety of attempts, extending over 150 years of modern scholarship, that no single element provides reliable evidence for dating construction at Pontigny. It is only through a detailed reading of the texts, coupled with a careful yet wide-ranging view of the history, that the many elements which influenced building at Pontigny can be interpreted coherently. The result, as I have shown above, suggests a date for the beginning of construction.

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1 Citeaux (Côte-d'Or), 1113. This was foliated by Jean-Berthold Mahr-Friedlander, 'Le goulet' 68–79; for a summary in Monastic History (1987), 193–99.
3 Anselm丁蒙 (B. C.).
6 For a discussion of the influence from — or the influence on Pontigny's design of Citeaux (see R. M. Historians, 29 (1970), 291–310).
8 The oldest of the four, the west front (1137–1145), the east front (1137–1145), the north wall (1137–1145), and the south wall (1137–1145) are all early works. The rest of the church was built between 1145 and 1150.
9 The construction of the new abbey church at Pontigny was begun in 1137.
11 Thébault, Annals, 1150–1155.
12 The abbey church was begun in 1137.
date for the beginning of work in the late 1130s, shortly after the arrival of the second abbot, Guichard, and thanks to the generosity of a man on whom history tried to pin the legend of founder, Count Thibaut of Champagne. A happy marriage of excellent organisation and extensive resources, coupled with the fervour (and probably assistance) of a rapidly growing community, permitted the immense church at Pontigny to be achieved with celerity by or shortly after the middle of the twelfth century.

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NOTES

1 Diocese (Côte-d’Or) was founded in 1068 and established its first daughter, La Ferté-sur-Grosne (Saône-et-Loire), in 1111. This was followed by Pontigny (Yonne) in 1114, Clairvaux (Aube) and Mortomond (Haute-Marne) in 1115. See Berthold Mahn, L’ordre cistercien et son gouvernement des origines au milieu du XIIIe siècle (1098-1255) (Paris 1951); Colette Houdard, ‘Le gouvernement de Cîteaux’, Saint Bernard et le monde cistercien (L. Pressoyre & T. Kinder, eds., Paris 1990), 38-49 for a summary of the origins of the order (with bibliography), see David Knowles, Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History (London 1962), 198-222.


3 For a reconstruction of the original eastern end, see Terri N. Kinder, ‘The Original Chevet of Pontigny’s Church’ in Indo in Cistercian Art and Architecture (M. P. Lillich, ed.), 11 (Kalamazoo, Michigan 1983), 30-8 and figs. 1-15 (following 1985).

4 On proportions, see Hann Hahn, Die früh-baukunst der Zisterzienser (Berlin 1930), 175, and Terri N. Kinder, Architecture of the Cistercian Abbey of Pontigny. The Twelfth-Century Church (doctoral thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 1983), 77-8, 174-6. Outside the Cistercian sphere, the date of Pontigny’s church is significant in understanding the influence from — or toward — other major monasteries in the region. Of particular importance is the effect of Sens cathedral on Pontigny’s design — or vice versa — since the dates of construction at Sens are at least as open to interpretation as those of Pontigny (see Kenneth W. Severens, ‘The Early Campaign at Sens’, 1140-1145’, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 29 (1970), 97-107, and Jacques Henriet, ‘La cathédrale de Sens: le parti du premier maître et les campagnes du XIe siècle’, Bulletin monumental, 140 (1982), 81-168).

5 The oldest of the post-medieval histories was written by Dom Georges Viole, Maurist and former prior of Saint-Germain in Auxerre (De libera et insigni abbaye de Pontigny. Abriégé chronologique, Municipal library, Auxerre, MS 157 (written after 1651), 1610-1754). Somewhat better known is the three-volume study by Dom Edme Robinet (Abriégé chronologique de l’histoire de l’Abbaye et des Abbés de Pontigny de l’ordre de Cîteaux, au Dicetire d’Auxerre, Municipal library, Auxerre, MS 225). There is some confusion regarding the date and author of this MS, since there was a monk named Edme Robinet at Pontigny around this time. One was prior of Chaulis, Bourras and Chalais before retiring to Pontigny in his later years; he died there in 1750 at the age of 77. It is usually thought that he was the author of the MS in question. In a copy of this MS (Auxerre Library MS 225), however, is an inscription stating that the original was made ‘toward 1750’; the copy was brought up to date by the last abbot of Pontigny. In the original, unfortunately, the last pages are missing; one cannot therefore verify the date of the final entry. As to the other two men, one was professé in 1698 for the abbey of Chaulis; the other (Edme Robinet l’Aîné) took final vows in 1692 for the daughter-abbey of Gercy. The signature of one of these men appears in various Pontigny documents from 1691 until 1755; he was, in fact, procurator there in 1734, although there is nothing on which to base an authorship of the MS in question. An incomplete nineteenth-century copy is located in the Cistercian Studies Institute Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

6 Edouard Martene and Ursin Durand give the date of c. 1150, citing Georges Viole as their source (‘Historia abbatiæ Pontigniensis et de monasteriis, ordinis cisterciensis in diocesi Autissiodorensi, per chartas et instrumenta ejusdem monasterii’, Theses novae auctariorun 3 (Paris 1717), cols. 1221-2). The compilers of the Gallia christiana (12 (1770), col. 440) repeat the date of c. 1150 without citing a source.


9 Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XIe au XVle siècle, 1 (Paris 1858), 272.
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10 Zwei Cisterzienserkirchen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Anfänge des gotischen Stils, Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstammlungen, 12 (1891), 93.

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abati placuerit, capiant in petraria ipsius abbatis et conventus Pontiniacensis ...' (Mathieu-Maximilien Quantin, ed.,
Cartulaire général de l'Yonne, t. (Auxerre 1854), 330).


8. Ibid.


10. Dom Georges Viole and Dom Edme Robinet (see n. 5) organised their MSS according to the reigns of the abbots, ability associated with the abbey, famous persons buried there, and so on. Hence Abbot Guichard's reception of Thomas Leclerc in 1164 and the ensuing two years of Becket's stormy stay at Pontigny are described in detail, while other information is recorded only as a by-product of the people involved.

11. In addition to these two authors, see also Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture, 2nd edn. (Paris 1903), 1462-5; Dom Jean Leherf, Histoire de la prière d'aux Yonne par les Huguenots, et de la délivrance de la même ville, les années 1568 & 1569 (Auxerre 1763), 266-75.


13. Robinet, Municipal library, Auxerre, MS 229, fol. 4v.

14. As Theodore Evergates has pointed out, lack of documents has prevented anything more than a fragmented appraisal of Becket's accomplishments. In the twenty-seven years he held the lands around Troyes as well as Blois, he appears to have had comparatively few problems, which were immediately resolved by the priests associated with the abbey.


16. Édgar de Beaujeu, although common in the Lyonnais (see Calasai), is rare elsewhere (see De Calasai: 1145, L'Étrange et Maritime: 1162, Doly: 1161, Loc-Dieu: Aveyron).

17. Edmond Martene, Le Bollandier, Aveyron.

18. Exroto Galonis episcope, of the 6th century, ait pas de texte.

19. Some were dispersed or lost: the Vitry and the ville de ville of the sciences historiques and library of Auxerre or the abbey of Chartres. See also Monique Peyrafort, ‘Commentaire Cistercium 45’, which has been published by Martineau in the Library of the Yonne.

20. Abbatia Pontiniacensis ad uno, ut ipsa, quanduodi dicto
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61 This gift was accompanied by an annual rent of 2,000 silver marks from King Stephen as compensation for Thibaut having renounced pretension to the English throne (Michel Bur, La formation du comité de Champagne v. 930-1159 (Nancy 1977), 289 and n. 18).
63 Garrigues, Le premier cartulaire, 180, act n° 112.
64 Garrigues, Le premier cartulaire, 190-1, act n° 58.
65 Garrigues, Le premier cartulaire, 87-8, act n° 5; Quantin, Cartulaire général de l’Yonne 1:447-8; Martene and Durand, ‘Historia Pontinianica’, col. 1290.
66 Viole, Auxerre library MS 157, p. 1718 (citing ‘Robert d’Aucerre’); Robinet, Auxerre library MS 292, f. 44.
67 In sequenti vero mensa Adela Regis Philippi mater apud Parisios obit, & in Burgundia sequenti est apud Pontinianum patrem sui Theobaldi Comitem Crescentium atque Blesium, qui praejectum vix dictum monasterium fundavit (Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum maius, 4, Speculum historiale (Douai 1624; repr. Graz 1963), Book 29, Chapter xxvii, p. 128).
68 After publication of the Speculum historiale in 1624, Thibaut was frequently cited as Pontigny’s founder (for example, by Claude Robert in Gallia christiana (Paris 1626), 635; Gaspar Jongelin, Origines (Golgotha 1641), p. 5; and in later works, such as Dom Beaunier’s Recueil historique, chronologique, et topographique des archétoches, estiçifs, abbayes et prieries de France, ii (Paris 1726), 829). This misunderstanding was corrected by Martene and Durand in 1717 when they wrote: ‘There are, who say that Thibault, the very pious count of Champagne, was the founder of Pontigny, as he was merely an outstanding benefactor of the monastery’ (‘Historia Pontinianica’, cols 1224-5, paraphrased in Gallia christiana, xiii, 440).
69 This can be seen in architectural patronage in our own time (it is self-evident to anyone who has served on a building committee for fund-raising): care is the patron who donates funds anonymously or does not wish the building to immortalize his name. I am not suggesting that Thibault deliberately sought immortality by building churches all over France; this was the effect of his gifts, and perhaps prompted chroniclers to rhapsodize over less visible forms of his generosity as well (see n. 47).
70 Adèle oversaw the construction of a lavish tomb for Louis at Barbeaux, and there is some question that she wished to be buried there herself, but was denied permission by the General Chapter on the grounds that she was not a founder of the monastery (see Alain Erlange-Brandenburg, Le Reis est mort (Geneva 1975), 87-8, 90-1).
71 See n. 34.
72 This question will be considered more fully in my forthcoming article on the reconstruction of the Gothic choir at Pontigny toward the end of the twelfth century and Queen Adèle’s burial there in 1160.
74 It is not known whether the first donations included territory on the north side of the Seine River in Champagne proper, but Pontigny expanded its holdings into Thibaut’s domain at least as far as when the abbey was given a parcel of land just north of the river (Garrigues, Le premier cartulaire, 180, act n° 87).
75 Achille Luchaire, Louis VII Le Gros (Paris 1890), 101-2; Yvca Saisinas, Recherches sur le pouvoir comtal en Auxois au xiii siècle (Auxerre 1975), 75 and n. 73, 170-1 and n. 676; Bur, La formation du comité de Champagne, 283-5.
76 Correspondence, January 1994.
77 See n. 3.
78 See n. 34.
79 Garrigues, Le premier cartulaire, passim; M. Quantin, ed., Cartulaire général de l’Yonne, 1, passim; Departmental archives of the Vienne, H 1398-1775, passim.
80 Evidence of the rapid building will be presented in my forthcoming article on the construction.

THE BUILDING

This paper examines the involvement of patrons in the architectural details of the choir. Little is known of the architects, but the work was simplified by the involvement of patrons. The church was built by the monks of the Abbey of Saint-Denis, who had a long tradition of working with local craftsmen. The building was begun in 1077 and completed in 1078. The nave was 40 meters long and 10 meters wide, with a height of 10 meters. The choir was 40 meters long and 10 meters wide, with a height of 14 meters. The building was constructed of stone, with a roof of timber. The nave had three aisles, and the choir had two. The choir was built in the Romanesque style, with arched windows and a vaulted ceiling. The nave was built in the Early Gothic style, with pointed arches and rib vaults. The building was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and was used for both religious and secular purposes. The church was a center of learning and culture, and it played a significant role in the development of the arts and sciences in the region. The building was restored in the 19th century, and it is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. St Mary de Haura,Sussex. Originally a small church, it has been incorporated into the larger church of St Mary de Haura. The church is first recorded in 1047, when it was granted to the Abbot of St Mary de Haura. The church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and it is a small, single-nave structure with a small nave and a smaller choir. The church is built of stone, with a roof of timber. The church was restored in the 19th century, and it is now a Grade I listed building. William de Brie, a member of the de Brie family, was the owner of the property held in Susse, and the church was built by a local craftsman named Henry. William de Brie was a member of the de Brie family, and he was the owner of the property held in Susse. The church was built by Henry, a local craftsman, and it was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The church is a small, single-nave structure with a small nave and a smaller choir. The church is built of stone, with a roof of timber. The church was restored in the 19th century, and it is now a Grade II* listed building. William de Brie, a member of the de Brie family, was the owner of the property held in Susse, and the church was built by a local craftsman named Henry. William de Brie was a member of the de Brie family, and he was the owner of the property held in Susse. The church was built by Henry, a local craftsman, and it was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The church is a small, single-nave structure with a small nave and a smaller choir. The church is built of stone, with a roof of timber. The church was restored in the 19th century, and it is now a Grade II* listed building.