

---

## *The Financing of the Cistercian Order*\*

John Hine Mundy  
Columbia University, New York

Introduced by two brief essays by the editors, the bulk of this monograph publishes a transcription of a fifteenth-century copy of a list compiled about 1354-5 recording the tax assessments levied on the houses of the Cistercian order. The assessments are listed in Roman numerals on the *verso*, and the *recto* facing this list identifies the pertinent houses with geographical information. I would have preferred Arabic numerals for the assessments because they would have allowed placing the facing pages (*verso* and *recto*) so that the book could be studied without having to turn it over. The geographical material might also have been more helpful. It is useful to know that Holstein and Scania were once part of Denmark, but one wishes that similar care had been shown about the part of eastern Germany now in Poland.

The edition of a text cannot be reviewed unless one either knows it or sees the original, and I will therefore instead point out how useful this document will be for economic and other history — when carefully studied. As a statistical source, the document has both advantages and disadvantages. As to the former, it may be argued that, regardless of its method of compilation and its sources of information, this list must have had some relation to reality. It may be true, as Mr. King asserts (p. 31) that the assessments of some Danish, English, and Gascon houses were low, but I wonder about his evidence. When he says, for example, that Berdoues in Gascony was taxed less than its filial Eaunes in Languedoc, he is merely making a mistake, having confused the

---

\* ARNE ODD JOHNSEN and PETER KING, *The Tax Book of the Cistercian Order*. Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, Hist.-Filos. Klasse, Avhandlingar, Ny serie No. 16. Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø, Universitetsforlaget, 1979. Pp. 123.

rich house of Aulnes in Hainaut with Eaunes. It is likely, moreover, that the real erroneous estimations found in the list are shared equally by the large regions concerned, unless, of course, it can be shown that certain regions were favoured or disfavoured in the legislation of the order. Another quality enhancing the value of the list for statistical purposes is that there was an inadvertent 'mixer' built into it. The houses are listed according to their filiation to the original five great French houses by which they were founded: La Ferté (16 houses in its *generatio*), Pontigny (45), Cîteaux (95), Morimond (219), and Clairvaux (426). One notes that even the smallest of these 'generations,' La Ferté, had filials in Italy, France, the Empire, and the Near East, and that the larger ones were even more widely spread.

The difficulties presented by this document are also many. Mr. King remarks (pp. 11-12) that repetitions of the names of houses make the total of 801 houses 'closer to 650 than to 800,' and further adds that 12 houses known to have existed have been omitted in the list. My own reading of the transcription and the editor's notes gives 679 monasteries useful for purposes of quantification. In addition to the repetitions discerned by the editors, I deleted 4 nunneries (in principle, they were exempt from tax), 2 monasteries because they have not been identified, 1 Italian monastery because its assessment was less than 1 pound (Tournois) and 10 because they had no listed assessments after their names. Interestingly, 6 of the latter category were Near Eastern houses, some long since dissolved. These were kept on the list presumably because of the nostalgia characteristic of all failing imperialisms. In addition to the omitted houses mentioned above one notes that there are no assessments given for the 5 innovative and probably major French monasteries from which the order spread, an omission that surely weakens our estimate of the average wealth of France. The difference between the total numbers of houses either listed or known to have existed and the total numbers of houses useful for quantification are shown in tables 1 and 2 below.

TABLE 1

TOTAL NUMBERS OF HOUSES BY AREA

	Numbers	%
France	231	32.7
Germany	133	18.8
British Isles	127	18.0
Italy	85	12.0
Portugal - Spain	66	9.3
Denmark - Norway - Sweden	19	2.6
Hungary - Croatia	16	2.2
Poland Danzig Latvia	15	2.1
Greece - Cyprus and Near East	13	1.8
Total	705	

TABLE 2

TOTAL NUMBERS OF QUANTIFIABLE HOUSES BY AREA

	Numbers	%
France	222	32.6
Germany	126	18.5
British Isles	126	18.5
Italy	83	12.2
Portugal - Spain	64	9.4
Denmark - Norway - Sweden	18	2.6
Croatia - Hungary	16	2.3
Poland - Danzig - Latvia	15	2.2
Greece - Cyprus	8	1.3
Total	679	

Table 3 presents a general breakdown by large regions of all quantifiable Cistercian houses. It is not surprising to see that France, on whose medieval frontiers this order was born, possessed not only the largest number of houses but also the highest average assessment for individual houses. Nor is it puzzling

TABLE 3

CONTRIBUTIONS BY HOUSE IN POUNDS TOURNOIS IN LATIN EUROPE

Group	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Average assessment of each house	
France	95	64	23	21	11	4	4	222	16.2
British Isles	47	50	19	9	0	1	0	126	14.0
Germany	59	50	6	6	4	1	0	126	12.5
Italy	37	32	9	2	2	1	0	83	12.8
Iberia	35	19	4	4	1	1	0	64	12.0
Denmark - Norway									
Sweden	10	8	0	0	0	0	0	18	8.9
Hungary - Croatia	9	6	0	1	0	0	0	16	10.1
Poland - Danzig -									
Latvia	11	4	0	0	0	0	0	15	7.1
Greece - Cyprus	6	2	1	0	0	0	0	8	8.9
	309	235	62	43	18	8	4	679	

\* For this analysis, Flanders, then part of the monarchy, is in France. The rest of the Low Countries, Alsace, Mosel-Lorraine, Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and the parts of today's Poland to the west of West Prussia, Poznan, and Opole (Oppeln in Upper Silesia) are in Germany.

to find that the lowest assessments were on Europe's peripheries, Scandinavia, the Baltic, Poland, Croatia-Hungary, and Greece and Cyprus. But certain nations pose special problems. On the whole, the relative modesty of Iberian Cistercianism is probably justified by the poverty of that peninsula, a condition attested by the fact that most of the houses were located either along the coastal regions of both the Atlantic and Mediterranean or in the north. If, on the other hand, Alcántara and Calantrava, the two Cistercian military houses and orders, had been obligated to pay taxes instead of being exempt, the average assessment per monastery would probably have put Spain near the same level as that of richer Italy.

Italy itself is something of a puzzle. It is both low in numbers of houses and low in individual assessments. Especially striking is the fact, as we see in table 4, that the assessments are higher in southern Italy and the islands than in the richer and more urbanized areas of Lombardy, the Veneto, Romagna,

TABLE 4

CONTRIBUTIONS IN POUNDS TOURNOIS BY HOUSE IN ITALY

Area	1-9	19-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Total	Average contribution
Southern Italy									
March, Abruzzi, Campania, Sicily & Sardinia	6	16	5	1	2	0	0	30	16.8
Northern Italy	31	16	4	1	0	1	0	53	10.5
	37	32	9	2	2	1	0	83	12.8

and Tuscany. This may well be because, since Cistercian houses grew especially during the twelfth century, available locations in rich agricultural areas and close to urban centres had been largely occupied by the earlier and ample spread of Benedictine monasticism, impeded by the new Italian orders of the Cistercians' own time, and their further economic growth inhibited by the enormous expansion of the mendicants there in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. All the same, a similar argument could be made for northern France and for much of west central and southern Germany, including Switzerland and Austria. In brief, the relative poverty of Italy's Cistercians must remain something of a mystery for the moment, but it serves to emphasize the fact that this list must be studied in conjunction with information about the wealth and distribution of older, contemporary, and later orders.

The best areas for purposes of comparison are those where the majority

of the houses were located, namely the British Isles, France, and Germany. In Germany, the houses with assessments of 30 pounds (Tournois) and above were in two principal areas, 5 in Brabant, Hainault, and Wallonia in modern Belgium, 4 more in the adjoining regions of Hesse and the Palatinate, 1 near Tübingen in Württemberg, and 1 in Austria. The difference between 'centre' and 'periphery' may be seen by dividing this large area into two parts, one northern and western and the other southern and eastern. As table 5 shows, the former is richer than the latter, and the contrast would be sharper were one to include in the latter the Slavic houses of Poland proper and the German ones from Danzig to Latvia. Here, however, one must recall that the rise of the Teutonic order in eastern Germany in the thirteenth century surely weakened the growth of the Cistercian houses there, and one has to be equally cautious about Switzerland and Austria because of the older Benedictine houses there.

In table 6 of the British Isles, the contrast is between England and the northern and western extremities of the Isles. As expected, England was very rich and Ireland, Scotland, and Wales relatively poor. What is impressive

TABLE 5

CONTRIBUTIONS IN POUNDS OF TOURS OF HOUSES IN GERMANY

Area	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Totals	Average Contribution
<b>Western and Northern</b>									
Germany	36	30	5	3	2	0	0	76	
Low Countries (Less Flanders)	1	5	0	2	2	1	0	11	
Alsace Mosel	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	
	43	35	5	5	4	1	0	93	13.2
Switzerland	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	
Austria	4	6	0	1	0	0	0	11	
Bohemia & Moravia	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	11	
German - Poland	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	7	
	16	15	1	1	0	0	0	33	10.5
<b>Totals</b>	59	50	6	6	4	1	0	126	12.5

TABLE 6

## CONTRIBUTIONS IN POUNDS TOURNOIS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

Area	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Totals	Average Contribution
England	21	23	8	7	0	1	0	60	15.3
Ireland - Scotland - Wales	26	27	11	2	0	0	0	66	12.8
	47	50	19	9	0	1	9	126	14.0

here, however, is that the average house in the 'quasi-Celtic fringe' was assessed higher than that in south and eastern Germany and about the same as the average house in Italy. An explanation for this may possibly be that these regions were richer than one is accustomed to believe, but the high assessments are more likely to have been caused by the relative weakness of earlier monasticism there and the later more modest development of the mendicant orders. Whatever the case, the overall picture given by the British Isles seems to show that Cistercian houses primarily reflected rural wealth and were only indirectly influenced by urban centres. In England, for example, the wealthier houses are to be found all the way from Northumberland in the north to Devon in the south, and the distribution is remarkably even throughout.

The area showing the sharpest contrast between rich and poor areas is France itself. When one separates from France the poor maritime provinces of Brittany and the larger part of southern France, the results are striking as may be seen in table 7. As map 2 shows below, moreover, the area defined as southern France does not suffice to contain all the poorer areas of this large country. It omits, for example, the poor regions of the Jura and Vosges moun-

TABLE 7

## CONTRIBUTIONS IN POUNDS TOURNOIS OF HOUSES IN FRANCE

Area	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Total	Average Contribution
North France - Flanders	48	50	20	14	11	4	4	151	19.0
South France - Brittany	47	14	3	7	0	0	0	71	10.2
	95	64	23	21	11	4	4	222	16.2

tains. Nor, furthermore, was southern France quite as poor as its Cistercian houses indicate. The regions around Toulouse, maritime Languedoc, and the lower valley of the Rhone witnessed an extraordinary growth of mendicant houses (one only equalled in northwest France) which surely diminished the wealth of the Cistercian and other monastic orders earlier established there. In spite of these reservations, the division into rich and poor seems reasonable. Except for the relative poverty of eastern France, a region whose potential was not agrarian but rather industrial and only realized in modern times, the division resembles that of modern France before 1914. This vision of France is reinforced, moreover, when we look at map 1 containing only the very richest houses, those with assessments of 40 or more pounds (Tournois), and contrast it with map 2 of the poorest houses, those with assessments of 1 to 5 pounds. If one removes from consideration the five founding houses whose wealth, as remarked above, is not mentioned in this list, it is evident that the heart of Cistercian wealth included the modern departments of France and the adjacent provinces of modern Belgium running in an arc from Paris to Ghent or Brussels. In fine, especially when we remember that the distribution of Cistercian monasteries is light in the region south and southeast of Paris and around Burgundy and adjoining regions where the Cluniac Benedictines had earlier enjoyed their greatest expansion, it is obvious that northern France and Belgium were richer than their neighbours in England and the western reaches of the German medieval empire. This was the richest and most developed agricultural area of western Europe in the early fourteenth century, and it is likely that the wealth of this countryside was multiplied by the fact that this area was also one of the two great urban regions of the time.



