B. P. McGuire, Conflict and Continuity at Øm abbey (Opuscula Graecolatina, no 8), Copenhagen, 1976.

This is a contribution to the study of Cistercian monasticism in Denmark, based on the Chronicle of Øm abbey (Exordium monasterii Carae insulae), a remarkable document of Danish Medieval Latin literature.

It is preserved in an original manuscript in the Copenhagen Royal Library (Ms. E don. variorum 135, 4°), published by Gertz in Scriptores Minores Historiae Danicae Medii Aevi, II, Copenhagen 1918-22, and in facsimile in Corpus Codicorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, 2, Copenhagen 1960.
It contains 1) the *Exordium* or foundation story properly speaking, written in 1207 by one hand, containing several documents concerning the monastery's privileges and possessions, 2) an abbot list up to 1320, with digressions, written by the first and several other hands, 3) an account of the conflict with bishop Tyge of Aarhus on tithes and procurements, also with documents, written by one hand ca. 1270, 4) a short biography of Gunner, former abbot at Øm, bishop of Viborg 1222-1251, written in the 15th century from a 1251/1280 original.

The composition of the present work follows that of the manuscript, in an attempt to treat it as a whole. After an introduction on the arrival of Cistercians in Denmark (1144) and the migrations of the monks before the settlement at Øm (1172) follows a discussion of the chronicle as a source in general — three chapters on the first part of it (*Exordium I*), one chapter on the abbot list, three on the conflict story (*Exordium II*), one on the Gunner biography, all with analyses and comparisons with other Cistercian literature. At the end there is a short survey of the monastery's renewed property expansion in the 14th century, based on diplomatic material, and an analysis of its library, according to an inventory of 1554, i.e. after the Reformation.

The book is well equipped with maps and photos of the site itself, a good index and a bibliography ¹.

The author's intention is "to bring a small but significant part of the Scandinavian medieval experience to the attention of an international audience" (foreword p. 7) but we are not given a comprehensive account of the historical or legal context. For this we are referred to earlier studies, mainly in Danish, here the main subject is monastic psychology. The author wants to avoid both Marxism, "a fully formulated theoretical basis for all human history which makes it irrelevant to write about monks" (p. 18) ², and neo-positivistic source criticism which "promises truth but often gives only a deadening aridity" (*ibid.*). So he plunges into psycho-history, a genre where monks are certainly relevant, developed by Erik H. Eriksson (*Young Man Luther*, 1958) and other Americans and Catholic medievalists. Thus he has "tried to show the Chronicle as a reflection of the attitudes, hopes, dreams and disappointments of a Cistercian community during the 12th and 13th centuries" (p. 7). This may be a very rewarding approach, but it can also lead to prolixity and shallowness, and the author has not escaped this

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¹. The reference system is not well organized, so it is sometimes hard to find cited books in the library.

². The "Marxist apparatus of class conflict" is in fact used in a way that looks like an irony (notes 136 and 265).
danger. In a way, the text is written in the same spirit as its sources, in
that several basic facts are not mentioned, and many interesting obser-
vations are hidden among lengthy comments on emotions and some
platitudes. The advice of bishop Tyge, given at a heated moment of the
conflict, sometimes comes to mind: “Dimitte verbositatem vestram”.

There is no systematic description of the manuscript itself, which is a
bit confusing for the reader. The purpose in writing it was to collect
legal evidence for the defence of economic interests, but the author also
wants to find emotional causes for the composition and style diffe-
rences. This is certainly permissible with respect to the second part of
the chronicle, where the bitterness is very striking. In fact, the author’s
explanation of the abrupt end of this part — that the monks had lost all
hopes to win the conflict with the bishop and found it meaningless to
put down their history — is a quite convincing result of the psychohisto-
rical method. But in general there are too many less well founded
opinions, too many retold episodes and too few citations from the text
itself. The chronicle is approved of as a rather reliable source, i.e. as a
source for what the monks thought and felt, not in the ordinary sense of
a source for what actually happened.

The often mentioned dependence — factual and emotional — of the
monks upon great families and “strong men” for the protection of
their interests could be explained by the fact that monastic life in theory
meant cutting off all kinship ties, which were otherwise the all impor-
tant network of protection in medieval Scandinavia.

The acquisition of landed property is mentioned several times, but
no figures are given, although this has been studied earlier: During the
first 25 years of the monastery’s existence ca. 100 holdings were acqui-
red, in the 13th century only ca. 35, in the 14th and 15th centuries
another 100 holdings. But it is rightly stressed that the country around
Øm, Jutland with its many often hostile peasants, was less favourable
for founding monasteries than Zealand with its great land-owners.

The controversy (1262-1268) with the bishop of Aarhus on procura-
tions and tithes was mainly a conflict between ecclesiastical and feudal
rights, between canon and national law. There followed an unhappy
involvement by the monks in the fight between king and archbishop,
appeals to a visiting cardinal, unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation,
mutual excommunications and possibly a falsification of documents.
This is rightly seen in connection with a general tendency in the
13th century to formalize ancient customs, which may in fact have been
an attempt, based on scholasticism and Roman Law, to break down
those customs. But when it is said that “the need for definition under-
mined the alliance between bishop and monks” (p. 85), this confuses
cause and effect, objective interests certainly being at the bottom. The author, in a modest polemic against the prominent historian Skyum-Nielsen, discusses little the actual events, defends the good faith of the monks, but also criticizes them for one-sidedness and naiveté, said to be a typically Cistercian feature. The Cistercians, though, were the first order with an effective centralised organisation.

Then “out of all the distortions and obsessions of the controversy with bishop Tyge came the best biography of the Danish Middle Ages” (p. 100), that of Gunner, bishop of Viborg. It was certainly composed during or soon after the conflict, perhaps as an attempt to find solace in the recollection of a friend among the great. But the date of the actual copy is not mentioned. It is analyzed at length with sometimes far-fetched and not very convincing comparisons with other Cistercian biography and Gothic sculpture. One would have wished instead to see a few citations from the text itself.

The concluding analysis of the Reformation Book List is very interesting but quite overworked. It gives us the curious picture of a Cistercian abbot well equipped to educate Protestant priests.

It could have been mentioned that the monastery was closed six years later, in 1560. Some of the great manorial abbeys (herrekloster) thus survived long after the Reformation, while the Franciscans, who had no land, were expelled already in 1527-32, according to the narrative “De expulsione fratrorum minorum” printed by Gertz in the same volume as the Öm chronicle.

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