CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INNER ENCLOSURE

Cistercian life was centred on the cloister and the inner enclosure it served to structure, and no other single architectural space in an abbey embodied monastic order in such an archetypal manner. Cistercians, like their Benedictine counterparts, employed the term *claustrum* to denote the specific space of the cloister or the wider enclosure as a whole, but also more metaphorically to signify the monastic way of life or spiritual state, and often there appears to be a deliberate play on this ambiguous range of meanings in the sources.¹ In this chapter, I focus on the cloister in its spatial significance and on its social functions. I explore the cloister in the context of the ‘inner enclosure’, which is to say the covered walkways forming a quadrangle enclosing a garth and the auxiliary conventual spaces that linked directly to it. While the cloister was partly perceived as an autonomous space with its own distinctive symbolism, the activities that took place in its galleries intimately connected with the annulus of conventual spaces around it. I therefore discuss the presbytery of the abbey church—with monks’ choir, altar-room and side chapels—as such an ‘auxiliary’ space, even though it was also the sacred head of the church. Defined in these terms, the overwhelming majority of a Cistercian’s life was spent in the claustral nucleus, and it is here that social interactions would, to some extent, have carried the most weight.

Closely following on from my previous chapters, I address the underlying question of how the primary cycle of life enacted in and around the cloister intersected with the lay-monastic encounters occurring within the sequence of gatehouse, narthex, and choir-screen. In what sense did the cloister constitute a boundary? Did it exhibit significant social permeability? Continuing the approach developed throughout this book,

¹ For the origins and use of the term *claustrum* in the monastic tradition as a whole, see Meyvaert (1973: 53–54). Dey (2004) shows how the dialectic of spiritual and physical meanings was present in Western monasticism from Augustine onwards. For the use of the term in Cistercian sources, see Cassidy-Welch (2001: 65–68). For an architectural overview of medieval cloisters, see McNeill (2006). For Cistercian examples based mainly on evidence from England and Wales, see Robinson and Harrison (2006). The special issue on the meanings and evolution of the cloister of the journal *Gesta* (1973) is still seminal. For a more recent overview, see Klein (2004).
I examine an interplay of practical uses and symbolic meanings in particular architectural spaces, according special attention to the communicative role of sculptural décor. I concentrate equally on those spaces of the inner enclosure where a regular lay presence and boundary-transcending exchange are in evidence. The specific architectural examples discussed in this chapter include the well-preserved cloister of Valmagne, rebuilt as part of the same construction campaign as the church around the early fourteenth century, complemented by contemporaneous remains at Villelongue Abbey, significant for its substantial, and largely unexplored, sculptural décor (Fig. 34).

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In her study of the Cistercian cloister, Cassidy-Welch links the four arcaded walkways to four underlying uses, namely; the liturgy, discipline, domesticity, and labour. While this categorisation is artificial (even somewhat misleading, in terms of the connections between spaces, their unity in both architectural and ritual terms, and the diversity of, and overlap in, the activities they harboured) it helps to give a basic overview of both the cloister’s range of inner-monastic uses and their spatial distribution into relatively well-demarcated areas. Site permitting, Cistercians, like all Benedictines, preferred to build their cloisters to the south of the church. This was the case at both Valmagne and Villelongue, and I adopt this orientation in the following description of the elementary components of the cloister. The northern, ‘liturgical’ wing of the cloister was adjacent to the church, and a portal led directly into the transept, and by extension the monks’ choir. It was typically furnished with benches providing seating for the *lectio divina*, carried out at regular intervals following the seasonally and weekly structured rhythm of the monastic day; the *lectio* ranged from a monk’s individual engagement with Scripture and other spiritual writings to the communal collation reading. The eastern, ‘disciplinary’ wing, communicated with the chapter house, the library, the parlour, and the day room (the dormitory on the upper level of the eastern range was usually connected directly to both the eastern cloister gallery and the church by stairs). The chapter house constituted the focal point of this wing, and served as the monastery’s key assembly hall; readings

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3 For more detailed descriptions of the typical architectural arrangement and development, as well as basic uses of individual spaces within the cloister, see Kinder (2001: 131–40) and Rüffer (2008: 89–114).