In his important essay on historical legitimation, Kaspar Elm raises a number of very fundamental questions on the use of historical arguments in the sphere of medieval religious orders: “Which function does historical legitimation have in the formation, maintenance, and change of the system of religious orders? How much did historical arguments help new orders and congregations to find their place and to exercise their specific function in the already existing system of regulated communities? Were historical arguments able to provide stability for orders and congregations who saw their existence threatened due to the loss of their original function or to external or internal pressures, and to prevent their final decline? … What significance did their respective origins have for the consolidation of certain groups, and to what extent were these origins suitable to facilitate the integration of these groups into the system of Church and orders? What were they able to contribute to the differentiation between communities featuring identical goals or similar forms of organization? And how much did they facilitate the union and association of such communities?”

These are central questions about knowledge and its use, since one can only use one’s origins as a meaningful argument, if one has knowledge of them. This may sound trivial, but this very realization reveals a serious and complex problem.

On the one hand, there should be no doubt as to the great usefulness that historical arguments have had for monasteries and religious orders in the Middle Ages, since they continually used such arguments. This conclusion, set against the background of a culture determined by tradition, which seems to characterize the medieval period in Europe at

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first glance (at second glance, this might not seem so certain anymore),
may also not come as too big of a surprise. As we know, medieval
institutions of ecclesiastical as well as of secular government strove, on
principle, to grasp, record, and spread the knowledge of their histori-
cal continuity\textsuperscript{2}—be it their endeavors to continue the \textit{Liber pontificalis}
throughout all centuries in order to prove the uninterrupted line of
succession begun with Peter,\textsuperscript{3} be it the recording of dynastic continuity
extending from \textit{Brutus} to the late medieval kings of England by means
of chronicles,\textsuperscript{4} or be it the attempt to trace the pattern of erudition
from Athens via Rome to Paris and Oxford by following the course of
the \textit{translationes}\textsuperscript{5} to name just a few examples.

On the other hand, there is another aspect that proves considerably
more difficult to grasp at the first attempt, and this is the fact that
references to history has to fulfill functions within the \textit{vita religiosa}
that differ remarkably. Quite pragmatically, they could serve as—as
we have already suggested above—means of legitimization, consolida-
tion, self-assertion, establishment of one’s own identity, integration, or
differentiation. Faced with such a broad range of functions, we must
assume many very different points of orientation and forms had to
be generated for this reference to the past and to the origins. In the
process, however, the limits to this probably became clear quite soon,
since the past and the origins were by no means always accessible
whenever they were needed, what is more, they were often completely
obscured. Those forces that destroyed continuity often played a consid-
érably more dominant role in the course of time, in the Middle Ages,
which were not really that static, than the stabilizing forces. Added
to this, the demands as to the scope of continuities far exceeded the
measure of continuity that actual historical structures were actually
able to provide. “Reference to the past” then, could only mean—that
is, if once was not willing to resign and renounce the argumentative

\textsuperscript{2} See Cécile Caby, “La mémoire des origines dans les institutions médiévales: bilan
d’un séminaire collectif,” in \textit{Écrire son histoire: les communautés régulières face à leur
passé: actes du 5 Colloque International du C.E.R.C.O.R.}, Saint-Étienne, 6–8 novembre

\textsuperscript{3} See Ottorino Bertolini, “Il ‘Liber Pontificalis’,” in \textit{La storiografia altomedioevale},
Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medievo 17 (Spoletto, 1970),

\textsuperscript{4} See Antonia Gransden, \textit{Historical Writing in England 2: c. 1307 to the Early
Sixteenth Century}, (London, 1982), passim.

\textsuperscript{5} See Vincenzo Cilento, “Il mito medievale della ‚Translatio studii’,” \textit{Filologia e