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Stephen of Obazine

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Stephen of Obazine († 1159)

1. Name variants: S. of Aubazine, Étienne de Vielzot

2. Places: Obazine (Aubazine), Coyroux, Xaintrie, Vielzot, Preaux, Charroux

3. Biography: Toward the end of the 11th c., S. was born in the village of Vielzot, Xaintrie. He received his early education perhaps at Preaux, a priory of the Benedictine abbey of Charroux. When his father died, S. took over the family estate, in which capacity he was charitable to the poor. He was ordained a secular priest, yet soon decided to embrace a life of asceticism and solitude. With guidance from an abbot of La Chaise-Dieu and a hermit, he and a companion settled in the forest of Obazine. Others joined them and they built and several times expanded a monastery to accommodate male recruits as well as a nearby monastery for women, Coyroux. They also established several monasteries elsewhere. In 1147, Obazine and its associated monasteries were admitted in the Cistercian Order. By the time S. died, Obazine was on solid financial footing, in part because whole families were admitted, who brought their possessions with them. Many miracles were attributed to him after his death.

His biographer presents S. as a man who attracted others, but also as a stern enforcer of discipline and somewhat volatile. As a hermit, he first practiced rigorous asceticism, later growing in moderation. He was reported to be a man of immense energy.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: –

b. Liturgical commemoration: 8 Mar

c. Patronage: –

d. Attributes: –

5. Fontes: Le cartulaire de l'abbaye cistercienne d'Obazine (XII–XIII siècle), ed. B. BARRIÈRE, Clermont-Ferrand 1989 – excerpts translated in: *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform*, ed. and transl. C. H. BERMAN, Kalamzoo 2002, 77–86; *Vie de Saint Etienne d'Obazine*, ed. M. AUBRUN, Clermont-Ferrand 1970.

6. Literature: G. MELVILLE, Stephan von Obazine: Begründung und Überwindung charismatischer Führung, in: G. ANDENNA / M. BREITENSTEIN / G. MELVILLE (eds.), *Charisma und religiöse Gemeinschaften im Mittelalter*, Münster 2005, 85–101; B. BARRIÈRE, *L'abbaye Cistercienne d'Obazine en Bas-Limousin: les origines—le patronomie*, Tulle 1977; H. FEISS / M. O'BRIEN / R. PEPIN, *The Lives of Monastic Reformers 1: Robert of La Chaise Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, Collegeville 2010.

7. Illustrations: The author of his biography describes Stephen as short and balding, with prematurely wrinkled skin, but otherwise young-looking. His 13th c. tomb (in the parish church of Aubazines, the former abbey church) is richly ornamented with scenes from his life.

Hugh Feiss