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Vitalis of Savigny

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Vitalis of Savigny (* c. 1060 – † 1122)

1. Name variants: –

2. Places: Tierceville, Abbey School at Grestain, Bayeux, Mortain, (Forest of) Craon, Savigny

3. Biography: His parents were not noble or rich, but were able to provide for his education, although where is not clear. He came to the attention of Robert of Mortain, who appointed him a canon. He resigned his position to become a hermit along with Bernard of Tiron and Robert of Arbrissel in the forest of Craon where Normandy, Maine, Brittany, Anjou meet. He was known primarily as a preacher of repentance and peace. He founded the monastery of Savigny in 1112 (and an associated women's community, L'abbaye blanche), but how much he was in residence or in charge at Savigny is not known. He was buried at Savigny. As was customary, his Vita concludes with accounts of a few posthumous miracles.

4. Cultus: –

a. Relics: Vitalis' remains were interred in the abbey church in 1122. Although never formally canonized, Vitalis was venerated locally, and by the Cistercians after Savigny was incorporated into the Cistercian Order in 1147. In 1182, his relics, along with those of four other holy Savigniacs, were transferred from the original abbey church to the chapel of St. Catherine. In 1243, during the abbacy of Stephen of Lexington, his relics were moved to the new abbey church, where their placement was rearranged in 1303. Their tombs were smashed and their relics scattered in 1562. The tombs of Vitalis and the other Savigniac saints were restored in 1603. Savigny was destroyed at the French Revolution; the relics of the "saints" were rescued by the local people and placed in the parish church of Savigny-le-Vieux. After a robber broke into the church of Savigny-le-Vieux, dumped out the relics, and stole the reliquaries, new ones were provided in 1806. Around 1960, several parish priests inventoried the relics. They were scientifically inventoried and studied in the period 2012–2014, but without any firm conclusions. The relics are still venerated at Savigny-le-Vieux.

b. Liturgical commemoration: 7 Jan (ZELBACHER 1731); the Cistercian general chapter of 1738 recognized him as a saint.

c. Patronage: –

d. Attributes: –

5. Fontes: Vita by Stephen of Fougères, ed. E. P. SAUVAGE, *AnBoll* 1 (1882), 354–410, transl. in: H. FEISS / M. O'BRIEN / R. PEPIN, *Lives of Monastic Reformers 2: Abbot Vitalis of Savigny, Abbot Godfrey of Savigny, Peter of Avranches, Blessed Hamo*, Collegeville 2014; L. DELISLE, *Rouleaux des morts du IX^e au XV^e siècle*, Paris 1866; I. DELISLE, *Rouleau mortuaire du B. Vital, Abbé de Savigny*. Edition phototypique avec introduction, Paris 1909; further sources in: J. VAN MOOLENBROECK, *Vital l'ermite, prédicateur itinérant, fondateur de l'abbaye de Savigny*, transl. A.-M. NAMBOT, Assen / Maastricht 1990.

6. Literature: C. Auvry, *L'histoire de la Congrégation de Savigny*, ed. A. LAVEILLE, Rouen / Paris, 1896–1898; H. FEISS / M. O'BRIEN / R. PEPIN, *Lives of Monastic Reformers 2: Abbot Vitalis of Savigny, Abbot Godfrey of Savigny, Peter of Avranches, Blessed Hamo*, Collegeville 2014; *L'abbaye de Savigny (1112–2012), un chef d'ordre anglo-normand*, ed. B. GALBRUN / V. GAZEAU, Rennes 2019; J. VAN MOOLENBROECK, *Vital l'ermite, prédicateur itinérant, fondateur de l'abbaye de Savigny*, transl. A.-M. NAMBOT, Assen / Maastricht 1990; H. SAUVAGE, *Saint Vital et l'abbaye de Savigny*, Mortain 1895; H. SAUVAGE, *Le livre des miracles des saints de*

Savigny, Mortain 1899; L. SHOPKOW, *The Saint and the Count. A Case Study for Reading Like a Historian*, Toronto 2021.

7. Illustrations: In 1759, the prior of Savigny, Dom Liégard, contracted with the painter François II de la Verte (1712–1771) to produce portraits of Vitalis and Hamo, based on engravings of Jacques-Nicolas Tardieu (1716–1791). The paintings were dispersed at the Revolution and no longer seem to exist. SAUVAGE (1895) reproduces two printed portraits of Vitalis and describes them (pp. 73–75).

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