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Caesarius of Heisterbach

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Caesarius of Heisterbach (* 1180 – † 1240)

1. Name variants: –

2. Places: Cologne, Heisterbach, Himmerod

3. Biography: Probably a Cologne native, C. attended the St. Andreasstift and the cathedral school. Reports of a miracle in the Cistercian abbey of Heisterbach prompted him to enter there. He was soon appointed novice master. He never was prior, as formerly thought. He traveled with his abbots to Bonn, Cologne, and other monasteries. C. left dozens of historical, theological, and hagiographical works, and 115 homilies. His most famous book is the 'Dialogus miraculorum', written 1219–1223 at his abbot's request. It contains over 740 example stories, written as dialogues between a monk and a novice. His stories of the divine and the demonic are derived in part from older sources such as the 'Vitae Patrum' and oral tradition; they serve today as a substantial source for medieval social life, beliefs, superstitions, and juridical practices. The majority of his stories take place in Cologne, Heisterbach, and Himmerod. The book was extremely popular. More than 100 manuscripts or parts of it have survived. It became a model for later authors, such as the Dominican Arnold of Liège. A second collection of exempla, the 'VIII Libri Miraculorum' (ca. 1226), has only survived incompletely. Other important writings by C. are a catalog of the archbishops of Cologne, the 'Vita S. Engelberti' (about the recently murdered archbishop of Cologne), and a vita for the already canonized Elizabeth of Thuringia.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: –

b. Liturgical commemoration: 25 Sep (HENRIQUEZ (1630), 324; HENRIQUEZ (1731), 186)

c. Patronage: –

d. Attributes: Writing utensils

5. Fontes: Caesarius von Heisterbach, Dialogus miraculorum – Dialog über die Wunder, N. NÖSGES / H. SCHNEIDER (eds.), Turnholt 2009; C. HENRIQUEZ, Menologium Cisterciense notationibus illustratum, Antwerp 1630, 33–34, 324; C. HENRIQUEZ, Menologium Cisterciense. Oder kurtz begriffene Lebens-Verfassung derer Heiligen, Prague 1731, 186.

6. Literature: J. BURKHARDT / I. KIMPEL: Tugend, Laster, Strafe – Die „Wunderbücher“ des Caesarius von Heisterbach als anwendungsorientierte Theologie, in: *Analecta Cisterciensia* 71 (2021), 83–118; B. MCGUIRE, Friends and Tales in the Cloister. Oral Sources in Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogus Miraculorum, in: B. P. MCGUIRE (ed.), *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women and their Stories, 1100–1200*, Aldershot, 2002, 167–247; A. J. GURJEWITSCH, *Mittelalterliche Volkskultur*, München, 1992; K. LANGOSCH, 'Caesarius von Heisterbach', in: W. STAMMLER (ed.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* 1, Berlin/New York 1978, 1152–1168; V. SMIRNOVA / M. A. POLO DE BEAULIEU / J. BERLIOZ (eds.), *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond. Caesarius of Heisterbach's 'Dialogue on Miracles' and its Reception*, Leiden / Boston 2015.

7. Illustrations: As writer in Cistercian habit in a manuscript miniature, 14th c., Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf, MS C27, fol. 1r; statue by Ernemann Sander in Königswinter-Oberdollendorf near the abbey ruins, showing C. as a writer, 20th c.