Who Keeps the Abbey?

By Vaidenon of Hustan, Warden of the Inkhorn Fellowship

how many clergy a Hârnic abbey holds, the lay brethren who work its land, the servants it hires, and how to people one at the table

> "By the reckoning I was taught, our house should hold sixty-five priests and acolytes. I have counted the spoons in my cellar, Warden, and we own nineteen."
>
> — the cellarer of a Laranian abbey in Melderyn, to the Warden (Inkhorn)

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Every abbey I have ever visited was smaller than the arithmetic said it should be. I do not mean the buildings, which are generally larger than any sensible community needs, but the people in them. The reckoning that every Hârnic steward learns, and that the church manors are said to follow, allows one cleric for every ten acres of land the house farms for itself. A modest abbey working six hundred acres of its own should therefore keep sixty brothers and sisters at prayer. I have never seen sixty. I have rarely seen twenty.

So I asked. My questions went, as such questions do, to the people who would have to feed the sixty: the cellarer of a Laranian abbey on Melderyn Island, a matakea of some fifteen years who keeps his house's stores and accounts, and a priestess of the Order of the Balm of Joy at Ulmstane, who has charge of that abbey's guests and its lay sisters. Neither wished to be named. The cellarer said that his serolan reads his letters before they are sealed, "and approves of very little"; the priestess, more gently, that her order does not put its sisters' names before its work. I have honoured both requests. Their words are the Fellowship's, and are marked as such. (Inkhorn)

Credits

Writer: Vaidenon of Hustan

Set down by Lesli of Bifel and his homunculus, Claudin

With the help of the cellarer of a Laranian abbey in Melderyn and a priestess of the Balm of Joy at Ulmstane, by letter (Inkhorn), and of Lesli of Bifel's correspondence on the religious houses of Terra; see Sources and Additions.

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How Sure I Am

Certain: Columbia Games' published works say so.

Near certain: both my correspondents agree, and the published works do not contradict them.

Confident: one of them says so from her or his own knowledge.

A fair guess: I have put two things together myself.

The Reckoning and the Spoons

The rule is in *HârnManor*: a church manor supports one cleric for every ten acres of its demesne, and of those clerics a Peonian house keeps one in five a priest, a Laranian or Save-K'norian house one in ten, the rest acolytes. Certain. It is a rule for what a house *can* feed. It says nothing about how many will come.

> *The land will feed sixty, I grant. The land will feed a hundred, in a good year. But sixty must be called, Warden, and sixty must stay, and sixty must be fed in a bad year too, and housed, and taught their letters, and*

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> *found shoes. The reckoning is a ceiling. We live a long way below it, and are glad of the headroom.*
>
> — the cellarer

Columbia's own accounts of particular abbeys bear him out. Namadees, the great Laranian abbey of Chybisa, holds about a hundred and fifty-five souls, its village included, and its acolytes' dormitory sleeps eight. Caleme, the seat of Kaldor's archbishop, has some three hundred and twenty-five, and among its towers is one given over to the abbey's *lay servants*, "the highest-ranking servants … on the third floor". Certain. An abbey, in other words, is a small convent of clergy at the heart of a much larger household of laymen.

What Terra Remembers

Lesli of Bifel, whose letters from Terra have so often supplied what our own records lack, sent me an account of the religious houses of that world, which seem to have faced the same arithmetic and answered it in the same way. I give it here, briefly and in my own words, because it settles the matter better than I could. (Terran sources, by Lesli of Bifel)

- **The ordinary house.** After the first great age of their founding, most Terran abbeys of the oldest rule held between twenty and sixty monks. The greatest houses of a whole kingdom held about fifty; a small priory or dependent cell, six to twelve. Twelve and an abbot was reckoned a full community, the least that could keep the hours properly.
- **Servants.** Those same houses kept roughly one servant for every monk. One abbey, counted by its king's officers, held sixty-seven monks and some sixty-five servants.
- **The lay brothers.** A reforming order of farmers, building in empty country, found it could not work its great estates with choir monks alone, and admitted *lay brothers*: men who took simple vows of obedience and chastity but were never ordained and did not keep the full round of prayer. They ploughed, herded, smithed, milled and kept the outlying farms. In its greatest years one of their abbeys held some hundred and forty monks and five hundred lay brothers and servants; wherever such an order held much land, the lay brothers outnumbered the monks two or three to one.
- **Their decline.** When labour grew dear and the lay brothers grew fewer, the abbeys hired what they had once been given, and the lay brother passed into history.

> *Your Terran friend has described us exactly, except that our lay sisters are better at bookkeeping than his lay brothers can possibly have been.*
>
> — the priestess at Ulmstane

The Lay Brethren

Both my correspondents keep such people, under several names. The cellarer calls his house's "the avowed"; the priestess calls hers simply "the sisters of the yard", as against the sisters of the chapel. They are men and women of the faith who have taken vows but not orders. They live within the house's walls, keep its rule of life, and are buried in its ground, but they do not perform the rituals, and the god does not answer their prayers as a priest's are answered. They work. (Inkhorn)

> *A good lay brother is worth three acolytes in the field and one in the chapel. The acolytes are there to become priests, and I must spare them to their lessons. The avowed are there to keep us alive while they do.*
>
> — the cellarer

Not every house admits them, and none takes them until it is large enough to need them. The priestess put it thus: a house of a dozen can work its own garden and hire the rest; a house of twenty cannot, and must either hire half a village or call that half to the life. Near certain. Where a house cannot find enough who will take the vows, it hires villagers who go home at night, as Caleme does. Every abbey I have heard of in Melderyn does some of each.

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Words of the Cloister

Serolan: the abbot or abbess of a Laranian house; **Pelnala**, of a Peonian house; **Ibarti**, the high deacon who holds a Save-K'norian house. Certain.

Valaran: master of acolytes and, in practice, of the house's day; **Suloran**, of its archives; **Obasaran**, of its secular affairs, its manor and its court; **Menoran**, of its fighting order. Certain (Caleme).

Matakea, Ebasethe, Haliki: priests of Larani, Peoni and Save-K'nor. **Esolani:** Peonian acolytes. Certain.

The avowed, the sisters of the yard: the lay brethren. Not ordained. (Inkhorn)

Hired folk: villagers paid by the house, who live at home.

The Fellowship's Reckoning

From all of this the Fellowship has drawn a way of sizing a house which keeps Columbia's rule as a ceiling and the published abbeys as a guide. It is set out below, and the abbeys of Melderyn have been peopled by it. Everything in this section is the Fellowship's. (Inkhorn)

- **Demesne.** Take a little over a third of the house's acres as the land it farms for itself (35%).
- **Clergy.** One cleric for every forty demesne acres, not ten. A house of fewer than thirteen is a priory or cell (six to twelve); a house with an abbot at its head is a full community of at least thirteen; a great house, such as an academy or a bishop's seat, keeps thirty to fifty. No house keeps more than fifty.
- **Priests and acolytes.** About three in ten of the clergy are priests and the rest acolytes, except in a teaching house, where Columbia's one in ten holds. The abbot is counted among the priests.
- **Lay brethren.** None until the house reaches thirteen. Then one for each cleric in a Peonian house, given to healing, alms and the garden; in a Laranian or Save-K'norian house with five hundred demesne acres or more, two for each cleric, given to the land; otherwise one.
- **Hired folk** make up whatever the lay brethren cannot.
- **Who they are.** Every cleric and lay brother is drawn from the house's own village and its near neighbours: the unmarried, the widowed, younger sons and daughters, never an heir. A Peonian house of the Balm of Joy, such as Ulmstane, takes only women.

Tier	Clergy	Priests	Lay brethren	Example
Priory or cell	6–12	about 3 in 10	none	a chapel-manor of an abbey
Abbey	13–30	about 3 in 10	1 or 2 per cleric	Peseh, Sarius, Juz
Great house	30–50	1 in 10 (teaching)	2 per cleric	Vil

> *Sixteen of us, then, and thirty-two of the avowed, if I could find them. I have two, and thirty hired folk who go home to their own fires, and one of the two avowed is my own sister, who will not let me forget it.*
>
> — the cellarer

The Abbeys of Melderyn

Fifteen manors of Melderyn are held by abbeys, according to the king's own fief tables: eight by Laranian serolans, three by Peonian pelnalas and four by Save-K'norian ibarti. Certain. Their acres are the king's figures; their clergy and lay brethren are the Fellowship's reckoning, from a demesne of 35% of those acres. (Inkhorn)

Abbey	Church (holder)	Acres	Clergy	Lay
Belim	Larani (Serolan)	2,780	24	48
Clima	Larani (Serolan)	1,510	13	26
Dutilo	Larani (Serolan)	1,360	13	13
Hoget	Larani (Serolan)	1,350	13	13
Jelim	Larani (Serolan)	1,420	13	13
Jeth	Larani (Serolan)	1,420	13	13
Kelnop	Larani (Serolan)	1,450	13	26
Peseh	Larani (Serolan)	1,860	16	32
Nephel	Peoni (Pelnala)	1,060	13	13
Sarius	Peoni (Pelnala)	1,880	16	16
Ulmstane	Peoni (Balm of Joy) (Pelnala)	1,540	13	13
Juz	Save-K'nor (Rydequelyn) (Ibarti)	1,600	14	28

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Abbey	Church (holder)	Acres	Clergy	Lay
Nilam	Save-K'nor (Ibarti)	1,900	17	34
Quist	Save-K'nor (Ibarti)	1,750	15	30
Vil	Save-K'nor (Ibarti)	1,980	30 (great house)	60

The clergy column is what each house should hold by the reckoning. In truth several fall short, because their villages could not spare enough young people: Ulmstane and Nephel have each found about two-thirds of their number; Vil, the academy, barely a third, and makes up its scholars from the rest of the kingdom. Most houses fill out their lay work with hired folk. Confident.

> *We are eight where we should be thirteen. The marsh does not send us many daughters, and the ones it sends would rather marry. I do not blame them. I only pray they come to us when they are widowed, as many do.*
>
> — the priestess at Ulmstane

For the Game Master

Setting Up an Abbey in HârnMaster

1. The house. Choose its church, its order if any, and who holds it: a Serolan, a Pelnala or an Ibarti. Note its acres; take 35% as its demesne.

2. The clergy. Demesne ÷ 40, within the tier: a priory 6–12, an abbey 13–30, a great house 30–50. About 3 in 10 are priests, the rest acolytes; a teaching house, 1 in 10.

3. The masters. In a house of thirteen or more, name a Valaran (acolytes and the day), an Obasaran (the manor and its court) and a cellarer. A great house adds a Suloran (archives) and, if a fighting order keeps a chapter there, a Menoran.

4. The lay brethren. None below thirteen clergy. Then one per cleric (Peoni) or two per cleric (Larani or Save-K'nor with 500+ demesne acres); otherwise one.

5. Hired folk. Whatever the lay brethren cannot fill, the village supplies by the day.

6. Where they come from. The house's village and its neighbours: younger sons and daughters, widows and widowers, never an heir.

Skills for the Community

Priests: Ritual (their god)/4, Folklore/4, the local script; Ritual improves about a point a year after six years of training. Most abbots stand between 60 and 80.

Acolytes: the same skills, opened lower; they are still learning.

Lay brethren and hired folk: the skills of their work, from the Occupation Skills table: a granger Agriculture and Animalcraft, a smith Metalcraft, an infirmarer Physician and Herblore, a cellarer's man Brewing and Cookery. Rate their work by the Craftsman Ratings (*HârnMaster*, Skills 6): Average work is ML 71–80.

A house's wares: cloth, illuminated scrolls, ale, cheese and honey sell at the market price for their makers' stars, like any guildsman's; the house pays no guild dues on them. (Inkhorn)

Using This at the Table

An abbey is a village with a convent in it. Most of the people a traveller meets at its gate are lay brethren or hired folk, not clergy.

The cellarer, the Obasaran and the guestmaster are the people who will deal with characters; the abbot will not, unless he must.

A house short of clergy is a house that wants recruits, and may press a little hard on a pious younger son or daughter.

Lay brethren are vowed and may not simply leave; one who has fled is a matter for the abbot, and sometimes for the sheriff.

What the published accounts say is happening at Melderyn's abbeys

- **Clima:** plagued by umbathri, whose babbling has driven villagers from the fields; the serolan is desperate. Certain.
- **Jelim:** an acolyte cleaning a cellar found what the serolan proclaims a piece of the Spear of Shattered Sorrow, and claims a vision of where its head lies. Certain.
- **Dutilo:** its serolan frowns on the Baron of Jothet's profiteering. Certain.
- **Ulmstane:** a recent disappearance has led the abbess to ask the sheriff to investigate; pilgrims come to soak in its waters. Certain.

- **Sarius:** its Peonian priests keep the beacon on the Banir Rocks off Voril Island. Certain.
- **Nilam:** makes illuminated "death-riddle" scrolls for the families of the departed, develops ciphers for wealthy clients, and nurtures the psionically gifted. Certain.
- **Juz:** keeps an academy of the Rydequelyn, whose jesters serve, secretly, as eyes and ears in noble courts. Certain.
- **Vil:** the academy of the Hyn-Aelori, with its holy spring, its library and the Six Sages nearby. Certain.

Sources and Additions

This section is set down plainly. It lists what in this account comes from Columbia Games' published works, and what the Inkhorn Fellowship adds; the Fellowship's additions are marked (Inkhorn) in the text.

Published sources

- Columbia Games, *HârnManor*: church manors and abbeys; one cleric per ten demesne acres; the share of priests in Peonian, Laranian and Save-K'norian houses.
- Columbia Games, *Kingdom of Melderyn*: the fief tables (the abbeys, their holders and acres); the churches of Larani, Peoni and Save-K'nor in Melderyn; the abbeys' present troubles.
- Columbia Games, *Namadees* (Chybisa): its population and its acolytes' dormitory. *Caleme* (Kaldor): its population, its masters (Serolan, Valaran, Suloran, Obasaran, Menoran) and its servants' tower.
- Columbia Games, *Religion*: the Laranian, Peonian and Save-K'norian clergy and their titles. *HârnMaster*: the Occupation Skills table and the Craftsman Ratings.

Terran sources

- Lesli of Bifel's correspondence on Terran religious houses: their usual size, their servants, the lay brothers of the farming orders and their decline. Paraphrased; no Terran work is quoted.

The Fellowship's additions

- The letters of the cellarer and the priestess at Ulmstane: their words are the Fellowship's.
- The Fellowship's reckoning (demesne, tiers, the share of priests, the lay brethren and hired folk) and the figures for each Melderyni abbey that follow from it.
- The names "the avowed" and "the sisters of the yard"; the advice on skills and on a house's wares.

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