

# Debating reform in tenth- and early eleventh-century female monasticism\*

Steven Vanderputten

Until recently, women religious were considered marginal to the story of monasticism's development in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Classic surveys tend to cast but sideways glances at female communities, arguing that these groups did not – as was considered to be the case for their male counterparts – exist primarily to provide prayer service and allow for ascetic *virtuosi* to pursue religious perfection, and did not aspire to constitute truthful expressions of the monastic ideal. Instead, these institutions simply provided a way for noblewomen to retire, permanently or temporarily, from the world, and for their relatives to consolidate their symbolic and material interests in an institutional setting. Also prominent in these discussions is the notion that a continuing lack of clear boundaries between female communities and the outside world, and of a clear distinction between nuns and canonesses, compromised the possibilities for women religious to take part in several reform 'waves' that transformed male monasticism in this period.

Over the last three decades, various authors have successfully brought forth arguments to correct this vision.<sup>1</sup> Thus the case against seeing female groups as the exclusive territory of the higher elites is now a strong one,<sup>2</sup> as is that against seeing

---

\* This article was written with the generous support of the Humboldt-Foundation and the Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO-Vlaanderen). My thanks to Melissa Provijn for her comments on the draft version.

<sup>1</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full bibliography; for an outstanding introduction to this subject I refer to Hedwig Röckelein, *Frauen im Umkreis der benediktinischen Reformen des 10. bis 12. Jahrhunderts*. Gorze, Cluny, Hirsau, St. Blasien und Siegburg, in: Gert Melville/Anne Müller (eds.), *Female "vita religiosa" between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages*, Vienna et al. 2011, 275–328, to be complemented by Urban Küsters, *Formen und Modelle religiöser Frauengemeinschaften im Umkreis der Hirsauer Reform des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: Klaus Schreiner (ed.), *Hirsau St. Peter und Paul 1091–1991. 2. Geschichte, Lebens- und Verfassungsformen eines Reformklosters*, Stuttgart 1991, 195–220, and Hedwig Röckelein, *Die Auswirkung der Kanonikerreform des 12. Jahrhunderts auf Kanonissen, Augustinerchorfrauen und Benediktinerinnen*, in: Franz Felten/Annette Kehnel/Stefan Weinfurter (eds.), *Institution und Charisma. Festschrift für Gert Melville*, Cologne et al. 2009, 55–72.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Felten, *Wie adelig waren Kanonissenstifte (und andere Konvente) im frühen und hohen Mittelalter?*, in: Irene Crusius (ed.), *Vita religiosa sanctimonialium. Norm und Praxis des weiblichen religiösen Lebens vom 6. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, Korb 2005, 93–162.

them as undisciplined or intellectually inert. Research by Katrinette Bodarwé has shown that prior to the mid-eleventh century the lack of clear distinction between groups of nuns and canonesses was not perceived as a significant risk to women's spiritual and physical integrity.<sup>3</sup> She and others have also uncovered ample evidence of female leaders' efforts to build extensive libraries, and stimulate intellectual and spiritual reflection at their institutions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are now strong indications of intensive spiritual and intellectual exchanges between male and female religious contexts.<sup>5</sup> Recent developments in the study of male monasticism have also yielded an interpretation of reform that allows us seeing significant parallels between these groups and what was going on for their female counterparts, in particular as regards the secular and ecclesiastical elites' patronage of reform.<sup>6</sup> But perhaps the most crucial development is that scholars have become increasingly aware of how contemporary commentaries regarding women's perceived inability to sustain a strict discipline or adequately manage an institution's material interests have impacted on previous evaluations of the female religious phenomenon. Reformist authors consistently painted a bleak picture of a monastery's situation prior to reform, relying on a variety of arguments to justify the interventions that followed.<sup>7</sup> It is now well documented that *herrschaftssichernde Komponente*, in addition to concerns about redemption, played a determinant role in the decisions taken by episcopal and secular leaders to reform female communities,<sup>8</sup> and that subsequent descriptions of the workings of these communities prior to the reform are to be approached with caution.

One important area of investigation that remains out of focus is how female communities debated institutional and disciplinary reform. While we now know that members of at least some of these groups possessed extensive intellectual resources and expertise in governance, and while we know from anecdotal references in narrative sources that abbesses and other women religious sometimes actively advocated change in their institution counter to their fellow sisters' wishes,<sup>9</sup> so far we have little understanding of what arguments were used internally during the process of reform.

---

<sup>3</sup> Katrinette Bodarwé, Immer Ärger mit den Stiftsdamen: Reform in Regensburg, in: Eva Schlotheuber/Helmut Flachenecker/Ingrid Gardill (eds.), *Nonnen, Kanonissen und Mystikerinnen. Religiöse Frauengemeinschaften in Süddeutschland. Beiträge zur interdisziplinären Tagung vom 21. bis 23. September 2005 in Frauenchiemsee, Göttingen 2008*, 79–102, at 79–80.

<sup>4</sup> See, among others, Rosamund McKitterick, *Frauen und Schriftlichkeit im Frühmittelalter*, in: Dagmar B. Baltrusch-Schneider a. o. (eds.), *Weibliche Lebensgestaltung im frühen Mittelalter*, Köln et al. 1991, 65–118; Katrinette Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales litteratae. Schriftlichkeit und Bildung in den ottonischen Frauenkommunitäten Gandersheim, Essen und Quedlinburg*, Münster 2004; and Christina Lutter, *Geschlecht und Wissen, Norm und Praxis, Lesen und Schreiben. Monastische Reformgemeinschaften im 12. Jahrhundert*, Wien 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Blennemann, *Die Metzger Benediktinerinnen im Mittelalter. Studien zu den Handlungsspielräumen geistlicher Frauen*, Husum 2011, 71; Lutter, *Geschlecht* (cf fn. 4), 31–51 and 80–86.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Parisse, *Der Anteil der Lothringischen Benediktinerinnen an der monastischen Bewegung des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts*, in: Peter Dinzelsbacher (ed.), *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, Köln 1988, 83–98 and Röckelein, *Frauen* (cf fn. 1).

<sup>7</sup> Parisse, *Der Anteil* (cf fn. 6), 84–85.

<sup>8</sup> Blennemann, *Die Metzger Benediktinerinnen* (cf fn. 5), 75–86.

<sup>9</sup> For the example of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains, see again Blennemann, *Die Metzger Benediktinerinnen* (cf fn. 5), 69–75; for the abbey of Maubeuge, see the references in notes 15 through 17.

Some information may be gleaned from hagiographic texts that couch the foundation myths of these institutions in an apologetic narrative for reform; charters issued by local bishops and lay lords also occasionally comment on the necessity of reform.<sup>10</sup> But as noted earlier, these texts should be approached with caution, and in any case tell us little about how reform was justified to the membership of such communities, and what key arguments were relied upon to effect disciplinary and social change within these groups. Such information has proven exceedingly difficult to retrieve. One reason for this is that reform of internal discipline, despite what reformist commentators liked to argue, was hardly a ‘flashpoint’ event, in the sense that it took time for a reformed community to adjust itself to the new regime, and to acquire the new behavior and attitudes imposed by the reformers. Much of this process, itself an integral part of the broader process of reform, would have been handled *verbo et exemplo*, through word and (exemplary) deed, and therefore would have left little or no traces in the written record.<sup>11</sup> The other is that much of the documentation that has been securely associated with a reform, for instance a newly made copy of St Benedict’s Rule<sup>12</sup> or a mortuary roll,<sup>13</sup> belongs to textual traditions or typologies that are too rigid to allow for much insight into how reform was debated and justified within these communities. But it is also possible to turn the argument around, and say that scholars have been focussing too much on a lack of explicit commentaries, ignoring in the process monasticism’s customary reliance on its considerable textual legacies when promoting new ideas and attitudes.<sup>14</sup> While there is little hope of finding undocumented narrative or other accounts of what happened in these critical phases of the history of female groups, a look at the way in which reformers relied on these legacies and other intellectual resources may shed new light on the aforementioned debates and processes.

This paper aims to show that we can learn more about how reform was debated in female groups by including in our analysis the way in which the previous literary and documentary production of these communities, as well as the contents of their libraries,

---

<sup>10</sup> Michel Parisse, *Die Frauenstifte und Frauenklöster in Sachsen vom 10. bis zur Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: Stefan Weinfurter (ed.), *Die Salier und das Reich*, Vol. 2: *Die Reichskirche in der Salierzeit*, Sigmaringen 1991, 465–502, at 475–478.

<sup>11</sup> On this see Steven Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process. Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900–1100*, Ithaca (NY) 2013.

<sup>12</sup> A well known example is the *Uta Codex*, made at the behest of Abbess Uta of Regensburg (c. 990–995), containing copies of St Benedict’s Rule adapted for women and Cesarius of Arles’ Rule for nuns; Bodarwé, Immer Ärger (cf fn. 3), 86–92.

<sup>13</sup> Anne-Marie Helvétius/Michèle Gaillard, *Production de textes et réforme d’un monastère double. L’exemple de Remiremont du VII<sup>e</sup> au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: Jeffrey F. Hamburger (ed.), *Frauen-Kloster-Kunst. Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Turnhout 2007, 383–394, at 392 f.

<sup>14</sup> The situation is considerably different from c. 1100 onwards. For this, see among others Fiona J. Griffiths, *The Cross and the “Cura monialium”*: Robert of Arbrissel, John the Evangelist, and the Pastoral Care of Women in the Age of Reform, in: *Speculum* 83 (2008), 303–330; Julie Hotchin, *Female Religious Life and the “Cura monialium” in Hirsau Monasticism, 1080 to 1150*, in: Constant J. Mews (ed.), *Listen Daughter. The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, New York (NY) 2001, 59–83; Elisabeth K. Bos, *The Literature of Spiritual Formation for Women in France and England, 1080–1180*, in: *Ibid.*, 201–220; also Fiona J. Griffiths/Julie Hotchin (eds.), *Partners in Spirit. Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100–1500*, Turnhout 2012.

were excerpted and organized in such a way as to reflect the current reformers' objectives. The case study under review concerns the early eleventh-century 'Roll of Maubeuge', a small monastic settlement not far from the current Franco-Belgian border. My objective here is not to rewrite the history of this specific institution; rather, it is to argue that previously overlooked textual strategies reveal some of the internal arguments brought forward to justify and debate changes in discipline, institutional and economic management, and relations with the outside world. I also show how those who compiled the roll 'recycled' textual legacies referring to previous debates over change, some of which went back nearly a century and a half. While the discrete parts of the roll tell us nothing about the monastery's situation in the early eleventh century, the fact that they are combined in this one document does, and revealingly so.

### I. Reform at early eleventh-century Maubeuge

All, or nearly all that is known about the history of the female convent of Maubeuge in the early eleventh century is found in the "*Vita Theoderici Andaginensis*" or "*Life*" of Thierry of Saint-Hubert (d. 1087), a follower of the noted Lotharingian reformer Richard of Saint-Vanne (d. 1046).<sup>15</sup> In the first few pages of the "*Life*", written so it seems between 1087 and 1091, the text sketches a fanciful picture of Thierry's first years, followed by a remarkable account of how Thierry's parents sent him as a young boy to the abbey of Maubeuge, where his sister Ansoaldis was then abbess, to learn the basics of reading and writing, and to memorize the psalter.<sup>16</sup> According to the author, Ansoaldis' parents had offered her to the monastery as a small girl. Soon after her admission, she had begun exhibiting signs of a particular devotion to modesty and prayer. In later years she became a "frightening" example to her fellow sisters, displaying among other things an exceptional propensity to corporeal mortification, and exhibiting all the characteristics considered ideal for a Benedictine nun: softness of manners, patience, modesty, forgiveness, charity, and chastity.<sup>17</sup> Her coun-

<sup>15</sup> "*Vita Theoderici abbatis Andaginensis*", ed. by Wilhelm Wattenbach, in: Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Historiae aevi Salici*, Hannover 1866 (MGH.SS 12), 37–57.

<sup>16</sup> "*Vita Theoderici abbatis Andaginensis*", in: MGH.SS 12 (cf fn. 15), 40 f. For a general account of Thierry's life and career, see A. J. Theys, *Le bienheureux Thierry de Leernes, abbé de Saint-Hubert: 1007–1087*, Tournai 1910; regarding his education at Maubeuge, see more specifically Andrée Despy-Meyer/Pierre Paul Dupont, *Abbaye de Saint-Hubert*, in: *Monasticon Belge*, Vol. 5: Province de Luxembourg, Liège 1975, 32 and Ineke van't Spijker, *Een jeugd in de Ardennen. De kindertijd van Theodericus van Saint-Hubert*, in: *Madoc* 11 (1997), 206–211.

<sup>17</sup> Ansoaldis' biography-within-a-biography was written at a time when several such texts relating to monastic leaders associated directly or indirectly with Richard originated: see for instance Onulph and Everhelm's "*Vita Popponis*", ed. by Wilhelm Wattenbach, in: Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Historiae aevi Salici*, Hannover 1854 (MGH.SS 11), 291–316; Hariulf's comments on the life of Gerwin of Saint-Riquier, in: Ferdinand Lot (ed.), *Chronique de l'abbaye de Saint-Riquier (V<sup>e</sup> siècle–1104)*, Paris 1894; and Hugh of Flavigny's biography of Richard of Saint-Vanne in his "*Chronicon*", in: Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Chronica et gesta aevi Salici*, Hannover 1848 (MGH.SS 8), 288–502, esp. 368–406. The passage on Ansoaldis' behavior is heavily informed by Sulpicius Severus' "*Vita Martini*" and "*Dialogi*"; cf Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, München 1974, 3 Vols., Vol. 3, 556.

tenance seems to have raised the resistance of her peers, and when the situation at the monastery became untenable – the author declines to clarify in what sense – she approached Bishop Gerard of Cambrai (1012–1051), and Count Renier of Mons, and obtained permission to reinstate – according to the biographer at least – a Benedictine regime at the monastery. No further information is given on the nature of Ansoaldis' reform, or on its consequences.<sup>18</sup> In the longer term, it appears to have failed, for by the first half of the thirteenth century, the community had returned to a regime of canonesses, in which it continued until the end of the Ancien Régime.<sup>19</sup>

It is not all that difficult to reconstruct the external influences at work in Maubeuge's reform. Gerard of Cambrai was a noted reformer, and between the early 1010s and the mid-1020s intervened in about a dozen institutions in the region. These included the nearby abbey of Hautmont, where Richard of Saint-Vanne was briefly abbot between c. 1015 and 1018,<sup>20</sup> and the abbey of Marchiennes, near Douai, where the community of sisters was brutally evicted (and possibly transferred to the much more modest institution of Denain) in 1024 and replaced by Benedictine monks.<sup>21</sup> The moves at Marchiennes may have been the first of several interventions in female communities: Book II of Gerard's "*Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*", a narrative written in 1024/1025, does not mention the reform at Maubeuge, and therefore a dating for an intervention at that institution of shortly after 1025 seems acceptable.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, Thierry had begun his monastic career proper at the mighty abbey of Lobbes, where Richard was also abbot between 1020 and 1032.<sup>23</sup> Lobbes functioned, literally and symbolically, as a meeting point for reformist networks active in the dioceses of Cambrai and Liège. Several of the individuals in high positions who were involved in these networks came from the same village as Ansoaldis and Thierry,<sup>24</sup> and so it seems not overly remarkable that the two siblings were involved in regional monastic politics.

Gerard's and his colleague Wolbodo of Liège's motives when reforming monastic houses in the region were diverse, but both greatly valued the Benedictine model as a more dependable, easier to control, form of monastic life than that of regular

---

<sup>18</sup> According to local tradition, Ansoaldis was still in post in 1039, when she carried out the translation of the body of St Aldegonde, and died in 1050; C. Liétard, *Les chanoinesses de Maubeuge (661–1790)*, Lille 1933, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Bertrand, *Réformes ecclésiastiques, luttes d'influence et hagiographie à l'abbaye de Maubeuge, IX<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in: Werner Verbeke/Ludo Milis/Jean Goossens (eds.), *Medieval Narrative Sources. A Gateway into the Medieval Mind*, Louvain 2005, 55–75, at 74.

<sup>20</sup> Anne-Marie Helvétius, *Abbayes, évêques et laïques. Une politique du pouvoir en Hainaut au Moyen Âge (VII<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Brussels 1994, 256 et seqq.

<sup>21</sup> Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process* (cf fn. 11), 97 and 135–139 (with extensive references).

<sup>22</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 288.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Warichez, *L'abbaye de Lobbes depuis les origines jusqu'en 1200. Étude d'histoire générale et spéciale*, Louvain–Paris 1909, 69 f.; also Alain Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VII<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Contribution à l'histoire religieuse des campagnes du Haut Moyen Âge, Sigmaringen 1985, 125 and Jean-Louis Kupper, *Liège et l'église impériale 11<sup>e</sup>–12<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris 1981, 360.

<sup>24</sup> Theys, *Le bienheureux Thierry de Leernes* (cf fn. 15), 5 f. and Joseph Warichez, *L'abbaye de Lobbes* (cf fn. 23), 122 and 178.

canons and canonesses.<sup>25</sup> For a long time, in fact ever since the Aachen council of 816 had issued the *“Institutiones sanctimonialium”*, the secular and ecclesiastical elites had shown little interest in strictly defining the observance of female communities.<sup>26</sup> But by the early eleventh century, they did commence to intervene: in the case of Maubeuge at least, these sentiments appear to have been shared by Count Renier, who was married to Mathilda of Verdun, the daughter of Herman of Ename, a member of the mighty Lotharingian clan of Verdun-Ardenne and a noted supporter of Richard of Saint-Vanne.<sup>27</sup> Herman had personally supervised the foundation of the abbey of Saint-Laurent in Liège, and was involved in a number of other reforms, including that of Florennes, the family monastery of Gerard’s relatives.<sup>28</sup> The aforementioned comments made by Katrinette Bodarwé and others on secular and episcopal patronage of monastic groups in this period as inspired by – in addition to spiritual and redemptive reasons – *herrschaftssichernde Komponente* certainly seem valid here,<sup>29</sup> even though the details of the reform elude us.

But all of this tells us little about the internal tensions and debates hinted at in the *“Life”* of Thierry. Fortunately, there actually exist two documents that originated much closer to Ansoaldis’ lifetime. The first of these, a new *“Life”* of patroness St Aldegonde written in all likelihood in the 1030s or 1040s, emphatically refers to Aldegonde and her subjects as observing the Rule of St Benedict,<sup>30</sup> thereby echoing the comment of Thierry’s biographer that Ansoaldis’ reform was in fact a return to

<sup>25</sup> For Gerard, see Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process* (cf fn. 11), 93 onwards; for Wolbodo, see Kupper, Liège (cf fn. 23), 256 et seqq. See also, more generally, Parris, *Die Frauenstifte* (cf fn. 10), 474 onwards.

<sup>26</sup> On the Aachen decisions, see generally Thomas Schilp, *Norm und Wirklichkeit religiöser Frauengemeinschaften im frühen Mittelalter*, Göttingen 1998. On attitudes of the secular and ecclesiastical elites, Ulrich Andermann, *Die unsittlichen und disziplinlosen Kanonissen. Ein Topos und seine Hintergründe, aufgezeigt an Beispielen sächsischer Frauenstifte (11.-13. Jahrhundert)*, in: *WestZs* 146 (1996), 39–63; Irene Crusius, „Sanctimoniales quae se canonicas vocant“. Das Kanonissenstift als Forschungsproblem, in: eadem (ed.), *Studien zum Kanonissenstift*, Göttingen 2001, 9–38, at 30p; and Franz Felten, *Auf dem Weg zu Kanonissen und Kanonissenstift. Ordnungskonzepte der weiblichen vita religiosa bis ins 9. Jahrhundert*, in: Crusius (ed.), *Vita religiosa sanctimonialium* (cf fn. 2), 71–92.

<sup>27</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the networks involved directly or indirectly in the reform of Maubeuge, see Steven Vanderputten, ‘Reformatrische lichamelijkheid’ en de geconditioneerde emoties van twee religieuze vrouwen omstreeks het jaar 1000, in: *TG* 126 (2013), 466–479. On Richard of Saint-Vanne, and on his relations with the Verdun-Ardenne clan, see Hubert Dauphin, *Le Bienheureux Richard, abbé de Saint-Vanne de Verdun* († 1046), Louvain-Paris 1946; also Frank G. Hirschmann, *Verdun im hohen Mittelalter. Eine lothringische Kathedralstadt und ihr Umland im Spiegel der geistlichen Institutionen*, Trier 1996, 3 Vols., Vol. 1, 135–144. Richard’s involvement with female monasticism appears to have been limited to the foundation of Saint-Maur in Verdun, some time during the 1020s; see in the first place Guild Rollins/François Heber-Suffrin/Anne Wagner, *Saint-Maur dans l’organisation ecclésiastique de Verdun. Un monastère de femmes et son pèlerinage*, in: Anne Baud (ed.), *Espace ecclésiastique et liturgie au Moyen Âge*, Lyon 2010, 347–368.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolas Ruffini, *Enjeux de pouvoir et compétition aristocratique en Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse (fin Xe-mil. XIe s.)*. Retour sur les fondations de Saint-Gengulph et de Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Florennes, in: *RBen* 122 (2012), 294–330.

<sup>29</sup> Katrinette Bodarwé, *Eine Männerregel für Frauen. Die Adaption der Benediktsregel im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert*, in: Melville/Müller (eds.), *Female “vita religiosa”* (cf fn. 1), 235–274, at 247 f. and 251. Also eadem, *Immer Ärger* (cf fn. 3), 99 et seqq.

<sup>30</sup> See further, at note 57.

a previous disciplinary reality. Yet, while the message in this text is clear enough, it does not corroborate the notion that Ansoaldis had promoted a radical transition from a regime of canonesses to one of Benedictine nuns, at least not from the beginning. Neither does it constitute solid evidence to support the hypothesis that early eleventh-century debates at the abbey of Maubeuge were in fact about choosing for one of these two extremes on the disciplinary spectrum. Even after Gerard and Renier had become involved it is not certain that those pursuing the reform envisaged creating an institution organized strictly along the lines of St Benedict's Rule. Gerard certainly did not see transforming groups of canonesses into Benedictine nuns as a straightforward procedure to follow in reform contexts: Marchiennes/Denain is a case in point. It may only have been after a certain period of time that, for reasons that may have had been related to bishops' and their lay associates' customary reliance on a rhetoric of dramatic change, a decision was made to promote the Maubeuge reform as focussed on establishing a Benedictine identity for the community. Whatever the exact relation of the testimonies of the "*Life*" of Thierry or the hagiography of Aldegonde to the disciplinary and organizational realities at early eleventh-century Maubeuge, it seems clear that these sources do not constitute a secure body of evidence for trying to understand how change was initially debated at the monastery.

Closer to the turbulences of a transition, or at least of an internal debate, that took place around the time of Ansoaldis' tenure is a second, much more enigmatic piece of evidence known to scholars as the 'roll of Maubeuge'.<sup>31</sup> At 234 centimeters long, and datable palaeographically to the early eleventh century, it is an exceptionally rare document, not just because of its form, but also because of its miscellaneous contents.<sup>32</sup> On the recto side, it contains a "*Life*" of patroness Aldegonde, a forged testament of the saint, and a brief, polyptych-like description of the abbey's estates; on the verso, it holds (besides a later addition to the polyptych), a forged charter issued by the Merovingian King Chilperic or Childeric to confirm Aldegonde's testament, and fifteen miscellaneous excerpts from canon law collections, penitential handbooks, and glossaries, presented so as to give the impression of a cohesive text.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Mons, Archives du Royaume, Coll. Archives locales, P 1755. On the roll, see Jacques Daris, *Vie de S. Aldegonde; Charte de dotation de l'abbaye de Maubeuge; Revenus de ses terres*, in: *Analectes pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique de la Belgique*, Vol. 2, Louvain-Brussels 1865, 40-47; Paul Bonenfant, *Note critique sur le prétendu testament de sainte Aldegonde*, in: *BCHAB* 98 (1934), 219-238, at 225 and Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 162.

<sup>32</sup> On dating, see Bonenfant, *Note critique* (cf fn. 31), 225, Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 162 at fn. 26. Theo Kölzer posits that one part of the roll, a charter by King Childeric, was added in the late eleventh or early twelfth century; see *Idem* (ed.), *Die Urkunden der Merowinger*, Vol. 1, Hannover 2001 (MGH.D Mer 1), 255.

<sup>33</sup> The roll currently consists of four leaves, and contains traces on the bottom suggesting that at least one additional leaf is missing. Up to a dozen individuals were involved in transcribing the texts. On the recto side, three scribes each worked on one text; on the verso side, one scribe copied the charter by Childeric/Chilperic, while up to eight others worked on the miscellaneous excerpts. All parts, with the exception perhaps of the charter (see the above note), are datable to the early eleventh century; more than a century later, a scribe copied an addition to the polyptych on the top part of the verso side, which had originally been left blank. Study of the hands by an expert palaeographer will undoubtedly yield more accurate results, but it does seem that at least the verso side and the

We have no clear idea of the original function of the roll. Judging from the evidence we have for male monasteries, many nunneries or groups of regular canonesses are likely to have owned similarly shaped documents: one only has to think of the mortuary rolls that circulated amongst monastic communities, rolls containing patrons' names and gifts, those that held the names of deceased members, or of oblate children, adults converts and their parents, and finally those with transcriptions of charters and informal notices. Katrinette Bodarwé has also drawn our attention to the practice, attested specifically for some female convents from the early Middle Ages, of preserving diplomatic texts as single-sheet copies, rather than cartularies.<sup>34</sup> But the roll of Maubeuge is special, in that its heterogeneous contents fit in none of these typologies. Its unusual nature suggests a conscious effort to collate certain texts in reference to specific events taking place at the time of its creation. As I will show further, considered together, the different sections of the roll suggest a context of change, almost certainly disciplinary, but also as regards communal identities and estate management. On the one hand, the combination of different hagiographical, economic, institutional, disciplinary and even intellectual arguments in one document is consistent with contemporary accounts of reformist agency on the part of female monastic leaders;<sup>35</sup> to have them literally in one place is both exceptional from a documentary perspective and revealing as to the accuracy of these accounts. Thus the connection with Ansoaldis' government seems likely, almost obvious even. On the other hand, it is typical for scholarship dealing with reform in this period to condense complex, lengthy processes of institutional and disciplinary transformation into mono-causal narratives of change.<sup>36</sup> A closer look at the contents of the roll reminds us of this risk, and at the same time lifts a tip of the veil that hides the long-term dynamics at the heart of Ansoaldis' reform.

## II. Mixed messages in the Roll of Maubeuge

One of the reasons why the roll has never been studied in relation to the early eleventh-century transitions at Maubeuge is that specialists have only been interested in specific parts of the document. The hagiographical and economic sections have been known to scholars since the mid-nineteenth century, and have been interpreted as belonging to a group of texts conceived specifically to protect the sisters' ownership of their estates by referring to St Aldegonde as original proprietor. This is consistent with contemporary accounts of what male reformers of the early eleventh century set out to do, and with the policies of regional ecclesiastical and secular rulers with

---

miscellaneous excerpts were copied within a relatively limited time period. As I will argue further, study of the final part of the roll suggests that, despite the number of scribes involved, there seems to be a cohesive logic – and possibly one author – behind it.

<sup>34</sup> Katrinette Bodarwé, *Gender and the Archive. The Preservation of Charters in Early Medieval Communities of Religious Women*, in: Mathilde Van Dijk/Renée Nip (eds.), *Saints, Scholars, and Politicians. Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies*, Turnhout 2005, 111–132, at 124 f.

<sup>35</sup> Parisse, *Der Anteil* (cf fn. 6), 91–95.

<sup>36</sup> Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process* (cf fn. 11).



regard to monastic reform.<sup>37</sup> However, a closer look at the contents and relative chronology suggests otherwise, and reveals that the set of four texts documents transitions and debates going back to at least the end of the ninth century.

While the history of the abbey of Maubeuge in the ninth century is largely obscured by a lack of explicit sources, we know that the sisters most likely observed a discipline based to a greater or lesser extent upon the constitutions of the Aachen council of 816, and that they were assisted by a group of canons, based at a local church dedicated to St Peter. By the mid-to-late ninth century, the abbey had become a royal institution, and was led by a lay abbess. It was in this period that the community issued the ‘Testament of St Aldegonde’, a text that claimed that the saint had bequeathed all of her properties to the monastery.<sup>38</sup> The latter document belongs to a genre of forged testaments of early medieval saints that was very popular in this period, and elements from its contents were quickly picked up when a male author drafted a revised edition of the early eighth-century “*Life*” of patroness St Aldegonde, a refined, stylistically attractive text known to scholars as the “*Vita Aldegundis secunda*”.<sup>39</sup> The “*Vita secunda*” contains several allusions to attempts on the part of the sisters to become less dependent upon the lay abbess, including by arguing that Aldegonde’s bequest had included provisions for the creation of a “*mensa conventualis*”.<sup>40</sup> A contemporary, or near-contemporary (the consensual dating is late ninth or early tenth century) “*Vita Madelbertae*”, also written for the sisters, takes these suggestive remarks one step further by insisting on the preferability of a Benedictine regime.<sup>41</sup>

From the early tenth century onwards, ownership of the abbey was transferred from Carolingian royalty to the comital house of Vermandois, whose head Heribert II appears to have replaced the local canons by a group of canons imported from the monastery of Saint-Quentin in Vermandois.<sup>42</sup> For a certain time around 900 at least, Maubeuge’s hagiographic production propagated a distinctly Benedictine model: in addition to the hints in the “*Vita secunda*”, the “*Life*” of Madelberta refers explicitly to the Rule, promoting poverty and obedience as key virtues in monastic life.<sup>43</sup> The dating of the “*Vita Madelbertae*” is concurrent with the early tenth-century regional elites’ push towards turning communities of canons and canonesses into Benedictine institutions, as documented for several institutions from the wider area.<sup>44</sup> Nothing

<sup>37</sup> A discussion of this topic, with extensive bibliographic references, can be found in Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process* (cf fn. 11), chap. 4–5.

<sup>38</sup> Daris (ed.), *Vie* (cf fn. 31), 37–41. On this dating in the late ninth century, see Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 161–168 and 248; previously Bonenfant had suggested the eleventh century; *Idem*, *Note critique* (cf fn. 31), 233.

<sup>39</sup> Edited in AASS Jan. II, Antwerp 1643, 1035–1040; see Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 159–168 and 318–320.

<sup>40</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 164 f. and Bertrand, *Réformes ecclésiastiques* (cf fn. 19), 66 f.

<sup>41</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 322–325 and Bertrand, *Réformes ecclésiastiques* (cf fn. 19), 71.

<sup>42</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 249–252 and 292.

<sup>43</sup> Both the “*Vita Aldegundis secunda*” and the “*Vita Madelbertae*” explicitly refer to the sisters of Maubeuge as “*puellae consecratae*”; also Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 161 at fn. 16.

<sup>44</sup> For the example of Sainte-Glossinde and Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains in Metz, see in the first place Blennemann, *Die Metzger Benediktinerinnen* (cf fn. 5), 75–87.

lasting seems to have come from this campaign,<sup>45</sup> and sometime prior to c. 1000, the canons concocted a forged charter issued allegedly by a contemporary of Aldegonde, the Merovingian King Chilperic (the preserved versions say Childeric), to confirm her bequest.<sup>46</sup> The text, even though it clearly relies on the “*Vita secunda*”, makes no mention of a female community, and claims the entire “*mensa conventualis*” for the canons. According to Anne-Marie Helvétius, it is clear that the cloister originated in the context of a struggle for control over the monastery’s estates between the female community and the canons.<sup>47</sup>

By the turn of the millennium, Aldegonde’s material and spiritual legacy had been a bone of contention for more than a century and a half. It is revealing for the ambiguous situation that resulted from these disputes that we have no idea who compiled a narrative known as the “*Vita Aldegundis tertia*”, or for whom.<sup>48</sup> Its publication is the *terminus post quem* for the creation of the roll, which begins with the “*Vita tertia*”, continues with the Testament, a brief polyptych describing properties in the villages of Cousolre and Solre-Saint-Géry,<sup>49</sup> and then follows with the aforementioned royal charter.<sup>50</sup> Helvétius has argued that the “*Vita tertia*’s” sole purpose was to serve as a narrative introduction to Aldegonde’s Testament, and situates its creation – which actually consists of nothing more than a collation of unaltered fragments from the two previous *Lives* of the saint – in the period prior to Ansoaldis’ reform on the grounds that the text twice refers to the original community at Maubeuge as one of canonesses.<sup>51</sup> In one notable passage quoted from the “*Vita Madelbertae*”, the author changed a reference to “*vita monastica*” into “*vita canonica*”.<sup>52</sup> This appears to rule out a connection between Ansoaldis’ reform

<sup>45</sup> Bertrand, Réformes ecclésiastiques (cf fn. 19), 70 et seq. A similar, failed attempt at ‘benedictinizing’ a female convent is documented for the aforementioned monastery of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains in Metz, where reform was initiated in the 920s under the supervision of Count Ricuin of Verdun. Only in the 960s, when Ricuin was long gone and had been replaced as patron of the convent by Otto I and the local bishop, did the community accept the Rule of St Benedict; Michel Parisse, Les religieuses de Lorraine au temps des réformes des X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles, in: RMAb 61 (1987), 257–279, at 259 et seqq.

<sup>46</sup> Kölzer (ed.), MGH.D Mer. 1 (cf fn. 32), 255 et seqq. (previously also edited in Bonenfant, Note critique [cf fn. 32], 235–238). The forged charter was certainly drafted before c. 1015, when Fulbert used it in the “*Vita Autberti*” or “*Life*” of Bishop Autbert of Cambrai; Helvétius, Abbayes (cf fn. 20), 251p.

<sup>47</sup> On this document and its dating, see Helvétius, Abbayes (cf fn. 20), 161 and 250–252; also Anne-Marie Helvétius/Jacques Nazet, Nouvelles considérations sur les faux testaments de sainte Aldegonde de Maubeuge, in: XLIX<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la Fédération des cercles d’archéologie et d’histoire de Belgique et 3<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l’association des cercles francophones d’histoire et d’archéologie de Belgique (18–21 VIII. 1988). Actes–Handelingen–Akten, 4 Vols., Namur 1988–1991, Vol. 1, 193 et seqq.

<sup>48</sup> Daris (ed.), Vie (cf fn. 31), 42 et seqq. With the exception of a passage relevant to the saint’s dotation, the entire text is copied almost word for word from the “*Vita Aldegundis secunda*” and a “*Life*” of Waudru of Mons (“*Vita Waldetrudis*”, c. 900); Helvétius, Abbayes (cf fn. 20), 330 et seq. It is likely that the author also relied on the first Testament of St Aldegonde and on Childeric’s confirmation.

<sup>49</sup> Daris (ed.), Vie (cf fn. 31), 44 et seqq.

<sup>50</sup> According to Kölzer, however, the charter was added to the roll in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. See Idem (ed.), MGH.D Mer. 1 (cf fn. 32), 255.

<sup>51</sup> Helvétius, Abbayes (cf fn. 20), 330 et seqq., with reference to Daris (ed.), Vie (cf fn. 31), 39 and 40. Also Bertrand, Réformes ecclésiastiques (cf fn. 19), 71 et seqq.

<sup>52</sup> “*Neptasque suas venerabiles Aldedrudem ac Madelbertam canonicae tradidit vitae*”; Daris (ed.), Vie (cf fn. 31), 40. The original passage in the “*Vita Madelbertae*” has “*monasticae tradidit vitae*”; see Bernard, Réformes ecclésiastiques (cf fn. 19), 72 et seqq.

and the conception of the roll. But as various authors have recently pointed out, it is not difficult to find references in contemporary documents to the fact that “*moniales*” and “*canonicales*” were still being used as interchangeable terms. When Emperor Otto I issued a charter in 960 for the new convent of Hilwartshausen, the text referred to the discipline of the women as both “*vita canonica*” and “*recta regula virginum*”.<sup>53</sup> And in 1003 Emperor Henry II wrote to the newly elected abbess of Alsleben that she was expected to behave “in a regular and canonical manner”; her contemporary, the abbess of Pfalzel, is referred to as “a canoness, who lived like a true nun.”<sup>54</sup> We do not even know for certain that a Benedictine regime was really what Ansoaldis had been promoting at the beginning of her tenure as abbess. She and her supporters may have advocated reform, for various reasons; but reform did not necessarily mean a radical transition from one regime of canonesses to one of Benedictine nuns. Internal reformist discourse may not even have centered on such a transition at all, focussing instead on specific aspects of observance and organization that were regarded as in need of change. Even if Ansoaldis did envisage a ‘total transition’ as regards observance and government, she may not have presented it as such, at least not initially, when Bishop Gerard and Count Renier were not yet actively involved. As argued earlier, in this period, reform, especially disciplinary reform, was very much of a process, and she and her supporters may have regarded as the appropriate tactic here one where new elements were introduced gradually and – intentionally, to avoid unnecessary conflicts – without much regard for labelling. Such labelling may have only become of interest when external forces stepped in, which likely was the point in time when the reform transformed from a debate into an enforced regime.

Even though the “*Vita tertia*” was evidently written by an author keen to substitute a memory of a community of canonesses for one of Benedictine nuns, it is nonetheless possible that the two references to the “*vita canonica*” did not offend subsequent reformers’ sensibilities, at least not in the way we would be tempted to imagine. A closer look at the polyptych also reveals that the notion of the roll serving as a statement of ownership as regards Aldegonde’s real and presumed properties may be less than adequate. The description of the sisters’ (or canons’) estates in this part of the roll is limited to the properties of Solre-Saint-Géry and Cousolre, the latter of which was known in tradition as the burial site of foundress Aldegonde. From the early eleventh century – roughly the same period as the roll – there exists a clumsily written fourth “*Life*” of Aldegonde that appears to insist on the existence of a cult of the saint at Cousolre.<sup>55</sup> According to Helvétius, it is not unlikely that the text is a product of former sisters of Maubeuge who, having refused to accept Ansoaldis’ Benedictine regime, were attempting to set up an independent monastery at Cousolre.<sup>56</sup> Given the emphatic references in the roll to the Cousolre estate, the “*Vita tertia*” and the creation of the roll may need situating in the specific context of this

<sup>53</sup> Andermann, *Die unsittlichen und disziplinlosen Kanonissen* (cf fn. 26), 40.

<sup>54</sup> See for both examples Parisse, *Der Anteil* (cf fn. 6), 92.

<sup>55</sup> Edited in *Catalogue codicum hagiographicorum Bibliothecae regiae Bruxellensis*, Vol. I.2, Brussels 1889, 133 et seqq.; see Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 19), 253 et seq. and 334 et seq.

<sup>56</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 308 et seq. and Bertrand, *Réformes ecclésiastiques* (cf fn. 19), 74.

dispute, and may be interpreted as an elaborate rebuke of the dissident sisters' plans. A fifth "*Life*" of Aldegonde, written so it seems in the 1030s or 1040s for the sisters of Maubeuge and possibly even authored by Ansoaldis' brother Thierry, revealingly ignores this claim, suggesting that the Cousolre issue was no longer troubling the abbey's leadership.<sup>57</sup>

Thus the polyptych emerges as the centerpiece of an argumentation in a dispute that was very current at the time of Ansoaldis' tenure, and related both to disciplinary questions and to matters relating to the institutional integrity of the monastic community of Maubeuge.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the different texts relied upon to construct this case – which therefore likely did originate around the time of Ansoaldis' reform – gather a set of arguments referring to distinctly different phases in the turbulent history of the monastery. Strikingly, not even the claimants in the different texts are the same: thus we have texts written from a distinctly male, female, and undetermined perspective. Surely more care would have been invested in ironing out the inconsistencies between the different parts had the roll been assembled in a context of institutional stability.

This impression is given added strength by the fact that the fifth "*Life*" offers a much more cohesive, clearly defined interpretation of Benedictine monastic identity and of Maubeuge's communal history, arguing that foundress Aldegonde had explicitly chosen to follow St Benedict's Rule.<sup>59</sup> It therefore appears almost as if the roll was assembled to deal with a pressing problem quickly and decisively, and that concerns over internal cohesiveness, or indeed the comprehensiveness of the argument, were regarded as secondary. This hypothesis regarding the *ad hoc* nature of the roll, the transitional context in which it was collated, and especially the authors' reliance on a range of texts and traditions that did not necessarily originate in contexts that exactly matched the then-reformers' objectives, is corroborated when we look at the second part of the roll, so far completely ignored by scholars.

### III. A 'reader' for reform?

The end of Chilperic's charter marks the end of the main part of the roll. What follows is a lengthy, seemingly random collection of excerpts, inscriptions and notes that so far has eluded any meaningful interpretation. Totalling some 1450 words, the collection consists of the following fragments:<sup>60</sup>

1. Institutio sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis (816), canon XXVIII.
2. Hildemar de Corbie, *Expositio regulae* (c. 840), excerpt from the prologue.

<sup>57</sup> Edited in AASS Jan. II, Antwerp 1643, 1040–1052; see Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 340–342.

<sup>58</sup> One of several known versions of the "*Vita secunda Aldegundis*" – one that so far has not been edited – refers to Cousolre as St Aldegonde's place of burial. According to Anne-Marie Helvétius, the author of the "*Vita tertia*" relied on this specific version (oral communication to the author, January 2014). This is likely a corroborative argument to support the context of a dispute involving Cousolre.

<sup>59</sup> Helvétius, *Abbayes* (cf fn. 20), 309 and 342; also Bertrand, *Réformes ecclésiastiques* (cf fn. 19), 73 et seq.

<sup>60</sup> The exact contents of the identified fragments is detailed respectively in notes 62 (1), 71 (2), 64–67 (4, 13, 15), 68–69 (5), 74–76 (8), 77 (9), 73 (10), and 72 (11).

3. Fragment of an unidentified glossary (beginning of the letter A).
4. Acts of the Council of Châlons (813), canons XVIII, LIV and LIX.
5. Acts of the Council of Worms (868), canons VIII and IX.
6. Unidentified fragment, possibly relevant to 1.
7. Fragment of a “penitential glossary”.
8. *Paenitentiale mixtum Pseudo-Bedae-Egberti*, canons XXXVIII, XLI, XLII, XLVII, and XLVI.
9. Fragment regarding the devil’s ways to keep people from performing penance.
10. Instructions for prayers and chants during the liturgical week; fragment for Sundays.
11. John Cassian, *Conferences*, paraphrase of cap. 14:8.
12. Inscription of a crucifix in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.
13. Acts of the Council of Châlons (813), canon LX.
14. Inscription of a chalice dedicated to St Aldegonde.
15. Acts of the Council of Châlons (813), canon LX, continuation of n. 13.

Not a single of these excerpts was taken from texts that post-date 900, and so interpretation of the compilation as a conscious reflection of current trends in canon law, theology and didactic literature has to be dismissed. But here again, its relation to the reform process is evident upon closer inspection, especially as regards discipline and the construction of a communal identity in the wake of (or indeed during) a phase of intense change. The fragments taken from ninth-century legislation clearly indicate the disciplinary and organizational preferences of whoever selected them, and taken together they sketch out priorities in organizing a community of nuns living according to the Rule. First, the sisters’ rights to their estates are confirmed, and provisions are taken to retain control over the clerics responsible for the monastery’s guesthouse and the parishes owned by the nuns. This principle of collective property is combined, as was common at the time, with arguments relating to sisters’ need for enclosure:<sup>61</sup> thus the excerpt from the “*Institutio sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis*” of 816 orders for guesthouses for the poor to be situated outside of the monastery, next to the church where the canons celebrate their liturgies.<sup>62</sup> An interpolation to the original text refers to the need to give tithes to the priests working at parishes belonging to the sisters, and continues with the original text to stipulate the revenues that are due to the priests serving the guesthouse and that go towards the sustenance of the poor.<sup>63</sup>

Added to these stipulations are excerpts from the Acts of the Council of Châlons of 813, with more regulations for the maintenance of and revenues from parish churches, based on a tithe system.<sup>64</sup> It seems that the intent of this selection is for the women to retain control over their estates and the management of parishes, even in a context of strict enclosure, and to prevent the canons from taking over. In a second group of excerpts, the obligations of the abbess and the sisters are succinctly but unmistakably laid out. Canon LIV of the same Council of Châlons stipulates that the abbess is to make sure the congregation strictly observes its obligations as

<sup>61</sup> Bodarwé, Immer Ärger (cf fn. 3), 100.

<sup>62</sup> Albert Werminghoff (ed.), *Concilia aevi Karolini (742–842)*, Vol. 1, Hannover–Leipzig 1906 (MGH.Conc II), 455 et seq., c. 28: “*Ut hospitale pauperum extra monasterium sit puellarum.*” See Schilp, Norm (cf fn. 22), 97 et seq.

<sup>63</sup> “*De villis unde sorores in Melbodio monasterio vivere debent unusquisque presbiter in sua parochia de laborato decimam partem accipiat.*”

<sup>64</sup> Werminghoff (ed.), MGH.Conc II (cf fn. 62), 277, c. 19.

regards readings, offices, and chanting of the psalms, but also – and this is crucial here – offers them an example “in all good works” and provides them with the necessary provisions to exercise their duties “so as to prevent that they would be forced to commit sin out of a lack of food or drink.”<sup>65</sup> Here too, the implied intent of the selection is not difficult to guess: to prevent the return of a system of lay abbesses, and to force the community’s leadership to make sure that the incomes from the *mensa conventualis* meets the community’s needs. A third and final group of provisions in just a few sentences sketch out the sisters’ duties and the principle of strict enclosure. Women religious according to canon LVIII of the Council of Châlons are expected to observe obligations as regards reading, chanting, prayers and the observance of the hours. They are also expected to sleep (with the exception of the sick) in the dormitory and attend communal meals.<sup>66</sup> Priests are also restricted from staying longer than needed in the women’s quarters, and are to be compensated for their pastoral services.<sup>67</sup> Several excerpts also address sexual misconduct. From the 868 council of Worms there are two excerpts, one regarding the degrees of kinship allowable in marriage (canon VIII),<sup>68</sup> and another stipulating that veiled women who had previously received formal ordination and subsequently engaged in sexual intercourse were not allowed to relinquish their veil, in other words abandon their consecrated status.<sup>69</sup> Such measures were meant to end a well-documented situation where consecrated virgins were effectively allowed to abandon their vow of chastity when the opportunity presented itself to get married. At the same time, their inclusion here reflects strong male preconceptions about the lack of self-control of female religious as regards their sexuality.<sup>70</sup>

This tripartite, microcosmic representation of female religious life allows several of the non-juridical excerpts to be interpreted meaningfully. Thus a seemingly random extract from the prologue to Hildemar of Corbie’s commentary on the Rule of St Benedict emerges as a strongly worded appeal in favor of obedience, and of a

<sup>65</sup> “*Abbatissa diligenter habeat curam de congregatione sibi commissa et provideat, ut in lectione et in officio et in psalmodum modulatione ipsae sanctae [...] strenue sint et in omnibus operibus bonis illa eis ducatum praebeat utpote pro animabus earum rationem in conspectu Domini redditura et stipendia sanctimonialibus praebeat necessaria, ne forte pro indigentia cibi aut potus peccare compellantur.*” This is an almost perfect match to the text in Werminghoff (ed.), MGH.Conc II (cf fn. 62), 284, c. 54. For contemporary expectations regarding the behavior of abbesses, see Parisse, *Die Frauenstifte* (cf fn. 10), 478–481.

<sup>66</sup> “*Sanctimoniales in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psalmodum celebratione et oratione et horas canonicas, matutinam videlicet, primam, tertiam, sextam, nonam, vespertinam, completoriam celebrant et omnes, excepto quam infirmitas tenet, in dormitorio dormiant et omnibus diebus ad collationem veniant.*” Compare with the text edited in Werminghoff (ed.), MGH.Conc II (cf fn. 62), 285, c. 59. A later hand erased “-moniales” as if to prevent the implication that the sisters at Maubeuge should be regarded as Benedictine nuns.

<sup>67</sup> Werminghoff (ed.), MGH.Conc II (cf fn. 62), 285, c. 60.

<sup>68</sup> Wilfried Hartmann (ed.), *Die Konzilien der Karolingischen Teilreiche 860–874*, Hannover 1998 (MGH.Conc IV), 266, c. 8: “*In quota generatione sibi fideles iungantur.*”

<sup>69</sup> Hartmann (ed.), MGH.Conc IV (cf. fn. 68), 267, c. 9: “*De feminis sacro velamine consecratis.*”

<sup>70</sup> According to the “*Life*” of Bishop Gerard of Toul (963–964), his plan to found a women’s convent in the town of Toul failed because of the sisters’ multiple infractions of the vow of chastity; Andermann, *Die unsittlichen und disziplinlosen Kanonissen* (cf fn. 26), 41 et seq. For similar examples see Parisse, *Der Anteil* (cf fn. 6), 95 and Bodarwé, *Immer Ärger* (cf fn. 3), 99.

master–disciple relation between the abbess and her subjects.<sup>71</sup> Although less obviously meaningful, the excerpt from John Cassian’s conferences may refer to the image of the monastery as a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>72</sup> Either way, it should be clear that references to both texts are significant also in that they sketch out specific priorities and ideological emphases in monastic ideology. Other fragments allude to the availability of instruments that allow implementation of the conciliar extracts. As regards liturgy, we have an excerpt from a liturgical handbook concerning the prayers and chants to be recited during the week,<sup>73</sup> and a fragment from the “*Paenitentiale mixtum Pseudo-Bedaegberti*” on the main feasts on the liturgical calendar.<sup>74</sup> As regards internal discipline, there are several more excerpts from the latter collection concerning the reporting of errors committed by fellow sisters<sup>75</sup> and ways to amend sinful behavior.<sup>76</sup> Excerpts from glossaries, one of which is identified as a “penitential glossary”, and an apocryphal appendix to a sermon “*De penitentia*” formerly attributed to Cesarius of Arles,<sup>77</sup> complete the picture of the legal, ritual and disciplinary framework in which reorganization of life at Maubeuge was to be carried out.

Finding these clear references to a situation of reform, or at least to efforts to implement reformist ideals, carries with it the risk of falling victim to wishful thinking about the origins of the final part of the roll. The message conveyed in the excerpts, and in the combination of the other texts on the roll, appears to concur with Thierry’s biographer’s claims about efforts made in the early eleventh century to reform the community. Upon first inspection it would seem acceptable to argue that Ansoaldis, or someone associated with her reformist ideals, commissioned the assemblage of the two hagiographical texts, the polyptych and the forged charter by Chilperic, to support

---

<sup>71</sup> “*Non tantum bonis et modestis, set etiam discolis. Indisciplinatis dicit nomine ducto a Greco eloquio, quia Grece scola vocatur locus, in quo adolescentes litteralibus studiis operam dare, et ad audientes magistros vacare solent, unde scola vacatio interpretatur. Denique in psalmo ubi canimus: Vacate, vidite, quoniam ego sum Dominus pro eo quod nos dicimus vacate, in Greco habetur scolamate. Scolastici sunt eruditi, discoli indocti et agrestes; sed utrisque vult obedire subditos.*” For the original passage, which the author of this part of the roll heavily truncated to refocus its subject on obedience, see Ruppert Mittermüller (ed.), *Expositio Regulae ab Hildemaro tradita*, Regensburg 1880, 66 and the more recent edition at <http://www.earlymedievalmonasticism.org/texts/Hildemar-Expositio.html>.

<sup>72</sup> “*Hierusalem secundum historiam civitas est Iudaeorum, secundum allegoriam ecclesia Christi, secundum tropologiam [...], secundum anagogen caeleste regnum.*” Paraphrase of the text in Eugène Pichery (ed.), *Jean Cassien, Conférences: VIII-XVII*, Paris 1958, 190 et seq., c. 14:8.

<sup>73</sup> “*Pronuntiationes orationum et laudium dicende in tota ebdomada.*” The only day covered in the fragment is Sunday.

<sup>74</sup> Herrmann Joseph Schmitz (ed.), *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt*, Vol. 2: *Die Bussbücher und das kanonische Bussverfahren*, Düsseldorf 1898, 700, c. 47: “*De praecipuis festivitatibus*”, and c. 46 (addition, attested only in the roll and Köln, Erzbischöfliche Diözesanbibliothek, 118): “*Hieronimus. CXXti missae speciales cum tribus psalteriis et CCCtas palmatas excusant C. solidos auri cocti in elemosyna.*”

<sup>75</sup> Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher* (cf fn. 74), 696, c. 38: “*De eo qui peccatum fratris silebit.*”

<sup>76</sup> Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher* (cf fn. 74), 698, c. 41: “*De pretio redemptionis*”, and c. 42: “*De pretio unius mensis.*”

<sup>77</sup> The appended paragraph (“*Tres suggestiones diabolus in mentem hominis mittit*”) to my knowledge is attested only in Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, 118, fol. 104<sup>r</sup> and the Roll of Maubeuge; it is edited in Eusebius Amort, *Theologia eclectica, moralis et scholastica*, 4 Vols., here Vol. 3, Wien–Würzburg 1752, 561.

a reformist cause, and that subsequently but not much later, someone added the compilation of excerpts as a testimony of what the reformers aimed to achieve. We might even be allowed to speculate that the final part of the roll consists of notes and excerpts taken in preparation of a significant event, for instance a chapter meeting, the common structure and purpose of which seems to match several liturgical, normative and didactic parts in the compilation.<sup>78</sup>

But in reality there is nothing in these fifteen fragments that allows their assemblage together to be dated to the early eleventh century. All datable fragments originated prior to c. 900, and were available in the specific form relied upon here as early as the later ninth or early tenth century. Some unusual variations to the common text tradition of the penitential sections, in particular those taken from the “*Paenitentiale mixtum Pseudo-Bedae-Egberti*”, reveal near-exact matches with the unique text variants found in Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesanbibliothek, 118 (formerly Darmstadt, 2117), a compilation of canon law, penitential handbooks, relevant sermons and miscellaneous texts all devoted to the question of penitence and the general issue of the remission of sins.<sup>79</sup> Cologne 118, a manuscript from the end of the ninth century made in the Reims region, is in fact so close to some of the excerpts that it is possible that the compilers of the roll actually used this volume, and that it was therefore part either of the Maubeuge library, or the library of the canons of Saint-Quentin, or of some neighboring monastery.<sup>80</sup> The presence of such volumes in a female community was hardly a unique phenomenon. In the “*Life*” of John of Gorze, Jean of Vandières mentions the presence of confessional handbooks and canon law books in the collection of the sisters of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains in Metz at the beginning of the tenth century;<sup>81</sup> several decades later, possibly towards the end of the century, a volume containing the relatively rare “*Paenitentiale mixtum Pseudo-Bedae-Egberti*” and now preserved as Düsseldorf, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, B113, became part of the famous collection of the sisters of Essen.<sup>82</sup> More generally, Katrinette Bodarwé’s study has shown that

<sup>78</sup> It is unfortunate that the near-contemporary chapter book of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains was only partially preserved; on this, see Gordon Blennemann, *Le nécrologe du livre du chapitre de l’abbaye Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains de Metz* (BNF lat. 10028), unpublished thèse for the École des Chartes, Paris 2006, a summary of which is available at <http://theses.enc.sorbonne.fr/2006/blennemann>.

<sup>79</sup> The variants in Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, 118, are edited in the footnotes of Schmitz (ed.), *Die Bussbücher* (cf fn. 74), 680–701.

<sup>80</sup> The *terminus post quem* for this manuscript, which appears to have originated in the Reims region, is c. 880, the earliest accepted date for the “*Collectio canonum*” by Pseudo-Remedius Curiensis. For its contents, see Reinhold Hagenmüller, *Die Überlieferung der Beda und Egbert zugeschriebenen Bußbücher*, Frankfurt am Main et al. 1991, 67 et seq. (with references) and the catalogue entry on the website Codices electronici ecclesiae Coloniensis: <http://www.ceec.uni-koeln.de/ceec/cgi/kleioc/0010/exec/katl/%22kn28%2d0118%22> (accessed 11 December 2013). Wilfried Hartmann dates the manuscript to the final third of the ninth century (cf. Idem, *Kirche und Kirchenrecht um 900. Die Bedeutung der spätkarolingischen Zeit für Tradition und Innovation im kirchlichen Recht*, Hannover 2008, 328), and situates it in Reims (Ib., 81 and 140; further discussion of the manuscript at pages 76, 167, 169 and 324).

<sup>81</sup> Michel Parisse (ed.), *La vie de Jean, abbé de Gorze*, Paris 1999, 54–59.

<sup>82</sup> Hagenmüller, *Die Überlieferung* (cf fn. 80), 59 et seq. and Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales litteratae* (cf fn. 4), 387 et seq. For a discussion of the transmission of this version of the mixed penitential, which seems to date from the 870s or 880s and originated in the region between the towns of Reims, Cambrai, Cologne, and Mainz, see Hagenmüller, *Die Überlieferung* (cf fn. 80), 246–273.



female communities of the tenth century could hold extensive collections of handbooks for liturgical practice, penitential handbooks, canon law volumes, and glossaries.<sup>83</sup> Admittedly the mere existence of such manuscripts tells us little about intellectual life in these communities. Some of these show little signs of use, and Bodarwé notes that Düsseldorf B113 contains but one indication of study: a small cross in the margin of canon 38 of the mixed penitential, entitled “*De eo qui fratris peccatum silebit.*”<sup>84</sup> This at least is a section that seems to have interested people working both at Essen and Maubeuge, for this same passage is the first canon from the mixed penitential that is featured on the roll.

It is striking that we have no indications for female institutions from the early eleventh century of active use of these and other texts, whereas we do have several parallel ones for a hundred years earlier. What happened at Metz and Essen is evidence that the early tenth century was a time when monastic groups paid particular attention to these canonical and other sources. Taking into account the similarities of the circumstances in which the first reform of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains was attempted in the 920s and the situation at Maubeuge in the 1020s, and considering the fact that we have indications of attempts at reform at Maubeuge around 900, it is very well possible that the assemblage of excerpts as featured on the roll took place, in part or entirely, in the early tenth century. As mentioned earlier, it appears that the sisters at the time had resisted lay abbesses’ control over the monastic estate, and had attempted to promote – though not necessarily realize – a Benedictine observance as a means to secure their collective interests. The emphatic references to the duties of the abbess, and to infractions of the vow of chastity, might be interpreted as more or less veiled criticism of the very existence of a system whereby laywomen could hold the office of abbess. While such arguments undoubtedly still made some sense to Ansoaldis and her supporters, their presence in the collection for obvious reasons – Ansoaldis not being a lay abbess – referred to less pressing concerns than those voiced by the sisters a century earlier.

But here again, the scarce evidence has a tendency to make us focus on the few documented phases in this institution’s history. If the hypothesis that the Cologne manuscript was used to compile the final part of the roll is correct, we must accept that the result may in fact date from any time between c. 900 and the first half of the eleventh century. Thus the compilation emerges as a reader for reform, but *what* reform exactly remains unclear.

#### IV. Conclusions: debating reform at early eleventh-century Maubeuge

The above analysis has shown that the Roll of Maubeuge likely is a document that originated in the early eleventh century, when the sisters intensively debated disciplinary and organizational change. To construct a written discourse supporting the various material, disciplinary and even moral aspects of the reform process, one or

<sup>83</sup> Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales litteratae* (cf fn. 4), 232–302 and 335–355.

<sup>84</sup> Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales litteratae* (cf fn. 4), 267 et seq.

several individuals closely associated with the monastery assembled a group of texts that originated at various points in time between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the eleventh. While the message regarding the nature of the sister's observance in this assemblage is considerably more diffuse than in the subsequent fifth "Life" of St Aldegonde, written c. 1035–1040, it is nevertheless a clear, and exceedingly rare indication for female or male monasteries of the time, of the priorities the reformers had given themselves. The fact that the documentation relied upon to detail these priorities in writing was not new, and in fact consisted of texts that had originated in past phases of debate and change, reflected a common practice in reformist circles of the time: a routine reliance on a historical, often well-known literary base, as a way of making a case for change in the present time.<sup>85</sup>

It is essential to our understanding of the purpose and context of the roll of Maubeuge that we do not – as scholars have done so far – consider each part separately. The act of assembling these texts, and reimagining their meaning in an early eleventh-century context, is what makes the roll reformist, for the actual creation of most of the texts already belonged to a past that could hardly have been remembered by the living members of the community of Maubeuge. To previous generations of specialists of monastic reform in this period, the roll and similar documents may have seemed a disappointing, uninspired witness of reformers' efforts at explicating their goals and ideology. It is up to twenty-first-century scholarship to show otherwise, and to explore the potential to rediscover in former monastic collections documents and manuscripts that originated in a similar context, but that have been ignored because of their perceived irrelevance to the innovative ideals and actions of eleventh-century reformers.

### Abstract

Recent years have seen significant progress in the study of the role of female religious in the monastic reform movements of the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The motivations of secular and ecclesiastical elites in promoting reform, the impact of reformist discourses on our understanding of pre-reform realities, and finally the processual nature of reformist government are now well established. One particular area of investigation that has so far eluded scholars' attention is how reformist women religious and their supporters debated institutional and disciplinary change. Looking at an exceptional document from the early eleventh-century monastery of Maubeuge, this paper argues that the perceived scarcity of evidence for these practices and discourses may be a false problem. Analysis of the Roll of Maubeuge reveals how reformist agents actively recycled texts and arguments from their institution's collective and intellectual past, in the process disconnecting them from their original context in order to advocate the current reform and outline its main goals and principles.

---

<sup>85</sup> Monique Paulmier-Foucart/Anne Wagner, *Lire au Haut Moyen Âge: un florilège spirituel de l'abbaye Saint-Vanne de Verdun*, in: *Annales de l'Est* 6<sup>th</sup> series 52 (2002), 9–24; Steven Vanderputten/Tjamke Snijders, *Echoes of Benedictine Reform in an Eleventh-Century Booklist From Marchiennes*, in: *Scriptorium* 63 (2009), 79–88; and Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process* (cf n. 11), 131–152.