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Jean Mabillon and the Debate on the Regular Origins of Secular Canonesses in Seventeenth-Century France

Abstract

This paper reviews the classic perception that the debate on the regular origins of secular canonesses in early modern France consisted of a clash between authors who sought to legitimize the members' then-present status and privileges and prominent scholars such as Jean Mabillon whose sole aim was to present a truthful account of the past. Through a case study of the abbey of Remiremont it shows that local commentators gained a nuanced understanding of that community's past and present identities, while Mabillon and others relied on second-hand arguments and flawed methods to make a case for a regular reform.

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Steven Vanderputten

The imposition of unwanted reform inspired countless communities of women religious across the early modern West to express their concerns in chronicles and other works of historiography.[1] An often-cited influence on this activity was the Council of Trent's 1563 decree that all women pursuing the religious life were to observe a cloistered regime, make vows, and wear a religious habit. However, studies from the last three decades have established that this was just one of a much wider range of reform interventions that began as early as the fifteenth century and aimed to subject groups of religious women to a strictly regulated observance and close juridical supervision by the clergy.[2] The scope, timing, methodology, and even the precise objectives of these initiatives to a large extent answered to local factors and connections.[3] And so did the response by the women and their supporters, whose historiographical production was born out of a desire to legitimize present identities, behaviours, and relations, and also to formulate strategies for either accepting or resisting reform. Alongside other interventions in archival, hagiographical, normative, and even material memory, history-writing was designed to shape the members' perception of the communal past and their understanding of self.[4] As such the texts deserve to be read and understood as 'acts of performance, representation, and interpretation'.[5]

There currently exists a broad consensus on the significance of this substantial body of historical narratives. However, at present its place in research on early modern memory cultures remains somewhat marginal. To an extent this is due to the fact that scholarly interest in the subject dates back only to the end of the twentieth century, and there are still many sides to the story that have yet to receive in-depth attention. But another reason is that specialist discussions until recently 'locate(d) women as

cultural memory's marginalized "other" in a dynamic which reflects and re-enacts a division between memory as technique and memory as affect'.[6] Scholars lacked interest in the historiographical production of groups of women religious because they saw this production as firmly anchored in pre-modern cultural memory, which put the study of the past at the service of present interests.[7] But beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, they argued, that particular approach to the past had faced increasing competition from a new one that replaced legitimation with the new goals of erudition and truth-seeking. Taking their inspiration from philologists and jurists, proponents of this trend had insisted on the revolutionary nature of their approach, which consisted of methodically bringing together the documentary evidence for their work, critically reviewing its authenticity, and assembling a dispassionate and above all truthful account of the past.[8] In France especially, prominent scholars developed their craft through writing case studies on the history of religious institutions, including some of those where the members had been producing their own chronicles. Many of these authors implied to their readership that this local production was inferior, due to the fact that it was incompatible with the objectivity and methodological rigor that were central to this new trend in historical writing.[9]

Perhaps the most well-known and prolific scholar in this latter cohort was Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) of the Benedictine Congregation of Saint-Maur (established 1615).[10] As a member of this religious movement which was noted for its intense preoccupation with the religious past, he published on medieval hagiographies and the study of charters, including the art of verifying their authenticity and deciphering their paleography; issued a treatise for local authors on how to research and write about the history of monastic houses; and subsequently demonstrated his approach in a number of case studies. One of those case studies was published in 1687 and dealt with the origins of the abbey of Remiremont, a prestigious house of secular canonesses in France's eastern region of Vosges. Although Mabillon was aware that the chapter members insisted that they had never been bound to any rule, in his opinion study of the abbey's medieval archives and its liturgical documentation revealed the contrary. Papal charters from the middle of the eleventh century onwards had frequently reminded the women that their institution was part of the Benedictine cohort. And throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period there had always been new recruits who chose to make regular vows on entering the community;

until the beginning of the sixteenth century this had in fact been the standard practice on the installation of a new abbess. Even as Mabillon was writing about these things, the local liturgy of the office still bore many traces of the rite as it was practised in regular institutions. From this he inferred that Remiremont had never truly lost its Benedictine identity.[11] Due to Mabillon's towering reputation as one of the founders of modern historical scholarship and source criticism, his case study on the Vosges abbey has so far eluded analysis in light of a seventeenth-century polemic in which parties on both sides of the table looked into the medieval past of this institution to either reject or justify the secular status of its then-current inhabitants. Various commentators from the early eighteenth century onwards have noted on the impressive scope of this polemic, which involved nearly two dozen authors and yielded hundreds of pages of published and unpublished text.[12] But until now neither its precise chronology nor its relationship to Mabillon's treatise have been properly established: presumably scholars thought that Mabillon's dispassionate approach made it pointless to consider his work within a debate in which local authors reasoned for or against a regular reform.

The current state of research on early modern memory cultures and historiographical practices indicates that this notion of a deep cognitive and methodological gap between Mabillon's work and that of other early modern commentators on Remiremont's past is now up for review. Studies from the last three decades have argued that like cultural memory (*memoria*), historical erudition (*historia*) was imbued with 'political, religious, and medial claims and instructions'.[13] This has been shown to great effect for the historiographical output by members of the Maurist Congregation in general.[14] Mabillon's work in particular has also been reinterpreted in light of his movement's ideological and institutional pursuits, as well as in the context of the controversies in which he personally became involved. Famously he liked to present himself as a detached observer who relied on the unprejudiced pursuit of erudition as a way to uncover the truth and glorify God.[15] But in reality many of his key statements on hagiography, diplomatics, and historical methods in general were issued either to criticize the historical and editorial work of his contemporaries or to rebuke those who criticized his own work and its obvious ideological subtext.[16] The case studies in which he applied his theoretical principles, too, were typically conceived in controversial circumstances. A prime example of this is his treatise on Remiremont abbey, which as we shall see in this paper must be brought into relationship with a campaign by the incumbent

Abbess Dorothée de Salm to impose a stricter, quasi-monastic regime on the canonesses.[17] And more broadly we must also understand the scholar's work in light of another campaign by the Maurists and other Catholic commentators in which historiographical propaganda was used to stop the ongoing 'secularization' of a number of female communities that were said to have historically belonged to the regular strand of religious life.[18]

If Mabillon's historical work was consistently informed by ideological and political motives, then surely it makes no sense to see it as being beyond meaningful comparison with that of local authors. And conversely, we should also be wary of a priori assumptions that these authors were out of step methodologically with contemporary trends in history-writing. In a recent study, Hilary Bernstein showed that local authors in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France early on took notice of emerging methodological trends and adopted them in their work.[19] While the Maurists' propagation of new methods for historical enquiry were chiefly directed to the members of their own congregation, their arguments and methodological propaganda surely also resonated in other places too. Presumably this resonance was especially great in circles that were targeted by these authors on political or ideological grounds, including in women's communities that were put under pressure to accept a reform of their institutions and lifestyle. And conceivably there were cases where local authors did not simply adopt the methods of historical enquiry they encountered in these learned publications, but actually reviewed their soundness. Comparative analysis of the abundant testimonies on Remiremont's past presents itself as the perfect way to gain a more nuanced understanding of the memory culture of women religious and its relationship to contemporary trends in historical writing. At the same time, such an analysis also offers us an opportunity to better understand how the formulation of historical arguments by both local authors and prominent scholars was driven not simply by these trends, but also by political and personal contingencies.

In order to verify the above hypotheses, this paper will put all the known testimonies from sixteenth- to early eighteenth-century about Remiremont's origins on a double timeline of (a) the relations between successive abbesses and the chapter members, and (b) a concurrent polemical debate about the abbey's historical origins. Doing so, three key things become clear. The first is that the creation of this documentation ties in with key episodes in the broader (political, juridical, ideological, and even

personal) struggle between those who advocated a regular reform and those who resisted it. The second observation is that together these treatises and other statements form a cumulative dossier in which each item either built on or refuted a previous one, and that this process drove forward methodological change. And finally, we will see that there is cause to review the notion that reformist authors (including Mabillon) employed a method and a way of historical reasoning that was fundamentally more objective than the canonesses and their allies. As such this paper hopes to contribute to a more accurate view on how advanced the historical outlook of these leading scholars was compared to that of local archivists and historians. Furthermore, it will also yield a clearer view of the early modern memory culture of canonesses and by extension also of uncloistered women religious in general, which is a subject that has so far been barely touched upon in specialist scholarship.

The Origins of a Polemic

Beginning in the 1560s the duchy of Lorraine, a region wedged between the Catholic kingdom of France to the west and Protestant-leaning polities to the east, became a hotbed of religious reform.[20] Since the early sixteenth century the dukes had sought to stem the advance of Protestantism in the region, which turned into an aggressively expansionist one from 1563, following the closure of the council of Trent. At the same time religious war had brought to prominence an apocalyptic spirituality that found expression in both personal and communal acts of atonement, which in turn hardened Church leaders' attitudes with respect to practices of piety and devotion.[21] This combination of political and spiritual ideals proved to be the perfect recipe for Lorraine to emerge as the keystone of what French scholars refer to as the *dorsale catholique*, a line of Catholic entrenchment stretching from central Italy over the Milan area, France-Comté, and upwards to the Southern Low Countries. Bishops at Toul, Verdun, and Metz set out to reform the secular clergy, and then the regular cohort, in order to turn these cohorts into the vanguard of this reformist action. The members of the latter cohort were encouraged to follow their rules and statutes more strictly; insert their institutions into congregations; and actively engage in intellectual and pastoral action at the service of the Counter-Reformation. The Benedictine congregation of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hydulphe played a significant role, as did the Norbertines and the Mendicants.

Between 1560 and 1635, the Franciscans founded no less than sixty-two houses of Capucins, Cordeliers, Grey Sisters, Minimes, Tiercelins, Recollects, and Annunciates, all of which belonged to the stricter strands of their movement.[22] One of the major proponents of religious reform in the area, Pierre Fourier (d. 1640), emblematized the movement's desire to work simultaneously on a number of fronts. These ranged over the reorganization of the regular cohort, reinforcing its ascetic appeal; the use of pastoral action to ignite a fervent penitential culture and Marian devotion amongst the laity; and active involvement with the dukes of Lorraine in their efforts to be good Christian rulers and defenders of the Catholic faith.[23] Fourier's ideals were relayed among other groups through the Franciscan Cordeliers of Nancy, who acted as a liaison with the ducal court.[24]

This cocktail of penitential spirituality, ascetic fervour, and commitment to enforcing the absolute authority of both Lorraine's ruling dukes and the region's bishops made communities of secular canonesses an easy target for the reformers. This small but prestigious cohort (of which there existed seven institutions in France and four in Lorraine) occupied a special place in the regional Church.[25] Unlike nuns and regular canonesses, these groups of uncloistered women did not observe a rule or make any vows. Rather, they received an allowance from the convent (also known as a prebend), and each lived in her own house. They also received visitors at will, were allowed to leave the convent for extended periods of time, and could even abandon their status altogether if they chose to get married. The fate of their institutions was largely controlled by a small number of aristocratic families from the region. As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, houses of secular canonesses had imposed strict rules for admission, considering only those individuals who could submit proof of their noble ancestry; these rules only became more restrictive as time progressed.[26] The canonesses' relatives also gained a tight grip on the allocation of prebends and the recruitment of new convent members, which only increased the elite character of these places and encouraged administrators to match the former aristocratic living standards of their recruits.[27] Reformers built on criticisms going back to the eleventh century that the lifestyle was religious only in name and that the houses only existed because of lay interference in Church affairs.[28] At the same time the reformers also banked on the dukes' wariness of these institutions as bulwarks of aristocratic power and wealth, and on the clergy's frustration that several of them were exempt from the local bishop's supervision.

Over the second half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, all four houses of secular canonesses in Lorraine (Bouxières, Poussay, Epinal, and finally Remiremont) were the subject of an attempt to regularize the women's lifestyle and status.[29] Depending on the context, the reformers proposed either to implement a 'soft' reform (through putting an end to the most offensive practices in these places, introducing the Roman rite, and reinforcing the authority of the abbess), or to outright abolish the women's secular status and turn their institution into one for vowed nuns. While previous reform attempts at Bouxières and Poussay had ended in failure, for Remiremont an aggressive course of action seemed realistically achievable when the post of *coadjutrix* (adjunct to the abbess and designated successor) became vacant in 1602. Remiremont's leading office was coveted not just because of the abbey's sheer size and prestige, but also because it was part of an ecclesiastical principality of the Holy Roman Empire, and so it seemed logical that Duke Charles III would want to claim it for his daughter Catherine (b. 1573). At the time the circle around the duke was deeply infiltrated by reform agents, who included in their number Catherine's confessor Julien de Dombasle, a Franciscan Capucin based at Nancy.[30] By the time the incumbent abbess Elisabeth de Salm resigned in 1611, the duke's daughter (who had originally planned to become a cloistered nun herself) had been mentally primed to launch a reign of drastic reform. Besides a mental preparation that made her a staunch adversary of the canonesses' lifestyle, over the previous decade she and her associates had also put together a hefty case file which contained arguments of a juridical, historical, and moral nature to initiate exactly such a process.

Shortly after she was installed, Catherine set the wheels in motion. Her first step was to prepare and submit to Pope Paul V (who was the abbey's direct ecclesiastical superior due to its exempt status) a long list of objections to the way Remiremont was administered and to what she viewed as the canonesses' inappropriate behaviour. Her litany referenced the chapter members' lack of respect for the authority of the abbess, and the fact that both the appointment of new members and the distribution of prebends were controlled by the convent members' noble families. Catherine also denounced the Remiremont women's absenteeism, disregard for the sanctity of Holy Office, inappropriate use of choir space, naïve and superstitious belief, frivolous clothing, and penchant for dancing. All of this was unacceptable, she argued, since it clashed with the abbey's historical identity as a community of vowed

nuns and with the remains of Benedictine tradition that were still part of the local liturgy. In order to address this dismal state of affairs she requested that the abbey be reformed.[31] At the pope's instruction a delegation of three Church prelates carried out a visitation of Remiremont abbey in summer 1613. In a written statement to the chapter members they made a number of recommendations to improve the standard and serenity of religious practice, but at the same time reassured the canonesses that they would not be made to give up their secular status.[32]However, in their formal report to Paul V they struck a very different tone. The three men told the Church ruler that the reassurances they had made to the canonesses by no means implied that the historical argument to bring these women back into the Benedictine fold was void. Remarkably, to make their point they did not submit juridical or moral arguments, but a historical one in which they distinguished three stages in the community's history. In the first, the women had adopted the *Rule* not long after their institution was founded as a double monastery in the Columbanian tradition. In the second, which lasted from the beginning of the tenth century until the end of the thirteenth, the Benedictine regime was continued, but towards the end of that period the resident monks had been replaced by clerics, regular discipline had become relaxed, and rules had been tightened so that only women who could submit proof of nobility in four quarters were admitted. Finally, in the third and most recent era of the abbey's history, most of the women had adopted the status of canoness as well as its associated lifestyle: among other actions that were emblematic of this transition, they had stopped wearing the religious habit. Yet despite these relaxations, remnants of the abbey's Benedictine identity were still in evidence: newly appointed abbesses still took their vows; the Benedictine breviary was still being used in office; various other regular-looking practices were still being pursued locally. There was no doubt, they added, that this institution truly still belonged to the Order of St Benedict.[33]

Evidently the chapter members did not believe that the proposed changes at the abbey would end with a handful of suggested interventions in liturgical customs and the use of sacred space.[34] Even as the visitation was still ongoing, they relied on the chapter and its principal officers to make defiant statements in defence of their status, filibuster planned reform actions, and bring legal challenges before a range of ecclesiastical and secular courts. By 22 September 1613 they submitted a counter-proposal for a reform that explicitly protected their secular status.[35] In response Abbess Catherine requested a second visitation from Paul V, who sent the nuntius and noted Tridentine reformer Louis de Sareggi to

the abbey. De Sareggi's concrete recommendations for reform were as moderate as those of his predecessors.[36] But at the same time he confirmed the canonesses' fear of an ulterior motive on his and Abbess Catherine's part, when he told them 'tradition establishes that the *Rule of St Benedict* was observed at Remiremont and this ought to be the case even today'.[37] From this they inferred (correctly, so it seems) that the proposed interventions in convent life were intended as a first step towards abolishing their institution's secular status. In the wake of de Sareggi's visitation the canonesses were also given to understand that the governing role of the chapter under the leadership of the deaconess was about to be dismantled. Catherine issued a statement saying that as abbess her authority over the convent members was equal to that which St Benedict described in his *Rule*; that is, absolute.[38] Even as the canonesses were appealing to the pope and the duke of Lorraine to prevent any further action,[39] she continued making provocative statements about her monarchic role as abbess.[40] And on 14 August 1616 she went one step further, taking her vows as a Benedictine nun and at the same time obtaining the bishop's confirmation of her status as a regular abbess.[41] Such actions explain why the canonesses relentlessly continued to argue their case for the next decade-and-a-half.[42]

It is tempting to explain away the chapter members' bristling reaction as self-interest; that they were merely looking to protect their individual liberties and the concerns of their aristocratic relatives. Yet a closer look at the canonesses' memory culture at that point suggests that they also perceived these statements as a brutal assault on a specific identity narrative that had only recently been established. Following its foundation in the seventh century, Remiremont's status as a religious institution had never been precisely defined, with the result that the language of the sources had remained ambiguous.[43] Papal charters from the middle of the eleventh century onwards had referred to the *Rule of Benedict* as a benchmark for how to organize the abbey.[44] But its archives also held documents by popes and lay rulers from the same period and later that referred to prebends, mentioned Remiremont's noble identity, and referred to the abbey as a *capitulum* (chapter), all of which were things that suggested a distinctly non-Benedictine identity.[45] For many centuries this ambiguity had not resulted in major challenges to the way in which the community was run and its members organized themselves. But this status quo was disrupted in the second half of the sixteenth century, when groups of secular canonesses were starting to draw the negative attention of Tridentine reformers and outsiders began to tamper with their

institutional memories to project onto the local past a story of Benedictine origins. A watershed moment in this respect was the publication in 1580 of a history of the dukes of Lorraine and Bar written by François de Rosières, a regional chronicler and notorious forger. One of the numerous pseudo-original sources in his book pretended to be Remiremont's foundation charter, in which St Romaric referred to himself as the creator of a monastery of nuns of the Order of St Benedict.[46] As far as we can tell this was the first time in Remiremont's history that someone claimed that historically speaking, the community's identity was unambiguously Benedictine.

The canonesses' response to this historiographical assault on their narrative of secular identity – an assault set within a broader background of impending reform – was swift. Beginning with the abbacy of Barbe de Salm (1580–1602), for the first time the Remiremont women dropped all references to the *Rule* from their official documentation.[47] And even though de Salm herself was a professed nun from the abbey of Lys, due to the controversial circumstances in which she had made her career at Remiremont she supported a secular view of her subjects' identity.[48] In contrast with earlier such documents, the papal bull that confirmed her installation at Remiremont does not refer to Remiremont as a monastery (*monasterium*).[49] And it was also under her auspices that a cleric from the nearby priory of Hérival, Sébastien Valdenaire, wrote a history of Remiremont that emphatically considered the institutional past from the viewpoint of its current secular members.[50] His focus on hagiographical traditions as a source of information about the abbey's origins and its original identity also influenced that of the polygraph Nicolaus Serarius, who as a young man had studied in Remiremont and in 1605 published a Latin hagiography of St Romaric. Like the medieval versions of Romaric's *vita*, Serarius' also lacked any reference to the abbey's apocryphal Benedictine identity.[51] The obscure 1605 edition of Serarius' work was reissued six years later in a much more widely disseminated version, around the time Catherine of Lorraine was made abbess. In all likelihood her and her supporters' subsequent assertion of the abbey's Benedictine origins and enduring identity was not just a reaction to the canonesses' worldly conduct, but actually a response to this newly secularized narrative of the communal past. To make their point, she and her reformist allies completely ignored the hagiography of Romaric and focussed exclusively on papal and other charters that referred explicitly to the *Rule*. It was this material that Abbess Catherine and the 1613 visitators worked with to make their case.

Catherine's rejection of the canonesses' view of the institutional past in the early 1610s could not have but struck the Remiremont women as an act of rhetorical brutality. It did so again in 1628, when she successfully obtained the endorsement of scholars at the Sorbonne for her preferred account of the abbey's regular past.[52] In response, the canonesses solicited the aid of an archdeacon of Zagreb cathedral named Johannes Marnavitius (d. 1637), who one year later, in 1629, published a pamphlet titled *The Holy Dove of the Chapter of Canonesses of St Peter of Remiremont, claimed by impostors and restored to its (true) origins*. Its original Latin title is a play on words, referencing the notion that the abbey had been founded in the Columbanian tradition (hence the use of the word *columba*, dove) instead of the Benedictine. And in the text itself Marnavitius relies on both the *Rule of Columbanus* and a detailed reading of early medieval hagiographies of local Sts Romaric, Eustache of Luxeuil, and first abbess of Remiremont Bungundofara to declare that anyone who thought differently about Remiremont's origins was an imposter.[53] Understanding the stakes at play, Catherine's party promptly issued a rebuttal. Its author, a monk from the reformist Congregation of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hydulphe named Ignace Philibert, did not attack Marnavitius for his approach to reading the hagiographical and normative evidence. Instead, he rejected the archdeacon's conclusions by arguing with the same charters that the 1613 visitators had used, drawing also on de Rosières' forged foundation charter.[54] Evidently neither of the two parties in the conflict was ready at this point to accept that the abbey's written memories in fact yielded a vision of a past that was neither entirely regular nor entirely secular. Instead, each side picked the sources that best suited their ideological agenda and constructed a narrative of religious identity around them, whilst at the same time ignoring the existence of any evidence that would have complicated their argument.

Even as Lorraine was being hit by devastating warfare and epidemics in the 1630s, the polemic raged on.[55] In 1634 a Metz printer reissued the early seventeenth-century *History of the Bishops of Metz*, in which the Franciscan monk Meurisse relied on de Rosières' forgery to postulate Remiremont's Benedictine origins.[56] And in the same year Jean Ruyr reprinted the forgery in his monumental religious history of the Vosges region.[57] Yet despite these publications that supported the abbess's viewpoint, the scales were now definitely tipping in the canonesses' favour. As Abbess Catherine became increasingly distracted by her project to establish a new Benedictine nunnery in Nancy, the chapter members were

able to take control of the abbey's governance without much opposition. To mark their victory they commissioned the cleric Charles Huchère to write a comprehensive description of Remiremont's history, its archives, the canonesses' privileges, and finally also convent life. In it, Huchère made no secret of the fact that the women's secular status was at the heart of his argument. He also tried to resolve the interpretive gap between that status and the story of the abbey's foundation, by arguing that the canonesses' current state in life derived from St Columbanus' wish that his followers (including those at Romaric's foundation of Remiremont) be active in secular society. To support his case he referenced hagiographies, liturgical traditions, and Marnavitius' printed pamphlet, as well as a range of Carolingian conciliar decrees, once again ignoring the evidence that the canonesses' adversaries had relied on.[58]

Neither Catherine's infant successor Elisabeth-Marguerite d'Orléans (b. 1646, r. 1648–55) nor the likewise juvenile abbess appointed after her, Anne-Marie-Thérèse de Lorraine (b. 1648, r. 1655–61), objected to this account of the institutional past. And when Dorothée de Salm ascended the abbatial throne as a ten-year-old in 1661, things remained the same for yet another half a decade. From later events we can infer, however, that de Salm's tutors told her that as an adult her principal mission as abbess would be to take control of her institution's affairs. To achieve that goal, they suggested, she and her allies might want to study Catherine of Lorraine's methods.

Mabillon's 'Pious Fraud'

Still only a teenager, between 1665 and 1670 de Salm launched one juridical procedure after another to obtain her full powers as abbess and take other prerogatives away from the Remiremont chapter and its chair, the deaconess: these included her right to dispense justice and exercise policing powers, as well as preside over the chapter; make all its officers accountable to her; and have the final say in the admission of new members, the allocation of prebends, and the appointment of clerical staff. In the meantime she sought the assistance of male reform agents from the Congregation of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hydulphe to give a stronger ideological basis to her campaign. After a hiatus of nearly four decades, this association brought back to prominence arguments about Remiremont's Benedictine identity and the need to reintroduce key elements of that legacy to the convent's administration and the

canonesses' lifestyle. Furthermore it enabled de Salm to link up with the Congregation of St Maur, whose members combined erudition with the strenuous pursuit of Benedictine reform. An early 1630s letter by Ignace Philibert to the Maurist Nicolas-Hugues Ménard shows that the dispute over Remiremont's origins had been common knowledge in these circles long before Jean Mabillon became involved.[59]

With Mabillon's star now rapidly rising, it was him that de Salm called upon to support her cause. Shortly after the dispute between herself and the chapter members once again erupted in full force, he duly voiced his sympathies. The second volume of his six-part edition of the hagiographies of Benedictine saints, which was published in 1669, included a version of the *Lives* of Remiremont's founder Romaric and first abbot Amatus. As if the mere inclusion of those saints was not enough to signal to his readers that he considered Remiremont a Benedictine institution, Mabillon also included in the introduction of the *Life* of Romaric an explicit declaration to that effect. He stated that Marnavitius had been wrong about St Romaric's intentions and that since the mid-900s the abbey had definitely belonged to the Order of St Benedict. To make his point he provided his readers with a succinct demonstration of his historical method, by referring to a number of charters from the twelfth to sixteenth century in which there was a mention of the Benedictine order or *Rule*; he asserted that the canonesses had used the Benedictine breviary until 1613; and finally also noted that the feast of St Benedict was still being celebrated at the abbey church. [60] Mabillon's implied expression of support for de Salm's cause and rejection of the chapter members' historical narrative of self was a major coup for the embattled abbess.[61] But the persuasive force of his words was somewhat tempered by the fact that Mabillon admitted he had been unable to inspect the abbey's archives.[62] And those who were familiar with the debate about the abbey's past could easily have worked out that his argument was drawn almost entirely from the visitators' report of 1613. A further factor that limited Mabillon's impact in the short term was the political context: in 1670 French troops invaded Lorraine, forcing de Salm (whose family had strong connections to the Empire) to flee to Aachen. For the next seven years she lived there as an exile, a personal predicament that insulated the canonesses from any further assaults.[63]

Not coincidentally it was shortly after de Salm's return that the polemic between students of the abbey's past flared up again. In 1681 Mabillon repeated his arguments about Remiremont's Benedictine

identity, in his famous methodological handbook for the study of medieval charters titled *De re diplomatica.*[64] According to Charles George, the *procureur-général* of the Congregation of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hydulphe, the Remiremont chapter members had vehemently objected to Mabillon's latest statement and pressured him several times to declare that their institution had never been of the Order of St Benedict. And although Mabillon had refused to comply on each occasion, he had subsequently been shocked to find that the canonesses had misquoted his findings.[65] Unfortunately, George did not refer to any specific statement or source issued by the canonesses and their allies. But we do have a likely candidate in the form of a treatise by a priest named du Heaume de l'Oratoire, which targets Meurisse's *History of the Bishops of Metz* and Mabillon's *De re diplomatica*. Titled *Discourse on the secular state of the Lady canonesses of Remiremont*, du Heaume's text has so far eluded notice because it survives only among the papers of another house of secular canonesses in Lorraine, namely that of Bouxières.[66] However, its interest to the present discussion and to the development of historical methods in general is unmistakeable given that it reveals a major leap forward, both in how local authors worked with medieval documents and in how they constructed a historical argument.

The first four chapters of the *Discourse* make a general case for the existence of secular canonesses, by tracing back the origins of their movement to the first centuries of the Church, explaining their etymology with the aid of late antique and early medieval sources. Du Heaume concludes here that the majority of secular canonesses by far had never made the three vows of stability, chastity, and obedience. But the meat of his argument is in the fifth and sixth chapters. In the former he pointedly notes that the 1613 report remains the key document on which all subsequent pro-reform accounts of Remiremont's past are based and that later commentators have offered no new evidence to support its argument.[67] In the latter chapter he focusses on methodological flaws in the work of Meurisse and Mabillon. Both of these authors had cited early and high medieval documents that referred to the abbey as a *monasterium*, to its leader as an *abbatissa*, and to her subjects as *sanctimoniales*, all of which referred (in their interpretation at least) to a regular observance in the Benedictine tradition. But as Du Heaume correctly points out, there were two major objections to this approach. One was that several of these charters were forgeries. The other was that the meaning of these key terms had evolved over time, and that their use in early and high medieval documents could not be taken as proof that the Remiremont

women at that time had been Benedictine nuns. These conclusions rendered not just Mabillon and Meurisse's historical argument invalid, but also their implied call for a reform. On these grounds it was from here a small step for Du Heaume to denounce the recent attempts to change the canonesses' status, saying that such attempts were based on 'pious skullduggery' (*filouterie pieuse*). Despite their claims to erudition and objective enquiry, he also accused both Mabillion and Meurisse of supporting this campaign with fraudulent historical arguments.

Du Heaume's work gave the polemic over Remiremont's past a new dimension, by bringing to prominence arguments about forgery, methodological rigour, and academic authority. These accusations riled the abbess's allies, in particular Charles George. In the mid-1680s he published his own views on the dispute in the provocatively titled *Monastic History of Remiremont*, in which he accused the canonesses of living a 'deregulated' life. He also blamed them for commissioning Marnavitius' mendacious treatise about the abbey's origins, and (as we already saw) attempting to corrupt Mabillon and falsifying his own research.[68] The rhetorical aggression that rises from these pages joined with de Salm's simultaneous war on the canonesses' reputation. In July 1685 she had scholars at the Sorbonne confirm her absolute authority over the chapter members.[69] And around the same time she issued a memorandum in which she insisted on the full application of the 1614 reform decrees, and painted a picture of impending chaos: 'it is easy to understand to what (dangers) is exposed a community where there are many young girls that have made no vows (and) of which the institution is situated in the middle of a region full of military troops, and that have no written regulations or permission that can keep them within the boundaries of decency'.[70] The chapter members now realized that they were being subjected to an intellectual and moral smear campaign. In a written statement they retorted that application of the 1614 decrees would not only run counter to the abbey's historical identity as a secular institution, but also sit awkwardly with Abbess de Salm's own worldly lifestyle.[71] When the news broke that Pope Innocent XI was on the canonesses' side,[72] de Salm requested that King Louis XIV arbitrate, made her profession in private (a move that technically did not make her a Benedictine nun but still signalled her future plans), insisted that the chapter's principal officers do the same, and gave new prominence in the liturgical calendar to the Feast of St Benedict and his commemoration on All Saints.

The canonesses issued an impressive deposition to the king that consisted of no less than 700 articles, in which they rejected all aspects of the abbess's campaign.[73]

Desperate to bolster her case de Salm now appealed directly to Mabillon. In response, he published his famous 1687 pamphlet, discussed in the introduction of this paper.[74] Not long after that a member of the Third Order of St Francis named F. Vincent summarized its arguments in a treatise titled *Explanation on the abbey of Remiremont*.[75] On reading the commentaries by Mabillon and Vincent one is immediately struck by their authors' refusal to acknowledge that the terminology (they encountered in the primary evidence *monasterium*, *capitulum*, and even *regula*) had to be interpreted differently depending on the chronology of the sources. The second thing of note is the excessive reliance on charters to reconstruct real-life experiences at the abbey and to make statements on the observance of the members over the course of its history.[76] And the final, unmissable point is that they add nothing of substance to the visitators' 1613 report. Presumably this is because neither author had been able to inspect the abbey archives (access to which was controlled by the *secrète*, one of the chapter's five officers) and relied instead on notes made at Catherine de Lorraine's behest in the seventeenth century. However, the canonesses and their intellectual allies did not act on these methodological weaknesses, due to an intervention by the king himself. Between 1693 and 1697 his State Council issued several decrees that endorsed de Salm's monarchic view of abbatial rule and imposed a number of new rules for convent life, yet retained the chapter's autonomy and confirmed the deaconess in her role as its head.[77]

Although the Council's aim was to end once and for all the disruptive conflicts at the abbey, inadvertently it gave the chapter members a golden opportunity to attack Mabillon and other renowned scholars. One of the key rulings of the 1694 decree was that an inventory be made of the abbey archives: the person who ended up being tasked with this was Thierry, the archdeacon of the nearby collegial chapter of Saint-Dié. Having uncovered a mass of information that had been unavailable to those scholars who ranged themselves on the Benedictine side of the argument, Thierry was able to verify the authenticity of key documents in the debate. In the inventory he not only noted that the foundation charter edited by de Rosières was definitely a forgery, but also called into question the academic abilities of the apparently erudite figures who had previously used it, by stating that 'all learned men believe that

it is a forgery'.[78] His work on the archives also confirmed suspicions that Mabillon and others had presented a highly selective account of the abbey's written legacies and a very tendentious reading of the primary evidence. In a pamphlet titled *Observations on a manuscript titled History of the Abbey of Remiremont* he sarcastically noted that it had taken a mere ten days for the three visitators of 1613 to verify that Remiremont had always been a Benedictine institution, despite the fact that this would normally require years of working on the abbey's charter evidence.[79] Not one to let his readers misunderstand the implied meaning of his words, Thierry added that the three papal legates and their intellectual epigones (George, Mabillon, and Vincent) had not worked in the abbey's archives at all and instead had relied on second-hand sources that were informed by the abbesses' agenda. Their statements about Remiremont's past painted a picture of linear moral decline from the abbey's monastic origins, yet Thiery knew that this erroneous picture had been misleadingly crafted almost exclusively from normative documents (charters in particular) that seemed to tell a straightforward story about the convent's enduring Benedictine identity.[80] In contrast, Thiery's own work as an archivist had revealed that regular and secular elements had been present in the abbey's organization and the canonesses' lifestyle throughout its long history. Thierry advised the Remiremont women not to yield to those who called on them to acknowledge their Benedictine predecessors, for doing so would make them vulnerable to attempts at reform.[81] Not content with this initial commentary, he subsequently reiterated it in the more polished *Treatise on the secular state of the abbey of Remiremont*.[82] And he also found an ally in Saint-Dié's Great Provost François de Riguet. Beginning in 1695 the latter began preparing a critical analysis of the foundation charter, citing numerous problems with the charter's dating, style, vocabulary, spelling, and content. In 1701 these findings were published in de Riguet's *History of the Bishops of Toul*.[83]

Embarrassed by Thierry's exposure of the flaws in the arguments of her intellectual allies, de Salm got back in touch with Mabillon and sent him a copy of Thierry's *Treatise*.[84] If she was hoping for a rebuttal she was destined for disappointment, for in a reply dated 8 February 1695 the Maurist scholar implicitly admitted defeat. He once again stated his view that Remiremont was a Benedictine institution, but now insisted that he held it more out of principle than on the basis of historical arguments.[85] This answer may have led to an invitation for him to return to Remiremont, which he did on 30 September

and 1 October 1696.[86] Judging by his travel companion Thiery Ruinart's notes on that visit, the two monks did not look at any archives or manuscripts there. And perhaps because he was mindful of the 1694 decree, he did not mention the ongoing tensions between Abbess de Salm and her chapter. Nevertheless Ruinart did drop a strong hint that the matter was brought up at some point during their conversations with the abbess. Describing their visit to the abbey church, he notes that they saw a subterranean chapel in honour of St Benedict, the interior of which was 'violated' and the altar 'destroyed' by 'recent people', allegedly because 'they feared that on account of the existence of that chapel an opportunity would be grasped to impose on them the Benedictine Rule'.[87]

Whether Ruinart and Mabillon also heard the views of the chapter members on this occasion is unknown: not that it would have changed Mabillon's mind anyway. In a note dated 3 August 1698, he reiterated the key arguments that he had made in 1687, as well as his personal opinion that houses of secular canonesses ought to be reformed to their original regular state. But this time he brought an important nuance to the argument, in that he firmly expressed his resolve to refrain from any activism:

> 'All that I have just said is not designed to shock anyone, but since I have been asked to give my opinion, I say it in good faith and without prejudice… I wish no other thing than that things at the abbey of Remiremont remain as they are in their present state and that peace, unity, and good order should reign there'.[88]

The reasons for Mabillon's caution are revealed in an undated letter written to him by a member of the reformist congregation of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hydulphe, Dom Hilarion Monnier (1646–1707). In it Monnier declined to lend his support to de Salm's campaign, stating that it was no use becoming involved in a cause that was already lost and that risked damaging their own intellectual reputations. Behind the whole affair also lurked *raison de politique*, political interests, in which the two men did well not to interfere.[89]

Mabillon's reluctance to make any firm statements in de Salm's favour strengthened de Salm and her associates' resolve to take matters in their own hands. In an undated memorandum she and her sister Christine accused Thierry of lacking the necessary skills to establish the authenticity of the

medieval evidence.[90] But neither their personality nor their arguments made much of an impression on Thierry, who stood by his views.[91] And a further blow to de Salm's confidence occurred shortly after the duke of Lorraine regained control of his ancestors' territories. Eager to claim his predecessors' influence over the selection of candidates for the office of abbess, Duke Leopold sought to have his infant daughter Charlotte-Isabelle appointed as *coadjutrix* (and automatic successor) to Abbess de Salm. Hesitating to accept the duke's proposal, de Salm found herself outmanoeuvred when the chapter members themselves confirmed Charlotte-Isabelle in her new role.[92] The 51-year-old abbess did not recover from this unexpected defeat. When she died soon afterwards, on 14 November 1702, her sister Christine became regent for Charlotte-Isabelle. In a memorandum dated 9 October 1703, specialists from the Sorbonne for one last time echoed the late abbess's objections to the chapter members' secular presumptions.[93] But the reality was that the women and their allies had firmly taken back control of their own lives. An apostolic visit by Cardinal de Rohan in 1727 confirmed Remiremont's status as a house of secular canonesses and consolidated the arrangement that had been proclaimed by the king's State Council in 1694.[94] And from that point onwards until the end of the abbey's existence in the early 1790s, the position of both the abbesses and the chapter members was to maintain the status quo. Among other things that affirmed the convent's secular status, they quietly dropped the Feast of St Benedict from the liturgical calendar.[95]

The canonesses had won the battle internally, but in the outside world the damage to their reputation was considerable. For many decades to come, pro-reform commentaries shaped perceptions of the canonesses' worldliness, rebelliousness, and their refusal to face the historical arguments in favour of reform. These commentaries shaped modern perceptions of this cohort as a secular one that was only nominally religious and determined to protect their privileged lifestyle.[96] Eighteenth-century commentators Philippe Hélyot (1660–1716) and Augustin Calmet blamed the chaos at Remiremont abbey on the canonesses' superstitious stubbornness.[97] Their contemporary Matthieu Gesnel accused the women of having picked documents from their archives in order to burn them whenever the contents did not suit their preferred version of the past.[98] And in the nineteenth century, the historian A. Guinot stated that the canonesses had responded to the arguments of scholars like Mabillon and George with mere sarcasm.[99] Yet looking back at the evidence reviewed in these pages, it becomes clear that

'sarcasm' is hardly an accurate term to describe the contents of hundreds of pages of erudite arguments and trenchant rebuttals. Nor does it seem legitimate to dismiss the canonesses' relationship with the past and its written legacies as 'medieval' or even backwards, and to contrast that with the 'modern' and supposedly more objective outlook of their detractors.

Conclusions

Historians view the seventeenth-century research into the regular origins of institutions of secular canonesses in France as an early chapter in the rise to prominence of modern methods in the study of the religious past. True as this may be, this paper has demonstrated that the evidence that so far has been submitted to make this point is both incomplete and biased in favour of those who advocated a reform of these places. The reconstruction here of the polemic waged between authors writing for (on one side) the chapter members and (on the other) Abbesses Catherine and Dorothée tells us two things. One, we can only properly understand the arguments by leading scholars such as Mabillon and George and the precise timing of their statements if we put these into a timeline of both the abbey's internal situation over the early modern period and the unfolding of the deep divisions over the abbey's supposed Benedictine past.

And secondly, former assumptions about a deep chasm between the 'modern' historical approach of highly regarded intellectuals and scholars and the 'medieval' one of the canonesses and their allies find no basis in the primary evidence. From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, sympathizers of the canonesses who wrote about Remiremont's past drastically broadened the scope of their primary evidence. Thanks to the work of diligent archivists, they also gained a deep and surprisingly nuanced understanding of their institution's written legacies and the ambiguous ways in which the identity of its resident community had been described over the centuries. And finally, they also dismantled the arguments of their adversaries, who had been rehashing the same historically inaccurate claims for decades. The fact that the painful defeat of Mabillon and others has been all but forgotten is due in large measure to the overwhelming reputation of these individuals and their ability to widely publicize their views. Further research on other institutions of secular canonesses in France

and other polities of the early modern period may well reveal that much is yet to be discovered about the complex ways in which the past of this cohort was negotiated.

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[1] Charlotte Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany*, Oxford 2002; Kate J.P. Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*, Cambridge 2003; Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,* University Park, PA 2004; Cynthia J. Cyrus, *Received Medievalisms: A Cognitive Geography of Viennese Women's Convents*, New York, NY 2013; and Thomas Schilp, 'Memoria: Kultur der Erinnerung und Vergessen. Überlegungen zur Frauengemeinschaft Clarenberg bei Dortmund-Hörde um 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', in Truus van Bueren, Paul Cockerham, Caroline Horsch, Martine Meuwese, and Thomas Schilp (eds), *Reformations and their Impact on the Culture of Memoria*, Turnhout 2016, 121-40; and Steven Vanderputten, '*They Lived Under that Rule as do Those Who Have Succeeded Them.* Simultaneity and Conflict in the Foundation Accounts of a French Women's Convent (10th-18th Centuries)', *The Downside Review* 139 (2021), 82-97.

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[2] Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms. Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, 385-488.

[3] Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators (1248-1545)*, Washington, DC 1997; Susanne Knackmuss, '*Ein Glaube und ein Schaafstall...* oder cuius regio – eius monasterium? Überlegungen zur Implementierung des Stiftsgedankens im Nürnberger Klarissenkloster St. Clara', in Thomas Schilp (ed.), *Reform – Reformation – Säkularisation. Frauenstifte in Krisenzeiten*, Essen 2004, 123-54; Thomas Groll, 'Statuten im Wandel. Das Beispiel St. Stephan in Augsburg', in Dietmar Schiersner (ed.), *Räume und Identitäten. Stiftsdamen und Damenstifte in Augsburg und Edelstetten*, Berlin 2014, 77-105; and Elisa Clodelli, 'Reforming Female Convents: the Role of a Venetian Ambassador in Curia (1519)', *Legatio: The Journal for Renaissance and Early Modern Diplomatic Studies* 2 (2022), 93-110.

[4] Helen Hills, 'Nuns and Relics: Spiritual Authority in Post-Tridentine Naples', in Cordula van Wyhe (ed.), *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe. An Interdisciplinary View*, Aldershot 2008, 11-38; Barbara Lawatsch Melton, 'Loss and Gain in a Salzburg Convent: Tridentine Reform, Princely

Absolutism, and the Nuns of Nonnberg (1620 to 1696)', in Lynne Tatlock (ed.), *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany. Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*, Leiden 2010, 259-80; and Steven Vanderputten, *Dismantling the Medieval. Early Modern Perceptions of a Female Convent's Past*, Turnhout 2021, 165-91.

[5] Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002), 1-19, at 5. A similar phenomenon can be observed at the end of the *ancien régime*, when many leaders of female religious communities in France used performative statements that drew on historical arguments in order to protest the impending dissolution of their house; Gemma Betros, 'Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789–90', *Women's History Review* 18 (2009), 311-36 and Steven Vanderputten, 'Discourses of Resistance, Resilience, and Resignation. The Secular Canonesses of Bouxières and their Multiple Response to the French Revolution (1790-91)', in Cormac Begadon and Gemma Betros (eds), *Female Religious and Narratives of the French Revolution, 1789–1850: Identity, Memory, and History* (forthcoming).

[6] Kate Chedgzoy, Elspeth Graham, Katharine Hodgkin, and Ramona Wray, 'Researching Memory in Early Modern Studies', *Memory Studies* 11 (2018), 5-20, at 13-4.

[7] Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles*, 52-5.

[8] Among a vast bibliography that subscribes to this dichotomous view of 'medieval' and 'modern' memory cultures, see for instance George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History. Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France*, Urbana, Ill. 1970, 20-6.

[9] Corinne Marchal, *Un âge d'or des chapitres nobles de chanoinesses en Europe au XVIIIe siècle: le cas de Franche-Comté*, Turnhout 2021, 160-9.

[10] On his life and legacy, see in first place Daniel-Odon Hurel (ed.), *Le moine et l'historien: Dom Mabillon, oeuvres choisies*, Paris 2007 (with a biographical preface by Henri Leclercq) and Jean Leclant, André Vauchez, and Daniel-Odon Hurel (eds), *Dom Jean Mabillon figure majeure de l'Europe des lettres: actes des deux colloques du tricentenaire de la mort de dom Mabillon*, Paris 2010.

[11] *Lettre de dom Jean Mabillon à un de ses amis touchant le premier institut de l'abbaye de Remiremont*, Paris 1687, now in Hurel (ed.), *Le moine et l'historien*, 870-87.

[12] Augustin Calmet, *Histoire de Lorraine*, 7 vols, Nancy 1746-57, 1:cxxviii-xxx and Georges Durand, *L'église Saint-Pierre des Dames de Remiremont*, 2 vols, Epinal 1929-36, 1:x-xv. On similar evidence from the eighteenth-century abbey of Baumes (a house of regular noble canonesses) in Franche-Comté, see Marchal, *Un âge d'or des chapitres nobles*, 164.

[13] Patrick Fiska, Ines Peper, Thomas Stockinger, and Thomas Wallnig, 'Historia als Kultur – Einführung', in Thomas Wallnig, Ines Peper, Thomas Stockinger, and Patrick Fiska (eds), *Europäische Geschichtskulturen um 1700 zwischen Gelehrsamkeit, Politik und Konfession*, Berlin 2012, 1-19, at 2-3: 'Historische Gelehrsamkeit ist denn auch selbst mit politischen, sakralen und medialen Ansprüchen und Vorgaben durchwoben'. Also refer to Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers, 'Introduction. On the

Early Modernity of Modern Memory', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller, and Jasper van der Steen (eds), *Memory Before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe,* Leiden 2013, 1-23.

[14] Refer to the following works by Daniel-Odon Hurel, 'Les Bénédictins de Saint-Maur et l'Histoire au XVIIe siècle', *Littératures classiques* (special issue titled *L'histoire au XVIIe siècle*) 30 (1997), 33-50; 'Les mauristes, historiens de la congrégation de Saint-Maur aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: méthodes, justifications monographiques de la réforme et défense de la centralisation monastique', in *Ecrire son histoire. Les communautés régulières face à leur passé,* Saint-Etienne 2005, 258-74; and 'Écriture de l'Histoire et identité bénédictine. Le rôle de Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) et des Mauristes', in Andreas Sohn (ed.), *Benediktiner als Historiker*, Bochum 2016, 41-52, esp. 41-2.

[15] Hurel, 'Ecriture', 42-4.

[16] Jean Delumeau, 'Dom Mabillon, "Le plus savant homme du royaume"', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (2007), 1597-1604 and Maciej Dorna, *Mabillon und andere. Die Anfänge der Diplomatik*, trans. from Polish by Martin Faber, Wiesbaden 2019, 135-42. Also Daniel-Odon Hurel, 'L'historiographie de Mabillon aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Restauration monastique (années 1830), commémoration (1908) et démystification', in Daniel-Odon Hurel (ed.), *Erudition et commerce épistolaire. Jean Mabillon et la tradition monastique*, Paris 2003, 15-51.

[17] Michel Pernot, 'La querelle de l'abbesse et du chapitre à Remiremont au temps de Dorothée Salm (1661-1702)', in Michel Parisse and Pierre Heili (eds), *Les chapitres de dames nobles entre France et Empire*, Paris 1998, 135-54.

[18] For instance, at the Benedictine nunneries of Saint-Pierre and Sainte-Marie in Metz, the members had only stopped making vows in the second quarter of the seventeenth century and over the next decades started to refer to themselves as canonesses; Corinne Marchal, 'La circulation du modèle séculier de chapitre noble par les relations entre les compagnies de chanoinesses (Franche-Comté-Lorraine, fin du XVIIe siècle–XVIIIe siècle)', in Marie-Elisabeth Henneau, Corinne Marchal, and Julie Piront (eds), *Entre ciel et terre: Oeuvres et résistances de femmes de Gênes à Liège (Xe–XVIIIe siècle)*, 2 vols (forthcoming). Although Mabillon did not intervene in the above two cases, we know that he wrote at least one set of instructions for the Benedictine nuns of Dieppe to avoid such a scenario and impose a stricter observance of the *Rule*; *Instruction sur le renouvellement de vie par Dom Jean Mabillon, religieux de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur*, de Bouis (ed.), Rouen, 1874.

[19] Hilary Bernstein, *Historical Communities: Cities, Erudition, and National Identity in Early Modern France*, Leiden 2021.

[20] Michel Pernot, 'Les débuts de la réforme tridentine au diocèse de Toul (1580–1630)', in Louis Châtellier (ed.), *Les réformes en lorraine, 1520–1620*, Nancy 1986, 89-112 and Gérard Michaux, 'Une grande réforme monastique du XVIIe siècle: la congrégation bénédictine de Saint-Vanne et de Saint-Hydulphe', in Noëlle Cazin and Philippe Martin (eds), *Autour de la congrégation de Saint-Vanne et de Saint-Hydulphe*, Bar-le-Duc 2006, 81-103.

[21] Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Planting the Cross: Catholic Reform and Renewal in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France*, Oxford 2019.

[22] Marie-Catherine Vignal Souleyreau, 'Religion et politique en Lorraine au tournant des XVIe et XVIIe siècles', *Europa Moderna. Revue d'histoire et d'iconologie* 1 (2010), 60-107.

[23] Vignal Souleyreau, 'Religion et politique en Lorraine', 69-72; also René Taveneaux (ed.), *Saint Pierre Fourier et son temps: actes du colloque organisé à Mirecourt, les 13 et 14 avril 1991*, Nancy 1992.

[24] Vignal Souleyreau, 'Religion et politique en Lorraine', 72.

[25] On the seven houses of secular canonesses in early modern France (Remiremont, Poussay, Bouxières, Epinal, Saint-Louis of Metz, Denain, and Maubeuge), see Parisse and Heili (eds), *Les chapitres de dames nobles*; Corinne Marchal, 'Définir et inventorier les chapitres nobles de la France du XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire de l'Eglise de France* 99 (2013), 115-26; and Jean Heuclin and Christophe Leduc (eds), *Chanoines et chanoinesses des anciens Pays-Bas: le chapitre de Maubeuge du IXe au XVIIIe siècle*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2019. On recent trends in the study of early modern secular canonesses, see Vanderputten, *Dismantling the Medieval*, 27-30.

[26] Marchal, 'Les chapitres nobles' and (by the same) 'La circulation du modèle séculier de chapitre noble'. These institutions are often considered together with a lager cohort of noble houses of regular canonesses, discussed in Corinne Marchal, 'Les chapitres nobles de dames lorrains et comtois au XVIIIe siècle: les caractères uniformisateurs d'une identité nobiliaire d'exclusion', in François Roth (ed.), *Lorraine, Bourgogne et Franche-Comté. Mille ans d'histoire,* Moyenmotier 2001, 271-88.

[27] Françoise Boquillon, *Les chanoinesses de Remiremont (1566–1790). Contribution à l'histoire de la noblesse dans l'église*, Remiremont 2000; Marchal, 'Les chapitres nobles'; and (by the same) 'L'utilisation du temps libre par les membres des chapitres nobles de Franche-Comté au XVIIIe siècle', in François Lassus a.o. (eds), *Mélanges offerts au professeur Maurice Gresset*, Besançon 2007, 485-94.

[28] Ulrich Andermann, 'Die unsittlichen und disziplinlosen Kanonissen. Ein Topos und seine Hintergründe, aufgezeigt an Beispielen sächsischer Frauenstifte (11.-13. Jahrhundert)', *Westfälische Zeitschrift* 146 (1996), 39-63 and Steven Vanderputten, *Dark Age Nunneries. The Ambiguous Identity of Female Monasticism, 800-1050*, Ithaca, NY 2018, 124-34.

[29] Vanderputten, *Dismantling the Medieval*, 172-4; Emile Gaspard, 'Abbaye et chapitre de Poussay', *Mémoires de la Société d'Archéologie Lorraine* 13 (1871), 88-129, at 102-3; Georges Poull, *Les dames chanoinesses d'Epinal*, Haroué 2006, 87-9; and Michel Pernot, 'Catherine de Lorraine, abbesse de Remiremont. Réflexions sur l'échec d'une réforme', in *Remiremont, l'abbaye et la ville,* Nancy 1980, 95-127.

[30] Pernot, 'Catherine de Lorraine', 95-6 and Boquillon, *Les chanoinesses*, 103-4.

[31] Remiremont, Archives Municipales (hereafter cited as RAM), 2, fos 53r-9v.

[32] RAM, 2, fos 61r-v.

[33] RAM, 2, fos 62r-7v.

[34] RAM, 2, fos 81r-4v.

[35] RAM, 2, fos 59v-61r.

[36] *Visitatio et reformatio ecclesiae S. Petri oppidi Romaricomontis in Lotharingia,* Como 1614.

[37] Paris, BNF, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises 3692, p. 374: 'par la tradition il paroissoit constant que la regle de St. Benoist avoit été observée à Remiremont, quelle devoit l'etre encore'.

[38] Epinal, Archives Départementales des Vosges (hereafter cited as EADV), G 989, pièce 11.

[39] EADV, G 898, pièce 5.

[40] EADV, G 103, pièce 11 and RAM, 2, fo. 74r.

[41] Charles Pfister, 'Catherine de Lorraine (1573-1648)', *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas* 5th ser./15 (1897), 242-326, at 269.

[42] Over a hundred years later, in the mid-eighteenth century, the Benedictine monk Augustin Calmet reported that some of the canonesses were so incensed that they enlisted the services of a magician to make a life-size wax effigy of Abbess Catherine, which they then took turns to stab in the heart. The fact that Calmet chose this anecdote to convey the canonesses' anger shows that he felt little inclination to investigate its rational causes and instead preferred to ridicule these women as superstitious; Calmet, *Histoire de Lorraine*, 7:176.

[43] Anne-Marie Helvétius and Michèle Gaillard, 'Production de textes et réforme d'un monastère double. L'exemple de Remiremont du VIIe au IXe siècle', in Jeffrey F. Hamburger (ed.), *Frauen - Kloster - Kunst: Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Turnhout 2007, 383-94; Eduard Hlawitschka a.o. (eds.), *Liber memorialis von Remiremont*, 2 vols, Dublin 1970, 1:x-xi; and Vanderputten, *Dark Age Nunneries*, esp. 56-9.

[44] Jean Bridot, *Chartes de l'abbaye de Remiremont des origines à 1231*, 2nd ed., Turnhout 1997, nos 19, 33, 57, 64, 76, 171.

[45] Bridot, *Chartes*, nos 44, 53, 56.

[46] François De Rosières, *Stemmatum Lotharingiae ac Barri ducum*, 7 vols, Paris 1580, 5:288v-9r.

[47] *Lettre de dom Jean Mabillon*, 879.

[48] De Salm's position at the time of her election was a delicate one. Her appointment as *coadiutrix* to the incumbent abbess in 1566 had taken place around the time the Council of Trent denounced the very existence of that office. While this turned her into something of an emblem of the secular organization of Remiremont, at the same time her relationship with the chapter members was fragile due to a conflict they had with her father; Victor-Augustin Bergerot, 'L'organisation et le régime intérieur du chapitre de Remiremont du XIIIe au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales de l'Est* 14 (1900), 35-73, at 56 and 59.

[49] A. Guinot, *Etude historique sur l'abbaye de Remiremont*, Paris 1859, 188.

[50] Sébastien Valdenaire, *Registre des choses mémorables de l'église de Remiremont*; Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 575.

[51] Nicolaus Serarius, *Comitum par genere, potentie, opibus, heroicaque virtute inclytum B. Godefridus, Vuestphalus, S. Romaricus, Austrasius*, Mainz 1605, 91-144.

[52] RAM, 2, fos 79v-81r.

[53] Johannes Marnavitius, *Sacra columba ven. capituli A.A.E.E. canonicarum sancti Petri Romaricensis,* Rome 1629.

[54] Ignace Philibert, *Antiquités des Monts de Vosge*; RAM, 2, fos 132r-201v, at 184v-5v.

[55] Stéphane Gaber, *La Lorraine meurtrie, 1616-1648*, Nancy 1991.

[56] Meurisse, *Histoire des evesques de l'église de Metz*, Metz 1634, 97-8.

[57] Jean Ruyr, *Recherche des sainctes antiquitez de la Vosge, province de Lorraine*, 2nd ed., Epinal 1634, 51-2.

[58] Charles Huchère, *Etat général de l'insigne église collégiale et séculière Saint-Pierre de Remiremont*; RAM, 3, fos 2r-36v, esp. 20v-4r.

[59] Paris, BNF, Manuscrit Latin 12780, fos 494r-5v.

[60] *Vita prima sancti Romarici*, in Lucas d'Achéry and Jean Mabillon (eds), *AASS Ordinis Sancti Benedicti,* 6 vols, Paris 1668-1701, 2:415-20, at 415-6.

[61] A set of handwritten notes by Mabillon reveals that he was also looking into the Benedictine origins of Maubeuge at this time; Paris, BNF, Manuscrit Latin 12694, fo. 293r.

[62] Mabillon's handwritten notes suggest that the primary evidence from Remiremont that he had been able to access was limited to just five manuscripts from the abbey church (two missals, a duirnal, a breviary, and a calendar) that Abbess de Salm had sent him for inspection; Paris, BNF, Manuscrit Latin 12694, fos 288r-93v.

[63] Pernot, 'La querelle', 135-54 and Boquillon, *Les chanoinesses*, 114-6.

[64] Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica*, Paris 1681, 321.

[65] Charles George, *Histoire monastique de Remiremont*; Epinal, Bibliothèque Municipale, 215, fo. 7r.

[66] Du Heaume de l'Oratoire*, Discours sur létat séculier des Dames Chanoinesses de Remiremont*; Nancy, Bibliothèque Stanislas, 413/1, fos 1-35.

[67] Du Heaume de L'Oratoire*, Discours*, fo. 22r.

[68] Charles George, *Histoire monastique de Remiremont*; Epinal, Bibliothèque Municipale, 215, fo. 7r.

[69] RAM, 20, fos 61r-71r.

[70] RAM, 19, fo. 3r: 'on comprendra aisément a quoy est exposée une communauté ou il y a beaucoup de jeunes filles qui n'ont point fait de voeux, dont la maison est située dans un grand paysage de trouppes, et qui n'ont ny reglement par ecrit ny autorité qui puisse les retenir dans les bornes de la bienseance'.

[71] Paris, BNF, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises 3693, p. 52.

[72] Pernot, 'La querelle', 144-5 and Boquillon, *Les chanoinesses*, 114-6.

[73] Pernot, 'La querelle', 147.

[74] *Lettre de dom Jean Mabillon,* 870-87.

[75] F. Vincent, *Eclaircissement sur l'Eglise de Remiremont*; Nancy, Bibliothèque Stanislas, 578, fos 14v-20r.

[76] Daniel-Odon Hurel, 'Entre histoire et tradition: le "Discours de la méthode" de Mabillon', in Hurel (ed.), *Le moine et l'historien*, 849-63, at 853.

[77] RAM, 12, fos 242-60.

[78] EADV, G 839, 1er cahier, fo. 4r: 'tous les savans croient que ce titre est supposé'.

[79] Rodolphe Thiery, *Observations sur un manuscrit intitulé Histoire de l'abbaye de Remiremont*; RAM, 3, fos 102r-13r, at 105r.

[80] Mabillon applied this strategy in several of his other works too; Dorna, *Mabillon und andere*, 136. Its influence on historical scholarship is felt even today, as some historians continue to mistakenly cite medieval papal charters that reference the *Rule of St Benedict* as reliable evidence of a convent's Benedictine identity in that period; Marchal, *Un âge d'or des chapitres nobles*, 164.

[81] Calmet, *Histoire*, 1:cxxxxvii-viii.

[82] Rodolphe Thiery, *Traité ou dissertation sur létat séculier de l'église de Remiremont*; RAM, 3, fos 93r-101v.

[83] François De Riguet, *Sistème chronologique, historique des évêques de Toul,* Nancy 1701, 227-65. A monk of Senones named Claude de Bar reportedly authored a pamphlet opposing de Riguet's views; Guermont, 'Notes de Dom Calmet sur l'abbaye de Remiremont', *Mémoires de l'Académie Nationale de Metz* 151-52 (1967-69), 77-84, at 78.

[84] RAM, 3, fo. 101v.

[85] RAM, 20, fos 54r-60r.

[86] Jean Favier, 'Deux lettres de Dom Jean Mabillon à la princesse Dorothée de Salm, abbesse de Remiremont', *Annales de l'Est* 7 (1893), 446-50, at 447.

[87] Vincent Thuillier (ed.,) *Ouvrages posthumes de D. Jean Mabillon et de D. Thierri Ruinart,* 3 vols, Paris 1724, 3:471-73, at 472.

[88] RAM, 20, fos 98r-101r, at 101r: 'Tout ce que je viens de dire n'est aucunement dans le dessein de choquer qui que ce soit: mais comme on m'a prié de dire mon sentiment, je le dis de donne foy, et sans aucun prejugé, ne souhaitant autre choses que les choses demeurant dans l'état ou elles sont dans l'abaye de Remiremont, la paix, l'union, et le bon ordre y regne, et que le Dieu de paix que l'on y sert avec tant de dignité, y soit honoré par un vray culte intérieur qui ne peut subsister sans union ny sans charité'.

[89] Henri Jodart, *Dom Thierry Ruinart (1657-1709). Notice suivie de documents inédits: sa famille, sa vie, ses oeuvres, ses relations avec D. Mabillon*, Paris 1886, 153-7.

[90] RAM, 3, fos 114r-5v.

[91] Paris, BNF, Manuscrit Français 18919, fos 34r-7v.

[92] Pernot, 'La querelle', 150.

[93] RAM, 20, fos 72r-4v.

[94] Boquillon, *Les chanoinesses*, 118-9.

[95] Christelle Poirier, *Le chapitre de dames nobles de Bouxières-aux-Dames*, Master's thesis, Université Nancy II 2001-2, 118.

[96] Corinne Marchal, 'L'éducation et la culture des chanoinesses nobles dans la France du XVIIIe siècle', in *Mélanges offerts à Roger Marchal. De l'éventail à la plume,* Nancy 2007, 181-94 and Vanderputten, *Dismantling the Medieval*, 27.

[97] Hippolyte Hélyot, *Histoire des ordres monastiques, religieux et militaires et des congrégations séculières*, 8 vols, Paris 1714-19, 6:405-12 and Calmet, *Histoire*, 7:170-90.

[98] Mathieu Gesnel, *Essay d'histoire du monastère du Saint-Mont*; RAM, 3, fos 152r-91r, at 155r.

[99] Guinot, *Etude historique*, 278.