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Community Building and Religious Change in the *Life of John of Gorze* (973/74-984)

Steven Vanderputten

Over the last two decades scholars have made a great deal of progress in trying to understand how tenth- and eleventh-century authors represented intentional change in religious settings. Their nineteenth- and twentieth-century predecessors saw no issue with referring to such changes as 'reforms', and even today the term remains firmly embedded in the discourse of specialist publications. However, recent studies have argued that its current use reflects a semantic shift that took place in the 1600s. As such, it implies a programmatic logic, forward-looking dynamic, and ideological cohesiveness, all three of which are features that sit uncomfortably with the 'messy' reality that emerges from the primary evidence. Not only that, but the early modern conceptualization of reform is also a mismatch with the way in which high medieval people perceived religious change, what they expected from it, and how they wrote about it.[1] In response

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[1] Julia Barrow, 'Ideas and Applications of Reform', *The Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 3. Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600-c. 1100*, ed. Tom Noble and Julia Smith (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 345–62; (the same), 'Developing Definitions of Reform in the Church in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Italy and Early Medieval Europe. Papers for Chris Wickham*, ed. Ross Balzaretti, Julia Barrow, and Patricia Skinner (Oxford, 2018), pp. 501–11; Laurent Morelle, 'Les mots de la "réforme" dans les sources diplomatiques du XIe siècle. Un premier bilan', *Autour de Lanfranc (1010-2010). Réforme et réformateurs dans l'Europe du Nord-Ouest (XIe -XIIe siècles)*, ed. Julia Barrow, Françoise Delivré, and Véronique Gazeau (Caen, 2015), pp. 33–56; and Nicolas Perreaux, 'Après la Chute, reformer le monde. Réflexions

to this greater semantic awareness, specialists have become a great deal more focussed on answering questions about the literary traditions and ideological trends that inspired the language of restoration and renewal in tenth- and eleventh-century sources. The narrative tropes used in these sources to describe real-life processes of spiritual and institutional change have likewise been subject to a new scrutiny. And the same is true of the degree to which this language and these tropes accurately captured these complex and incremental phenomena.[2]

Among a large number of publications that address these issues, one of the latest and most intriguing is a monograph by the German scholar Stephan Bruhn. Analysing literary sources from tenth- and early eleventh-century England, he notes that authors relied on a concept of religious change that was neither programmatic nor ideological, but social. Their argument centered on the existence of what Bruhn calls 'communities of value' (*Wertegemeinschaften*), heterogeneous cohorts of people who shared the same ethical values and interest in religious change but who neither necessarily agreed on a course of action, nor always had a precise view of long-term outcomes.[3] When it comes to applying his analysis to the Continent, however, Bruhn has expressed reservations. In his view, specific contextual factors and literary traditions in England created the specific conditions for authors to write about religious change in this manner. True as this may be, to not take up the implied challenge would be an opportunity missed. In addition to the fact that such an investigation might lead to radically new interpretations of works of literature that have been a staple of discussions about tenth- and early eleventh-century 'reform' for

sur la sémantique du lexique dit "réformateur"', *Reformatio? Dire la réforme au Moyen Âge*, ed. Marie Dejoux (Paris, forthcoming).

[2] Due to space constraints I am unable to submit a representative selection of relevant studies. As an alternative, refer to the synthetic discussions in the forthcoming volume *Rethinking Reform in the Latin West, c. 800-1150*, ed. Steven Vanderputten.

[3] Stefan Bruhn, *Reformer als Wertegemeinschaften. Zur diskursiven Formierung einer sozialen Gruppe im spätangelsächsischen England (ca. 850-1050)* (Ostfildern, 2022), pp. 57–66 and 539–45.

centuries, it might also open the door to a new way of looking at real-life dynamics that drove spiritual and institutional change in this period.

In order to demonstrate both of these points, this paper will consider a key literary witness to religious change in the former middle kingdom of Lotharingia, namely the *Life of Lord John, Abbot of Gorze Abbey* by John of Saint-Arnoul 973/74–84 (hereafter cited as *Life*).[4] Scholars used to interpret this text as an account of the 934 'restoration' of Gorze abbey as a Benedictine institution and of its subsequent emergence as one of the principal regional centers (alongside Saint-Evre in Toul and Sankt Maximin in Trier) from which ideals and modalities of institutional and spiritual change were disseminated.[5] But since the 1990s this institutional interpretation has gradually eroded, due to the fact that studies have thoroughly nuanced the narrative's account of Gorze's resurrection and subsequent influence.[6] The

[4] John of Saint-Arnoul, *Vita Johannis Gorziensis*, ed. and trans. Peter C. Jacobsen, *Die Geschichte vom Leben des Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze* (Wiesbaden, 2016) (hereafter *VJ* for the Latin text and Jacobsen, *Die Geschichte* for the introduction). On this remarkable narrative see among many other commentaries those by Monique Goullet, 'Les saints du diocèse de Metz', *Miracles, vies et réécritures dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Monique Goullet and Martin Heinzelmann (Ostfildern, 2006), pp. 149–317, at 267–71 and Guy Philippart and Anne Wagner, 'Hagiographie Lorraine (950-1130). Les diocèses de Metz, Toul et Verdun', *Hagiographies. Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, 4, ed. Guy Philippart (Turnhout, 2006), 583–742, at 601–8. One of the very few relevant discussions of the text in English is that by Patrick C. Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast', *Bishop Aethelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara A. E. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), 13–42.

[5] Refer to the synthetic discussion in Elmar Hochholzer, 'Die Lothringische ('Gorzer') Reform', *Die Reformverbände und Kongregationen der Benediktiner im Deutschen Sprachraum*, ed. Ulrich Faust and Franz Quarthal (St. Ottilien, 1999), pp. 43–87, at 55–67. On the 934 reform of Gorze abbey, see in first instance Michel Parisse, 'Restaurer un monastère au Xe siècle. L'exemple de Gorze', *Vita religiosa im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Stephanie Haarländer, Franz J. Felten, and Nikolas Jaspert (Berlin, 1999), pp. 55–78.

[6] Michel Margue, "Lotharingien als Reformraum (10. bis Anfang des 12. Jahrhunderts). Einige einleitende Bemerkungen zum Gebrauch räumlicher und religiöser Kategorien", *Lotharingien und das Papsttum im Früh- und Hochmittelalter: Wechselwirkungen im Grenzraum zwischen Germania und Gallia*, ed. Klaus Herbers and Harald Müller (Berlin, 2017), pp. 22–33.

interpretation that is now preferred gives center stage to the recounted quest of John (c. 905–74) and his associates to establish the most perfect form of religious communal life. Earlier parts of the narrative explain how these individuals had felt dissatisfied with the options that existed in institutional settings; how their response had been to experiment with different community models along with men and women who lived as ascetic wanderers, hermits, urban anchorites, household ascetics, and cloistered religious; and finally how they had moved from one such experiment to another until Bishop Adalbero of Metz (929-92) pressed them to enter the monastic life at Gorze. The latter sections of the *Life* are mostly about the struggle the members of the newly established group of monks faced when they tried to establish a sense of community amongst themselves.

The *Life*'s depiction of these quests and struggles reminds us of tenth- and early eleventh-century English testimonies, which feature a similar focus on religious change as the result of various experiments in community-building. But to this, John's *vita* adds a dimension that sets it apart from Bruhn's literary texts, in that it highlights the role of political, social, ideological, and even personal conflict in the rise, development, and disintegration of these communities.[7] This tension between conflict-driven processes of community-building and *un*building is central to the author's argument, as is the role of such processes as a vector of both social and religious change.[8] In what follows I will investigate that tension and the way in which it is addressed in the narrative, by looking at instances of community un/building in three sections of the text, contextualizing them, and finally also confronting them with historical episodes that the author

[7] Observations on the shifting composition and scope of secular communities on either side of the year 900 lend credence to this account of community dynamics; Otto G. Oexle, 'Individuen und Gruppen in der lothringischen Gesellschaft des 10. Jahrhunderts', *L'abbaye de Gorze au Xe siècle*, ed. Michel Parisse and Otto G. Oexle (Nancy, 1993), pp. 105–39.

[8] The *Life*'s argument bring to mind Walter Pohl's statement that historical communities tend to 'privileg(e) certain types of conflict over others' and rely on conflict to learn and develop; 'The Construction of Communities and the Persistence of Paradox: an Introduction', *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 2003), pp. 1–15, at 6.

left unmentioned. In doing so I hope to contribute to a new reading of this keystone account of social and religious change in tenth-century Lotharingia that is no longer burdened by problematic notions of reform. At the same time, this paper issues a warning about the need to consider genre and authorial intentions, and how these factors can distort our understanding of real-life religious change and its underlying social processes. Despite claims about the *Life*'s reliable nature as a historical document,[9] there is substantial evidence that the author drastically intervened in the written memory of community un/building processes in order to project a meritocratic vision of John's social and spiritual ascent, and of Gorze as a beacon of Benedictine renewal.

Biographical Arguments and Formative Communities

Exactly in what circumstances the *Life* originated is unknown. Scholars have established that it was part of a wave of literary activity in the 970s and 80s that celebrated the memory of major figures of the Gorze's past.[10] And we can also tell from circumstantial evidence that the text originated in a context of growing concerns over Gorze's future. The tenures of John's successors Odalbert (974–82) and Immo (982–1015) saw a downturn in the abbey's influence (among other things, its monks were no longer recruited as abbots of other institutions) and were marked by a fractious relationship with Bishop Theoderic of Metz (965–84).[11] That being said, students of this literary production have been unable to tell if it was the result

[9] Goullet, 'Les saints', pp. 267–71 and Jacobsen, *Die Geschichte*, pp. 81–105.

[10] Philippart and Wagner, 'Hagiographie Lorraine', pp. 615–9, 609–15, 623–4, 633–4 and Monique Goullet, Michel Parisse, and Anne Wagner, *Sources hagiographiques de l'histoire de Gorze, Xe siècle. Vie de saint Chrodegang, Panégyrique et Miracles de saint Gorgon* (Paris, 2010), pp. 27–33, 122–25, 288–95.

[11] Anne Wagner, *Gorze au XIe siècle*. *Contribution à l'histoire du monachisme bénédictin dans l'Empire* (Turnhout, 1997), pp. 37, 40–2; Goullet, 'Les saints', p. 264; and John Nightingale, *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform. Lotharingia c. 850-1000* (Oxford, 2007), p. 71.

of a coordinated action by Gorze's leadership.[12] Nor have they been able to find out to what extent the contents and argument of the individual narratives derived from earlier literary activity at the abbey.[13] Similarly, they are in the dark about why it fell to an ex-monk of Gorze and abbot of the urban monastery of Saint-Arnoul in Metz named John (reigned c. 960–84) to write John of Gorze's biography, except for the fact that he was one of the man's close associates towards the end of the latter's life. Related to these questions is that of how John of Gorze's legacy and the *Life* itself were perceived by medieval audiences. In the only extant copy (which is believed to be a faithful version of the biographer's autograph manuscript and originated from the abbey of Saint-Arnoul),[14] the narrative cuts off mid-sentence in a passage about John's 952–53 embassy to Caliph Abd-al-Rahman III in Cordoba, sent on the orders of Emperor Otto I: presumably the author died while still working on the text.[15] For reasons that elude us, no one at Saint-Arnoul or at Gorze subsequently completed the narrative with a description of the last two decades of John's life, including his tenure as abbot between 967/68 and his death on 7 March 974. Nor does a copy of the text feature in Gorze's mid eleventh-century library catalogue or in any later booklists from the abbey.[16]

Some elements that explain the *Life*'s lack of appeal to medieval audiences can be inferred from the text itself.[17] To begin with, the structure is unusual. According to John of Saint-Arnoul's own testimony, he initially planned to write a conventional abbot's biography in three parts, covering the subject's youth,

[12] Goullet, Parisse, and Wagner, *Sources hagiographiques*, pp. 125–7.

[13] Goullet, 'Les saints', pp. 264–6, 269 and Philippart and Wagner, 'Hagiographie Lorraine', p. 601.

[14] BNF, MS lat. 13766, fols. 49v–96v; Peter C. Jacobsen, 'Die Vita des Johannes von Gorze und ihr literarisches Umfeld. Studien zur Gorzer und Metzer Hagiographie des 10. Jahrhunderts', *L'abbaye de Gorze au Xe siècle*, ed. Parisse and Oexle, pp. 25–50, at 25–31 and (the same)*, Die Geschichte*, pp. 105–15.

[15] E.g. Natalie D. Levin, 'Empire and Caliphate in the Life of John of Gorze', *Medieval Sicily, al-Andalus, and the Maghrib: Writing in Times of Turmoil*, ed. Carol L. Symes and Nicola Carpentieri (Leeds, 2020), pp. 39–58.

[16] Wagner, *Gorze*, pp. 101–90.

[17] Michel Parisse, *La vie de Jean, abbé de Gorze* (Paris, 1999), p. 19.

early adulthood, and conversion; his life as a monk; and his time as abbot up to and including his death. In the first stage (which began shortly before the subject's death and lasted until 977–79) he wrote the first of those three parts in forty-five chapters, but abandoned the project because he was dissatisfied with his work. And when Bishop Theoderic of Metz (with the assistance of Bishop Poppo of Utrecht) managed to get him back to writing shortly afterwards, the biographer radically dispensed with the narrative's original chronological approach. The second part consists of moral portraits of more than a dozen Gorze monks (in chapters 47–61), another one of John himself (72–94), a description of his activities in his capacity as manager of Gorze's estate (95–114), and finally the description of his above-mentioned embassy to Cordoba.[18] How this drastic change in compositional approach would have affected the structure and argument of the planned but never-written third part is unknown. So too is the answer to the question of whether or not the author was planning eventually to rewrite either or both of the first two parts with a view to turning them into a more cohesive whole. Even with critical editions and translations at their disposal, modern readers have struggled to see what the author's intentions were at the time of his death, let alone imagine what the finished *Life* would have looked like. There is no reason to think that contemporary and later medieval audiences were any less puzzled.

A second reason why there is so little evidence of the narrative's impact is the unusual way in which it depicts its main subject. Giulia Barone has noted that the *Life* presents a view of tenth-century Christian sainthood made not of grand gestures and miracles but of 'quotidian perfection', and has drawn comparisons with the better-known lives of Gerald of Aurillac, Archbishop Bruno of Cologne, and Wenceslas of Bohemia.[19] But Guy Philippart and Anne Wagner have nuanced this assessment, saying that

[18] Parisse, 'Restaurer un monastère', pp. 56–7.

[19] Giulia Barone, 'Jean de Gorze, moine de la réforme et saint original', *Religion et culture autour de l'an mil. Royaume capétien et Lotharingie*, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat and Jean-Charles Picard (Paris, 1990), pp. 31–8 and (the same) 'Une hagiographie sans miracles. Observations en marge de quelques vies du Xe siècle', *Les fonctions des saints dans le monde occidental (IIIe-XIIIe siècle)* (Rome, 1991), pp. 435–6, at 441–2.

even though John of Saint-Arnoul expresses his awe of John's achievement as a religious virtuoso and a monastic estate manager, his portrayal of John is definitely not that of a saint.[20] Unusually for the time, the biographer does not shy away from repeatedly drawing his readers' attention to the man's comparatively humble origins as the son of well-off farmers, the darker side of his personality (in particular his stubbornness), and his numerous personality clashes with his peers and superiors. In addition, the writer paints a picture of John as a religious virtuoso who always kept his inner feelings to himself and whose real goals in life (be they spiritual or other) were obscure to even his closest associates.[21] And finally, John is also depicted as an energetic social climber, who in his ascent relied on a carefully managed set of connections with powerful lay and clerical allies, his reputation as a skilled estate manager, and a life-long habit of assiduous learning. The *Life* notes that this attitude and the rewards it brought him irked some of his monastic peers, who (depending on their own previous status) either accused him of being an opportunist or treated him as a parvenu.[22]

Alongside the narrative's local scope, unfinished nature, and odd structure, this out-of-the ordinary biographical argument explains why the *Life* was not an obvious addition to religious libraries in either Lotharingia or elsewhere. But despite this obscurity in the medieval period, John of Saint-Arnoul's account deserves its reputation with modern scholars as one of the most remarkable narratives to survive from tenth-century Lotharingia. Its depiction of John as an individual of modest origins who carved his own path yet at the same time was the product of his involvement in a range of secular and religious communities turns it into a rare literary counter-argument against accounts of that period as an era of social immobility and of top-down 'reforms'. However the biographer's focus on John's singularity is one reason why our understanding remains incomplete of how these communities and their development – in

[20] Philippart and Wagner, 'Hagiographie Lorraine', pp. 604–8.

[21] Brian P. McGuire, *Friendship and Community. The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY, 2010), pp. 156–57, 159.

[22] Further, at notes 73–77.

other words, their building and *un*building – drove social and religious change on an individual and a collective level. And another reason is that John of Saint-Arnoul drastically intervened in the memory of key episodes of community un/building in order to present a very specific reading of his hero's legacy as a self-made spiritual leader and monastic administrator, and that of Gorze abbey as a beacon of Benedictine renewal. Fortunately, due to the unfinished nature of the work it remains fairly easy to spot several such interventions.

The first place where we can see him editing aspects of such information out of John of Gorze's life is in a passage at the very beginning of the main text. It opens with a brief statement that John was born in a village named Vandières, to a wealthy farmer of moderate social origins (a status that the author intriguingly refers to as *mediocritas*) and his much younger wife (whom he states belonged to a 'freer' section of society). Then it goes on to talk about the boy's early education, which is the first of many passages that lack key information. Having been taught to write 'close to his father', at some point in the years 917–19 John was sent as a teenager to the town of Metz to pursue his education, but his father disapproved and soon called him back to Vandières.[23] Following his return, John was then sent to be educated at the abbey of Saint-Mihiel (in the diocese of Verdun), where he was taught by a master named Hildebold. As a former disciple of Remigius of Auxerre, Hildebold came from an intellectual milieu of some renown, and the abbey itself had the distinction of being the former institution of the prominent Carolingian thinker Smaragdus. Despite these auspicious circumstances, the boy's education at the abbey was an outright failure. In later life John reportedly admitted that he remembered nothing of what he had been taught there.[24]

Much is left unsaid in this passage: why exactly Metz was picked as John's initial destination, who hosted him there, why his father called him back, and why he was subsequently sent to Saint-Mihiel? It is

[23] *VJ*, pp. 174, 176.

[24] *VJ*, pp. 176, 178.

possible that the author's knowledge of this period was poor: after all, these events had taken place more than half a century before he started working on the *Life*. However a closer look at the text reveals the absence of a narrative logic that must have been intentional. Indeed, it appears that the author was trying to get his readers to think that the events of his hero's life at this stage (when he was not yet in control of his own destiny) had been without consequences later on. But in reality, quite the reverse was true. Peppered throughout the text are clues that John's parents had intended to introduce him to the entourage (in other words, a secular community) of a clerical or lay lord, but that political circumstances had forced them to change their approach mid-way through.

If we begin our investigation in Metz, Anne Wagner has found that aside from the cathedral, the town at the time featured no other religious institution that could have provided John with an intellectual education. This brings its lord, Wigeric (then newly installed as the bishop of Metz (917–27)), into view as the teenager's host there.[25] But John of Saint-Arnoul would have been keen to avoid mentioning any connection between his hero and Wigeric, for at least two reasons. One has to do with the fact that Wigeric stood for a way of handling Church property that went counter to John's later views as provost of Gorze. Prior to becoming bishop, Wigeric had been lay abbot of Gorze, and following his enthronement he had distributed properties owned by religious institutions (possibly including Gorze) to his lay allies in exchange for their support.[26] It stands to reason that the biographer or his source would not have liked his readers to know that the two men had somehow been associated in the 910s–20s. Another reason for not mentioning Wigeric's role as the boy's host in Metz would have been that the bishop was a political rival of Count Ricuin of Verdun (d. 923), with whom John and his relatives were closely involved. At the time,

[25] Anne Wagner, 'La vie culturelle à Gorze au Xe siècle d'après la Vita Johannis Gorziensis et le catalogue de la bibliothèque de Gorze', *L'abbaye de Gorze au Xe siècle*, ed. Parisse and Oexle, pp. 213–31, at 214.

[26] Arnoud Hari, *Ecrire l'histoire des évêques de Metz au Moyen Age: les Gesta episcoporum de la fin du VIIIe à la fin du XIVe siècle* (PhD dissertation, Université Paul Verlaine-Metz, 2009–10), pp. 146–7.

Ricuin held the title of lay abbot of the Metz female abbey of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains and in that role also acted as the incumbent lay lord of its estate of Vandières, John's home village.[27] When Ricuin married to Cunegonde, the widow of Bishop Wigeric's relative Wigeric of Bidgau (the count palatine of Lotharingia, d. 916/19), this triggered significant aristocratic strife, due to the fact that the children from Cunegonde's first marriage (in particular, the future Bishop Adalbero) and their allies feared that it would negatively affect their situation.[28]

The risk of alienating the lord of his village, the general context of political instability at Metz, and a series of Magyar raids (some of which directly affected the town of Metz) were all factors that likely led John's father to recall him to Vandières, hastily aborting an attempt to build a secular community around his son.[29] And surely it was no coincidence that John's next destination, Saint-Mihiel, brought him close to the count of Verdun, who happened to be that institution's lay lord.[30] Whatever educational end point John's parents may have had in mind, they clearly intended that their oldest son forge a link with Vandières' lay lord. As the next series of events would show, that strategy paid off. When John's father died not long after the lad's arrival at Saint-Mihiel and his mother remarried, the teenager became manager of his father's estate and 'custodian of his brothers and the household's entire *familia*'.[31] This point marked the end of his education at Saint-Mihiel and the beginning of a close political association with Ricuin, serving in the count's 'household' for a number of years. In return for his service he received the church of Vandières as a benefice, which belonged to the estate of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains.[32]

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[27] Gordon Blennemann, *Die Metzer Benediktinerinnen im Mittelalter. Studien zu den Handlungsspielräumen geistlicher Frauen* (Husum, 2011), pp. 68–9.

[28] Nightingale, *Monasteries*, pp. 73–5.

[29] *VJ*, p. 176.

[30] Anja Gillen, *Saint-Mihiel im hohen und späten Mittelalter. Studien zu Abtei, Stadt und Landesherrschaft im Westen des Reiches* (Trier, 2003), p. 62, n. 121.

[31] *VJ*, p. 178: 'fratrum totiusque familiae domesticae curator'.

[32] *VJ*, p. 180.

Although this connection with Ricuin was clearly engineered by John's relatives while he was still a boy, John's biographer declined to mention this fact. Instead he set John's social ascent as a young adult in a meritocratic light, informing his readers that John's personal qualities allowed him to establish additional connections –in other words, build community– with lay and clerical lords in the region. So he became part of the circle (*frequentia*) of Bishop Dado of Verdun (880-923) and that of a nobleman named Warnerius from the adjoining diocese of Toul. Warnerius entrusted him with the stewardship of the church of St Laurent in the village of Fontenoy-sur-Moselle. The *Life* states that John's virtue and lively spirit made him an attractive ally for Dado and that his talents as an estate manager found similar favor with Warnerius.[33]

Unfortunately the narrative's argument at this point shifts away from John's early involvement in these secular communities, for this leaves us in the dark about how he subsequently coped with their collapse, as one after the other of these communities were *unbuilt* by conflict and circumstances. In 923 Ricuin was murdered by Adalbero's ally, Count Boso.[34] The same year, Dado of Verdun passed away. And the Toul nobleman, Warnerius, disappears from the *Life* just as abruptly as he had first appeared. While the rest of the narrative focusses entirely on John's religious quest, it is quite obvious that he would have had no choice but to look for other patrons, among other things to protect his relatives' interests. One of these individuals has been tentatively identified by John Nightingale as Count Adalbert of Metz, who became the beneficiary of parts of Gorze's estate in the late 920s or early 930s.[35] The absence in the text of a putative connection with Adalbert or any other secular lord draws our attention to yet another of the narrative's glaring omissions, which is that John also sought and found a connection with a new clerical

[33] *VJ*, p. 182.

[34] Michel Parisse, 'L'abbaye de Gorze dans le contexte politique et religieux lorrain à l'époque de Jean de Vandières (900-974)', *L'abbaye de Gorze*, ed. Parisse and Oexle, pp. 51–90, at 53–8.

[35] Nightingale, *Monasteries*, p. 95.

lord. Indeed, judging by a number of clues in the *Life* he must also have entered the clergy (and thus also joined a secular community that was centered on one of the region's bishops) around the time he reached adulthood. Indicating this new status, the biographer mentions that John took up office as the *hebdomadarius* (a function that was exclusively assigned to ordained clerics) of the women religious at Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains in Metz.[36] Another clue is in the biographer's mention that all the adults who entered the abbey in early 934 did so in priests' clothing.[37] Presumably this means that John had initially obtained a lower ordination in the mid-920s (possibly from Bishop Wigeric of Metz or from the latter's colleague Dado of Verdun) and only became a priest after a number of years.

The fact that neither these nor any other identity-shaping connections with lay and clerical lords from after c. 924 are mentioned in the *Life* indicates two things. For one, we can easily see how it would have been awkward for John of Saint-Arnoul to suggest that John had been involved with individuals who (as he saw it) had contributed to the alleged downfall of Gorze abbey and that of other religious houses in the early tenth century. Adalbert was related by marriage to the Wigeric family, and in the late 910s probably received from Bishop Wigeric of Metz the lay abbacy of Gorze and several of its properties as a benefice.[38] And we already saw that before him, Wigeric himself, both before and after becoming the bishop of Metz, had been closely involved in Gorze abbey. As to the second point, we can tell how important was the biographer's desire to paint a literary portrait of John as a man who in the mid-920s unburdened himself from all his former connections to secular communities and to clerical and lay lords in order to embark on a decade-long journey of spiritual discovery and religious community-building.

[36] *VJ*, p. 192.

[37] *VJ*, p. 252.

[38] Hari, *Ecrire l'histoire des évêques de Metz*, p. 146 and Michèle Gaillard, *D'une réforme à l'autre (816-934): les communautés religieuses en Lorraine à l'époque carolingienne* (Paris, 2006), pp. 256, 258.

Evidently this urge to present the late abbot of Gorze as a self-made man came at the price of presenting to his readers a drastically truncated memory of the historical John.

A Society of Secret Solitaries

Just as abruptly as John's secular connections fade into the background of the *Life*, an informal community of urban ascetics in Metz and Toul comes into view.[39] In the previous section the author had already made some allusions to that upcoming shift in focus. The passage about John's stewardship of the church of Fontenoy-sur-Moselle tells us about John's nascent interest in ascetic lifestyles and his inclination to explore these in the company of others. He is described as personally financing divine service at the church, appointing a foreign cleric (*peregrinus*) there, and bringing in a woman from Warnerius' *gynaeceum* (a term used in sources from the period to designate a rural textile workshop for unfree women) to serve as an anchoress.[40] Also referred to are John's encounters with a cathedral cleric from Toul named Berner, who taught him the elements of grammar and Bible study.[41] But these individual connections and one-on-one encounters apparently did not satisfy him. On moving to Metz (where he owned a house) John allied himself with clerics whose private conduct revealed an active interest in ascetic pursuits yet who also occupied key positions in cathedral centers, boasted specific managerial, intellectual, or artistic skills, or were in some or other way (not in the least through their aristocratic origins) advantageously connected.[42] Commuting back and forth between the region's major episcopal centers of Metz, Toul, and Verdun, John

[39] *VJ*, p. 204.

[40] *VJ*, pp. 184, 186.

[41] *VJ*, pp. 182, 184.

[42] Michel Parisse, 'La culture au service de la réforme monastique. Les clercs Toulois et l'abbaye de Gorze au Xe siècle', *Lotharingia. Archives lorraines d'archéologie, d'art et d'histoire* 7 (1997), pp. 27–37.

lodged for up to a month at a time with 'people of good reputation', participating as if he were a disciple in their mode of life.[43]

In a series of individual portraits the *Life*'s author describes the membership of this Bruhnian 'community of value' as being determined by two things. One was a shared interest in pursuing a learned, elitist, and above all discreet mode of Christian self-abnegation. The other was the fact that the members combined their spiritual quest without giving up on their other social and institutional roles. The narrative singles out three men whose influence on John was particularly strong. The first is the above-mentioned Berner, whom the biographer praises for his learning and his steadfastness in practicing strict chastity (which went so far that he refused to be seated where he had previously seen a woman sit), piety, and soberness in dress and food. Furthermore, Berner did these things without looking impoverished or unkempt.[44] The narrative's second focus is Humbert, a priest of relatively modest origins who at the time lived as an urban recluse at Verdun and briefly hosted John, persuading him, among other things, to do penance and abstain from eating meat. Humbert awoke in John a love of fasting, which lasted his entire life.[45] And the third man is Einold, the archdeacon of Toul, whom John met through Humbert. In contrast with his fellow canons, Einold (who lived in a cell near the cathedral clerics' enclosure) observed stability, did not own anything except for a simple shirt, books, and his clerical ornaments, practiced rigorous fasting, and lived on gifts from his bishop and other pious individuals. Assisted only by a servant in his cell and by an unfree cleric (*clientulus*) while saying mass, he practiced a quasi-eremitical lifestyle within the institutional setting of his cathedral chapter.[46]

[43] *VJ*, p. 192.

[44] *VJ*, p. 190.

[45] *VJ*, pp. 202, 204.

[46] *VJ*, pp. 218, 220, 222.

Besides these three men the *Life* mentions Rotland, the head of the singing school of Metz cathedral, who lived in a chapel on the upper level and spent his days and nights praying, singing psalms, and holding masses, and also Bernarcer his assistant, a scribe, singer, and computist. Warimbert practiced a similar lifestyle to Rotland, but at the urban church of St Salvator, and Angelramnus was an archdeacon and *primicerius* of the cathedral of Toul and later on of Metz. Also present in the text are Blidulph, an archdeacon of Metz; Odilo, a *primicerius* of Verdun; and Isaac and Odilbert, canons at Verdun cathedral. Living near the centers where these men carried out their duties were Salecho, who was a cleric at Saint-Martin-outre-Moselle in Metz, and Randinc, a canon at Saint-Symphorien in the same town. [47] John's ascetic education involved a succession of master–disciple relationships in which he each time learned to understand the advantages and disadvantages of a specific ascetic lifestyle by actively taking part in it. While this meant that some individuals with whom he interacted subsequently faded from his social circle, for most of those who are cited in the *Life* the bond was apparently strong enough to survive his shifting preferences.

Although John of Saint-Arnoul insists on the informal nature of this community of value, he intriguingly uses the expression 'society of secret solitaries' to describe it.[48] His word choice reminds us of the *societates* of clerics that are occasionally mentioned in episcopal and conciliar decrees from the early ninth century onwards, where the term is used to describe different forms of association between (mostly lower-ranking) priests. In one of these, the clerics met on a regular basis (in some cases monthly) to dine together on important feast days, pray together, converse over current affairs and exchange information, and provide mutual support in case of illness or death.[49] The informal nature of *societates*, their emphasis

[47] *VJ*, pp. 200, 202, 228, 278, 280, 282, 304, 306, 310, 312.

[48] *VJ*, 190: 'in solitario comitatu secreto'. The *Life* interchangeably uses the terms *conventio* and *societas*; *VJ*, pp. 224, 226, 270, 272.

[49] Steffen Patzold, *Presbyter. Moral, Mobilität und die Kirchenorganisation im Karolingerreich* (Stuttgart, 2020), pp. 433–51.

on discretion, on provision of mutual aid, on information exchange, and on celebrating a shared spirituality may well have been an inspiration to John and his peers.[50] In fact, there is no reason to believe that such informal *societates* were not still operative in 920s Metz, Toul, and Verdun, and that John at one point was introduced to them by his connections there. That being said, the biographer also makes a point of telling his readers that the society of solitaries was not one that exclusively consisted of clerics, which brings us back to Bruhn's observation that 'communities of value' were diverse, not just in social and functional, but also in gendered terms. To make his point, John's biographer refers to a young woman religious named Geisa at the abbey of Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains, who together with her aunt practiced a penitential lifestyle that made a deep impression on John, who visited them as their *hebdomadarius*. Significantly, the passage establishes a link between the learned culture of John's clerical associates and that of the Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains women, when it mentions that the asceticism of these women was grounded in intensive study of the abbey's book collection.[51]

The author's explicit reference to John's connection with the two cloistered women stands in stark contrast with the absence of any mention of interactions wit any of the region's male monastics. Some specialists have tried to explain this absence by speculating that he wrote the narrative (which we already saw was dedicated to Bishop Theoderic of Metz) strictly with a clerical audience in mind. It is true that the Gorze monks and their associates in the 970s–80s actively relied on their literary production to sustain the abbey's influence on the region's clergy (many prominent members had been educated there) and possibly even to promote change in that cohort's behavior.[52] While this may well be a relevant explanation for the *Life*'s focus at this stage on clerics, we must also consider two additional motives. One relates to the

[50] *VJ*, pp. 190, 192, 224, 226.

[51] *VJ*, pp. 192, 194, 196.

[52] For instance, in the late 970s or 80s an anonymous author from Gorze redacted a *Life* of Chrodegang of Metz; Philippart and Wagner, 'Hagiographie Lorraine', pp. 609, 615–6.

author's claim that all male monastic houses in the area had turned into places of dissolute morals, which we already saw is a bold claim that is difficult to substantiate on the basis of the available evidence but that served the purpose of representing Gorze's 'rebirth' as a triumphant new beginning for male monasticism.[53] And a second motive is his already cited strategy of avoiding any suggestion that prior to Adalbero's intervention at Gorze in 934 and John's subsequent transition to the monastic life, John had been personally involved with one or several of the region's monasteries, their members, and their stakeholders. Here again we can plausibly suspect that the biographer deliberately refrained from cluttering the narrative with information that would have compromised his literary vision of John as someone whose post-conversion attitudes as a monk and a provost at Gorze were consistent and seamless with his earlier ones.

Whatever the true scope of the community of value in which John was involved in real life, evidently it was too nebulous (in the sense of too informal and insufficiently asking a permanent commitment by its participants) to meet his expectations.[54] Accordingly he embarked on a series of experiments in un/building virtuoso communities. A plan to become part of a small settlement of urban anchorites near the church of Saint-Salvator in Metz was quickly abandoned due to the distractions of urban life. Another idea of his to join a hermit named Lambert in the wooded Argonne region, together with Humbert and Andreas (a *Britto* and former associate of Bishop Dado of Verdun), likewise came to nothing. The biographer states that although John tried valiantly to emulate Lambert's example, he and his two companions grew impatient with Lambert's extreme and outright repulsive behaviors.[55] At Humbert's advice John then embarked on an episode of ascetic peregrination to Italy, which according to his biographer turned into a fact-finding mission about religious community life. John of Saint-Arnoul

[53] *VJ,* p. 230.

[54] *VJ*, p. 264.

[55] *VJ*, pp. 202, 204, 206, 208.

subtly informs his readers that this too was a communal endeavour, by noting that John mobilized his circle of secret solitaries to take a part in his spiritual quest. As his travel companions he took along the above-mentioned Bernacer (who himself was a follower of the recluse Warimbert) and a group of unnamed companions.[56] Among other things, the *Life* reports, John studied the observance of the monks of Monte Cassino (who at the time were living in Capua) and found that they retained at least 'some elements of […] the fundamentals of holy observance'.[57] But on returning to Metz he was none the wiser about what path to follow. At a loss about how to proceed, John took to practicing an ascetic lifestyle within the privacy of his own home, incorporating a routine of incessant prayer, auto-flagellation, and fasting that (the biographer states) was hard to distinguish from that of a monk. To this the biographer adds that John's quasi-monastic lifestyle was discreet to the point that even those who lived under the same roof hardly took notice of it.[58]

That latter comment is frustrating because of the lack of detail it provides about what John's household asceticism entailed and who were its unwitting spectators. But it is nevertheless significant, for it implies that throughout this phase of intense experimentation with ascetic lifestyles and religious community-building, John remained committed to his other duties as head of his family's household and presumably also as a cleric. A second reason for its significance it that it suggests that John was able to pursue his religious goals in a secular community setting where the other members (in this case those who lived at his urban home) did not participate in his ascetic lifestyle. And a final reason why the comment about John's return to the privacy of his urban home in Metz merits our attention is that it functions as an elegant segue to the biographer's account of how John covertly relaunched his community-building

[56] *VJ*, pp. 208, 210.

[57] *VJ*, p. 212: 'sancti propositi vestigia, que ubi nonnulla supererant'.

[58] *VJ*, pp. 214, 216: 'vita eius, qui a monachi instituto differet, haud facile quisquem discerneret'.

project as a joint venture with Einold, whose profile as an educated, discreet, and (on account of his role as archdeacon at Toul cathedral) active ascetic was a good fit with John's ideal.

On hearing about the Metz society of solitaries from John, the narrative continues, Einold travelled to Metz where he met Salecho, Randinc, Bernacer, and the two ascetic women whom John had encountered at Saint-Pierre-aux-Nonnains. These encounters (which took place outside Metz's southern city gate *in loco secretioris usu*, 'in a place far removed') were frequent and presumably covered a wide range of topics.[59] But eventually they centered on finding a place where the clerics could 'live together after having vowed to a communal life'.[60] The next part of the narrative is dedicated to how they ended up extrictating themselves from their previous roles (as cathedral clerics, parish priests, and so on) and building a Benedictine community at Gorze. But here again we shall see that the biographer's account is highly elliptical.

Un/building Gorze Abbey

John of Saint-Arnoul's account of how the group became involved in Gorze abbey and subsequently built community there is hard to disentangle. In his version of events John tried to persuade his fellow solitaries to relocate to the remote rural parts of Benevento, an area he had visited during his time in Italy and which he described to them as removed from urban society and set between vineyards and fertile farmland. But instead the group sent Bernacer (whom we saw was a member of Metz's cathedral chapter) to Bishop Adalbero's counsellor Lantbert to signal their availability to establish a new community in that area. Adalbero arranged for another group member, Randinc, to tell Einold to ask Adalbero himself to be released from his obligation to observe Chrodegang's rule for canons and to seek permission to instead

[59] *VJ*, pp. 224, 226, 228, 230.

[60] *VJ*, p. 230: 'in quibus communem vitam professi pariter habitare possent'.

become a monk. For his part, Bernacer received instructions to inform Einold to secretly ask the bishop for Gorze as the location for the new religious community, after which Adalbero made all the necessary arrangements.[61] In early 934, Einold, John, Salecho, Randinc, Bernacer, and two boys named Theuthinc (a servant of Einold's) and Theuther (a cousin of Randinc) then entered Gorze to form the core of the new community. Adalbero granted them permission to elect an abbot, adopt the Rule of St Benedict, and take the monastic habit. And not long afterwards he welcomed the group's abbot-elect Einold at the cathedral in Metz, obtained from him an oral and a written promise to maintain the *Rule*, and vested him with the monastic cowl: after that the six other converts made their monastic vows. And in a final stage, Adalbero turned his attention to a handful of individuals who had entered Gorze abbey prior to his intervention and had been allowed to stay on afterwards, albeit only as novices. He made them adopt a communal lifestyle, and accept Einold as their new leader.[62]

On presenting this version of events, the biographer implies that the group of secret solitaries (or at least part thereof) became involved in Adalbero's intervention at Gorze by chance. However, his account of how John had described the Benevento region to his peers strikingly mirrors the abbey's rural environment, which suggests that they were actually discussing the possibility of setting up a new community much closer to home. And the transition from that passage to the next is abrupt to the point that it is clear that here again, the author chose to withhold information. Several of the clerics in John's circle held key positions in Adalbero's cathedral chapter and therefore also in the administration of the diocese, which must have made it difficult for them to keep their plans to renege on their former responsibilities as secular clerics (and by doing so also unbuild various communities in which they were implicated) a secret. And conversely, any keen observer of contemporary politics in the Metz area would also have known that Gorze was very much in the bishop's thoughts at this stage. From his election in 929,

[61] *VJ*, pp. 232, 234, 236, 238.

[62] *VJ*, pp. 250, 252.

Adalbero had struggled in several ways. For a start, he had not succeeded in gaining the upper hand over his aristocratic rival Count Adalbert and his former ally Boso (with whom he fell out in 931). Nor had he improved his financial situation, or established himself as an authoritative Church leader. An intervention to 'restore' and 'renew' Gorze abbey presented itself as an ideal way to achieve all of these aims, even though the politically delicate nature of such an intervention compelled him to do so with utter discretion. It stands to reason that behind the biographer's tale of an unforeseen meeting of minds between Adalbero and the secret solitaries there lurked a complex story of how the prelate had carefully planned his intervention at Gorze and sent out recruiters to find the right people to staff the abbey, and how John, Einold, and a handful of Metz clerics were solicited to submit their candidacy. Attentive late tenth-century readers of the *Life* would surely have suspected all these things too. But John's biographer was not interested in telling that story. Instead, he was out to craft a narrative of Gorze's rebirth as a virtuoso community from the perspective of the secret solitaries, and to give them most of the credit for it.

Likewise elliptical is the biographer's account of community-building at the newly 'reformed' abbey. He describes how the original group of seven new members rapidly expanded and significantly diversified to include monks and former hermits. One of those 'second-wave' entrants was Adalbero's uncle Frederic, a former monk of Saint-Hubert in Ardennes, who was made Einold's provost and took control of the abbey's estate. Another high-ranking individual was Odilo, the former estate manager of the bishop of Verdun.[63] Yet another was Andreas, a former hermit from Brittany whom Bishop Dado of Verdun had put in charge of an eremitical settlement several decades earlier.[64] Also mentioned are John's associate Humbert, the hermit from Toul, and a child named Milo that he had brought along.[65] All these individuals are mentioned in a charter from 935, which allows us to put an approximate chronology to this

[63] *VJ*, pp. 276, 278.

[64] *VJ*, pp. 204, 206, 208.

[65] *VJ,* p. 266.

quick expansion.[66] Subsequent growth was steady, and based on the biographer's account and on charter evidence Michel Parisse has estimated that by the early 960s about two dozen monks lived at Gorze.[67] But in the *Life* this information is imparted mainly in the form of a series of moral portraits of monks, which offer us mere glimpses of how an actual community of Benedictine monks was constituted. Among a range of things that the text fails to mention is who in the earliest stage of the community's existence actually taught this heterogeneous cohort of clerics, hermits, laymen, and young boys how to be a monk.[68] Just as John is portrayed in the *Life* as a man who carved his own path, the newly established community of Gorze thus emerges from the narrative as a spiritual success story that it owed strictly to itself.

An explanation for the absence of references to how the community members learned to be monks is provided in the numerous references throughout the text to the learnedness of key participants.[69] But even if Einold and his associates had deep theoretical knowledge of monasticism's normative and literary traditions, they would still have found it exceedingly difficult to establish concrete liturgical and other routines, let alone a shared sense of identity, without any outside help. And given that bringing in one or several monks from another institution was a common approach at the time when so-called reform agents were trying to change an abbey's spirituality and governance, it is hard to believe that there were no such individuals brought to Gorze. Because the text gives a fair amount of detail about the members' practice and especially their liturgical routines, Anselme Davril was able to establish that the observance of the Gorze monks as described in the *Life* strongly resembles that which we find in the oldest customary of Fleury (which dates from the early eleventh century but describes practices from the

[66] Armand D'Herbomez, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Gorze. Ms. 826 de la Bibliothèque de Metz* (Paris, 1898–99), no. 93, p. 174.

[67] Parisse, 'Restaurer un monastère', pp. 58–60.

[68] Presumably the monks who had entered Gorze prior to the reform did not play any role in this, since they were all made novices; *VJ*, pp. 242, 246.

[69] Wagner, 'La vie culturelle' and Jacobsen, *Die Geschichte*, pp. 72–81.

980s–90s), and suggests a kinship between the experience of monastic life in the two places. Davril tried to explain this kinship by suggesting that the monks of Gorze were initially trained in the monastic life by monks from the abbey of Saint-Evre in Toul, where Abbot Archembald of Fleury had previously intervened on behalf of Bishop Gozelin of Toul.[70] We must also consider that it is far from certain that the break with 'pre-reform' experiences and practices at Gorze was truly as radical as the biographer suggests. With the possible exception of a poorly documented phase in 922–34, Gorze abbey in the later ninth and early tenth centuries was staffed by a sizeable community of (on average thirty) monks, who performed their prayer duties and liturgical routines, maintained a steady recruitment rhythm, and were to a greater or lesser extent organized in accordance with the Carolingian interpretation of the *Rule of St Benedict*.[71] Presumably the author's silence on all these crucial points was meant to imply not only that Gorze's new observance was entirely home-grown but that it also marked a fundamental departure from previous local experiences of the religious community life.

Just as notable as this omission of information about how the Gorze monks learned to be monks is the fact that the *Life* hardly spends any time explaining how Abbot Einold and his associates created a meaningful community. However it does tell us that because new community consisted in large part of adult converts, these people brought with them deeply rooted notions about who they were and how they related to others. A first anecdote worth mentioning is about Angelramnus, a *primicerius* of Toul and later Metz who entered the convent shortly after the first group. Despite giving all his possessions to the abbey, he insisted on boasting about his noble origins and demanding these be recognized, until Abbot Einold reprimanded him. Angilramnus then suffered a mental breakdown, after which he took to a life of strict abnegation inside a small hut next to Bishop Chrodegang's grave in the abbatial church. He also

[70] Anselme Davril, 'Points de contact entre la 'Vita Iohannis Gorziensis' et les 'Consuetudines Floriacenses Antiquiores'', *L'abbaye de Gorze au Xe siècle*, ed. Parisse and Oexle, pp. 183–92.

[71] Nightingale, *Monasteries,* pp. 59–64 and Gaillard, *D'une réforme à l'autre,* pp. 208–11.

downgraded his rank in the abbey's pecking order by taking a seat in the back of the choir, a place that (the *Life* states) was reserved for the very lowest in rank.[72]

A second anecdote is about John himself and how the transfer of social inequalities from the secular world into the cloister compromised the internal harmony of the monastic community. So we read that monks of lower origins accused John of being an opportunist and a social climber. On entering the monastic life, John had given all his wealth to the abbey, but had also brought with him his two brothers, his widowed mother, and several members of his extended household (*familia*). His brothers ended up entering the monastic life, while his mother and a number of servants were housed in the outer parts of the monastic compound, where they served the monks by producing textiles.[73] John's critics are quoted as saying, 'Through a ruse you have brought what is yours to this place, so that you may own it freely here and can even take better care of it here than you in your home. Look, you have turned this monks' cloister into a poor women's house'.[74] John of Saint-Arnoul brings no closure to the story, except to say that he bore these accusations without anger and in silence.

The other anecdote about John alledges that his *mediocritas* (literally his 'middling status') triggered a response from those whose status in the world was higher. Despite John's lack of 'nobility of the flesh' (*nobilitas carnis*), Einold initially made him responsible for managing the abbey's estate on account of his personal talents in that field.[75] But as soon as the original group of seven was expanded with new recruits, John's status changed dramatically. Adalbero's uncle Frederic became the abbey's provost and John (whom Frederic openly treated as someone of lower rank) became his assistant.[76] Over the

[72] *VJ,* pp. 282, 294.

[73] *VJ*, pp. 256, 258.

[74] *VJ*, pp. 322, 324: 'Tua huc subdolus contraxisti, ut liberius ea hic possideres et melius quam domi sufficeres hic procurares. Ecce egeneceum claustrum monachorum fecisti'.

[75] *VJ*, p. 254.

[76] *VJ,* pp. 256, 318, 320.

course of the next decade John was given a range of roles to play at the monastery that seemingly belied his status as co-founder of the renewed Gorze community. These included that of kitchen aid, gardener, cellarer, *vestiarius* (responsible of the monks' clothing), *circuitor* (night guard and organizer of the day order), porter, and dean: several of these roles, the text notes, were below John's rank.[77] The idea of Gorze abbey as a meritocratic utopia where adult converts could be given roles strictly on the basis of their talents and their zeal for learning had turned out to be an illusion, so the biographer clearly lets his readers understand.

Post-934 the abbey of Gorze thus emerges from the *Life* as a moral arena in which its principal protagonists are challenged to display their mastery of the virtues of humility and patience as part of an effort to avoid a catastrophic process of community unbuilding. This challenge, it argues, emerged in light of social tensions that continuously put the monastic community at risk of splintering into elite, middling, and lower class cohorts. But the text actually does more than this. It plausibly suggests that Einold relied on the virtues humility and patience specifically to build community, by harnessing the social ambitions and nurturing the talents of the abbey's diverse crowd of adult converts, particularly of those individuals whose talents were obvious but whose ascent to leading positions was compromised by their pre-conversion background. John, we already saw, was one such figure. Although he clearly had the talent and the ambition to be the abbey's estate manager and temporarily took up that role in 934, it took a decade and a half before he was formally appointed as the abbey's provost.[78] First impressions suggest that Einold decided to test John's patience and humility by giving him a series of lowly roles in the cloister. But if we take a closer look at some of the other duties John performed post-935, it becomes plaussible that Einold put him through a *cursus honorum* of major supporting and managerial roles in anticipation of attaining the stressful and high-stakes position of provost. The functions of *vestiarius*, *circuitor*, and porter in

[77] *VJ*, pp. 314, 316, 318, 324, 326 and *Cartulaire*, no. 100, p. 186.

[78] *Cartulaire*, no. 105, p. 193.

particular were crucial to the internal management of convent life and the monitoring of the monks' interactions with the outside world. Another likely reason for putting John's ascent on hold was that Einold realized that the office of provost required its holder to be particularly resilient and perhaps a little more mature than John had been on entering the monastic life. From the onset, Bishop Adalbero despite his role as the abbey's 'restorer' had been a formidable adversary, especially when it came to matters touching on the integrity of the abbey's estate and the restitution of alienated properties.[79] And presumably there was also the problem that the bishop was ill-disposed towards John on account of the latter's association with Ricuin and (possibly) Adalbert.[80]

One effect of bringing humilty and patience centre stage in his governance approach – whether or not Einold was aware of this – was to eventually advantage the community's lesser-ranked and junior members. The advancement of some high-status individuals early on – Gorze becoming a mere station towards a career in another of Lotharingia's monasteries – in time cleared the path for others. By the middle of the 940s, Salecho, Frederic, Odilo, and Humbert were gone, having been recruited to become abbot at (respectively) Saint-Martin-outre-Moselle, Saint-Hubert, Stavelot-Malmédy, and Saint-Evre in Toul.[81] Three further Gorze monks who had left were Heribert, whom Adalbero of Metz made abbot of Saint-Arnoul in 942; Ansteus, who succeeded Heribert in 944; and Erluin, who became abbot of Gembloux and Soignies.[82] And about five years later Andreas left for Rome, where he had been called by the pope to

[79] Egon Boshof, 'Kloster und Bischof in Lotharingen', *Monastische Reformen im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert,* ed. Raymund Kottje and Helmut Maurer (Sigmaringen, 1989), pp. 197–245, at 219–21 and Nightingale, *Monasteries*, pp. 78–82, 85, 93. Barely one year after entering Gorze the monks threatened to relocate to the abbey of Sankt Maximin in Trier; *VJ*, pp. 378, 380 and Peter C. Jacobsen, *Miracula s. Gorgonii. Studien und Texte zur Gorgonius-Verehrung im 10. Jahrhundert* (Hanover, 2009), p. 116.

[80] *VJ*, pp. 373–84.

[81] *VJ*, pp. 272, 276, 278 and Wagner, *Gorze*, p. 32.

[82] Margit Müller, *Am Schnittpunkt von Stadt und Land. Die Benediktinerabtei St. Arnulf zu Metz im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Trier, 1993), p. 17 and Wagner, *Gorze*, p. 32.

direct (along with a monk of Luxeuil) an intervention at the abbey of San Paolo fuori le Mura.[83] This exodus of high-status individuals gave lower ranked monks, including John himself, the opportunity to gradually work their way up the ranks and gain crucial experience in the process.

It is unfortunate that, due to the *Life*'s abrupt ending, we do not know how this strategy played out in the second half of Einold's tenure, and under what circumstances John abandoned his coveted post as provost in the early part of the 950s to go on a diplomatic mission for the emperor. Had he been able to finish his biography, John of Saint-Arnoul would probably have made his account of those years just as selective and just as profoundly biased as the text that currently survives.

Conclusions

John of Saint-Arnoul's *Life of John of Gorze* emerges from the analysis in this paper as a carefully crafted portrait of John and the early 'reformed' abbey of Gorze for an audience living in the 970s-80s, at a point in time when living memories of the man and his social and religious milieus were beginning to fade. The unusual discourse of this biography, its elliptical argument, and its unfinished state all limit our ability as modern observers to understand what end the author had in mind. But paradoxically, these same features also allow us to see where he intervened in the biographical memory of John and the institutional memory of the abbey, and to rely on contextual evidence to speculate as to why. In the first part of the text, which deals with John's life prior to monasticism, the author did his best to represent him as a free agent who autonomously chose the secular and religious communities he engaged with and depended on his own preferences and ambitions to trade one for the other. And in the second part, which covers John's post-conversion years until the early 950s, his aim was to celebrate Gorze's post-934 triumph as a self-made

[83] *VJ*, p. 274; also Giulia Barone, 'Gorze e Cluny a Roma', *Retour aux sources: textes, études et documents d'histoire médiévale offerts à Michel Parisse*, ed. Sylvain Gouguenheim (Paris, 2004), pp. 583–90.

community of virtuoso ascetics and at the same time also to highlight the social tensions that brought that community to the brink of collapsing. As such the *Life* gives center stage to processes of community un/building, which makes it a testimony of first importance for scholars' ongoing efforts to formulate an alternative account of tenth-century social and religious change. But its significance in that respect must also be nuanced, as the author's drastic interventions in real-life memories yielded an account of those processes that was both biased and highly selective. Exactly how representative this literary approach was in the decades on either side of the year 1000 remains to be understood. Further case studies will help us to understand if authors typically described and explained religious change in this way in Lotharingia and other parts of the Latin West, including in England.