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 (Tenth-Eighteenth Centuries)

Steven Vanderputten (Ghent University)

Extraordinary testimonies from the past often emerged in circumstances that seemed ordinary at the time. One such is a book by the French cleric and amateur historian Jean-Jacques Bouvier (pen name Jean-Jacques Lionnois, 1730–1806), entitled Histoire des villes vielle et neuve de Nancy. Considered his magnum opus and conceived over several months in 1788, this three-volume study of the capital of France's eastern region of Lorraine remained unpublished for nearly two decades.¹ And when Bouvier finally found a publisher who was willing to make the work available to the public, he declined or was unable to update his original text. As a consequence, the published Histoire presented early nineteenth-century readers with an account of the region's past that was conceived in blissful ignorance of the Revolution and its profound impact on French society and culture.

Of particular note to cultural historians are the passages in which Bouvier expressed concern over his contemporaries' fragile relationship with the collective past and its various legacies (or, to use Pierre Nora's expression, lieux de mémoire).² From the perspective of those who purchased the book, memories

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² Bouvier shared these concerns with many commentators of the mid-eighteenth century onwards; see, by way of introduction, Brecht Deseure and Judith
were still fresh of how the revolutionaries had destroyed and dismantled many of these legacies. However the cleric's text sharply reminded them of the fact that the pre-1789 custodians of these legacies had often failed in their duty to preserve key documents, objects, images, buildings, and landscapes. To make his point he submitted various case studies, perhaps the most compelling of which is that of the noble canonesses of Bouxières abbey, a small convent situated some two kilometres to the north-east of Nancy. Just four years earlier the chapter members of this elite institution had decided to relocate from their eight-hundred-year-old hill site overlooking the river Meurthe to a new one adjacent to the urban church of Bon Secours.³ Although construction work on the new convent had begun only in summer 1787 and planning for the move was still underway, the cleric sternly condemned the project. The canonesses' chosen location was prone to flooding and remote; the budgeting for the new convent buildings optimistic at best; and the very idea that the hill of Bouxières would no longer host a religious community deeply offensive.⁴

To argue the importance of the old abbey as a "monument of our ancestors" and the catastrophic implications of the canonesses' decision to abandon it, Bouvier decided to include in his work the story of its venerable origins in the 930s, when it was founded by the bishop of Toul, St Gozelin (d. 962).⁵ To this end he reprinted two extracts of a Latin office for the feast day of

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⁵ On Gozelin's life, see in first place Michel Parisse, Un évêque réformateur: Gauzelin de Toul (922-962), in: Ad Libros! Mélanges d'études médiévales offerts à Denise Angers et Joseph-Claude Poulin, ed. Jean-François Cottier, Martin Gravel, and Sébastien Rossignol, Montréal, 2010, p. 69-82. The only monographic study of the abbey's past from the foundation until the dissolution in early 1791 is Henri Lepage, L'abbaye de Bouxières, Mémoires de la Société d'archéologie lorraine 1 (1859), p. 129-301; more recent discussions of the abbey's early history are in Robert-Henri Bautier, Les origines de l'abbaye de Bouxières-aux-Dames au diocèse de Toul: Reconstitution du chartrier et édition critique des chartes antérieures à 1200, Nancy, 1987 and John Nightingale,
the saint, taken from a late-seventeenth-century publication and given a full French translation. The extracts recount how the Virgin Mary appeared to Gozelin in a dream and instructed him to build a church in her honour on the hill; a white doe miraculously revealed the location to Gozelin; Gozelin set to work and was assisted in his mission by the Virgin, who enlisted the help of an unidentified queen, three camels, and a self-propelling boat; and Jesus Christ said the first Mass in the newly built church. And in the final chapter of the story, the bishop once again consulted the Virgin to find out who should serve at the new sanctuary:

(she) appeared to him and said: "Go to the bridge of Saint-Michael: there three women will come to you, one at six o’clock, another at nine, and the third at noon". When he went there, all happened as it had been announced to him. For at six o’clock a veiled woman presented herself before him, to whom he said: "My daughter, where are you going?" To which she answered: "Lord, I heard that a certain saintly bishop (his name is Gozelin) has built a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That is where I am going: but I do not know where he is". He told her: "Sit down, my daughter". At the third hour there came another woman, and he told her what he had told the first. He also spoke thus to the third who came at the sixth hour. St Gozelin brought them to his church, gave them statutes, awarded them prebends, and they lived under that rule, and in the custom that they had when they arrived, as do still those who have succeeded them. 

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6 Lionnois, Histoire, vol. 1, p. 595-605. On the booklet, see the commentary below in note 49.

7 Ibid., p. 602-603: "B. autem Virgo ei apparuit et dixit: 'Vade ad pontem B. Michaelis, et cum ibi perveneris, venient ad te tres mulieres, una hora prima, altera hora tertia, tertia vero hora sexta'. Et veniens ibi reperit ista. Hora enim prima venit ad eum quaedam mulier habens velum super caput suum, et dixit illi Sanctus Gauzelinus: 'Filia, quo vadis?' Et illa: 'Domine, audivi quod quidam sanctus nomine Gauzelinus aedificavit ecclesiam in honorem B. Virginis Mariae, et illuc vado; sed nescio ubi sit'. Et ille dixit: 'Sede hic, filia'. Hora autem tertia, venit altera, et ad eam sicut ad alteram locutus est. Similiter locutus est ad tertiam quae hora sexta venit, quas Sanctus Gauzelinus ducens ad ecclesiam
The Nancy cleric spent an entire ten pages of his book citing the office text and submitting it as evidence of the importance of the hill at Bouxières as a prominent *lieu de mémoire* of the regional past. But paradoxically he also indicated that he thought very little of the office as a historical document and also little of those who used it in the liturgy. "One cannot be much surprised", he wrote, "that these Ladies (who are not obliged to know Latin) in the simplicity of their conscience and to fulfil their duty recited these pious musings. But (I do not know) how their canons... did not warn them that the Church has always wanted to remove from its offices all the legends that have no authority and deserve no respect".⁸

What Bouvier failed to mention to his readers was that he had picked a foundation account that was by far the most recent, most obscure, and least authoritative of no less than three different versions. When he wrote his study, the oldest two of these (Gozelin’s foundation charter and a text known as *Deeds of the Bishops of Toul*) had long shaped the scholarly consensus about the hill’s historical significance and were widely available in print. And another thing he failed to mention is that these two earlier versions were also known at the abbey itself and that Gozelin’s foundation charter especially was still held in high regard there. This suggests that Bouvier had been looking for a way to portray the canonesses as credulous, uneducated women and their canons as incompetent. It suggests, too, that he wished to imply that Nancy’s urban society would gain very little from their presence once they had moved there, and desired to brand them as disinterested caretakers of one of the prime sites of Lorraine’s illustrious past. All three of these purposes fit his derogatory comments in the rest of the passage. But his strategy also raises two further questions. If the canonesses of Bouxières had at their disposal no less than three different accounts of their origins as a religious community, how exactly did they handle this simultaneous praedictam, praebuit eis regulam vivendi, et statuit praebendas, et sub tali habitu et ordine quo venerunt illae vivunt nunc et reliquae".

⁸Ibid., p. 605-606: "On ne peut pas être étonné que ces Dames, qui sont pas obligés de savoir le latin, dans la simplicité de leur conscience, et pour remplir leur devoir, ayent récité ces pieuses rêveries. Mais comment leurs Chanoines, qui doivent le savoir, ne les ont-ils pas averties, que le voeu de l'Eglise a toujours été d'ôter de ses Offices toutes les légendes qui n'ont aucune autorité, et ne peuvent mériter aucun respect..."
presence in their cultural memory? And what does this tell us about their memory culture?

Beginning nearly half a century ago, foundation narratives of medieval religious institutions have been the subject of intense scholarly interest. Initially studies sought to establish *historiae fundationum* as a distinct historiographical genre with its own narrative conventions and literary influences. But since the late 1980s, specialists have become more broadly interested in why authors felt the need to recount the origins of their institution, (con)federation, or order and what the consequences were for the way in which they represented its origins. These pioneering studies highlighted the need to carefully consider the relationship between the timing and content of foundation narratives and the context in which they originated. More specifically, they revealed that these accounts played a crucial role in the shaping of a common sense of identity and purpose for monastic groups, congregations, and orders, and that they functioned as a means to project then-current realities and expectations onto a legitimizing past. These observations helped researchers make sense of the fact that foundation accounts were subject to processes of revision, some of which were subtle and some of which were drastic. Since then, studies have

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immensely expanded in scope. A considerable bibliography now covers narratives from the entire medieval era, a very large geographical area, and a wide typology that includes (besides texts) iconography, objects, spaces, and even landscapes.¹¹

Yet there still remains room to further expand the debate in numerous ways. One of these is to consider how multiple versions of the same foundation narrative related to each other in the perception of medieval and early modern observers, particularly within the community to which they applied. Scholars used to look at such narratives in strict chronological order, building on the assumption that every new version of a story of origins was supposed to update and replace previous ones. However their work gave few answers to the question of what to think of narratives that were created to complement instead of supersede older ones. Likewise, this scholarship did not try to give an answer to the question of how we must explain the fact that these narratives had subsequently co-existed in the memory culture of religious communities. In what follows, I consider these questions via a case study of Bouxières abbey's three foundation accounts and of their reception over the course of the tenth to late eighteenth centuries. At the heart of my argument stands the hypothesis that conflicting narratives of origins were allowed to exist alongside each other in the convent's memory culture because they related to different arguments in the canonesses' identity narrative. As such, this paper hopes to contribute to an ill-

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understood aspect of foundation narratives as a literary genre and a memorial practice in religious communities, with a particular attention to long-term developments.

*The Beginnings of a Tradition about Beginnings*

Like so many religious institutions of the early and high medieval periods, the origins of Bouxières abbey as a religious community are somewhat obscure. What we do know is that before the creation of a Benedictine nunnery the hill was occupied by a small group of women who pursued a quasi-eremitical lifestyle. According to a note in a 1560 archive inventory from Bouxières, a now-lost charter by Bishop Gozelin of Toul dated 8 March 930 described how the women were living in a chapel situated at the top of the hill, and how Gozelin gave them some orchards, fisheries, and the tithes of a local church to build a few small dwellings and establish a cemetery.\(^{12}\) Thanks to the reconstruction work by John Nightingale, we know that Gozelin probably acted as proxy for a widowed noblewoman named Hersendis, who had donated parts of her dower to the bishop of Toul with the express purpose of sponsoring the Bouxières religious. By doing so, she apparently succeeded in her goal of establishing a small religious settlement without triggering a claim by her husband's heirs. Nightingale further revealed that Hersendis was assisted in the earliest stage of the community's existence by a number of relatives, including the widowed Countess Eva of Chaumontois and her son (and Hersendis's grandson) Odelric, who later became lay abbot of Bouxières and later still archbishop of Reims. Other widows from aristocratic families in the area likewise used their dowries to support the community: after the settlement was turned into a convent, they received a burial in the abbey church or had one or several of their daughters enter the community.\(^ {13}\) All these individuals were personally connected, either via family ties or otherwise, to Gozelin.

In 937–938 Gozelin himself stepped in to become the community's most prominent patron and turn it into a cloistered one of women who lived according to the *Rule of St Benedict*. His actions are described in the abbey's foundation


\(^{13}\) Nightingale, *Monasteries*, p. 148-164.
charter (which is also the abbey's earliest narrative of origins), dated 13 January 938. The authenticity of this document has long been disputed. The presumed original was removed from the convent archives shortly before the abbey was dissolved in early 1791. Although it resurfaced in Paris in the autumn of 1833 and subsequently entered the collections of Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph's library (now the Austrian National Library) in Vienna, its existence went undetected for another one hundred and sixty-nine years. And when the French historian Robert-Henri Bautier prepared an edition of the abbey's charters up to 1200, he used a 1788 copy of a poorly made early eighteenth-century copy of the original to declare it a forgery from the late eleventh or very early twelfth century. In 2002 German historian Klaus Oschema finally located the original document in Vienna, which enabled him to rehabilitate the charter text as authentic with some light interpolations in the description of the abbey's properties. He also made a persuasive argument that the document itself (a single sheet of parchment measuring an impressive 665x250 millimetres) is contemporary to the abbey's foundation in the late 930s.

The text of Gozelin's prestigious charter begins by recounting how the bishop was doing a pastoral tour of the parishes in his diocese and found "an old sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God Mary, which was very dilapidated due

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{14}} \] The charter text was edited several times, most recently in Klaus Oschema, Zur Gründung des Benediktinerinnenklosters Notre-Dame de Bouxières. Eine wiedergefundene Urkunde des 10. Jahrhunderts, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 110 (2002), p. 188-189.

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{15}} \] On the charter's whereabouts in this period, see for now Steven Vanderputten, Encased in Silk. The Women of Bouxières and Their Medieval Archives, in: Gender, Memory and Documentary Culture, 900-1200, ed. Laura Gathagan and Charles Insley, forthcoming.

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{16}} \] Bautier speculated that the charter was made in response to a request for information from the author of the Deeds of the Bishops of Toul (discussed further in this paper); Les origines, nr. 6, p. 72-76 (edition) and 11-19 (discussion). Nightingale (who appears to have been unaware of Oschema's discovery of the original charter) agreed with Bautier and declared the document a late eleventh- or early twelfth-century forgery; Monasteries, p. 148.

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{17}} \] The current shelf mark is Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bestand Fideikommissbibliothek (1809-1945), Cod. Ser. n. 12672. Refer to Oschema, "Zur Gründung" and the additional commentary in Parisse, "Un évêque réformateur".
to a lack of care... where those who are suffering from various infirmities are healed by (her) prayers and where the common people often gather to worship (her)".  

He then enlisted the help of Abbot Ercambold of Saint-Evre (an abbey of which he had overseen the 'reform' in 934) and began thinking about how to install a Benedictine community of women. By the foresight of God, the text continues, he found a few religious women on site, who were "wandering like sheep in search of the pasture of eternal life, who were burning with love for God and who wished to serve that remote place". Moved by commiseration, he consulted Ercambold and his other faithful aides, established a "cell" for them to live in, and gave them an abbess named Rothildis. He then confirmed the community's properties (including those donated by Hersendis) and added a few more, ordained that the women owed nothing to future bishops as long as they

18 Ibid., p. 188: "repperimus quandam antiquam basilicam honore Dei genitricis Mariae dicatam, sed per incuriam vale neglectam, sitam quoque in quodam montis devenxo ad cuius radicem est villa posita quae dicitur Buxeria, ubi, quia eiusdem Dei genitricis precibus sanabantur infirmi diversis detemptis langoribus et vota vulgaris populi ibidem confluebant sepius".


20 What exactly spurred Gozelin to do so is unclear. Robert-Henri Bautier speculates that he and Ercambold had been looking to establish a female subsidiary institution of Saint-Evre; Bautier, Les origines, p. 18. But another factor might have been his desire to create a representative institution that competed with other female houses in the area and to regulate the existing semi-eremitical community at Bouxières; Steven Vanderputten, Dark Age Nunneries. The Ambiguous Identity of Female Monasticism, 800-1050, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 95-102.

21 Oschema, "Zur Gründung", p. 188: "...Deo preordinante, invenimus quasdam sanctimoniales, velut oves errantes sed tamen aeternae vitae pasca querentes, Dei dilectione ferventes et ad servienda illi locum remotum desiderantes, quarum miseratione permoti, consultu praedicti abbatis ceterorumque Deum timentium nostrorumque fidelium, iam dictam cellulam eis ad habitandum delegavimus, praeficientes illis unam earum, Rothildim scilicet, abbatissam, quae illarum regeret vitam".
handed over two pounds of candle wax annually, and awarded them (as part of the *libertas monasticae religionis*) the freedom to elect their own abbess. Finally, he also arranged for the sisters to sing two psalms for his salvation daily and to give him a place of honour in their commemorative prayers after his death. The charter's purpose, besides recording the creation of a Benedictine convent for women, confirming its estate, and awarding it certain liberties, is clear. It erases memories of an earlier semi-eremitical community of women religious, likewise obscures the way in which its estate and its patronage network had actually emerged, and establishes the abbey as a personal sanctuary for the bishop.

The second version of the abbey's foundation narrative emerged more than a century later. Following his death in 962 Gozelin was buried in the abbatial church and a modest saint's cult developed around his person. His reputation as sole founder of Bouxières was firmly established by the time the hagiographer Widric (d. shortly after 1050) wrote a *Life* of Gozelin's successor Gerard of Toul (963–994), which briefly mentions Gozelin's "laborious and useful" work in building the abbey. Widric's text introduced the story of Bouxières' origins into the episcopal historiography of Toul, as it was extensively used by the anonymous author of the *Deeds of the Bishops of Toul*, a narrative written either shortly after 1050 with some of the latter parts added in the early twelfth century, or entirely in the early 1100s. The relevant passage on the

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22 Ibid. Gozelin's instructions for the sisters' intercessory and commemorative prayers in his honour closely mirror those he presumably detailed in his 936 'restoration charter' for Saint-Evre. The most accessible edition of the charter, the authenticity of which has been questioned by scholars, is in Augustin Calmet, *Histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Lorraine*, Nancy, 1728, vol. 1, Preuves, c. 342.
23 Lepage, "L'abbaye", passim.
25 *Gesta episcoporum Tullensium*, ed. Georg Waitz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 8, Hannover, 1848, p. 639-640. The dating of the narrative is a matter of debate among scholars. According to Joachim Dahlhaus, it was conceived in two stages, one shortly after 1050 (including the parts about Gozelin) and a second shortly after 1107; Zu den Gesta episcoporum Tullensium, in: *Papstgeschichte und Landesgeschichte. Festschrift für Hermann Jakobs zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Joachim Dahlhaus and Armin Kohnle, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna,
Abbey's origins consist of three distinct parts. In the first, the Deeds quote the succinct statement in the Life of Gerard verbatim. Then, in the second, it switches to a narrative that begins with a mixture of common hagiographic tropes. We read about the bishop's brother, a man named Hadrad, who went on a hunt along the Meurthe River. Following his dogs in pursuit of a wild boar into the dense forest around Bouxières, he noted that the boar suddenly halted under a spiny tree: on closer inspection it turned out to be the site of a former sanctuary. Hadrad reported his discovery to Gozelin, who consulted "people of great age" and learned that the hill had once hosted a church dedicated to the Mother of God and that heavenly lights often illuminated the surroundings. The bishop then set out to acquire it from his colleague at Metz, trading a precious relic of St Peter's staff for it: following the transaction Gozelin rebuilt the church, and installed an altar in honour of Mary. The third and final part of the narrative closely follows the story as recounted in Gozelin's foundation charter. It mentions the women "errring like sheep and looking for the pastures of the eternal life"; Gozelin's intervention so they could live according to the Rule of St Benedict under Abbess Rothildis; and very briefly states that he donated several properties. "This was...", it concludes, "the beginning of the community of Bouxières: with the aid of God it grew from day to day".26

Inspection of the two latter parts of this new version of the abbey's foundation story yields some interesting observations. For a start, we can see that it is heavily based (over and above its use of common hagiographic tropes)27 on Adso of Montier-en-Der's Life of St Mansuy. Adso's text has been

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26 Gesta episcoporum Tullensium, ed. Waitz, p. 640: "Tale ergo fertur habuisse exordium Buxeriense cenobium, quod Deo juvante in dies sumit incrementum".

27 One such example is the hagiographical motif of the abandoned sanctuary in a forest; see Anne Wagner and Monique Goullet, La forêt dans l'hagiographie, in:
dated c. 970 and tells the story of how Gozelin rebuilt a former sanctuary of St Peter that was situated outside the walls of Toul, in the middle of an old cemetery; installed a group of monks from the abbey of Saint-Evre to venerate the tomb of St Mansuy; and gave them an abbot, and also arranged for royal confirmation of their properties. Another, more important observation we can make is that the author of the Deeds omitted all of the foundation charter's provisions to exempt the abbey from episcopal interference. From the turn of the tenth century onwards the bishops of Toul had assumed full control of the abbey, a situation against which the abbess and religious appealed in Rome more than a century later: in 1137 they received confirmation of the abbey's estate and of their liberties. While the author of the Deeds clearly had access to the text of Gozelin's foundation charter, his eleventh- or early twelfth-century version of the foundation narrative was probably designed to reflect the bishop's side in a dispute that had already been brewing and therefore omitted anything that hinted that Gozelin had intended the abbey to be a self-governing institution. Unfortunately, we have no idea at all whether the contents of the new version were initially communicated to the sisters, let alone what their response to it might have been.

Six Centuries' Worth of Reception History


Edited in Bautier, Les origines, nr. 47, p. 134-147, with discussion Ibid., p. 46-47 and in Vanderputten, "Encased in Silk".
As far as we can tell, between the beginning of the twelfth century and the end of the medieval period there were no attempts to edit, substitute, or complement the abbey’s two foundation narratives (the one in Gozelin's foundation charter, and the other in the Deeds). However, the subtle discordance in the two versions concerning the sisters’ relationship with the Toul bishops does suggest that even though the charter was a good deal more attractive narratively speaking, the women at Bouxières would have preferred the other account. What is more, they also attached a great deal of value to Gozelin’s charter because of its significance as the legal foundation of their institution and for the connection it represented – as a text but definitely also as an object – to their saintly founder.

Regarding this latter aspect, we know that at Bouxières Gozelin’s cult as a saint had a strong material dimension, the focus of which far exceeded his tomb and its contents in the crypt of the abbatial church and (from the fifteenth century onwards) several relic shrines with his remains. Throughout their history the convent members cherished a sumptuous collection of precious liturgical objects, an ornate evangeliary in a metal binding with gemstones, and several personal items from the bishop’s estate.30 And over time, they also began to award special value to a small collection of the abbey's earliest charters, which not only contained several items that were either made at the bishop's orders or came from his archives, but also held multiple documents that testified to the crucial role of several of his male and especially female relatives and associates in the creation of the abbey. Eventually this set of documents turned into a prestigious material reminder of the abbey's oldest past and its founders, most especially of course, St Gozelin. And it also turned into what I have described in another study as an 'archival narrative of origins' that provided a more complete, more accurate, and (from the viewpoint of the convent members at least) more

30 Gozelin's was initially buried in the crypt of the abbatial church, as first attested in Adso of Montier-en-Der's Vita et miracula s. Mansueti episcopi Tullensis, ed. Goullet, Adso Deruensis, p. 161. Over the course of the fifteenth century his remains were placed in three shrines: one for his head, one for his arm, and one for the rest. On the shrines and relic treasure, see the discussion in Lepage, "L'abbaye", p. 249-267; Eduard Auguin, Monographie de la cathédrale de Nancy depuis sa fondation jusqu'à l'époque actuelle, Nancy, 1882, p. 266-331; and Marianne Barrucand, Le trésor de saint Gauzelin à la cathédrale de Nancy, Le pays lorrain 63 (1982), p. 89-106.
favourable account of the abbey's origins than in the *Deeds of the Bishops of Toul*.\(^{31}\)

We have substantial evidence for both of these shifts. After Pope Innocent's above-mentioned 1137 privilege had ended the immediate legal use of the abbey's earliest charters, local archivists bundled a number of these documents into an archival category named *Fondatio*, “Foundation”. The earliest clue for this is a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century dorsal on the original of Gozelin's foundation charter note that reads *Fondatio I*.\(^{32}\) While there are no cartularies or archive inventories from the later medieval period that might help us determine the scope and persistence of *Fondatio* as an archival category, it is described in no less than eight inventories from the early seventeenth to late eighteenth centuries.\(^{33}\) And beginning in the late seventeenth century and throughout the rest of the abbey's existence it is once again explicitly identified to in these documents by the (now French) title *Fondation*:\(^{34}\) by the late 1780s *Fondation* had been split up over two folders of about a dozen documents each, only the first of which kept the name *Fondation*.\(^{35}\) Evidence of the way these documents were physically preserved additionally points towards a special status that transcended their archival and legal value. According to a nineteenth-century report, they were not actually filed alongside the abbey's other archives, but instead were kept inside an ornate wooden chest along with Gozelin's evangeliary, which was locally venerated as a secondary relic.\(^{36}\) And we also have at least three accounts (one from the middle decades of the eighteenth century and two further ones from 1788) that Gozelin's foundation charter was

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\(^{31}\) Vanderputten, "Encased in Silk".

\(^{32}\) Oschema, "Zur Gründung", p. 190, note 44.


\(^{34}\) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection de Lorraine, 717, f. 215-222.

\(^{35}\) According to an archive inventory from 1788; Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 175, p. 1-4.

kept inside a black wooden box lined with silk, the appearance of which strikingly resembled the shrines that held the bishop's remains.  

These archival and ritual manipulations shaped the convent's memorial culture over more than six centuries. But beginning in the later medieval period that culture also became significantly more complex, for a variety of reasons. Over the course of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, the convent had gradually evolved from a Benedictine community into one of canonesses. This meant that members of this small institution were no longer expected to live a cloistered life, were awarded prebends, and could (if they wished) leave to get married, return to a secular life, or (in just a few cases that we know of) enter a cloistered community. In a simultaneous development, entrance to the convent was increasingly restricted to young girls and women from the higher echelons of the regional and international aristocracy: over the course of the early modern period the nobility requirements became ever more stringent. The impact was significant, and not just because the lifestyle of the women and the experience of daily life at the abbey changed drastically. Over the course of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, convent life was repeatedly disrupted (and in some cases even temporarily suspended) as a result of tensions over the authority of the abbess in financial matters, the question of whether individual convent members and their relatives could decide who would inherit their prebend, and members' obligations as regards residence, attendance of liturgical services, dress, and suchlike.

These developments impacted on the local memory culture in a number of ways. One, for instance, was the growing need for archive-based research into the aristocratic pedigree of candidates and also to resource the simultaneous rise in the seventeenth century of scholarly study of Lorraine's past. Both these developments put the spotlight on Bouxières' exceptional collection of early medieval documents, several of which were by kings, emperors, popes, bishops, and prominent male and female aristocrats. And whereas other convents of noble

37 Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 413/1, fol. 234v; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection Moreau, 5, f. 148r; and Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 175, p. 1.
38 Poirier, "La translation".
39 See below, at nn. 54-58.
canonesses sometimes outright refused access to their archives, the community at Bouxières actively welcomed this interest. Two prospectuses (one from the 1690s and another from after 1720) indicate that the canonesses actively advertised the contents of Fondation and a select number of charters in other parts of the collection. Another result of the changes both within and outside the abbey was that the canonesses arranged for the production of multiple copies and French translations of Gozelin's foundation charter. This was presumably to cater for the growing demand to inspect its contents and to protect the original, which (we already saw) was probably kept inside a custom-made box lined with silk. The charter's publication in the fourth volume of Augustin Calmet's Histoire de Lorraine (1747–1757) gave the document further notoriety, as did the author's derogatory comment on the version in the Deeds as being "miraculous" and his declaration that "in truth, it very much resembles a fable". His comments instantly established the charter as the oldest and most authoritative account of Bouxières' origins. When he published his comments in the first volume of the Histoire de Lorraine, the Bollandists were in the process of preparing the entry for St Gozelin in the third September volume of the Acta Sanctorum (published in 1750). They advised caution in using the Deeds and reprinted Calmet's edition of Gozelin's charter in full.

Presumably Calmet had made this comment about the Deeds to counter its growing reputation among Church historians as a source of prime importance for the history of the Toul diocese. At least three copies of the text were

40 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection de Lorraine, 717, f. 215-222 and Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 413/1, f. 234-240.
41 Bautier, Les origines, p. 72. Of several French translations that are mentioned in the abbey's eighteenth-century archive inventories, one ended up in Vienna along with Gozelin's original charter; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bestand Fideikommissbibliothek (1809-1945), Cod. Ser. n. 12672.
43 Ibid., vol. 1, c. 893: "...à l'égard du récit de l'auteur de la Vie de St Gauzlin, il faut... abandonner toute l'histoire qu'il a faite de la manière miraculeuse dont Bouxières fut fondée, laquelle, à la vérité, a beaucoup l'air de fable".
44 Acta Sanctorum Septembris 3, Antwerp, 1750, c. 130-137 (discussion) and 137-138 (edition).
produced for research purposes in the seventeenth century, and in 1706 Jean Mabillon relied on the *Deeds* to speculate (erroneously, one might add) on the date of the abbey's foundation. Then, in 1717, the Benedictine monks Edmond Martène and Ulysse Durand published the first edition, which gave the text wide notoriety. But Calmet's scepticism may also have been designed to counter a challenge that was closer to home, for insiders at the convent had recently been taking a renewed interest in the *Deeds* and its narrative legacy.

*The Office in Honour of St Gozelin*

Earlier in this paper we saw that the early modern canonesses of Bouxières held Gozelin's foundation charter in high regard, so much so that they 'enshrined' it at some point in the later seventeenth or eighteenth century. They also saw it as the cornerstone of a collection of early charters that together formed an 'archival narrative of origins' that they called *Fondatio* or (later) *Fondation*. In both these respects, Gozelin’s charter remained the authoritative statement about the abbey's origins until the very end of the convent's existence and even beyond. But as an actual narrative of the convent’s origins that could be used to remediate for the lack of a hagiographic narrative or an actual foundation story, it eventually fell short of expectations.

To address that lacuna, the sisters and their male associates turned to the *Deeds*. When exactly this happened is unclear, but presumably it was long after the resolution of the early twelfth-century conflict with the bishop of Toul, when memories of the nature of that dispute had faded. The earliest mention of the relevant passage in the *Deeds* being represented in their memorial culture is in a 1570 inventory, which states that a parchment copy of the text was kept in the

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47 Edmond Martène and Ulysse Durand, *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, 3, Paris, 1717, c. 991-1012, with the relevant passage about the foundation of Bouxières abbey at c. 1001-1002.
However the only reliable evidence that the canonesses actually used it to narrate their convent's origins is the office in honour of St Gozelin that (we saw at the beginning of this paper) the 1780s commentator Jean-Jacques Bouvier so vehemently condemned. The story told in the office – the most chronologically recent of the three foundation stories – derives from the *Deeds* but also adds a substantial amount of new material. Its content is preserved in two ways. The first is Bouvier's study, which reproduces the fifth and sixth lessons of the office as it was published in an in-octavo booklet by a Metz bookseller named P. Collignon in 1692. And the second is an eighteenth-century painting which used to hang in the abbatial church of Bouxières and faithfully represents the key scenes in the office.

In the opening passage of both these sources, the Virgin Mary appears to Gozelin in his sleep and exhorts him to build a church in her honour: he is to find the right location by taking his dogs on a hunt and then following a white doe into the woods on the hill of Bouxières. After a brief statement about the next morning's events, the narrative of the office follows the *Deeds*' account of the transaction with the bishop of Metz, which claims that Gozelin traded a relic of St Peter for the hill site. In the following scenes, the office text gives an account that was completely new to local tradition. It recounts how the Virgin called on an unidentified queen to subsidize Gozelin's project when his funds ran out due to a famine: the queen has three camels loaded with "tapestries and ornaments of silk for use in the church... gold and silver, and... foodstuffs". The camels then arrive at the Meurthe River and are taken to the other side by an unmanned boat. A mute witness gets back his speech and is able to report to Gozelin what

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48 Nancy, Archives Départementales de Meurthe-et-Moselle, H 2945.
49 The text of the two lessons is in Lionnois, *Histoire*, vol. 1, p. 595-605 (reprinted in Guillaume, *Histoire du culte de la très-sainte vierge en Lorraine, et principalement dans l'ancien diocèse de Toul, formant aujourd'hui ceux de Nancy-Toul et Saint-Dié*, Nancy, s.d., p. 8-16). My attempts to track down a copy of the original booklet were fruitless. The Metz bibliographer Jean-Julien Barbé (1890-1950) inspected a copy in the early twentieth century (Metz, Médiathèque Verlaine, 1551/3, p. 6): my warmest thanks to Claire Haquet for pointing out the existence of Barbé's note.
50 The painting currently hangs in the parish church of Bouxières-aux-Dames and can be viewed at https://vieuxbouxieres.com/le-tableau-de-st-gauzelin/ (accessed 25 April 2020).
has happened, and the church is finished. Then Gozelin brings together a group of ecclesiastical dignitaries to consecrate the church for the next morning, but discovers during the night that Jesus Christ is already performing the rites. The final scene, which is again completely original, describes Gozelin's conversation with the Virgin about who should serve the church, and how he recruits the first women religious of the new abbey (quoted in the introduction of this paper).

It is easy to see why Bouvier cited this particular version of Bouxières abbey's foundation narrative. Writing at a time when Gozelin's charter was widely available and when prominent historians and hagiographers had long since agreed that the account in the Deeds was spurious, he submitted the office text to reveal his disdain for this elite convent and to indicate that its impending transferral to Nancy would hardly enrich the town's religious life. In his view, its use on the feast day of St Gozelin and the fact that it had been made available as a printed publication painfully revealed that the convent of Bouxières was not an adequate custodian of the abbey's venerable legacy as a lieu de mémoire of (as he wrote) "our ancestors". These arguments shed light on the perception of the convent by a contemporary just three years before it was dissolved: but they do not tell us anything about why and in what circumstances someone had actually rewritten the account drawn from the Deeds, adding all these 'frivolous' elements. Nor do they reveal to us why it was publicized so prominently, both in print and in iconography.

To answer these questions about context, we must first look for clues in the office narrative itself. One such is the emphasis on the cult of the Virgin Mary and the introduction into the foundation story of a eucharistic miracle, both of which suggest that it was conceived in the general context of the Catholic Reformation. We also know that the cult of the Virgin was heavily promoted at Bouxières in the early modern period, and that there was a custom that the abbess sponsored one mute individual. Further elements – the white doe, the camels, the self-propelling boat, and the story of the three arriving women – probably derive from the increased availability of late antique and medieval saint's lives, thanks to the circulation of printed hagiographies and to the work of compilers such as Mabillon and the Bollandists. But these clues pale in

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51 Lepage, "L'abbaye", p. 141.
52 Regarding the reference in early medieval hagiographies to camels, the biblical
significance compared to the very last sentence of the office text, which recounts St Gozelin actions after he had brought the first three members of the Bouxières convent to the new sanctuary on the hill. Here, it states, he “gave them statutes, awarded them prebends, and they lived under that rule, and in the custom that they had when they arrived, as do still those who have succeeded them”. Short of an explicit statement, this is the most emphatic declaration possible that Gozelin had created the convent as a community of canonesses and that the contemporary members’ secular lifestyle was legitimized by his original actions. As such, it marked a sharp and deliberate break with the earlier foundation accounts, both of which had insisted on the earliest sisters' Benedictine observance.

A second set of clues reveals to us why the author decided to go against received wisdom in scholarly and hagiographic publications but also against Gozelin’s own statement in his foundation charter, we must look at the convent’s situation in the early modern period. Beginning in the 1550s and continuing into the early seventeenth century, the convent struggled with both external and internal pressure to become more stringent. Abbess Françoise de Ludres (1553-1603) in particular attempted to make the community adopt a stricter, more ‘monastic’ lifestyle, hoping to deny the canonesses control over their prebends, impose more rigorous attendance rules, and so on. The ensuing conflicts resulted in a breach of trust between (on the one hand) the canonesses and their relatives and (on the other) the abbess. Her successor, Abbess Françoise de Hautoy (1603–1636), managed to restore order at the convent, among other things by issuing a set of statutes in 1622 that confirmed the members’ status as

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53 Refer to the quoted Latin text in note 7 above.
54 The relevant documents are lost, but summaries are described in a 1788 archive inventory; Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 175, p. 176-177. Generally on the history of the abbey in the early modern period, see the unpublished master’s thesis by Christelle Poirier, Le chapitre de dames nobles de Bouxières-aux-Dames, Nancy, Université Nancy II, 2001-2002.
canonesses. But by the late 1660s, old tensions flared up again and convent life was once more disrupted, a situation that was aggravated when the abbey was evacuated due to warfare in the Lorraine area.

It took until the election and installation as abbess of Anne Marie Simiane de Moncha (1685–1716) before the matter was settled once and for all. In the first thirteen years of her tenure, she worked on a comprehensive set of statutes that was finally published in December 1698. It confirmed the canonesses' rights (among other things, to live under statutes instead of a monastic rule, own prebends, be absent from the abbey for a certain period, and dress as they liked except during office). Both the act of issuing those statutes and their content strikingly remind us of the final sentence of the office of St Gozelin, which (judging by the 1692 date of the booklet) was either conceived under her direction or brought back to prominence at her initiative. In all likelihood, both of these publications – the office and the statutes – reveal de Moncha's plan to reassure the convent members and their relatives that a return after many centuries to a monastic or quasi-monastic regime was out of the question. Through anchoring the canonesses' secular identity in the abbey's revised foundation narrative, she willingly and consciously committed an anachronism for the benefit of her convent and its members.

Conclusions

In this case study I looked at Bouxières abbey's three foundation accounts to argue that, from an internal viewpoint at least, such accounts were considered relevant only if they could be made to serve a contemporary purpose. But I also showed that several such purposes could be operative at the same time. Thus Gozelin's 938 charter was simultaneously used to celebrate his legacy as founder, maintain the integrity of the 'archival narrative of origins', and

55 While the full text of those statutes is lost, the titles of the five chapters are described in Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 175, p. 185.
56 Summaries of the relevant (and now lost) documentation are found Ibid., p. 31-47.
57 On the difficult beginnings of de Moncha’s tenure as abbess, refer to Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, 101, f. 1v-33v.
58 Ibid., f. 34r-36r.
perpetuate his cult as saint. Likewise, the office and the painting in the church defiantly celebrated the canonesses' lifestyle as legitimate, while at the same time portraying them as dignified custodians of Gozelin's legacy. These two narratives peacefully co-existed in the later stages of this small convent despite their glaring contradictions; and they were both equally prominent in the convent members' memorial culture. Evidently such a situation caused offence only to those who, like Bouvier, declined to see that these narratives fulfilled different roles in the canonesses' story of who they were and what legacy they carried on.