

Creating the Monastic  
Past in Medieval Flanders

KARINE UGÉ

## Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders

The creation of a past for themselves was of pressing importance to religious communities, enabling them to increase their status and legitimise their existence. This book examines the process in a group of communities from the southern part of Flanders [the monks of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer, the community of Saint-Rictrude at Marchiennes and the canons of Saint-Amé at Douai] over a period running from the ninth to the end of the eleventh century. The central contention is that the communities produced their narratives [history, hagiography, charter materials] for a specific time and purpose, frequently as a response to or intended resolution of internal or external crises. The book also discusses how the circumstances which triggered narrative production had an impact not only on the content but also on the form of the texts.

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Karine Ugé



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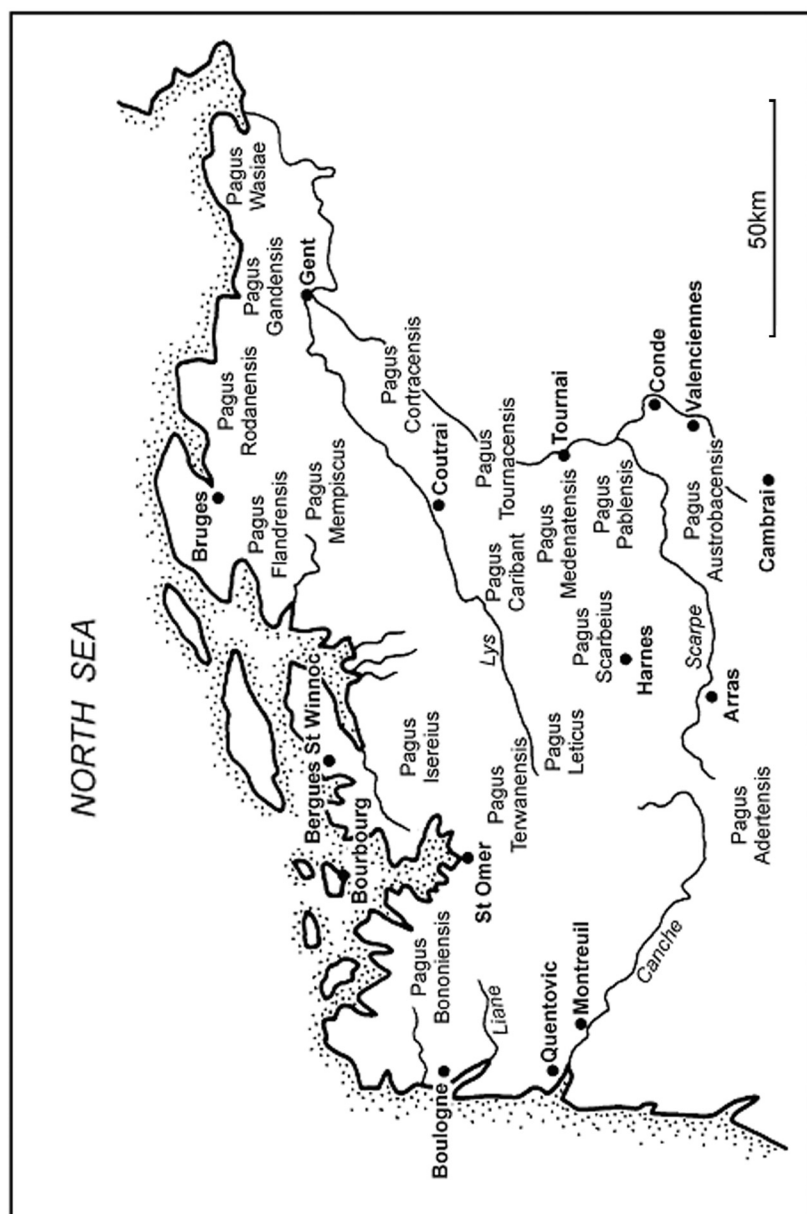


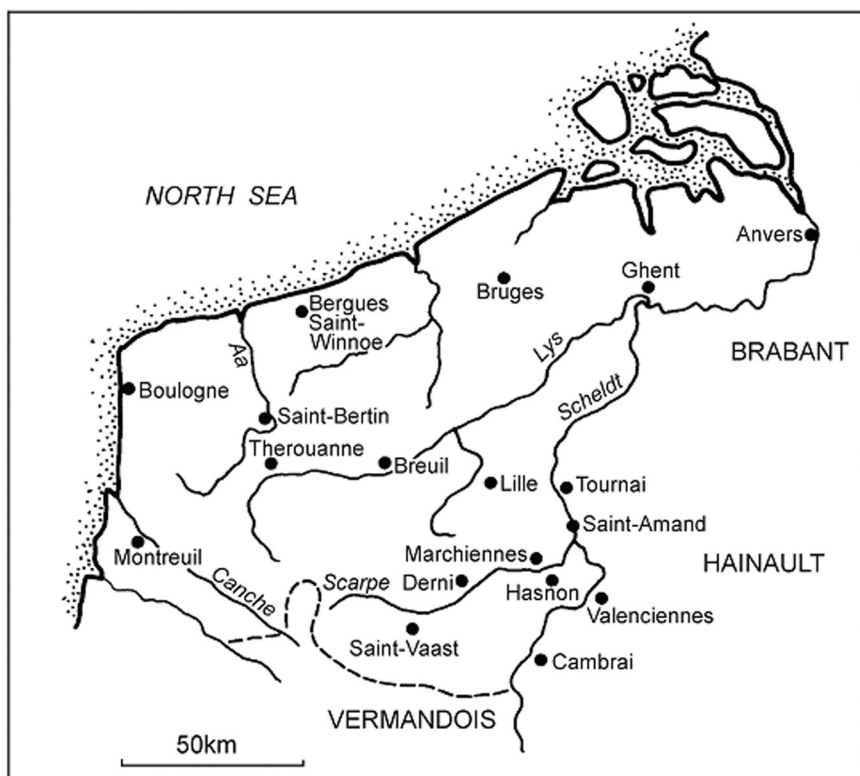
## ABBREVIATIONS

AA SS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
ASB	<i>Acta Sanctorum Belgii</i> , ed. J. Ghespuiere (Brussels, 1783–1794), 6 vols
<i>Anal. Boll.</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Series
BCRH	<i>Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire</i>
BHL	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina (Brussels, 1898–1901), 2 vols
BL	British Library, London
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
BSM	Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibliothèque Municipale
BSAM	<i>Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de la Morinie</i>
CLA	<i>Codices Latini Antiquiores. A Paleographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century</i> , ed. E. A. Lowe, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1934–1966)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>Diplomata Belgica</i>	<i>Diplomata Belgica ante annum millesimum centesimum scripta</i> , ed. Gysseling and A. C. F. Koch, vol. I, <i>Teksten</i> (Brussels, 1950)
DHGE	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</i> (Paris, 1912– )
KBR	Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
SRG	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum</i>
SRM	<i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
SS	<i>Scriptores</i>
MSAM	<i>Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de la Morinie</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1841–1864)
<i>Poet. Lat.</i>	<i>Poetae Latini Medii Aevi</i>
RB	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
RBPH	<i>Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire</i>
RHE	<i>Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique</i>
RHEF	<i>Revue d'Histoire de l'Église de France</i>
RN	<i>Revue du Nord</i>
Settimane	Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo
S-O	Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque Municipale

## *Abbreviations*

<i>VA<sup>1</sup>, VA<sup>2</sup>, VA<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>Vita S. Audomari Prima, Altera and Tertia</i>
<i>VAL</i>	<i>Hucbald, Vita Amati Episcopi Longior</i>
<i>VAm</i>	<i>Vita Amandi Episcopi Prima</i>
<i>VB<sup>1</sup>, VB<sup>2</sup>, VB<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>Vita S. Bertini Prima and Altera; Folcard, Vita Tertia S. Bertini</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vita Eusebiae</i>
<i>VM</i>	<i>Vita Mauronti</i>
<i>VR</i>	<i>Hucbald, Vita S. Rictrudis</i>
<i>VW<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Vita S. Winnoci Prima</i>

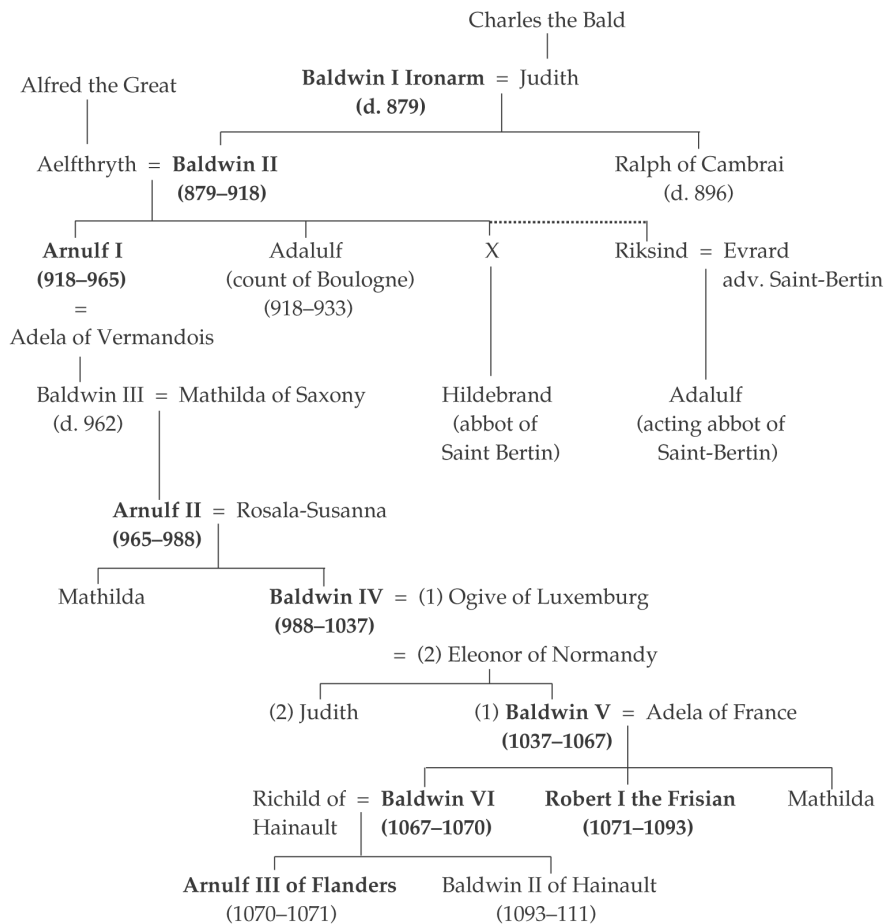




Map 2. The County of Flanders, ca. 1100

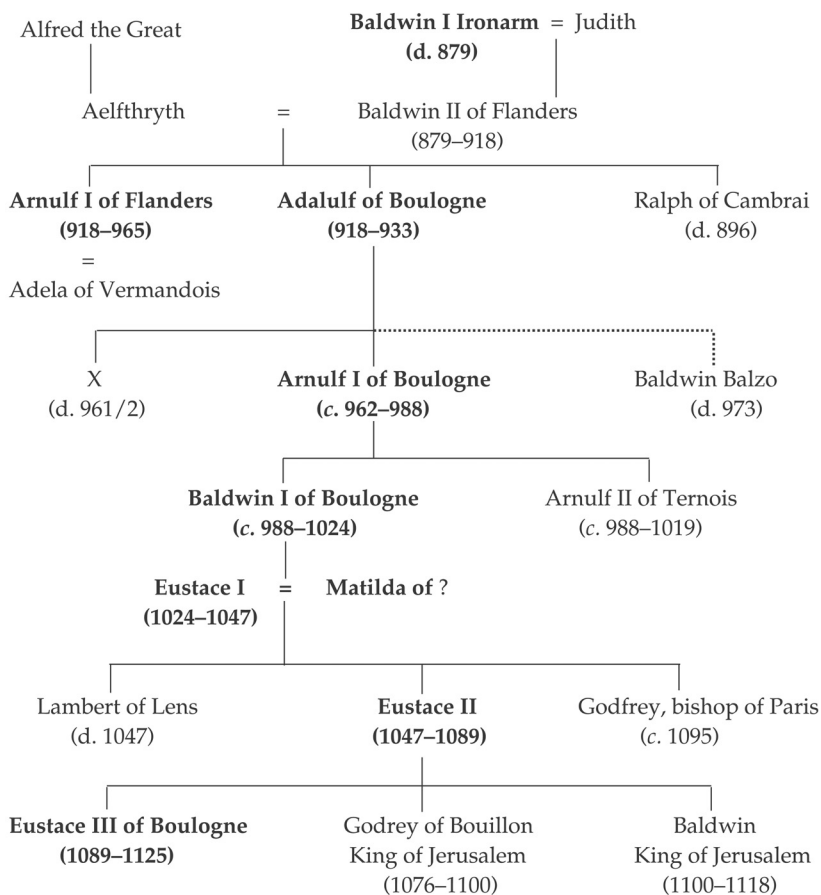
## The comital family of Flanders (ninth–twelfth century)

Counts of Flanders appear in bold



## The comital family of Boulogne (ninth–twelfth century)

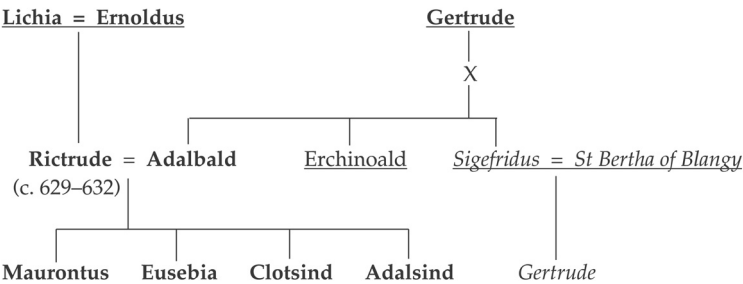
Counts of Boulogne appear in bold





Rictrude’s kin according to the studied sources

Names in Bold: earliest tradition found in Hucbald’s *Vita Rictrudis* (907)  
Underlined names: additions developed in the late eleventh century at Douai  
Names in italic: additions by Andrew of Marchiennes, *Historia Succinta* (twelfth century)





## INTRODUCTION

This book examines the processes through which monastic communities created a usable past for themselves. The central issue is that communities did not produce historical narratives fortuitously, but rather that they did so under specific circumstances and that the writing of a text often served as a catalyst for the resolution of internal or external crises. This 'utilitarian' dimension of historiography implies that, in the course of events, communities kept adapting old accounts of their past in a way that fitted their present needs. To illustrate my subject, I have chosen to study historical narratives produced between the ninth and the eleventh centuries by the communities of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer and Saint-Rictrude at Marchiennes, both located in the southern part of the county of Flanders. I will first provide a brief overview of the geographical and historical context and then I will outline the theoretical framework on which the arguments of the book are based.

Saint-Bertin was founded in the middle of the seventh century by St Omer, bishop of Thérouanne, in the context of King Dagobert's efforts to assert his authority in Neustria. It soon grew into an important religious and economic centre in the region and can be counted among the most prestigious monasteries that were patronized by the Carolingian kings and, later, by the counts of Flanders. Marchiennes was founded around 640 by St Amand during his mission in the region of the river Scarpe; it was located on the Scarpe, a few miles away from Saint-Amand. The double monastery seems to have been fairly prosperous in the ninth century, but decayed during the tenth. It was restored in 1024 as a male Benedictine community by a disciple of reformer Richard of Saint-Vanne under the impetus of Count Baldwin IV and Bishop Gerard of Cambrai.

Both communities were located in the southern part of the county of Flanders. Flanders, considering its most extensive boundaries, consisted of the *pagi* of Waas, Aardenburg, Flanders, Yser, Ghent, Courtrai, Mompisc and Tournai to the north and to the east, and of Boulonais, Ternois (region of Thérouanne), Melantois (region of Lille), Pévèle, Ostrevant (region of Douai) and Artois (region of Arras) to the south. In terms of ecclesiastical organization the county encompassed the bishoprics of Thérouanne, Noyon-Tournai, and Cambrai-Arras: an important part of the archbishopric of Reims.<sup>1</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> On the formation and history of the county of Flanders, see most recently, H. J. Tanner, *Families, Friends and Allies: Boulogne and Politics in Northern France and England, c. 879–1160* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 21–7; D. Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London, 1992), pp. 39–55 and A. C. F. Koch, 'Het Graafschap Vlaanderen van de 9de eeuw tot

Merovingian period, Flanders was controlled by the Neustrian kings and, after the division of the Frankish Empire by Louis the Pious' sons in 843, it made up the northern part of Charles the Bald's West Frankish kingdom. The formation of the county was the result of the progressive concentration of these *pagi* into the hands of one *comes* during the ninth century. The forefather of the Flemish lineage was Baldwin Ironarm, who originally controlled only two *pagi* – Ghent and Waas – of the future county of Flanders. In 864, thanks to Charles' acknowledgment of Baldwin's marriage to his daughter Judith, Baldwin was also entrusted with Ternois and Flanders (and the lay abbacy of Saint-Peter at Ghent).<sup>2</sup> Baldwin Ironarm's title was not hereditary, and the *pagi* that he controlled were not yet perceived as a territorial unit. His son, Baldwin II (879–918), had to seize power in each of the *pagi* he once controlled. Baldwin II quickly regained Flanders, Mempisc, Ghent, Waas and Courtrai.<sup>3</sup> In the south, his expansion was limited by the powerful family of Eberhard of Friuli. Indeed, in 883, West Frankish king Carloman (d. 884) had created a marcher region covering Artois and Ternois and entrusted it to Eberhard's son, Ralph.<sup>4</sup> Ralph's grandfather, Unroch – Eberhard's father – was already known as count of Ternois in the first half of the ninth century. Ralph's sister, Helwich, was married to the count of Ostrevant, Hucbald. Ralph's uncle, Adalard, had been abbot of Saint-Bertin and Saint-Amand. Furthermore, Ralph was Charles the Bald's nephew through his mother Gisela – so he was also related to Baldwin II.<sup>5</sup> Hence, Ralph, who was also lay

1070', in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Utrecht, 1982), pp. 354–83; a useful overview running up to the time of Arnulf the Great is found in R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians* (London, 1983), pp. 248–54. See also J. Dhondt, *Études sur la naissance des principautés territoriales* (Bruges, 1948); J. Dhondt, *Les Origines de la Flandre et de l'Artois* (Arras, 1944); F.-L. Ganshof, *La Flandre sous les premiers comtes* (Brussels, 1944) and L. Vanderkindere, *La Formation territoriale des principautés belges au moyen âge*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1902) I.

<sup>2</sup> McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 249; on Ghent and its two abbeys, Saint-Peter and Saint-Bavo, see G. Declercq, 'Heiligen, lekenabten en hervormers: De Gentse abdijen van Sint-Pieters en Sint-Baafs tijdens de Eerste Middeleeuw (7de–12de eeuw)', in *Ganda en Blandinium. De Gentse Abdijen van Sint-Pieters en Sint-Baafs*, ed. G. Declercq (Ghent, 1997), pp. 13–40 and G. Declercq and A. Verhulst, 'Early Medieval Ghent between Two Abbeys and the Count's Castle', in *Ghent: In Defense of a Rebellious City*, ed. J. Decavele (Antwerp, 1989), pp. 37–59; see also A. C. F. Koch, 'Gent in de 9de en 10de eeuw. Enkele benaderingen', *Stadsarcheologie. Bodem en Monument in Gent* 14 (1990), 3–43.

<sup>3</sup> Ganshof, *La Flandre*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> On the family of Eberhard of Friuli, see E. Favre, 'La famille d'Évrard marquis de Frioul dans le royaume Franc de l'Ouest', in *Études d'histoire du moyen âge dédiées à Gabriel Monod* (Paris, 1896), pp. 155–62; Ph. Grierson, 'La maison d'Évrard de Frioul et les origines du comté de Flandre', *Revue du Nord* 24 (1938), 241–66 and J. Dhondt, 'Une dynastie inconnue de comtes d'Ostrevant', in *Miscellanea Historica in Honorem Leonis van der Essen* (Brussels, 1947), pp. 177–87.

abbot of Saint-Bertin and Saint-Vaast at Arras, constituted a powerful obstacle to Baldwin's ambitions in the south. It should come as no surprise that Baldwin took advantage of Ralph's death in 892 to progressively, if ruthlessly, take control of Ternois, Artois and Vermandois. In 900, Baldwin II became the first lay abbot of Saint-Bertin.<sup>6</sup>

Like his father, Baldwin II made a prestigious alliance by marrying a daughter of the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred, Ælfthryth, probably in 883. Although Baldwin had not been able to keep all the territories he had conquered (he lost Artois and Vermandois), his power over his county was such that, at his death in 918, he could pass it on to his two sons, Arnulf (918–965) and Adalulf (918–933). The elder of Baldwin II's sons, Arnulf, later known as 'the Great', received the northern *pagi*, the historical core of the county. His younger brother, Adalulf, received Ternois, Boulonais and the lay abbacy of Saint-Bertin. Arnulf pushed the limits of his county southward to its 'natural' borders: the Scarpe and the Canche. In 932, he took Saint-Vaast, and the next year he succeeded his brother in Boulonais and Ternois, disregarding the legitimate claims of his two nephews, Baldwin and Arnulf. By 941, the conquest of Ostrevant no longer posed a problem because no strong local power countered him there; Arnulf easily conquered southern Ostrevant along with Douai. Finally, from 952 onwards, his control over northern Ostrevant was asserted.<sup>7</sup>

Arnulf's son, Baldwin III, died before his father, leaving an under-age son, Arnulf II (976–988). The succession was disputed, and Arnulf I requested the help of King Lothar IV (941–986); he offered the king Artois, Ostrevant and Ponthieu in exchange for the young Arnulf's protection. Furthermore, Arnulf had to bestow Boulonais and Ternois to their legitimate heir, his nephew Arnulf, the son of Adalulf.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding the king's protection, when Arnulf II eventually became count in 976, his position had considerably weakened and he had lost control over Boulonais, Ternois, Waas and Ghent.<sup>9</sup>

At his death in 988, he left his son Baldwin IV a county which was still politically frail and had diminished territorially – although Arnulf II had recovered Arras and the monastery of Saint-Vaast. Baldwin eventually regained control over the northern part of Ternois, including Saint-Omer. The southern part of Ternois, which would become the county of Saint-Pol, and

<sup>6</sup> Tanner, *Families*, pp. 24–8.

<sup>7</sup> For Arnulf's conquest of Ostrevant, see Tanner, *Families*, pp. 32–8; see also E. Delcambre, 'L'Ostrevant du IXe au XIIIe siècle', *Le Moyen Âge* 28 (1927), 241–79 and Dhondt, 'Une dynastie inconnue'.

<sup>8</sup> Koch, 'Het Graafschap Vlaanderen', p. 369. Arnulf II's reign is traditionally considered as a disastrous period for Flanders; more recently, J. Dunbabin, 'The Reign of Arnulf II, Count of Flanders, and its Aftermath', *Francia* 16 (1989), 53–65, has challenged this interpretation and proposed a more positive view of the period as a time of consolidation.

<sup>9</sup> Tanner, *Families*, pp. 39–40.

Boulonnais, however, remained out of the counts of Flanders' direct control and were left under the authority of the successors of Arnulf the Great's late brother, Adalulf. Baldwin IV also slightly expanded his territory east of the Scheldt. It is clear, therefore, that by the time of Baldwin IV, the attention of the counts of Flanders was focused on the northern part of the county and that the southern *pagi* were relatively isolated from the centres of political decision. Hence the state of the southern *pagi* would remain unchanged, apart from the situation of Ostrevant.<sup>10</sup> Ostrevant and its main city, Douai, had been taken over by Arnulf the Great after 943 and remained under his control until his death in 965. During Arnulf II's childhood, the region was controlled by Lothar IV, but it was returned to Arnulf in 988, after the Capetian takeover. Ostrevant, which was located on the border with the county of Hainault, remained Flemish until the battle of Cassel (1072), after which it came under the authority of the counts of Hainault.<sup>11</sup>

The counts' involvement in religious matters was strong and constant. As far as the production of historical narrative at Saint-Bertin and Marchiennes is concerned, two measures were of peculiar importance: the Benedictine restoration imposed upon Saint-Bertin by Arnulf the Great and reformer Gerard of Brogne in the mid-tenth century on the one hand and, on the other hand, another Benedictine movement commanded by Baldwin IV, Gerard bishop of Cambrai and reformer Richard of Saint-Vanne, which led to the reformation of both Saint-Bertin and Marchiennes in the 1020s.

Arnulf the Great always took care to reinforce his authority and prestige by asserting his control over local monasteries. Saint-Peter's Ghent fell into his hands with his inheritance in 918. Upon his re-conquest of Artois in 932, he claimed the lay abbacy of Saint-Vaast. At his brother's death in 933, he took over Ternois and Boulonnais, as well as the abbacy of Saint-Bertin; his gradual conquest of Ostrevant led him to control Saint-Amand, where he nominated the new abbot in 952. With the assistance of his friend and ally Gerard of Brogne, he undertook a sweeping movement of Benedictine revival in his monasteries. The Carolingian legislation of 816–817 was meant to draw a clear distinction between the religious practice of canons and monks, the latter of whom were to follow the Benedictine Rule. The effects of this reform were short-lived, however, and by the tenth century, most monasteries were no longer Benedictine *stricto sensu* – and in actual fact, it is unclear that they had ever been. The goal of Gerard of Brogne's restoration movement, which spread in Lotharingia and Flanders thanks to Duke Gislebert and Count Arnulf's assistance, was the (re)establishment of the Rule. The specificity of Gerard's reform eludes investigation because no customal from his restored abbeys has survived. In any case, the forceful opposition that Gerard often

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders*, pp. 45–9.

<sup>11</sup> Delcambre, 'L'Ostrevant', pp. 259–60.

met suggests that the observance of the rule that he wished to impose was fairly severe. Gerard started his religious career by founding a monastic community on his patrimonial land of Brogne in 921.<sup>12</sup> In 931, following the *inventio* of St Ghislain's relics, he was called by Duke Gislebert to 'restore' the abbey of Saint-Ghislain.<sup>13</sup> Arnulf and Gerard had probably met in the 920s–930s since both men were connected with the emerging Robertians.<sup>14</sup> In 941, Arnulf entrusted Gerard with the abbacy and the reform of Saint-Peter at Ghent. Besides the re-establishment of the Benedictine Rule, the restoration involved the restitution of lands which Arnulf had seized for his own profit. He did not give back everything though – only the lands needed by the community to maintain a proper standard of living. Furthermore, in blatant contradiction to the Rule, the count-abbot maintained his right to approve the regularly elected abbot.<sup>15</sup> In 942, Gerard undertook the reform of Saint-Bavo.<sup>16</sup> Once the Ghent abbeys were put on the track of reform, Arnulf sent Gerard on a similar mission to Saint-Bertin, where he remained abbot until 947. Absorbed by his duties at Ghent, Gerard attempted to entrust Saint-Bertin's abbacy to his nephew Wido, but the young man did not share his uncle's pious aspirations, and he was soon removed from his post. Saint-Bertin was then ruled by Womar, a monk from Ghent, until Arnulf gave the abbacy to his own nephew, Hildebrand, in 950.<sup>17</sup> Hildebrand's reform was apparently successful and, in 953, Arnulf sent him to restore the abbey of Saint-Vaast.<sup>18</sup> In 948, as soon as he controlled Saint-Riquier, Arnulf nominated Fulchar, a disciple of Gerard, to restore the community to the Benedic-

<sup>12</sup> On Gerard of Brogne, see D. Misonne, 'La restauration monastique de Gérard de Brogne', in *Naissance et fonctionnement des réseaux monastiques et canoniaux. Actes du premier colloque international du C.E.R.C.O.M., Saint-Étienne, 16–18 septembre 1985* (Saint-Étienne, 1991), pp. 117–23 and A. Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VIIe–XIe siècle). Contribution à l'histoire religieuse des campagnes du haut moyen âge*, Beihefte der Francia 14 (Sigmaringen, 1985), pp. 220–47; see also *Saint Gérard de Brogne et son oeuvre réformatrice. Études publiées à l'occasion du millénaire de sa mort (959–1959)*, RB 70 (1960); on Arnulf and Gerard's restorations at Ghent, see W. Mohr, *Studien zur Klosterreform des Grafen Arnulf I von Flandern: Tradition und Wirklichkeit in der Geschichte der Amandus-Kloster*, Mediaevalia Lovaniensia 22 (Louvain, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> On the foundation of Saint-Ghislain, see A.-M. Helvétius, *Abbayes, évêques et laïques. Une politique du pouvoir en Hainaut au moyen âge (VIIe–XIe siècle)* (Brussels, 1994), pp. 213–34.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard was reputed to have miraculously cured Arnulf from a kidney stone: on this episode, see A. C. F. Koch, 'Gérard de Brogne et la maladie du comte Arnould Ier de Flandre', RB 70 (1960), 119–26.

<sup>15</sup> Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres*, p. 234.

<sup>16</sup> Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres*, pp. 236–7.

<sup>17</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta Abbatum Sithiensium*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 13 (Hanover, 1881), pp. 607–35 (c. 107, pp. 628–9); see also Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres*, pp. 238–9.

<sup>18</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta*, c. 109, pp. 630–1.