Meaning and context: Moringus the lay scribe and charter formulation in late-Carolingian Burgundy

It is well-known that ‘private’ charters, that is to say documents drawn up in the name of agents other than kings and popes, were written in a particular set of styles in Carolingian Francia.¹ These styles can be described as formulaic, and indeed there survive from this period a number of collections of anonymised documents, known as formularies, that are ostensibly documentary templates, even though the precise relation of these manuscripts to actual documents of practice remains somewhat unclear.² Equally well-known is that in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, Western Frankish documents became less and less confined by these traditions, and more inclined to express whatever transaction was involved in creative and innovative fashion. In short, the Carolingian charter formulary was gradually abandoned. Historians have traditionally interpreted this transition as a sign of decay, reflecting a wider breakdown of the social and legal order, but more recently, that interpretation has been robustly challenged, as we

¹ I should like to thank Tom Faulkner, Karl Heidecker, Emma Hunter, Matthew Innes and the audience at the IMC, as well as the editors and reviewers of this book, for their helpful comments and suggestions. For reasons of space, bibliographical references in what follows have been pared down to a minimum.
will see. This chapter intends to contribute to this discussion, one that raises a number of critical questions for the study of medieval documentary texts in general, by means of a case study, based around the expertise of a single ninth-century scribe.

I. Introducing Moringus the lay scribe

882 was an eventful year for the Frankish kingdoms, marked by the death of several ruling kings and difficulties caused by pillaging bands of Vikings; but for the inhabitants of the village of Aiserey (about 15 miles south of Dijon), disruption took a more immediate form. A married couple named Aroard and Fulchildis found themselves compelled to hand over a meadow in the village to the ecclesiastical institution of St-Étienne of Dijon, as compensation (‘pro leudo’) for the murder of a servant (servus) of St Étienne named Archenrad. Though this kind of transaction is familiar from templates in formulary manuscripts, there are few surviving documents that show it occurring in practice. In spite of its dramatic content, however, the dedicated historian of diplomatics

3 Olivier Guyotjeannin, ‘« Penuria scriptorium » : le mythe de l’anarchie documentaire dans la France du Nord (Xe – première moitié du XIe siècle)’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes* 155 (1997), 11-44, is the classic recent treatment of the issue.

4 The charters are most conveniently edited as an appendix to Joseph Courtois, *Les origines de l’hypothèque en Bourgogne et chartes de l’abbaye de Saint-Etienne des VIIIe, IXe, Xe et XIe siècles* (Dijon: Jobard, 1907). The edition is unfortunately deficient in many respects, but a new edition of the main cartulary is in preparation by Hubert Flammarion. The text of this particular charter actually names the woman as Fuschildis, but this is probably a copying error for Fulchildis, under which name she appears in other charters.
is struck less by the charter’s business, and more by the means of its production, for the 
scribe who produced it was a layman.

We can be confident of this because of a helpfully explicit statement in the 
charter, namely ‘I Moringus the layman (laicus) wrote and signed [this]’, which is 
moreover matched by similar phrases in his five other surviving charters, each one 
recording his lay status.\(^5\) Though all these charters survive only as copies (as discussed 
below), we can be reasonably confident that this word laicus was not an error on the part 
of the copyists.\(^6\) It is not clear why Moringus was so insistent about his secular status, but 
whatever its rationale, the statement makes Moringus a remarkable figure. Lay scribes 
were not particularly uncommon in Frankish kingdoms in the eighth century. For

\(^5\) ‘Ego Moringus laicus scripsi et subscripsi’. I am grateful to Karl Heidecker for checking the original 
manuscript’s reading of this charter for me. Moringus laicus subscribes his five other charters as follows: 
‘scripsi et subscripsi, datavi’ (‘I wrote and subscribed and recorded the date’); ‘presens fui, scripsi et 
subscripsi, datavi’ (‘I was present, wrote...’); ‘praesens fui, scripsi, datavi’; ‘interfui, scripsi et datavi’ (‘I 
was there, wrote and recorded the date’); and ‘presens fui, scripsi et datavi’. These five charters, all 
concerning Saint-Bénigne, are edited in Chartes et documents de Saint-Bénigne de Dijon, prieurés et 
dépendances: des origines à 1300, Tome I, VIe-Xe siècles, ed. by Maurice Chaume and George Chevrier 
(Dijon: Bernigaud and Privat, 1986), at nos. 80, 97, 110, 113, and 122, respectively.

\(^6\) The most plausible kind of error would be an erroneous expansion of an abbreviated form of levita 
deacon). However, not only is laicus used of Moringus (and only him) across two independent cartularies, 
which elsewhere did specify when charter scribes were levitae (e.g. Chartes et documents, nos 76, 78, 95), 
but Burgundian scribes from this period do not seem to have abbreviated levita in their charters: see for 
example Les plus anciens documents originaux de l’abbaye de Cluny, ed. by Hartmut Atsma and Jean 
Vezin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997-2002), vol. 1, no.2 (pp. 26-9, including facsimile), signed by a Ratbodus 
laevita indignus, written between 893 and 898.
instance, we know of one named Herirad, an ‘influential local landowner’ active in the Rhineland in the 770s and 80s who seems to have written at least three surviving charters. Over the course of the ninth century, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to find scribes in the northern Frankish realms demonstrably working outside monastic and episcopal contexts, let alone ones who were not clerics at all. South of the Alps, documentary traditions were somewhat different, and it is generally believed that ninth-century scribes there were sometimes laymen; but while this is perfectly plausible, it should not be forgotten that this observation rests largely upon inference from the absence of clerical titles, rather than anything more positive. In fact, Moringus is to my knowledge alone in this period in overtly advertising his lay status. In view of this uniqueness, it is on the face of it surprising that this Burgundian lay scribe has been rather neglected by historians.

The explanation for this neglect is doubtless in part that although there are some ‘private’ charters from ninth-century Burgundy that survive as originals, Moringus’s are

8 The collection Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages, ed. by Warren Brown and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), offers a balanced and authoritative discussion of the question: particularly relevant for this point is the contribution by Costambeys, ‘The laity, the clergy, the scribes and their archives: the documentary record of eighth- and ninth-century Italy’.
not amongst them, and his charters are preserved only through medieval copies, not in their original form.\textsuperscript{10} We do not, in other words, have at our disposal the sheets of parchment touched by Moringus’s hands. It ought to be acknowledged that this is a great loss from a strictly empirical point of view, since it means we can neither compare the scripts of his charters to ascertain whether Moringus had a deputy or whether any subscriptions were autographs, nor can we investigate forms of archiving as indicated by patterns of folding or dorsal notes, and we must also be mindful of the possibility of interpolation or other kinds of tampering by later copyists. There are methodological implications too, however. We must be conscious of the fact that we are obliged to study as doubly mediated texts (mediated through the medieval copies and, for practical purposes, again through the modern printed editions) what had originally been crafted, physical artefacts.\textsuperscript{11} The documents themselves often make clear that their materiality

\textsuperscript{10} The texts of all surviving original charters kept in France and issued before 1121 have been collated by a team working at the University of Nancy II. This major database can now be freely accessed online, at http://www.cn-telma.fr/originaux. There are plans to make images of the documents available too. In the meantime, for a facsimile of a Burgundian charter contemporary with those of Moringus and dealing with a similar kind and level of transaction, consult Anciens documents, I, no. 1 (pp. 23-25). This charter, issued in 880 to record a transaction between two married couples, includes two autograph subscriptions (one by one of the two husbands) and some striking graphical marks (in particular a chrismon). Moringus’s charters might have been very similar.

\textsuperscript{11} This matter has been incisively addressed by Matthew Innes, ‘On the material culture of legal documents: charters and their preservation in the Cluny archive, ninth to eleventh centuries’, in Documentary Culture. I am grateful to Professor Innes for allowing me to see a draft of this paper before publication.
demonstrably mattered to ninth-century contemporaries, so we should recognise that our understanding of Moringus’s work can only ever be partial.  

There are nevertheless two mitigating factors which go some way to balance the lack of Moringus’s original charters. The first, which does not seem to have been fully appreciated by those few who have paid passing attention to Moringus, is that his charters are preserved in not one but two medieval cartularies (collections of charters), one produced in the mid-eleventh century by St-Bénigne of Dijon, which records five of Moringus’s charters, and one prepared by St-Étienne of Dijon a century later, which preserves the compensation document with which I began. That there is no great difference in form or style between these charters provides at least some reassurance that the cartulary-makers did not alter Moringus’s texts beyond recognition. A second mitigation is that the cartulary-maker of St-Bénigne was apparently as keenly aware as we that a purely textual representation of a material object is a poor substitute for the real thing, and so went some way to reproducing the graphic marks and even layout of the original charters in his collection. The intention behind what has been described as a

12 For discussion of forms of charter documentation that did not necessarily involve single sheets of parchment, see Hodge, this volume.

13 The St-Bénigne cartulary, probably produced in the 1040s, is housed in the Bibliothèque Municipale at Dijon (MS 591); the cartulary of St-Étienne in question, the so-called ‘First Cartulary’, is kept in the Archives Départementales Côte-d’Or, G 125 (alternatively known as Cartulaire 21), and Moringus’s charter is on fol. 9. For further details on the cartulary of St-Étienne, see Laurent Durnecker, ‘Consécration d’autels et dépôts de reliques. L’exemple de Saint-Étienne de Dijon du XIe au début du XIIIe siècle’, in Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration d’église dans l’occident médiéval, ed. by Didier Méhu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 189-218.
kind of photocopying *avant la lettre* seems to have been to instil a kind of visual veracity into the record.\(^{14}\) As a consequence, even if Moringus’s charters themselves are lost, we do at least have an image of what they might have looked like.

![Figure placeholder](image)

**Figure 4.1. Cartulary of St-Bénigne, f.96v. The cartulary scribe has added Moringus’s subscription clause in the bottom left margin, including an attempt to represent his graphical sign (perhaps a monographic ‘subscripsi’)***

### II. The village of Aiserey

Given the dual path of transmission of Moringus’s charters, it seems unlikely to be entirely coincidental that each and every one of them concerns the village of Aiserey, and that Moringus appears in no other context. It seems reasonable to assume that Aiserey was Moringus’s base of operations. We are therefore fortunate that half a dozen other charters concerning Aiserey are preserved to complement those drawn up by Moringus, in aggregate giving us a reasonably detailed picture of this Burgundian village between 863 and 882, the period in which Moringus was active.\(^{15}\) As a result, we can for

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\(^{14}\) Karl Heidecker, ‘Crisis or Business as Usual?: political crises as reflected in the charters of St Gall’, paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 15\(^{th}\) July 2010. Dr Heidecker’s forthcoming work on the Dijon manuscript, which contains both the chronicle and the cartulary of the monastery, sheds much light on how and why it was put together, and on its subsequent complex history.

\(^{15}\) These charters are nos 71, 86, 88, 98, 100 and 101 in *Chartes et documents*; they were copied into the cartulary as a group. The most recent analysis of ninth-century Burgundian society is Olivier Bruand’s thought-provoking *Les origines de la société féodale : L’exemple de l’Autunois (France, Bourgogne)* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2009), but this book is anchored further to the south, and in a different archive. The older but still useful André Deléage, *La vie économique et sociale de la Bourgogne*
instance make out something of the topography of the settlement. Aiserey had a series of sectors or zones within which land was located, such as the ‘plana Liscaria’ mentioned in a number of charters. The boundary clauses which occur in most of the charters, delineating the borders of the rights over land being transferred, suggest that individual plots in Aiserey were quite small, and that they were generally adjoined on at least one side by a public road (‘strada publica’).

Though there is no reason to assume that it was anything more than an agricultural settlement, Aiserey was a reasonably prominent one, since various institutions were represented there, including the two Dijon institutions of St-Bénigne and St-Étienne, St-Léger of Autun, an unidentifiable community of St-Pierre, and the local village church of St-Albin, though this fell at some early point under the patronage of St-Bénigne. In spite of the presence of these external institutions, the charters suggest that the heart of the village (as others) in this period was formed by small-scale local landowners.\textsuperscript{16} From the fifty or so names mentioned in the charters, a good number recur within this twenty-year period in turn as neighbouring landowners, as witnesses, and sometimes as donors. Of course, not everyone resident in Aiserey was part of this


‘gentry’. Wandelbert, for example, was a serf (servus) who was given to St-Bénigne with the admittedly token obligation of paying two pence or performing two days work.\textsuperscript{17} Another Aiserey charter transferred six people called mancipia along with some land, namely Anseran, his wife Landilana and their children, and Walgis and his wife Telenna.\textsuperscript{18} It may well be, as recent research has suggested, that the term mancipium tells us nothing about the real legal status of the people so labelled, and that we cannot assume these people were legally slaves.\textsuperscript{19} Yet these families were clearly of lower social standing, neither invited to witness this charter nor appearing in others, and their day-to-day obligations are likely to have been more onerous than those of higher-status neighbours.

Amidst the details, a leading kin-group in Aiserey is dimly visible. St-Bénigne’s interests in the village had begun early, and the community exchanged some land with a certain Fulcric in the 820s.\textsuperscript{20} Some years later, Emperor Louis the Pious granted in 836 a demesne holding and five and a half dependent holdings in Aiserey to a certain Fulbert, a

\textsuperscript{17} Chartes et documents, no. 97.

\textsuperscript{18} Chartes et documents, no. 100.


\textsuperscript{20} For a study of St-Bénigne in the ninth century, addressing the community’s connections with the world beyond the cloister, see Charles West, ‘Unauthorised miracles in mid ninth-century Dijon and the Carolingian church reforms’, Journal of Medieval History, 26 (2010), 295-311.
small grant in absolute terms but substantial at a local level.\textsuperscript{21} In the 870s, the most active member of the village was a certain Fulcard, who is mentioned in six charters. There was also a Fulcrad in Aiserey at the same time, easily distinguished from Fulcard because the former was married to Teutbergis, the latter to Ermengardis. The repetition of the Ful-Fol elements within the same village makes it likely that these people were related in some way to one another. Admittedly not everyone who mattered in Aiserey was part of this network. For instance, a donor of lands in Aiserey named Mummius seems likely to have been a \textit{vassalus} of the bishop of Langres, and probably had wider horizons. However, he had no sooner acquired land in Aiserey than he passed it on to St-Bénigne, and the suspicion must be that he bought it with the intention of making of the gift.\textsuperscript{22}

The impression of Aiserey afforded by the charters is therefore one of a relatively close-knit community with a predominant kin-group, whose influence was not however all-encompassing, and which was in increasingly close contact with nearby churches. It is worth emphasising that all the surviving charters concerning Aiserey were drawn up in order to transfer rights to ecclesiastical institutions, even those made by Moringus \textit{laicus}. Of course, all these documents were selected for preservation by ecclesiastical institutions in ecclesiastical archives for their own purposes at various dates, and we can

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\textsuperscript{21} Chartes et documents, no. 47; Johann Friedrich Böhmer, \textit{Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, 751-918}, ed. by Engelbert Mühlbacher, Regesta Imperii I (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1889-1906): I, no. 963. Fulbert had already held these lands as a benefice.

\textsuperscript{22} Chartes et documents, nos 100 and 101 (and no. 87 for the reference to Mummius as a \textit{vassalus} of Bishop Isaac – he also appears in other charters that do not concern Aiserey). The chronicle of St-Bénigne states that he made the gift upon becoming a monk.
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wistfully speculate on quite how much documentation from Aiserey has been lost as a result of these pressures of selection.\textsuperscript{23} Recent work has suggested that the exclusively clerical transmission of early medieval charters has hitherto obscured a very active participation in documentary practice beyond the ecclesiastical world, a suggestion which Moringus’s charters would seem to support.\textsuperscript{24}

Yet the clerical focus of our records is not misleading insofar as it reveals that St-Bénigne in particular was slowly increasing its influence in Aiserey, manifested by its steady acquisition of plots of land there. After the ninth century, the world of small-scale landowners negotiating with regional monasteries fades from view. By the twelfth century, papal charters confirmed St-Bénigne’s possession not just of particular holdings within the village, but of the village in its entirety.\textsuperscript{25} It is true that having consolidated this parcel of landholding, St-Bénigne was unable to hold onto it, but all that happened was that Aiserey changed hands as a bloc. Appearing again in documentary records in the thirteenth century, Aiserey was by that point under ducal control, forming part of the

\textsuperscript{23} The key work here is of course Patrick Geary’s \textit{Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Note that the Louis the Pious charter mentioned above was not copied into St-Bénigne’s cartulary, and survives as an original; it is not known when it passed into the Dijon archives.


castellany of Brazey, and was included in the castellany’s accounts rendered to the duke. It is only in the fifteenth century, however, that, thanks to a terrier (a kind of estate survey), we can see the details of the lordship exercised by the seigneur of Aiserey, whose judicial rights presumably derived in theory or practice from the duke of Burgundy. In short, we should be aware that the ninth-century charters about Aiserey allow us a glimpse of a village at a particular moment in a long historical trajectory; that things were in movement even as they were documented; and moreover that the charters themselves probably played an active role in that movement, cementing the monastery’s tightening grip on the settlement.

III. Scribes and formularies

The paragraphs above have sought to sketch the outlines of two important contexts for Moringus’s charters, namely the textual transmission of the surviving documents through ecclesiastical institutions, and the changing ‘small world’ in which these artefacts were originally created, one composed of small-scale village landowners in touch with a range of ecclesiastical institutions. It may not yet be clear how such


28 For the original phrase, see Wendy Davies, *Small Worlds: the Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
contextualisation has a bearing on the question of changing charter formularies. After all, historians interested in the ‘collapse’ of formulaic charter-writing in the post-Carolingian age have tended to concentrate upon that change, not what came before it. It is however the contention of this chapter that to understand the transition in diplomatic practice properly – a change fully attested, it should be noted in passing, by the archives of the institutions discussed here – we need to start by establishing a firm grasp on why formulaic phrasing was used in the first place. That is an issue for which a properly contextualised Moringus may indeed prove helpful.

Why was it desirable to have documents drawn up in a particular way in ninth-century Aiserey, or for that matter anywhere else in the Carolingian world? Though the question is one that is surprisingly little explored, it goes to the heart of the issue of the ‘Carolingian formulary’. The tacit assumption used to be that it was necessary to draw up documents in a certain way to comply with legal requirements. Yet while the details within ninth-century charters might be carefully scrutinised, and sometimes the scripts compared, there is to my knowledge no instance of a ninth-century Frankish document being rejected or classified as invalid purely on a technicality of formulation (or ‘dictamen’, to use the technical term). Historians have rightly tended to move away from the strictly legalist view of charters on which such a perspective depends, because in a world of ‘substantive legalism’, technicalities are unlikely to have carried much weight.29

29 For substantive legalism, see Innes, ‘Material culture’, drawing here on the work of Stephen White.

While Thomas Faulkner’s forthcoming work, based on his 2010 Ph.D. thesis, will re-evaluate the relation between the written word and Carolingian conceptions of law in a broad sense, Patrick Wormald, The
With this in mind, it is not surprising that historians have recently begun instead to view the use of formulaic charter language as little more than a sign of hide-bound archaism. It is certainly the case that the precise phrasing of Carolingian-period charters, while responsive to local circumstances such as the presence or absence of particular kinds of resources like ponds or woodland, seems nevertheless sometimes to be at odds with what is known of the working of social relations on the ground.30 This was an observation made forcefully by Jean Durliat, and one does not have to concur with the controversial inference he drew – that Carolingian charters are in reality describing not landholdings but still intact Roman fiscal and taxation systems, and so are dealing in exemptions rather than property – to perceive the problem which he identified.31 No wonder then that historians with perspectives quite different from that of Durliat have come to stress the fundamental artificiality of Carolingian forms of documentation, suggesting that subsequent change in documentary practice was simply the product of writing practices less divorced from social reality, perhaps connected with monastic

30 For a parallel discussion, see McKinley, this volume.

reform movements of the tenth and eleventh centuries, as they began ‘shaking off the rigid and formulaic framework of the old *carta*’.  

This is precisely where the example of Moringus is important, serving as a corrective for both sides of this debate. To begin with, we need to appreciate that charters from all periods can be seen as miniature histories, texts that tell stories about the past in order to shape the present and the future.  

Taking our cue from the ‘law and literature’ tradition of modern legal scholarship, which concentrates on the way in which legal discourse constitutes a particular way of representing reality, we can view ninth-century charters (like other formal texts) as skilful translations of irreducibly specific circumstances into a schematic and universalised form of narrative. This kind of disembedding was necessary if specific sets of claims over people and land were to be successfully transferred from one individual or community to another. Aroard and  

32 The quote comes from the fine study of Georges Declercq, ‘Originals and Cartularies: the organisation of archival memory (Ninth-Eleventh centuries)’, in *Charters and the use of the written word in medieval society*, ed. by Karl Heidecker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp.147-170, at p. 165. The most prominent supporter of this interpretation is however Dominique Barthélemy, whose important work on what he has called the ‘mutation documentaire’ can be most conveniently sampled by the Anglophone reader in his *The Serf, the Knight and the Historian*, trans. by Graham R. Edwards (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).  

33 Sarah Foot’s ‘Reading Anglo-Saxon charters: memory, record or story?’, in *Narrative and History in the early medieval West*, ed. by Elizabeth Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 39-65, is highly suggestive on this particular point, while Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), offers a more general account of the uses of history in the ninth century.  

Fulchildis’s control of a meadow in Aiserey, for example, was doubtless a very personal affair, with its own historical roots, caught up in and determined by particular relations with neighbours, patrons, and clients. The formulaic record of the transaction articulated that control, however, in abstract, dehistoricised terms and stripped it of those particularising contexts, a step necessary if that control were to be effectively passed on as both donors and recipients intended.\textsuperscript{35} The issue here was surely not, or not primarily, one of compliance with legal technicalities, but of promoting a particular understanding of how things ‘really were’, in order to enable a transfer.\textsuperscript{36} It was in this process that Moringus’s artisanal expertise lay. We can only speculate how he acquired it. Yet it was an expertise that quite probably determined his social standing since, in view of the confident execution of his documents, and given that none of the copious Aiserey charter material refers to him holding lands in this or any other village, he may well have been a professional scribe.

Crucially, the case of Moringus further suggests that this kind of expertise was simultaneously widely shared and locally embedded. Clerics at St-Bénigne (and other institutions) in the late ninth century certainly could and frequently did act as scribes and produce their own charters. One of them, Wulfard, in fact drew up some charters concerning Aiserey, one even made in the village itself in 870. Not only are the members


of the village community there represented from the same familiar circles as those represented in Moringus’s texts, but, even making allowances for the potential alterations made during the textual transmission, these charters are in style virtually indistinguishable from those made by Moringus. It would appear that there were not two ways of phrasing documents in ninth-century Burgundy, one religious and one secular, but rather that there was a single shared documentary culture, a point Kosto has developed in his work on tenth-century Catalonia.37

Unlike Wulfard, however, Moringus appears as an essentially local figure, as a lay scribe active only in and around Aiserey, perhaps connected to the family-grouping discussed above.38 If transactions between local, secular landowners and a highly literate religious community were on occasion recorded by someone who was explicitly outside that religious community, it seems reasonable to assume that the initiative for this must have rested at least partially with those landowners.39 The implication is that ninth-century charter-writing was not an archaic or irrelevant legacy of inadequate Roman forms cherished by a church a dozen miles away (or for that matter by the Carolingian state) and artificially imposed upon disengaged rural communities, but was rather a skill

37 Adam J. Kosto, ‘Laymen, Clerics and Documentary Practices in the Early Middle Ages: the example of Catalonia’, *Speculum* 80 (2005), 44-74. My thanks to Jon Jarrett for drawing my attention to this article; he makes a similar observation for ninth-century Catalonia in his chapter below.

38 Cf the comments of Tock, ‘Actes’, pp. 125-27, on independent (though clerical) scribes’ associations elsewhere in southern Burgundy.

39 See McKinley, this volume, for other reasons to think this at eighth-century Wissembourg.
fostered within a late ninth-century Burgundian village, and valued by its inhabitants in their interactions with the wider world.\textsuperscript{40}

This does not entirely contradict the idea that the shift in forms of charter production that took place in the post-Carolingian world was related to the growing dominance of monastic and episcopal scribes, at the expense of figures like Moringus. It does suggest, however, that that shift also depended on the redundancy of the expertise mastered by Moringus and others like him. To put this differently, if the ‘Carolingian formulary’ were to collapse, it needed no longer to matter precisely how records of transactions were drawn up, as it had to those ninth-century landowners in Aiserey. The form of representation in which Moringus was professionally trained had to become no longer necessary or appropriate in the eyes not just of the church, but also of local communities like Aiserey which had been equally invested in these kinds of writing, to the extent of sheltering their own scribe. It is surely not insignificant that when Aiserey appears again in our documentation in later centuries, the central elements at stake were not the ‘ownership’ of fields and meadows and their circulation, but, as the terrier of Aiserey makes clear, judicial rights of a rather more intangible nature, representing a connection of property and power altogether different from that prevailing in the ninth century, and, one might suggest, more susceptible to expression on parchment. Moringus’s mastery of a form of textual representation (and quite possibly of artefactual production, too), in other words, spoke to a specific historical configuration of social relations: as one changed, so necessarily did the other.

\textsuperscript{40} Cf. Jarrett, ‘Uncertain Origins: comparing the earliest documentary culture in Carolingian Catalonia’, this volume.
Conclusion

To move from an 882 charter recording compensation for a murder to the nature of Carolingian scribal practice and the implications this carries for how that practice changed is a long way to go in a short essay, and six charters about one village is a thin empirical basis upon which to base such generalising arguments. Moringus’s charters obviously cannot in themselves offer a complete explanation for why a relatively rigid and formal means of expressing transactions should have been steadily abandoned in subsequent decades, nor should we lose sight of their intrinsic value simply as intriguing evidence for scribal practice in a corner of Carolingian Burgundy. We do not have to generalise from these charters for them to have value.

Nevertheless, even if they do not hold hidden keys to resolve the question of changing charter composition, Moringus’s charters do at least carry implications for how we should approach these changes more broadly. Charters in ninth-century Burgundy, as for that matter everywhere, were attempts to capture and describe diverse local situations by means of a universalising discourse, in order that these local situations could be acted upon and altered. What Moringus shows us is how deeply rooted a particular practice of representation was in the ninth-century northern Burgundian countryside. The fact that he was apparently not a cleric reinforces the impression that Carolingian Europe was a society shaped by literate practices at all levels, and it is to my mind unlikely that he was

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41 For further investigation of some of the themes briefly addressed here, albeit in a different geographical context, see Charles West, Reframing the Feudal Revolution. Political and social transformation between Marne and Moselle, c.800-c.1100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
the only lay scribe in ninth-century Burgundy, as opposed to a uniquely documented one. Yet questions of typicality or representativeness are in any case beside the point for the argument here, since one case study is enough to show that artificial though they might have been (indeed necessarily were), Carolingian forms of textual representation could be locally meaningful, and locally appreciated.

It follows that in seeking to understand the process by which such practices came to an end, we cannot be simply dealing with the whimsy of monastic scriptoria conducting literary experiments, disconnected from wider realities. That whimsy may be part of the story, and charters are indeed narratives amenable to literary analysis and even elaboration, but they are also narratives that, as in this instance, had demonstrable local relevance. Accordingly, our understanding will not be advanced without first acknowledging that a change in such a deep-rooted representation necessarily implies a change in what was being represented, too. That is hardly a novel proposal, but it has a curious force when it comes to thinking about such authoritative, or authorised, representations of social relations as charters, which simultaneously shape what they are designed to show. Moringus’s expertise was suited to a particular configuration of social relations, and cannot be divorced from that configuration, so to concentrate on either one element or the other will not permit a full grasp of the processes at work. For all that Moringus may be an unusual case, his charters do at least make clear that exploring a monastic ‘takeover’ of scribal production does not exhaust the issues raised by the fading out of Carolingian ways of writing charters.