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Political culture and social memory in the *chansons de geste*”

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Introduction

Our story begins somewhere close to Paris. William, called *al curb nes*, because he had the tip of his nose cut off in a previous adventure, finds himself in a peculiar situation. News has just reached him that King Louis had not given him the fief he so desires and indeed needs to sustain his livelihood. How else can he possibly feed his horse or pay his men? He crosses the Petit Pont and rides without delay to the royal palace. William dismounts from his noble steed, walks pass the orchards and the olive trees and with large steps makes his way to the palace. He wants to speak to the king. While he marches up the marble stairs, thoughts are running through his head. Has the king forgotten him? He is not a nobody in the realm. Everyone knows the story of how he heroically drove off the Saracen invaders from the doorsteps of Rome and Louis himself owes him his crown. After all it was him, who defended the king when he was still an infant against evil usurpers when nobody else would. He killed so many men in the king's service that he lost count, but sometimes they still haunt his soul. Finally he reaches the great hall...

At a different time Raoul de Cambrai is also on his way to speak to King Louis. 'Always remember that the foolish king took your rightful inheritance and gave it to that low-born Giboin,' they said. 'It is your duty to take it back once you are old enough.' Only vaguely can he recall the events of that unfortunate day, he was barely three years old. But since then his relatives told it to him time and time again. So also this morning. His uncle dragged him from his chess game and demanded that he reclaims his fief. Raoul has grown up to be a praiseworthy knight, educated in the arts of weaponry and chivalry and he even served the king, loyally. Now the time has come to take back what is his. He slams open the door and makes his demands to the king...

Some years earlier, King Pepin and his household just returned from a hunt. The king is very pleased with the outcome as his trusted knight Begon shot a deer and a boar. So pleased that he makes Begon an invaluable gift, he grants him the lands of Gascony. Fromont is so furious, he almost loses his mind. It did not go unnoticed to him that the king favored Begon and his family, the Lohrains, but this is unacceptable. He just as much deserves a piece of land, he too spent his

best years in the king's service. And why does it have to be Gascony, of all places, right in the middle of his family's estates? With a loud voice Fromont makes his anger felt...

In all three cases the king plays the waiting game. He promises his knights the land of the next lord who dies. Only one or two years and they will get the fief they so want (and deserve). This is the crucial scene that sets everything in motion. Now our characters are faced with the first, in of a line of consequential decisions. Do they accept the king's offer or do they protest? How the stories proceed from this point, and why the trajectory is so different in each song will be the topic of this essay. These are the three different solutions of William, Raoul and Fromont.¹

At first glance, this might seem like a mundane question, but it is certainly not. The three solutions are much more than just different story lines in some twelfth-century novels. How the narratives are continued and resolved has huge implications for the world of the High Middle Ages. In a society where social and economical standing was inseparably connected with the possession of land, how a fief was acquired in the past was a central concern. When a knight in the twelfth century found himself without a fief, he would have looked at these stories for guidance. The songs can give us insights into debates surrounding this ever important issue. They also point to aristocratic ideology. Besides the epics, a multitude of other medieval histories deal with the very same question. However, how it is answered in *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* is essentially different from what was the case before them, pointing to a fundamental change in attitude in the second half of the century.

This thesis is not a piece of literary history.² While the *chansons de geste* appear entirely fictitious to twenty-first century eyes, people 800 years earlier³ considered them true stories of their own past.

1 I am not the first one to observe the similarities between the scenes. See Adler Alfred, *Epische Spekulanten: Versuch einer synchronen Geschichte des altfranzösischen Epos* (München: W. Fink, 1975), 195-97. Michael Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe: Untersuchungen zur chanson de geste des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts und ihrer Zyklenbildung* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1991), 214 and Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Raoul de Cambrai: L'impossible Révolte* (Paris: Champion, 1999), 44f.

2 Historians have been somewhat reluctant to use the *chansons de geste* as source for their research. Time and time again scholars found it necessary to point out that they have received less attention than they deserve (See Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1 and Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30). The reason is not entirely clear to me, but one is reminded of the wonderfully sarcastic words of Ian Miller: "Real historian look at plea roles and other court records, census returns, cartularies, administrative records, etc. Literature is what you read on vacation." (William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 45).

3 The exact dating of the *chansons de geste* is problematic. The *Charroi* is generally put in the middle of the twelfth century, *Raoul* and *Garin* in the second half of the twelfth century. (Catherine M. Jones, *An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2015), 149-152).

For many they were the only source of information about their ancestors. Modern historians have spent enormous amounts of time and paper trying to find some sort of historical remnants of the eighth and ninth century in the epics, but did not consider what it means that people in the twelfth century believed in these stories. Groups construct their own image of the past. What and how they choose to remember can tell us a lot about them, their identity, their worldviews and their aspirations for the present and future.⁴

When I first started my research on the *chansons de geste* I was looking for treason, but to my surprise I found little. Instead, I saw knights driven by their desperate search for a fief and consideration. However, looking even closer, I noticed the many different elements that make up these stories. This is not surprising; social memory is established through communication and constant renegotiation. This way a lot of different, sometimes contradictory elements could find their way into the epics. The goal of this thesis is to identify the many components and explain what they can tell us about the people of the High Middle Ages.

This essay is split into four parts. The first addresses fundamental questions about the genre of the *chansons* itself, it talks about the nature of the songs – were they written or sung? – and their audiences. The second section deals with methodological considerations and memory from a variety of perspectives. The third discusses the three solutions of William, Raoul and Fromont and their meaning for the twelfth century. The fourth puts the picture into context with aristocratic genealogies and other stories about how a fief was acquired in the past. Every part starts with a short introduction stating research questions and important conclusions.

I am grateful for the help and support of too many people to mention them all here. In particular, however, I would like to thank my father and Jelle Wassenaar for their input on important parts of my work. Also my advisor, Philippe Buc, who not only sparked my interest in the High Middle Ages, but also let me find my own way with his “no arranged marriages” (a frequent quote of his) approach. This, however, also meant that I felt free to wander around, from the mountainous regions of Serbia to the bloody feuds of nineteenth-century Corsica and ultimately led to this monstrosity of a master’s thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Roxana Stauber for her encouragement and count-

4 See James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) and Part II below.

less hours of lively discussions after which, more often than not, I could not distinguish her ideas from mine.

Part I

In this first part we will be looking at the *chansons de geste* from a more general perspective. We will address important questions about the songs' audience(s) and the nature of their performance. Over the last century our understanding of the genre has become somewhat more nuanced. Recent historiography challenged the notion of an exclusively knightly genre, and rightly so. The *chansons* could appeal to different audiences on different levels and people had varying preferences depending on their social standing, origin and tastes. However, one should not go too far. Some songs, especially those of the so called cycle of revolt, are clearly addressed at an aristocratic public. Just as the listeners were not all from a specific class, neither were the singers. They came from diverse social backgrounds and lived in different economical circumstances, some knew the world of the aristocracy very well.

Lastly, we will turn to the issue of orality; to the fact that we are dealing with songs that came to us in written form and the challenges that brings. If we acknowledge them as oral genre – for which there are good reasons – it comes with accepting that there was not a single version of a song, but multiple, each greatly differing in quality and length. The majority of people probably never heard them in the form we have them today. Regardless of the nature of the composition, the performance of a *chanson* was always a social event and authors undoubtedly had a live audience in mind.

Origins

From the very beginning the historiography of the *chansons de geste* was highly politicized. Immediately after its first publication in 1837 the *Chanson de Roland* became a pawn in the hands of nationalists. It filled a vacuum in literary history – without a great national epic, the French could have never matched the classical tradition. The *Chanson de Roland* was the French *Iliad*. Some were seeing the dawn of the French nation on the battleground of Roncevaux. During the siege of Paris in 1870 the influential historian Gaston Paris appealed to his audience in a lecture on the *Roland*: "Let us make ourselves known as the sons of the men who died at Roncevaux and of those who avenged them."⁵ Leon Gautier, of whom we will be talking more in the next chapter, emphasized, for every German reading his 1872 edition of the *Roland*, the strong French patriotism already in the eleventh century.⁶ Even today one still stumbles upon ideas of a "nascent sense of nationhood" and "the establishment of a 'French' identity", even in renowned publications.⁷ In *The Subject of Violence* Peter Haidu claimed that studies undertaken in France are still dominated by "traditional French ideological values of nationalism and superficial religiosity."⁸

At the turn of the last century historians were not only fascinated by the origins of the French nation, but also by that of the songs themselves. Many *chansons* have some remote connection to historical events in the eighth and ninth century, but most of it remains obscure to this very day. Scholars disputed if the songs arose from the brilliant mind of a single poet or – to speak in the terms of the nineteenth century – were the product of a *Volksseele*. This question haunted the scholarship on pretty much every epic at one point or another, from the *Nibelungenlied* to the *Iliad*. The so called *Traditionalists* saw the songs composed shortly after the real events. The epics were then orally

5 See Taylor for the quote and a longer discussion of the early historiography (Andrew Taylor, "Was There a Song of Roland?," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 30).

6 "Jamais, jamais on n'a tant aimé son pays. Et écoutez bien, pesez bien les mots que je vais dire, ô Allemands qui m'entendez: IL EST ICI QUESTION DU XI^e SIÈCLE. À ceux qui étouffent aujourd'hui ma pauvre France, j'ai bien le droit de montrer combien déjà elle était grande il y a environ huit cents ans" (Léon Gautier, ed., *La Chanson de Roland. accompagné d'une traduction nouvelle: et précédé d'une introduction historique* (Tours: A. Mame, 1872), lxxvi). On Gautier's mindset see David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900 - 1300* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), 12-14.

7 Finn Sinclair, "The Chanson de Geste," in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, ed. William E. Burgwinkle, Emma Wilson, and Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30f.

8 Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The Song of and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 214 FN 4.

transmitted over generations until they were finally written down two or three centuries later.⁹ Joseph Bender and the *Individualists* on the other hand suggested that the *chansons* were the product of individual poets who got their inspiration in monasteries that wanted to attract pilgrims. This pilgrim route theory remained consensus until the 1950s, when it came under heavy critique from two sides. Bender's argument of *l'universel silence* between the ninth-century chronicles and the first *chansons* was invalidated by the *Hague fragment* and the later discovered *Nota Emilianense* that showed important similarities with later songs.¹⁰ The extensive works of selfproclaimed *Neo-traditionalist* Ramon Mendez Pidal among others proved that there was a continual historical tradition until the first appearance of the *Roland*. At the same time another important impulse came from Milman Perry and Albert Lord and their work on Yugoslavian epics. Their search for the answer to the Homeric question had led them to the mountainous regions of modern day Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, where at the beginning of the twentieth century a tradition of oral poetry still existed.¹¹ Jean Rychner picked up their ideas and applied them to the *chansons de geste*. He stressed that one should look first at the form in which the songs survive before one can speculate about their origin. However, his conclusion fired up the question of origin once again. His study seemed to prove the oral nature of the *chansons*. He argued that every song was created in the moment of the performance itself, depending largely on improvisation, making the picture of a single master poet in a candle lit scriptorium rather obsolete.¹²

While nowadays it is widely accepted that the *chansons* had historical predecessors, in one important point Bender was right: The *chansons de geste* are first and foremost a product of their own society and time. Admittedly, it seems very attractive to look for some kind of hidden truth that was conserved in popular knowledge. However, in doing so historians made the same mistakes as the contemporaries themselves: confuse memory with reality.¹³

9 One of the most influential proponents was the already mentioned Gaston Paris. See for example Gaston Paris, *Histoire poétique de Charlemagne* (Paris: A. Franck, 1865).

10 For a summary of the historiography see Kurt Kloocke, *Joseph Bédiers Theorie über den Ursprung der Chansons de geste und die daran anschließende Diskussion zwischen 1908 und 1968* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1972) and Erich Köhler, *Mittelalter*, vol. I, Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der französischen Literatur (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985), 76-88.

11 Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

12 Jean Rychner, *La chanson de geste: essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* (Genève: Droz, 1955), 7 and 154-158.

13 More on that in chapter "Social memory" below.

A knights' world?

In the following chapter we will be examining who were the people that listened to the *chansons de geste*. Over the last hundred or so years, this was asked multiple times and rightly so, considering how important it is in the interpretation of the songs' roles and meanings. Unsurprisingly historians came to very different conclusions.¹⁴ In recent years established notions came under attack and made way for a more nuanced picture of the *chansons*' audiences.

The best starting point is the already mentioned Leon Gautier, who imagined a day in a jongleur's life. His imaginary singer passes by a town, he is greeted by loud welcomes - "*a jongleur, a jongleur*" - and soon a crowd of over a hundred people had assembled. Finally he starts his performance: "*Écoutez-moi, chevaliers et sergents, bourgeoises et bourgeois, baron et sage clerks qui savez lire, dames et pucelles, et vous aussi, vous, petits enfans; écoutez-moi, tous, les hommes et les femmes, les petits et les grands...*"¹⁵ The moment the singer's story gets the most exiting, he stops and asks his audience for a few coins. But as is the case with most audiences today, they quickly disperse the moment he passes his hat around. Unsatisfied with the outcome he moves on to his next destination, the lord's castle. Gautier saw this setting as the most important one. There the singer is received generously. The lord is hosting a feast and is in need of evening entertainment.¹⁶ How a *séance épique* like this might have taken place, is described more in detail in Leon Gautier's *La chevalerie*. This time around the jongleur sings not one entire *chanson*, but the most beautiful scenes from different ones. From young to old, all are assembled in the *grand salle* and listen to the jongleur's tales. When it comes to Ganelon's treason the women cry and the men ponder. Reminded of the politics of their own day by the closing scene of *Ogier de Denmarche*, a dispute arises and the performance finally comes to an end.¹⁷

More than half a century later Joseph Duggan imagined a performance not unfamiliar to Gautier's first vision. His is taking place in a public square in some fortified town in northern France for a

14 For a longer discussion see Joseph J. Duggan, "Social Functions of the Medieval Epic in the Romance Literatures," *Oral Tradition* 1 (1986): 728-766. Régis Boyer and Léopold Genicot, *L'épopée*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1988), 89-91 and Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de Geste*. (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2010), 23-107.

15 Léon Gautier, *Les Épopées françaises: étude sur les origines et l'histoire de la littérature nationale*, vol. II (Paris: V. Palmé, 1878), 114.

16 Gautier, *Les Épopées françaises*, 112-142.

17 Léon Gautier, *La chevalerie* (Paris H. Welter, 1895), 656-669.

medium sized crowd of mostly townspeople and peasants, who had come to the city to sell their goods. A few knights and ladies also listen to the jongleur's tales. Among them a young nobleman, barely fourteen, who is most excited by the story, until he is dragged away by a rather angry looking priest.¹⁸ Paula Leverage, who wrote a more recent discussion on the topic, would have moved the scene from the main square to some monastic or ecclesiastical setting. Maybe featuring an eager monk interested in the stories of William d'Orange or a priest who would later use some of the stories in his own sermons, drawing parallels to some saints' life.¹⁹

The biggest problem in pinning down the audience of the *chansons de geste* is our sheer lack of evidence. As Andrew Taylor put it: "*we have little to go on beyond the occasional allusion in a popular sermon or the highly conventionalized references in the lais, romances, or chansons de geste themselves, one of the trickiest of sources. Reconstructing minstrel performance involves us in speculation, generalization from a handful of examples, and a literalistic reading of literary texts as if they were social reportage.*"²⁰ In this last part he is referring to scenes where the narrator addresses his audience directly. These are not uncommon in the *chansons*. At the beginning of *Raoul de Cambrai*, for example, the jongleur tells his audience: "*This is the song you should hear: so hold your peace and listen to the song.*"²¹ We find an even more telling passage in the thirteenth-century *chanson Huon de Bordeaux*. After about 4.000 lines the author stops and addresses his audience:

*"It's close to vespers and I am very weary. Therefore I entreat you all, if you hold me dear and also love Auberon and Huon, to return here tomorrow after dinner; and now let's go drinking for that's what I crave [...] And I also beg each of you to bring me then a farthing tucked away in your shirt knot."*²²

18 Duggan, "Social Functions," 759.

19 Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 45.

20 Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations, Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 21.

21 "*Ceste chancon n'est pas drois que vos lais:/ oiez chancon et si nos faites pais,*" (*Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Sarah Kay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 12f.; trans. 3 (subsequently cited as *Raoul*). When citing the *chansons de geste* Arabic numbers refer to line numbers in the respective editions, Roman numbers to chapters/*laisses*. Passages with a single quotation mark ('...') are loose translations by me. To keep the quotes short, they are often summarizing the gist rather than exact quotes. Passages with a double quotation mark ("...") are exact quotes from either the edition or the translation.

22 "*Pres est de vespre, et je sui moult lassé.
Or vous proi tous, si cier com vous m'avés*

Later, presumably the next evening, the author laments the audience's unwillingness to give him money and threatens to stop his performance for good.²³ If we believe that the texts are written down from live performances, we can assume these are taking place at a public square or street corner, for a crowd of rather simple people with the jongleur heavily depended on their generosity. (We can see where Gautier and especially Duggan got their inspiration.) This vision is supported by a scene in the *Moniage Guillaume*. In this song William joins a monastery in his old days, resulting in a number of legitimately funny scenes of social tension between William and his cloister brothers. After a series of unfortunate events, the monks decide that they have to get rid of him. Knowing that bandits roam the woods, they ask William to travel to the nearby town. Before his departure the abbot reminds him that he cannot use violence, except if the bandits want to steal his pants. William, eager for a fight, buys an expensive belt, hoping that they would want to take it away from him. On his way back from his mission, he makes the sergeant accompanying him sing a song. The bandits hear it and think that he is a minstrel who “*must have come from some borc, vile or cite, where he has sung in the square.*”²⁴ Of course they try to steal his belt and William gets the fight he so craved for. Christopher Page argued that *borc* and *vile* here indicate an urban environment. There a continuous flow of money was assured and the jongleurs could get paid.²⁵ Describing the music of the lay people in thirteenth-century Paris, the musical theorist Johannes de Grocheio reports that “*this kind of music [chansons de geste] should be laid on for the elderly, for working citizens and for those of middle station when they rest from their usual toil, so that, having heard the miseries and calamities of others, they may more easily bear their own and so that anyone may undertake his own labour with more alacrity. Therefore this kind of cantus has the power to preserve the whole city.*”²⁶ This might be a more wishful than realistic account of the listeners,²⁷ but he is clearly suggesting popular crowds (the elderly, the working class and those of middle station).

*Ni Auberon ne Huon le membré
 Vous revenés demain après disner;
 Et s'alons boire, car je l'ai désiré [...]
 Et si vous proi cascuns m'aït aporté*

Un pan de sa chemise ine maille noué.” (Cited in Michel-André Bossy, “Roland’s Migration from Anglo-Norman Epic to Royal French Chronicle History,” in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt Raaflaub (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 305.

23 Duggan, “Social Functions,” 755f.

24 Cited in Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100 - 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 176f. This dialog appears only in the second redaction of the *Moinage*. Interestingly in the first redaction one of the robbers suggests that they should leave the jongleur alone.

25 Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 176f.

26 Cited in Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 177.

27 See Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 43.

A knightly audience is so universally accepted that it is not worth spending much time discussing it here. Just to name a few: the chronicler William of Malmesbury speaks of a song about Roland being sung by the Normans before the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Other sources record jongleurs traveling with the army of William the Conqueror. Sermons claim that *homines militares* liked to hear about the deeds of Roland, Oliver and Charlemagne and they are customary recited in their houses. Some poems speak of jongleurs performing at castles and at chivalric feasts or aristocratic weddings.²⁸

More recent studies focusing on manuscript evidence argued that there must have also been a clerical audience. A rather obvious conclusion, who else might have copied or owned a manuscript? But we should not dismiss it outright. Already Bedier noticed the frequent mentions of relics associated with monasteries along pilgrim routes. His thesis has been widely discredited as theory of origin, but as theory of diffusion it might have its merits. It does not seem unreasonable that these monasteries or the places of great battles, like Roncevaux, attracted a great number of visitors.²⁹ Furthermore the jongleurs themselves sometimes claim that they found the song in a monastery library. This is most likely a literary convention, therefore efforts by historians to find these books were naturally unsuccessful. It is interesting, however, that the singers wanted to place themselves in a learned-clerical tradition.³⁰

We know of various clerics who enjoyed the stories. The Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis reports that one winter a monk from Winchester brought a copy of the story of William to their monastery and showed it to their eager eyes. He might have preferred a “*reliable account, carefully written by pious scholars and reverently read aloud by learned readers for all monks to hear*” to a popular song performed by jongleurs.³¹ However, his *Ecclesiastical History* is full of references to the legends of Troy and Thebes, Roland and Charlemagne and his style is reminiscent of that of the epics and romances.³² The same is true for Ralph of Caen's *Gesta Tancredi*. In his account of a skirmish in Asia Minor he even compares the fighting Crusaders with Roland and Olivier.³³

28 See Duggan, “Social Functions,” 732 and 748. Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 31. Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?,” 56f.

29 Duggan, “Social Functions,” 756f.

30 Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 60.

31 *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Book 6, iii.6; trans., 219.

32 Marjorie Chibnall, ed., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 4: Books VII and VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), xxivf.

33 Bernard S. Bachrach and David Stewart Bachrach, eds., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen: A History of the Normans on the First Crusade* (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2005), 9-10. “You would say that Roland and Oliver had been reborn if you saw the raging of the counts, this one with a spear and that one with a sword.” (*The Gesta Tan-*

The prior Caesarius of Heisterbach tells us about an abbot Bevard who talked about King Arthur after he noticed that many of his cloister brothers were sleeping, some even snoring, during his speech: “*Listen, brothers, listen, I have new and glorious things to report to you. Once upon a time there was a king, his name was Arthur.' After these words he stopped and said: 'Brothers, behold this great misery. When I speak of God, you sleep. But as soon as I throw in frivolous words, you wake up and begin to pay attention with ears cocked.'*”³⁴

Preachers in thirteenth-century Paris customary refereed to the deeds of Charlemagne, Roland, and Oliver to excite their listeners. A sermon from 1272 compares the great blows of Roland, Olivier, Charlemagne and Ogier the Dane with the blow of St. Martin when he divided his cloak for a pauper.³⁵ When Pope Urban II. spoke at Clermont about the greatness of Charlemagne and Louis and the kings who destroyed the pagan kingdoms, he was not referring to the Charlemagne of the chronicles, but to that of the *chanson de geste*.³⁶

When the English theologian Thomas of Chobham talked about the profession of the jongleur, he singled out those that sing of the deeds of princes and the lives of saints.³⁷ Mentioning them in the same breath was not as uncharacteristic as one might think. According to Taylor, the *Song of Roland* was never far from clerical hands. It might have had the character of a saints life.³⁸ After Roland's death his soul is carried to paradise by the angel Cherubin, Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel.³⁹

Is it now time to abandon the picture of Gautier? Yes and no. With the evidence presented above, one can argue for all of the scenarios mentioned at the beginning. If we take a step back, we see that the songs were enjoyed by a wide range of people. Which is not surprising considering that people can enjoy the same things on different levels and for different reasons. However, when we look at the content of the songs a rather different picture presents itself: The *chansons* are a knights' world.

credi of Ralph of Caen: A History of the Normans on the First Crusade, eds. Bernard S. Bachrach and David Stewart Bachrach (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2005), Ch. 29; trans., 53).

34 Cited in Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 513.

35 Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?,” 51 and Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 71f.

36 *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade*, ed. Carol Sweetenham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), Ch. I; trans., 80, see also FN 6.

37 See chapter “The singer of tales“ below.

38 Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 59.

39 *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, vol. 2: Oxford text and English translation, ed. Gerard J. Brault (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State UnivPress, 1978), Ch. 176 (subsequently cited as *Roland*).

While common people and the clergy do inhabit the songs, they are mostly extras in the background. In some epics the common people make their presence felt in support of their lord against intruders.⁴⁰ But very seldom a single person emerges from this huge anonymous group, like the door guard in the *Couronnement*.⁴¹

When the clergymen are not mere secretaries to illiterate nobles, they are presented predominantly negatively.⁴² In the opening scene of *Garin le Lohrain* a part of the clergy does not want to fund equipment for the impoverished nobility, even though the country is threatened by Saracen invaders.⁴³ Or are accused of outright treason as the archbishop Henri, who is payed by Fromont to attest that Garin and his promised wife are related.⁴⁴ When they come into conflict, the knights use their superior strength to crush the clerics. In the already mentioned *Moniage Guillaume* a monk wants to stop William from going through the wine cellar, but William throws him so hard against a pillar that the poor guy needs crutches. In *Renaut de Montauban* the sack of an abbey and the slaughter of the monks seem to be justifiable, at least when they harbor traitors. The few favorable clerical characters behave like knights or lords.⁴⁵ They fulfill worldly functions or like Archbishop Tulpin are fighting like the paladins in Charlemagne's army. Roland says that Tulpin "*is a very good knight. There is no finer one on the face of the earth, he is formidable with lance and spear.*"⁴⁶

That is not to say that the knights of the *chansons de geste* are not pious. They swear on relics, pray, use religious language, found monasteries and go on crusades – actions that have parallels in the lives of real knights such as William Marshal. But it is their very own sense of piety. They absorb the ideas that are compatible with their way of life and sense of honor and play down or ignore those that are not.⁴⁷ If the clergy cooperates with the knightly class, they can be tolerated, even praised, but otherwise their advice carries very little weight.⁴⁸

40 William C. Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt: Raoul de Cambrai, Renaud de Montauban, Gormond et Isembard* (Genève: Droz, 1962), 119.

41 "Le Couronnement de Louis," in *Wilhelmsepen: Le Couronnement de Louis; Le Charroi de Nîmes; La Prise d'Orange*, eds. Michael Heintze and Bodo Hesse (München: W. Fink, 1993), Ch. XXXVI-XXXIX (subsequently cited as *Couronnement*).

42 Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 122.

43 *Garin Le Lohrain: According to Manuscript A (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 2983) with Text, Introduction and Linguistic Study*, ed. Josephine Elvira Vallerie (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Bros., 1947), 1-139 (subsequently cited as *Garin*). A French translation with some missing parts: *Garin le Lorrain: chanson de geste du XIIe siècle*, trans. Bernard Guidot (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1986).

44 *Garin*, 5856-5964.

45 Peter Noble, "Anti-Clericalism in the Feudal Epic," in *The Medieval Alexander Legend and Romance Epic: Essays in Honour of David John Athole Ross*, ed. Peter Noble (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1982), 153-156.

46 *Roland*, 1673-1675; trans., 105.

47 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 45-47.

48 Noble, "Anti-Clericalism," 152-156.

While Paula Leverage is indeed right to stress that one should not draw the line between aristocracy and clergy too sharply, it does not explain why the *chansons* almost exclusively feature aristocrats. While clerics like Orderic Vitalis were not principally opposed to violence, it seems rather strange that they would have appreciated songs that are so openly anticlerical or feature outright cruelty against the church as in *Raoul de Cambrai* or *Renaut de Montauban*.⁴⁹ The simple answer is that *chansons* like these probably did not have a lot of clerical hearers. Overly worldly clerics like Bishop Gaudry of Laon⁵⁰ would have identified with the aristocratic heroes or the battle-bishop Turpin. Scenes from the *Roland* could be used to spice up a sermon or read or even chanted in the dining hall of some monastery. Some *chansons* could be used to make the lives of the ordinary people more bearable, as suggested by Johannes de Grocheio, or as moral role models. At least some people drew parallels with the *chansons* and hagiography.⁵¹

But not all *chansons* make a good saint's life. This idea is the result of selective reading. Especially the *Chanson de Roland* was singled out for all sorts of reasons, but as Sarah Kay has shown, these early songs are not necessarily representative of the genre. This distorted picture is still haunting historiography today.⁵² When we stop looking at the epics as one group we might see a bit more clearly.

Starting at around 1180 medieval authors speak of three different epic cycles. In his *Girart de Vienne* Bertran de Bar-sur-Aube gives the most detailed description. He speaks of three great *gestes* (meaning both lineages and deeds): that of the kings of France, or the *Cycle du Roi*, centered around Charlemagne and his paladins; the *Cycle de Garin de Monglane*, about Guillaume/William d'Orange and his lineage and the *Cycle de Doon de Mayence*, focusing on vassals rebelling against the king. The later is commonly referred to as the cycle of revolt. This is not an unproblematic description, especially the third lineage is pure invention by Bertran, trying to construct a family of traitors going back to Ganelon, when in reality they have little in common. Modern scholarship nor-

49 Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 30f. Makes the same observation, but draws a different conclusion.

50 Guibert de Nogent reports that he was "more of a soldier than a clerk [...]. In word and manner he was remarkably unstable, remarkably lightweight. He took delight in talk about military affairs, dogs, and hawks, as he had learned to do among the English." (Cited in Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 58).

51 Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 45 and 61.

52 Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 1-15. Contrary to this see for example Keith Busby, who calls into question our whole understanding of the epics a secular genre: "[...] the question must be asked as to whether it was indeed regarded as secular at the time. Certainly, the position of Charlemagne as the Holy Roman Emperor and the general crusading spirit of the texts rendered them perfectly apposite to the holdings of a religious institution." (Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 751).

mally adds at least two cycles, the *Cycle de Lohrains*, focusing on Garin le Lohrain and his family and the *Cycle de la Croisade*.⁵³

In painstaking work Keith Busby collected the available evidence for manuscript ownership of vernacular literature. Building on his work, Paula Leverage suggested regionally and socially different tastes, even personal preferences for the *chansons de geste*.⁵⁴ She observed that: “monasteries and ecclesiastical figures tend to own texts associated with Roland and Charlemagne, and Aspremont, and Ami et Amile, which each feature several times in the records of ownership, the works which recur in aristocratic records are the Crusade cycle, the Lorraine cycle, the William cycle, Anseïs de Cartage, Aye d’Avignon, and Renaut de Montauban.”⁵⁵

While manuscript ownership in the thirteenth and fourteenth century can only give us limited information about the situation two centuries earlier, the patterns we witness here seem to align with the content of the *chansons*. Songs that are more in the spirit of holy war and hagiography found their way more often into clerical hands. While the cycle of revolt, the William and *Lohrain* cycle seem to be more in aristocratic ownership. It is not by chance that the most severe examples of anti-clericalism are also all found in these. Can we conclude that there were a lot of different listeners, but not all listened to the same songs?

Manuscript ownership only allows us for two categories – aristocratic and clerical – since they were the only ones that could afford them. But what about the common people? Of course them not featuring, does not mean that they could not identify with the songs and their upper class heroes. We have more than enough examples from our own time, from *Sex and the City* to the Kardashians. In fact we do know that all audiences had a deep emotional involvement with the matter.⁵⁶ But it indeed raises the question if some songs could be more “universally” acceptable. The *Roland* in particular enjoyed enormous popularity in different times and places, as is visible by multiple medieval

53 Duggan, “Social Functions,” 741-745. To get a different sense of their content, Alfred Adler described these sub-genres with the relationship of the aristocracy to the king. In the *Cycle du Roi* the king is trustworthy, in the William cycle he is weak, but there is a good vassal to protect him, and in the cycle of revolt they have a rather difficult relationship (Alfred Adler, *Rückzug in epischer Parade: Studien zu Les quatre fils Aymon, La chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche, Garin le Loherenc, Raoul de Cambrai Aliscans, Huon de Bordeaux* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1963), 25f.).

54 Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 95f. and 101. Her argument for regionally different tastes is rather thin, her only basis is that 1/3 of the *Lohrain* Cycle manuscripts originate in Lorraine.

55 Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 85. Busby has also shown that a significant amount of epic manuscripts were owned by women. How this might change our perception of the genre is to my knowledge still undebated.

56 Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 101. See for example this description of the listeners' reaction by a contemporary witnessing a performance on the Petit Pont in Paris: “The voice of the minstrel sitting on the Petit Pont tells how the mighty soldiers of long ago, such as Roland, Oliver and the rest, were slain in battle, then the people standing around them are moved to pity and periodically burst into tears. (Cited in Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 22f.).

adaptations reaching from Spain to Wales, but also by its long and fascinating history after the Middle Ages. It was used by late nineteenth-century bandit groups in northern Brazil, by participants of the Mexican peasant revolt of 1926-29 and by the *mafiosi* of Palermo.⁵⁷ Had war against Saracens or Roland's heroic resistance against an overwhelming enemy a broader appeal than stories of aristocratic feuds?

The singer of tales

Over the last pages we stumbled a few times over the jongleur, the minstrel, the poet or the singer of tales, whatever you want to call it. But who is he (or she; while few, there were some female jongleurs)? Our understanding is still heavily influenced by Edmond Faral's *Les jongleurs en France au Moyen Âge* published in 1910. He distinguished between jongleurs, who were wandering poets, much like the ones described by Gautier and minstrels who were professional poets under courtly patronage. His criteria for which song was composed by whom is rather arbitrary, based on style and the anonymity of the authors.⁵⁸ But just as Faral's categorization, the contemporary terminology was varied and imprecise. How strict the distinction between a *jongleur* and a *menestrel* was, remains unclear.⁵⁹ Theologians grouped them together with actors, mimes, buffons, as well as acrobats, dancers, jugglers, and animal trainers. Because of the use of their bodies, some associated them with shady professions such as prostitutes, gamblers and magicians.⁶⁰ Their unstable and wandering lifestyle did not fit the clerical idea of stability and therefore put them outside of society. It was not just their way of life that opposed the clergy, they also rivaled the preachers for popular crowds and at the courts. In *Elucidarium* the theologian Honorius of Autun lets a disciple ask his teacher if *joculatores* have any hope of salvation, the answer is a simple none.⁶¹

This hostility, however, was not shared by the aristocracy, some knights even composed songs themselves. Philippe de Novare, according to his memoirs, wrote poetry when he was a young man.⁶² Lambert of Ardres boasted that Baldwin owned such a library that he rivaled “the most

⁵⁷ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 105-108.

⁵⁸ Leverage, *Reception and Memory*, 50f.

⁵⁹ Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 13.

⁶⁰ John W. Baldwin, “The Image of the Jongleur in Northern France Around 1200,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 639.

⁶¹ Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, “Clerics et Jongleurs Dans La Société Médiévale (XIIe et XIIIe Siècles),” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 34 (1979): 913-16.

⁶² Elspeth Kennedy, “The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance,” in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honor of Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. James Patrick Carley and Martin Shichtman (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994), 78.

renowned troubadours in epic songs, whether the deeds of the nobles or even the fables of the common folk.”⁶³ If we go back to Gautier the jongleurs are of almost religious importance for the transmission of chivalric tradition and values. Jacques Le Goff, somewhat sceptically, also noticed this tight connection to the knightly class.⁶⁴ But is that a realistic depiction? Jongleur certainly did not equal jongleur. In an effort to rehabilitate the profession Thomas of Chobham made the following distinction:

“Some go to public drinking places and wanton gatherings so that they may sing wanton songs there to move people to lustfulness, and these are damnable just like the rest.” But others that “sing the deeds of princes and the lives of saints and give people comfort either when they are ill or when they are troubled [...] may be tolerated.”⁶⁵

The profession of the jongleur might have very well been as heterogeneous as their audience. There were those that rolled their eyes, denuded themselves and made all sorts of shameful gestures. Others sang about the deeds of the past and afterward passed their hats around to buy a drink in the local bar. Again others entertained at aristocratic festivities and in turn were generously rewarded. Mixed in there were the paupers that sang in the hope of some coins. The better established ones for sure looked with suspicion at the others. Poets like Walther von der Vogelweide can hardly be compared to beggars singing on the streetcorner.⁶⁶ What, however, united them was their dependence on their audience's generosity. Which in turn meant that he had to give them what they wanted.

To do that a jongleur needed a large repertoire of songs;⁶⁷ but also had to change his songs according to the taste of his audience. We can see examples of that in modern day oral poetry. Albert Lord described a bard changing his stories depending on the company he was in. When he was with Turks he changed his songs so that the Muslims won the battles.⁶⁸ On the basis of the trash talk we sometimes find in the prologues of *chansons*, we can speculate how this might have looked like in

63 “Lamberti Ardensis historia comitum Ghisnensium”, ed. Johannes Heller in *MGH Scriptores* 24 (Hannover 1879), Ch. 81. For the English translation see *Lambert of Ardres, The History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres*, trans. Leah Shopkow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 114.

64 Jacques Le Goff, *Ritter, Einhorn, Troubadoure: Helden und Wunder des Mittelalters (Héros et merveilles du Moyen Âge)* (München: Beck, 2005), 123.

65 Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 23.

66 Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 18.

67 The German *Spruch* poet *Der Marner* tells us about the difficulties that came with that:

“When I perform my songs for the listeners, the first one wants to hear how Dietrich von Bern left the land, the second where King Rother was at home; the third wants to hear of the war against the Riuzen; the fourth of Ekehard's distress; the fifth of Kriemhild's betrayal; the sixth takes more pleasure in hearing what became of the Wilzen; the seventh wants to hear of the battle against Heime or Lord Wittich, of the death of Siegfried or Lord Ecke; the eighth, on the other hand, wants only courtly minnesong; the ninth finds all this too boring; the tenth can't decide, he wants this and that, now here, now there. Moreover, some would like to hear of the treasure of the Nibelungen: it doesn't weigh much, believe me. Such a one thinks only of gold.” (Cited in Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 439f.).

68 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 19.

the Middle Ages. Oftentimes the introductions are nothing more than a “would you like to hear the story of soandso”, sometimes, however, they are longer and tell us about the singer's opinion of his fellow poets: They are always bad, they forget important parts of a story, or tell it wrong. In *Anse'is de Cartage* the jongleur says that they “pay more attention to lechery, chatter, and frivolity.”⁶⁹ This is meant as an insult, but chatter and frivolities might have been exactly what the audience wanted. What we know for sure is that people liked fighting scenes. The author of *Perceforest* tells us that he expanded the battle scenes to make it more enjoyable to hear.⁷⁰

Composing a *chanson de geste* for different audiences might not have been unlike preparing a sermon for the educated and the uneducated. Guibert of Nogent gives some good advice in how to do that. He says that one should adapt to the capacity of one's audience. When addressing the *illiterati* you need to be simple and plain and use paraphrases to make a difficult message understandable. More sophisticated people might enjoy insights from the Gospels and the Old Testament. To appeal to simpler crowds one should tell stories from the past.⁷¹

To make their living some jongleurs would praise lords at market squares and street corners, as the ones commissioned by William Longchamp.⁷² Others would introduce the names of generous barons and ladies into their stories,⁷³ or, as in the case of Arnold of Guines, would omit the names of less open-handed ones. Lambert of Ardres tells the story of a jongleur, who would not sing about the deeds of his lord in the Holy Land, because he had refused to give him two scarlet stockings. “So he made no mention of Arnold in his song; in this song he mixed false things with true ones, but nevertheless left many deeds of many praiseworthy men untouched under a blanket of silence.”⁷⁴ Whether this particular story is true or not, matters little. (Although Arnold of Guines appears nowhere in the Crusade cycle.) It must, however, have seemed possible that a jongleur changed a song in this way.⁷⁵ In any case, it was nothing to be treated lightly. Roland urges his men to “em-

69 Cited in Joseph J. Duggan, “Oral Performance, Writing, and the Textual Tradition of the Medieval Epic in the Romance Languages: The Example of the Song of Roland,” *Parergon* 2 (1984): 86.

70 Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 89.

71 Wanda Zemler-Cizewski, “Guibert of Nogent's How to Preach a Sermon,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 414.

72 Duggan, “Social Functions,” 751.

73 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 516.

74 *Lambert of Ardres, History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 130; trans., 165.

75 Joseph J. Duggan, “Medieval Epic and History in the Romance Literatures,” in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt Raaflaub (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 285.

ploy great blows, so that a bad song not be sung about us!”⁷⁶ The same is true for Bernier in *Raoul de Cambrai*, who fears that a bad song might be made about them by a jongleur.⁷⁷

A jongleur at a noble court probably did not have to live from day to day, but still depended on the lord’s goodwill, even though it was expected from a great lord to spend lavishly.⁷⁸ A good jongleur at an aristocratic court or household needed to know what to say and when. This was no easy task and required a deep knowledge of the nobility and their world. When we look at things like gestures or emotions for example, it must have been well understood by all parties – singer and audience – when it was appropriate to display them.⁷⁹ This also helps us with our previous question. What is the point of such scenes when the *chansons* were not, at least originally, meant for a knightly audience?

Oral versus written

A central problem to the study of the *chanson de geste* is that we are dealing with texts that were presumably sung, but that came to us as manuscripts. When we work with them, we hold a book in our hands, but we listen to a lost song. This gap has huge implications on how to look at them.

The strongest argument for their oral nature is their form and style. Jean Rychner’s work helped us a great deal in understanding how they functioned. The epic *laisse* gives the text a flexible structure well equipped for oral performance and diffusion. The author could lengthen or shorten particular scenes according to his or his audience’s liking. With the use of “linking”, “parallel” and “similar” *laisse* he could pause the narrative and highlight specific passages.⁸⁰ A number of stereotyped formulae – rhetorical motifs like the knighting, the single combat with a lance or the message to an ambassador – allow him to think ahead, so that he will not lose himself trying to remember specific expressions.⁸¹ With the skillful employment of these techniques the jongleur could distinguish him-

76 “*Or guarit chascuns que granz colps i empleit/ Que malvaise cançon de nus chantét ne seit!*” (*Roland*, 1013f.; trans., 65).

77 “*Povre chançon en fust par gogleour!*” (*Raoul*, 3963).

78 We know of very little commissioned epic literature. (Diana B. Tyson, “Patronage of French Vernacular History Writers in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *Romania* 100 (1979): 184). However, when we look across the Rhine it does not seem implausible (Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 458 and 485).

79 Stephen D. White, “The Politics of Anger,” in *Angers Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion*, ed. Barbara Rosenwein (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 137-139.

80 Jones, *Introduction*, 15.

81 Dominique Boutet, “The Chanson de Geste and Orality,” in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 358 and Rychner, *La chanson de geste*, 128-130.

self from other poets and push certain elements to the foreground.⁸² Scholars came to consider this “formulaic style” as the defining characteristic of all oral poetry. So for example Joseph Duggan, who argued that every text that contains a certain density of formulae is a product of oral tradition.⁸³ With the application on different areas, however, people came to realize that it is not that easy. The formulae do not characterize the whole of oral poetry and texts that were certainly meant for silent reading, show the same characteristics.⁸⁴

Scenes in which the narrator addresses his audience have been read as taken down from a live performance. But why treat a jongleur telling his audience to come closer or to be silent any differently from the rest of the fictitious text? While it is not impossible, there is little evidence of this kind of medieval ethnographic reporting.⁸⁵ Joyce Coleman has shown in her work on the Late Middle Ages that these interruptions are part of the rhetoric of reading out loud.⁸⁶ When we look across the Rhine we see it being used as literary tool. The late twelfth-century poet Wolfram von Eschenbach uses his fictitious narrator to mediate between performance, reading and listening, creating different perspectives on the plot and manipulating the audiences' identification and sympathy with characters and events.⁸⁷

While the mode of production and transmission was not necessarily or exclusively oral, the mode of performance for sure was. Every medieval literary text was intended to be performed in front of a live audience. Still for Geoffrey Chaucer's contemporaries it seemed weird that he would read a book in silence.⁸⁸ Even if they were written down in a manuscript, the texts were created with the event of the performance and the human voice in mind.⁸⁹ In this sense Paul Zumthor is right to stress that “*the question of "orality" in the chansons de geste or in any other poetic genre can therefore be raised only in terms of performance, not of origin.*”⁹⁰ So when we look at the different performance situations, we inevitably come back to what we have discussed in previous chapters: The *chansons de geste* had multiple, socially diverse audiences and the jongleurs needed to adapt to

82 Paul Zumthor, “The Text and the Voice,” *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 79.

83 Joseph J. Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

84 Zumthor, “The Text and the Voice,” 82.

85 Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?,” 61.

86 Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

87 Kathryn Starkey, *Reading the Medieval Book: Word, Image and Performance in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Willehalm* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 70f.

88 Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 20.

89 Boutet, “The Chanson de Geste and Orality,” 363.

90 Zumthor, “The Text and the Voice,” 67.

their respective tastes. For the rest of this thesis we will take a position that is leaning towards the oral nature of the *chansons*.

One can only speculate what happened, when a text was written down on parchment, but the changes must have been substantial.⁹¹ Already the manuscripts differ substantially. According to Joseph Duggan, none of the over 300 manuscripts can be shown to have been copied from one another. It is more likely that “*when a tradition seems to be relatively consistent, the explanation for that uniformity appears to be that we lack manuscripts in sufficient numbers to show the true variety of versions as they circulated in the Middle Ages.*”⁹² This is backed by the study of foreign adaptations and contemporary references to songs that all seem to be based on different versions than those we possess.⁹³

Without the stability of the text, the gap between sung song and surviving manuscript becomes even bigger. And with that the notion of a single song gets rather obsolete. To the question if there was a song of Roland, Taylor answers: “*There were songs of Roland, certainly: cantilenas, chansons de gestes, gestes: short songs whose broader context existed in the minds of the people. There was a tradition of Roland, transmitted in a stream of tellings and retellings that was as broad as chivalric culture, and the short fragments were given meaning by this broader tradition. There is a poem of Roland, a major epic that incorporates the formulae of the oral performer into the fixity of the literary form and whose formal unity and cultural authority are both dependent on the authority of the book.*”⁹⁴

To modify our previous conclusion, not only did different social groups have different preferences, there were numerous versions of each song, oral and written, circulating side by side. The version we have today is only one of many possible ones. If there was a great number of different versions of a song, there must have been some kind of general understanding of the plot.⁹⁵ Even if the mode of production and transmission was not entirely oral, the mode of performance for sure was. Therefore it was always a social event and should be seen as one.

91 Eugene Vance puts it rather melodramatic: “*the violence of such a transition [from oral to written culture] was in some ways more profound than the violence of the sword*” (Eugene Vance, “Roland, Charlemagne, and the Poetics of Illumination,” *Olifant* 6 (1979): 223). More on that in the discussion of modern oral poetry in chapter “The idea of a story”.

92 Joseph J. Duggan, “The Manuscript Corpus of the Medieval Romance Epic,” in *The Medieval Alexander Legend and Romance Epic. Essays in Honour of David J. A. Ross*, ed. Peter Noble (Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1982), 31.

93 Duggan, “Manuscript Corpus,” 31. Contrary to this i.a. Madeleine Tyssens, who argued that the different redaction are a product of the collection into epic cycles.

94 Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?,” 64f. and Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 71.

95 Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?,” 64.

When we look at the aristocratic setting – which will concern us the most in the following chapters – three scenarios seem to be the most likely: the performance at a noble household, at aristocratic feasts and festivities and private readings. The most common image is that by Gautier: a group of people gathered around the fireplace in a castle's great hall, listening to the singer's tales. This, however, is rarely documented.⁹⁶ Far more often we find jongleurs at weddings and knightings and not alone, but in the dozens if not hundreds. Taylor argued that on these occasions there was hardly enough time or attention for a single singer to perform a whole *chanson* or even the 1000-2000 lines that are usually assumed for one sitting. While he admits the possibility that on humbler occasions there might have been more time, he sees it as rather exceptional.⁹⁷ He for sure is right that at feasts there were – again – different versions of the songs recited, maybe just key scenes. However, his argument *ex silentio* is wrong. Of course it is the feasts that we know most about, those were the events a chronicler would describe in detail. Why would anyone bother to write about the regular evening entertainment? From modern examples of oral poetry we also know that a performance is seldom undisturbed, people constantly come and go, a newcomer arriving with important news might interrupt or even stop the whole performance. A good jongleur will cope with these circumstances and will keep his audience attentive.⁹⁸

However, time might indeed have been an issue. Parry found a bard in southern Serbia who performed a song of 12.000 lines for him. He sang two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. To perform the whole song it took him two weeks with a week of rest to recover his voice.⁹⁹ Hearing *chansons* the length of *Aspremont* with almost 12.000 lines or *Garin le Lohrain* with over 18.000 must have taken weeks if not months. Among those that could have heard them in their entirety were *juvenes* and lower aristocrats that spend their time at a noble household. As we will see, songs like the *Charroi de Nime*, *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* were addressed particularly at this audience and therefore reflected their hopes and fears.

96 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 520.

97 Taylor, "Was There a Song of Roland?," 56-59 und 65.

98 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 14-17.

99 Cecil Maurice Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 351.

Part II

Now that we have looked at the *chansons de geste* in general, we need to ask how to use them for historical research and what they can tell us about the reality of the twelfth century. This question has baffled historians for decades. I propose to look at them as what they were to the people of the High Middle Ages: stories of their own past. This is not a new position, but few historians have considered the implications. To understand memory better, we will look at Robert Bartlett's experiments about memory, at collective memories and the memory of the jongleur. Groups construct their own visions of the past. How and why something is remembered can tell us little about the actual events, but a lot about the people who believed in these stories and their identity. Things that are not important or do not make sense in the present are changed or forgotten, while other elements are highlighted or introduced. When working with social memory it is important to realize that groups remember in specific forms that have their own rules. Only when we understand these, can we unearth the social meaning of an image of the past.

The memory of the jongleur is a very particular one, combining characteristics of individual and collective memory with oddities of its own. Songs are not recited word for word, instead they are improvised on the spot. To do that the jongleur uses specific building blocks that cling together in particular ways, heavily influenced by tradition. Because of the close connection of singer and audience and the fact that each song must have been told and retold numerous times in order to get popular, the *chansons* contain a particularity social image of the past that can get us close to important issues of the aristocracy.

Mirror metaphors

Undoubtedly there are fundamental problems with using literature for historical research. It is only too easy to get lost in the logic of the story and confuse reality with the imaginary, fact with fiction.¹⁰⁰ But that should not stop us from using them, for it is obvious that the *chansons de geste* were more than “just” entertainment. And it is precisely because they are imaginary that they can give us a privileged view on some of the core issues of the twelfth century.

Knights took the literary examples seriously and we can see how the songs influenced how people thought and in turn how they acted. The descriptions of tournaments in courtly romances and the life of William Marshall show the interplay between them. In *Les quatre âges de l'homme*, a treatise on correct behavior in the different stage of one's life, Philippe de Novare says that the sons of great lords should be taught these stories and books because they contain great advice.¹⁰¹ In his *Memoirs* Philippe uses an illusion to William d'Orange and King Louis to strengthen a request for help from the king of Cyprus. This is of course only possible if knights were deeply involved with romances and *chansons*.¹⁰²

On the other hand it would be foolish to see them as simple mirrors to the world of the twelfth century (and even more so for the eighth century). Historians seem to love these kind of allegories and over the last 100 years or so they came up with all sorts of mirror metaphors to describe the relationship of the *chansons de geste* to social reality. Most of the time these are not really helpful and more importantly, they conceal the complexity of the picture.

The ambiguous relationship of the nobility with kingship has attracted most attention from historians and is in the center of explanations of the social functions of the *chansons de geste*. Only with the growing influence of anthropological scholarship on historical research, innerclass tensions

100 Jacques Le Goff, *Phantasie und Realität des Mittelalters (L'imaginaire médiéval)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 256.

101 “eux faire apanre les estoires et les livres des autors ou il a mout de biaux diz, et de bons consaus” (Cited in Kennedy, “The Knight as Reader,” 73.

102 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 32f. Kennedy, “The Knight as Reader,” 71-76. We find two similar request for royal intervention against foreign invaders in *Garin le Lohrain*.

were considered more willingly. Worth emphasizing here is George Duby's pioneer work on the *juvenes*, about which we will talk about in a separate section.¹⁰³

While the question of origin was a predominantly French and to a lesser degree Spanish phenomenon, much of the sophisticated input after the war on how to work with the *chansons* came from the German-speaking world. Historians soon observed the particular socialness of the epics of revolt. While earlier works saw them as direct representations of the anarchy of the Dark Ages, the generation working after the war recognized them as answering to contemporary issues.¹⁰⁴ Important works came from Erich Köhler and William Calin, who interpreted the epics of revolt as a reaction to the revival of monarchic power. The image presented in them is an aristocratic *Wunschbild* in a time of increased pressure by the French monarchy. The songs show a world where the king is still weak and the nobility powerful. Calin argued that the *chansons* were positive answers to a danger keenly felt by the aristocracy. The inability of the epics to solve the contradiction between reality and ideal, so Köhler, led to their eventual replacement by the courtly romances, where the actions are transferred to the imaginary world of King Arthur.¹⁰⁵

Karl-Heinz Bender trying to construct a chronology of the image of kingship in the twelfth century, saw an inverted relationship of monarchial power in reality and the moral standing of the king in the songs.¹⁰⁶ Contrarily Alfred Adler viewed the songs as synchronous and complementing each others. The poets set out a variety of extreme examples of social conduct and imagined what could happen if one would think them all the way through. The *chansons* offer solutions, but also prove the impossibility of these extreme situations. Here too the world that is imagined is one where the vassal is still strong.¹⁰⁷

Under the influence of Jack Goody and other anthropologists Howard Bloch argued that the *chansons de geste* are not about the struggle against kingship per se, but about the price it costs. The epics of revolt in particular point to a crisis of institutionalized violence, to a failure of war that calls

103 Georges Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society. Northwestern France in the Twelfth Century," in *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 112–22. See chapter "Looking for a fief and consideration" below.

104 Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 113 and 124.

105 Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 127–139. Erich Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik: Studien zur Form der frühen Artus- und Graldichtung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 6–17. See also Erich Köhler, "Quelques observations d'ordre historico-sociologique sur les rapports entre la chanson de geste et le roman courtois," in *Chanson de geste und höfischer Roman: Heidelberger Kolloquium, 30. Januar 1961* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1963). Another influential voice came from Pauline Matarasso working on *Raoul de Cambrai*, also arguing that the epics of revolt were a reaction to the centralization efforts of Philip Augustus. (Pauline Maud Matarasso, *Recherches historiques et littéraires sur "Raoul de Cambrai"* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1962), 151–158).

106 Karl-Heinz Bender, *König und Vasall: Untersuchungen zur Chanson de geste des XII. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1967).

107 Adler, *Rückzug in epischer Parade* and Alfred, *Epische Spekulant*.

into question the very purpose of the warrior society. The *chansons* present a ritual reenactment of group values and norms, but unlike Bloch's anthropological models they acted not as a conservative force but as agents of change. The songs are not a desperate attempt to resist the inevitable, but a way for a class in transition to accommodate to changing political realities.¹⁰⁸

Sarah Kay's answer to Bloch was that the songs are just as much in occlusion as in conformity with historical reality. In her interesting approach to genre, she disputed the notion that courtly romances replaced the epics, which Köhler and many others beforehand had argued. They should instead be seen as complementary, portraying different versions of reality, bound by different social, political and narrative assumptions. Romance and *chanson de geste*, she argued, are essentially two different political worlds. The most obvious example is love and sex which play a huge role in the romances, but basically none in the epics. She admitted that both genres might respond to social and political changes in the twelfth century, but each only describe a small, very selective portion of the complex and contradictory social experience of the High Middle Ages.¹⁰⁹

The most recent discussion on the cycle of revolt has come from Luke Sunderland. He also focuses on the king-vassal relationship and sees the epics as rival narrative to medieval political theory, which had no place for resistance to royal power. The *chansons* are a way to determine a legitimate rebellion. Aristocratic violence is seen as corrective force to wrongful behavior of the king.¹¹⁰

An alternative to a history of *mentalités* is Stephen White's more praxeological approach to *Raoul de Cambrai*, drawing on Ian Miller's work on the Icelandic Sagas. While characters, dialogues and events might be invented, the framework these characters live and act in is the author's own world. So what we see in the songs is not an evil king disinheriting a loyal vassal, but simply the political strategies and negotiations of the time. The song points to different, often contradictory models of the fief and of proper aristocratic behavior, which provided lords and vassals alike with flexibility in their strategies.¹¹¹

The most recent English-language synthesis on chivalry by Richard Kaeuper brings together the arguments of Kay and White. Kaeuper emphasized the songs' importance in laying out chivalrous values and behaviors and stressed their role in shaping them. They served as a form of debate in

108 R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 7-10, 103-106 and 257f. and R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 13-16.

109 Kay, *Chansons de Geste*.

110 Luke Sunderland, *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

111 Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*. Stephen D. White, "The Discourse of Inheritance in Twelfth-Century France: Alternative Models of the Fief in 'Raoul de Cambrai,'" in *Re-Thinking Kinship and Feudalism in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2005), 173-97.

knightly households on important issues. They point to problems and express hopes and fears. Songs often offer choices to dilemmas or paradoxes and encourage discussions on the proper behavior.¹¹²

Social memory

In a little noticed article George Duby suggested that historians interested in memory should carefully reread the epics.¹¹³ Besides some general observation, this was to my knowledge not done before. Seeing the *chansons* as histories might discomfort some scholars as it is clear to us that they are works of fiction. But, considering the insights of the linguistic turn and how much historical writing has in common with literature, it should not.

Our strict distinction between the two would have seemed novel to most people in the Middle Ages. Early medieval historiographers learned from the writers of antiquity that they ought to produce works of art. And just as the classical authors before them, they happily took liberties to fit the facts to a higher truth.¹¹⁴ Besides, there was no theoretical ground to banish legends, miracles, or other fictions from their histories. Leaving things out would have been distorting the truth.¹¹⁵ Alfonso el Sabio, historian and since 1252 king of Castille, incorporated fourteen epics into his *Primera Cronica*. When more authoritative material was available and contradicted the epics, he did not hesitate in discrediting them. However, this did not prevent him from telling the story of *Mainet*, a completely fictional account of Charlemagne's youth in Moorish Spain, in the very next section of his chronicle.¹¹⁶

This was even more true for the epic poet and his audience. Jean Bodel divided the Old French literary genres into three groups. He called the *Matière de Bretagne* (the stories of King Arthur) "*frivolous and amusing*", the *Matière de Rome* "*a source of wisdom*" and the *Matière de France* (the *chansons de geste*) true as the day is long - "*sont voir chascun jour aparant*".¹¹⁷ We already men-

112 Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 92-94 and 107-109.

113 Georges Duby, "Memories with No Historian," *Yale French Studies*, no. 59 (1980): 7-16.

114 R. W. Southern, "Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing 1. The Classical Tradition from Einhard to Geoffrey of Monmouth," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 20 (1970): 178. With Donald Trump we are seeing a return to these tactics.

115 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative," *History and Theory* 22 (1983): 45f.

116 Suzanne Fleischman, "On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages," *History and Theory* 22 (1983): 299f.

117 Fleischman, "Representation," 299.

tioned the introduction of epic heroes into clerical writings. A case in point is the speech of Urban II at Clermont that clearly points to the Charlemagne of the epics. The most striking examples, however, are multiple forged diplomas from the eleventh to the thirteenth century that mention Turpin, Roland and Olivier as witnesses.¹¹⁸ Why would the people manipulating these documents bother introducing the epic heroes if they did not believe in their authenticity? That is not to say that they believed in the epics as much as in the warmth of the sun – even though Bodel's use of words might suggest otherwise. Different forms of belief might coexist.¹¹⁹ Suzanne Fleischman argued that the distinction between historical deeds, legendary elaborations and pure invention “*was at best blurry and probably nonexistent.*”¹²⁰ History was what was willingly and collectively believed. And for all but a few people the epic legends were their only source of historical narrative.

In the castle of Ardres the stories of the lord's lineage were told alongside the deeds of the Roman emperors, the heroes of the *chanson de geste* including Charlemagne and the adventures of King Arthur, Merlin, Tristan and Isolde as well as the Crusades.¹²¹ This is probably the best description of the historical understanding of the people (except maybe the court cleric) in an aristocratic household.

This brings us to the question of how people remember. In the following sections we will look at different forms of memory – individual, social and the memory of the jongleur. Memory is always ambiguous. Everyone has recollections of their childhood of which they are not sure if they are real or just imagined. Not to speak of experiments where participants came to remember totally made up stories from their past, after being told them the day before. In his classical study *Remembering* Frederic Bartlett undertook a series of experiments whose conclusions are still widely accepted in the field of cognitive psychology.¹²² He let participants read the native Canadian folklore *War of the Ghosts*, a story from a different cultural background and with some incidents that have no apparent interconnection. After different intervals he let them retell the story. While the general outline and central incidents were remembered remarkably consistently, he found a strong tendency to rationalize the story. The subjects supplied missing explanations or links; apparent incoherences or unim-

118 Joseph J. Duggan, “Medieval Epic as Popular Historiography: Appropriation of the Historical Knowledge in the Vernacular Epic,” in *Grundriß der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, vol. 11 *La littérature historiographique des origines à 1500* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1987), 305.

119 Amy Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1-3.

120 Fleischman, “Representation,” 303.

121 *Lambert of Ardres, History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 96.

122 See Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook* (London: Psychology Press, 2015), 209-451.

portant details were omitted, rearranged or transformed. Unfamiliar names, events or phrases were changed to fit the characteristics of their own culture. So a canoe in the story became a boat.¹²³

For a second experiment he let A's reproduction of the *War of the Ghosts* be reproduced by B, whose version was then reproduced by C, and so on. Simulating what happens when a story circulates within a group. After only ten times the changes were already quite considerable. The results were similar to those of the first experiment: The story was shorter and much more coherent, here too a rationalization had taken place. However, once the story reached a point where it could be readily dealt with by all members of the group, it stayed relatively stable.¹²⁴

In another of Bartlett's experiments, he gave his participants the story of "*The son who tried to outwit his father*". In this tale the son proposes to hide from his father, in – as the title suggests – an effort to outwit him. In the course of multiple reproductions the part about the outwitting disappeared. For subsequent readers it did not make sense why the boy would hide in the first place and so they introduced a part where the boy had done something bad and therefore hid from his punishment.¹²⁵ This is already a prime lesson in social memory. That the boy did something bad, is not the only reason why he would possibly want to hide from his father. But that this particular one was chosen, can already tell us a lot about early twentieth-century British education and punishment. When we apply the same logic to the *Song of Roland* and ask the naive question of why the Frankish rear-guard was attacked, the answer is treason. It is not the only possible answer, but it made most sense to people in the High Middle Ages.

The biggest flaw for us historians is of course that Bartlett could not measure what happens to a story when told over several generations. The point we can take away, however, is that things are only remembered if they make sense to people, otherwise they are changed or forgotten.¹²⁶

In the *chansons de geste* we are hardly looking at the memory of a single person, but the memory of a whole group, a collective or social memory. The concept of a collective in contrast to an individual memory was first introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925, but only since the 80s it has seen

123 Frederic Charles Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 64-94.

124 Bartlett, *Remembering*, 119-146.

125 Bartlett, *Remembering*, 123f.

126 For the use of Bartlett's experiments for historical research see Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19f. and Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 35.

more usage.¹²⁷ Most grand narratives of social memory deal with the creation of the nation state.¹²⁸ Some historians have argued for key transformations in people's relationship to the past accompanying the industrialization¹²⁹ and again others have described a fundamental shift when societies transition from orality to literacy.¹³⁰ Only with some delay has medieval memory received more attention.¹³¹ Worth mentioning in particular is the excellent *Social Memory* by anthropologist James Fentress and medievalist Chris Wickham, whose ideas underpin a lot of the following discussion.¹³²

Social groups construct their own versions of the past. These are immensely important for the identity of these groups and a point of reference for reflection and aspiration for the future. When we look at how these social memories come into being, we are rarely dealing with the transmission of real events, but with ideas, images and certain phrases that are, for some reason or another, important to a group. In a similar fashion the transmission is accompanied by a process of conceptualization. Things that do not seem meaningful are suppressed or substituted. So it is only natural that in the times of the Crusades, Roland fights Saracens hordes and not Christian Basques. This process happens virtually unnoticed by the participants.¹³³

127 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1925). See also Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For an excellent state of the art see Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40. Recent studies have rightly underlined the overlaps between social and individual memory (Elma Brenner, Meredith Cohen, and Mary Franklin-Brown, eds., *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 5).

128 Classical studies include Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

129 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992). Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974). Eric Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past. Some Questions," *Past & Present* 55 (1972): 3–17.

130 Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (1963): 304–45 and Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For the Middle Ages see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the 11th and 12th Centuries*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1983).

131 See Mary Carruthers on the *ars memoria* (Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Amy Remensnyder on monastic foundation legends (Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*), Patrick Geary on remembering and forgetting in the 11th century (Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*), Elisabeth Van Houts for a gendered view on medieval memory (Elisabeth Van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) and Rosamond McKitterick on memory in the Carolingian world (Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

132 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*.

133 Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 38. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 25f. and 58f.

We should not try to excavate the remnants of historical events in the *chansons de geste*, for even if we find genuine pieces, we have no way of separating them from the elements of pure imagination.¹³⁴ Instead we should look at what was remembered and ask what this can tell us about the people that remembered it. Images of the past are complex, often contradictory and only seldom can we trace exactly how social memories came into being. Figuring out why something was remembered in a certain way, might often result in many different answers, as the following example will show.

The Saracen plundering of the outskirts of Rome in 846 features in some way or another in at least half a dozen *chansons*, so it clearly left a strong impression on social memory of the twelfth century. Papal sources and modern historiography speak of a small to medium size attack that did not manage to penetrate the Roman walls.¹³⁵ In the *chansons*, however, it is presented as a serious threat. Regardless if one looks at the heroic account of the *Couronnement de Louis* or the grim depiction of the *Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*, the image of a large hostile sieging force stays the same. In the latter the pope is even murdered and the Eternal City burned to the ground. The brutal and therefore seemingly realistic account of the *Destruction de Rome* has made historians until quite recently try to use it as sources for historical events.¹³⁶

Why did people in the High Middle Ages remember the events of 846 in this particular way? The easiest answer is that it was perceived as a bigger threat than the *Liber Pontificalis* wants us to believe. If that is the case, why did people not commemorate the sieges of Salerno and Coscenza in 871 and 902. Both times much larger Saracen forces landed on the Italian peninsula and contrary to the raid a few years earlier, they came with the aspiration to conquer.¹³⁷ While this is curious, it does not help us much in understanding its meaning for the group. There are numerous examples of peo-

134 A similar argument for the early Arab conquest was presented by Patricia Crone (Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3-12). It might be a fruitful to look at the stories of the early Islamic conquest the same we look at the *chansons de geste*. See Thomas Sizgorich, "Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity," *Past & Present* 185 (2004): 9-42.

135 Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 18. Tommi P. Lankila, "The Saracen Raid of Rome in 846: An Example of Maritime Ghazw," *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 114 (2013): 93-120. Lankila suggests that the Saracens were only after plunder and did not even have the means to overcome the Roman walls. While the *Liber Pontificalis* speaks of a force of 11000 men and 500 horses, the number of casualties (one day twelve, another seven) suggest a smaller force. (*Liber Pontificalis: The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes: the Ancient Biographies of Ten Popes from AD 817-891*, ed. Raymond Davis (Liverpool: Univ. Pr., 1995), 94f.).

136 Klaus Herbers suggested that the *Destruction de Rome* could be used to reconstruct parts of the events of 846. (Klaus Herbers, *Leo IV. und das Papsttum in der Mitte des 9. Jahrhunderts: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen päpstlicher Herrschaft in der späten Karolingerzeit* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1996), 109-111).

137 For Saracen attacks in southern Italy see Kordula Wolf, "Auf dem Pfad Allahs. Ġihād und muslimische Migrationen auf dem süditalienischen Festland (9.-11. Jahrhundert)," in *Transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Jahrtausend. Europa, Ostasien, Afrika*, ed. Michael Borgolte and Matthias Tischler (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012), 140-145 and Metcalfe, *Muslims*, 16-32.

ple remembering something that is generally considered less significant instead of the “great events” of history. The most prominent example is the peasants of the Cèvennes remembering the Camisard revolts of 1702-04 over the Napoleonic wars and both World Wars. Different groups can have very different views of what is important.¹³⁸

Another possibility is that the *chansons* are not describing the raids of 846, but instead talk about the siege of Salerno in 871. The *Couronnement* mentions a King Gaifier of Capua, who is captured by the Saracen army before they move on to besiege Rome. In the tenth-century *Chronicon Salernitanum* the ruler of Salerno is called Guilfiero. In the course of 300 years the memory of Salerno could have been replaced by Rome. A twelfth-century knight might not have been familiar with the south Italian city, but he for sure knew Rome.¹³⁹ Critics have noted that this is unlikely due to King Louis' absence from the campaigns in Italy. Considering his instrumental role in the relief of Salerno and the destruction of the Saracen stronghold in Bari (866-873), he would have needed to play an important part.¹⁴⁰ When we look at his absence not from a historical, but from a narrative and *mentalité* standpoint, his no-show makes more sense. It is very much in tone with the song's general characterization as weak king. Moreover, how can Louis later be attacked by traitors trying to rob his crown, if he is not even in France? William's actions on the other hand are in accordance with the immensely popular idea of the aristocratic hero achieving great success on his own. In the end King Gaifier offers William the hand of his daughter and half of his kingdom, just as in the Old French adaptation of the *Aeneid*.¹⁴¹ Only through a sudden change of events – maybe the result of the fusion of different songs – William is forced to return to his native France. Ultimately, the mentioning of Gaifier could just as well have nothing to do with the memory of a siege of Salerno at all. He could be one of the stock characters that inhabit the world of the *chansons*. A Gaifier of Spoleto even finds his way into *Raoul de Cambrai*.¹⁴²

138 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 92-95. For another example see Anna Collard's study on Greek villages, where the Ottoman empire and the Greek civil war was remembered over the events of WWII (Anna Collard, “Investigating ‘Social Memory’ in a Greek Context,” in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald, and Malcolm K. Chapman (London: Routledge, 1989), 89–103).

139 *Anonimo Salernitano, Chronicon*, ed. Raffaele Matarazzo (Napoli: Arte tipografica, 2002), 179-185. On Salerno instead of Rome see Mario Roques, “L'élément historique dans Fierabras et dans la branche II du Couronnement Looïs,” *Romania* 30 (1901): 176-181.

140 Michael Heintze and Bodo Hesse, eds., *Wilhelmsepen: Le Couronnement de Louis; Le Charroi de Nîmes; La Prise d'Orange* (München: W. Fink, 1993), 10-12. We are of course not talking about Louis the Pious – even in 846 he was already dead for six years – but about his namesake Louis II.

141 We will discuss this in more detail in chapter “Half of my kingdom” below.

142 *Raoul*, 1500. See also Gaston Paris' addition to Roques, “L'élément historique,” 181-183.

Another possible explanation is that through a process of rationalization over the years a raid turned into a siege, as was more representative of the warfare in the twelfth century;¹⁴³ or that the siege is simply a literary tool to make the Frankish victory over the Saracens seem even greater. This would make much sense for the *Fierabras*, where Charlemagne later goes to Spain to revenge the destruction of Rome.

If we want to get through to the social aspects of memory, we have to carefully peel away the different layers of the story. Only if we manage to identify the different elements, we can see why something is remembered. As we will discuss in the next chapter, a *chanson*'s form is heavily depended on the idea of the story. That is, certain events, character traits or images that absolutely have to be part of a story for it to be considered true. The idea is what gives the story a certain framework and is what is transmitted from jongleur to jongleur. We will see how this might have driven the action in *Raoul de Cambrai* in a certain direction against other forces at work. In terms of events social memory can be very fragile, but in terms of ideas it can remain very stable. It matters little for us if these ideas have roots in genuine history or not. Historical events are only insofar interesting for us, as they can show us what was added, what was changed and what was lost in the process of remembering.¹⁴⁴

When we look at the setting of the *chansons*, they are all taking place in the heroic Carolingian age. The appearance of Charlemagne should not come as a surprise. He left a huge mark on the memory of Western Europe. From popes to kings, aristocratic families, monastic and urban communities, all based their claims to legitimacy and traced their origin back to the white bearded king.¹⁴⁵ Considering how much he takes up of remembrance, we should rather get curious when he is not there. As we will see below some northern French aristocratic families purposefully chose not to set their origin stories in the Golden Age of Charlemagne.¹⁴⁶

It is interesting to note that aristocratic memory in northern France did not go further back than the eighth century, quite contrary to the eastern parts of the Frankish empire, where we find characters like Attila and Theodoric.¹⁴⁷ While all the *chansons* from the twelfth century take place in Carolin-

143 On medieval warfare see Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

144 See chapter "The idea of Raoul de Cambrai" below. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 47-55 and 91.

145 Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 150f. Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 2. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 154-162.

146 See chapter "Once upon a time in a land far, far away..." below.

147 Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 107f.

gian age, not all feature the great Charles. In the *Charroi de Nime*, *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* we encounter his son Louis, Charles Martel and Pippin. While they share certain personality traits, they are no mere replicas of one another.¹⁴⁸ However, they behave more like embodied images and roles than anything resembling their historical counterparts. In the *Couronnement*, for example, Louis is described as weak, totally depended on the goodwill of his loyal vassal William. How much of this is owed to the memory of Louis the Pious himself, the fusion of other Carolingian kings with the same name into one (Louis the Stammerer seemed to have a particularly bad reputation in the twelfth century)¹⁴⁹ or just his role in opposition to Charlemagne's reign, is an interesting question, but would stretch the scope of this discussion. Not to mention the influence of contemporary events¹⁵⁰ and political theory.¹⁵¹

Amy Remensnyder's work on Meridional monastic founding legends has shown that the figure of the king was not selected randomly, nor that the northern tradition was just copied. The king was chosen with a specific reason in mind. Louis for example does not appear in southern legends at all. Even where (northern) epic tradition would need him to appear, he is absorbed by Charlemagne.¹⁵² Similarly we could ask why Pippin and Charles Martel feature in the *Garin le Lohrain* instead of Charlemagne and his son, but that would again exceed the scope of this discussion.

Characteristic for local memory is the importance of geography as structuring force and the outwards relationship of the stories – from the individual to the family, to the community and finally to the world.¹⁵³ In the twelfth century most people still thought very much in local terms. When one looks at aristocratic family stories the preference of local over national history is obvious.¹⁵⁴ Or take the example of the household of Ardres. When they were locked in the castle for two days because of bad weather, the stories of the lords of Ardres were the main event of the evening. Even the storm stopped for a while “*as if to let us listen*”.¹⁵⁵

148 Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, 652.

149 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, eds. Louis Halphen and René Poupardin (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1913), 28f.

150 The description of the crowning of Louis in the *Couronnement* has a lot of resemblance with the crowning of Ludwigs VII in 1131 (Bender, *König und Vasall*, 49).

151 Edward Peters, *The Shadow King: “Rex Inutilis” in Medieval Law and Literature, 751-1327* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 23f., 107 and 170.

152 Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 116f and 153.

153 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 103 and 109-113.

154 See chapter “Mythical beginnings” below.

155 *Lambert of Ardres, History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 96; trans., 130.

We have to assume that every *chanson* was already somewhat popular on an over-regional level before it found its way into writing. How much local memory is still left is hard to say. When we look at geographical accuracy as an indicator, the description of William's Rome expedition in the *Couronnement* is confused at best. *Garin le Lohrain* on the other hand is a beacon of geographical accuracy. But, as we will see below, this can have entirely different reasons.¹⁵⁶

When people remember, they do so through certain genres and narratives. The choice for one rather than another is not random and can tell us a lot about the people's identity and how they perceived their world.¹⁵⁷ How these narratives are ordered in turn influences the content and structure of the memories themselves. Here the *chansons* give us a privileged view. They are probably the closest we can get to one of the actual forms people in the twelfth century learned and experienced their past. Neither the world of the eighth nor that of the twelfth century was in a state of constant conflict, nor was it inhabited only by brave heroes, glorious kings, beautiful princesses and wicked traitors. As Sarah Kay argued they only capture a very limited part of the complex reality of the lived experience. However, as constricted as this view might be, there is a good chance that most people in the High Middle Ages had an equally narrow view of their ancestors.¹⁵⁸ It is not a coincidence that even a learned man like Raymond of Aguilers calls the Saracen lands around Antioch *Hispania*, imagining a global Spain in analogy to Charlemagne's epic expeditions and the William cycle.¹⁵⁹

But that is not the only way the *chansons de geste* are limited in their capability of mirroring the past (or the present). As we will see in the next chapter, most songs were improvised on the spot, consisting of specific building blocks – formulae and themes – that make up a story. How this limits the realm of the possible is masterfully described by Erich Auerbach. For him the *Chanson de Roland* is caged by its structure. The story is merely a sequence of images with little connection and causality between them. Characters all feel and act the same. The events happen as they have to happen, nothing is uncertain. There are no decision making and no conflict that could be labeled

156 Josephine Elvira Vallerie, ed., *Garin Le Loheren, According to Manuscript A (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 2983) with Text, Introduction and Linguistic Study* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Bros., 1947), 7. See more on that in chapter "The image of the conqueror" below.

157 More on that in our discussion of the structure of the *Charroi*, *Raoul* and *Garin* in Part IV below.

158 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 88, 106 and 171.

159 Duggan, "Medieval Epic as Popular Historiography," 308.

tragic. The world is so small that even the Saracen society is simply a mirror of the Christian one. The only difference is that the Saracens are wrong and the Christians are right.¹⁶⁰

Few historians would still fully agree with his characterization of the genre. Especially in the later songs characters are forced into making (impossible) decisions, having to decide between family and lord, honor and fief.¹⁶¹ I would call Raoul and Fromont tragic heroes. It is also not true that there are no causalities in the *chansons*. Especially in *Raoul de Cambrai* we find quite a few situations where the narrator remarks that because of something, something else happened. All this aside, Auerbach is not wrong in his general assessment of the Old French epics – it is indeed a small world. But that does not mean that all songs are the same, that they are just a series of topoi and motifs. While the building blocks are given, how they are assembled and combined is very much open and can absolutely result in distinctive plots.¹⁶²

The most important thing to acknowledge is that shared memories are established through communication.¹⁶³ Naturally people did not spend every cool summer evening and every freezing winter night discussing long dead kings. That is not to say they were not interested in politics, far from that, simply that stories that concerned them more directly had more relevance to them, be it every day problems, gossip or tales of their own ancestors and communities. Chris Wickham used the example of his faculty meetings at the University of Birmingham. The things that mattered most, at least for the people who were involved, were not the official documents, but what was discussed afterwards in the coffee lounge.¹⁶⁴ For a medieval example we could look at Montaillou. The villagers talked about all sorts of things – food, marriage problem or about that one time someone tricked the spies of the inquisition – sometimes even until dawn. When they were asked by the inquisitor, they could remember the smallest details about their neighbors. This kind of local gossip probably char-

160 The often cited “*Païen unt tort e crestiens unt dreit*” (Roland, 1015). Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1994), 99-114.

161 See Calin's comments: “Auerbach's basic estimate of the *chanson de geste* [...] is excessive. In our opinion, the French epic is not a fixed entity in space and time but a richly varied, highly organic literary genre. In the course of the 12th century war-songs took on more realistic traits.” (Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 201f.).

162 Duggan, “Medieval Epic as Popular Historiography,” 288.

163 McKitterick stressed this in particular. (McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World*, 3 and 85).

164 Chris Wickham, “Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry,” *Past & Present*, no. 160 (1998): 10-13, 17 and 23.

acterized most of pre-modern memory and even today rural Austria is still infamous for how fast news travel, especially when it comes to stories of secret affairs.¹⁶⁵

The following scene from *Raoul de Cambrai* is a good example of gossip within the *chansons de geste*. Raoul just learned that the king will not help him conquer Vermandois, so he makes preparations for war. His mother Alice advises him not to summon the men from Artois. She calls them “*malvais et felon*” (873). They are quick when it comes to looting and eating, but shy away from a fight. Rumor has it (“*tex en est la novele*” 1010) that they are worth less than a cream cheese in battle. From what we know Alice has no reason to call the Arrouaisise cowards. After all they are her brother's men, and according to him they never lost a fight.¹⁶⁶ This is quite simply medieval gossip. When a jongleur told this in an aristocratic household he would have gotten some laughs. Where this kind of cheap joke would have worked, might tell us more about the origins of the text than any dialect analysis, but that is beside the point.

What matters to people and how they talk about it will evolve with changing contexts and world-views. Until now we only discussed the somewhat natural, slow change of memory over time and due to differing circumstances. There is of course the possibility of people purposefully manipulating the past to further their own interests. We already saw a few examples of this being the case for the *chansons de geste* in previous chapters. We can only imagine how many characters found their way into the songs just because a few coins changed hands. Or take the slightly later vernacular prose historiography, Gabrielle Spiegel was able to detect a small anti-royal Flemish elite that patronized these vernacular histories with the goal to create a new discourse of the past that would better suit their interests.¹⁶⁷

But there does not even have to be any conscious action involved. It is enough that individuals feel somehow connected to the group in question. None of the participants in Bartlett's experiment had any emotional connection to the ghost stories, so that was not really an issue. However, a recent experiment has shown that when participants are told that they are part of one of two conflicting parties, the story gets more biased with every reproduction. Small distortions accumulate over time to a highly one-sided version of the original story.¹⁶⁸ So unsurprisingly a story of a king fighting a

165 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: ein Dorf vor dem Inquisitor 1294 bis 1324 (Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324)* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1986), 180-202 and 266-272. See also Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 111-113.

166 *Raoul*, Ch. LII, LVIII.

167 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2-10 and 317.

168 Tiane Lee, Michele Gelfand, and Yoshi Kashima, “The Serial Reproduction of Conflict: Third Parties Escalate Conflict through Communication Biases,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 54 (2014), 68-72.

knight, if told multiple times in an aristocratic household, will lean towards the latter, even without deliberate acts of the people involved.

Seeing a deliberate in contrast to a natural process of change is, however, somewhat misleading. For an image of the past to be accepted in a group, it needs to be meaningful or made meaningful for its members. It is not enough to simply propagate a new version of the past. If it is not relevant to people, it will not be recognized as part of their past. Especially not with texts that go through as many hands as the Old French epics.¹⁶⁹

Groups under social pressure are most receptive to changes to their memory. The past can be a powerful tool to strengthen an identity under attack from outside or in times of discontinuity and rapid social change. Whereas Gabrielle Spiegel and Amy Remensnyder could investigate the specific circumstances for the appearance of an image of the past very precisely that is not possible for the *chanson de geste*. As we just discussed, some songs appear to be more local, that is, contain more remnants of what might have been a reaction to more specific or immediate problems. This, however, can only give us some indications. That we are able to pin down the *Geste de Lohrain* to the regions of Picardy, Champagne and the Ile de France, is nothing compared to a single monastery or the specific milieu Spiegel was able to unearth for the translations of the *Pseudo-Turpin*.¹⁷⁰

The nature of the songs as product of countless retellings makes it possible to grasp the attitudes of a larger group, but for the same reasons, issues that were not felt by all were quickly transformed or lost on the way. And in the end the *chansons* are not mere reactions to social pressure, but part of a larger process of mental and physical reconstruction of the medieval West in the High Middle Ages, the rediscovery of the past and the construction of an aristocratic identity. If we want to understand why they look the way they do, we must search within as well as outside the world of the imaginary.¹⁷¹

169 For the importance of “meaning work” in the establishment of a social trauma see Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Neil Smelser et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 12-15.

170 Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 70-74. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 3, 215-289. For a case of construction of a new version of the past after rapid social changes see Southern's discussion of England after the Norman Conquest. (R. W. Southern, “Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 4. The Sense of the Past” 23 (1973): 243-63). The localisation is Paris' (Paulin Paris, ed., *Li Romans de Garin le Loherain* (Paris: Techener, 1833), xx).

171 For changes in the medieval mindset see R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953). For the rediscovery of the past see Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 29 and 117-180. For crucial changes in chivalry see Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* and Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*. For the importance of both, imaginary and non-imaginary factors in the development of images of the past see Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 203 and 289.

The idea of a story

As we have discussed previously, the singing of a song was a highly social event. The jongleur knew the people he was singing to, or at least was familiar with their world and their issues and would have adapted his story accordingly, expanding or shortening certain episodes and elaborating scenes that arouse the audience's attention.¹⁷² But the knights were also actively taking part in the event. In Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*, written in the late twelfth century, the narrator is interrupted by a listener trying to guess the appearance of a saddle:

*"Be quiet, dear Hartmann: do you think I can guess it?" — I'm quiet, speak quickly. — 'I have to think about it first.' — Do it quickly then, I'm in a hurry. — 'Do I seem a clever man to you?' — Of course. Speak, for God's sake. — 'I will tell you.' — The rest you may keep to yourself. — 'The saddle was of yoke elm.' — Yes, what else would it be? — 'Beautifully gilded.' — Who told you that? — 'With strong straps.' — You guessed it right. — 'On top was scarlet.' — This makes me laugh. — 'See, I could guess it right.' — Indeed, you are a true weather-prophet."*¹⁷³

This of course should not be seen as taken down from a live performance, this listener is clearly a product of Hartmann's imagination, but this kind of behavior must have been considered plausible, if not desirable. Modern examples show us how the audience's participation, shouts and exclamations from the crowd are an integral part of the event.¹⁷⁴ After the singing was concluded, there might have been long discussions about what they just heard. Is Raoul right in claiming the land of the Vermandois? Should he instead have gone for Cambrai? Or for the king even? These discussions in turn might have played into the next singing of the song.

172 See chapter "Oral versus written" above. For a modern day example see Karl Reichl, "Introduction. The Music and Performance of Oral Epics," in *The Oral Epic: Performance and Music*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2000), 24f.

173 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 511.

174 Dzhamilya Kurbanova, "The Singing Traditions of Turkmen Epic Poetry," in *The Oral Epic: Performance and Music*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2000), 121.

We have talked a lot about social memory, but for the transmission of epic songs somewhat different rules apply. Evidence from the twelfth century is sketchy at best, alternatively we could look at regions where scholars still witnessed modern day jongleurs. Relying mostly on twentieth-century examples of course comes with its own problems. As we have seen, recent scholarship has heavily attacked the notion of an entirely oral genre with extreme positions arguing for exclusively written texts using an oral style. We will not find all the answers in the mountainous regions of Yugoslavia, but it can help us understand some things better.

First of all we need to realize that a song is not remembered in an exact form and then recited, but is always a (re)creation in the moment of the performance. This does not seem to have been clear to the people at the time either. The Italian poet Niccolo of Verona left a copyright using the first letters of each *laisse* in one of his texts to protect it from a jongleur stealing it. What Niccolo did not realize was that this technique would only have worked if the jongleurs recited the whole text word-for-word.¹⁷⁵ However, experiments with singers in Yugoslavia have shown that this is clearly not the case: Perry and Lord made sure that a talented bard witnessed the performance of a song that he had never heard before. Afterward they asked him to reproduce the whole song. He was not only able to sing a poem the length of several hours without any difficulties, his version was also considerably longer - almost triple in length - much more detailed and ornamented; human touches that were missing before were introduced. "*The story remained essentially the same*", so Lord "*the changes have not been of the kind that distort the tale. If anything they have enhanced it.*"¹⁷⁶

The oral poet uses certain themes as building blocks to construct his narrative. These themes are basic incidents and descriptions; not a set of fixed words, but a group of ideas. During his lifespan the singer acquires an entire repertory of these, be it from his master or other poets. When the singer thinks of a song, he thinks of it in terms of a flexible plan of themes, some of which are essential and some of which are not. When hearing a new song, he reproduces it with the themes already in his possession, not the exact ones his counterpart is using. To do so the story must already be in the correct form, a singer cannot just hear a story and repeat it in verse.¹⁷⁷

Perry and Lord also looked at what happens to a song when a singer performs it in short and long intervals. There were those changes that one might expect: the omission or addition of detail, elaboration or simplification and change in the order of sequence. Some have parallels with Bartlett's ex-

175 John Levy, "Acrostics as Copyright Protection in the Franco-Italian Epic. Implications for Memory Theory," in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*, ed. Elma Brenner, Mary Franklin-Brown, and Meredith Cohen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 207-215.

176 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 105.

177 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 68-82 and 100.

periments, others were due to the poet's preference and skills.¹⁷⁸ However, Lord could not explain the great number of different versions of a single song with the conventional rules of memory. While the changes in oral tradition might seem arbitrary, they are not. He argued that there is a strong urge to conserve the idea of a story as it is expressed in a theme or a group of themes. Multiple times during a performance, the singer reaches certain points where strong forces draw him into different directions. Certain themes seem to cling together. When his knowledge or memory of a story is weak, he might take a different route as the original song. But he can be brought back in line by other singers when he diverges too far from the tradition.¹⁷⁹

Of course Perry and Lord could not test their observations over a longer period of time. But there are examples from other parts of the world of relative stability even over several generations. The Ryabinin family, a family of bards active in Russia the late nineteenth and early twentieth century passed their songs down for four generations. And indeed the stories kept – mostly – to the general outlines. However, when a story leaves the realm of local and family tradition, changes might be more significant, even penetrating core elements of the narrative, as shown by two Yugoslavian poems about Music Stefan at the battle of Kosovo. In the two traditions the story keeps the earlier outline – the departure of a warrior despite his wife's entreaties – but is continued in an entirely different way. We can see the effects of time on the memory of the singer in two poems on the Russian national hero Skopin-Schuiski, one told in the Ural mountains and one in Moscow. In between them lies a span of 150 years. A reevaluation of the different elements of the story has been taking place, things that seemed important in the earlier poem were abandoned or changed in the later one.¹⁸⁰

What we can take away from this short overview is that there is no interest in remembering specific details, the jongleur constructs the story as he goes along. Furthermore, even though oral poetry tries to conserve the main elements, characteristics and ideas of a story – which might include the hero's personality, his motives and the emotional effect a story is trying to convey – this gets increasingly difficult when the story travels in time and space. If there is no strong local or family tradition, the songs are equally vulnerable to change.¹⁸¹

178 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 102-105.

179 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 118-123.

180 Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 443-454.

181 Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 455 and 464.

In an earlier chapter we touched upon the question of the epics' origins. One school saw them composed shortly after the historical events and transmitted over centuries, the other as a product of a single jongleur in the twelfth century. In my view this is the wrong thing to focus on, we have to assume that in both cases the song would have been circulating for quite some time before it was put on parchment. While it is true that a jongleur could just have taken up a local, family or monastic legend and put it into epic form, it was not in a single stroke of genius as Bedier imagined it. Oral poetry is in this sense much less romantic. A good documented case is the Aceh poet Dokarim, who composed a song about the wars against the Dutch in late nineteenth century. According to his statements it took him five years, he talked to eye-witnesses, added fresh matter to his song and would modify it at each recitation.¹⁸² The few times Parry and Lord actually witnessed the first singing of a song, they were always quite disappointed. Although the poets were able to compose a song on the spot, it is only through much practice and repeated performances that it is perfected and only through the acceptance by other singers it will spread. In their hands the song will undergo further changes. So even though a song might have a single origin, it becomes social property as soon as it gets popular. If not, it simply dies with the singer. Considering the difficulties Perry and Lord had recording a song, it seems unlikely – just for practical reasons – that someone would have chosen an unknown *chanson* or a song the jongleur was not comfortable singing.¹⁸³

To conclude our discussion of memory, the *chansons de geste* can undoubtedly give a privileged window into the world of the twelfth century. Their particularly social nature makes it possible to speak of an image of a class not just of a small group. While there were mechanisms in play to preserve the idea of the story, we should not see them as static. Over time even central questions could be affected by change. Through countless tellings, retellings and discussions, elements that did not make sense were transformed or forgotten, in a similar fashion important issues in the present made their way into the epics. The jongleur, however, could also take an active part in shaping his songs to please his audience or his patron.

182 Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 441.

183 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 100; see FN 3 for a (disappointing) first song and 126-128.

Part III

At last we will explore the three solutions that we briefly touched upon in the introduction and that entitle this thesis. We will try to identify the different forces that play into this image of the past with the goal to explain why they look the way they do and what this can tell us about the people who constructed, listened and ultimately believed in these stories. To do that we will first turn our attention to the idea of *Raoul de Cambrai* and see how the narrative is driven into a specific direction because of the way the historic Raoul was remembered. Then we will discuss the three solutions themselves. In particular we will look at what characters and the narrator have to say about the important question of how to acquire a fief. Much of it is reflecting political models of the twelfth century. However, next to these “real” discussions we find actions that are often highly unrealistic, in other cases almost comically stupid and are best described as bad clichés. In our songs the king plays a pivotal role in depriving the heroes of social mobility. As I will argue, this has little to do with the role of kingship in the High Middle Ages; the bad king is only a literary tool used by the jongleur to put the heroes in specific situations. When it comes to important issues, dreams and fears the *chansons* are close to the social experience of the time, when it comes to the actual behavior not so much.

Moreover, our songs not only raise questions, they also give – sometimes very concrete – answers. How the narratives turn out is a literary argument for the superiority of certain methods of social mobility over others. If a knight found himself without a fief, he would have looked at the role models of the past and would have found a compelling solution. These literary answers point to high aristocratic ideology and speak for their influence on the composition of the epics.

The idea of Raoul de Cambrai

If we take Andrew Taylor's critique (see chapter "Oral versus written") seriously and accept the fact that there was not *one* song, but multiple, vastly differing in length, details and quality, what is left? He suggested that there must have been a common idea of what a story is about. As we have seen, this is reinforced by what we know about modern day oral poetry. And ultimately we have no choice than to work with what we have, even if it means accepting that many people might never have heard a song in the form we have it in front of us. Besides, since we are interested in why a particular text looks the way it does and what that can tell us about the group that remembered it that should not worry us too much.

If we assume that at a bare minimum a jongleur transmitted the idea of story, alongside certain images and phrases, the rest of the story must have had different reasons besides tradition. But before we can dive into that, we first need to establish what this idea of the story was. In other words, what did the authors have to stick with in order for his audience to believe his story and what were considered core elements in family or local jongleur tradition? We will limit our discussion here to *Raoul de Cambrai*, for the relatively large number of outside sources makes what people in the twelfth century thought of the story best comprehensible. With the exception of longer narratives in the mid-twelfth century *Waulsort Chronicle* and the thirteenth-century *chanson Vengeance Fromondin* these are short allusions.¹⁸⁴ The picture that emerges is surprisingly coherent in its selectivity. Raoul is primarily remembered as a figure of arrogance and great violence, oftentimes associated with other rebellious barons and as the king's nephew. The only specific action he is remembered for is the burning of the abbey of Origny. (It is not always this particular monastery, sometimes it is a different church or city.) This scene is certainly among the most picturesque and memorable of the song and found many imitators in the Middle Ages.¹⁸⁵ Sarah Kay concluded that what people knew of Raoul de Cambrai was a set of character traits and images, not a coherent narrative. So if people in the twelfth century remembered mostly the arrogance, the excessive behavior and the uncontrolled violence of the historic Raoul, a story about him had to incorporate these elements even if they did not necessarily fit the story the jongleur wanted to tell. This might also explain the

184 See Paul Meyer and Auguste Longnon, eds., *Raoul de Cambrai, chanson de geste* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1882), xvlv and Sarah Kay, ed., *Raoul de Cambrai* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), lxii-lxv.

185 See for example the epics *Gerbert de Metz* and *Aubri le Bourgoing* (Russell Keith Bowman, *The Connections of the Geste Des Loherains with Other French Epics and Mediaeval Genres* (New York: Columbia University, 1940), 88f., Adler, *Epische Spekulanten*, 107, Kay, *Raoul*, 93 FN 37).

sudden change in character we see after about a quarter of the song. The positive description of Raoul's youth is slowly replaced by more and more excesses. The first time this gets really obvious is when Raoul gives his men the, until then, totally out of character command to desecrate the church of Origny:

*"Pitch my tent in the middle of the church and my packhorses will stand in its porches; prepare my food in the crypts, my sparrow-hawks can perch on the gold crosses, and prepare a magnificent bed for me to sleep on it in front of the altar; I will use the crucifix as a back rest and my squires can make free with the nuns."*¹⁸⁶

This is what one would expect from an archetypal figure of uncontrolled violence. Even the craziest of Raoul's men, so the song, did not want to obey these orders. The narrator calls him *desreez* (1094) and says that he acted in *desmesurez* (1093). From there things spiral out of control. Raoul had made an agreement to spare the town of Origny, but goes back on his promise after two of his men (the author calls them *glouton pautonnier*, 1223) are killed in an attempt to rob some townspeople. He burns the city to the ground, killing the mother of his companion Bernier.¹⁸⁷

Afterwards he orders his men to organize a feast. He wants them to prepare peacocks, swans and plenty of venison. "*Por la grant cruauté*" (1388) Raoul's men cross themselves three times - 'Have you renounced God', they say, 'it is Lent'. To underline his wicked and ungodly character he has also forgotten Lent!¹⁸⁸ His sudden change in behavior even makes other people wonder. When Eudes is told that Raoul is marching into their lands, he thinks that he is being made fun of. 'I would have never thought that Raoul could be so immoderate (*demesurez* 1831)', he says.¹⁸⁹

That people expected a story about violence also gets clear by the effort the author makes to connect the rather peaceful beginning with the later parts of the song. By making predictions and connections to later events – as a result of this many noblemen will die, will be thrown out of their saddles, etc.¹⁹⁰ – he reminds his audience of what is about to come.¹⁹¹ In the prologue the singer claims that the other jongleurs left out the best part of the song ("*laissant la flor*" 4). As we have seen this might simply be a literary convention, but it could also be a sign that the singer incorporates elements that might not have been as familiar to medieval audiences, who would have mainly known the later, more brutish parts.

Violence was not in principle condemned in the northern French warrior aristocracy, only when used with arrogance (one of the traits typically remembered with Raoul) and without moderation,

¹⁸⁶ *Raoul*, 1058-1065; trans., 79.

¹⁸⁷ *Raoul*, Ch. LXIX-LXXI.

¹⁸⁸ *Raoul*, Ch. LXXIV.

¹⁸⁹ *Raoul*, Ch. XCV.

¹⁹⁰ For example *Raoul*, 112, 132, 465, 523, 571, 605, 647.

¹⁹¹ Kay, *Raoul*, lxviii. Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible révolte*, 59.

with *demesure*.¹⁹² It might very well be that the story of Raoul was a cautionary or moral tale of what happens when you behave excessively. *Demesure* is for sure a big issue in our song and it comes filled with proverbial expressions. Ybert tells his men: “*I can tell you the story of many men's lives, and an arrogant man will never succeed.*” Eudes knows: “*An immoderate man, is soon brought low*” and “*A man without moderation is not forth a fig.*”¹⁹³

Similarly it is also necessary to keep in mind that people remembered Raoul as the king’s nephew. We will see below how this close connection with the monarch will drive the story into a certain direction, a direction the author had to reconcile with the story he wanted to tell. In a nutshell, a tale about Raoul had to absolutely include violence, *demesure* and a close connection to the king, otherwise people would have had a hard time believing it.

William, Raoul and Fromont, three different solutions

Finally we will turn our attention to the three solutions of the *Charroi de Nîmes*, *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain*. All three songs start very similarly, with the problem of acquiring a fief and a king refusing the request for one, but the stories take three very different directions. By focusing on just these three scenes, I hope to be able to go into more detail than I would when analyzing the whole songs or the entire genre. I am very well aware that this will leave significant issues untouched and will probably result in an overemphasis on certain parts, but I am hopeful that the advantages outweigh the flaws.¹⁹⁴

We will see that characters have different opinions on questions of inheritance, marriage, service and how to acquire a fief and dispute them quite vividly. In these disagreements we see reflections of real debates and opinions of the twelfth century. Recently Richard Kaeuper emphasized the importance of imaginative literature in providing questions and animating earnest conversations among the nobility.¹⁹⁵ We will see how our high aristocratic characters, through specific literary tools, are forced into positions they would normally not find themselves in, but that must have seemed all too familiar to the petty nobility and the *juvenes*. They in turn would have been very interested in how certain problems are solved. It might seem as if we are moving away from the ques-

¹⁹² See Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible révolte*, 95-100.

¹⁹³ *Raoul*, 1690f., 2033 and 1924; trans., 117, 137 and 131.

¹⁹⁴ The connections between these three songs go beyond a single theme. Thematic similarities and genealogical connections link *Raoul de Cambrai* and the *Cycle de Lohrains*. A thirteenth-century continuation of *Garin* even incorporates the story of Raoul and Bernier into the feud between the Lohrains and Bordelais. (Bowman, *Connections*. Catherine M. Jones, “Recasting Raoul de Cambrai: The Loherain Version,” *Olifant* 14 (1989): 3–18 and Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible révolte*, 27-30). The connections with the stories of William are not that obvious, but still considerable (see Adler, *Epische Spekulanten*, 103f.). As we will see below some scenes made it almost word-for-word into both songs.

¹⁹⁵ Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 109.

tion of how people viewed their past, but these points are crucial to understanding why these images look the way they do.

Considering how much our texts deal with correct behavior, we should start with what was – or could be considered – ideal conduct, at least in the world of the *chansons de geste*. In the *Couronnement de Louis* Charlemagne warns his son only to take up the crown if he is willing to follow certain rules. He tells him not to indulge in *demesure*, treacherous and sinful behavior, nor to disinherit orphans or take from widows and to threat his knights with love and affection.¹⁹⁶ This is the closest thing we have to a mirror of princes from the aristocracy. The king's actions should be judged according to this set of rules. A little foreshadowing: he will break them a lot. Another important characteristic is *largesse*. The pope in the *Couronnement* makes clear that to show honor, one has to be generous (“*A onor faire deit chascuns estre larges*” 1345). A lord should give to his men abundantly, spontaneously and immediately. If he cannot, he should make apologies and clearly outline his intentions, so that everyone can see his desire to make good. A bad lord will hold back as long as possible and will place many conditions on his gifts. This is also something we will see the king do quite often.¹⁹⁷

The perfect knight, on the other hand, combines *prouesse* and *sagesse* (the Latin *fortitudo* and *sapientia*). These values – central to knighthood – are tragically summarized in the antithesis of Roland and Olivier: “*Rollant est proz e Olivier est sage*.”¹⁹⁸ *Prouesse* is of course fundamental in a world centered around war, but on its own it leads to excessive behavior, *demesure*. *Demesure* is committed by those that act out of *orguel* (pride), *outrage* (thinking one is outside the laws of God and men) and *folaiage* (folly). In this regard Raoul and Roland are not that different. They possess the same *demesure* and merely direct it against different enemies.¹⁹⁹ Pride (*orgueil*) and envy (*envie*) are the qualities that Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube associated with the lineage of Ganelon. ‘If it were not for these characteristics, they could have ruled over France,’ he claims.²⁰⁰

For the correct behavior of a vassal vis-à-vis his king we have Bertran's words to his uncle William. The count is mad with rage, thinking about deposing the king for the injustices he has done to him. Bertran calms him down and says: ‘You are not talking like a baron. You should not threaten your

196 Charlemagne's words in the *Couronnement* stretch over several *laisses* (Ch. VII-XIII). The most important part are lines 80-86.

197 Stephen D. White, “Service for Fiefs or Fiefs for Service: The Politics of Reciprocity,” in *Re-Thinking Kinship and Feudalism in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2005), 76f.

198 *Roland*, 1093.

199 See Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible revolte*, 95-100 and Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 31-33.

200 *Girart de Vienne: Chanson de Geste: Edited According to Ms BXLIX (Royal) of the British Museum*, ed. Frederic G. Yeandle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), 17-20 (subsequently cited as *Girart de Vienne*).

rightful king, quite the opposite, you should help him against all his enemies, elevate him and increase his reputation.’²⁰¹

Charroi de Nîmes

The story begins on an idyllic summer day somewhere in northern France.²⁰² Birds are singing and William just returned from the hunt. His nephew Bertran arrives in a hurry from the king's palace with bad news: ‘The king Louis has given land to all of his barons, but he forgot the two of us. I am still a *bachelor*,’ he says, ‘so its not a big deal for me, but you have undergone such work and hardship in service for the king (40-42).’ They ride to the palace and bring their complaint before their sovereign. Louis tells William to be patient: he will receive the land of the next peer that will die and if he so desires, his wife. Here we have a good example of a bad gift. The king tries to stall and makes William an uncertain offer – how can anyone know when the next peer will die? ‘A long time to wait for a *povre bachelor* like me (81),’ he responds. (We will come back to this argument in a bit.) William gets angry and reminds the king of everything he has done for him – how he saved him from traitors, freed Rome from Saracen attackers and killed countless men – and received nothing in return. The king responds that William is not the only one to whom he has not granted anything, pointing to the problem that land for a medieval lord was usually scarce but always in high demand.²⁰³

In the end Louis gives in to William's demands and offers him the fief of Count Foucon, but the hero refuses. Two of the count's children are still alive and he does not want to take the land from them. Then Louis offers him the fief of the Burgundian Auberi and the hand of his stepmother. Again William refuses, as he left a young son. ‘If you do not want to disinherit the child,’ so King Louis, ‘take the land of Marquis Beranger and marry his wife.’ ‘He left a son, the little Beranger, to take the inheritance away from him would be *fel* and *renoiez* (368),’ William replies.²⁰⁴

So Louis offers William a fourth of his kingdom – every fourth city, every fourth castle and every fourth penny from his treasury – but he refuses again. William does not want the other barons to think that he deceived his king and reduced his livelihood. The knight sees the offer as an insult.

201 “Le Charroi de Nîmes,” in *Wilhelmsepen: Le Couronnement de Louis; Le Charroi de Nîmes; La Prise d’Orange*, eds. Michael Heintze and Bodo Hesse (München: W. Fink, 1993), Ch. XVII (subsequently cited as *Charroi*).

202 On the *Charroi de Nîmes* in general see Adler, *Epische Spekulanten*, 28-32, Bender, *König und Vasall*, 43-83. Mario Mancini, *Società feudale e ideologia nel Charroi de Nîmes* (Firenze: Olschki, 1972). On William’s emotions see White, “Politics of Anger.” On good and bad gifts: White, “Service for Fiefs,” 82-88. On matters of inheritance see Jason Jacobs, “An Inheritance of Violence: Patrimony, Vassal Service, and Conquest in the Charroi de Nîmes,” *Exemplaria* 24 (2012): 293–312.

203 *Charroi*, Ch. I-XI.

204 *Charroi*, Ch. XIII-XV.

Does the king want to pay him off? Louis has nothing else to give him, so William leaves the palace in anger.²⁰⁵

Bertran in the meantime has thought of a different solution: William should ask for the Saracen kingdom of Spain, as Louis' realm will not be burdened by this. When William brings it up at the royal court, the king responds that it is not his to give, since he does not own it.²⁰⁶ He offers him half of his own kingdom instead. William refuses again, not wanting to diminish the king's estates. In the end Louis accepts his request for the Muslim kingdom, but refuses to help William take it.²⁰⁷ Already on the way to sunny Spain, William fears the judgment of the barons. Has he ill-treated his king by demanding land to which he has no hereditary right? Bertran tells him to leave it be: 'What the future brings lies only in God's hands.'²⁰⁸

William goes on to conquer Nîmes, which is considered part of the Muslim kingdom of Spain. Disguised as merchant, he smuggles his best soldiers hidden in barrels, in a Trojan horse-like maneuver, into the city and takes it. In a later song he seizes the city of Orange, where he converts and marries the Saracen queen Orable.²⁰⁹

In the *Charroi de Nîmes* there is not much controversy over what is correct behavior – quite the contrary to *Raoul de Cambrai*, as we will see in a bit. However, with the frequent references to what the barons might say, there are references to different positions. It is quite clear that William is entitled to a reward for his services. In the end the king offers him the land of someone else, even worse, the land of orphans. Then Louis proposes to divide his own lands with him, which again would be unjust as William would decrease the king's honor instead of increasing it. As William states himself in the *Couronnement*: a good knight should always increase his sovereign's fiefs.²¹⁰ With the conquest of Nîmes a good alternative is found, even though it is only the second best. How things might turn out, if you do not have a cast of people that are the embodiment of knightly values, we will see in the next song.

Raoul de Cambrai

The first verses of *Raoul de Cambrai* tell the story of Raoul's father Raoul Taillefer, who served the French king well and was awarded the fief of Cambrai and the noble Alice as wife in return.²¹¹ He

205 *Charroi*, Ch. XV and XVII.

206 For already Getafix tells us to never count your wild boar piglets before they are hatched.

207 *Charroi*, Ch. XV-XXIV.

208 *Charroi*, Ch. XXX.

209 For a summary of both songs see Jones, *Introduction*, 80-98.

210 *Couronnement*, 135-138.

211 We are mainly dealing with the first part of the song (to about line 5374), which is a generation older and features most of the discussions about inheritance and how to acquire a fief (Kay, *Raoul*, xxvii-lxxiii). More general studies

went on to live a long life and when he died his wife was pregnant with a baby boy. The tragedy begins a few years later, when Giboin, a young knight of the king's household, is expecting a reward for his services to the king. Bad counselors (those from the other side of the Rhine) advise Louis to give him the land of little Raoul. The king offers the fief to Giboin under the condition that he will give it back once Raoul is old enough to bear arms. The king's desire not to disinherit Raoul indicates that Giboin is only receiving the guardianship over Raoul's lands until he is old enough to hold them himself. Giboin consents, but only under the condition that he also gets the hand of Raoul's mother Alice. She, however, refuses to marry him. What happens next is not quite clear, but the king seems to be giving Raoul's land to Giboin anyway. Raoul's uncle Guerri contests the king's decision, but is told to wait until the boy has grown up, so he himself can be heard at the royal court. The matter remains unsolved for the next few years. Bernier, the bastard son of Ybert of Vermandois and second hero of the story, grows up alongside Raoul and they become companions.²¹²

The tale is picked up again when Raoul is 15 years old. The king seems to be making up for his previous misdeeds; he dubs Raoul a knight and makes him the seneschal of France. Then the moment arrives when Raoul is to be rewarded for his services. Guerri demands from Louis that he compensates his nephew adequately or at least have his inheritance returned to him. The king refuses, saying that he regrets the decision he made years ago, but he gave his pledge and therefore cannot take the land back. Guerri storms out of the hall, finds Raoul playing chess and forcefully reminds him of his duty to reclaim his father's fief. He calls him a coward and threatens to withdraw all his support. Thereupon Raoul makes his case in front to king; his plea mirrors that of Guerri: 'I served you, but received nothing in return, at least give me my father's lands back.' Raoul and Guerri threaten to kill Giboin should they ever get a hold of him. The king takes pity on the frightened knight and proposes a counter-offer to Raoul: He shall receive the land of the next count who dies. Raoul asks for hostages to guarantee the agreement.²¹³

The whole conversation is accompanied by grim predictions for the future. Guerri's demands will result in many knights being thrown from their saddles (463-65). Because of Raoul's speech many barons later died bloody deaths (522-23). Accepting the king's offer will result in Raoul's death and many barons being killed or ruined (564-566 and 570-71). These are literary tools often used in the

on *Raoul de Cambrai* include Sarah Kay, "Topography and the Relative Realism of Battle Scenes in Chansons de Geste," *Olifant* 4, no. 4 (1977): 259-259. Kay, *Chansons de Geste*. Calin, *Epic of Revolt*. Matarasso, *Recherches*. Dominique Boutet, "Le roi Louis et la signification politico-historique de Raoul de Cambrai," *Romania* 118 (2000): 315-35. Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible revolte*. Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*. On issues of inheritance see Jean Acher, "Les archaïsmes apparents dans la chanson de 'Raoul de Cambrai,'" *Revue des langues romanes* 50 (1907): 237-66. Ronald G. Koss, "Raoul de Cambrai and Inheritance Disputes in Feudal Society," *Olifant* 13, no. 2 (1988): 97-110 and White, "Discourse of Inheritance." On emotions see Richard E. Barton, "Zealous Anger and the Renegotiation of Aristocratic Relationships in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century France," in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998), 167-169.

212 *Raoul*, Ch. III-XIX.

213 *Raoul*, Ch. XXII-XXVI and XXXII-XXXV.

chansons de geste to tell the audience something important is happening. We get the same prediction when the king is about to disinherit baby Raoul. The author artificially stops time and warns his audience that something terrible is going to happen if no one stops it.²¹⁴ Raoul gets 40 hostages, selected from the most noble families of the kingdom. For the singer this is again a scene of utmost importance. In slow motion he repeats the same passage four times with slight variances.²¹⁵

Little over a year passes until the death of Herbert, count of Vermandois. Raoul and Guerri make their way to the king's court to claim his lands. The king breaks his word again and refuses to give the dead lord's fief to the young knight. Raoul threatens the life of the hostages so they would make Louis change his mind. Geoffrey of Anjou²¹⁶ steps in front of the king to explain their terrible situation: 'Why did you give us as hostages to this malefactor, the biggest felon that ever wore a hauberk. It was a *grant folaise* to give Raoul another man's land. He is in the right, yours is the *outraige*' (712-715 and 718-722). King Louis is persuaded, but refuses to warrant his gift. This is also the last time that Louis will appear for a long time, besides a seemingly out of place mentioning of his troops taking place in the battle of Origny at line 2281.²¹⁷

Raoul is pleased with how the confrontation turned out. His mother, however, urges him to make peace with the Vermandois and instead reclaim the land taken by Giboin. Realizing that she is unable to change his mind, she curses her son, which she will regret dearly.²¹⁸ At about this time we see a change in Raoul's character. An increasing number of people call him arrogant and *demesure*, the depiction of an outstanding knight that characterized his time at the royal court slowly makes way for a number of excesses.²¹⁹

Raoul rallies his troops and starts pillaging the countryside of Vermandois. Until now Bernier, while resentful that Raoul is attacking his family, is still with his liege lord. His dilemma of having to decide between his lord and his family is crucial to the first part of the song, but less interesting for our question.²²⁰ Raoul's army makes camp in front of the town of Origny, a place very dear to the Vermandois. Here, in the local abbey, Bernier's mother took refuge after Bernier's father Ybert had refused to marry her. Raoul makes an agreement with her to spare the town, but goes back on his promise, after two of his men were killed in an attempt to rob some villagers. In a very vivid scene Raoul sets fire to the town and Bernier's mother dies inside the church. This is the moment of the definitive fall out between the two heroes. Multiple times Bernier stresses how Raoul has awarded

214 *Raoul*, 110-112. On these techniques see Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 56f.

215 *Raoul*, Ch. XXXV-XXXVIII.

216 Geoffrey of Anjou is a very interesting character. He also found his way into several others *chansons* (for example the *Song of Roland*). His biography in the twelfth-century family story of the Anjou reads very much like an epic song itself.

217 *Raoul*, Ch. XXXIX-XLIII.

218 *Raoul*, Ch. XLVIII-LV.

219 See chapter "The idea of Raoul de Cambrai" above and Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible revolte*, 95-115.

220 For Bernier's role in *Raoul* see for example Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogie*, 174 and Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 63.

him badly for his services, how he has killed his mother and now wants to make war on his family. In a heated quarrel Raoul even strikes him on the head, irreparably breaking their relationship. Raoul offers to make redemption, but Bernier is irreconcilable. He rides out to his father's camp and changes sides. After the death of his mother, Bernier's revenge is introduced as second central motivation alongside Raoul's strife for land.²²¹

The four sons of Herbert of Vermandois try twice to reach a settlement with Raoul, but in the end Bernier sparks the fight between the two sides. 'Who was right or wrong does not matter anymore,' so states the narrator. The two armies meet near Origny and Raoul is killed on the battlefield. Raoul's nephew Gautier swears to avenge him.²²² Two juridical duels between Gautier and Bernier remain undecided and eventually the conflict is settled. Finally the two parties realize that the king is the cause of their problems and turn against him. Guerri's daughter Beatrice falls madly in love with Bernier and they marry. The feud seems to be a thing of the past, but when Guerri and Bernier ride past Origny, Guerri is reminded of Raoul's death and kills Bernier. Vengeance is taken up again by their successors.²²³

Using the example of *Raoul de Cambrai* Stephen White masterfully illustrated how there were different models of the fief existing side by side and could be invoked by different characters at different times for different strategies.²²⁴ When we look at the discussions around it, we see that similar understandings underpin the protagonists' positions. However, contrary to what White argued, the narrative does not present every option as equally legitimate. When we go back to the beginning, it is quite clear that the king is wrong to disinherit baby Raoul. He is to blame for taking bad advice (117), has committed a *grant folaise* (135). He is called foolish by Alice (176i) and Guerri for taking away his nephew's land (187).²²⁵

For the events surrounding the fief of Vermandois, the blame falls again on the king. He is called a *felon* for giving his nephew the land of someone else (603-604). The authoritative voice of the narrator makes clear who is in the right: "*Raous ot droit, tres bien le vos dison*" (602) and again at lines 648-650:

*"R[aus] ot droit si con je ai apris;
le tort en ot li rois de Saint Denis -
par malvais roi est mains frans hom honnis."*

²²¹ *Raoul*, Ch. LX-LXXXVIII.

²²² *Raoul*, Ch. CIV-CLXXVIII.

²²³ For a summary of the song see Kay, *Chansons de Geste* or Jones, *Introduction*, 98-100.

²²⁴ White, "Discourse of Inheritance," 194-197.

²²⁵ When Guerri confronts the king, he is told that the gift has been made, there is no turning back (191). Louis says the same twelve years later: He regrets the decision, but the barons advised him to do so (473-477).

Louis is ill-advised for giving hostages (“*malvais conceal crei*” 573), while Raoul was wise in demanding them (606-607). Soon afterward it becomes clear why. When Raoul claims the land of Herbert of Vermandois, the king's first instinct is to renege. He argues that the whole nobility would blame him (*blasmer*), he could not expect services from them, and he does not want to disinherit four knights for the sake of one (669-679). ‘The king's *demsurance* made him break his word,’ so the narrator, ‘and many noblemen will suffer great sorrow as a consequence (626f.).’ Raoul on the other hand is made a mockery by the king.

The hostages, while not pleased that their lives are being used as pawns in this quarrel, state quite clearly that Raoul is right and the king is wrong:

“*Drois empereres, trop feis grant folaige
qant ton neveu donnas tel eritaige,
et d'autrui terre l'onnor et le fieaige.
Mors est Herbers qi menoit grant barnaige;
R[aul] a droit, vos en aveiz l'outraige.*”²²⁶

Later he will be made responsible for the war by both sides. In the earlier parts of the poem the critique is often sugarcoated; he is young or ill-advised. In later episodes, however, Louis is totally out of line, resulting in the two families going against him.²²⁷

When we look at debates between aristocrats, the first major dispute is caused by Giboin. He is a rather secondary character, but his request for land triggers an important strand of the story. He is said to have committed a *grant outrage* for wanting someone else's land as compensation for his service as a warrior (137) and is *fox* for wanting to marry Alice (131). Alice says that she would rather be burned to death, than to marry a low-born like him (214-215).

The more interesting character is of course Raoul. It is clear that he is in the right vis-a-vis the king, but it is about more than just right or wrong; the whole question is connected with a strong sense of honor and shame. That Raoul is not holding his father's inheritance is shameful for him and his lineage. It is a disgrace that someone else is holding his land (528). Guerri even threatens to withdraw his support altogether if he does not seize his estates immediately (519-521). However, does it really have to be his inherited land or would any land suffice? After all, Raoul happily accepts the king's counteroffer for another fief. “*Ne vos en iert failli* (569),” he says to Guerri.

²²⁶ *Raoul*, 718-722.

²²⁷ See especially *Raoul*, Ch. CCXLI-CCXLVII.

Bernier voices his objections to Raoul receiving Vermandois. He calls it *desraison* (749). 'The sons of Herbert did not commit any felony to deserve to be disinherited.' The king agrees: 'Raoul has accepted my gift against my will'. In a conversation with Raoul, Bernier urges him to make a settlement, which Raoul refuses: 'The gift is made, I will not give it up.'²²⁸

Raoul has a long discussion with his mother in which she urges him to leave the estates of the Vermandois alone.²²⁹ She fears for his life. 'Whoever gave you their lands, invested you with a sudden death. Herbert and your father were always friends,' she tells Raoul, 'never was there any enmity between them.' Raoul does not seem to care. Letting go would put shame on him and his successors. If he will not take the land that was promised to him, he would be seen as failure: "*qe toz li mons m'en tenroit a failli/ et li mien oir en seroient honni.*"²³⁰

Alice says over and over again that he should not start a war so wrongfully ("*a si grant tort guere ne commencer*" 856 and 901). She reminds him of the great force the Vermandois are able to muster and of Bernier, who finds himself between a rock and a hard place. She urges Raoul to seek a settlement with Herbert's sons and instead go for Cambrai with combined forces. Raoul ignores her pleas. 'What a coward must one be to take advice from a women, when one ought to go to war,' he says. In the end Alice curses him for wanting to claim land that was not his ancestor's: "*or viex aler tel terre challengier / ou tes ancestres ne pris ainz un denier*"²³¹

Alice is expressing the classic fear of a mother – going back at least to the *Iliad* – of her son's death. But besides her rather weird mocking of the troops of Arrouaise – Guerri tells Raoul to ignore her comments for she is old and senile – her arguments are similar to those brought forward by other characters. William fears the baron's judgment should he conquer Nimes, since it is not his hereditary land. Bernier and the four sons of Herbert – independently from each other – also urge Raoul to make a settlement. Guerri tells Alice that Raoul is too arrogant (*orgiex*). 'Once someone has blamed him (*blasmoit*), they will never regain his friendship (980-982).' When Guerri asks him if he would give up the war, he says that even thinking about it is foolish; he would rather die, than to give it up.²³²

In the meantime the Vermandois find themselves in the same situation as baby Raoul a few years ago. The king wants to seize their inheritance and another aristocrat desires their lands. Ybert asserts that it is right to deny Raoul's claim and that Raoul is wrongfully invading their territory. If

228 *Raoul*, Ch. XLIVf.

229 The conversation between Raoul and Alice stretches from chapter XLVIII to LIV.

230 *Raoul*, 824-25.

231 *Raoul*, 953-954.

232 *Raoul*, Ch. LVI.

they would not defend it, he would not be worth a rotten apple. Here we see the same dynamic of honor that leads Raoul to attack the Vermandois.

*“Je ne soit hom (qi de ce me desdie -)
de la parole drois est qe l'en desdie:
il a ma terre a grant tort envaie;
cel nel desfen a m'espee forbie,
je ne me pris une poume pourie.”*²³³

In a conversation with his brother Eudes, Ybert informs him that the king wants to disinherit them (*“Rois Loeyz nos vieut deseriter”* 1823) and that Raoul is invading their territory. At first he cannot believe it: ‘I did not think Raoul to be so *desmesurez*’ (1830-31). The four brothers rally their troops and boast that Raoul will rue the day he received the gift of Vermandois. In the assembly, however, Eudes admits doubts. He fears the king's revenge should they kill Raoul. He suggests that they should instead try to make a deal with Raoul: Give him a piece of their land, repair the damages and then ride against Giboin together and help Raoul take back his hereditary fief. They send a messenger to the opposite camp. Guerri tells Raoul that it is a good deal: ‘You can be proud if four counts want to make peace with you. You have no business ruling over their land anyway.’ (*“Laisse lor terre, ne la te chaut baillier”* 1994) Something that previously also Bernier and Alice have argued. Raoul tells Guerri the same he told his mother: ‘If I give it up, I would be a shame in the eyes of everybody.’ Raoul even calls Guerri a coward for shying away from a fight.²³⁴ The Vermandois make a second attempt at solving the conflict and Raoul is ready to accept the offer. This time, however, Guerri intervenes. Here their roles are reversed, ironically repeating Raoul's earlier words, now Guerri accuses Raoul of cowardice.²³⁵ Finally hell is unleashed and the battle begins.²³⁶

To conclude, the king's actions towards Raoul are called wrong by all parties; Raoul is right in wanting a reward for his services and the return of his inheritance. It is also clear that his insistence on the king keeping his promise is legitimate. However, instead of (forcefully) claiming the land by himself, Alice, Guerri, Bernier and the Vermandois themselves suggest a settlement. Raoul answers with an argument about honor and shame. The characters seem to disagree about what is the correct behavior in this case.

²³³ *Raoul*, 1726-30.

²³⁴ *Raoul*, Ch. CIV and CVIIF.

²³⁵ See similarities with the Roland-Olivier relationship (Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 102).

²³⁶ *Raoul*, Ch. CIX-CXVII.

Garin le Lohrain

Garin le Lohrain is the fascinating story of a feud between two families – the Lohrains and the Bordelais – spanning several generations.²³⁷ The story begins with the grim prospect of a Saracen attack on France. King Charles Martell is killed while beating back the evil invaders. A second wave of attackers march against Metz, the land of Hervis, father of Garin and his younger brother Begon. Hervis requests help at the royal court, but Charles' son Pepin is still young and weak and is easily persuaded by the treacherous Hardré of the Bordelais family to deny him assistance. Hervis denounces his vassalage to the king and instead goes to Anseis, the king of Cologne, to offer him his services in exchange for help against the invaders. The German king agrees and they march against the intruders. Hervis drives them back, but dies of a bolt wound. With his death Anseis considers their agreement to be nullified. In fear of losing Metz, he marches into the city and occupies it. The people of Metz confuse them for Saracens and in the tumult little Garin and Begon flee the town. The brothers grow up in one of their uncles' care until they are old enough to join the royal court, where they are educated together with their later archenemy Fromont (son of the aforementioned Hardré). The king has great affection for the two of them. After a successful hunt he awards Begon the fief of Gascony and both brothers are made seneschals. Fromont is not at all happy with this decision and makes his anger felt. He is said to almost lose his mind, his father Hardré is *correcex* and *marris* (1062-1063). So in turn the king promises Fromont the next fief that falls back to him. (As we will see below, the wording is crucial here). It is not entirely clear why the young knight gets so furious. Some historians have speculated that by granting Begon Gascony, the king is giving him territory right in the heartland of the Bordelais, who hold the city of Bordeaux and other lands in the southwest of France.²³⁸ But besides these political considerations, Fromont might rightfully expect a reward for his services for the king. The similarity of William's, Raoul's and Fromont's reactions suggests so. Despite his rather shady character, Fromont is facing the same issues as the other heroes and can trust to be treated the same way.²³⁹

After Garin and Begon suppress a rebellion that mirrors an uprising in the *Couronnement*, the king suggests to take back Metz. The city is still controlled by King Anseis, but the people of the land soon rally behind the two heroes. The action continues as Saracen invaders have again landed and attacked King Thierry in the Auvergne. A call for help reaches the royal court and King Pepin is persuaded to move against the Saracens, but falls ill and the others move without him. In the midst

²³⁷ *Garin le Lohrain* has received less critical attention. Important works include Kay, *Chansons de geste*. Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*. Adler, *Epische Spekulanten*. Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*. Stephen D. White, "Un imaginaire féodal. La représentation de la guerre dans quelques chansons de geste," in *La Vengeance 400-1200*, ed. Dominique Barthélemy, Francois Bougard, and Regine Le Jan (Roma: L'Ecole Francaise de Rome, 2006), 1000–1024.

²³⁸ Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 194.

²³⁹ *Garin*, Ch. I-XXIII.

of the battle King Thierry is badly wounded. On his deathbed he gives his daughter Blanchefleur and his lands to Garin to reward him for his help. Garin accepts under the condition that King Pepin approves.²⁴⁰

At the royal court Garin brings forth his plea. Fromont is furious and reminds the king of the promise he made earlier. The king outright denies his wish. Garin and Fromont exchange insults. Fromont throws the first punch and a brawl erupts in the king's hall. 'Pepin was young and incapable of doing anything to stop it,' so the narrator. Fromont's father Hardré is killed in the mix. Here too we have grim predictions for the future: 'Because of his death a great number of knights will find an early end.'²⁴¹ Fromont jumps out of the window and flees to his cousin. There his uncle Droon tells Fromont to forget his foolish demand, instead he will find him a wife. The issue seemed to be settled, but at that moment a messenger arrives with the news that Garin has taken Fromont's fief, Soissons. Soon afterwards Fromont's marriage with a noble lady from Flanders is arranged. With the newly found allies, the Bordelais decide to go against Garin's nephew Huon of Cambrai. Their reasoning is that with his death, Hardré would be revenged and in possession of Cambrai, the loss of Soissons will be forgotten. Now the logic of the feud takes over and the back and forth begins.²⁴²

Fromont is able to prevent the marriage between Princess Blanchefleur and Garin by bribing his cousin Bishop Henri to attest that the two are related. Instead King Pepin, intrigued by her good looks and her vast estates, agrees to a marriage. After the ceremony another brawl breaks out and the Bordelais are imprisoned. They allege that the Lohrains wanted to poison the king. A trial by combat decides the issue in favor of Garin and his party.²⁴³ The fighting is continued until the absolute exhaustion of both families.

The peace lasts for over seven years until Begon is killed on a hunt by one of Fromont's nephews and the *guerre* is resumed once more. Slowly we can see a change in Fromont's character that I attribute to him not being a *bachelor* anymore. When the news of Begon's death reaches Fromont, he is trying everything in his power to prevent the war from breaking out again.²⁴⁴ At a later point he starts being called *li viel*²⁴⁵ - the old - and behaves less like the treacherous and driven youngster, but more like the prudent head of a lineage. In the end Garin wants to embark to the Holy Land, but is ambushed and killed by Fromont's son Fromodin.²⁴⁶

240 *Garin*, Ch. XXIV-XL.

241 *Garin*, Ch. XLI-XLIII.

242 *Garin*, Ch. XLVII.

243 *Garin*, Ch. LXIX-LXXIII.

244 *Garin*, Ch. CVIII.

245 For example at line 10667.

246 For a good summary of the plot with a huge set of characters with often similar names see Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 193-196.

With the advancing narrative and the increasing body count the distinction between right and wrong becomes increasingly blurry, but at the beginning it is safe to say that the king is doing the correct thing by favoring Garin and Begon and not the treacherous Bordelais. In the king's behavior towards Begon we might see the ideal vassal-lord relationship and in turn Begon will behave likewise and award all his followers with appropriate fiefs.²⁴⁷ What makes the story of Fromont so interesting is that he is clearly not a positive character. He is liked by neither the narrator, nor by the king. And just as the heroes of our other songs, he is overlooked in getting a fief in favor of someone else.

When Garin asks for the permission to receive the land of Thierry, a heated discussion breaks out in the great hall. The king happily accepts Garin's request. He declares that Garin has increased his honor and served him loyally – one is reminded of what Bertran said to William about ideal vassalage. Fromont, however, contests the decision *molt felenesement* (2247), reminding King Pepin of the promise he made after the hunt. The king denies it outright. ‘What a stupid argument,’ he says, ‘the gift a father makes during his lifetime to his child cannot rightfully be taken away.’ Instead Fromont should demand another fief, he will get it certainly. But Fromont does not want any other.²⁴⁸

Then Garin steps in. ‘We were brothers in arms for seven years,’ he tells Fromont. ‘Never have you given me a reason to be angry, but now you showed me the disloyalty of your ancestors. If you would just have told me that you desire the noble lady and the fief, I would have gladly given it to you. But because of your pride (*orguel*), wickedness (*felonie*), arrogance (*boubant*) and treachery (*traison*) you will receive nothing (2283-2286).’ Should Fromont have rather asked for a settlement with his former companion instead of a public protest at the king's court, as is also suggested between Raoul and the Vermandois?

Fromont replies *orguillousement*: ‘You seek to dispossess me (“*porchaciez mon deseritemant*” 2291), not even half a year will pass before I will lay siege to your fief Metz.’ Garin insults and tries to hit Fromont, but is held back by the king. ‘You cannot stop yourself from committing treason,’ Garin continues. ‘It is the custom of your ancestors. They killed my godfather in a monastery and cut off the head of his liege lord, while you in the meantime administer their lands. They were my cousins and I claim their possessions. Those that are wrong and put shame on their sovereign should not have the right to own territory in the first place.’²⁴⁹

247 *Garin*, Ch. XXIII and LXV.

248 *Garin*, Ch. XLI.

249 “*De traison ne voz poez gaitier,
Que vostre aiol en fu bien costumier;
Qui son parin murdri en .i. mostier;
Et son lige segnor copa le chief,
Dont voz tenez les terres et les fiez.
Mi cousin erent; je les voel chalengier.
Qu’a tort honist son segnor droiturier,
Ne li devroit Dieus honor envoier.*” (*Garin*, 2324-2332).

Besides himself with rage Fromont punches Garin in the face, thereby starting a brawl. Fromont flees to his cousin Oedon in St. Quentin and delivers the sad news of his father's death. Oedon asks him in what manner Hardré was killed and what was the cause of the conflict – suspecting that Fromont has provoked them with his treacherous and quarrelsome ways. Here again we see the general unpopularity of Fromont.²⁵⁰ He explains that the king granted him in front of many witnesses the first land that *escheats* in this country:

*“Il m'otria, plus l'orient de mil,
S'il eschaoit honor en cest pais
Qui me pleust ne deust enbellir,
Que je l'aroie, n'i aroit contredit.”*²⁵¹

His uncle Droon tells him that he was wrong and involved himself in a great folly (*“Tort en eustes, par Deu, sire cousins! De grant folie vos estes entremis.”* 2675-2676). He sees an altogether different motivation behind Fromont's actions: he wants a wife. ‘If that is what you desire,’ so Droon, ‘you shall have ten.’ (*“Voz cuidiiez bien a fame faillir;/ S’une en volez, voz en arez bien x”* 2677-2678) Droon already has a suitable candidate in mind: the recently widowed Helissent de Ponthieu. Fromont could administer the lands of her infant son until he is grown up and a marriage with her family would give the Bordelais powerful allies in the fights to come. Fromont agrees to the arrangement.

With this marriage, Fromont's wish for a fief is fulfilled and the issue that was started with the king giving Begon Gascony seems to be resolved. However, by claiming the land of Garin, Fromont has committed serious wrongs himself. Garin is furious: He calls his former brother in arms all sorts of bad things and then makes a counterclaim to his land, alleging that he owns it unrightfully. The Lohrains see a conspiracy to harm them in Fromont's actions. They argue to the king that by hurting their lineage the Bordelais are also hurting the kingship. Henri de Montaigu claims that Fromont wanted to trick Pepin in favor of his own kin (*“Li quens Fromons te voet voir engignier/ Por son linage qu'est orguillox et frier”* 2474-2475). ‘You are very young,’ he continues, ‘you must bring justice to your men and foster and elevate your friends. Fromont wanted to slaughter the barons that serve you with all their heart.’²⁵²

250 *Garin*, Ch. XLIII and XLVII.

251 *Garin*, 2662-2665.

252 *Garin*, Ch. XLIII.

Henri advises the king to take Soissons. ‘That would lower your enemy,’ he says. Fromont is called a flatterer – a trait commonly associated with the traitor at court.²⁵³ In the end Garin conquers Soissons and offers it to Pepin. The king replies that Garin cannot make him this gift, as he himself gave it to Fromont’s father. ‘While that might be true,’ Garin responds, ‘my ancestors had it before him.’ Convinced by this argument, the king finally takes possession over the city. After a series of bloody events the issue of Soissons is discussed again at an informal meeting between the two families and Fromont’s wish for the return of the city falls on deaf ears. The city is not Fromont’s to have, for it was not his ancestor’s.²⁵⁴

The proposed marriage between Garin and Blanchefleur continues to strain the relationship between the baronial families and the king. Bishop Henri urges the king not to allow the allegedly incestuous marriage. France would be dishonored and never would Fromont or any member of his lineage and friends serve him. When King Louis wanted to deny the fief of Vermandois to Raoul, he defended his decision with a similar claim – he would not be able to call the sons of Herbert to his court anymore. So it is not only a matter of justice, but also of loyalty.²⁵⁵

The king is eventually persuaded to marry the noble lady himself. When confronted with the news Garin makes an argument we have seen a few times already: ‘I have served you good and loyally and you have repaid me badly.’ Begon intervenes and urges him to let her go. He tells him, mirroring what Fromont’s uncle said previously, if he wants a wife he shall have ten.

“Foux Loherenz, qu’es ce que tu as dit?

Laissiez ester Blancheflor al cler vis,

Se volez fame, voz en arez bien x

*De haut parage et de riches amis.”*²⁵⁶

After the marriage ceremony a great feast is organized. Garin is chosen as the king’s cup-bearer. Bernard de Naisil thinks this honor should go to Fromont. Fromont tells him to leave it be, but is unable to calm him down. Furious, Bernard jumps up and tries to wrestle the cup out of Garin’s hands. Unable to do so, he shouts at Garin, reminding everyone that he has disinherited Fromont and his friends. Another brawl starts and the conflict continues.²⁵⁷

Garin le Lohrain offers a welcome counterweight to the other stories. Because the feud between the Bordelais and the Lohrains is in the center of the narrative (much more than in *Raoul*), a lot of the

²⁵³ Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 186.

²⁵⁴ *Garin*, Ch. XLIII-XLVI and LIV.

²⁵⁵ *Garin*, Ch. LXV.

²⁵⁶ *Garin*, 6013-6016.

²⁵⁷ *Garin*, Ch. LXV.

mechanics surrounding the question of how to acquire a fief, function as they are supposed to. We can see this especially in the importance of marriage and the fact that the frequent calming voices are actually being heard.

In conclusion, our three characters are all denied the opportunity to acquire the fief that would allow them to sustain their livelihood. They have served the king, but did not get the appropriate reward. These questions take up more (*Raoul*), or less (*Garin, Charroi*) space of the narrative, are told from different perspectives and involve different character-types; William the perfect knight, Raoul the *demesure* and Fromont the traitor or traitor-like figure. What we have seen are the discussions around a commonly posed question and how matters of service, fief, marriage, honor and loyalty interconnected.

With no absolute authority over the truth, there ought to be conflicting versions of what is right and what wrong. After Raoul's death the essential question of the story becomes whether Bernier was right to kill his liege lord. As Sarah Kay and others before her argued, the answer must have been obvious when we look at it from a perspective of feudal law: Bernier is in the right; he did everything he ought to have done. Raoul ill-rewarded him by killing his mother and hitting him on the head; Bernier even publicly renounced his vassalage.²⁵⁸ However, that does not seem to matter. So even if Raoul acted wrongly in attacking the Vermandois, and Bernier was right to break his vassalage, Raoul's death has to be avenged. This is an important lesson in medieval politics: two wrongs do not make a right.²⁵⁹ This is especially true when it comes to matters of honor and revenge. Even for the justest of killings one still had to expect retaliation.²⁶⁰

The same applies to the question of acquiring a fief. From Raoul's perspective he is right in wanting a reward for his services and claiming the land that was promised to him by the king. From the perspective of the Vermandois, Raoul is wrongfully invading their territory. The tragic and the brilliance of the texts is to force the characters to make these impossible decisions.²⁶¹

258 See Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 74.

259 Guy Halsall argues quite the opposite in his otherwise fine study on medieval vengeance. (Guy Halsall, "An Introductory Survey," in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 22).

260 Paul R. Hyams, "Was There Really Such a Thing as Feud in the High Middle Ages?," in *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud*, ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 168-170. Revenge was especially likely when property was threatened (Peter Hayes Sawyer, "The Bloodfeud in Fact and Fiction," in *Tradition Og Historieskriving*, ed. Kirsten Hastrup and Preben Sørensen (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1987), 35). More on feud in the chapter "Raoul de Gouy's feud" below.

261 See Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible revolte*, 36f. and 126. Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 151.

Looking for a fief and consideration

As we have seen in the previous chapter our heroes need to find a solution to the problem of how to acquire a fief when they are denied the possibility of a reward for their services. Considering how central social mobility through adventure and hardship is to the courtly romances, to many other epics and to the very idea of chivalry, these failures are worth looking into. Some have argued that the portrayal of the king in our songs is a reaction to Philip Augustus' policy of surrounding himself with sometimes lowborn professionals and petty knights, thereby depriving the high aristocracy of career opportunities.²⁶² It seems to me, however, that it has more to do with the struggles of the less fortunate segments of the nobility. In the course of the twelfth century the possession of a landed estate became increasingly important as a marker of status at the lower boundaries of the nobility – clearly separating those who had managed to take a step up from those that had not.²⁶³ When we look more closely at our passages, the heroes are not deprived of a career at court, but of a fief; in other words of tangible social mobility for the lower aristocracy.

However, in the end our songs only give us the illusion of advancement or decline. Even without a piece of land of their own, our heroes are still high aristocrats. They can muster thousands of followers without even batting an eye; Raoul is still the king's nephew. As we will see William, Raoul and Fromont are only mimicking the struggles for a fief happening at the lower end of the social strata that were so quintessential to the life of the *juvenes* and the lower aristocracy.

Georges Duby was the most vocal proponent of the notion that youth was a driving factor in the material and imaginary world of the high medieval aristocracy. He described a particular stage in the life of a knight between child- and adulthood. These so called *juvenes* (the romance *bachelor*) were already grown up, educated in the skills of weaponry and chivalry, often knighted, but not yet married and settled down. He associated a particular playboy-like lifestyle with this time of prolonged adolescence, where groups of these young men roamed the countryside, looking for adventure and a noble lady willing to marry. They could be firstborn sons not content with a domestic role in the father's household, but were more often second or thirdborns who had little prospect of gaining an inheritance except through adventure.²⁶⁴ This antagonism of the old, landowning *seniores* and the *ju-*

²⁶² Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 182. On this policy see John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 104-106.

²⁶³ Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 246-248.

²⁶⁴ Duby, "Youth." See also Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) and Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès, eds., *Geschichte des privaten Lebens*, vol. 2: Vom Feudalzeitalter zur Re-

venes – socially inferior but embodying the principal virtues of chivalry – led to a generational conflict. Marie-Gabrielle Garnier-Hausfalter and later Sarah Kay saw this opposition played out in medieval literature, often resulting in the young knight being forced to make his fortunes elsewhere.²⁶⁵ Duby's ideas were based on the misconception that there was a change in family structure from a broad clan to a patrimonial lineage sometime in the twelfth century. This narrowing of the social framework coincided with the limitation of inheritance to the eldest son, which led to a large number of second, third and fourth sons being excluded from inheritance.²⁶⁶ Newer studies have undermined this premise. There was no sudden change in family structure and families made arrangements for younger sons as well.²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, there can be no denying that the eldest son had a privileged position when it came to inheritance. Besides, especially less wealthy families would have found it difficult to provide all of their offspring with an adequate fief. But, considering the importance of land in economic and symbolic terms, being second or third in the line would not have stopped a *bachelor* from striving for one.²⁶⁸

For Erich Köhler and Mario Mancini being a *bachelor* was more of a social than an age category. They argued that the *chansons de geste* and courtly literature represent the dreams and wishes of the petty nobility fearing impoverishment and social degradation. The predominance of knightly values and ideas of equality were supported by the high aristocracy in order to bind the lower nobles to their cause. The social reality, of course, often looked different. In our case this distinction is not really helpful. The issues, dreams and fears of the petty nobility probably coincided more often than not with those of the *juvenes*.²⁶⁹

Jean Flori studied the use of the word *bachelor* in the *chanson de geste* and pointed to the inconsistent usage of the term. Eleven times noble *bachelers* were landed, seven times they were not; three times they were married, twenty times they were not. Based on this quantitative analysis he rejected any sort of social, juridical or professional meaning that others before him asserted. Flori concluded

naissance (*Histoire de la vie privée*, vol 2: De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance) (Augsburg: Weltbild Verl, 1999).

265 Marie-Gabrielle Garnier-Hausfalter, "Mentalités épiques et conflit de générations dans le Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange," *Le Moyen Âge* 93 (1987). Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 92-136.

266 Georges Duby, "The Structure of Kinship and Nobility," in *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 134-49.

267 See especially Constance Bouchard, *Those of My Blood: Constructing Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). For a good summary see Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 121-125. For more on this debate see chapter "Once upon a time in a land far, far away..."

268 Jacobs, "Inheritance of Violence," 296f.

269 Mancini, *Società feudale*. Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit*, 67-72. Erich Köhler, "Die Rolle des niederen Rittertums bei der Entstehung der Trobadorlyrik," in *Esprit und arkadische Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verl., 1966) and Erich Köhler, "Über die Möglichkeiten historisch-soziologischer Interpretation," in *Esprit und arkadische Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verl., 1966). Köhler wrongly assumes a replacement of the *chansons de geste* by the courtly romances. On the contemporaneity of the genres see Kay, *Chansons de geste*.

that there was no clear definition of *bachelor* beyond young man, or, more precisely, man, who embodies the ideology of youth.²⁷⁰

In her study on male conduct in different strata of medieval society, Ruth Karras argued similarly that in literature one can only see what was associated or expected from an aristocratic youth.²⁷¹ This is an important point. Our *chansons* have as much to do with actual practice as high-school-movies with the actual high school experience. They are about what were thought to be the typical fears and issues of young knights, not so much about their actual behavior. These are *topoi*, often exaggerated and sometimes even comical. However, we should not forget that these youths were an important part of the *chansons*' audiences themselves, so these issues and fears were probably not far from their actual ones. It is necessary to note that the person responsible for the singer's payment was most likely not a *bachelor*, but the head of the household. This discrepancy will concern us in a later chapter.

Of the aforementioned issues the most pressing were land and marriage. Returning to our songs, it is not hard to find the connection to youth: Raoul is said to behave like someone who is not a child anymore in claiming his father's lands (*"l'enfes Raous n'a mie sens d'effant/ l'onnor son pere va molt bien chalengant"* 472-473). When in *Garin le Lohrain* a messenger arrives at the court with a plea for help against Saracen invaders, the old Hardré suggests to stay back. Garin tells the king not to believe *"les viex chanus barbez"* (1379). Garin, Begon, Fromont and the others press the king to intervene. All of them are young and newly knighted and should be looking for a fief and consideration (*"Qui tuit sons jone de novel adoubé./ Or devons quere honor et honesté."* 1394-1395). The narrator is clearly on the side of the young. 'There is no traitor like Hardré in the whole kingdom,' he claims (1281).

In the *Couronnement de Louis* the pope tells William that he is in need of a fief, because he is a *bachelor*. (*"Bachelers estes, de terre avez mestier"* 1369). In the *Charroi* William says without a piece of land he cannot be called a knight (*"N'i ai conquis vaillissant un denier/ Dont nus en cort m'apelast chevalier"* 254-255). On matters of marriage it is enough to remember Droon's and Begon's comments that all Fromont respectively Garin want and need is a wife. For a literary portrait of a lower aristocrat, we might look at Chrétien de Troyes' description of Enide's father. When Eric asks him why his daughter is so poorly dressed, he laments his poverty. His entire live he was at war and lost all his lands.²⁷²

270 Jean Flori, "Qu'est-ce qu'un bachelor? Étude historique de vocabulaire dans les chansons de geste du XIIe siècle," *Romania* 96, no. 383 (1975): 289-314.

271 Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 12-23.

272 Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec und Enide*, ed. Ingrid Kasten (München: Fink, 1979), lines 505-517.

A bad cliché

At the beginning of this chapter we looked at debates surrounding the proper conduct in acquiring a fief, but how are our characters even put into the position of having to worry about these issues in the first place? As we will see, the authors deliberately created conditions to force them into unusual situations. Our high aristocratic cast would normally not find themselves landless, but there were numerous *povres bachelers* to whom the situation would have seemed all too familiar. Stephen White is right in arguing that the models underlining these discussions mirror the discourse if not the practice of the twelfth century.²⁷³ The circumstances that lead to these situations seem so out of place, however, that they can only be understood as literary tools to pressure the main characters into certain positions.

As we have seen in previous chapters, most theories centered around the epics of revolts see them as a reaction to the increasingly powerful and centralized kingship in the second half of the twelfth century and especially during Philip Augustus' reign.²⁷⁴ That the monarch is the bogeyman in our stories might speak for a latent bias on the side of the aristocracy. Regardless, the king-aristocracy relationship is not at the center of the narratives. An obvious point is that the monarch disappears for most of the story in the *Charroi* and *Raoul*, in *Garin* he only plays a secondary role. If the king was more important, why is he nothing more than a cliché come to life, when the same authors were able to create multi-faceted characters like Raoul and Bernier?²⁷⁵ The issues we are discussing here, are not so much about how to cope with a bad and powerful king, but how to react when you are deprived of an important form of social mobility. The bad king is only a literary tool.

Some historians have argued that the portray of the king as a weakish boy is a nostalgic dream of the aristocracy of times long bygone when the kingship was still powerless. However, what these stories tell us is quite the opposite; a weak king is not good for anyone. Valor and power should co-inhabit the king.²⁷⁶ The image of the *rex inutilis* was widespread in medieval political theory and was more likely a way to discuss general concerns about the use and misuse of power. In the world of the *chanson de geste*, the king is often the most powerful when it comes to violating the rights of his subordinates and least powerful when it comes to upholding justice.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ White, "Discourse of Inheritance," 173-178. and White, "Service for Fiefs," 70-73.

²⁷⁴ See the pioneer works of Matarasso, *Recherches*, Calin, *Epic of Revolt* and Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit*. Most recently Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*.

²⁷⁵ Matarasso, *Recherches*, 155.

²⁷⁶ Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, *L'impossible revolte*, 51.

²⁷⁷ Peters, *The Shadow King*, x, and 24. See also Kay, *Chansons de geste*, 120.

The king's bad characteristics are most obvious in *Raoul de Cambrai*: He disinherits orphans, takes from widows, surrounds himself with low-borns (Giboin), is ill-advised by those pesky Germans, stalls when he should show *largesse* and gives bad gifts. All this time the narrator does not shy away from blaming him for his bad behavior. The text reads as if Louis were purposefully ignoring the advice Charlemagne gave him on his deathbed.

In the *Charroi* and *Raoul* he overlooks the heroes in rewarding them for their services. 'That is what you get for serving a bad man,' ("*Sert a male gent*" and "*sert mauvés segnor*" 297 and 303) says William. The same is asserted by the narrator in *Raoul de Cambrai*: "*Par malvais roi est mains frans hom honnis* (650)." We should not forget that William and Raoul are not nobodies, they are the king's *druz* (*Charroi*, 262 and 271) or *bon ami* (*Raoul*, 347-8) and excellent knights. William's heroic deeds stretch over a multitude of songs and while Raoul cannot boast with the same accomplishments, he is still the king's nephew and senechal.

When put under pressure the monarch promises them the next vacant fief – the wording is crucial here. He fails to clarify that he is referring to the next land that *escheats* – meaning the next land that falls back to him because of the lack of an heir – but rather the land of the next nobleman who dies.²⁷⁸ In the case of the *Charroi* one could argue that he wanted to give William the hand of the dead lord's widow. However, the fact that he later offers William the fiefs of infants, indicates that he does not mind disinheriting children.²⁷⁹

Raoul:

"*qe c'il muert conte de ci q'en Vermendois
d'aiz la Chapele deci en Cellentois,
de Monloon deci en Ollenois,
qe les honnors et la terre tenrois.*"
(559-562)

Again at 589-590:

"*qe les honors li donra il en fin,
qex quens qe muire entre loire et le Rin.*"

Charroi:

"*Un de cez jorz morra uns de voz pers;
Tote la terre vos en vorrai doner,
et la moillier, se prendre la volez*"
(76-78)

The hostages swear:

²⁷⁸ Acher, "Archaismes" and Koss, "Inheritance Disputes," 107.

²⁷⁹ For that position see Acher, "Archaismes," 263.

*“qe se queus muert d'Orliens desq'a Soisons,
 de Monloon dusq'a Ais au perron,
 qe la contè li donra a bandon”*
 (599-601)

When comparing this to *Garin le Lohrain*, we see an almost opposite situation. King Pepin is far from a model-monarch. He too he is described as young and naive and as the narrative develops, he will act more outrageously.²⁸⁰ But when put in the same circumstance as Louis, he does not make the same mistakes. A lot of the institutions work as they are supposed to. Contrary to the *Charroi* and *Raoul* the king sides with the heroes of the story. He makes Begon and Garin his designated senechals and rewards Begon with a vast estate. Garin's hereditary land is later reconquered. Moreover, he promises Fromont the next fief that *escheats* and not the next land that becomes free. So when confronted by Fromont later on, not even his uncle supports his claim.²⁸¹

*“Li rois l'apelle i don li promis:
 Tout le premier qui iert en son pais
 Qui escherra, s'il li vient plaisir;
 Se il n'i a droit oir por le tenir,
 Il sera siens, cui qu'il doie enbellir.”*²⁸²

If in the other songs the king was being intentionally vague or never planned to keep his promise – as a part of a deliberate strategy²⁸³ – why would he then give Raoul 40 of his most noble men as hostages? When confronted with the death of Herbert of Vermandois, the hostages make it unmistakably clear that it is the king's fault: “*R[aous] a droit, vos en aveiz l'outraige*” (722). Now Louis is forced to make the even more unusual decision of disinheriting four knights for the sake of one, of whom at least one is already grown up.²⁸⁴ And again, he is giving a worthless gift by not warranting it and thereby forcing Raoul to take it himself. While all these actions might in theory be possible, they are as representative of actual political practice as a chase to the airport to save a failing relationship. The king who does not reward his best knights and the father who disinherits all his sons – which we will be discussing below – is nothing but a literary device, a bad cliché. These are not

280 The narrator says that the king was young and did not have any *raisons*. His people did not consider him worth two cents (*Garin*, 2316-2317). He commits injustices in not protecting Garin's father, depriving Garin of his fiancée and later siding with the wrong side, the Bordelais.

281 Heintze argued that the king's promise does not apply, because the lands were never part of Louis' kingdom (*S'il eschaoit honor en cest pais*). But none of the characters make that case.

282 *Garin*, 1064 – 1070.

283 See White, “Service for Fiefs,” 84f.

284 Acher, “Archaïsmes,” 263.

caricatured representations of actual practice, as Stephen White argued, the only purpose is to put the high aristocratic heroes in the position of *juvenes*.²⁸⁵ The case of Louis promising the land of the next baron who dies and then disinheriting four men, makes one wonder if the story of Raoul was even seen as a tragedy as so often suggested. Or would knights have rather laughed in disbelief and asked themselves how can anyone be so stupid?

But no matter how unrealistic our stories might have seemed, being denied a reward for one's services and being without a piece of land was something only too familiar to most *juvenes* and the lower aristocracy. This connection gets most obvious in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, where William calls himself a *bachelor* multiple times. When the king tells him to be patient and wait for the next peer to die, he responds that this is an awfully long waiting period for a *povre bachelor* (81) and a "*bachelor qui est de ma jovente*" (89). He continues to portray his situation in the most dramatic terms. He cannot even feed his horse, the very symbol of his knighthood. It is a huge hardship having to wait for another man's death to gain riches:

*"Deux! Con grant val li estuet avaler
Et a grant mont li estuet amonter
Qui d'autrui mort atent la richetè!"*²⁸⁶

The situation he is describing here, being young, poor and landless and having to wait for social advancement, must have been a common or at least feared experience for many members of the aristocracy; from sons passed over in matters of inheritance to heirs waiting for their father's death to landless knights in the service of a lord. Waiting must have been the typical experience of the household knight at court.²⁸⁷

While William finds himself in the same situation, he is in fact not a *povre bachelor* himself. He is neither young nor poor.²⁸⁸ This is again only a literary tool to make William more relatable to the *juvenes*. Just to give a few examples: A little later he says that he has served the king so long that his hair has turned white ("*Tant t'ai servi que le poil ai chanu*" 257). Which is certainly more believable considering the numerous adventures he has already undertaken in the king's name. When William's army finally moves to Spain, it is accompanied by 300 pack horses, laden with precious

²⁸⁵ White, "Service for Fiefs," 84.

²⁸⁶ *Charroi*, 85-7.

²⁸⁷ See for example Duby, "Youth," 117f. and Mancini, *Società feudale*, 108.

²⁸⁸ See Flori, "Qu'est-ce qu'un bachelor?," 293. It is such an unrealistic description that some historians argued that it was meant humorously.

religious items and cooking utensils. Just a moment ago William did not have the grain to feed his horse, but now he can supply a several thousand men-strong army?²⁸⁹

Before Raoul can even be in the same position as William, he first has to lose his rightful inheritance. The king insists that he does not want to disinherit Raoul and he should receive his land back once he reaches maturity. First he seems to appoint Giboin as guardian, but after Alice refuses to marry him, Louis seems to be taking Raoul's land away ("*toli son eritaige*" 136). Alice and Guerri see this as an absolute disgrace. By doing so the king not only disinherits Raoul, but also puts him in great danger. Guerri suggests that if he sets foot in Cambrai, he would have his head cut off.²⁹⁰ This was probably not an unreasonable thing to assume. With the only potential claimant to the fief out of the way Giboin could hold the land uncontested. When Raoul is old enough to make his case in court Louis breaks his word and refuses to return his inheritance. So Raoul is denied social advancement on two grounds; inheritance and reward for service.

For Fromont to be made landless even more things need to go wrong. First he does not receive the fief of Gascony, which makes him and his father very angry. Later he is denied the land that was promised to Garin. At this point he is, however, already in possession of the city of Soissons. After the brawl the Lohrains convince the king to take control over the city, thereby depriving Fromont of his fief. So only through this series of unfortunate events he is made landless, but just for a short period of time. A marriage is quickly arranged and Fromont also receives the lands of his father. In this brief moment Fromont bemoans his situation, similarly to Guerri when he is reminding Raoul that he has no land to call his own.²⁹¹

Raoul:

"N'as tant de terre, par verté le te di,
Ou tu peüses conreer .j. ronci."
(489-490)

Garin:

"Las!" dist Fromons, "or sui je mal baillis.
N'ai tant de terre o me couchasse vis,
Ne serè mors ou je fuisse enfois,"
(2707-2709)

The bad king was not the only literary tool a jongleur could use to put the aristocratic heroes into the position of *juvenes*. When William's nephew Guielin expresses his reluctance to accompany his uncle to Spain, he is also told that he needs a piece of land. ("*Querez hennor, dont vos n'avez*

289 Charroi, Ch. XXVI-XXVIII.

290 Raoul, Ch. XIV.

291 Kay, "Topography," 272.

neant,” 622). His father makes clear that he will not inherit anything from him – ‘You need to conquer it yourself, just as I did when I was young.’ Here we have a different narrative device: the resentful father who sends his sons away. Quite a few of those seem to inhabit the world of the William cycle.²⁹² Most prominently in the early thirteenth-century *chanson* *Le Narbonnais*, where the old Aymeri forces his six elder sons to leave and promises the city of Narbonne to his youngest. Aymeri orders them to go and serve a good lord, just as he did when he was young, as his land is not big enough to divide it into seven pieces. ‘What are you waiting for in my fortified city,’ he tells them. ‘Do you want to rape virgins and put shame on the townspeople?’²⁹³ His words are quite contrary to the intimate family relationships we are used to from other songs, but could very well present common prejudices towards the *juvenes*.

Aymeri’s wife Hermenjart heavily protests her husband’s decision. She fears that they would find themselves unprotected. The same argument is also made by the city’s merchants. And as fate would have it, Saracens invade Narbonne soon after. Hermenjart clearly states that her husband’s decision is not normal – Charlemagne never ruled this way – and that according to French custom everyone should get a fair share. Later Aymeri indicates he only wants to bequeath everything to his last born, because he is not yet grown up. He would rather give it to neither of them and instead leave everything to his godson.²⁹⁴ A decision that is again heavily criticized in a later song.²⁹⁵

The practice to pass one’s estates only to the youngest son is just as unusual as Aymeri’s reasoning for it. He says that Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar did so. Here too, the authors create a world where noble heirs find themselves without a piece of land – this time not because of a bad king, but because of a resentful father. I doubt that the disinheritance of all of one’s own sons was a widespread practice in high aristocratic households. When we look at William Marshall, he provides for all his children by dividing his lands and goods between them. When he announces that he will not give anything to his youngest, William is quickly convinced to leave his son enough land to at least sustain his livelihood.²⁹⁶

We find a slightly different situation in *Girart de Vienne*. Here the four sons are forced to leave the paternal estates, not by their father, but because of poverty. The once-wealthy family lands were so badly pillaged by Saracen attacks that they do not even have enough food on the table. On their own

292 For example in *Les Narbonnais*, *Guibert d’Andrenas*, *Charroi de Nîmes* and *Girart de Vienne*. See Garnier-Hausfater, “Mentalites,” 32-40.

293 “Volez I fere oltraje ne folie

Ne les puceles prandre par estoutie

Ne les borjoies honir par vilanie?” (*Les Narbonnais; chanson de geste*, ed. Hermann Suchier (Paris: Firmin Didot et cie, 1898), 281-285 (subsequently cited as *Les Narbonnais*).

294 *Les Narbonnais*, Ch. VIII-IX, XI-XIII.

295 Garnier-Hausfater, “Mentalites,” 32.

296 *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, ed. Paul Meyer, (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1891), 18136-18154.

accord the sons decide to seek fortune away from home.²⁹⁷ Here we have yet another reason for the characters to leave home and live the *juvenes*-lifestyle. Poverty might have been a frequent cause for third or fourth sons, or members of the lower aristocracy to move away, but Saracen plundering obviously was not an issue anymore in twelfth-century France.

The dire economic situation of many professional warriors and the necessity to join a noble household to get a chance at social advancement is illustrated by the innumerable *povres bachelers* that seem to inhabit the world of the *chansons*. They appear whenever a promising opportunity arises. In the *Charroi* William vows that everyone willing to join him will get rich rewards. 30.000 *povres bachelers* that have served, but not conquered, riding draft horses and wearing torn cloths, flock to him and follow him south.²⁹⁸ In the *Couronnement* William also appeals to them (“*Et tuit I vieignent li povre bachelor;/ A clos chevaux, a destriers desfeerez,/A guarnemenz desroz et despanez;/ Tuit cil qui servent as povres seignorez*” 2256-2259). When in *Le Narbonnais* Aymeri’s sons go out to conquer somewhere else, they promise to divide the spoils with everyone willing to join them. Here too a huge number of *bachelers* – sons of counts and peers, but also of burgers – are willing to go with them wherever they go.²⁹⁹ These *povres bachelers* would have known only too well how difficult it was to gain a fief by their own accord.

Lastly, I want to comment on a point made by Jacques Le Goff and Howard Bloch.³⁰⁰ They observed that most heroes searching for a fief and renown in the *chansons de geste* and the romances are firstborns or sole heirs instead of second and third sons. Regardless of whether there was a change in family structure, the first born sons did have a privileged position in matters of inheritance. So why would they find themselves so often without a piece of land? The answer is simple: people did not relate to the characters because they were *exactly* like them. Or do people really relate to the heroines of *Sex and the City* because they too live in Manhattan mansions and drink Cosmopolitans all day? Most second sons would not have had to identify with the heroes’ social position (although they might have desired to be in their shoes) to find the epics meaningful. However, they could relate very well to William’s or Raoul’s dreadful living situation (or would have feared ending up in it).

When confronted with these kind of crises in real life, people in the Middle Ages would have looked at historical role models for guidance on how to behave. Issues that were important in the present were projected onto the past. It is therefore not a coincidence that questions of land and marriage are so prominent in our songs. In the same way actual opinions and debates found their

297 *Girart de Vienne*, Ch. I-III.

298 *Charroi*, Ch. XXV-XXVI.

299 *Les Narbonnais*, Ch. CVII.

300 Bloch, *Medieval French Literature*, 194f. Le Goff, *Phantasie und Realität*, 197f.

way into the *chansons*. While these debates mirrored disputes in knightly households, the literary solution to the ever-important question of how to acquire a fief is a very particular one. One that was not necessarily in the best interest of the *juvenes* and the petty nobility.

Beyond the three solutions

In the same way that our characters are deliberately put into the position of *juvenes*, the manner how events unfold can tell us something that goes beyond a simple mirror of debates about fiefs and inheritance. They offer solutions. The most prominent example of this kind of narrative justice is Ganelon's trial in the *Song of Roland*. The knights at Charlemagne's court seem to be undecided if Ganelon committed treason, but godly intervention in the duel between Pinable and Thierry proves his guilt beyond any doubt.³⁰¹ The same is true for *Raoul de Cambrai*. The text is quite clear that the outcome of the battle near Origny determines who is right and who is wrong. To the prospect of a fight until death between him and Raoul, Bernier says: "*I am all eagerness, and that's the truth. I would prove, if I were to be believed, that it was wrong to accept the glove for this land, and that you have been wicked and treacherous towards me.*"³⁰²

The result of the battle settles the issue. On his deathbed Raoul admits that it was to his misfortune that he was ever awarded the land: "*Mar vi le gant de la terre bailier-/ceste ne autre ne m'avra mais mestier.*"³⁰³

In this regard the case of Raoul is the most interesting, since his claim to the fief of Vermandois is called rightful by the narrator and other characters, despite numerous people urging him to make a settlement. This is never the case for Fromont. Everyone, even his uncle, seems to agree that he is wrong. At a later stage the cause of the Bordelais' is further delegitimized by Isore losing the duel against Begon.³⁰⁴

In a world without written rules and no absolute authority over the truth, norms are only significant in so far as they can be used as cultural resources in disputes. As was said earlier, Stephen White suggested that there was a whole array of possible options that were more or less equal and could be used strategically.³⁰⁵ However, the evidence from our songs suggests that the options were far from that. Knights could not have the cake and eat it too. When we look at how the stories unfold and the

301 *Roland*, Ch. CCLXX-CCLXXXVII.

302 *Raoul*, 2151-2154; trans., 145.

303 *Raoul*, 2950f.

304 *Garin*, Ch. LXXIII.

305 White, "Discourse of Inheritance," 177f. Although he admits to the privileged position of inheritance.

opinion and actions of the characters in detail, it becomes quite clear what is considered acceptable behavior and what is not. If Stephen White were correct in his assumptions, why would William argue the same as Alice, Guerri and the Lohrain brothers about the preferability of inheritance? Why would Alice, the Vermandois, Bernier and Garin all suggest a settlement and why would Begon, Droon and King Louis give the same advice and urge a marriage? If every option were equal it would be highly astonishing that most of our characters come to similar conclusions in the highly complex game of land and honor.

When we look at the question of how to acquire a fief, only two times rules are explicitly mentioned. One time in *Garin le Lohrain*, where King Pepin says to Fromont that one cannot take away by right the gift that was made by a father to his child during his lifetime:

*“Et dist li rois, “Or oi plait de noient,
Ce dont li peres fait don a son enfant,
Et il li siet et done a son vivant,
Ne la puet prendre par droit devisement.”*³⁰⁶

And a second time when Raoul addresses the king, saying that many know that by right the land of the father should go to his child: *“L’onnor del pere, ce se vent li auquant, / doit tot par droit revenir a l’esfant (525-526).”* We also remember Guerri and Alice telling Raoul that he has no business ruling over Vermandois, since it is not his ancestor’s land. The same, but in reverse, is argued by Garin when he is taking Soissons, which is only acceptable because his ancestors once held it. William, already on the way to sunny Spain, fears that he has ill-treated the king. After all he demanded Spain to which he has no hereditary right. Even bad King Louis initially does not want to disinherit baby Raoul. It is save to say that inheritance was seen as rightful and desirable. The comments of William and others even indicate that it is always the preferable option.

An alternative is a reward for loyal services. Raoul and William, and arguably also Fromont, are expecting and seemingly deserving of a compensation for their employment. The very premise is never questioned. In the roughly contemporary *Girart de Vienne* this gets an almost contractual nature.³⁰⁷ Because of the king’s flaws and weaknesses, however, this form of social mobility is not an option. What is left when neither the preferred model inheritance nor loyal service work?

³⁰⁶ *Garin*, 2260-2263.

³⁰⁷ *Girart de Vienne*, Ch. XVIII, XIX and XL.

The most successful alternative is William's conquest in Saracen Spain. The same opportunity is triumphantly taken by the eldest son in *Girart de Vienne*. Before William decides to try his luck abroad, the king offers him the estates of other nobles. He could have easily given in to the temptation and faced the same disasters as Raoul and Fromont in our other songs. The options are all on the table. However, as we will see in the next chapters, the unusual thing is not William rejecting the other options, but Fromont and Raoul pursuing them and not even thinking about a conquest abroad. Foreign expeditions were not only widespread in the world of the epics, but also the dominant form of how aristocratic families in the twelfth century imagined their ancestors to have come in the possession of their fiefs.

Now, instead of conquering abroad or pursuing a marriage or a settlement, Raoul decides to go for the lands of a fellow aristocrat. From his point of view, he is in the right, which is asserted multiple times by the authoritative voice of the narrator. From the point of view of the Vermandois, he is wrongfully invading their territory. This is one of the situations of conflicting truths Stephen White was referring to. However, if – as a young knight – you were in doubt about the correct way to proceed, the way the events unfold would have given you a compelling and powerful answer. Raoul's arguments about honor and courage are invalidated by what happens later. He starts a bloody family feud and is eventually killed. Literary justice has spoken.

If we go back to the beginning of the song of *Raoul de Cambrai*, the narrator states that the king committed a *grant folaise* in taking away his nephews' inheritance and Giboin did a *grant outrage* for wanting someone else's land (135-137). These words were carefully chosen. While the king is "only" committing a folly, Giboin, the aristocrat, is committing an outrage in claiming the land of one of his own. This nuance must have been obvious in a noble household.

Claiming land from a fellow aristocrat also has wide reaching consequences in *Garin le Lohrain*. Here too it is Fromont's claim that triggers a bloody feud. One should not be distracted by the constant back and forth and the ominous history of enmity between the two families. They seem to be getting along quite well before Fromont's claim sets everything in motion. Hardré is killed in the brawl and vengeance is soon becoming the dominant factor in the strategies of both parties. While Fromont's desire for a fief is quickly resolved, the claim to Garin's land is not as easily forgotten. The Lohrains immediately retaliate by demanding and eventually taking his fief of Soissons. Before Fromont's unfortunate actions the legitimacy of the Bordelais holding the city was never even questioned.

Raoul's failures in his mission to acquire a fief are quite clear, but the text also gives hints at what would have been more desirable behavior (or at least provide the basis for a long discussion by the fire in a freezing winter night).³⁰⁸ When we look at the routes not taken, the most obvious one is an alliance between the two families. This is suggested multiple times by Raoul's kin and even offered by the opposing party. The Vermandois even suggest to reconquer Cambrai together. But going against Giboin would also put Raoul at odds with the king, which he seems unwilling to do, despite how he mistreated him. Only in the later parts of the song the nobles realize the king's true nature. Louis is trying to disinherit Bernier in favor of one of his other proteges. When he is met with resistance, he completely loses his temper and threatens to disinherit everyone (*"chascuns en iert en fin deseritez!"* 5261). In a dramatic turn of events the feuding parties unite and burn down Paris only to notice that there is no alternative to kingship.³⁰⁹

Dominique Boutet argued that with his actions Raoul is *de facto* seeking royal recognition as a great baron.³¹⁰ This seems rather unconvincing, considering Raoul is purposely acting against the king's will by claiming the fief of Herbert de Vermandois. We remember that he only reluctantly agreed to the deal he had made with Raoul. In my opinion Raoul's unwillingness to go against the king has something to do with what people expected of the story. We do not know much about previous alterations, but the little information we have indicates that he always had a strong connection with the king. Sending him against Louis would have gone against the very idea of the story.

The option of an alliance is also on the table in *Garin*. Fromont offers the hands of his sisters to Garin and Begon. In the end they do not go through with it – a marriage would be against the core of a narrative of a feud between two families – but the possibility is a powerful one. The king is clearly frightened by the prospect of the two most powerful families uniting. To prevent this union from happening, he quickly arranges a marriage with his nieces to bind the Lohrains closer to him.³¹¹ Garin also seems to be hinting at a settlement, when he tells Fromont that he should just have asked for the lands and the noble lady instead of treacherously claiming them at the royal court.

It is also worth looking at the calming voices of Droon and Begon, who urge Fromont and Garin to refrain from fighting for a specific woman or land. In the case of Fromont it was too late as blood had already been shed, but Begon's words likely prevented a costly conflict between the Lohrains and the king.

308 See chapter "Social memory" above for the importance of gossip and communication in general for the construction of social memory.

309 *Raoul*, Ch. CXLIII-CXLVII.

310 Boutet, "Signification politico-historique," 320.

311 *Garin*, Ch. LXXVIII.

A second option is hinted at in *Raoul*, but never pursued further. At the beginning of the song Giboin is requesting the hand of Alice as condition to accept Cambrai from the king. To marry the widowed mother of an infant heir to gain the guardianship over his land, was a customary practice. King Louis seem to have this in mind, but the noble lady denies categorically. We can only imagine how the story could have turned out differently. Maybe there would not even be a story to tell. When we look at the marriage between Fromont and Helissent, her infant son is never mentioned again. Even more telling are the king's almost prophetic words after he has unwillingly pledged Vermandois to Raoul: It would bring great outrage and suffering if the deal is not accompanied by a marriage:

*“je qit si[s] dons li vendra outrage.
Se ne remaint par plait de mariaige,
mains gentix hom i recevront damage.”*³¹²

A marriage is never discussed by the two families – maybe for the lack of a potential bride – but that the idea is not even brought up is more than curious. Especially when we compare it to *Garin* where matrimony is used so successfully to acquire allies and land. If the knights would have carefully examined all of Raoul's options after the jongleur finished his performance, marriage must have been on their minds.

Matters of social mobility are also of utmost importance in the first part of *Girart de Vienne*. Count Garin has four sons, each more chivalrous than the other. Their father's land was so badly devastated that the once wealthy estates are now extremely poor. The brothers decide to leave their family's household to find their luck elsewhere. Their strategies mirror those of our songs: With inheritance seemingly out of question, one brother conquers abroad, one marries a noble heiress and two pursue a career at Charlemagne's court. Here too the life in the royal routine is accompanied by uncertainty and waiting. The sons who do not depend on the king's generosity have a much easier time building a livelihood for themselves.³¹³

In conclusion, our songs offer four options for social mobility, besides inheritance, which seems to be the preferred one: a reward for service, marriage, a conquest abroad and a conquest of another aristocrat's land. In *Girart de Vienne* we see three of these options successfully played out, a reward for their services, however, is denied to William, Raoul and Fromont. This should not come as a

³¹² *Raoul*, 727-29.

³¹³ *Girart de Vienne*, Ch. IX-XI, XXIII. See also Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, 655.

surprise, when one is serving Charlemagne's spoiled son Louis, instead of the white-bearded king himself. The classical solution would now be a conquest abroad. William demonstrates that handsomely, but even that is only the second best option, for it is not his hereditary land.

What is left (hinted at in *Raoul*, taken in *Garin*) is marriage. That matrimony and inheritance are the only successful options in *Raoul* and *Garin* is not a coincidence. Some have argued that *Raoul* is primarily a song about *demesure* and about the limits of legitimate violence.³¹⁴ This is very much true and as we saw the characterization of Raoul as a figure marked by arrogance and violence was one of the essential components of the story. However, reducing it to just this moralistic meaning is not sufficient to explain why this image of the past looks the way it does. The specific way the narrative is constructed, combining the fate of a disinherited, unrewarded *bachelor* with an unsuccessful, violent conquest turning into a feud, points to something beyond that. It propagates a conservative view clearly beneficial to the high aristocracy. The preferred mode – inheritance – is only possible for those that have something to inherit, thereby blocking social mobility for all that do not. Alternatively, taking someone else's fief by force would seem a natural and attractive option in a warrior society. But this attitude is clearly delegitimized in *Raoul* and *Garin*. With marriage left as the sole option of social advancement, the families giving the wealthy daughters had all the important cards in their hands and at the same time increased the competition between potential husbands. Furthermore it was a message of dominance on part of the high aristocracy. In a society where power was experienced largely through violence, constraining it also meant exercising control.³¹⁵

The lengthy marriage negotiations that must have preceded many aristocratic weddings are missing from the *chansons de geste*.³¹⁶ But sometimes we are lucky enough to see matters of contention come up in our songs. In these cases, rank-difference is a major issue. In *Raoul* Alice rejects the offer to marry Giboin even at great personal loss, because he is not of the same rank. She would rather be burned alive than to introduce a watchdog into the bed of a greyhound.³¹⁷ The bastard Bernier is

314 Bloch, *Medieval French Literature*, 103-106. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 156-159. Boutet saw the vision of the clergy and the values of the Peace of God movement in Raoul de Cambrai. (Boutet, "Signification politico-historique," 335). It seems to me more likely that the interests of the high aristocracy met with those of the clergy in this regard, as they sometimes did. (Hans-Werner Goetz, "Kirchenschutz, Rechtswahrung und Reform. Zu den Zielen und zum Wesen der frühen Gottesfriedensbewegung in Frankreich," *Francia* 11 (1983): 208). See especially the case of William V of Aquitaine (Andre Debord, "The Castellan Revolution and the Peace of God in Aquitaine," in *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response around the Year 1000*, ed. Thomas Head and Richard Landes (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 156-164).

315 We can see an alliance of kings and magnates in all parts of Western Europe trying to repress the violence of "wicked men" as part of what Thomas Bisson called a distinct stage in European political transformation at the turn of the thirteenth century. Here the interests of the high aristocracy might have aligned with that of the king. (Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 530-533 and 576).

316 Ursula Peters, *Dynastengeschichte und Verwandtschaftsbilder: die Adelsfamilie in der volkssprachigen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999). She also argued that the issues of *juvenes* are underrepresented which is clearly not the case in our songs.

317 *Raoul*, 215-216. See Jessie Crosland's translation.

having similar concerns when the noble Beatrix throws herself at him.³¹⁸ On the contrary, Fromont's wife is only willing to marry so soon after her husband's death, because Fromont is "*biaus et gentis*" and richer than her previous husband (2817-2823). In any case social status mattered and to convince a noble family to marry off one of their daughters to a knight of lower rank, would have needed convincing arguments.

If a knight for whatever reason found himself landless – a situation that must have been well known to some and feared by others – he might have looked at his past and at what people like Roland, William, Raoul, or even Fromont did when they were faced with similar problems. And being landless was indeed a dramatic situation. One just needs to recall William's desperate plea to the king that he cannot even feed his horse. Besides a knight's economic dependence on the fruits of the land, there was also the ideological importance of the fief as symbol of status and rank that seemed to have increased even further in the second half of the twelfth century. So if this anonymous knight would have taken our songs to heart, he would have rather sought a burdening marriage agreement than to attack a landowning aristocrat.

For an image of the past to be accepted in a group it has to make sense to all its members, not just to a small elite. Frederic Bartlett's experiments showed that elements that are not meaningful are changed or simply forgotten in the process of transmission.³¹⁹ The image of the past in our songs could be so readily accepted in broad segments of the nobility precisely because it appealed to all its members. Our *chansons* dealt with important issues of the *juvenes* and the petty aristocracy, while giving an answer that was very much to the liking of the high aristocracy. After all it was probably the head of the household, who paid the jongleur and not a *povre bachelor*.

It might seem like a contradiction that the petty aristocracy and the *juvenes* would put such a high emphasize on the possession of land, rather than on knightly values. After all, even the poorest knight could, at least in theory, match the most noble aristocrat in his chivalry. However, the fief played an immensely important role in the lower aristocracy's social and economic standing and thus in their identity. A high aristocrat on the other hand could care little about a piece of land. In a world where everyone around them had vast estates, they needed to find other ways to distinguish themselves. In the next chapter we will look at the mythical founding stories of high aristocratic families. While these stories also deal with how an ancestor acquired a fief, knightly values and behavior are much more central. Contrary to the *chanson de geste* these stories were not meant for a

³¹⁸ Raoul, CCLIII-CCLV.

³¹⁹ Bartlett, *Remembering*. See also chapter "Social memory" above.

large audience of *juvenes* and lower aristocrats, but for the inner family circle – a high aristocratic private history.

Part IV

The question of how a fief was acquired in the days gone by is also an important element in other medieval histories. Besides the *chansons de geste*, aristocratic genealogies are the closest thing what we have to an aristocratic image of the past in the twelfth century. In these stories a mythical founding father from a far away land (or metaphorical equivalents) achieves great success by his own merits. This has strong parallels with William's adventures in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, but is in stark contrast to the lives of Raoul and Fromont. The most striking difference is in the way the story is built. Instead of the *Aeneid* model that dominated the mental landscape of the Middle Ages, *Raoul* and *Garin* are conceived according to the back and forth of a family feud. Narrative models like these are hugely important in structuring memories of past events, but also for the jongleur who thought of his stories as a sequence of themes. They are the skeletons onto which people could then put flesh. These changes in narrative framework were caused by the jongleur introducing high aristocratic ideology into his songs. However, as we will see, this new image of the past could only be accepted, because it made sense to people. Fundamental changes at the turn of the century made the grim depiction of *Raoul* and *Garin* more meaningful.

Mythical beginnings

The aristocratic genealogies are much more than just lists of names of the ruling family and their filiation (*A genuit B, B genuit C, C autem genuit D*, etc.), they tell the history of the whole community. These narratives should exalt the lineage and legitimate the position and power of the family. Most genealogies prior to the twelfth century tried to construct a line to the Carolingians and some continued to do so afterwards. However, at the beginning of the century and in different parts of France a new character emerges: the legendary founding father. These stories drift up into the mythical Carolingian or post-Carolingian world and tell the adventures of a man of humble or obscure origins, who acquired the ancestral lands of the family by his own merits. The great houses of northern France ordered scribes to collect the little information that was left of their ancestors. They arranged, manipulated and quite frankly invented parts to create a coherent story and to please their lords.³²⁰ The most comprehensive narratives we find in Lambert of Ardres' *Chronicle of the counts of Guines and lords of Ardres* and in the *Chronicle of the deeds of the consuls of Anjou*.³²¹

Both chronicles, at least for the founding stories draw heavily on local legends, family gossip and hearsay. When we leave the mythical world and get closer to the authors' own time, the reports become more factual and much of what is said can be checked with other sources.³²² The authors seem to be very aware that they are dealing with events long ago and therefore try to assure their credibility to the reader. Lambert does so even more than the authors of the *Gesta*. In the prologue he says that he incorporated not only what he has seen, but also what he heard, learned, and what their ancestors told him. He states that he used the report of the ancients ("*veterum fama*") more than what he witnessed himself. Which is somewhat obvious, considering he was not alive for most of what he talks about.³²³

The authors of the *Chronicle of the consuls of Anjou* claim that the narrative is based on very confused and unpolished written accounts ("*scripta nimis confuse rudique sermone*").³²⁴ About the old-

320 Léopold Genicot, *Les généalogies*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1975), 19-23 and 36-38. Jean Dunbabin, "Discovering a Past for the French Aristocracy," in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Paul Magdalino (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), 4-7. Georges Duby, "French Genealogical Literature," in *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 149-58. Duby, "Structure of Kinship," 134-148 and Duby, "Memories with No Historian," 178.

321 Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines* and *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*. Duby made a list of the northern French aristocratic genealogies. He argues that they must have been more abundant (Duby, "French Genealogical Literature," 150f.).

322 Dunbabin, "Discovering a Past," 8.

323 Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines*, Prologue. See also Shopkow's introduction (Shopkow, *Lambert of Ardres*, 6-8).

324 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 25. On the five reductions see Louis Halphen and René Poupardin, eds., *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise* (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1913), v-xlvi.

est ancestor Torquatius, the father of the founder of the lineage, they have so little information that they are beseeching the reader to believe their words – they can only say what is sufficient (“*quod sufficiat loquamur*”). The account of the earliest Anjou relays on popular memory: Many report (“*complures referunt*”) that he lived in a forest as hunter, others believe (“*sunt alii qui [...] volunt*”) that he lived with the peasants of the village of Redon. Which of the two versions is closer to the truth does not matter, so the *Chronicle*, because they both refer to a humble origin.³²⁵

It is precisely because of the scarcity of information that we can see most clearly how the authors tried to construct their story – quite the contrary to the *chansons de geste* where the hand of the poet has become blurred after hundreds of performances. A passage in which Lambert is trying to refute a claim of the people of Boulogne, is particularly enlightening:³²⁶ The people of Boulogne say that a certain Count Erniculus held Boulogne together with Saint-Pol and Guines and distributed it to his three sons according to their abilities. Lambert says that he examined, read and reread (“*circumspectis, lectis et relectis*”) the annals of the ancients from both Flanders and Boulogne and heard and understood the tales and fables of many elders (“*narrationibus antiquorum et fabulis*”). We learn that in fact there was a certain Count William of Ponthieu, who was of great bodily strength and noble family (attributes often encountered in other founding stories). Because his possessions were not enough for him, he subjugated the surrounding lands and bequeathed them to his four sons. The firstborn got Ponthieu, the most excellent part of his dominion. This was because of his knightly interest in weapons and horses. The second received the wood-rich lands of Boulogne for his love for hunting. The third, for his devotion to agriculture, got Saint-Pol. For the fourth son William envisioned the lands of Guines with its vast pastures, because he had a passion for cattle and sheep. So, according to Lambert, it was William and not Erniculus and he had four and not three sons. The story continues that at this time Siegfried – more on him below – arrived and rightly and manfully conquered Guines. Hearing this, William, fearing for his life, abandoned his plan. “*These things*”, so Lambert “*come from the annals of the ancients (veterum annalibus) and not from popular opinion (opinionone vulgali) should be sufficient to contradict what the people of Boulogne say.*”³²⁷ The *Bolonienses* turn facts into fables and speak as if they were dreaming. It is more than questionable if Lambert had actually consulted any written sources on this matter. His statement seems to be a mere reflection of the medieval attitude towards the written word. Besides, he is contradicting himself here, a little earlier he claims that he got his information from aged ancients (“*grandavis patribus*”), the archetypal bearers of popular memory.

³²⁵ *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 26f.

³²⁶ *The history of the counts of Guines*, Ch. 15.

³²⁷ *The history of the counts of Guines*, Ch. 15; trans., 64.

The kernel of Lambert's problem seems to be that the people of Guines and of Boulogne imagined their past differently. Gabrielle Spiegel argued that medieval authors were only critical with their sources once they contradicted each other.³²⁸ We can see that very well here. But in this case it also had potential political consequences. The lands of Guines and Boulogne lay in close proximity and had in the past come into conflict over questions of inheritance.³²⁹ Lambert not only needed to resolve the contradiction of his sources, his remarks must also be seen as a comment in an ongoing debate about the past.³³⁰ By constructing an authoritative version of the events – after all it is based on written accounts – he could hope to solve this problem once and for all in favor of his patron.

We can see how Lambert is trying to accommodate two (or possibly three) local myths. On the one hand the story of Siegfried, the mythical founder of the lineage who took and later received Guines from the count of Flanders. This is the story he wanted to tell. However, what the people of Boulogne are saying contradicted his version of events. They believe that Count Erniculus possessed Boulogne, Saint-Pol and most controversially Guines and distributed it to his sons according to their abilities. Somewhere in between comes the tale of William and his four sons, which might have been another legend, probably localized in Ponthieu. At least the story fits the pattern of other founding myths of the region very well, for why else would Ponthieu be described as the most excellent piece of land? In his account Lambert now replaced Erniculus of Boulogne with this legendary William and added his homeland of Ponthieu to the list of estates that are handed down. So we arrive at the four sons of Lambert's story. Four might have also been a more desirable number of sons. It is a reoccurring theme in the *chanson de geste*, as seen in *Les quatre fils Aymon* or Raoul de Cambrai fighting the four sons of Herbert of Vermandois.

Siegfried, the first lord of Guines

In the next section we will briefly look at the founding fathers of the lords of Guines and the Anjou. We will see many similarities with the *chansons* we just examined, but more importantly there are some crucial difference, especially with the stories of *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain*.

Lambert of Ardres starts his history by reporting about a count Walbert who, according to the oldest records (*"vetustissimis paginulis"*), held Guines in the seventh century. Lambert then goes on to construct a connection between this Walbert and Siegfried, the legendary founder of the lineage, whom we already encountered before. In between them lies a time span of over 200 years. Lambert

does not give us much on what happened during those two centuries, but the land of Guines, de-
 328 Spiegel, "Genealogy," 45f.

329 Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 53-61.

330 We find analogous arguments in Jordanes' *History of the Goths*. He also seems to be taking position in a debate on the question if the Goths came from *Scanza* or Britain. (Walter A. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D.550 - 800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 89f.).

prived of an heir, fell back to the hands of the count of Flanders.³³¹ Lambert picks up the story again in 928. The aforementioned Siegfried had served the king of the Danes, was his adviser and had close family ties to the royal family. He had received word that the county of Guines was his by hereditary succession and that the count of Flanders had usurped the lands unrightfully. So he gathered troops and landed in Francia. The land was wooded and inhabited by only a few people, so he was not met with much resistance. He constructed a motte – which would become the center of the lordship – and subjugated the surrounding lands. Count Arnold of Flanders, angry about his arrival, summoned him to his court. Aided by his kinsmen Siegfried managed to appease the lord and did homage, twelfth-century style. They became friends and over the years Siegfried, through the qualities of his character, rose up in standing in the realm. When Count Arnold died, Siegfried stayed with his son Baldwin. Later Siegfried forcefully impregnated Baldwin's sister Elftrude, who is said to have been of great beauty. When this became public knowledge he fled to his castle, where he passed away soon after – we are told because of love sickness. Baldwin also died a few days later. His son Arnold taking pity on his aunt Elftrude, took her under his care and godfathered the newly born bastard Ardulf. Once grown up, he knighted and conferred Guines to Ardulf and even expanded his territory. So ultimately Siegfried's ruthless strategy was successful.³³²

In parts the account of Siegfried's life reads much like a mirror of princes. He is described as noble in spirit, notable of family, foresighted, discreet in his advice, illustrious in his prudence, munificent in his generosity, and exceptional in the complete integrity of his character. He listens to the advice of wiser men and has faith in God.

The first Anjou

The *Chronicle of Anjou* names a certain Torquatius, who lived in a forest or village in Armorica as the oldest ancestor of the family. He is said to have been made forester by Charles the Bald.³³³ According to the genealogies of the *relatores* he had a son named Tertullus, who was to become the founder of the lineage. Tertullus was a man of brave character and in the hope of improving his position and gaining honor and fame, he left his father's possessions and joined Charles' clientele. It was at this time, so relates the *Chronicle*, that the noble families of the realm prided themselves with the deeds of their ancestors rather than their own and new men could earn great wealth and inheritance through their own labor and risk. Tertullus proved his worth in the fight against the Nor-

³³¹ Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines*, Prologue and Ch. 3-6.

³³² Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 7-12.

³³³ On the first Anjou see especially Bernard S. Bachrach, "Some Observations on the Origins of the Angevin Dynasty," in *State Building in Medieval France: Studies in Early Angevin History* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995).

mans and as a result was awarded a noble wife and Chateau-Landon and other lands in Gâtinais as fief.³³⁴

Tertullus' son Ingelgerius was given his father's estates and was knighted in King Louis' presence. Ingelgerius was of even greater virtue than his father. He acquired more land including Orleans and Angers, which he bravely defended against Norman and Breton invaders.³³⁵

In another family story of the Anjou, written a few decades earlier, (allegedly) by Count Fulk le Rechin of Anjou himself, Torquatius and Tertullus do not appear at all. Fulk relates that his uncle told him about four consuls of Anjou, who long ago wrested the land away from the hands of the pagans and defended it against Christians. For him the *primus* of the lineage is Ingelgerius who received the consulship from Charles the Bald (he insists that it was not a Capetian). He knows nothing else about his oldest ancestors besides that, as he is unaware of where their graves are.³³⁶

Why would two different authors, who wrote at the same place choose two different people as the founder of the family? We find the same phenomenon in the genealogy of the counts of Flanders. In the *Genealogia Flandrae Bertiniana* (before 1111) we find three ancestors (Lidricus, Ingelrannus and Audacer) of the founder of the dynasty Balduin Ferrabrace, who are not found in the earlier versions of the *Genealogia comitum Flandrae* dating from the tenth century.³³⁷ In the *Liber floridus* (1120) the founding story is further developed. Lidricus is said to have come to Flanders which was an uninhabited woodland and occupied it.³³⁸ The parallels with Siegfried's story are obvious.

Historians have argued that Fulk was only interested in reporting about the counts of Anjou, therefore Torquatius and Tertullus were insignificant to him. Likewise, the connection to the king of Italy through the female line finds no mention.³³⁹ Undoubtedly Fulk looked for continuity with his past and he found it in Ingelgerius, he held the same office and approximately the same land. What interested the later generations was how the first ancestor made himself head of a duchy or county, not how he sealed his position by marrying into an old aristocratic family.³⁴⁰ Jean Dunbabin proposed that "*Fulk was less ignorant than indifferent to certain aspects of his family history.*"³⁴¹ However, this is part of the same coin. When there is no way of fixating the past, the things that are deemed unimportant are changed or simply forgotten along the way. It is not entirely impossible that there existed some today lost genealogies of the *relatores*, but Fulk's report seems very much in line with what we know about memory. With the loss of the locus of remembrance – the graves in this case –

334 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 25-29.

335 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 29-31.

336 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 232f.

337 "Genealogia comitum Flandriae," ed. Ludwig Bethmann in *MGH Scriptores* 9 (Hannover 1851), 302-305.

338 "Genealogia comitum Flandriae," 309.

339 Bachrach, "Origins of the Angevin dynasty," 5 and Dunbabin, "Discovering a Past," 6f.

340 Bouchard, *Those of my Blood*, 38.

341 Dunbabin, "Discovering a Past," 6

Fulk's memory only goes back three generations. For everything that goes beyond that, namely the time of the four consuls, he knows little more than their names and that they fought pagans, which is arguably a founding myth as well. So no surprise that when authors a few decades later were interested in the forefathers of the first counts, everything they could find were myths. The clerical authors constructed their histories by adapting local memory to fit the story they wanted to tell. The story of the first Anjou and Siegfried both feature a hero from obscure origin, who achieved greatness on his own.

Once upon a time in a land far, far away...

Historians have long discussed if the high medieval nobility were the decedents of new men or of Carolingian or even Merovingian noble families. The most influential voice for the former came from Marc Bloch in his monumental *La Société féodale*. He argued that there simply was no aristocracy as a defined group in the Early Middle Ages. Only after the year 1000, provoked by the invasions of Vikings, Magyars and Saracens, they started to emerge.³⁴² Karl Ferdinand Werner among others showed that the great aristocratic families all had ancestors among the Carolingian nobility. The idea that they were new men is all but fiction.³⁴³ Georges Duby while refuting Bloch's idea of a new aristocracy, saw a similar crisis around the millennium. Building on the works of the *Freiburger Arbeitskreis* around Gerd Tellenbach and Karl Schmid, he argued for a major transformation of the family structure in the late tenth and early eleventh century. The family changed from a large horizontal *Sippe* (clan) that had characterized the Carolingian world to a vertical *Geschlecht* (lineage) focused solely on the patrilinear line.³⁴⁴ His ideas were consensus until the 90s. As we already discussed briefly, historians have since then moved away from questions of structure to the more explicit question of how family was used. As it turns out it was a much more flexible concept than previously thought, changing multiple times even during a persons lifetime. The larger kin was used intensively to further one's career, one could expect protection and opportunities, but for inheritance they were never interesting. Fathers sought to divide their earthly belongings among their children, but tried to keep the majority of the estates in the patrilinear line.³⁴⁵ This, however, was not new. Lineage did not suddenly appear in the eleventh century. Constance Bouchard showed that al-

342 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 299f.

343 Karl Ferdinand Werner, "Untersuchungen zur Frühzeit des französischen Fürstentums (9.-10. Jahrhundert)," *Die Welt als Geschichte* 20 (1960), 117f.

344 Georges Duby, "Lineage, Nobility and Knighthood," in *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 59–81 and Duby, "Structure of Kinship," 134–148. For the problems with this thinking see: Bouchard, *Those of my Blood*, 15f.

345 A good summary is Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 121–125.

ready in the ninth century, aristocratic families tried to make this a reality. The only thing that changed in the eleventh century was their success in achieving it. The question of old versus new is more a matter of perspective. Most of the new families did have some connections to the old aristocracy as a result of marrying into them. However, medieval high aristocrats seemed to care very little about these connections. When they looked back at their past, they saw themselves as descendants of an ancestor who had acquired title and land by his own labor, not by the noble lady he married, however blue her blood was.³⁴⁶ This violent seizure of land stands in stark contrast to *Raoul* and *Garin* where the do-it-yourself-attitude is delegitimized and marriage is a desirable option. One can surmise therefore that the *chansons*' choice to criticize this option is far from accidental.

Howard Bloch argued (still in the line of Duby) that aristocratic families in the eleventh century began to reorient themselves towards what he called the "*biopolitics of lineage*" and that the genealogical texts were symptoms as well vehicles for this change.³⁴⁷ There can be no doubt that the people's view of their past in the twelfth century was heavily influenced by the idea of the lineage. After all that is what they experienced in their present and what was exemplified in the Bible and other authoritative texts. However, the answer is not that simple. If their only concern was to construct a coherent, straight line going as far back as possible, it seems strange that they would do so in this particular way. There were much better examples to draw from. The *Genealogia comitum Buloniensium* traced their lineage back to Priamus, saying that Godfrey of Bouillon and his brother Baldwin were of the same lineage as Charlemagne.³⁴⁸ Similarly in the *Chronologia Flandriae IV* (1120), the Frankish kings as well as the counts of Flanders have a common ancestor in the Trojan prince.³⁴⁹ The most impressive example, even though later, of such an unbroken succession are of course the *Grandes Chroniques*.³⁵⁰ And if the idea of the lineage was not really new, what was different then? Something must have changed in the twelfth century that made them construct the past in this new way.³⁵¹

In terms of how the northern French family stories came into being, they have a lot in common with the family histories of the Welfs,³⁵² but the image of the past is essentially different from what we see in northern Gaul. The anonymous author of the *Historia Welforum* (ca. 1170) also speaks of

346 Bouchard, *Those of my Blood*, 31-38 and 67-73.

347 Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 15 and 64-91.

348 "Genealogia comitum Buloniensium," ed. Ludwig Bethmann in *MGH Scriptores 9* (Hannover 1851), 300.

349 "Genealogia comitum Flandriae," 308.

350 Spiegel, "Genealogy," 49f.

351 See Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 155f.

352 This German counterpart has been strangely neglected by the Angloamerican historiography. For a good summary see Bernd Schneidmüller, *Die Welfen: Herrschaft und Erinnerung (819 - 1252)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 15-51.

great difficulties in finding sources for the first Welfs. They could not find a member of the family prior to the time of Charlemagne, but “*ex plurimis circumstantiis*” they know that there must have been some, going back even further than the Christianization. They tell a legendary story of an exodus from Troy, a migration to Thracia and then to the Rhine border between Germania and Gaul, where the Welfs separated from the other Franks and finally settled in the wilderness of Swabia. Similarly to the authors of the *Gesta Consulum Andegavorum*, they tell the reader to look at other historical precedents if they do not believe their story – in the texts of the pagans it is often written that peoples migrated and conquered somewhere else; alluding to the numerous founding stories of other medieval *gentes*. The fog of time is lifted again in the time of the Carolingians. The founding father is a certain Count *Gwelfo*, who had a son and a daughter. Contrary to the French founding stories it is a woman who helps the family to prominence. *Gwelfo*’s daughter Judith marries King Louis the Pious.³⁵³ In the about 50 years older *Genealogia Welforum* this first Welf makes no appearance, neither does the royal marriage between Judith and Louis. *Gwelfo*’s son Eticho is the founder of the dynasty.³⁵⁴

The image that is constructed in these family stories was on the one hand determined by their relationship, or better non-relationship, with the past. On the other hand by the way the aristocracy saw or wanted to see its ancestors. While the mutation around 1000 is now seen by historians as less of a rupture than still 20 years ago,³⁵⁵ the world that emerged in the second half of the eleventh century was nevertheless fundamentally different from that of the Carolingians. Patrick Geary speaks metaphorically of a gulf that now separated those two periods.³⁵⁶ In an effort to make sense of their past, people tried to cross this gulf and they did so by the means of their present. They looked for continuity in a time where there was little. The only thing that connected them with their past was a common ancestor (for everyone must have an ancestor), the land and an office.³⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly the foundation stories are exactly about that.³⁵⁸ Siegfried comes to Guines, asserts his authority and constructs the motte that will later become the center of the family holdings. The *Chronicle of the Anjou* is even more fanciful in this regard. Tertullus is awarded Gâtinais and Château-Landon for his services, but only his son gets Angers and half the county of Anjou. Bernard Bachrach argued based on evidence from the middle of the tenth century that the Anjou had possessions in Gâtinais a hundred years earlier.³⁵⁹ While this might lead one to think that the story has a basis in reality, it is

353 *Historia Welforum*, ed. Erich König (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), 2-9.

354 *Historia Welforum*, 77f.

355 Dominique Barthélemy, *La chevalerie: de la Germanie antique à la France du XIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

356 Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 25f.

357 Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 79.

358 Duby, “French Genealogical Literature,” 149-157 and Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 80-86.

359 Bachrach, “Origins of the Angevin dynasty,” 21.

more likely just a coincidence. When the Anjou died out in the male line after the death of Geoffrey Martel in 1060, his nephew Fulk le Rechin took power, whose father was the count of Gâtinais and Château-Landon. To legitimize him, rather than his older brother – from whom he forcefully seized the county – he transferred Gâtinais to the king and later received it as fief.³⁶⁰ While the Anjou had possessions in the region before, what they wanted to show in the founding story is that Gâtinais and Château-Landon were part of the Angevin holdings ever since the days of the foundation in the distant past.

Land kept memory alive and when these ties were lost, the context got lost as well. What was left were a bunch of disconnected names and stories that the people in the eleventh and twelfth century tried to patch together to a coherent story. An extreme example of such a block of remembrance we can find in the mid-eleventh century *Chronicon Novaliciense*.³⁶¹ The monastery was destroyed by Saracen attacks in 906. When the monks moved back over a century later, not much had remained of the institution's past. In an effort to recreate the history they turned to what was left of local memory and used the framework of the few documents that were available to them. The result was a story of three ages, each containing a legend, a destruction and the entering of a great man into the monastery.³⁶² The last age is that of the Saracen pillage and the story of a noble house, ending in the time of the authors. Two brothers came down from the mountains and by their own virtues gained holdings in the region.

The similarities to our founding stories are obvious. Not only in terms of narrative, but also how they came into being. When we loose the fix-points that connected the past to the present, we reach a wall. When we ask where the ancestors of the lords of Anjou and Guines came from, all we get is woodlands and Denmark – the medieval geographical equivalents of nowhere.

While the medieval forest was far from empty and some people's livelihood depended on the fruits of the woods, it immensely inspired the medieval imagination.³⁶³ Le Goff described it as a place of solitude for hermits, of refuge for criminals, exiles and secret lovers and a place of adventurers. For the knights of the Round Table it was a place where constant adventures and trails awaited. Heroes

360 Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making, 843 – 1180* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 188-190.

361 *Cronaca di Novalesa*, ed. Gian Carlo Alessio (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1982). Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 115-133. Chris Wickham, "Lawyers' Time: History and Memory in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Italy," in *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London: British School at Rome, 1994).

362 The *moniage* is also a popular motive in the *chanson de geste*.

363 See Chris Wickham, "European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: Landscape and Land Clearance," in *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London: British School at Rome, 1994). Le Goff, *Phantasie und Realität*, 88-97. Marilyn Sandidge, "The Forest, the River, the Mountain, the Field, and the Meadow," in *Handbook of Medieval Culture*, ed. Albrecht Classen, vol. 1 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 538-545. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 135f.

like Parzival and Aiol grew up in the forest and might just as well have served as role models for the founding fathers. For the hero the crossing of a forest is often a transformation or transition. When Tertullus left his parent's wood it might have been such a symbolic initiation.

In the fourteenth-century founding story of the Lusignans, the *Roman de Mélusine*, a forest also plays an important role. Fleeing from his previous life Raymondin comes across the half-human, half-fairy Melusine in a forest. She turns into a serpent every Saturday and only if she finds a husband who will never see her on this day, the curse will be lifted and she can live the life of a mortal woman. Melusine promises Raymondin that he will become the most powerful and honorable man of his lineage, but only if he agrees to marry her and respects her one taboo. No sooner said than done: They have ten sons together, who would all rise to great prominence. But, as it is bound to happen, Raymondin breaks his promise and Melusine is denied the life of a human.³⁶⁴ As unbelievable as this story might sound, the author Jean d'Arras did not think of it as fiction: “If I have included anything in this story that seems unbelievable to anyone, may they pardon me, for according to what I have found and what I could learn from the ancient authors, from Gervase and from other authors and philosophers, I maintain that this story and the chronicles are true, and the marvels as well.”³⁶⁵ He mentions that there are great number of tales where faeries married mortal men and had children. The forest was a place where these kind of unbelievable and strange things could happen.

Denmark was just as much a place of the imaginary as the high medieval forest. From the sixth century onwards it found its way into a variety of origin stories of early medieval *gentes*. The earliest is Jordanes' mid-sixth century *History of the Goths*. *Scanza* – as Jordanes calls the obscure island in the north – is inhospitable to men and beast alike. The people eat only the flesh of wild beasts and eggs and live in stone caves like animals. While extremely poor they are clothed in the most beautiful furs.³⁶⁶ The idea of Scandinavian origin was taken up by the anonymous author of the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, who in turn served as source for Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*.³⁶⁷ Paul records that overpopulation led the Lombards to cross the sea and seek new homes. The image of the ancestral land is the same as in Jordanes' *Getica*: An inhuman place, associated with all sorts of mythical occurrences. Somewhere in *Germania*,³⁶⁸ so we are told, the Lombards encountered Amazons. This story is so fantastic that even Paul is skeptical, but does not find it impos-

364 *Melusine; Or, The Noble History of Lusignan*, eds. Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012), 23-48 and 109-117. See also Sara Sturm-Maddox, “Crossed Destinies: Narrative Programs in the Roman de Melusine,” in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 12-31.

365 *Melusine*, 137.

366 “Iordanis Romana et Getica,” ed. Theodor Mommsen in *MGH Auctores antiquissimi* 5,1 (Berlin 1881), I.9 and III.16-24.

367 Goffart, *Narrators*, 383f.

368 Paul's geography is obscure. The island of *Scadinavia* is part of *Germania*.

sible, since he heard people relate that in the remotest corners of Europe they still existed.³⁶⁹ We find Scandinavian origins again in Dudo of St. Quentin's *History of the Normans* – written between 996 and 1001.³⁷⁰ He finds a creative way to combine the origin stories of *Scanza* with those of Troy. Rollo, the founding father of the Normans, came originally from Dacia from there he fled to *Scanza*. The *Daci*, so Dudo, call themselves *Dani* or *Danai* and are the descendants of the Trojan refugee Antenor.³⁷¹ Therefore the Dacians are Greeks, Trojans and Danes at the same time, while coming from both, Troy and *Scanza*. In William of Jumieges' reduction of the *History of the Normans* from the 1050s, the origin story of the Normans is somewhat altered, grounding it more in Scandinavia. He says that there were two Gothic tribes that settled in *Scanza*. One of these tribes moved to *Dacia*, or Denmark (*Denmarcha*) as it is also called. According to William the land gets its name from a certain King Danaus, who was a descendant of Antenor, thereby also incorporating a Trojan origin.³⁷²

Some historians have accepted a Scandinavian origin for the lords of Guines. Indeed, in the tenth century Vikings were active in the region and the leader of a war band could have been granted a holding there.³⁷³ But when we compare it to the evidence above, it seems just as unlikely as a Scandinavian origin for the Lombards.³⁷⁴ When Lambert talked about Denmark, he was not referring to a real country. It was a mythical space that was said to be the place of origin of many peoples.³⁷⁵ Jordanes calls it a "*officina gentium*" or "*vagina nationum*".³⁷⁶ Was it unrealistic to think that the first count of Guines was from there too? In short, saying that a founding father came from the woods or Denmark is the medieval equivalent of saying they came from a land far, far away.

Just as twelfth-century people denied their founding fathers any meaningful past, they also denied it to their ancestral lands. Guines is described as wooded and uninhabited, the same is said about the land that is claimed by the oldest ancestor of the counts of Flanders. Or it is turned into empty wasteland by foreign intruders as in the case of Anjou. What is left is a blank sheet, where everything starts with the ruling family. It is as much a start of history as it is a start of civilization. Some-

369 "Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*," ed. Georg Waitz in *MGH SS rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* (Hannover, 1878), Book I, 1-3 and 15.

370 On the dating see Ewan S. Johnson, "Origin Myths and the Construction of Medieval Identities: Norman Chronicles 1000-1100," in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Richard Corradini, Christina Pössel, and Philip Shaw (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2006), 153.

371 *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, ed. Jules Lair (Caen: Le Blanc-Hardel, 1865), Book I, Ch. 3 (subsequently cited as *History of the Normans*). For an English translation see *Dudo of St Quentin: History of the Normans*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998). See also Susan Reynolds, "Medieval Origines Gentium and the Community of the Realm," *History* 68 (1983): 376.

372 *The gesta Normannorum ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Book I, Ch. 2f. See also Van Houts' introduction, xxxv-xxxvii and Johnson, "Origin Myths."

373 Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines*, Ch. 26.

374 See Goffart, *Narrators*. Reynolds, "Medieval Origines Gentium," 378f.

375 See for example Dudo's description (*History of the Normans*, Book I, Ch. 1).

376 "Iordanis Romana et Getica," IV.25. So do William of Jumieges and subsequent adaptations (*The gesta Normannorum ducum*, Book I, Ch. 3(4)).

thing that could be said about William's conquest in Saracen Spain, but hardly about Raoul and Fromont in northern France.

What is also striking about the founding stories is that most of them take place, not in the Golden Age of Charlemagne, but in the time after that. From Charles the Bald to the middle of the tenth century, a time that was described by historians as archaic or as a Dark Age. It was precisely because it was a Dark Age (in both meanings – troubled and thinly documented) that they chose it as the zero hour for their comital families. In this time period they could paint the past according to their liking. Of Charlemagne people in the twelfth century had a more or less clear image – one just needs to remember the popularity of the *Song of Roland*. The behavior of the founding fathers would have been hard to explain in the time of the great Carolingian king. We witness the same pattern in the *chanson de geste*. Seldom is Charlemagne put in the wrong, in most songs it is his son Louis who is made the bad guy.³⁷⁷ Of Charles the Simple, however, people knew comparatively little. His memories merged with that of his predecessor with the same name, leaving an empty sheet for authors in the eleventh and twelfth century to write on.³⁷⁸

As we have seen the question of how a fief was acquired in the past was central to many medieval histories. They have this in common with the *chansons* we examined in the last section. Land was one of the few things that connected people to their past. We are told remarkably similar stories of mythical founding fathers coming from nowhere and founding great lineages on their own. The big difference is that the behavior that is so successfully laid out in those narratives is clearly invalidated in the songs of the *Raoul* and *Garin*.

Half my Kingdom

Now that we have discussed what scant information people had of their forefathers, we will look at how these memories were structured. Chris Wickham stressed that to turn the little surviving material into a coherent text, people needed both the intelligence and the necessary literary framework to do so.³⁷⁹ Our clerical authors constructed their image of the past by resorting to models from literature and historiography, some were old, going as far back as ancient Rome, others were quite new. The most creative were undoubtedly the authors of the *Chronicle of Anjou*.³⁸⁰ At the beginning of

377 See Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 157-162.

378 See Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 150-153. The same happened in Ribagorça, Spain (Thomas N. Bisson, "Unheroed Pasts: History and Commemoration in South Frankland Before the Albigensian Crusades," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 297f.).

379 Wickham, "Lawyers' Time," 280.

380 Dunbabin, *France*, 246-249 and Bouchard, *Those of my Blood*, 13.

his *De bello Jugurthino* Sallust is lamenting that there were young noblemen who preferred riches over goodness and honor. In the *Chronicle* his words are slightly altered, but in such a way that the original meaning is completely distorted. The passage is transformed into: There were young non-nobles (*nobiles* changes into *ignobiles*) who valued goodness and honor more than the nobles did.³⁸¹ In Gaius Marius, who is the hero in the later part of Sallust's account about the war against Jugurtha, the authors found a suitable role model for the Angevin forefather. He was a new man himself, rose up through his military skill to become one of the most admired men in Roman history. Sallust put a lot of emphasize on the fact that Marius was a *homo novus*, most symptomatic in his speech in front of an assembly of the people of Rome.³⁸² Tertullus is described by the words of this speech: He strikes the enemy, sleeps on the bare ground, endures hard summers and winters and fears nothing but a bad name. The aristocrats on the other hand boast of the deeds of their ancestors rather than their own.³⁸³

There is another, even more striking, example of the usage of Roman texts in the founding myths. As we discussed before, there seem to have been two different versions of Torquatius' origin circulating in popular memory. Did he live in a village or a forest? The chronicle says it does not matter, for we have read many times, that senators were taken from the work in the fields to become emperors. This is a reference to the story of Cincinnatus. In the early years of the Republic the Sabines attacked Rome. In this moment of greatest danger Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus was appointed dictator to save the city. Messengers were sent and when they finally found him, he was plowing a small farm just on the opposite side of the Tiber. The next day Cincinnatus chose Lucius Tarquinius as his master of the horse. He was of patrician family and first in military skill among the young men of Rome, but because of his poverty he had previously served among the footmen. The similarity of the names of this *magister equitum* with the oldest ancestor of the Angevins is obvious – Torquatius and Tarquinius. If it was purposely chosen or if it was just a confusion of names – as they also mention Torquatius' Breton name “Tortulfus”- is unclear. What is striking, however, is how perfectly he fits the role model.³⁸⁴

381 “*Ea tempestate in exercitu nostro fuere complures novi atque nobiles, quibus divitiae bono honestoque potiores erant, factiosi domi, potentes apud socios, clari magis quam honesti [...]*.” (“Sallust, Bellum Jugurthinum,” ed. Wilhelm Schöne in *Sallust. Werke und Schriften* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1980), Ch. VIII) turns to “*Igitur tempore Karoli Calvi, complures novi atque ignobiles, bono et honesto nobilibus potiores, clari et magni effecti sunt.*” (*Chroniques des comtes d’Anjou et des seigneurs d’Amboise*, 25).

382 “Sallust, Bellum Jugurthinum,” Ch. LXXXV.

383 *Chroniques des comtes d’Anjou et des seigneurs d’Amboise*, 25f.

384 See Bernard S. Bachrach, “Neo-Roman vs Feudal: The Heuristic Value of a Construct for the Reign of Fulk Nerra, Count of the Angevins (987-1040),” in *State Building in Medieval France: Studies in Early Angevin History* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 6 and FN 20. Unlike Halphen and Poupardin thought, the source is not Cicero's *De Senectute* XVI, but Livy's *Ab urbe condita* III.26f.

We should keep in mind that we are seeing social memory here only filtered through the eyes of the clerical authors. Most people probably did not see a parallel with the Roman models. That is not to say that all models are taken directly from classical authors nor that it was a one way street. Popular ideas certainly found their way into the imagination of the learned and vice-versa. In any case, it is not hard to imagine that there were legends circulating about the first Angevin coming from humble origins. When interested clerics came across these stories, they immediately were reminded of the great heroes of antiquity. By drawing these parallels they could make sense of the stories they heard. How else could the family of a simple forester become one of the most powerful lineages in France? They mixed in the little things they knew about the time of Charles the Bald, *et voilà*, a founding story. In underlining their ancestors' chivalrous character rather than their rich possessions, the Anjou could distinguish themselves from other high aristocratic families. In a world where everyone had vast estates, they had little value – quite the contrary to what we see in our songs, those, however, targeted a different audience.

An alternative model was provided by the legend of the *Aeneid*, written down by Virgil in the decades preceding the beginning of the Common Era. It is the story of the Trojan prince Aeneas who fled from the burning city to become the founder of Rome. He has to endure an *Odyssey*-like wandering through the Mediterranean, even going to the underworld; when he finally reaches Italy, he has to defeat the hostile Turnus and his followers. It is the ultimate story of how a nation is built and early medieval authors drew heavily and eagerly from it.³⁸⁵ The descent from ancient Troy first appears in the seventh-century *Chronicle of Fredegar* and is subsequently used in many Frankish chronicles.³⁸⁶ Most interesting for our case is the already mentioned *History of the Normans* by Dudo of St. Quentin and subsequent adaptations. Rollo's journey mirrors that of Aeneas; guided by dreams and visions he is led to his destined new homeland. The conquest is also justified in a similar fashion. We should not forget that Rollo is at this point still a pagan, fighting the successors of Charlemagne.³⁸⁷

We know that Lambert of Ardres was familiar with the *Aeneid*, as he references it in his prologue. It is however uncertain whether he was familiar with Dudo's history.³⁸⁸ In any case the structure is similar in all three texts, a heroic forefather is forcefully driven from a far away land to construct a new home with a glorious future somewhere else. Just as Dudo used the *Aeneid* to understand how a

385 On the importance of Virgil (and Sallust) for early medieval writing see Southern, "Classical Tradition."

386 Reynolds, "Medieval Origines Gentium," 375f.

387 Christiansen (ed.), *History of the Normans*, xxif. and Pierre Bouet, "Dudon de Saint-Quentin et Virgile: «L'Énéide» au service de la cause normande," *Annales de Normandie* 23 (1990): 226-231.

388 *Lambert of Ardres, History of the Counts of Guines*, Prologue. Dunbabin assumes that he was familiar with Dudo's *History* (Dunbabin, "Discovering a Past," 5).

blood-thirsty pirate crew became the founders of Christian Normandy,³⁸⁹ Lambert used the same age-old structure to explain how the first forefathers of the lords of Guines, concerning whom probably little to nothing survived, came into possession of their ancestral lands. We can see how through time the Trojan descent in these stories is slowly replaced by Denmark. Already Dudo had difficulties fitting the two together. Our mid-twelfth century author did not even try, there was no need for a Trojan origin. When we look at Siegfried, it is his knightly behavior that legitimizes his conquests and a somewhat mysterious story of an ancestor holding the land 200 years prior.³⁹⁰

As we have seen, while the method of constructing the past was not always the same, the outcome, however, was quite similar. Beyond the foundation of the lordship there was nothing that connected the aristocratic families to their past and the stories that might have circulated in the family or region lost all relevance. Deprived of all meaning and ripped from the social context of their time, they were forcefully conferred into the realm of the mythical. And so it happens that the forefathers are nobodies from nowhere. But it is precisely that fact that makes them so perfect. It is in this time of weak kings and weak memory that they could build a power base and a future for the lineage without the interference of any outside power, especially not the king. We already see strong anti-Capetian sentiments in Fulk's account, where the prince claims to have gotten his inheritance from Charles the Bald, not from any ancestor of Philip I.³⁹¹ In later founding stories even any Carolingian partaking is diminished as much as possible.³⁹² That is not to say that the white bearded king was entirely expelled from the memory of aristocratic families – for the lords of Boulogne, for example, he continued to be an important point of reference.³⁹³ But again, the king is not the cause, but a symptom. These stories look the way they do because the aristocratic families wanted to portray their ancestors as new men rising from humble origins by their own labor and chivalrous virtues, gaining their power and legitimacy only by themselves.

On a side note, although Siegfried's origin is obscure, Lambert finds it necessary to underline that he is of notable family. It is not enough to show the proper conduct, one also has to be of noble birth. We can see the same idea in multiple other stories of heroes coming from humble origins who later turn out to be nobles. Parzival and Aiol grew up in the forest and know nothing of knightly be-

389 Southern, "Classical Tradition," 192.

390 In this sense, funnily enough, Siegfried's story is closer to the *Aeneid*. Aeneas' forefathers are said to have come from Italy. (*Vergil, Aeneis*, ed. Niklas Holzberg (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), Book III, 165-170 and VII, 205-211).

391 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, 233.

392 For other examples from outside northern France see Jaume Aurell i Cardona, *Authoring the Past: History, Autobiography, and Politics in Medieval Catalonia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 29-32. Paul Freedman, "Cowardice, Heroism and the Legendary Origins of Catalonia," *Past & Present* 121 (1988): 15-18 and Bisson, "Unheroed Past," 293-301.

393 Genicot, *Les généalogies*, 37f.

havior, but are easily identified as aristocrats.³⁹⁴ The same is true for the kitchen assistant Rainouart, who turns out to be the long lost brother of William's wife Orable. Interestingly, this characterization was not needed in the earlier *Chronicle of Anjou*. I suspect this is a sign of the aristocracy closing their social boundaries in the second half of the twelfth century, but that would need further examination.³⁹⁵

The way aristocratic families imagined their forefathers having acquired the land they now owned, is essentially different from what we saw in *Raoul* and *Garin*. There much effort is put to delegitimize the do-it-yourself-attitude that is so successful in the case of Siegfried and Rollo. When we look at the *Charroi de Nîmes* or many other songs of the William cycle the similarities with these stories, however, are plentiful. In the *Charroi* William is an Aeneas-like hero, forced from his native country to build a new home elsewhere. When compared to the just discussed *History of the Normans* by Dudo of St. Quentin and its twelfth-century adaptation by Wace the correlations are even more striking and go as far as the borrowing of whole scenes.

As discussed previously, Prince Rollo's story starts in Dacia. According to Dudo's late tenth-century account, the youths of the land were making war against their fathers, their uncles, among themselves and by doing so devastated the whole country. The fathers went to the king urging him to purge the country "of this pestilent plague of the most immoral foes, so that we, the reminder, may be able to live and rest in perpetual peace."³⁹⁶ Thereupon the sons sought shelter with Rollo and his brother, but through trickery they were defeated and forced to flee across the sea to *Scanza*.³⁹⁷

For his twelfth-century *Roman de Rou* Wace relied heavily on Dudo's history, especially for the events prior to William the Conqueror's time. However, it is not a simple translation from Latin to the vernacular, but rather a sophisticated adaption. The exodus story is very similar to the original account, with the crucial difference that the roles of the fathers and sons are inverted. The blame shifts from the sons to the fathers. In Dudo's version of events the fathers only want to exile the youths to bring back peace and order to the country. In the *Roman de Rou* the fathers drive their eldest sons away and leave their inheritance to their younger brothers, arguing that the lands were not enough to feed all the children. One time, conflict arose between the two parties as the first borns refused to leave to take someone else's inheritance by force and be exiled throughout the world. In-

³⁹⁴ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 36 and Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 86.

³⁹⁵ See Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 244-248.

³⁹⁶ *History of the Normans*, Book II, Ch. 1; trans., 25.

³⁹⁷ *History of the Normans*, Book II, Ch. 2-4.

stead they wanted to share the lands with their little brothers.³⁹⁸ Wace here changes his source to match the literary cliché of the resentful father that so often appears in the William cycle.³⁹⁹

A little further in Wace's narrative Rollo strikes up a friendship with the king of England and attacks the Frankish mainland. Rollo's troops are laying siege to Paris when they receive the news that the English king is threatened by domestic enemies. Rollo returns to the British Isles and King Aethelstan offers him half of his kingdom in exchange for his assistance.⁴⁰⁰ Rou defeats the king's enemies, but refuses his price: "*I ask for no part of your land and for none of your wealth, except for this. If there is in your land any warrior who is willing to come with me in search for something better than he has, allow him to come.*"⁴⁰¹ The parallels with the *Charroi* are again obvious. William too refuses Louis' offer for half of the kingdom as reward for his service and William also encourages the *povres bachelers* of the country to come with him and conquer abroad. Wace uses the same literary tools as the author of the *Charroi* to paint his hero as a perfect knight.

We find a similar episode in Dudo's *History of the Normans*, but Wace reworked it substantially. In the earlier text the scene is much more dragged out. In Dudo's *History* the king also promises the Norman prince half of his kingdom, but Rollo does not reject it immediately. Only after he is reminded by a vision that his fate lies in Francia, he returns the land to the king.⁴⁰² Through this reworking the meaning of the episode is changed entirely. In the late tenth-century text, Rollo is an Aeneas-like hero led by dreams to fulfill his destiny, two centuries later he is a perfect knight, who rather conquers somewhere else than to take from his king.⁴⁰³ While Wace's story still has the structure of the ancient text, it is adapted to the world of the twelfth century. It was argued that Wace

398 Wace's *Roman de Rou: The History of the Norman People*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 13-16.

399 See chapter "A bad cliché" above. This might be a coincidence, but the image of the father sending his sons away seems to have a frequent connection to the Normans. The founding father of the Hauteville dynasty, Tancred de Hauteville, is also portrayed as a resentful father. Orderic Vitalis tells us that he advised all but one of his twelve sons to seek their fortunes elsewhere and passed his entire inheritance to Geoffrey. (*The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Book III, ii.88). Malaterra – another historian of the Normans – lists Geoffrey as fourth brother. Malaterra further states that the estates of Tancred de Hauteville were not sufficient for all of them and therefore the brothers decided by themselves to leave their father's lands; the oldest first because they were stronger (*Gaufrido Malaterra: De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis fratris eius*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri (Bologna: Lapi, 1928), 1.5). The parallels with the story of Wace, as well as the songs *Les Narbonnais* and *Girart de Vienne* are obvious. This is for sure a carefully cultivated self-image as Robert Bartlett argued (Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Civilization and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (London: Penguin, 1994), 88f.), but we might also be dealing with what people in northern France considered stereotypical "Norman behavior".

400 Wace's *Roman de Rou*, 17-24.

401 Wace's *Roman de Rou*, 24.

402 *History of the Normans*, Book II, Ch. 18f.

403 Interestingly Rollo's deeds in Denmark are omitted in William of Jumieges' reduction from the 1050s, but are reintroduced by Robert of Torigni writing at the end of the 1130s (*The gesta Normannorum ducum*, Book II, Ch. 2). In both reductions, the story of Rollo's return to Britain are shortened to the degree that the original meaning is lost (*The gesta Normannorum ducum*, Book II, Ch. 7 (13)).

heard the jongleurs as a boy and imitated their style in his texts.⁴⁰⁴ So it is not unrealistic to assume that he also changed the narrative of his Latin source to match the model of the *chansons*. However, certain things, like the fathers forcefully sending away their sons, could just have made more sense to him and his audience.

A king promising half of his kingdom to a successful hero is of course a popular topos of folklore.⁴⁰⁵ Already in the *Aeneid* King Latinus of Latium is pledging to share his kingdom with the titular hero.⁴⁰⁶ However, contrary to what Eric Christiansen suggested,⁴⁰⁷ the usage of this theme in Dudo's and Wace's texts is clearly different. People in the twelfth century in particular interpreted the Roman epic in a different way. In the high medieval adaption *Le Roman d'Eneas* the idea of Latinus sharing his lands with the arriving Trojans is floating around, but that is never the king's plan. Instead he wants to give Aeneas all his possessions (*"ma terre li abandon"* 3253). Aeneas' antagonist Turnus sees through the king's intentions – *"tu ne vuels pas o els partir/ anceis lor vuels le tot guerpir"* (3845f.) – and eventually starts war for the lands that were promised to him before the arrival of Aeneas. The only time half of the kingdom is actually offered is at a later stage, but to Turnus in order to avoid a duel between him and the Trojan prince, not to Aeneas himself.⁴⁰⁸

Virgil's epic concludes rather abruptly, so we never learn what happens after Turnus is killed. However, the twelfth-century version adds a fairy-tale-like happy ending. Aeneas marries the princess and his now father-in-law makes him the heir of his kingdom and gives him a large piece of land to rule.⁴⁰⁹ This is again not how the literary topos is used in the case of Rollo – in both the tenth and twelfth-century version. However, we find the same usage in the *Couronnement de Louis*. Out of gratitude for having saved Rome from the attacking Saracens, King Gaifier promises William his daughter and half his kingdom. After his death William shall be his heir.⁴¹⁰

As concluding remarks it is important to stress that when we look at how aristocrats remembered their forefathers having come into the possession of a fief, it is by glorious conquest. The stories are

404 Laurie Tomchak, "Wace's Work: Patronage, Repetition and Translation in the Roman de Rou" (Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1983), 72-101.

405 See Q112 (half a kingdom as reward) in Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature (Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myth, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Porvoo Bloomington, Ind.: Söderström Indiana UnivPr, 1936).

406 Vergil, *Aeneis*, Book VII, 255-7.

407 Christiansen (ed.), *History of the Normans*, 40 FN 178.

408 *Le Roman d'Eneas*, ed. Monica Schöler-Beinhauer (München: Fink, 1972), 7805-7812. In the *Aeneid* there are also efforts to convince Turnus to let go of the duel, but the king never offers him half his kingdom.

409 *Le Roman d'Eneas*, 10120-10153.

410 *Une fille ai, n'a si gente soz ciel:*
Je la vos doins de gré et volentiers,
Se la volez ne prendre ne baillier,
Et de ma terre avrez une meitié,
Après ma mort serez mes eritiers. (*Couronnement*, 1360-1364).

structured according to the model of the *Aeneid*. We find the same framework in the *Charroi*, but quite the opposite is the case for Raoul and Fromont. Them trying to take their fate into their own hands, ends in total disaster.

Beneath the olive trees

One of the reasons the three solutions of the *Charroi de Nîmes*, *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* look the way they do, is the specific way the *chanson de geste* are constructed, story lines are connected, and characters make decisions. It seems as if there are only certain moments at which a story can move forward. Over the years historians had different interpretations for this phenomenon. Alfred Adler argued that the jongleurs were familiar with all the songs and these scenes are implicit commentary on each other. J.P. Martin called them “*motifs narratifs*” and saw them foremost as literary tools; moments at which the relationship between characters change, for better or for worse.⁴¹¹ The explanation that seems most convincing to me, however, has nothing to do with aesthetics, but with the techniques of oral poetry. Lord argued that there is a specific grammar-like logic behind how themes hang together. When a singer reaches certain points an underlining force drives him into certain directions. These are deeply embedded in tradition, therefore very old.⁴¹²

For a long time historians were blinded by those apparently old, archaic elements in the epic songs. Gaston Paris and others saw *Raoul* as an accurate reflection of the chaos of the post-Carolingian world. Raoul's disinheritance could not have happened in the twelfth century. Aside from the fact that this is not as unrealistic – looking at multiple Capetian interventions in questions of succession during the course of the twelfth century⁴¹³ – it is important to keep in mind that just because something is old, does not mean that it cannot make sense to the people in the present. Disinheritance and feud might have been rare(er) in the twelfth century, but far from impossible or – more importantly – unthinkable. The singer could use the traditional elements at his disposal to create a story that is about issues of his present. As we have seen the author put characters into situations that must have felt only too real for the people of the twelfth century.

Baumgartner and Half-Lancer identified the assembly at the royal court as one of these turning points.⁴¹⁴ Looking again at these scenes in the *Charroi*, *Raoul* and *Garin* we will see how the world

411 Adler, *Epische Spekulanten*. Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 76 FN 62.

412 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 118-123.

413 Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 131.

414 Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 79f.

of the *chansons de geste* is constructed from similar building blocks, but arranging them differently can result in totally different outcomes.

In the first *laisses* of the *Charroi* William is informed by his nephew that the king has omitted him in the distribution of land. William goes to the king and forcefully reminds him of his services. King Louis is trying to stall: ‘Winter will pass and summer will come, then, when the next peer dies, you will receive his land.’⁴¹⁵ We have the same structure in *Raoul de Cambrai*. Raoul is reminded by his uncle (here the roles are inverted) that the king is taking away his land. They go to the king's hall and Raoul calls attention to his past services and that he did not receive anything in return. Here too the king plays the waiting game. Giboin, currently holding Raoul's inherited land, should have it for another two or three years and Raoul shall have the next vacant fief between Rhine and Loire instead.⁴¹⁶ In *Garin* King Pepin awards Begon the fief of Gascony after a successful hunt. How Fromont reacts to the king's action is similar to William's attitude in the *Charroi*. To smooth things over the king also promises his vassal the next fief.⁴¹⁷ This is one of the turning points. Raoul and Fromont accept the king's compromise and wait for the next fief to get free, William instead goes out to conquer Nîmes.

A little over a year passes until count Herbert of Vermandois dies. Hearing the news, Raoul makes his way to the monarch. In scene that has striking similarities with William's arrival at the royal court, he dismounts beneath the olive trees (naturally olive trees do not grow in Paris) and storms into the king's hall, requesting the land he was promised.

Charroi

Trusqu'au palès ne se volt arester
A piè descent soz l'olivier ramè,
Puis en monta tot le marbrin degrè
 (52-54)

Raoul

Li baron vinre[n]t a la cort a Paris,
a piè descenden[n]t par desoz les olis,
el palais montent – ja iert li rois reqis.
 (651-653)

Only reluctantly Louis gives in to Raoul's demands. He is forced to do so by the hostages he had had given earlier, but Louis will not help the epic heroes to get the land. Here again the parallels to the *Charroi* are striking.

Charroi

Franc chevalier, or venez dont avant
Ge ferai, voir, tot le vostre talont.

Raoul

“Biach nîes R[aous]”, dist il, “venés avant.
Par tel covent vos doing ci le gant:

⁴¹⁵ *Charroi*, 73-78.

⁴¹⁶ *Raoul*, Ch. XXXII-XXXIV.

⁴¹⁷ *Garin*, Ch. XXIII. See also *Charroi*, 79.

<i>Tenez Espagne, prenez la par cest gant;</i>	<i>je ne mi home ne te seront garant. “</i>
<i>Ge la vos doing par itel covenant:</i>	<i>Et dist R[aous] ““et je miex ne demant. “</i>
<i>Se vos en croist ne paine ne ahan,</i>	(731-734)
<i>Ci ne aillors ne t'en serai garant. “</i>	
<i>Et dit Guillelmes: “Et ge mielz ne demant,</i>	
(583-589)	

But unlike William, who refuses to go against another aristocratic family, Raoul attacks the Vermandois, resulting in a feud spanning several generations and ultimately his death.

In *Garin* King Thierry of the Auvergne awards Garin his kingdom and the hand of his daughter for his assistance against Saracen invaders. Accompanied by Fromont,⁴¹⁸ Garin makes his way to the royal court to get Pepin's approval, who happily accepts. Fromont contests the king's decision. Pepin tells him to demand another fief – he will get it certainly.⁴¹⁹ Here we have the reverse situation to the *Charroi*, where William asks the king to give him another fief. While William rejects all the offers, because they would either hurt the king or another noble, Fromont is insisting on the land that is promised to Garin. One can easily see the story going a different way, had Fromont accepted the king's offer of another fief or had he requested hostages earlier. (This might be the reason why the scene is so elaborated in *Raoul*.) The same is true for the other songs. The plot of the *Charroi de Nîmes* has very much the potential to become a feud between two families: William only needs to accept the king's offer for the land of one of his fellow aristocrats and we have the same bloodbath as in *Raoul* and *Garin*. The options are all on the table. It is not trivial and certainly no coincidence that William goes out to conquer abroad and Fromont and Raoul unleash a family feud. Had the singer wanted to tell a story about a foreign conquest, he could have easily done so.

Because of how oral poetry functions, the connection of certain themes is not random, there are certain rules. When we look at how the stories hang together, we see two different models. The story of William conquering Nîmes is very much in line with how twelfth-century aristocrats imagined their forefathers having come into the possession of a fief. The combination with family feud, as we see it in *Raoul* and *Garin*, however, is new. That is not to say that feud as a concept or as a way to structure a story is new, certainly not. I am also not saying that in practice disagreements over land were not oftentimes the origins of conflicts or feuds – they certainly were. But when we look at how aristocrats in the eleventh and early twelfth century imagined the heroes of the past having come into

⁴¹⁸ This might be a play on the theme. In the other court scenes it is a pair of uncle and nephew that bring their demands to the king. Fromont could be seen as having the same role, as years earlier Fromont took the young Garin in his care and until this moment Fromont and Garin were companions.

⁴¹⁹ *Garin*, Ch. XLI.

the possession of a fief, they would not have thought of a feud between two families. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak suggested that one should look not only at new ideas, but also at when two (old) discourses intersect.⁴²⁰ This is exactly what we see here. In the world of the imaginary this connection was not made before. To the question why the jongleur made this link for the first time and – equally important – why it made sense to his audience, we will return below. Something must have changed in the second half of the twelfth century that these connections were more meaningful to singer and audience alike. The appearance of texts like *Raoul* and *Garin*, however, is not a sign that there were more feuds, the opposite is most likely the case.⁴²¹

Raoul de Gouy's feud

The little we know about the development of the story of Raoul de Cambrai seems to support this assumption. Only in the end of the twelfth century a story about a bloody vendetta came to be linked with the literary tool of the bad king. To investigate this we need to look back at the evolution of the song. Not to ask the question of origin – again – but to see what changed and why. This is also another angle to tackle the question of the idea of a story. For *Raoul* we have an unusual number of sources that allow us to make more substantial theories about the development of the song. But even here they are but mere glimpses in the dark.⁴²²

The historical role model for Raoul was identified as a certain Raoul de Gouy, who appears in a short episode in Flodoard's *Annales* in the year 943: “Count Heribert [of Vermandois] died and his sons buried him at St-Quentin. When they heard that Raoul, the son of Raoul de Gouy, had come to the lands of their father as if he were invading, they attacked and killed him. The news of this greatly saddened King Louis.”⁴²³

The similarities with the central plot of *Raoul* is remarkable. Historians have made an effort to identify other characters of the song with historical persons – for example we find five obituaries mentioning a certain countess Aalais and her son – but these are on rather thin basis.⁴²⁴ But that is not

420 Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Were Jews Made in the Image of God? Christian Perspectives and Jewish Existence in Medieval Europe,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History. Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 66f.

421 See Bisson, *Crisis*, 530-534 and 576.

422 For a lengthy discussion of the historiography see Matarasso, *Recherches*, 20-101.

423 “Flodoardi Annales,” ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz in *MGH Scriptores* 3 (Hannover 1839), 389. For the English translation see *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919-966*, trans. Steven Fanning and Bernard S. Bachrach (North York, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 37. When I am referring to Raoul de Gouy below I mean the son, not the father.

424 Daniel Misonne, *Eilbert de Florennes: histoire et légende* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1967), 102f.

the only problem, central parts which arguably make the *Chanson de Raoul* to what it is, like Raoul's disinheritance and Bernier as a rival character to Raoul, are missing entirely.⁴²⁵

The next glimpse into the development is provided by the *Waulsort Chronicle*, written in the middle of the twelfth century. It is the legendary biography of Eilbertus the founder of the monastery. This story is the first time we come across Bernier (Bernerus), who is made the second hero alongside Eilbert. In the parts that interest us, Eilbert gets into a conflict with King Charles (not Louis) and takes him prisoner. Count Herbert of Vermandois dies and his four sons are put under the tutorship of his brother (not son) Eilbert. Remembering his captivity, the king, however, decides to give their lands to his nephew Raoul (Rodulphus), who invades their lands and sets fire to Saint-Quentin, where Bernier's mother is burned to death. The tragedy between Raoul and Bernier unfolds similarly to the *chanson* and eventually Raoul is killed in battle and the Vermandois keep their land. Once Raoul's nephew Gautier is grown up, he gathers an army to avenge his uncle. A three day long duel between Bernier and Gautier remains undecided until the king ends the fighting. The author claims that the resentment between the people of Vermandois and Cambrai continues to this very day. Bernier dies a natural death soon thereafter. Eilbert regrets his past wrongs and goes on to found monasteries. Bernier is the uncontested hero of the episode and Raoul the villain. The many moral grey areas that characterize the epic are missing. He is simply portrayed as the character of violence and arrogance that people in the twelfth century remembered him as.⁴²⁶

Pauline Matarasso argued in 1962 that the *chanson* was originally a *Geste de Vermandois*, some kind of family story or local legend about the victory over Raoul de Gouy that was preserved in Vermandois. Somewhere along the way Bernier was introduced as antagonist for the young Raoul. This story was then picked up by the monks of Waulsort with Bernier as the hero, only later Raoul was made a positive character by the introduction of a complicated story of royal injustice.⁴²⁷ Her theory about a family story is entirely plausible. The evidence is rare, but it seems that some written traditions were born in context of noble families that saw their ancestors in the epic heroes. *Hervis de Metz* might have been produced under the patronage of the noble family of Montbeliard. We already saw Geoffrey of Anjou making an appearance as hostage in *Raoul de Cambrai*.⁴²⁸

425 Matarasso, *Recherches*, 18.

426 The relevant passages are printed in *Raoul de Cambrai, chanson de geste*, eds. Paul Meyer and Auguste Longnon (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1882), ic- civ and Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 151-159.

427 Matarasso, *Recherches*, 58-96.

428 See Joseph J. Duggan, "Prolegomenes a une pragmatique textuelle," in *L'épopée romane au Moyen Âge et aux temps modernes: actes du XIV^e Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals pour l'Étude des Épopées Romanes, Naples, 24-30 juillet 1997*, ed. Salvatore Luongo, vol. 1 (Napoli: Fridericiiana, 2001), 429f. Duby argued that the heroes of the epics served as inspiration for the founding fathers of great lineages. (Duby, "French Genealogical Literature," 155f.). See also Pauline Taylor and Lindrich Zezula, "La Geste des Loherains et les Coucy," in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du Moyen âge et de la renaissance: offerts à Jean Frappier*, vol. 2 (Genève: Droz, 1970).

However, already William Calin, publishing in the same year, raised suspicion concerning Matarasso's assumptions about the nature of the *Waulsort Chronicle*. He saw a substantial interference of the monks into the narrative.⁴²⁹ Daniel Missone's thorough study left little doubt about that.⁴³⁰ In the chronicle it is said that the people of Vermandois and Cambrai are hostile until this very day. This is a strong indication that the legend had its origins in the confines of these areas. The author knew the local legend and assimilated the founder of his monastery Eilbert with Ybert. The monastery was in rivalry with the neighboring abbey of Hastieres. In this conflict the past was a powerful tool to gain legitimacy and nothing could be too good for the founder of the monastery. With the same goal the monks constructed a genealogical connection between Eilbert and Aymeri de Narbonne of the William cycle.

The only thing Eilbert of the chronicle and Ybert of the *chanson* have in common is their name. Without the introduction of the story of Raoul and Bernier no one would have thought of a connection between the two. The monks used the story to highlight the contrast between the excesses of Eilbert's past and his pious foundations.⁴³¹ We see the same tactics that Lambert of Ardres used in the story of the people of Boulogne – incorporating and adapting local legends to fit his agenda. The *Waulsort Chronicle* is most likely a reworking of a local legend or song. There is, however, no way of saying with reasonable certainty what this earlier story was about.

A look at the *Song of Roland* suggests that the changes might have been significant. The earliest description of events that appear in the epic are in Eginhard's *Vita Karoli Magni* from 830; they depict a Basque attack on the Frankish rearguard. The only people named are called Roland, Eggihard, and Anshelm, no mention of Olivier, Tulpin, or Ganelon. Only Roland will find his way into the epic, the other two disappear in time. Studies of the names of brothers have shown that at least since the 1030s Olivier is known in connection with Roland.⁴³² While what this early legend contained is more than obscure, the role of Roland's companion probably changed significantly. In the majority of cases where brothers are called Roland and Olivier, the first born is named Olivier. With the role he has in the Oxford *Roland* it is hard to explain that he would be made the older brother.⁴³³ Ganelon was probably a later introduction to the poem as well. The *Nota Emilianese*, which is dated between 1065 and 1075, mentions Roland, Ogier, William (who is later removed), Olivier and

429 Calin, *Epic of Revolt*, 21-26.

430 Missone, *Eilbert de Florennes*, 106f.

431 Missone, *Eilbert de Florennes*, 111f. Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 17-21.

432 While Roland was a popular name already in the eighth century, Olivier is featured on his own, that is, not in combination with Roland, only after 1055. Therefore these earlier mentions must be in reference to a legend about Roland. (Martín de Riquer, *Los cantares de gesta franceses: sus problemas, su relación con España* (Madrid: Gredos, 1952), 77f.)

433 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *La Chanson de Roland y el neotradicionalismo: orígenes de la épica románica* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1959), 178-80.

Archbishop Tulpin, but not the traitor Ganelon. He is first traceable in relation to Roland (outside the song itself) in 1131.⁴³⁴

The same is likely true for the legend of Raoul de Guoy. When we take Flodoard's *Annales* as starting point, one of the most significant changes to the story is in structure. An isolated episode of an invasion changes into a story about a family feud. On the ground feud was oftentimes not distinguishable from other forms of conquest and raids, but the logic and motivation is entirely different.

But what is the medieval feud? In recent years historians moved away from the notion of a peace in the feud. It seems as if it was not an all important structuring force that allowed stability in the absence of a strong state. In an important article Guy Halsall pointed out that what we see in the Middle Ages is not the same feud anthropologists described in eastern Africa or in nineteenth-century Corsica, as the characteristic reciprocity is missing in our sources.⁴³⁵ Peter Sawyer argued that "*bloodfeud flourished best, not in the real world, but in the fictions of poets, story tellers and lawyers.*"⁴³⁶ While since then Paul Hyams convincingly argued that there was indeed a mindset of vengeance in the Middle Ages,⁴³⁷ others stressed that feud should also – if not primarily – be viewed in narrative terms.⁴³⁸ For something to become a feud it first had to be made into such, either by the actors themselves or by observers and historians. It could be used as a flexible political tool to make enemies at a convenient time, rally supporters to one's cause or (retroactively) legitimate a conflict or make sense of a series of events. As we have seen multiple times already, where the context of the time was lost, isolated events needed to be put into a new framework in order for people to make sense of them. Endless circles of revenge not only made a good story, they also provided this structure. Gregory of Tours often portrayed isolated events, or events that are best described as war, as part of a feud.⁴³⁹ The same could be said about Orderic Vitalis' description of certain incidents of the eleventh century.⁴⁴⁰ In this sense feud is just as much a structuring tool as the *Aeneid*. Similarly

434 Hans E. Keller, "The Song of Roland: A Mid-Twelfth Century Song of Propaganda for the Capetian Kingdom," *Olifant* 3, no. 4 (1976), 246.

435 Halsall, "Violence and Society," 21-25.

436 Sawyer, "Bloodfeud," 35f.

437 Hyams, "Feud in the High Middle Ages," 168-170.

438 Since Halsall's article was published in the late 90s a lot has been done in the field of medieval feud. See Dominique Barthélemy, "Feudal War in Tenth-Century France," in *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud*, ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). John Hudson, "Feud, Vengeance and Violence in England from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White*, ed. Tracey L. Billado and Belle S. Tuten (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). Thomas Roche, "The Way Vengeance Comes: Rancorous Deeds and Words in the World of Orderic Vitalis," in *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud*, ed. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). Stephen D. White, "Clotild's Revenge: Politics, Kinship and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud," in *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living: Essays in Memory of David Herlihy*, ed. David Herlihy, Samuel Kline Cohn, and Steven Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 107-30. For a discussion of feud in the *chansons de geste* see Sunderland, *Rebel Barons* and White, "Un imaginaire faidal." On feud in Icelandic sagas see Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*.

439 Sawyer, "Bloodfeud," 29. White, "Clotild's Revenge," 108f.

440 Roche, "The Way Vengeance Come," 120-122.

to how clerical authors used ancient models to explain how a nobody from nowhere could become the founder of a great lineage, people connected detached memories of violence and destruction to a story of never ending feud. Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner suggested that the *Chanson de Raoul* was a song of the frontier, representing a collective memory of a quasi permanent war.⁴⁴¹ It is not hard to imagine that the events surrounding the invasion of Raoul de Guoy were made into a feud between two families by later generations to give unconnected memories coherence and meaning.⁴⁴²

At least since the mid-twelfth century the story of Raoul was remembered as a vendetta. The *Waulsort Chronicle* already contains many of the most important elements of the *chanson* we have today. It knows of a feud between two families, it contains the story of Raoul's nephew Gautier and his efforts to avenge his uncle. But the crucial scenes where Raoul's motivation is explained, where he gets disinherited and is denied a reward for his services, are missing. So pretty much everything we identified as the literary tool of the bad king is not there.

In Flodoard's tenth-century chronicle nothing is said about Raoul's motivation for invading the lands of the Vermandois. The short remark that the news of Raoul's death saddened the king, however, makes it possible to speculate. Some historians, looking at the twelfth-century *chanson*, argued that King Louis might have been somehow related to Raoul de Guoy (Raoul is the king's nephew in the song) and he is therefore sad to hear the news of his death.⁴⁴³ That Raoul is mentioned nowhere else and that he is in possession of a rather unimportant fief makes this, however, unlikely. Matarasso offered a different version of events: Just as in the *Waulsort Chronicle*, Raoul de Guoy is acting according to the king's will. This explains why a knight, who held a rather unimportant fief would attack the Vermandois, one of the most powerful families of the kingdom.⁴⁴⁴ As we have seen, Raoul having close relations with the king might very well have been part of the idea of the story. It explains the happy beginnings at the royal court and why he goes against the advice of all the people around him in the song.

But neither in Flodoard's *Annales* nor in the *Waulsort Chronicle* can we see anything resembling the motivation of Raoul in our song. In the *chanson* he is not operating in accordance to royal will, quite the contrary, he is acting against his wishes. Furthermore, Raoul is only forced to do the things he does, because of the injustices committed by his bad king, not because he is pursuing his com-

441 Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 22f.

442 Flodoard in general does not use vengeance as principle to order the events he describes, contrary to other authors in the tenth century (Barthélemy, "Feudal War," 107f.). Since he is the only one reporting about the events surrounding Raoul de Gouy, it is not entirely unlikely that already contemporaries saw the occurrences as part of a feud.

443 Fanning and Bachrach, *Annals of Flodoard*, 37 FN 121.

444 Matarasso, *Recherches*, 90-93. See also Boutet, "Signification politico-historique," 318f.

mands. The same bad king that forces William to conquer abroad and Fromont (somewhat unjustified) to claim the lands that were promised to Garin.⁴⁴⁵

Looking at the evidence above, one cannot help but notice how unusual the beginning of *Raoul de Cambrai* is compared to the other stories about him. Generations of historians noticed this and, as seems only too obvious, made the changing role of the French kingship responsible for the introduction of the king's injustice. However, as I hope to have shown in previous chapters, the bad king was simply a tool the singers used to put the characters into the position of *juvenes*. It is not fundamentally about Philip Augustus or the centralizing kingship.

The question that will concern us in the final chapter is why a singer would have used a legend about a family feud to tell a story about how to acquire a fief. If one would have asked an author at the beginning of the twelfth century to compose such a narrative, it would have looked a lot like the *Aeneid*. And his story would have been in good company, many stories of medieval *gentes* and the founding stories of northern French aristocratic houses looked like the ancient Roman legend and incidentally so does the *Charroi de Nîmes*. Undoubtedly a skilled jongleur would have had no problems creating such a story, but in the case of Raoul and Fromont he chose not to.

The Image of the Conqueror

In a lot of ways the image of the past in *Raoul* and *Garin* is different from what we saw previously. When it comes to how a fief was acquired, the *Charroi* and the aristocratic genealogies tell tales of glorious conquests, *Raoul* and *Garin* instead recount a grim story of two bloody feuds. A conquest abroad is not even thinkable. As we already discussed above, the fate of Raoul and Fromont should have given ambitious knights a compelling reason not to attack a fellow aristocrat.⁴⁴⁶ Naturally the

⁴⁴⁵ An interesting comparison is the thirteenth-century *chanson Venjance Fromondin*, where Raoul's motivation is again different, but somewhat closer to the *Waulsort Chronicle*. It is an interesting mashup between *Raoul* and the heroes of the *Cycle de Lohrains*. Raoul is attached to the lineage of the Lohrains, while the Vermandois are related to the Bordelais. I do not want to put too much emphasis on this, as the story is much later and obviously subordinated to the narrative about the conflict between the two families, but it fits the pattern perfectly. There is, again, no disinheritance of the young Raoul. Instead he is besieged in Cambrai and liberated by the king (here king Pepin) who then gives him the land of the Vermandois. Raoul invades, burns Origny and has the well known quarrel with Bernier, who then joins the other side. Raoul is killed, but the Lohrains keep the upper hand and eventually Bernier is made prisoner. It is striking that the drama between Bernier and Raoul found its way into the song almost in its entirety, while other important elements and characters are missing. The king is transformed into a trustworthy ally who defends Raoul and later helps him gain his fief. So here too Raoul is fighting on the king's side (See Catherine M. Jones, "Recasting Raoul de Cambrai: The Loherain Version," *Olifant* 14 (1989): 3–18. Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 27–32. The relevant parts are printed in Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 161–165).

⁴⁴⁶ See chapter "Beyond the three solutions" above.

story has to end badly in order to have the desired effect. The jongleur used a legend that was already known for its negative outcome to tell the specific story he (or more likely his lord) wanted. However, the image of *Raoul* and *Garin* is so different from earlier songs that I find it hard to explain it with just high aristocratic ideology. Other factors had to cumulate for this image to be accepted. At least in some circles this particular vision of the past must have made sense, otherwise it could not have spread as far as it did.⁴⁴⁷ However, as we will see, it was not an immediate reaction to changed realities, as foreign expeditions were always a risky business and the French aristocracy was expanding in all directions, but rather due to a more pessimistic vision of the past and future.⁴⁴⁸

With inheritance not an option for our three heroes and the king denying them a reward for their services, the most natural option would be to go abroad, at least that is the model provided by numerous other stories that talk about how a fief was acquired in the distant past. Crucially that is not even an option for Raoul and Fromont. Even if people did not remember Raoul as a great conqueror and the stories sought to be negative examples of what happens when you unleash war on another noble, one of the characters should have suggested an expedition to Saracen Spain. But there is no indication whatsoever that a conquest abroad is even an option. A settlement or a marriage between the two families would have also gone against the idea of the stories, but in these cases other characters are not shy in voicing their opinions.⁴⁴⁹ When we look at the plethora of stories about heroes from the past conquering abroad, it seems very strange that it was never even taken into consideration, especially if the songs were meant to spark a discussion in the noble household. This could simply be carelessness on part of the singer. For the ideological model to work, it did not need to be absolutely perfect.⁴⁵⁰ However, considering how the stories are constructed – the jongleur using the same building blocks for the opening scenes of our three songs, sometimes even word for word – it would be highly astonishing if he did not even think of a conquest abroad. Quite the opposite was the case, he deliberately decided against telling such a story.

Generally speaking characters in *Garin le Lohrain* and *Raoul de Cambrai* are much more attached to their native soil. Even for those that are successful in gaining a new home elsewhere, the future looks rough. When the feud is eventually, at least temporarily, settled in *Garin le Lohrain* and Begon returns to his fief in Gascony. He has everything a knight could wish for – a noble wife and a rich piece of land – but he is not happy. When confronted by his wife, he says that the only wealth that counts is that of family and friends. In Gascony he has no one and is surrounded by the hostile Bordelais. ‘I was installed in this land by Pepin, I have no friends and family here,’ he laments.

447 See chapter “Social memory” above.

448 On the expansion of the European aristocracy see Bartlett, *Making of Europe*. The chapter title is a reference to a chapter in Bartlett’s book.

449 See chapter “William, Raoul and Fromont. Three different solutions” above.

450 I thank Philippe Buc for this good point.

(“*En cest terre me herberja Pepins,/ Ne je n’i au ne parent ne ami*” 10179-10180). Here we can see the dark side of a seemingly successful knightly career. Even though Begon should be grateful – especially when considering how it turned out for some of the other heroes – he cannot quite be happy, because Gascony is not his ancestor’s land.⁴⁵¹ For Garin it is quite the opposite. When he returns to Metz as a young man, after having fled from his hometown as a child, the nobles and the people of the land soon recognize him as legitimate ruler. They swear allegiance to him and imprison the men of King Anseis.⁴⁵² In the later *Gerbert de Metz* Fromont even flees to the Saracen king Marsilie only to return to France to continue the feud with the Bordelais. He seems to be doing well for himself at the foreign court, but he has never any intention of building a new home there.⁴⁵³ The *Charroi*, *Raoul* and *Garin* are all stories about the dreams and wishes of the *juvenes* and the lesser nobility, but in the latter the solutions are imagined not in a far away land, but right next door. Given the social reality of the twelfth century that does not seem out of the ordinary, one’s neighbor was always closer to one’s mind, but in the world of the imaginary this is remarkable.

The songs are also more local in the way they are attached to the geography of the land. The accuracy of geographic depictions is exceptional for the epics, especially when compared to the surrealistic world of the earlier *Chanson de Guillaume* or the *Song of Roland*.⁴⁵⁴ Interestingly, in their local nature they are much closer to the aristocratic genealogies. Chris Wickham and James Fentress stressed the importance of geography in structuring local memory.⁴⁵⁵ The survival of descriptions as accurate might be a sign that these songs are closer to regional memories. Maybe they did not go through as many hands as the *Song of Roland*. As we already discussed, it is not unlikely that some songs had roots in local tales or even family histories (or vice versa). However, in that case it is even more astonishing that the narrative solutions are so different from what we see in the aristocratic genealogies. Fromont and Raoul could have had a successful knightly career like Siegfried or Rollo, but instead of creating a great lineage, they achieve nothing but death and destruction.

Did foreign expeditions get so much more difficult in the second half of the twelfth century that they are not even thinkable in our songs? When we look at the grand scheme of things this was clearly not the case. In the twelfth century the world of the French aristocracy was expanding in all directions. While Jerusalem might have been lost in 1187, French elites came to reside in Ireland, Cyprus and since 1204 even in Constantinople.⁴⁵⁶ And more importantly expeditions abroad were always risky undertakings. Apart from the hardships and dangerous of war, which must have been

451 *Garin*, Ch. XCIX.

452 *Garin*, Ch. XXVI.

453 Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, 213-217.

454 Kay, “Topography,” 260-267.

455 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 103 and 109-113.

456 See i.a. Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 3 and Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 28-30.

considerable – we remember William’s nephew Guielin lamenting that he is too young to bear the suffering that come with such an expedition⁴⁵⁷ – one also needed the resources to do so. Jonathan Riley-Smith has stressed the enormous financial burdens for the participants of the crusades and the lengthy preparations that preceded the departure. Similar preparations must have been made before every major campaign. The difficulties for a *povre bachelor* to come up with the cash needed to fund an expedition even of modest size must have been formidable, possibly bankrupting his whole family and, ultimately, there was of course no guarantee of success.⁴⁵⁸ The most successful crusaders drew on extensive and highly committed family networks. It is not by chance that certain families like the Montlherys and later the Lusignans acquired so much power in the Holy Land, while others returned home empty handed.⁴⁵⁹ For a petty or even a medium noble building a kingdom in a far away land was always an unlikely undertaking, even more so without the support of his kindred. Under these circumstances a father sending his sons away and forcing them to conquer abroad, as we see it so often in the Williams cycle, seems almost impossible. Of course there was always the option for an ambitious knight to join the campaign of a magnate or king in hope that he would remember one’s loyalty. However, Louis’ failure to reward William for his years of service is exactly what makes him go find his luck on his own in the first place.

The entire *Aeneid* model seems highly unrealistic in practice. Considering the constant usage in all sorts of historical writing, we might best speak of a bad cliché in these cases as well.⁴⁶⁰ That is not to say that it was impossible for a knight to go abroad and conquer a fief for himself, but for every Hauteville there must have been numerous people failing that never made it into the chronicles. Ultimately a foreign conquest was never likely to succeed, especially for someone with limited resources. However, it was as unlikely at the beginning of the twelfth century, as it was at the end of it. The costs of the gamble, striking rich in distant frontier lands, cannot therefore account for the difference between the adventurous Guillaume cycle and *Raoul* or the *Cycle de Lohrains*. The hero coming from far, far away and building a new home somewhere else, flourished best in the world of the imaginary and only there the attitude changed.

It is not a crisis of foreign conquest per se, but a lack of optimism for the future. Robert Bartlett spoke of an “*expansionary mentality*” that characterized the Western European aristocracy. We find

457 “*encor ne puis paine soffrir si grant*” (*Charroi*, 611).

458 Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders: 1095 – 1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109-113 and 130-135. Riley-Smith calculated that a poor knight would have needed four times his annual income for him alone to take the cross.

459 Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, 149, 170-173 and 190-195.

460 See Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 85-87 for other examples. Payen argued that William’s conquest of Spain would have made a medieval audience laugh. They would have know the literary repertoire and expected what was about to come. (Jean-Charles Payen, “Le Charroi de Nimes, Comedie epique?,” in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du Moyen âge et de la renaissance: offerts à Jean Frappier*, vol. 2 (Genève: Droz, 1970), 894).

the same confidence that makes the Swordbrothers demand a third of all of Livonia as they are about to invade, in the *Charroi*, but not in *Raoul* and *Garin*. King Louis and the bishop of Riga even reply in a similar fashion – they cannot give what they do not own. But that does not seem to matter to the William of the epics and neither did it to many other people. Numerous accounts from southern Italy, the Levant, Andalusia or the Baltics speak of anticipatory grants of lands not yet conquered, no matter how unrealistic the conquest seemed at the time.⁴⁶¹

In a speech that is put into the mouth of the Norman lord Walter Espec in an account written in the early 1150s, he appeals to the Norman army just before the Battle of the Standard (1138) against the invading Scots: ‘Why have you given up hope, has not God invested us with constant victory?’ He goes on to construct an almost overly confident image of the past that can hardly make one come to a different conclusion. After all, one only needs to remember how their great grandfathers seized so much of Gaul with so few troops; how many times they defeated the Angevins, Aquitaines or the French king even against all odds, how easily they conquered England that had withstood even the *victoriosissimus* Julius Caesar for so long and, last but not least, how they successfully subjugated Apulia, Calabria and Sicily.⁴⁶²

If people on the other hand would have looked at the historic examples of *Raoul* and *Garin* it is hard to believe that they would have seen a bright future. The plot has come a long way from the heroic defense of the Vermandois against an evil invader that it might have been in earlier iterations. Even if people remembered an atmosphere of darkness and destruction of the tenth century, other *chansons* that are set in the same time instead end on a positive note. Norman Daniel argued that they were “*transformed by the exuberant moral of the new aristocracies.*”⁴⁶³ In our songs, however, there is no sign of this winning mentality.

If the singer wanted to convey the message of his high aristocratic sponsors that unleashing a war on a fellow aristocrat is bad, it makes sense for him to pick a story that was already known for its negative outcome. He simply added a well-known episode of royal injustice to deprive the heroes of social mobility and then let the way the story turns out, prove that Raoul and Fromont’s actions were wrong. This is the case here. However, how this is done in our songs is highly unusual for the genre. In earlier and contemporary epics the order of the feudal world is eventually restored, but not in *Raoul* and *Garin*. We are left with a pile of corpses and a fight that can only end with the total annihilation of the opposing party. There is no happy ending for our heroes.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 90-92.

⁴⁶² “*Relatio Venerabilis Aelredi, Abbatis Rievallensis, de Standardo*,” ed. Richard Howlett in *Chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, 1886), 185f.

⁴⁶³ Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 26.

This is not the only way the image of the past in these songs is exceptional. We already discussed the unusual accuracy of geographical descriptions, but the songs are also unique in their portrayal of warfare. Considering war takes up a good part of the narrative this is not insignificant. The grandeur of the *Song of Roland*, featuring epic battles between hundreds of thousands of troops is absent, instead we have the sacking of small towns, the plundering of the countryside and uncountable sieges that often end inconclusive, with the retreat of one side or a treaty. Sarah Kay remarked that “*Garin reads like a cross between an art of war and a travelogue.*”⁴⁶⁵ Undoubtedly this is a more realistic description of the warfare of the High Middle Ages.⁴⁶⁶ However, for a genre with exaggeration as one of its key stylistic elements, this shift to realistic depiction must have been radical, especially to an audience familiar with the conduct of war.

Realism, of course, is not innocent, it is a literary tool by itself. The ideological goals are hidden – more or less sophistically – behind an “objective” reality. By appearing closer to the lived experience of the twelfth century the outcome of the story must have felt all the more natural, making the literary solutions of *Raoul* and *Garin* even more powerful. Simultaneously the realistic elements would have given legitimacy to a genre increasingly losing authority over the truthful narration of the past.⁴⁶⁷ In vernacular historical writing of the early thirteenth century we can see authors making a similar shift towards realism in order to make their stories seem more truthful. Perhaps this was not as novel as Gabrielle Spiegel thought it to be, jongleurs used the same techniques already a generation earlier.⁴⁶⁸

The world of Fromont and Raoul looks fundamentally different from that of earlier *chansons*. It is more local in its solutions and geography, more realistic in its depiction of war and, contrary to other epics, order cannot ultimately be restored. These changes combined must have been so radical that we best speak of a new image of the past. One should be careful when calling something as embedded in tradition as oral poetry, new, but undoubtedly a lot of the characteristics seem novel. The grim depiction of our *chansons* can be explained with high aristocratic ideology, however, the image must have also made sense to broader circles, otherwise the songs could not have reached the enormous popularity they did. The *Chanson de Raoul* would have simply stayed a local legend in the confines of Vermandois and would have never spread as far as the Languedoc and Aquitaine.⁴⁶⁹

464 Baumgartner and Half-Lancer, *L'impossible revolte*, 51 and 55. We see the total destruction of the enemy achieved in *Yonnet* for the Lohrains and in *Anseis* for the Bordelais (Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 187).

465 Kay, “Topography,” 268-176. The dystopian descriptions let Howard Bloch believe that there is a critique of war in these epics (Bloch, *Medieval French Literature*).

466 See Strickland, *War and Chivalry*.

467 Representative for this change is for example the introduction to the vernacular Pseudo-Turpin: “*Many people have heard it told and sung, but what these singers and jongleurs sing and tell is nothing but a lie, for they know nothing but a lie. No rhymed tale is true [...]*” (Cited in Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 55).

468 Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 55-76 and 220f.

This new image did not suddenly suppress all other visions of the past in late twelfth-century France. The *Aeneid* continued to be used extensively in other epics. What we see in *Raoul* and *Garin* was only one of many images of the past that existed side by side. That we do not know them is simply because the others did not survive, not because they did not exist. Luke Sunderland convincingly showed the coexistence of rival images of Charlemagne in the High and Late Middle Ages. While some traditions, like that of the *Grandes Chroniques*, were certainly more widespread, they could never silence all the other voices. Chris Wickham pointed to two contradicting versions of the past circulating in late eleventh-century Milan. Earlier we saw the people of Guines, the people of Boulogne and (possibly) the people of Ponthieu having three different versions of who held or did not hold Guines.⁴⁷⁰

In the long run, the model of *Raoul* and *Garin* would not become the norm for the composition of the *chansons de geste*. Instead later epics would move even more into the realm of the imaginary. They would also turn their attention to foreign lands again.⁴⁷¹ In the late thirteenth-century epic *Doon de Mayence*, we find a scene that is mirroring the *Charroi*. Here too the king (Charlemagne in this case) is offering the hero Doon first the hand of an infant heiress, then the city of Loon and his niece, finally even Paris and the whole kingdom. Doon declines, instead he wants the city of Vauclore in pagan Saxony. Charlemagne replies, as did Louis, that he cannot give what he does not own. Ultimately a duel between the two has to decide. After a lengthy fight God intervenes in favor of Doon, thereby endorsing the old model that we saw so successfully played out in the *Charroi*. The solution, however, is not as clear as it was before. At the end of the song Doon sends his twelve sons to Charlemagne's court, where they are offered fiefs by the white bearded king, but they immediately reject his offer. Instead they also want to seize lands from the pagans. Charles has learned his lesson and grants them their wishes.⁴⁷²

Of course the future of the French aristocracy was not as hopeless as the songs and modern day historiography might make one believe. Their supposed decline was about to last almost as long as that

469 See the relatively large amount of allusions to *Raoul* from Occitanian authors. It might be interesting to look at the usage of *Raoul* in the south in more detail. The description of Simon de Monfort in the Provençal *Cançon* has remarkable similarities with that of *Raoul*. (Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 132f.) The *Cycle of Lohrains* has the richest manuscript tradition of all major groupings (Busby, *Codex and Context*, 545f.).

470 Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 138-174. Wickham, "Lawyers' Time," 284. See also chapter "Mythical beginnings" above.

471 Heintze saw the later *chansons* increasingly ignoring the problems at home and, following the model of the *Charroi* and the Crusade cycle, seeking a solution abroad. The movement away from home is completed in *Huon de Bordeaux*, where the hero flees entirely into the world of the imaginary (Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, 246f. and 664f.) Heintze is wrong in his assessment of the nature of the *Charroi*. As we have seen its solution was the norm in medieval imagination. The later *chansons* only return to the tradition *Raoul* and *Garin* had departed from.

472 Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, 391-393. *Doon de Maience, chanson de geste*, ed. Alexandre Pey (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1859), 6039-7332 and 11408-11496.

of Gibbon's Roman Empire and, contrary to what the more local depictions might suggest, their world actually expanded.⁴⁷³ However, in some circles it must have felt that way. Feeling is the crucial word here. It is not so much about social reality as about the psychology of the noble class.⁴⁷⁴

The question to ask now, is what made people susceptible for this new vision of the past. Looking at political events of the time the devastating loss against Saladin at the Battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 comes to mind. It caused shock waves in the whole of Christianity and initiated enormous activities of writing that rival even that of the First Crusade. It led to the development of entirely new forms of liturgical texts and practices, significantly this was not the case after the first conquest in 1099. We see an equally fundamental change in Latin and German crusader poetry. The confidence in the Christian victory that characterized earlier poems, makes way for questions of penance and spiritual renewal after the Battle of Hattin. Was the loss of Jerusalem a symbol that changed the optimistic view at the beginning of the new century; a 9/11 of the High Middle Ages?⁴⁷⁵

It is tempting, but without a precise dating of our songs we cannot in good conscience make this argument. In any case, it was more likely not a reaction to a single event – although the fall of Jerusalem might have played a part – but a response to much broader developments. Groups are especially susceptible to changes to their vision of past in moments of severe social stress and feeling of discontinuity with their past.⁴⁷⁶ Both was true for the second half of the twelfth century. Growing populations and rapid social and economic change threatened the old structures of society. These developments affected all parts of aristocracy, but the petty aristocracy in particular must have felt their identity under attack. The ranks of the noble class were closing, making social mobility ever more difficult. In some regions about half of lower aristocratic families died out or sank in social scale in the course of a century.⁴⁷⁷ In this environment the new image of the past of *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* made perfect sense. While it was originally introduced as high aristocratic ideology, it only reached popularity because it made sense to people living in the final years of the twelfth century. In times of an unknown, potentially scary future and of an increasing feeling

473 For a debunk of the paradigm of the crisis of the aristocracy see Hilla Zmora, *Monarchy, Aristocracy, and the State in Europe, 1300 - 1800* (London: Routledge, 2001).

474 See Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 3f.

475 Sylvia Schein, *Gateway to the Heavenly City: Crusader Jerusalem and the Catholic West (1099–1187)* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 143–157. Amnon Linder, “The Loss of Christian Jerusalem in Late Medieval Liturgy,” in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Bezalel Narkiss*, ed. Bianca Kühnel (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 165–78. William E Jackson, *Ardent complaints and equivocal piety: the portrayal of the crusader in medieval German poetry* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003), 11–13 and 113–121. Roxana Stauber, “‘Si Oblitus Fuero Tui Hierusalem...’ The Lost Jerusalem in the Letters of Pope Innocent III,” (unpublished seminar paper). I am thankful for Roxana Stauber's input and the fitting comparison.

476 Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 3. Southern, “The Sense of the Past.”

477 See Bisson, *Crisis*, Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, Crouch, *Birth of Nobility* and Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 47.

of alienation with the past, there could be no happy ending for our heroes, no glorious conquest abroad. Death and destruction is all that awaits them.

Conclusion

Time has now come to put the picture that we have thus far so carefully unpacked back together.⁴⁷⁸ What emerges is a multi faceted image that can tell us a lot about the people who believed in these stories. Vivid debates about the fief grounded in the political culture of the time, feature next to entirely fictional behavior; the dreams and fears of the lower nobility are side by side with high aristocratic ideology. On a very superficial level we can even catch a glimpse of High Medieval gossip or trash talk when Alice mocks the men of Artois as fighting like cream cheese. When we dig a little deeper, we notice the most basic ideas of the story; certain core elements that had to be included. Raoul was remembered as a figure of uncontrolled violence and the story diverges into that direction. The author might have wanted to shed a more positive light on the main character, but could not leave out essential parts like the burning of Origny, if he wanted people to consider his story true. For that reason Raoul is turning more and more into the *demesure* knight as the story goes on. The same applies to his close relationship with the king. Raoul never dares to go against Louis, even though it would arguably be the better option and people around him strongly urge him to do so.

The *chansons de geste* are extremely social in their nature. Every performance was a communal event, involving a vivid back and forth between singer and audience and through countless tellings and retellings things that did not make sense to the people were changed, replaced or forgotten. The songs should encourage discussions at a noble household and the opinions voiced by the characters probably reflected real positions at the time. The songs deal with important issues, dreams and fears of the people in the audience. In our case particularly the question of how to acquire a fief and a noble lady, something that was ever more pressing with the aristocracy increasingly defining themselves over the possession of land and not solely through the knighting.

We looked at a scene that appears almost identically in the *Charroi de Nîmes*, *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain*, but from there the story is continued very differently. Through the use of spe-

⁴⁷⁸ For interim conclusions see especially chapters “Beyond the three solutions” and “The image of the conqueror” above.

cific literary tools the high aristocratic heroes are put into positions they would normally not find themselves in, but that must have been all too familiar to the *juvenes* and the lower aristocracy. William, Raoul and Fromont are all denied social mobility by a bad king. The circumstances that lead to these situations, pace Stephen White, seem so out of place that we should rather speak of a bad cliché. It resembles in nothing actual behavior. However, the experiences of our heroes – being without a fief (and everything that meant in social and economic terms), being denied a reward for their services and having to wait for social advancement – must have been known and feared by many.

For numerous modern day historians the portrayal of the monarch has been the key to understanding the meaning of the songs. The rise of kingship during the reign of Philip Augustus has become a somewhat universal explanation for all that is different in the cycle of revolt from the *Song of Roland*. The basis for this view is all too often built, consciously or subconsciously, on just one scene in *Raoul de Cambrai*. Historians argued that King Louis' injustice at the beginning of *Raoul* must be a reaction to the rise of the French monarchy. A conclusion that seems obvious, especially so, when we consider that in the *Waulsort Chronicle* these crucial events are missing. However, when compared to other songs that feature the exact same events, it seems more likely that it has little to do with the king, but was introduced merely to put the high aristocratic heroes into the position of *povres bachelors* and to initiate a discussion on how to react when one is deprived of an important form of social mobility. The *chansons* are about the hopes and dreams of *juvenes* and petty knights, or more generally about the identity of a group.

Furthermore, the songs not only provide starting points for debates, they also offer solutions. While the models that underpin the character's opinions might all be grounded in the social reality of the twelfth century, not everything is equally legitimate. With inheritance and a reward for service not possible (because of a bad king), our heroes need to find a different venue. In the *Charroi de Nîmes* William ultimately conquers a new home in far away Nîmes. This proves to be a very successful alternative, in *Raoul* and *Garin*, however, this is not even thought of. Fromont eventually marries the daughter of wealthy noble, but only after unleashing a family feud by claiming the land that was promised to his companion Garin. In *Raoul* marriage is also suggested, but never pursued further. In the end Raoul attacks another aristocratic family, which also ends in disaster.

How events unfold for Raoul and Fromont would have pleased the high aristocrat paying the jongleur. Seizing someone else's land by force must have seemed natural in a warrior society, but is clearly delegitimized in these songs. With inheritance blocking mobility for those that have nothing to inherit and a conquest abroad not even thought of, marriage is the sole option left. If a knight

found himself landless, he might have looked at his past for guidance and would have found a compelling answer. The noble families giving away their daughters, on the other hand, thereby gained significant leverage over ambitious knights in search for a fief. Furthermore, in a society where power was largely experienced through violence, constraining it simultaneously meant exercising control. The image of the past in our songs catered to broad segments of the nobility and could therefore be readily accepted. It dealt with important issues of the *juvenes* and the petty aristocracy, while giving a solution (mainly on what not to do) that was very much to the liking of the high aristocracy.

Besides the *chansons*, genealogies of noble families are the closest thing we have to an aristocratic social memory of the twelfth century. The acquisition of a fief also plays a big role there, as the ownership of the land was one of the few things that connected these families to their past. In the founding stories the forefathers are men of obscure origin having come into the possession of a fief by their own merits. This model strongly resembles that of the *Charroi*. It is the classical *Aeneid* story of a hero coming from far away conquering land with a glorious future elsewhere. This idea was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and found its way into numerous origin stories of medieval peoples. The *History of the Normans* by Dudo of St. Quentin and subsequent adaptations in particular share strong similarities with the story of William. *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Garin le Lohrain* instead are structured by the violent reciprocity of a family feud.

Modern examples of oral poetry have shown that every performance is improvised on the spot. To do that the jongleur uses specific building blocks. When the singer reaches the end of such a block an underlining force pushes him in one direction or the other. There is a specific logic to how they cling together; not everything goes. We can see this very well in our songs, not only are they made of similar parts, but on multiple occasions we can make out where the story could have taken a different path. The jongleur deliberately decided against telling an *Aeneid* story, although for centuries it was the dominant form of how people imagined their forefathers having come into the possession of a fief. Instead he chose to connect this crucial question with a family feud. The link between these ideas is new. That is not to say that in reality land was never the cause for feuds, quite the contrary, but in the world of the imaginary this connection was not made before. Evidence of the development of the legend of Raoul also indicates that it did not always contain the episode of royal injustice that sets the tone of the song. The author introduced this crucial scene to put Raoul into the position of a landless *bachelor*. Knowing the negative outcome, the singer used this legend to tell a *juvenes*-story with the message his high aristocratic patrons wanted.

But that is not the only way *Raoul* and *Garin* stand out in comparison to other *chansons de geste*. Their image of the past is more local in their solutions and geography and more realistic in their descriptions. Most importantly, however, the optimism that characterized the *Charroi* and the aristocratic genealogies is missing. A conquest abroad is not even thought of in a song that is supposed to animate a discussion at a noble household. Contrary to other songs, order is not eventually restored, everything ends in death and destruction. Fundamental social changes taking place in the second half of the twelfth century put people at odds with their past and future. Especially the lower aristocracy must have feared an uncertain tomorrow. In this environment the new, grim depiction of the past of *Raoul* and *Garin* must have made more sense to some people than the optimistic *Aeneid* story. Ultimately the vision of *Raoul* and *Garin* would not prevail, nevertheless it provides us with an important window into the aristocratic imagination in these crucial times of change.

I hope to have shown the usefulness of seeing the *chansons de geste* as what they were to the people of the twelfth century, stories of their own past. Of course that comes with the dangers of using memory and the imaginary – at the crossroad of which the *chansons de geste* so uniquely stand – as historical source. How they relate to social reality is often not obvious, sometimes even contradictory. The sudden appearance of songs featuring long narratives of bloody vendettas has nothing to do with an increase in actual feuds. Just as foreign expeditions did not suddenly become impossible, at least no more than they were before, even though they are unthinkable for our characters.

The same could be said about the sudden popularity of lineage as structuring tool for all sorts of (hi)stories in the twelfth century. For decades scholars argued that it must have been caused by a shift in family structure from clan to lineage. However, as it turns out, there was no such shift. Crucial changes like these sometimes have no immediate basis in reality, their appearance is often due to entirely different reasons, or quite frankly, only takes place in people's heads. That being said, we should not underestimate the influence the imaginary can have on people's actions. Oftentimes feelings are more important than reality; for many they *are* reality. Looking at today's politics that should not come as a surprise and should act as a reminder of their power, however ridiculous they may seem.

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German abstract

Dieses Essay untersucht das soziale Gedächtnis und das Bild der Vergangenheit in den *chansons de geste* *Charroi de Nîmes*, *Raoul de Cambrai* und *Garin le Lohrain*. Der Ausgangspunkt ist eine Szene, die fast identisch in allen drei Epen vorkommt. Ein schlechter König verweigert seinen Rittern ein Lehen als Gegenleistung für ihren Dienst. Was die Helden William, Raoul und Fromont nun stattdessen versuchen, um ein Stück Land zu erlangen, wird in jedem Lied völlig anders beantwortet. Warum die Geschichten so unterschiedlich fortgesetzt werden und was uns das über die Menschen des 12. Jahrhunderts aussagen kann, ist das Thema dieser Untersuchung. Obwohl die *chansons* für viele die einzige Quelle über ihre Vergangenheit waren, hat ihr Geschichtsbild in der Historiographie wenig Beachtung gefunden.

Entgegen der geläufigen Meinung ist das Bild des schlechten Königs keine Reaktion auf ein erstarrendes Königtum unter Philipp August, sondern lediglich ein literarisches Werkzeug um die hochadeligen Helden in Situationen zu bringen, in denen sie sich normalerweise nicht wiederfinden würden. Die Lieder thematisieren die Wünsche und Ängste des niederen Adels und der *juvenes*, geben aber gleichzeitig narrative Antworten, die im Interesse der Hocharistokratie lagen. Im Kontext anderer mittelalterlicher Geschichten darüber wie ein Stück Land in der Vergangenheit erworben wurde, zeigt sich, dass die *Charroi* nach dem Modell der *Aeneis* strukturiert ist, welches die mittelalterliche Vorstellungswelt geprägt hatte. Das düstere Bild von *Raoul* und *Garin* auf der anderen Seite, unterscheidet sich entscheidend davon. Die Gründe dafür sind in hochadeliger Ideologie und veränderten Umständen im ausgehenden 12. Jahrhunderts zu suchen.