The Politics of Land Inheritance as Represented in Raoul of Cambrai

ABSTRACT

The twelfth century chanson de geste, Raoul of Cambrai, serves as a political commentary on land inheritance, depicting the lack of leadership and legal protection present at this time in France. This poem represented the many issues that surrounded the complex matter of land ownership including conflicting land inheritance methods, the ill-defined limits of royal power in regards to marriage and the nature of ecclesiastical land tenure. Drawing from primary source passages this paper will work to show that the author of Raoul of Cambrai was seeking to convey the issues pertaining to land inheritance and ownership that existed within his own society in the chanson de geste that he created.

There are many chansons de geste that originated in twelfth century France. These epic poems are representative of a variety of social and political themes that were present during this period of French history. The chansons de geste often relegated current customs into their versions of the past. New social and legal customs were given precedence by being given the appearance that they were long established traditions in French medieval culture. The twelfth century chanson de geste, Raoul of Cambrai, serves as a political commentary on land inheritance, depicting the lack of leadership and legal protection present at the time. This poem represented the many issues that surrounded the complex matter of land ownership including conflicting land inheritance methods, the ill-defined limits of royal power in regards to marriage and the nature of ecclesiastical land tenure. There were various methods and models for land inheritance present at this time in France, resulting in discrepancies and disagreements over the ownership of land. The king was at the head of the feudal system, and as seen in Raoul of Cambrai, he was capable of repossessing and redistributing parcels of land among his vassals. Marriage, as represented in Raoul of Cambrai, also played a large role in land ownership and inheritance. The king held a high degree of control over the marriages of his lords, thus giving him even greater control of land ownership within his kingdom. Finally, the Church was a large landholder in medieval France. As in Raoul of Cambrai, lords developed claims for church lands creating concern in regard to the rightful owner of the land.

1 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch,” History and Theory 14, no. 3 (October 1975), 315.
Raoul of Cambrai accurately depicts many of the issues that could result from the presence of multiple inheritance methods and thus serves as an effective political commentary on land inheritance for twelfth century France.

Many historians have written about the French epic poem Raoul of Cambrai. The main area of study usually focuses upon the literary aspects of the poem or its theme of rebellion. Raoul of Cambrai was one of the most famous examples of rebellion in twelfth century French literature. Consequently, it can be expected that many historians would examine this aspect of the poem. The concept of focusing on the issues of land inheritance inherent in the poem is fairly unique, and few historians have taken this route in their study of the poem. Wolfgang van Emden is a leading medievalist, focusing in the study of the French epic. He has spent his career studying a variety of French epics, including Raoul of Cambrai.

In his work pertaining to Raoul of Cambrai, he focuses upon the theme of kingship; the King Louis within the poem as well as the king this may represent, King Philip II Augustus. He states, however, that there is little relationship between these two kings. Van Emden has argued for an opposing opinion to the one presented in this paper. He works to show that Raoul of Cambrai does not represent political events and themes within twelfth century France. Van Emden achieves this, however, not by looking at the land inheritance issues revealed within the poem, but rather based on the political issues involved in kingship; the power and authority of the king. He works to show that the poem was not referring to King Philip II Augustus, as many of the characteristics of the king within the poem and the events that occurred do not coincide with the historical events during King Philip II Augustus’ reign. By establishing this key difference between the poem and the period in which it was written, van Emden has worked to show that the poem was not a political commentary about twelfth century France. His study differs from most that exist on the subject of Raoul of Cambrai as he spends little time analyzing the theme of rebellion in epic French poems.


It is a lesser known historian, Stephen D. White, who has produced a work most relevant to the theme of this paper. White has explored the issue of the fief within Raoul of Cambrai. As a result, he delves into the concepts of land inheritance both in the poem and in medieval French society. In this way, his work shows the similarities that existed in the political conception of inheritance in both Raoul of Cambrai and the historical reality of twelfth century France. Thus, White has chosen to argue that Raoul of Cambrai was a political commentary about the issues surrounding land inheritance, in opposition to van Emden’s assertion that it was not, based on the characteristics of kingship. While White does discuss the theme of land inheritance, he spends the greater part of his studies focusing on the many ways in which Raoul of Cambrai has defined and redefined the fief. Like van Emden, White has not placed the theme of rebellion as the main focus for his work. This is a trend that can be seen in some of the more modern historical works on the subject of Raoul of Cambrai. It is typically an older generation of historian, like William C. Calin, that devote their study to revolt and rebellion. More recent historical works, such as those by van Emden and White, have been working towards a well rounded view of the poem and the various themes and ideas it represents.

The theme of land inheritance, and the lack of legal precedence surrounding it, is one that takes central focus in Raoul of Cambrai. The surviving version of this poem from 1180 discusses two interrelated inheritance disputes. Both of these inheritance issues involved the claim of the deceased tenant’s heir against the claim that the king had the ability to give the land to another. There was no clear legal directive governing the transmission of fiefs, thus allowing multiple inheritance methods to emerge. The first example of this occurred after the death of Lord Taillefer, Raoul’s father, when the king granted the land to Gibouin, despite the presence of a young male heir, Raoul. The poem illustrated that the king did possess the power to redistribute land after the death of the lord, however it criticised both the king and the accepting lord, Gibouin, as traditionally land was inherited by the lord’s direct heir. The narrator of the poem states that:

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6 White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 173.
King Louis did a very foolish thing when he took the heritage away from his nephew; and Gibouin on his side acted like a felon when he desired the land of another as his fief.\textsuperscript{7}

This dispute demonstrated an inconsistency in the terms of inheritance. There were two methods being used to determine inheritance, and while both were legitimate, each participant believed their own method should take precedence. A second example of this dispute arose later in the poem, when Raoul was promised Vermandois by the king following the death of its lord, Count Herbert, although there were several heirs expecting to receive this inheritance.\textsuperscript{8} This once again displayed the inconsistency of the inheritance methods used in twelfth century France, where the direct heir was in conflict with the will of the king. Conflicting models of inheritance were present within Raoul’s society, representing similar issues within medieval France.

Land ownership was of key importance in twelfth century France. In the eleventh century, the emphasis had been placed on the acquisition of new land.\textsuperscript{9} In the twelfth century, however, the possibilities for acquiring new lands were unlikely, therefore nobles began to develop strategies to attain previously and currently owned sections of land.\textsuperscript{10} As seen in Raoul of Cambrai as well as in medieval French society, there were different methods that could be used in order to determine inheritance. This allowed multiple people to vie for the same parcel of land as a result of the lack of leadership and legal protection that existed within the sphere of land inheritance. Patrimonial inheritance was the preferred method of vassals, however this was often contradicted by the lord’s ability to revive rights to the land upon the tenant’s death, creating contradictory methods of inheritance.\textsuperscript{11} The first of the models present in twelfth century France was what historians such as Stephen White have referred to as the heritable estate method, which, at the time of the tenant’s death, allowed for the land to be passed to the tenant’s direct heir.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8} Crosland, \textit{Raoul de Cambrai}, 14.
\textsuperscript{12} White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 179.
was the model Raoul attempted to use to gain his inheritance of Cambrai. It was the heritability of the fief that the tenant’s heirs most believed in and that they would work to achieve. This could be done by formally requesting the inheritance of the fief within a specific time period, but even then inheritance was still up to the discretion of the lord. However, in twelfth century France, not all fiefs appear to have been heritable. This can be seen in another model, described by White (and others), that upon the death of the tenant, the fief was to revert back to the lord, to be reallocated at his discretion. This was known as the Life-Estate model. It was the method which allowed for King Louis to seize Cambrai and redistribute it to Gibuoin in Raoul of Cambrai. It is believed that the legal culture of twelfth century France did employ both of these opposing models. While the tenant’s heir could request the inheritance of the land, the legal rights of the lord revived upon the death of the tenant, thus allowing him to have the power to redistribute the land as he saw fit. Without a clear legal directive, lords and tenants would invoke the model of inheritance that maximized their acquisitions and furthered their family strategies.

The parallel, between the Capetian kings of the twelfth century and King Louis, would have been apparent to Raoul’s audience. Throughout the twelfth century, the Capetian kings had meddled in matters of succession of several of the kingdom’s most eminent nobles in Flanders in 1127, Toulouse from 1162-1163 and once again in Flanders from 1180-1185. The Capetian dynasty experienced a revival of dynamic monarchic power during this time, and as a result a struggle ensued between the Capetian kings and the lords who did not agree with this trend towards giving total power to the sovereign. This struggle led to the kings’ exercising their power to seize the lands of the lords, either to be retained by the king or to be redistributed to a more agreeable vassal. In the examples of Flanders and Toulouse in the twelfth century, it was King Louis VII and King Philip II Augustus each employing the Life-Estate model that gave them the power to seize Flanders and Toulouse, resulting

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in years of tension and struggle with the disinherited lords.\textsuperscript{19} Feudal law at this time was inexact, unwritten and dependent on social customs and often proved ineffective in maintaining order in disputes concerning land inheritance.\textsuperscript{20} This allowed for conflicting methods of land inheritance to exist, resulting in various struggles over land ownership, as represented in Raoul of Cambrai with the conflicts between Raoul, King Louis and the heirs to Vermandois.

Similarly, there was another method of land inheritance demonstrated in Raoul of Cambrai that involved the jurisdiction of the king and represented a conflict between other existent methods. As seen in the Life-Estate model, the king had the power to claim any land, despite the presence of a direct heir to inherit from the previous tenant. This next method of inheritance determined what the king could do with the newly claimed land. Upon the death of Lord Taillefer, Cambrai was left to the widow, Lady Aalais. King Louis, who possessed the ability to reclaim this land, granted Cambrai to a knight and vassal whom he could trust. One who had served him without fail and who was devout and loyal; this was Gibouin of Mans. As the poem states, the king “listened to the barons talking and advising him to give the fair Aalais to the baron of Mans who had served him so well.”\textsuperscript{21} It was the past service of Gibouin to the king that allowed for his inheritance of the land. While he was unable to marry Lady Aalais as a result of her refusal, the land remained his. Past service and present excellence were justifiable reasons for the king to bestow land upon a vassal in the poem. This showed a system of meritocracy that had the ability to override blood inheritance.

There were several methods of inheritance that could occur between a lord and his vassal in twelfth century France. These methods generally fell under the Life-Estate model, where the king had the ability to claim the land upon the death of the tenant, and outlined what the king could do with this reclaimed land.\textsuperscript{22} Each of these methods of land redistribution was advantageous for the Capetian dynasty, as they allowed monarchs to assert more control over their vassals and land. One of these methods was employed within Raoul of Cambrai, where Cambrai was given to Gibouin as a reward for his history of loyal service to the king. In this model, the vassal could claim a fief without any prior right to it, and

\textsuperscript{19} Calin, \textit{The Old French Epic of Revolt}, 129.
\textsuperscript{20} Calin, \textit{The Old French Epic of Revolt}, 128.
\textsuperscript{21} Crosland, \textit{Raoul de Cambrai}, 4.
\textsuperscript{22} White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 180.
his lord would be obliged to give him a fief equal to the value of his past service.\(^2^3\) This was a method of inheritance based upon a meritocracy system and worked to serve as a reward for loyal vassals. Another method existed that was similar to this; however it involved the king warranting the land not only to his vassal, but also to his vassal’s heir. It served as a way to protect the land from third party claims.\(^2^4\) This model was portrayed in Raoul of Cambrai as justification for the king’s attempt to protect the fief of Vermandois from being seized by Raoul from its rightful heirs. When Raoul demanded the land of Vermandois, the king refused, stating:

‘I cannot, brother,’ said baron Louis. ‘This noble count of whom thou speakest has four valiant sons, than whom no better knights can be found. If now I handed their land over to you, every right-minded person would blame me for it and I could not summon them to my court, for they would refuse to serve or honour me. Besides, I tell thee, I have no desire to disinherit them: I do not wish to vew four men on account of one.’\(^2^5\)

The king attempted to save the land of Vermandois for its rightful heirs but was unsuccessful in this, however it did show that there were methods used to try to protect land from unwanted claimants. Finally, the last method employed by the lord was when land was used as a gift for future service, which had to be performed by the vassal before they could lay claim to the land.\(^2^6\) These methods of inheritance all took into account the lord and vassal relationship and constituted situations where the loyal vassal could gain enormously.\(^2^7\) As in Raoul of Cambrai, the loyal vassal had the ability to acquire land legally from the king, land that had a pre-existing male heir. This system of meritocracy often took precedence in the feudal society that existed in France during the twelfth century. These methods of land inheritance were preferred by the rulers and the vassals they favoured. Consequently, the vassals who lost their land or did not receive any land preferred other methods of inheritance, such as the heritable estate model, that more directly favoured their own interests.

The multiple methods for the lord to bequeath land conflicted not only

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\(^2^3\) White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 181.
\(^2^4\) White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 182.
\(^2^5\) Crosland, Raoul de Cambrai, 14.
\(^2^6\) White, “The Discourse of Inheritance,” 183.
with each other, but also with the methods of direct inheritance, allowing for discrepancies to arise in the determination of ownership of a fief.

The monarch in medieval French society combined two sources of authority, feudal lordship and sacral kingship.\(^{28}\) It was this that gave the king the power to reclaim and redistribute land among his vassals as he saw fit. Homage was an integral part of this society, and its presence was reflected in many ways, including that of land ownership, power and authority, and designating an heir.\(^{29}\) In the twelfth century, King Philip II Augustus began to have oaths of fealty recorded in writing, as opposed to the typical oral oaths, to serve as confirmation of each of his vassals and their duties to him.\(^{30}\) From these records, the vassals who did not support him properly could be subject to the lord’s court, as was the Count of Toulouse when he broke his oath of fealty to the king during the last decade of the twelfth century.\(^{31}\) Vassals who displeased the king could have lands taken from them by this court, and it was the king who could bestow lands upon those who pleased him. King Philip II Augustus, however, was concerned with increasing the size of his royal demesne. As a result, he did not grant land in this traditional method. Instead, he instituted baillis, officials that would preserve royal interests in the king’s land.\(^{32}\) This was a new program instituted by the king, but it used the same principles as land grants. It was a method employed by Philip to reward his most loyal vassals for their past service, and represents another way in which the system of land inheritance lacked legal protection for those within the society who were not favoured by the king.\(^{33}\) The events in Raoul of Cambrai were not identical to those that existed during the reign of King Philip II Augustus. The poem, however, did serve as a representation of the ways in which vassals could benefit from their service to the king, while offering little in the way of land protection for


those who were not the king’s favourites. A clear example of this can be seen in Raoul of Cambrai when a loyal vassal to the king, Gibouin, was granted the land of Cambrai. While in twelfth century France lords were not often granted the title to land as seen in the case of Gibouin, they did inherit the power over the land as well as the benefits in social and political standing that accompanied both land ownership and bailiff status. This was another example of how Raoul of Cambrai was representative of the methods involved in land inheritance in medieval France. It serves as a political commentary on the issues of the time as being representative of one of the conflicting methods of land inheritance; this does not mean it presented identical situations, merely that the issues the poem portrayed can be likened to twelfth century practices. Raoul of Cambrai has successfully achieved this by portraying conflicting ways in which land could be inherited or gained, and likening these methods to means of inheritance that existed in twelfth century France.

Marriage was another way in which land was shown to be inherited in Raoul of Cambrai. Within the poem the concept of inheritance through marriage arose in relation to Lady Aalais, Raoul’s mother. Upon the death of Lord Taillefer, Gibouin asked the king to allow a marriage between himself and the newly widowed lady. With this marriage, Gibouin would acquire not only a wife, but also the estate of Cambrai. It was the king who wielded the power in this situation and he accepted Gibouin’s offer, stating:

‘Go, saddle the Arab steed, and tell my fair sister in her heritage of Cambrai, that she take to husband the brave Gibouin of Mans. Between here and Carthage there is not such a knight to be found, and I give him all the land as a marriage portion.’

Lady Aalais refused the marriage, but still lost the land. The king had already assured the land to Gibouin, and so while the marriage did not occur, he stated that the promise of the land could not be overlooked. Thus, Gibouin gained ownership of Cambrai while Lady Aalais and the young Raoul were left without their inheritance from Lord Taillefer. This worked to display marriage as an acceptable method of land inheritance in Raoul of Cambrai.

In medieval French society, marriage was a method of inheriting property and estates. Marriages were often arranged for young heiresses or widows, and it was common for the king to have a role in this, especially if the bride was the heiress of a great estate. Lady Aalais in Raoul of Cambrai was susceptible to this, although she opposed the interference and refused the marriage that the king had chosen for her. Kings, however, did often have power over aristocratic marriages, and used this as a way to secure the loyalty of their lords and to serve as a guiding force over the destinies of their major vassals. The king’s involvement in aristocratic marriages was a traditional practice and was widely accepted as a way to reinforce feudal ties. The marriages that were arranged demonstrated the importance of the family and its place within the aristocracy, as often these marriages included the inheritance of parcels of land and great estates. An advantageous marriage could help aristocratic families grow both socially and politically, with acquiring land being a pinnacle of success. While the marriage in the poem was not accepted, it does demonstrate that one of the crucial reasons for marriage at this time was to acquire land. It also demonstrates the ability that women possessed at this time to accept or refuse marriages. While there was a degree of compulsion upon the women by male family members, consent became a necessary feature for the marriage to take place.

Raoul of Cambrai depicts these changes that were occurring in the legal culture of marriage, describing the woman’s ability to accept or refuse, and the land rights that were based around such decisions. Dowries were often provided by the family upon the marriage of their daughter, granting land to the groom. Widows or young heiresses who had inherited land would also submit their land to their new groom upon marriage. It was in these ways that the ownership of land was gained when marriage occurred, as was the intention of Gibouin in Raoul of Cambrai.

The concept of using marriage as an inheritance method, as seen in Raoul of Cambrai, was also present in twelfth century France. King Philip II Augustus often exercised approval over the marriages of the heiresses

40 Ganshof, Feudalism, 144.
and widows of great estates, helping to decide which lord would acquire the estates of these women. He was involved in many of these arrangements, including the baronies of Nevers, Champagne, Flanders, Brittany, and Burgundy, who all submitted to the king’s jurisdiction for the marriages of their heiresses.\textsuperscript{42} In 1181 the male line of the counts of Nevers died out, resulting in a vast property with no male heir. King Philip II Augustus took advantage of this situation, and exercised wardship over the county and the young heiress, Agnes. Agnes was taken into his custody at the royal court, and in 1184 he arranged her marriage to his cousin, Pierre de Courtney.\textsuperscript{43} This gave the king greater control over his kingdom and who could inherit its lands. He could ensure that those closest and most loyal to him, such as Pierre de Courtney, acquired the best lands, thus strengthening his reign and rewarding his vassals.\textsuperscript{44} Marriage was a commonly used method of inheritance at this time, employed as a political tool for kings and lords to control inheritance and to obtain land. King Philip II Augustus, however, did not possess complete control over inheritance through the marriages of his lords. As consent was necessary from both bride and groom for a marriage to take place, it meant that the king was not fully in control of who inherited certain lands. While the king did play a large role, the power and strength of women was growing during this period, as witnessed in the case of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her ability to control her own lands and her marriages.\textsuperscript{45} Women were beginning to play a larger role in the legal culture of medieval France, and as a result, the king was no longer in complete control of land inheritance. Marriage as a method of land inheritance lacked leadership, and as such there was no finite method for the king to control it. Raoul of Cambrai functions as a political commentary on the issues surrounding marriage as a means of land inheritance and the power of the woman, Lady Aalais, overruling the wishes of the king.

Raoul of Cambrai also explored another method of land inheritance, that of seizing ecclesiastical lands. This method was unlike the more typical methods of inheritance explored earlier in the poem, where the land was given to the new tenant either through a family member, a new marriage or their lord. Instead, this method involved lords

\textsuperscript{42} Baldwin, \textit{The Government of Philip Augustus}, 271.
\textsuperscript{43} Baldwin, \textit{The Government of Philip Augustus}, 27.
\textsuperscript{45} Ganshof, \textit{Feudalism}, 144.
capturing lands that had traditionally belonged to the church and represented the lack of legal protection that existed both within the poem and in twelfth century France. In Raoul of Cambrai, Raoul was promised the estate of Vermandois by the king after he lost his inheritance of Cambrai. He faced opposition by the heirs of the deceased lord of Vermandois, Count Herbert, and thus launched an attack.\(^{46}\) One of the first acts he ordered was for his soldiers to take possession of the Church at Origny by setting up their tents within the church itself. He ordered his men,

‘Take your arms,’ said he, ‘without delay; four hundred of you ride speedily and reach Origny before night-fall. Spread my tent in the middle of the church; let my pack-horses be tether in the porches; prepare my food beneath the vaults, fasten my falcons to the golden crosses and make ready a rich bed before the altar where I may lie. I will lean against the crucifix and deliver the nuns up to my squires. I mean to destroy the place and ruin it utterly because the sons of Herbert hold it so dear.’\(^{47}\)

Raoul was laying claim to the lands of Vermandois, and with that he also wished to seize the church and its lands. For Raoul, he viewed this as his right. He believed himself to be the true possessor of Vermandois, as the king had promised him this land. For him, this included the church and everything within it, a feeling only amplified by his knowledge that the sons of Count Herbert highly valued it. Raoul took the church by force, and even if it meant destroying the church itself, he was still determined to seize the lands.

The practice of taking lands from the church can also be seen in medieval French society. Throughout this time period, nobles would seize land from the church for a variety of reasons, including recreation, greed and desperation.\(^{48}\) Some nobles found their ability to take church land a game or contest, to prove how much power they wielded. Others merely wanted to acquire as much land as possible, and would use any means necessary. There were nobles, however, that were so desperate to own any piece of land and achieve high standing and wealth in the society that they felt there was no other recourse than to take the vulnerable lands of the churches, abbeys and monasteries. This can be interpreted as Raoul’s


\(^{48}\) Livingstone, “Kith and Kin,” 436.
motive for seizing the Church at Origny in Raoul of Cambrai; he was so desperate to possess any land he was even willing to steal from the church. This was not a universal theme, however. There were many noble families throughout the Middle Ages who did not take lands from the church, and who enjoyed amiable relations with the clergy. Each usurpation of monastic land that occurred during this period must be considered on an individual basis, as each family had its own motives for taking the land. It was, however, the lack of one cohesive system of property law, combined with multiple claims and rights to the property from outside parties, that often allowed for the seizure of church lands to occur.

One of the most common ways in which church lands were seized was as a result of a gift of land. A noble family would have previously given the land on which a church or monastery could be built as a donation to the church. During the twelfth century, however, land became scarce and many noble families wished to have their land returned to them. As a result of the lack of a unifying system of property law and few written records being kept, the family was able to lay claim to the land and have it returned to them, though the monarch would often attempt to defend the church lands from seizure. This situation is not necessarily the way in which Raoul’s seizure of the church lands occurred in Raoul of Cambrai. The poem did, however, represent the lord’s ability to seize church lands as their own in the matter of contested lands. While the exact details of Raoul’s situation were not the traditional way in which church lands were taken in twelfth century France, each case was quite different, and overall the author of the poem is representing the practice of gaining ownership of church lands, which was employed during the time in which he was writing.

Seizure of church lands by nobles can be seen throughout the twelfth century in France. Immediately after King Philip II Augustus’ coronation in 1180 he responded to calls for help from churches and monasteries against their covetous noble neighbours, just as his father

King Louis VII had done before him.\textsuperscript{52} The kings travelled throughout much of France working to protect the various churches from possible destruction and usurpation by greedy nobles during their respective reigns.\textsuperscript{53} Monarchs were not always necessary to protect church lands from seizure, as seen in the case of Agnes of Montigny in 1107. Agnes made claim to lands that had been gifted to local monks generations earlier by her ancestors. These ancestors had donated lands to the church to ensure the health of their souls, without any formal contract. As a result, Agnes laid claim against the land, arguing that her ancestors had not given it to the monks after all, prompting the monks to produce a charter, which stated their reactions to this claim:

\begin{quote}
Such sadness! Behold the evil days, behold the time of such misery. In which [time], growing careless of charity, injustice has overcome all. So that, pious gifts made by the fathers of old for their souls to the church and the poor of Christ are now publicly and privately plundered and usurped by their perverse successors!\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

In this charter, the monks not only lamented the seizing of church lands, but also vowed to make proper record of all future gifts and endowments in order to prevent similar claims and establish means of legal protection for use in case of future conflicts.\textsuperscript{55} Eventually Agnes assented that her claims were unjust, and returned the land to the monks, but not before causing them much distress. In this way, it can be seen that claims for church lands did occur during this period in France as a means to acquire valuable lands and as a result of the lack of legal protection and leadership that existed. The description in Raoul of Cambrai regarding Raoul’s attempt to seize church lands was an interpretation of this practice, used to draw attention to another method of land inheritance in twelfth century France.

The twelfth century epic poem, Raoul of Cambrai, serves as a political commentary on the methods and inconsistencies involved in land inheritance. While it was a poem that discussed events which took place during the tenth and eleventh centuries, much of the political matters, including land disputes and conflicting inheritance methods, were representative of France in the twelfth century. The poem represented

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\textsuperscript{53} Baldwin and Hollister, “The Rise of Administrative Kingship,” 891.
\textsuperscript{54} Livingstone, “Kith and Kin,” 447.
\textsuperscript{55} Livingstone, “Kith and Kin,” 447.
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multiple methods of land inheritance, including direct inheritance from a deceased tenant, inheritance resulting from interference by the lord or king, marriage, and the seizure of church lands. These methods displayed that it was often the lack of one comprehensive set of property laws that led to disputes between multiple claimants. The absence of legal protection and leadership in regards to land inheritance in twelfth century France was successfully portrayed in Raoul of Cambrai as a means for the author to create a discourse about the subject. Land was essential for the twelfth century noble to possess, yet there was a deficiency in the amount of available land. As a result, many nobles felt it was necessary for them to take land by force or through political alliances, such as marriage and vassalage. Land, or the power over the land as seen in the baillis system, was used as a means to raise a noble’s social standing and political prowess. This system was also used by the king as a means of controlling his vassals and his kingdom. It was only natural that land, as a critical factor within this feudal society, would be represented in the literature of the time. Land inheritance was therefore a central theme within both Raoul of Cambrai and medieval French society.
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Primary Source


Secondary Sources


