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Richard A. Leson

*University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee*

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## Reconstructing the Tomb of Robert of Cassel in Warneton<sup>1</sup>

By **Richard A. Leson, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

The term “Franco-Flemish” derives from the history of music, where it refers to the novel, polyphonic compositions developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by composers from northern France, Flanders, and the Netherlands. It was long ago appropriated by Art History in order to characterize the visual arts of the same regions during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Thus, when we describe a work of art as Franco-Flemish, we imply that, like the motet, it is the product of multiple voices. Since their political and economic reach encompassed portions of France and western, “Crown” Flanders, the patronage of the Dampierre clan, the embattled, French-speaking overlords of the County of Flanders during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, offers an opportunity to further nuance Franco-Flemish art. The House of Dampierre was a regular presence in Paris, where the Count entertained guests in his sizable mansion, the Hôtel de Flandre.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the Dampierre family enjoyed access to both the finest artisans of the capital and the manuscript and sculptural ateliers of the

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Sarah Blick and Elizabeth Moore Hunt for careful readings of this essay. Any mistakes are entirely my own. I wish to thank Alexis Donetzkoff and Hervé Passot for facilitating my research in the Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, in the Fall of 2014. Francis de Simpel, President of the Société d'Histoire de Warneton-Comines, kindly shared documentation from his personal archive. I am especially grateful to Zan Kocher, whose meticulous translation work and generous sharing of ideas have been nothing short of humbling.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Court Culture in North-West Europe* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 84, 152.

great cities of Flanders.<sup>3</sup> With such factors in mind, this essay focuses upon a tomb crafted for Robert of Cassel, a scion of the House of Dampierre. The tomb of the Lord of Cassel was the product of multiple, geographically-circumscribable artistic traditions, but it also channeled the interests, motivations, and movements of multiple “voices,” aristocratic and functionary, local and supra-regional, French and Flemish.

### **A Rediscovered Witness to a Flemish Tradition**

In January of 1924 the town of Warneton (medieval “Warneston” or “Waesten,” now in the Walloon municipality of Warneton-Comines, on the Belgian side of the River Lys) was still rebuilding after the near obliteration suffered during World War I. The war saw the destruction of the town’s seventeenth-century church, a structure built on the foundations of a medieval three-aisled basilica that once belonged to the Augustinian canons of Warneton.<sup>4</sup> In the course of digging foundation trenches for the southern walls of the new church, workers under the supervision of Jan van Hoenacker, architect and director of excavations, unearthed three medieval sarcophagi constructed of brick masonry.<sup>5</sup> **(Figure 1)** The area in which the tombs were discovered—immediately to the south of the nave of the present church—corresponded to

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Moore Hunt’s essay on the famous Psalter of Guy of Dampierre, a manuscript made in Flanders, in this issue.

<sup>4</sup> See Fernand Beaucamp, “La découverte archaéologique de Warneton (Belgique),” *Bulletin de la Commission historique du département du Nord* 32 (1925): 243, n3. The medieval building was burnt down in 1644 and was almost entirely reconstructed in 1645. In 1664 the church suffered another fire and further reconstruction was necessary. From that point forward, the church remained undisturbed until 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Van Hoenacker’s unpublished report on the discovery of one of the tombs, addressed to the local bureau of architecture and dated July 28, 1924, is now in the archive of Francis de Simpel, President of the Société d’Histoire de Warneton-Comines. This is accompanied by Van Hoenacker’s blueprint for the tomb, dated to July 19, 1924. Van Hoenacker’s blueprint for the tomb of Robert of Cassel, if it existed, is now lost. Were it to turn up, it would likely also be labeled “Relevé d’une tombe moyenâgeuse découverte lors des fouilles des fondations de la nouvelle église” and feature an exploded view of the tomb’s decorated interior walls. It is my great pleasure to acknowledge Mr. Simpel’s generous hospitality in Warneton in September of 2014. The Warneton tomb paintings have since been conserved, but I have not been able to consult Isabelle Hennebert’s unpublished thesis, “Les peintures murales funéraires de Warneton. Identification et traitement,” (unpublished M.A. thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1982).

the nave and choir of the medieval church. Of particular interest was the fact that the interior walls of two of the sarcophagi were painted with fresco decorations that included



**Figure 1** Photograph of newly rediscovered tomb of Robert of Cassel being prepared for transportation in 1924. Photo: from *Le Grand hebdomadaire illustré de la région du Nord*. Collection of Mr. Francis de Simpel.

armorial shields. One of the first to learn of these discoveries was A. van Zuylen van Nyevelt, state archivist at Bruges, who undertook immediately to identify the occupants of the sarcophagi through a study of the heraldry.<sup>6</sup> As to the identity of the person buried in the larger tomb,

<sup>6</sup> His account, titled “Tombes découvertes à Warnêtton,” appeared in the *Annales de la société d’émulation de Bruges*, LXVII, nos. 2-3 (Avril-Juillet 1924): 135-138. In October, these findings appeared in several newspapers, along with photographs of the excavation.

unearthed in the area of the old choir—a privileged space—Van Zuylen van Nyevelt was certain. On the lateral sides of the interior were the arms *Or, a lion rampant sable within a border*



**Figure 2** Photograph of the tomb of Robert of Cassel shortly after its excavation. Photo: from *Le Patriote illustré*, 19 October, 1924, p. 668.

*engrailed Gules*. These belonged to Robert of Cassel (c. 1272-1331).<sup>7</sup> (**Figures 2, 3, 6**) Born sometime after 1272, this Robert was the son of Count Robert III of Flanders (r. 1305-1322) and Yolande of Nevers. He was thus a grandson of Guy of Dampierre.<sup>8</sup> His bones were

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<sup>7</sup> Van der Zuylen van Nyevelt, “Tombes,” 135. The other painted tomb may have belonged to Ingelram Van de Waele, abbot of Warneton between 1334 and 1343 (or his brother and successor, Anselme, 1343-1346). The identity of the occupant of the third tomb is unknown. See Fernand Beaucamp, “La polychromie dans les monuments funéraires, en Flandre et en Hainaut, au moyen âge” in *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* (1928-1929): 551-567, here at 554-555.

<sup>8</sup> Two major studies of Robert of Cassel appeared over the final decades of the nineteenth century: P.-J.-E. de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel et Jeanne de Bretagne sa femme (XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Hazebrouck: A. David, 1884), and J.-J. Carlier, “Robert de Cassel. Seigneur de Dunkerque, Cassel, Nieppe, Warneton, Gravelines, Bourbourg” *Annales du Comité flamand de France*, X (1870): 17-248. To these we may now add important contributions by Filip Hooghe: “Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1: Vlaams Edelman tussen feodale trouw en rebellie in de eerste helft van de 14<sup>de</sup>



**Figure 3** Impression of the counterseal of Robert of Cassel appended to a document of February 8, 1327. Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, B 413, no. 5.790. Photo: author.

discovered in the remains of a lead coffin which, judging from several iron rings and hinges, was once enveloped by a larger vessel of oak. The rings enabled staves to be passed through for transportation. No other material goods of

significant value were found with the exception of a single iron spur, confirmation that Robert was buried in armor, as befitted his noble status.<sup>9</sup> For nearly a century it has been possible to view the Lord of Cassel's tomb and his bones in the dimly lit undercroft beneath the southwestern bell tower, where it was moved during the course of the new construction. **(Figure 4)** In Flanders, production and use of brick in masonry construction seems to have begun around 1200.<sup>10</sup> Judging from the available evidence, the earliest brick masonry tombs of the sort constructed for Robert of Cassel date to this time.<sup>11</sup> The tradition of decorating such tombs with fresco dates to the late thirteenth century. Possibly the practice originated in Bruges, as tombs of this sort have been uncovered there in some sixteen different churches.<sup>12</sup> Their interior fresco

eeuw," 1-34. See

[http://www.academia.edu/3846918/Robrecht van Kassel. Deel 1 Vlaams edelman tussen feodale trouw en rebellie in de eerste helft van de 14de eeuw](http://www.academia.edu/3846918/Robrecht_van_Kassel_Deel_1_Vlaams_edelman_tussen_feodale_trouw_en_rebellie_in_de_eerste_helft_van_de_14de_eeuw) (accessed March 27, 2015), and idem., "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 2: Historische banden tussen het Westland en het Land van Bornem in de eerste helfte van de 14<sup>de</sup> eeuw," 1-36. See [http://www.academia.edu/3846980/Robrecht van Kassel. Deel 2 Historische banden tussen het Westland en h et Land van Bornem in de eerste helft van de 14de eeuw](http://www.academia.edu/3846980/Robrecht_van_Kassel_Deel_2_Historische_banden_tussen_het_Westland_en_het_Land_van_Bornem_in_de_eerste_helft_van_de_14de_eeuw) (accessed March 27, 2015). These essays originally published in *Westhoek. Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis en familiekunde in de Vlaamse en Franse Westhoek*, XXIV, no. 3-4 (2008): 123-176; and XXV, no. 1-2 (2009): 3-48.

<sup>9</sup> See Fernand Beaucamp, "La polychromie," 557.

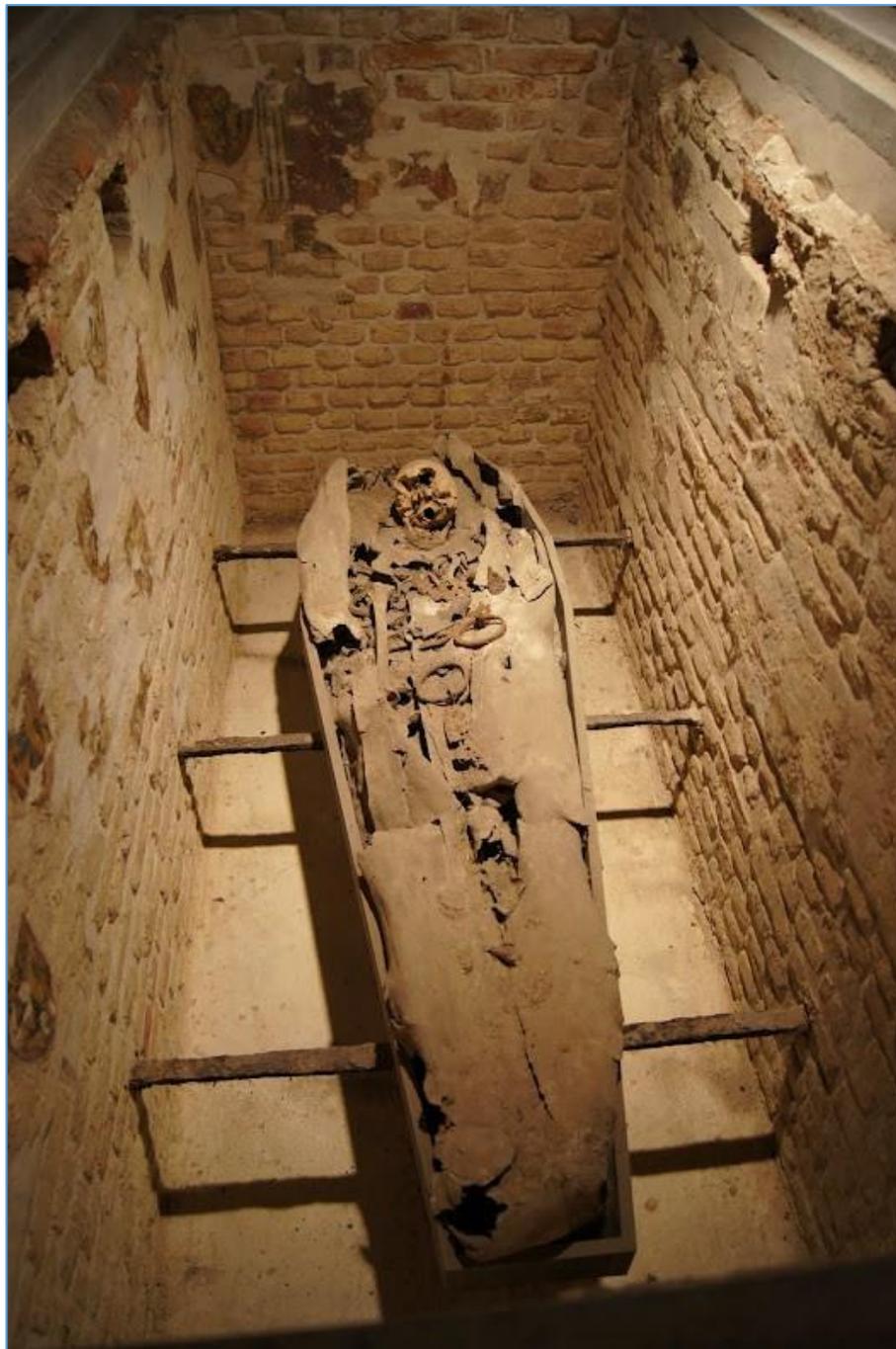
<sup>10</sup> Thomas Coomans and Harry van Royen, eds., "Medieval Brick architecture in Flanders and Northern Europe: The Question of the Cistercian Origin," *Novi Monasterii*, Vol. 7 (Ghent: Academia Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Luc Devlieghe, "Middeleeuwse beschilderde graven," in *Middeleeuwse murrschilderingen in Vlaanderen* (Brussels, 1994): 66-73, here at 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 73.

**Figure 4** The Tomb of Robert of Cassel in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Warneton. 1331. Photo: author.

decorations evince a limited iconographic repertoire.<sup>13</sup> On one side of the sarcophagus, usually above the head of the deceased, was an image of the Crucifixion, the suffering Christ flanked by the Virgin and St. John. Opposite was a Virgin and Child enthroned. Often, on the lateral walls of the



tomb, angels appear censuring the Virgin and Child. **(Figure 5)** Other motifs include popular saints or varying decorative cross patterns. In a general sense, these subjects speak to themes of

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<sup>13</sup> On the iconography of the Flemish painted tombs, see, for example, R. van Belle, "Ikonografie en symboliek van de beschilderde grafkelders en memorietaferelen," *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Kortrijk*, n.s. 48 (1981): 9-97, esp. 19-53; W. Dezutter, "Beschilderde middeleeuwse grafkelders te Brugge" in *Brugge onderzocht. Tien jaar stadsarcheologisch onderzoek 1977-1987* (Bruges, n.d.), 192-208; and Devliegher, op. cit.



**Figure 5** Fourteenth-century painted tombs discovered in St Salvator Cathedral, Bruges, in 1993. Photo: Magenta Brugge. Reproduced from *Middeleeuwse murschilderingen in Vlaanderen* (Brussels, 1994), 71.

penitence, intercession, resurrection and salvation; it has been suggested that their repetitive employment reflects the growing powers of the mendicant orders, who were of course

instrumental in the elucidation and dissemination of the doctrine of purgatory.<sup>14</sup> If purgatory was the antechamber to heaven, the sturdy architecture of the sarcophagi gave substance to theology, while the tomb paintings, on account of their intercessory function, protected and nourished the soul during its period of purification.

The tomb of Robert of Cassel certainly belongs to this iconographic tradition, but its construction and decoration exhibit a greater degree of customization than many of the other examples. Its rectangular shape differentiates it from the more customary trapezoid of the other brick tombs, as typified by the other examples discovered at Warneton.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that the original, now-lost cover of the tomb was also rectangular; as we will see, this was likely the case.<sup>16</sup> The usual Crucifixion, in this case badly damaged, appears on the eastern side of the tomb, opposite an enthroned Virgin and Child on the west. The lateral sides of the tomb, however, were not painted with censuring angels or saints but some thirty examples of Robert's arms, arranged at regular intervals, in four horizontal registers. **(Figure 6)** One such shield was painted next to the image of the enthroned Virgin, suggesting what Michael Michael has called the "privilege of proximity," but the general absence of censuring angels, intercessional saints, or cross motifs like those found in many of the other painted tombs is a striking departure from iconographic norms.<sup>17</sup> According to witnesses, in addition to this discrete pictorial customization, the floor of the tomb was paved with terracotta and majolica tiles in hues of

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<sup>14</sup> Dezutter, "Beschilderde," esp. 194-196. As Dezutter observed, mendicants were likely behind other Flemish pictorial innovations of the thirteenth century, most notably the important group of Psalters studied by Kerstin Carlvant. See her *Manuscript Painting in Thirteenth-Century Flanders. Bruges, Ghent, and the Circle of the Counts*, (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2012), 51-74.

<sup>15</sup> See Fernand Beaucamp, "La polychromie," 556.

<sup>16</sup> A series of four rectangular cavities high on the interior lateral walls of the sarcophagus were no doubt once fitted with wooden beams in order to provide further support for the tomb's heavy lid (discussed below) It is clear that the cavities postdate the tomb's fresco decorations; at least one of the many painted armorials was damaged when the cavities were excavated.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Michael, "The Privilege of Proximity: Towards a Re-definition of the Function of Armorials," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 55-74.



**Figure 6** Painted arms of Robert of Cassel in his tomb at Warneton. 1331. Photo: author.

yellow, green, red and brown, the whole arranged in a geometric pattern.<sup>18</sup> Robert's tomb, therefore, had as much in common with the luxuriously decorated *salles aux écus* of contemporary Flemish and French castles as it did with other instances of such burials.<sup>19</sup> The tacit dialogue between the multiple Cassel arms and the more customary iconographic repertoire of the painted tombs adumbrated the spiritual benefits that noble status afforded, even in death. If the recurring intercessional saints and censuring angels that decorated analogous zones in other

<sup>18</sup> These tiles are now lost, but they were visible shortly after the tomb's discovery. See Beaucamp, "La polychromie," 557.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of the *salles aux écus* see Carina Fryklund, *Flemish Wall Painting* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 10, 23-24 (and figs. 10-11). Good examples include the hall in the former Castle of Hesdin (c. 1299), a property of Mahaut of Artois, and the still extant heraldic decoration in the great hall of the Castle of Ravel (Puy de Dôme) near Clermont-Ferrand (c. 1299-1302).

examples of the Flemish painted tombs served as aids to the soul in the purgatorial struggle, such decorations were perhaps less compulsory for one who could afford, among other luxuries, multiple anniversary masses for the profit of his soul.<sup>20</sup> To put the matter another way, in death, Robert was “shielded” from malevolent forces, his sufferings in purgatory diminished on account of his noble identity. If the Flemish tombs and their iconographic repertoire are evidence of a local cultural and artistic tradition, we can understand the heraldic customization of the tomb Robert of Cassel as a noble intervention into this practice, a not-so-subtle expression of privilege and prerogative. This situation finds parallels in Robert’s often fraught involvement in the lives of his own subjects.

### **Robert of Cassel and the Flemish Rebellions**

A survey of Robert of Cassel’s political career reveals that his objectives aligned perfectly neither with those of his Capetian masters nor his Flemish subjects, a situation exacerbated by a prolonged quarrel with his elder brother, Louis of Nevers, and Louis’ son of the same name. The consequences of this feud were as detrimental to political stability in Flanders as the designs of the French monarchy. From 1314 until 1320, as the aged Count Robert III

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<sup>20</sup> Robert’s testament, originally drawn up in 1328 after the Battle of Cassel, is witnessed by Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, B 451, 5.789. This document was executed at his estate in Montingy en Perche in France around the time of his death, sometime between mid-May and mid-June 1331. The testament specified his wish to be buried in Warneton and provided funds to endow requiem masses for Robert’s soul: “Item, je eslis et ai esleu le lieu de ma sépulture en l’abbaye de Warneton, et lesse à la dicte abbaie le CC livres contenues en mon dit testament pour donner ou lieu où je serais ensevelis pour la cause contenue en mon dit testament,” that is to say, “pour acater rente pour faire men anniversaire solennement cascun an une fois et aussi pour dire perpetuelment cascune semaine, par trois jours, cascun jour une messe de requiem pour l’ame de mi...” I rely here on the transcription of the testament by A. Desplanque supplied in Carlier, “Robert de Cassel,” 220-238, here at 232 and 222. For a discussion of the confusion surrounding the precise date of Robert’s death, see Van der Zuylen van Nyevelt, “Tombes,” 135-36, n1, who cites the same passages. Funerary masses for Robert of Cassel were acknowledged by the Abbot Pierre d’Assende in 1333. See the *Chronicon abbatiae Warnestoniensis, ordinis canonicorum regularium s. Augustini, ex actis quibusdam monasterii et ex auctoribus collectum cura et studio duorum dioec. Brug. Sacerdotum* (Bruges, 1852), 34-36.

continued his fraught negotiations with the French kings, the latter pursued a strategy of divide and conquer with respect to the Count's sons. Louis X, for example, hatched a plan with Louis of Nevers in 1315 with the intent of completely disinheriting Robert in turn for French control over the cities of Lille, Douai, and Bethune (the cities of the so-called "Transport of Flanders").<sup>21</sup> Yet with his father's support, Robert ultimately secured an extensive apanage within "Crown" Flanders, an arrangement witnessed by an important succession agreement of 1320. In addition to baronies he already held in France, Robert would now enjoy lordship over contiguous Flemish territories in Dunkirk, Cassel, Bourre, Waten, Nieppe, Warneton, the Pont d'Estaires, Gravelines, Bourgourgh, Bergues, Nieuwpoort, and Deinze. The whole of these lands he would hold in fief to the king and, in the event of his father's death, his brother.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, however, Count Robert and Louis of Nevers died in quick succession, and Robert was forced to pay homage to his brother's dilettantish son, now Count Louis of Nevers, who had recently been married to a daughter of Philip V as part of the 1320 peace negotiations. Robert soon mounted a campaign to disinherit the young Count.<sup>23</sup> It was at this moment, too, that he married Jeanne of Bretagne, daughter of Arthur II of Dreux-Bretagne and Yolande of Montfort, a move likely intended to bolster his suitability as a candidate for the throne of Flanders in the eyes of the king.<sup>24</sup> This effort failed, and Robert had no choice but to join his nephew in the imposition of heavier taxes that his father had so long sought to avoid. The result was the 1323-1328 uprisings of the Flemish burghers and peasantry, the brutal suppression of the rebels by the Count and his uncle,

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<sup>21</sup> Hooghe: "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 6.

<sup>22</sup> On the creation of the apanage, see Hooghe: "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 9-10; Michelle Bubenicek, *Quand les femmes gouvernent. Droit et politique au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Yolande de Flandre* (Paris: École des Chartes, 2002), 55-56; de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, esp. 18-22; Carlier, "Robert de Cassel," 66-100.

<sup>23</sup> Hooghe: "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 13-14; William H. TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection: Popular Politics and Peasant Revolt in Flanders, 1323-1328* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 48-49.

<sup>24</sup> On the marriage of Robert of Cassel see Bubenicek, *Quand les femmes gouvernent*, 56-58; de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, 36-39; Carlier, "Robert de Cassel," 138-142.

and the destruction of many of Robert's Flemish holdings, including his castles at Cassel and Dunkirk.<sup>25</sup>

In order to remain in the good graces of the Count and to avoid the further destruction of his property, Robert served as chief advisor to his nephew and arbitrator in peace talks with the rebels, a position that quickly proved untenable. A conciliatory approach to the rebels quickly gained Robert the enmity of his uncle, John of Namur, who successfully supplanted Robert as counsel to the young Louis. On June 9, 1325, Louis perfunctorily dismissed Robert from his service; two days later, on his way to peace talks at the Abbey of the Dunes, Robert narrowly escaped capture by John of Namur's men. Shortly thereafter, however, the Count was himself taken prisoner in rebel Bruges. Having gained the advantage, Robert claimed the title of regent for the imprisoned Count Louis and, extraordinarily, became the *de facto* leader of the Flemish rebels in their fight against loyalist forces and John of Namur.<sup>26</sup>

Charles IV, in response to Robert's actions, seized all of his French possessions, proclaimed John of Namur regent in Flanders, and encouraged the Flemish clergy to excommunicate the rebels. Royal sanctions and a series of defeats soon saw Robert pleading his case before the Parliament of Paris. In March of 1326, seeking a conclusion to the rebellion, the king granted clemency to the Lord of Cassel and lifted all censures against him. One month later the Peace of Arques was signed, the Flemish excommunications repealed, and Robert's lands in France and Flanders restored. Within a year, however, rebellion resumed. Robert and his nephew arrived at another truce and together marched on Flanders with the army of Philip VI. The Battle

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<sup>25</sup> Hooghe: "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 13-14, 16; TeBrake, *Plague*, 48-49, 78.

<sup>26</sup> For accounts of these events, see Hooghe, "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 13-18; TeBrake, *Plague*, 81-91. To this moment dates the famous brass tomb plaque effigy of the loyalist Ghent knight William Wenemaer, now in the Ghent city museum; an inscription on the plaque reports Wenemaer slain by Robert of Cassel at the battle of Recklyn on July 5, 1325.

of Cassel, fought on August 23, 1328, marked the destruction and total suppression of the Flemish rebellion. Robert dealt harshly with those rebel forces who had occupied and damaged property in his apanage.<sup>27</sup>

Robert of Cassel spent the final years of his life reconsolidating his lands. Philip VI awarded him damages on his properties destroyed by the Flemish rebels. Robert also sought the aid of his nephew in gaining reparations for destruction of his properties wrought by the Ghent loyalists during his service as arbitrator and his time as leader of the rebellion. The Lord of Cassel died at his castle in Warneton sometime between mid-May and mid-June in 1331. Warneton was among Robert's most affluent and favored possessions. Located along the Lys, it was easily accessible to the merchants of Ypres. The town seems to have played an increasingly important role in the Flemish cloth and textile trade during Robert's lifetime. As Filip Hooghe observed, Robert may have tried to monopolize the trade earlier in his life.<sup>28</sup> In addition to naming the abbey of Warneton as his preferred place of burial, Robert's testament stipulated that two horses and harnesses used to conduct his body to its burial place be disposed of by his executors as they deemed appropriate.<sup>29</sup> It is likely, therefore, that Robert's funeral procession resembled that of his father. As Malcolm Vale has shown, the Count Robert stipulated in his testament that his procession be led by fully armored horses, fitted with valuable tournament saddles, and ridden by knights carrying the arms of Flanders. While the horses were to be disposed of as the Count's executors saw fit, all other decoration, including "cloth of gold, torches, or other items," were to remain at the place of interment.<sup>30</sup> Those present for the

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<sup>27</sup> Hooghe, "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 18-20, Te Brake, *Plague*, 95-99.

<sup>28</sup> Hooghe, "Robrecht van Kassel: Deel 1," 10-11, 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> "Item, je voel et ordenne que l'offrande des chevaus et dou harnas qui sera faite pour mi le jour que mes corps sera mis en terre puist estre racatée par mes exécuteurs sil leur plaist pour cent libvres de tournois." Carlier, "Robert de Cassel," 222. Judging from the short distance between the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul and the earthen redoubt that still marks the site of the castle of Warneton to the east, this procession was a short one.

<sup>30</sup> See Vale, *Princely Court*, 242-243.

solemnities observed during the funeral of Robert of Cassel, therefore, would have witnessed similar pageantry. Throughout these events, Robert's arms were omnipresent, even on the walls of his freshly painted sarcophagus.

### **Jeanne of Bretagne and the Tomb of Robert of Cassel**

As one of the executors of her husband's will, Jeanne of Bretagne ensured that her husband's tomb testified to his dignity. It is reasonable to assume that she financed the interior fresco work, even if we cannot be certain that she dictated the pictorial contents. If, as has been suggested, such decoration was the province of the mendicant orders, it was easy enough for Jeanne to enlist their aid.<sup>31</sup> The interior decoration was probably completed quickly as it was common practice to bury the dead as soon as possible.<sup>32</sup> The tomb's exterior embellishment required more time. No trace of this decoration was evident in 1924, but documentary evidence confirms that it was financed by Jeanne. The contents of a sole receipt, dated one year after Robert's death, bear witness to Jeanne's efforts in this respect: **(Figure 7)**

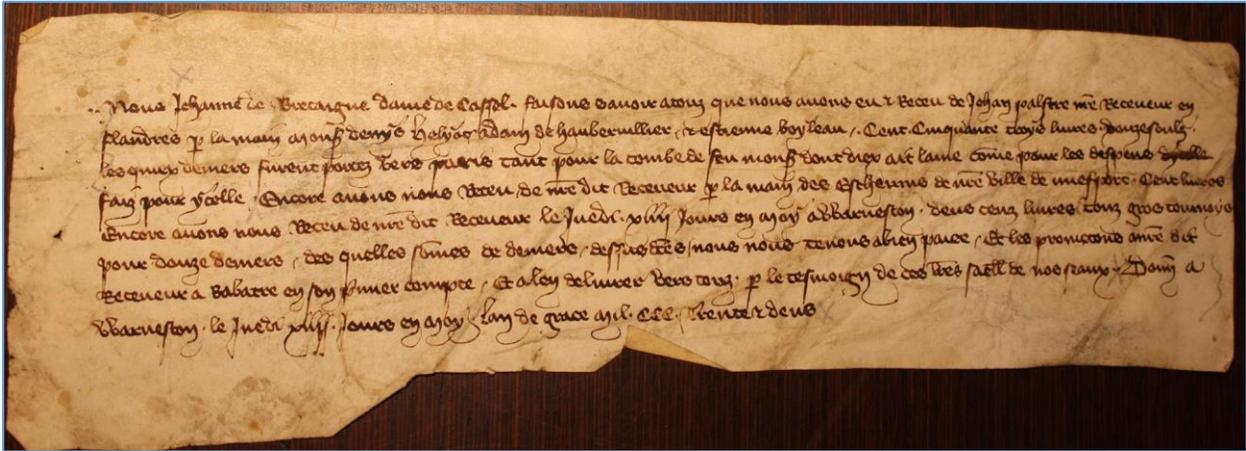
I, Jeanne de Bretagne [Jehanne de Bretagne], dame of Cassel, let it be known to everyone that I have obtained and received 153 pounds [and] 12 sols from Jehan Palstre, my financial officer in Flanders, hand-delivered by Mr. Denys Helyot, Adam de Haubervillier, and Estienne Boyleau. This money was delivered to Paris for the tomb of my late lord [and husband] (may God keep his soul), as well as for the expenses incurred for it [the tomb]. Also I have received 100 pounds from my aforementioned financial officer, hand-delivered by the municipal councilmen of my city of Nieuwpoort [Neufport]. Also on Thursday, May 14, in Warneton [Warneston], I have received 200 pounds in *gros tournois* [currency] worth 12 deniers [per pound], from my aforementioned financial officer. I acknowledge having received the above-mentioned amounts of money in full, and I promise my aforesaid financial officer to deduct them in his first account, and [I declare] his obligation concerning them is fulfilled toward

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<sup>31</sup> Among Jeanne's co-executors named by her late husband was the Dominican "Jehan de la Ferrière, de l'ordene des Frères-Prêcheurs." This Jehan belonged to the convent at Le Mans, closer to Robert's holdings in France, but his presence suggests the ease with which Jeanne might call upon the assistance of the mendicant orders in general. See Carlier, "Robert de Cassel," 230; de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, 148.

<sup>32</sup> As noted by Devliegher, "Middelleeuwse," 69. The execution of many of the frescoes in the Flemish tombs suggests that, in general, they were painted in haste.

everyone. By the witness of this document sealed with my seal. Enacted at Warneton [Warneston], Thursday, May 14, in the year of grace 1332.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 7** “Quittance” issued by Jeanne of Bretagne on May 14, 1332. Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, B 3245, no. 112097. Photo: author.

What might we conclude from this receipt? To begin with, the other parties named in the transaction were members of Jeanne’s household. Jehan Palstre, who provided the funds, was Robert’s longtime chamberlain and co-executor of his testament.<sup>34</sup> The funds were collected by Denys Helyot and Estienne Boyleau, two of Jeanne’s chaplains, who delivered them to her along with Adam de Haubervillier.<sup>35</sup> The latter served Jeanne as a financial officer in some capacity

<sup>33</sup>“Nous Jehanne de Bretagne dame de Cassel, faisons savoir a touz que nous avons eu et receu de Jehan Palstre n[ost]re receveur en Flandres p[ar] la main mons. Denys Helyot, Adam de Haubervillier, et Estienne Boyleau, Cent Cinquante troys livres, douze soulz, les quix deniers furent portez vers Paris tant pour la tombe de feu mons[eigneur] dont dix ait lame com[m]e pour les despens ~~de ycelle~~ faiz pour ycelle. Encore avons nous receu de n[ost]re dit receveur p[ar] la main des eschevins de n[ost]re ville de Nuefport, Cent livres[.] Encore avons nous receu de n[ost]re dit receveur le Juedi .xiiii jours en may a Warneston, deus cenz livres, touz gros tournoys pour douze deniers, des quelles som[m]es de deniers, dessus d[i]tes, nous nous tenons a bien paiee. Et les prometons a n[ost]re dit receveur a rabatre en son p[re]mier compte, Et a l'en delivrer vers touz. p[ar] le tesmoign de ces l[ett]res saell[ees] de nos seaux •• Donn[e] a Warneston, le juedi xiiii jours en may, lan de grace mil .CCC. trente et deus.”

I am extremely grateful to Zan Kocher for undertaking a new transcription and translation of this receipt and for his great patience and kindness in discussing its implications with me. The receipt is now Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, B 3245, no. 112097. My thanks to Alexis Donetzkoff and Hervé Passot for their help in locating it at Lille in September of 2014. It was partially transcribed and dated May 14, 1322 [sic] by M. le Chanoine Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers concernant l'histoire de l'art dans la Flandre, l'Artois et le Hainaut avant le XVe siècle* (Lille: Imprimerie L. Danel, 1886), 290. See also de Smyttère, Robert de Cassel, 74.

<sup>34</sup> See Carlier, “Robert de Cassel,” 230-231.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. Denys Helyot (as “Denis Aliot”) appears in Robert’s will immediately after Jehan Palstre. For a full list of Jeanne’s chaplains, see Jules Finot, *Les comptes et pièces comptables concernant l'administration de l'hôtel des*

since he is documented conducting business at her Parisian hôtel shortly after the creation of the May 14 receipt.<sup>36</sup> It may be that the chaplains and Adam de Haubervillier not only delivered the sums to Jeanne, but took them to Paris as well.

Of the three sums mentioned, only the first, the “153 pounds and 12 sols,” was clearly specified for the tomb. Since the amount specified is not a round sum, it may indicate that some work had already been accomplished by May of 1332. It would follow that the contract for the tomb had been agreed upon earlier, perhaps shortly after Robert’s death.<sup>37</sup> Whether the payment was for raw materials or completed labor is unclear, but a post-medieval description of the completed monument, written prior to its destruction on August 14, 1566 by the Huguenot iconoclasts, strongly indicates that the funds delivered to Paris were intended for the carving of an effigy and the preparation of stone revetments.<sup>38</sup> Around the middle of the sixteenth century, the heraldist Corneille Gaillard (1520-1563) witnessed the tomb. He observed that:

At Warneton in the middle of the choir is a tomb of colored marble, upon which lies a man clad in a hauberk, the whole of alabaster; he carries around his neck the great shield of Flanders, the border engrailed.

An epitaph inscribed on the tomb gave:

Here lies Sir Robert of Flanders, Lord of Cassel, son of the Count of Flanders, who passed in the year of grace 1331, the day of the Trinity, and for whom this sepulcher was

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*comtes de Flandre, des sires et des dames de Cassel et de Bar, des comtes et des comtesses de Hainaut, des duces et des duchesses de Bourgogne, conservés aux archives du Nord* (Lille, Impr. L. Danel, 1892), xxxvii, citing documents in Archives du Nord cartons B 3245 and B 3246.

<sup>36</sup> Jules Finot, ed., *Inventaire sommaire des Archives départementales antérieures à 1790, Nord: Archives civiles, Série B: Chambre des Comptes de Lille*, vol. 7 (Lille : Imprimerie de L. Danel, 1892), 25. Adam de Haubervillier may have been from the Aubervilliers near St. Denis. In his testament, Robert of Cassel left small sums to an Ysabel de Haubervillers, her sister Jehane, and a Jehannette de Haubervillers. These were among the “femmes de la chambre ma chière compaigne et de mes enfants.” See Carlier, “Robert de Cassel,” 232. Jeanne de Bretagne, therefore, seems to have had a strong connection to this family which may have been based in and around Paris.

<sup>37</sup> Alternatively Jeanne may have seen to this matter in February of 1332, at which time she was in Paris advocating for her children’s inheritance rights. See P.-J.-E. de Smyttère, “Mémoire sur l’apanage de Robert de Cassel (1320),” *Annales du Comité flamand de France*, VII (1863-64): 55.

<sup>38</sup> See de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, 75; Beaucamp, “La polychromie,” 555-556. In the 1924 excavation photographs the remains of a brick-vault roof are visible on the western side of the tomb. This vault was probably put in place after the vandalism of 1566. Evidently it was removed in 1924. Beaucamp suggested that the tomb was completely buried during the reconstruction of the church following the fires of 1645 and 1664.

made by my lady Jeanne, eldest daughter of Duke Arthur of Bretagne, his wife. Pray for his soul.<sup>39</sup>

When, therefore, in 1884, the biographer P.-J.-E. de Smyttère concluded that the 1332 receipt was related to the effigy and marble tomb witnessed by Gaillard, he was completely in the right.<sup>40</sup>

Certainly the makers of fine tomb carvings did business in the capital. Jeanne of Bretagne's patronage of such artisans was in keeping with practices fashionable among the most powerful women of the extended Capetian court. Well known is the 1312 contract, witnessed by the *prévôt* of Paris between the Countess Mahaut of Artois and the Flemish tomb maker Jean Pépin of Huy, for the tomb of her late husband, Otto IV of Burgundy, Count of Artois, who had died on account of wounds suffered at the Battle of Kortrijk.<sup>41</sup> The contract stipulated that the tomb should include:

the image of an armed knight, with shield, sword and armor, a lion under the feet of the statue and two small angels at his shoulders supporting a pillow under the head of the reclining figure. There will be an inscription surrounding the tomb and, as was said before, the tomb will be of alabaster, the whole for the price of 140 pounds *parisis*...<sup>42</sup>

An unusually rich collection of documents provides further insight into this transaction and attests to the ornamental components of the Count's completed tomb. The entire process seems

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<sup>39</sup> "A Wastene, au mitant du choeur, est une tombe de marbre poly, dessus ung homme couché, armé de hauberge, le tout d'alabastré; il porte sur luy ung grand escu de Flandres, la bordure endentée: Chy gist Mons. Robert de Flandres, sire de Cassel, fil du comte de Flandres, qui trespassa l'an de grace 1331, le jour de la Trinité, et lui fit faire ceste sepulture Madame Jehenne, aînée fille du Duc Arthus de Bretagne, sa femme. Priés pour l'ame de li." The description and epitaph were attributed to Gaillard by the Bruges historian Olivier de Wree (1596-1652), called "Vredius," in his *Genealogia comitum Flandriae*, vol. 2 (Bruges: Apud Ioannem Baptistam & Lucam Kerchovios: 1642-1643), 226. See also de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, 75; Van Zuylen, "Tombes," 135.

<sup>40</sup> See de Smyttère, *Robert de Cassel*, 72-76.

<sup>41</sup> For a transcription of the original document (Archives Départementales du Pas-de-Calais, A. 302 9) see Dehaisnes, *Documents*, I, 202-3. Here I rely on the translation in Teresa G. Frisch, ed., *Gothic Art 1140- c. 1450 Sources and Documents*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 20 (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 112-114. For a good overview of the career of Pépin of Huy, see Gerhard Schmidt, "Jean Pépin de Huy: Stand der Forschung und offene Fragen," in *Gotische Bildwerke und ihre Meister* (Wien: Böhlau, 1992), 46-58.

<sup>42</sup> Frisch, *Gothic Art*, 113-114.

to have taken some four years from start to finish.<sup>43</sup> Pépin oversaw the tomb's transportation from Paris to the Abbey of Chileux in Burgundy as well as the installation of the tomb upon arrival. Mahaut of Artois later decided to order additional embellishments (for example arcades and the sculpting of the arms on the shield) not included in the original contract with Pépin, since several other artisans subsequently received payment for the gilding and painting of the tomb. In other words, the initial cost of 140 pounds *parisis* did not represent Mahaut's total expenditure for the tomb.<sup>44</sup>

The documents pertaining to the tomb of Otto IV of Burgundy allow further speculation as to the nature of the commission and final appearance of the tomb of Robert of Cassel. Most notable are the similar costs of the projects. To what type of coin the "153 pounds [and] 12 sols" named in the May 14, 1332 receipt refers—whether pounds *parisis* or pounds *tournois*—is not immediately clear, but it is reasonable to conclude that this was the Parisian coin, like that specified in the contract for Otto IV's tomb. That Jeanne (or her secretary) felt obliged to specify that one of the later sums mentioned in the receipt was issued in *gros tournois*, and to note the exchange value for that currency of "12 deniers [per pound]," is probably an indication that the intended readers were more accustomed to dealing in Parisian coin, since around this moment one *gros tournois* purchased twelve deniers *parisis*.<sup>45</sup> The price of "153 pounds [and] 12 sols" in *parisis* would be only slightly more than that agreed to by Mahaut of Artois and Jean Pépin of Huy (140

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Mahaut's transactions with Pépin began on May 18, 1311 with an advance payment made to the sculptor in the amount of 80 pounds *parisis*, delivered by a representative of the Countess. The 1312 contract confirms that the 140 pounds *parisis* included 70 pounds already paid to the sculptor. This suggests that the 1311 advance payment was renegotiated. See Frisch, *Gothic Art*, 113, n7; Dehaisnes, *Documents*, I, 198.

<sup>44</sup> See Dehaisnes, *Documents*, I, 198-215.

<sup>45</sup> A 1329 quittance delivered by Donat, receveur-général of Flanders, to the treasurer of Bruges, specifies that "le gros tournoys compté pour douze deniers parisis." It would seem, therefore, that the exchange rate of "gros tournoys pour douze deniers" mentioned in the May 14, 1332 quittance issued by Jeanne refers to the common exchange rate of one pound *tournois* to twelve deniers *parisis*. This would suggest that it was necessary to specify when coins were *tournois* but not when they were *parisis*. See G. Bigwood, "Sceaux de Marchands Lombard," *Revue belge de numismatique et de sigillographie*, 64 (1908): 221. I am grateful to Zan Kocher for this reference.

pounds *parisis*) twenty years earlier, and may simply reflect inflation. Certainly the materials mentioned in Gaillard's description—alabaster and marble—were similar. The same descriptions of Robert's tomb do not attest to ornamentation like sculpted arcades, but additional charges may have been incurred later for the carving of the effigy's shield, gilding of the tomb's inscription, and any required painting, as was the case for the tomb of Otto IV.

In addition to the similar cost and Parisian provenance, the essential iconographic details of the tombs of Otto IV and Robert of Cassel agree. While Otto's tomb, like Robert's, is now lost, a surviving effigy of a son of Mahaut of Artois, also commissioned by the Countess from Pépin and executed between 1317 and 1320, provides a general idea of the appearance of the effigies of Otto, Robert, and countless other early fourteenth-century noblemen. **(Figure 8)** The epitaph on Robert's tomb, moreover, probably "surrounded" the effigy; this is to say that it was inscribed around the perimeter of the marble tomb slab upon which the effigy laid. The formula employed for the inscription is standard, with the exception that it bears witness to Jeanne de Bretagne's role as commissioner of the tomb. In this respect it recalls an inscription on yet another tomb financed by a noble widow, the dowager Queen Clementia of Hungary, for the heart of her great grandfather, Charles I of Anjou, in 1326.<sup>46</sup> **(Figure 9)** As Robert's effigy reputedly lay on a "*tombe de marbre poly*," the tomb slab and the revetments applied to the brick sarcophagus were perhaps fashioned from a rectangular piece of polished black "Tournai marble," like the stone upon which the effigy of Charles I still lies.<sup>47</sup> We can imagine that the

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<sup>46</sup> For this effigy see Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *et.al.*, *Gisants et tombeaux de la basilique de Saint-Denis*, Bulletin - Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, no. 3 (Saint-Denis: Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, 1975), 21.

<sup>47</sup> See Ludovic Nys, *La pierre de Tournai: son exploitation et son usage aux XIIIème, XIVème, XVème siècles* (Tournai: Fabrique de l'Eglise cathédrale de Tournai, 1993).



**Figure 8** Jean Pépin of Huy, sculptor. Tomb effigy of Robert of Artois, St. Denis. Between 1317 and 1320. St. Denis. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

shield of Robert's effigy, painted with "*Or, a lion rampant sable within a border engrailed Gules*" was pleasingly accented by the dark stone. That Jeanne of Bretagne would undertake such a commission is by no means surprising; funerary matters, to include the creation of tombs and arrangements for liturgical commemorations, were often the province of noblewomen.<sup>48</sup> A tomb, and in particular one decorated with heraldry, was also an important means for the

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<sup>48</sup> The bibliography on this subject continues to grow. See recently Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz, "Gender and Medieval Art" in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. C. Rudolph (Malden, Mass., 2006), 125-158, here at 133-137.



**Figure 9** Tomb effigy of Charles I of Anjou, St. Denis. 1328. St. Denis. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

expression of familial power and legitimacy.<sup>49</sup> In the case of the tomb of Robert of Cassel, the addition of a finely carved effigy not only aggrandized the memory of the deceased, but also bolstered Jeanne's tenuous hold on the regency of her children. The Count Louis had been at odds with his uncle over territorial rights since the Battle of Cassel. With Robert's death, Louis immediately sought to disenfranchise Jeanne. Robert had provided generously for his widow, but all of the property left to her was in his French domains. Jeanne therefore found herself in a precarious position as protector of her young son Jean's rights to the apanage; Louis also claimed

<sup>49</sup> A definitive study in this respect is Anne McGee Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship in France, the Low Countries, and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

custody of Jean and his sister, Yolande. Multiple interventions by Philip VI on Jeanne's behalf did not deter the Count: a protracted battle between Jeanne and Louis played out over the course of several years. Jeanne's son died prematurely, but she was ultimately able to thwart Louis by negotiating Yolande's betrothal to Henry IV, Count of Bar, in 1338.<sup>50</sup> Embellishment of her husband's tomb monument was thus one strategy by which Jeanne could protect her husband's legacy, her rights, and her children's inheritance. This was a plan she likely arrived at in consultation with her financial and spiritual counsellors. Indeed Denys Helyot and Estienne Boyleau, her chaplains, may have been instrumental in deciding upon the material and iconographic content of the tomb. Once again the accounts of Mahaut d'Artois provide a good precedent for Jeanne; Mahaut's claims to the County of Artois were similarly challenged, both by her late husband's brother and his nephew, during the course of the creation and decoration of Otto's tomb. Also like Jeanne, Mahaut would turn to the king of France for justice and ultimately see her capable daughter succeed her and achieve great power.

### **The Tomb of Robert of Cassel as “Franco-Flemish” Art**

In 1925, a report on the Warneton excavations was published by Fernand Beaucamp, secretary of the Commission historique du département du Nord. Aware that the tomb's lost effigy was made in Paris, Beaucamp mused: “It would have been curious to see what influences, whether French or Franco-Flemish, could have been practiced or mixed in this work.”<sup>51</sup> Precisely what Beaucamp meant by “Franco-Flemish” is unclear, but it is reasonable to assume that his use of the term stemmed from the fact that the tomb's interior and exterior components represented

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<sup>50</sup> For the circumstances of this marriage see Bubenicek, *Quand les femmes gouvernent*, 53-62.

<sup>51</sup> Beaucamp, “La polychromie,” 556: “Il eût été curieux de voir quelles influences, ou françaises ou franco-flamandes, pouvaient s'être exercées ou mêlées en cet ouvrage.”

geographically-circumscribable phenomena, artistic practices that were “French” (Parisian effigies) and “Flemish” (tomb paintings) in origin.<sup>52</sup> Here, we might revisit the term’s older, musical associations in order to arrive at a more nuanced account of the conception, financing, construction, and reception of the monument. The concept of polyphony accommodates the voice of the tomb’s primary referent (Robert), the geographic origins of the tomb’s components, and the rich network of people, actions, and peregrinations embodied in the final, summative monument. As the tomb’s patron, the voice of Jeanne of Bretagne is clear. It is reasonable to assume that she was counseled in this project by Jehan Palstre, co-executor of Robert’s testament and her financial agent in Flanders, a man with considerable experience in Flemish political affairs who would understand the symbolic importance of the endeavor. Jeanne’s agents Denys Helyot, Adam de Haubervillier, and Estienne Boyleau, served as financial conduits and, possibly, communicated the wishes of their mistress. To the voices of Jeanne, her counsel, and

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<sup>52</sup> In the wake of the Great War—and amid the literal reconstruction of Warenton—such a taxonomy was arguably as much if not more resonant with contemporary political circumstances than it was with the realities of fourteenth-century France and Crown Flanders. It is particularly urgent to keep this in mind where the Dampierre family is concerned, since Count Robert III had become something of a Flemish culture hero over the course of the 1800s, a phenomenon that also resulted in the revival of historical interest in the Count’s son, Robert of Cassel. From the same discourse arose Hendrik Conscience’s famous 1838 novel *The Lion of Flanders*, in which Count Robert III appears at the July 11, 1302 Battle of Kortrijk as champion of the peasant militia which miraculously fought back an army of French noble invaders. As is commonly observed, the Count (the titular “Lion”) did not participate in this battle, the sole victory of Flemish forces over a French army. As Robert Govers and Frank Go have shown, Conscience’s revision was successful in kindling a Flemish nationalist sentiment, despite “the fact that present-day Flanders was not a political entity seven centuries ago, and that the arms [at Kortrijk] were taken up by many armed forces from different ethnicities.” In 1893, July 11 was declared “a celebration day of the Flemish community” and, as recently as 1985, the patriotic hymn “The Lion of Flanders” (winner of an 1847 poetry contest) was adopted as the Flemish anthem. See Govers and Go, *Place Branding: Global, Virtual, and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined, and Experienced* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121. Conscience’s work certainly deserves the credit for kindling historical interest in the Dampierre clan. The main beneficiary of these developments was, of course, the Count Robert, but the closing decades of the century saw interest in Robert of Cassel, as discussed above. The statue of Robert of Cassel on the town hall of Dunkirk (1897-1901), a testament to his sponsorship of the city’s militias, likewise belongs to this moment. These men were not, of course, champions of the rights of the Flemish people. As Robert of Cassel’s career demonstrates, the political and economic objectives of the House of Dampierre did not align neatly with those of the burghers or the Flemish peasantry, among whom he had as many enemies as allies. As we have seen, if Robert took part in the Flemish insurrections of the early fourteenth century, he did so with his own objectives in mind. His interests may have occasionally agreed with those of the local, mercantile elite, but were first and foremost those of an early-fourteenth century nobleman eager to consolidate his territorial rights.

her agents we must add that of a sculptor, undoubtedly one of the leading artisans at work in the capital, and assistants. Around 1331, Jean Pépin of Huy remains a reasonable candidate for this work, but so do the unnamed sculptors from the royal workshops commissioned to repair the tomb effigies of the kings and queens at St. Denis between 1327 and 1329.<sup>53</sup> A quick glimpse of those artisans called *ymagier* or *tailleur de pierre* in the 1313 Paris tax rolls shows that sculptors and stone workers came from many regions to work in the capital.<sup>54</sup> The effigy thus typified the work of cosmopolitan artistic community centered in Paris; its transportation and installation in Flemish Warneton, accomplished perhaps by its maker, demonstrated the supra-regional scope of Jeanne's power. The voices of other contributors, among them that of the painter responsible for the interior frescoes — a Flemish mendicant? — were muffled. Finally there are the voices of the taxpayers, residents of Jeanne's estates in France and Flanders, whose labor contributed to this commemoration of Robert of Cassel. The tomb of Robert of Cassel is thus a reminder that embedded in many of the luxury objects or monuments described today as “Franco-Flemish” are untold layers of historical and social complexity as yet unexcavated. 🐼

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<sup>53</sup> See *Les journaux du Trésor de Philippe VI de Valois: suivis de l'Ordinarium thesauri de 1338-1339*, ed. Jules Viard (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899), 10 (no. 51), 32 (no. 145).

<sup>54</sup> Geoffroy de Paris, *Chronique métrique ... suivie de la taille de Paris, en 1313, publiées pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de la bibliothèque du roi*, vol. 9, ed. J.A. Buchon (Paris: Verdrière, 1827).