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Negotiating Identity in Northern France and the Lowlands in the High Middle Ages

The inspiration for this volume was a session titled “Lions of Flanders: Material Culture and Identity in the Flemish Low Countries” that we organized for the 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the Spring of 2013. That session stemmed from our mutual interest in material and visual expressions of identity in the Flemish Low Countries during the High Middle Ages. With the kind encouragement of *Peregrinations* general editor Sarah Blick we have expanded our scope to include relevant developments across the contiguous landscapes of northern France, western (or “royal”) Flanders, and the County of Brabant. The manuscripts, monuments, luxury objects and common materials explored in these essays bear witness to the ever-shifting allegiances and political boundaries that defined this region in the High Middle Ages. In the shadow of the French King and the German Emperor, ecclesiastics and nobles consolidated identities through material and visual means. Thus, Jeff Rider’s examination of authorship in the twelfth-century autograph manuscript of the *Genealogia Flandrensium comitum* (Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque d’Agglomération, MS 746, 64r-68v), a seminal source for the historiography of the Counts of Flanders in Saint-Omer composed at the Abbey of Saint-Bertin, sheds light on the monastic author’s efforts to navigate a

“readable” path through the complicated interdynastic history of the Flemish nobility. In the Psalter of Guy of Dampierre (Royal Library of Belgium MS 10607), Elizabeth Moore Hunt demonstrates how heraldic decorations—another means of qualifying allegiance and descent—constituted the political and dynastic network of the Count and, in tandem with the visual and material environment of the comital family, substantiated his identity. The Dampierre family shared this heraldic language with the French monarchy; accordingly, Anne Lester’s examination of the Parisian Longpont coffret—an object later repurposed in Picardy—demonstrates the rich valences of a heraldic constellation that moved across borders temporal and geographical. The diffusion of an architectural language is the subject of Bailey K. Young and Laurent Verslype’s report on recent excavations at the castle of Walhain-Saint-Paul in Walloon Brabant. While the lesser lords of Walhain held their lands in fief to the Duke of Brabant, their castle testifies to the transmission of *phillipien* fortification models and demonstrates the surprising material resources that members of the lesser nobility might bring to bear. Finally, Richard Leson shows how the fragmentary tomb of Robert of Cassel in Warneton—a monument that once boasted a Parisian alabaster effigy—embodied the local and supraregional powers of the Franco-Flemish nobility in the early fourteenth century.

During the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, the material articulation of identity, whether individual, familial, or regional, depended upon a range of media to assert claims of power, legacy, or allegiance. Through written and illuminated manuscripts, structural and architectural elements, and funerary and luxury displays,



the emphasis on materiality in this special issue promotes the idea that a cross-section of media is necessary to understand the creation and validation of identity among noble families, particularly those residing in the northern European counties between the crowns of France and Empire. The objects covered here resonate with one another and formulate sites for memory that were as potent to their original viewers as they are to us today. 🐉

-Elizabeth Moore Hunt and Richard A. Leson