



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Masculine Sexuality and a Double Standard in Early Thirteenth-Century Flanders?

Bradley, Cameron; Mazo Karras, Ruth

Citation

Bradley, C., & Mazo Karras, R. (2010). Masculine Sexuality and a Double Standard in Early Thirteenth-Century Flanders? *Leidschrift|Priesters, Prostituees En Procreatie. Seksuele Normen En Praktijken In De Middeleeuwen En Vroegmoderne Tijd*, 25(December), 63-77. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/72878>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/72878>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Leidschrift

Historisch Tijdschrift

Artikel/Article: *Masculine Sexuality and a Double Standard in Early Thirteenth-Century Flanders?*

Auteur/Author: *Cameron Bradley, Ruth Mazo Karras*

Verschenen in/Appeared in: *Leidschrift*, 25.3 (Leiden 2010) 63-77

© 2010 Stichting Leidschrift, Leiden, The Netherlands

ISSN 0923-9485

E-ISSN 2210-5637

Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden gereproduceerd en/of vermenigvuldigd zonder schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Leidschrift is een zelfstandig wetenschappelijk historisch tijdschrift, verbonden aan het Instituut voor geschiedenis van de Universiteit Leiden. *Leidschrift* verschijnt drie maal per jaar in de vorm van een themanummer en biedt hiermee al vijftientig jaar een podium voor levendige historiografische discussie.

Artikelen ouder dan 2 jaar zijn te downloaden van www.leidschrift.nl. Losse nummers kunnen per e-mail besteld worden. Het is ook mogelijk een jaarabonnement op *Leidschrift* te nemen. Zie www.leidschrift.nl voor meer informatie.

Leidschrift is an independent academic journal dealing with current historical debates and is linked to the Institute for History of Leiden University. *Leidschrift* appears tri-annually and each edition deals with a specific theme.

Articles older than two years can be downloaded from www.leidschrift.nl. Copies can be order by e-mail. It is also possible to order an yearly subscription. For more information visit www.leidschrift.nl.

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts*.

Secretariaat/ Secretariat:

Doelensteeg 16
2311 VL Leiden
The Netherlands
071-5277205
redactie@leidschrift.nl
www.leidschrift.nl

Comité van aanbeveling/ Board of recommendation:

Dr. J. Augusteijn
Prof. dr. W.P. Blockmans
Prof. dr. H.W. van den Doel
Prof. dr. L. de Ligt
Prof. dr. L.A.C.J. Lucassen
Prof. dr. H. te Velde

Masculine Sexuality and a Double Standard in Early Thirteenth-Century Flanders?

Cameron Bradley and Ruth Mazo Karras

The idea of a double standard of medieval sexual conduct is so frequently rehearsed that it almost has achieved the status of an axiom. The church taught consistently that fornication and adultery were as serious for men as they were for women, and yet many scholars have argued that male sexual license was accepted, even praised, among the nobility, while women were kept firmly under control to prevent any such indiscretions. While a great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted in recent years to the feminine side of the equation, leading to a much richer picture of women's activities and involvement in medieval society, the subject of men's sexual practices with women remains relatively unexplored.¹ Did aristocratic culture allow, expect, or even encourage men to indulge in non-marital sexual behaviour? Or was it instead more receptive of the church's program, which would imply that sources such as Lambert of Ardres' *History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres* portray a skewed picture of aristocratic life in thirteenth-century Flanders? Either way, the existence of conflicting discourses on men's sexual practices indicates a tension at work, one that is not comfortably accommodated by the double standard model.

While men's sexual behaviour in early thirteenth-century Flanders was not entirely ruled by the teachings of the church, there also existed a measure of respect for ecclesiastical morality on the matter of sex and marriage. The men of Lambert's *History* frequently indulged in sexual relations outside marriage, but Lambert took care to show that they did so when they were single men, not husbands. This solicitude suggests concern for fidelity toward the marriage bond, and even acceptance of the prohibition against adultery. The nobility of thirteenth century Guines and Ardres adopted a modified double standard that illustrates the complexity of aristocratic notions about these issues, the underlying tensions between

¹ Notable studies on the topic include J. Murray, "'The Law of Sin that is in my Members': The Problem of Male Embodiment" in: S. J. E. Riches and S. Salih ed., *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (London 2002) 9-22; R. M. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London 2005) 120-149.

noble and ecclesiastical ideals and practices, and the importance of procreation in the evaluation of masculine behaviour.

Sources

Much of the existing view of an aristocratic model of sexual behaviour that clashed directly with an ecclesiastical model can be traced to Georges Duby, whose works continue to be influential. In two of his studies, *Medieval Marriage* and *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, Duby accorded pride of place to Lambert of Ardres' *History*, a family chronicle written between 1198 and 1206 for Count Baldwin II of Guines (d. 1206) and his son, Arnold II of Guines and V of Ardres (d. 1220). This chronicle, which has been characterized as 'a marvelous window into the Middle Ages', provides considerable detail about the sex lives of the noblemen of Guines and Ardres, making it an irresistible source for Duby's investigations.² It will serve as the focal point of this article.

By the time he wrote his chronicle, Lambert, who was clearly well educated, had been chaplain of Ardres for several years. By his own testimony, his motivation for writing grew directly out the performance of his clerical duties. He was required by Count Baldwin II of Guines to ring the church's bells in honour of Arnold II's marriage to Beatrice of Bourbourg, which took place around 1194. Prior to the date of the wedding, however, Arnold had been excommunicated, and although Arnold repented so that the wedding might take place, Lambert was unaware of Arnold's absolution. Therefore, he delayed in ringing the bells, an act which greatly enraged Baldwin.³ Lambert laments in his history that Baldwin never again showed him the same favour he had previously enjoyed, and it was in the hope of regaining the count's approval that he took up the task of writing.⁴

² L. Shopkow, 'Introduction' in: Lambert of Ardres, *The History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres*, L. Shopkow trans. (Philadelphia 2001) 1.

³ Lambert of Ardres, *Historia comitum Gbisenensium*, J. Heller ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores* 24 (Hannover 1879) 550-642: ch. 149, 637-638 (from here on: Lambert). Although Shopkow's translation is readily available, translations here are our own.

⁴ Lambert, ch. 149, 637-638. In his prologue, Lambert says he also wrote at the instigation of Arnold II, but either this or, as Shopkow ('Introduction', 6) suggests,

In addition to Lambert's *History*, we make use of two further sources of similar chronological and geographic origin. Gislebert of Mons' *Chronicle of Hainaut*, written in 1195 - 1196 upon the death of Count Baldwin V of Hainaut, is another family chronicle. Like Lambert, Gislebert was a cleric, but his position in the secular world was somewhat more elevated than Lambert's, in that Gislebert served as chancellor of Hainaut, and acted as an envoy to the royal courts of France and the Empire.⁵ We use Gislebert's *Chronicle* primarily as a foil for Lambert's *History*. Completing the trio of texts used in this study is Jean Renart's *Roman de la rose, ou Guillaume de Dôle*, a romance written early in the thirteenth century and dedicated to Milon de Nanteuil, provost of Reims.⁶ While little is known about Renart the man, it is evident that he worked in the Franco-Flemish borderlands, since his stories feature recognizable landmarks and personages of the region, and he dedicated another work, the *Escoüfle*, to Count Baldwin VI of Hainaut.⁷ As John Baldwin has demonstrated, Renart was influenced by his literary predecessors, including Marie de France (late twelfth century) and Chrétien de Troyes (1135 - 1183), making him a suitable exemplar of aristocratic literary tastes.⁸ Furthermore, Renart's preference for real-world settings, characters, and plot devices allowed Baldwin to utilize his stories as evidence for historical mentalities.⁹ For the same reasons, we have selected the *Roman de la rose*, the latest of Renart's works, to serve as another voice in the conversation with Lambert's *History*.

the tale of offending Baldwin and seeking again the Count's good graces may be a literary convention.

⁵ L. Napran, 'Introduction' in: *Chronicle of Hainaut*, L. Napran trans. (Woodbridge and Suffolk 2005) xxvii-xxviii, xxxiii.

⁶ There is disagreement about the precise dating of the romance's composition, but the span of possibilities falls between 1200 and 1218. See R. Psaki, *The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dôle [Roman de la rose ou de Guillaume de Dôle]*, R. Psaki ed. and trans. (New York and London 1995) ix-xii; J. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200* (Chicago and London 1994) 26. Both Psaki and Baldwin lean toward the second decade of the century, with Psaki focusing on 1212 and Baldwin opting for the range of 1209 to 1214.

⁷ Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 34.

⁸ J. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil* (Baltimore and London 2000) 11-19; idem, *The Language of Sex*, 29-36.

⁹ Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 34; idem, *Aristocratic Life*, 14.

Church doctrine on sexuality

By the twelfth century the church's official views on sexual activity were fairly well established, and it was quite clear that the official attitude was one that considered men's fornication and especially adultery to be morally equivalent to women's. As Gratian noted in his great *Decretum* or *Concordance of Discordant Canons*, citing Ambrose:

Let no one be fooled by the laws of humans. All illicit sexual behaviour [*stuprum*] is adultery, nor is what is not allowed to women allowed to men. The same chastity is expected from a man as from a woman. Whatever is done with a woman who is not his lawful wife is condemned as the crime of adultery.¹⁰

It is not quite right to say that canon law did not distinguish between men and women. Gratian made extensive reference to men dismissing their wives for adultery, but not to women dismissing or leaving their husbands for this reason.¹¹ He did not draw an explicit point from this, but many of the sources he quotes (Augustine, Chrysostom, Pope Pelagius) simply assume that it is the woman's adultery that creates an issue. Indeed, he also cites Roman law to say that women may not bring an accusation of adultery in a public court. These passages must be viewed in their context, however: the question Gratian is answering here is whether it is permissible to take a prostitute as a wife, so the focus is on female behaviour.

Elsewhere Gratian did refer, although more briefly, to both men and women dismissing their spouses for adultery.¹² He included a letter of Pope Innocent I, written in the early fifth century, noting and deploring the existence of a double standard:

The Christian religion condemns adultery by both sexes on the same grounds. But women do not easily accuse their husbands of adultery, and do not take revenge by revealing their sins. Men, however, are accustomed freely to consult their priests about adulterous wives.¹³

¹⁰ Gratian, *Decretum*, Pars 2 C. 32 q. 4 c. 4, E. Friedberg ed., *Corpus Iuris Canonici* 1 (Graz 1959) col. 1128. See also Pars 2 C. 32 q. 5 c. 15-16, c. 20, cols. 1136-1138.

¹¹ Gratian, Pars 2 C. 32 q. 1 c. 4-8, cols. 1116-1117.

¹² *Ibidem*, Pars 2 C. 32 q. 7 c. 3, 5, 8, cols. 1140-1142.

¹³ *Ibidem*, Pars 2 C. 32 q. 5 c. 23, col. 1138.

He also cited Augustine that husbands should be punished more severely for adultery than wives.¹⁴ Later decretalists did not contradict Gratian on the point of equality in adultery.

Canon law had little to say about simple fornication, that is, between two unmarried people. Theologians who considered the issue were mainly concerned with persuading people of the sinfulness of simple fornication, but although they did not explicitly discuss whether it was as serious for men as for women, their treatments were generally very even-handed.¹⁵ Virginity prior to marriage was not much discussed for men, although lifelong virginity for those who chose not to marry was important for both sexes in different ways; male virginity was not described as much in terms of an unbroken seal, but it demonstrated a special kind of triumph over temptation.¹⁶

While the church clearly taught that fornication and adultery were sinful for men as well as for women, this religious ideal was, not surprisingly, often ignored. As Duby argues, the *History* of Lambert of Ardres seems to show that noblemen often took pride, or at least no shame, in ignoring it. Lambert's account is rife with details about men's sexual activities with their wives, and more importantly for our inquiry, with other women as well.

History of the Counts of Guines and Lords of Ardres

The *History* begins with the sexual exploits of the county's legendary tenth-century founder, Siegfried, who seduced Elftrude, the sister of a local count.¹⁷ Arnold I of Ardres (d. 1094) 'played and amused himself with a certain most beautiful girl of Saint-Omer',¹⁸ as well as 'a girl of most

¹⁴ Gratian, Pars 2 C. 32 q. 6 c. 4-5, cols. 1139-1140.

¹⁵ See e.g. Thomas of Chobham, *Summa Confessorum* 7.5a.1, F. Broomfield ed., *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia* 25 (Louvain 1968) 341. Thomas was a member of Peter the Chanter's circle at the University of Paris in the period under consideration here.

¹⁶ J. Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Virginity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries' in: A. Bernau, R. Evans and S. Salih ed., *Medieval Virginites* (Toronto and Buffalo 2003) 102-118; K. Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London 2000) 91-118.

¹⁷ Lambert, ch. 11, 568.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, ch. 105, 612.

excellent figure' near Boucres, whom he 'deflowered.'¹⁹ Count Manasses of Guines (r. 1091-1137) 'had an affair with a certain girl of highest beauty originally from near Guines', whose name Lambert does not include.²⁰ While Arnold II of Ardres (died c.1138) was in England in the service of William the Conqueror, he 'sired three sons from three girls.'²¹ Arnold's son, Arnold III of Ardres (died c.1139) continued the practice of non-marital sexual congress when he 'had an affair with a certain girl from Ardres', and when he 'had an affair with a certain girl born of Herchem, Helewide by name.'²² Baldwin of Ardres (d. 1147), brother of Arnold III, 'deflowered a certain other [girl] of notable, indeed of exceptional figure, a young girl of lofty nobility, daughter of Robert the canon and his noble wife Adela, by name Natalie.'²³ He also had sex with his first cousin, Adela, 'the daughter of his paternal uncle, namely of Radulph the canon', who was a virgin at the time.²⁴

The counts of Guines and lords of Ardres were not the only men of the region whom Lambert reports indulging in sexual activity outside marriage. A relatively minor noble, Baldwin (d. 1211), son of Robert V of Béthune, succeeded in impregnating the widowed countess of Aumale 'because of eminence in knighthood.'²⁵ Through the intervention of King Richard of England, for whom he had long fought, he married her and became count of Aumale. Baldwin thus improved his social standing through his illicit liaison with the countess.

Throughout the chronicle, Lambert forthrightly, even brazenly, details the sexual exploits of the male figures, but in the case of the most notorious philanderer of all the noblemen of Guines and Ardres, he proves more reticent. He records that the enemies of Baldwin II of Guines (d. 1206) claimed that the count was ruled by 'the intemperate excitement of his loins in unbearable lust (...) from the first stirrings of adolescence all the way to the aged state.'²⁶ Elaborating, he has these enemies say that 'he burns for young girls and especially virgins, so that neither David nor his son

¹⁹ Lambert, ch. 105, 612.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, ch. 34, 579.

²¹ *Ibidem*, ch. 113, 615.

²² *Ibidem*, ch. 134, 628.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, ch. 114, 615.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, ch. 88, 603.

Solomon is believed to be his parallel in the corruption of so many young girls, nor even Jupiter.²⁷ Rather than listing the occasions when Baldwin had affairs, Lambert provides the names of several of Baldwin's illegitimate children, but he declines to include them all, since 'their father did not even know all the names', and because 'if we were to describe entirely the story of truth about them, we might fear to offend more than please.'²⁸

Presented with the plentiful evidence from Lambert, it is worthwhile to ask if noblemen gave any thought to church teachings while they were in pursuit of a woman. While Lambert does not tell us what his principals may have been thinking, Jean Renart may be of use here. While they cannot be taken as reflections of reality, the interior lives of literary characters can show us what the audience would have found plausible, and indeed in the case of popular works may have influenced the attitudes of the audience. In Renart's *Roman de la rose*, the narrator comments that, as Holy Roman Emperor Conrad and his knights were dallying with certain women in the woods:

They did not think about their souls,
and neither did they have bells or churches.
Nor was there great need of them.
No chaplains except the birds.²⁹

In the moment, neither the men nor the women were concerned with the sinfulness of their actions, and marriage as well was far from their minds.

Thus far, the evidence points to the validity of Duby's claims about aristocratic sensibilities in regard to sexuality. Our sources indicate that noblemen availed themselves of the opportunities to be found with various women, some noble and others of unknown social standing, without regard for the church's steadfast condemnation of adultery and fornication. Furthermore, it appears that they saw such behaviour as perfectly normal and even celebrated it. The fact that Lambert wrote so extensively on the sexual activities of his patrons' house indicates, for Duby, that the counts of

²⁷ Lambert, ch. 89, 603.

²⁸ Ibidem, ch. 89, 603.

²⁹ Jean Renart, *Roman de la rose*, lines 224-227. Our translation was made from the Old French text available in R. Psaki's edition (see note 6).

Guines and lords of Ardres wanted their activities to be made known.³⁰ Indeed, Duby argues that '[m]en were proud of their sexual exploits, which are treated as a matter of course'³¹ and that Lambert's *History* was 'a laudatory account, mind you, that meant to preach by example and to pass on a set of moral values to future generations.'³² The view of a nobility operating fully outside the church's parameters for proper sexual behaviour seems complete.

Historical fictions

Lambert's *History* is by no means an unproblematic window to the past. An examination of its form as well as its content is essential to a thorough understanding of this rich source, and indicates that the noblemen of northern France and Flanders were at least somewhat influenced by the church's teachings on sexuality. Lambert's *History* was written in a specific historical context, one that must be considered simultaneously with the internal workings of the text. This, in turn, leads to an inquiry into the complicated categories of gender and power, to which sexuality is undeniably linked.

Much about Lambert's *History* is unusual. It was written in ornate Latin prose, with a generous sprinkling of verse passages, at a time when these compositional choices were falling out of fashion. As Gabrielle Spiegel has shown, a shift to vernacular prose chronicles was underway in the early thirteenth century, pioneered by the Franco-Flemish elite.³³ Verse was a particularly suspect medium, since it was believed that the truth would be sacrificed to the needs of the rhyme scheme.³⁴ On the subject of truth, Lambert is openly cavalier, flouting the accepted conventions (such as they

³⁰ G. Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore 1978) 93.

³¹ Duby, *Marriage*, 92.

³² *Ibidem*, 92.

³³ G. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley 1993) 11-54.

³⁴ Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 55-60.

were) for the writing of history.³⁵ According to his prologue, he preferred oral evidence to written, and mixed ‘fiction’ with ‘fact’ where it suited him.³⁶

But although the *History* is not an entirely reliable source for ‘facts’ about the past, it is invaluable for evidence of contemporary attitudes.³⁷ The ways in which Lambert constructs his text are just as illuminating in this regard as are the acts he reports. For example, the *History* bears the imprint of several types of sources, as Leah Shopkow notes. He cites Horace, Ovid, and Virgil, among other classical authors, and it is clear that he is familiar with the vernacular romances of Chrétien de Troyes.³⁸ Furthermore, Lambert appears to have been well-read in the Latin literature of satirists and moralists such as twelfth-century Andreas Capellanus and John of Salisbury, both of whose works were readily available.³⁹ Shopkow suggests that Lambert’s loose way with historical facts owes much to the influence of the moralists, who did not see truth as ‘evident, but problematic, and moral considerations were more important than a mere fidelity to fact.’⁴⁰

Lambert’s set of sources, especially the moralists, provide clues about his thought-world as well as his possible expectations for the chronicle. To Duby, the chronicle was a publicity tool for the houses of Guines and Ardres, so that any information that appeared in the text was there at the direction of Lambert’s patrons. Thus, when Lambert records that Baldwin II of Guines’ sexual appetite surpassed David, Solomon, and Jupiter, Duby

³⁵ L. Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D.C. 1997) 119-143.

³⁶ ‘If, however, they again proclaimed that we create new things, which we cannot deny at all...’. Lambert, ‘Prologue’.

³⁷ E. A. Freeman recognized this over a century ago when he described the chronicle as portraying ‘the thoughts, the feelings, the manners, of the time’. E. A. Freeman, ‘The Lords of Ardres’, *The British Quarterly Review* 71 (1880) 1-31: 2.

³⁸ For the classical references, see F. Ganshof, ‘A propos de la chronique de Lambert d’Ardres’ in: H. X. Arquillière etc. ed., *Mélanges d’histoire du Moyen Age offerts à M. Ferdinand Lot par ses amis et ses élèves* (Paris 1925) 207 n. 1; Shopkow, ‘Introduction’, 6. The episode in which Christine of Ardres signals her consent for marriage to Baldwin II of Guines ‘by the cheerfulness of her face’ (Lambert, ch. 67, 593) mirrors a similar scene found in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Cligès*, in which Sordamore signals her enthusiasm for marriage to her beloved Alexander. Shopkow also sees Arnold II’s pursuit of Ida of Boulogne as following the conventions of courtly romance. Shopkow, ‘Introduction’, 7.

³⁹ Shopkow, ‘Introduction’, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 7.

declares that ‘we can be sure that these were the shortcomings the count wished to be talked about.’⁴¹ That Lambert may have had other purposes in mind than a simple celebration of his patrons’ unfettered sexuality does not enter the analysis.

However, when we take into account the influence of the Latin satirists and moralists, particularly with regard to the passages on Baldwin II, another view of the chronicle begins to emerge. It is important to note how Lambert constructs these crucial sections. He creates a double enclosure, in which he places the details of Baldwin’s habits in the mouths of the count’s enemies, and also textually frames his description within references to those enemies. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Nevertheless, rivals of him and us, as though they have spoken the truth, reproach him with this... And accordingly they add true things, as though not differing from the truth, and they try to convict him, and now more or less do convict him, on the grounds that the intemperate excitement of his loins in unbearable lust stood out in him from the first stirrings of adolescence all the way to the aged state. [Ch. 89] Indeed, as they say, he burns for young girls and especially virgins, so that neither David nor his son Solomon is believed to be his parallel in the corruption of so many young girls, nor even Jupiter, to the extent that he was concerned with girls. These things toward him and toward us the maligning rivals [say]. But let it be distant from the minds of the discreet that they should accept or agree that our enemies, repeating mocking, wrinkled grimaces at us, at any time might be or might be called our judges.⁴²

In effect, Lambert distances himself rhetorically from his account, a technique that does not lend itself to an understanding of the chronicle as a publicity instrument.

Rather than the ‘laudatory account’ Duby sees, it is likely that Lambert was providing a sort of anti-mirror for the young Arnold of Guines, an example for him (and future generations) *not* to follow. This anti-exemplum strategy appears throughout the work on other topics, particularly excessive largesse.⁴³ That Lambert ends the section about

⁴¹ Duby, *Marriage*, 93.

⁴² Lambert, ch. 88-89, 603.

⁴³ For a good example of Lambert’s view on prodigality, see ch. 18, 570-571, in which he links Count Ralph of Guines’ (died c. 1036) excessive spending,

Baldwin's affairs on a note of embarrassment about the vast number of his patron's illegitimate children further suggests that his own attitude was not entirely favourable. Lambert was not acting as Baldwin's publicist in mentioning his non-marital sexual activity.

Stepping back for a moment from the questions of form and style, there are hints in Lambert's chronicle that suggest that the church's view either affected the aristocracy, or permeated the society even at the level of the local clergy. Lambert takes care to show that the non-marital sexual activities of the men took place either prior to marriage or after their wives' deaths. Count Manasses' affair with the unnamed girl from Guines is presented in the chapter preceding his marriage to Countess Emma of Tancarville, the affairs of Arnold I of Ardres with girls from Saint-Omer and Boucres occur five chapters before his marriage to Matilda, and Arnold II of Ardres' several affairs in England come ten chapters before his marriage to Gertrude.⁴⁴ The narrator explains that Arnold III's exploits occurred 'before he married the noble Petronilla',⁴⁵ and details about Baldwin of Ardres' sexual escapades are found five chapters before his marriage to Beatrice of Bourbourg.⁴⁶ Even Baldwin II of Guines is presented as having his affairs after Countess Christine's death, as though he consoled himself upon the departure of his beloved wife by giving free rein to his sexual desires.⁴⁷ Lambert's concern to establish the non-adulterous context of the noblemen's sexual license suggests a measure of respect for the church's teachings about marriage and fidelity.

Although Duby recognizes that the affairs Lambert reports were not during the men's marriages, he argues that Lambert does not talk about

unpopularity with the people, and untimely death. Shopkow observes that '[t]he whole question of living nobly, for Lambert, seems to revolve around the question of prodigality, which he condemns repeatedly, vociferously as it applies to more historically remote figures, and quietly in relation to more contemporary figures'. Shopkow, 'Introduction', 17.

⁴⁴ For Count Manasses, see Lambert, ch. 34 and ch. 35, 579. For Arnold I of Ardres, see Lambert, ch. 105, 612 and ch. 110, 614. For Arnold II of Ardres, see Lambert, ch. 113, 615 and ch. 123, 622.

⁴⁵ Lambert, ch. 134, 628.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, ch. 134, 628 and ch. 139, 632.

⁴⁷ For Baldwin's great love for Christine, see Lambert, ch. 86, 601, which describes his serious illness upon the death of the countess. For the many children Baldwin fathered 'after Countess Christine of Guines died and was buried', see Lambert, ch. 89, 603.

similar affairs during their marriages because ‘it was not considered seemly to mention it.’⁴⁸ Such a view finds support in Gislebert of Mons, who relates that ‘in any man it is rarely found that he might turn his attention to his sole wife alone and be content only with her.’⁴⁹ Duby interprets this passage as disparaging the virility of Count Baldwin VI of Hainaut, remarking that ‘Gislebert clearly regards this fidelity as a weakness rather than a virtue, a laughable defect in such a highborn lord.’⁵⁰ Yet Gislebert’s otherwise almost-total silence on the subject of non-marital sex suggests that the passage should be read as praise. Even Lambert’s text is vague enough about Baldwin II of Guines, whose ‘unbearable lust stood out in him from the first stirrings of adolescence *all the way* to the aged state’, to introduce some doubt about Baldwin’s fidelity to his wife.⁵¹

The value of marriage

Whether or not the married nobles of Guines and Ardres actually did have sex with other women cannot be determined with certainty from reading Lambert’s chronicle. What Lambert accomplishes through his reassurances about the non-marital character of the men’s sexual exploits is, in effect, a validation of fidelity to the marriage bond. Renart’s works as well suggest the influence of the church’s teaching on adultery upon noblemen’s sexuality. As J. Baldwin has noted, marriage is the ultimate end of each of Renart’s stories, effectively concluding any illicit sexual activities by the protagonists.⁵² The *Roman de la rose* opens with a hunting scene that features Conrad and his knights in full pursuit of non-marital sex, and Renart says the emperor ‘knew fully the turns of love.’⁵³ The lyrics placed throughout the romance, many of which are uttered by Conrad as he pines for Liënor, serve as a vehicle to express sexual desire.⁵⁴ Yet, Renart makes marriage, not

⁴⁸ Duby, *Marriage*, 96.

⁴⁹ Gislebert of Mons, *La chronique de Gislebert de Mons*, L. Vanderkindere ed. (Brussels 1904) ch. 123, 192. Our translation.

⁵⁰ G. Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York 1983) 264.

⁵¹ Lambert, ch. 88, 603. Our emphasis.

⁵² Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 72-73.

⁵³ Renart, *Roman*, line 161.

⁵⁴ Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 151.

sexual conquest, the climax of the plot. While Baldwin probably is correct in arguing that Renart's promotion of marriage was in line with aristocratic interests in lineage and succession, the moralizing influence of the church was likely at work as well.⁵⁵

The fact that Lambert talks about non-marital sex, openly and frequently, especially in contrast with more reserved writers such as Gislebert of Mons, is what makes his text so attractive for Duby.⁵⁶ Yet, when such a wealth of information appears, seemingly on a silver platter, it is necessary to account for why it is there at all. What purpose did these anecdotes serve? If Lambert wanted to impress his patrons, who had shown themselves to be pious Christians through extensive gifts to the church and through participation in crusades, why broadcast their sinfulness?⁵⁷ If their behaviour was, on the other hand, commonly accepted for the nobility, why is it almost entirely absent from other contemporary chronicles?

An answer lies at the intersection of gender and power. One of the ways in which a man could demonstrate his masculinity was in the siring of children. Whenever Lambert tells of an affair, he invariably includes details about the child it produced, just as he does when he discusses the marriages of the county's noblemen. If there were non-marital liaisons that did not result in offspring, Lambert says nothing of them. His emphasis, therefore, is as much on the child as on the sex act, and while both served to shore up a man's masculinity, the fathering of children was undeniable proof of virility.

Seen in the political context of the Franco-Flemish borderlands in the early thirteenth century, the combination of sexual practice, masculinity, and power becomes even more illuminating. Guines was located along a disputed border between the counts of Flanders and the King Philip II of France, and the ongoing conflict between these forces encouraged lesser

⁵⁵ Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 73.

⁵⁶ Duby, *Marriage*, 84.

⁵⁷ Lambert records many demonstrations of piety by the nobles of Guines and Ardres. For a few examples, see: ch. 30, 576-577 (Count Baldwin I of Guines founds the monastery of Andres) ch. 75, 596 (Count Baldwin II of Guines establishes the chapel of St. Catherine at La Montoire) and ch. 115, 616-617 (Arnold I of Ardres builds the church at Ardres and places canons there). In addition, Arnold II of Ardres, his illegitimate son Anselm, and Baldwin of Ardres travelled to the Holy Land as crusaders (see ch. 130, 625-627, ch. 113, 613, and ch. 141, 633, respectively).

magnates, such as the count of Boulogne, to harass the county.⁵⁸ This situation was complicated even more by the county's long-standing ties to England, which placed it in the middle of the many struggles between Philip II and the English kings.⁵⁹ Arnold II of Ardres served with William the Conqueror in England, Count Manasses of Guines married an English countess (Emma of Tancarville), and Baldwin of Béthune, who had served with King Richard, succeeded to the county of Aumale through Richard's intervention. The county of Guines was thus subject to multiple conflicting political forces, a position which required an array of strategic responses.⁶⁰

In the midst of such a state of affairs, Lambert set out to write a family chronicle for a patron whom he says he had offended. The resulting text performs a double movement, at once moralizing and valorising. Under the influence of such Latin authors as Andreas Capellanus and John of Salisbury, Lambert sought to instruct Count Arnold, one of his patrons and the son of the unrestrained Baldwin II. At the same time, however, he included many illicit sexual exploits in his narrative, a move which has the effect of underscoring the virility of the county's noblemen. Lambert shows that the noblemen who made up his patrons' ancestry had acted manfully throughout their history, beginning with Siegfried in the mists of the tenth century. One proof of this virility was in children, and the noblemen of Guines and Ardres had these in abundance. That some were conceived outside the bond of marriage, and thus as a result of sin, was less important than their role as symbols of masculine power. Ultimately, Lambert's details in support of the virility of the noblemen of Guines and Ardres served to show that the counts deserved to retain authority over their county, without undercutting the idea of marital fidelity.

⁵⁸ Shopkow, 'Introduction', 30-32.

⁵⁹ For more on the connections between Guines and England, see Freeman 'The Lords of Ardres', 1-31. For the continuing wars between France and England during this period, see J. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1986) 19-20 and 77-100.

⁶⁰ Gabrielle Spiegel has shown that the Franco-Flemish nobility commissioned a new kind of history, the vernacular prose chronicle, when presented with social pressures from the merchant class of the towns and political pressures from the French crown. Their response was part of an effort to shore up their own position in a changing world. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*.

Conclusion

It should be apparent by now that there was significant tension between varying ideals in thirteenth-century Franco-Flanders. The church taught that non-marital sexual acts were wrong. Yet Lambert, and presumably the aristocracy for which he wrote, reports mostly without criticism that unmarried noblemen did as they pleased, when and with whom it pleased them. Lambert wrote that the free-spirited sexuality of the unmarried noblemen was 'usual for those of youthful age.'⁶¹ Gislebert extended such behaviour past the marriage vow when he commented that faithfulness to one's wife alone was unusual. Renart's Conrad was an experienced lover long before he turned his affections toward Liënor. It is tempting to conclude that aristocratic men were prepared to ignore the church completely on the matter of their sexual practices. Indeed, one could push the evidence a bit further and claim that noblemen actually celebrated their sexual prowess, and that non-marital sex was an expected part of noble culture.

However, the many complicating factors of Lambert's *History* show that the long-standing argument for a double standard of sexual conduct requires modification, particularly in terms of the distinction between pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations. Lambert's efforts to establish the non-adulterous context of the sexual practices he records, suggests that there was at least some adherence within aristocratic culture to the church's teachings on sex and marriage. Yet this theme exists alongside a valorising element, which works to reinforce the noblemen's masculinity and authority by emphasizing their fertility as much as their sexual prowess. Thus, even as the chronicle reveals a limited acceptance of the church's views on sex, it also demonstrates defiance of them, and in doing so, hints at the complexity of aristocratic ideals and practices regarding the church, sex, marriage, masculinity, and power.

⁶¹ Lambert, ch. 105, 612.