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Benjamin Wright  
*Western Michigan University*

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## RITUAL, CULTURE, AND POWER: POLITICS AND THE SHRINE OF NOTRE-DAME DE CAMBRON, 1322-1329

By Benjamin Wright  
 The Medieval Institute  
 benjamin.a.wright@wmich.edu

Does religious ritual transform political identities? Political identities often rise out of culture; and cultures in turn are shaped by the countless manifestations of religious ritual. It should come as no surprise that this triangle of ritual, culture, and power is used as a tool for the construction of the homogenous political identities upon which nation states are created. The case study of the religious cult center of Notre-Dame de Cambron, a 14<sup>th</sup> century pilgrimage shrine in Belgium a few miles from the French border, provides one example of this triangularity. In the midst of its bicultural region, Cambron's shrine illustrates how religious ritual homogenizes diverse cultures and transforms political identities in borderlands.

Cambron's bicultural context has long sought political homogeneity. Belgium was born as a nation by treaty in 1830, incorporating a diversity of cultural identities under one government. This hybrid state, constructed in the interests of French and German diplomacy, was always an uneasy product of cultural contact and fusion. Among the numerous regional identities, the two main cultural groups of Belgium are formed along a linguistic plane: Germanic speaking Flemings and Francophone Walloons. These linguistic divisions are predominantly north/south, but are not completely geographical and many regions host sizeable linguistic minorities. This rolling topography of culture stands in contrast to the otherwise flat geography and attempts to level power imparities are troubled by disputed questions over identity and culture.

Such debates are not merely the constructions of contemporary politics, however. The history of such contacts and confrontations are coeval with the recorded history of the region. The Walloon scholar Henri Pirenne characterized the early history of Belgium as a contact zone between cultures. At the beginning of the Roman period, the region was inhabited by the Celto-Germanic tribe known as the *Belgii*, namesakes of the present day country of Belgium, and centuries of Roman colonization created a bi-cultural Gallo-Roman society. Later, Germanic migrations deposited yet another layer onto the strata of cultures constituting the political environment of the region.<sup>1</sup>

This plasticity of culture and identity has long presented the opportunity to shape the political identities through the manipulation of ritual and culture. Peter Arnade's groundbreaking study of ritual in the civic life of 15<sup>th</sup> century Flanders is the first work to analyze public culture and political identity in the medieval Low Countries. Arnade discusses Flanders under the house of Burgundy, beginning in 1384, and traces the evolution of civic processions and ceremonies under these counts over the following century. The scope of Arnade's monograph therefore limits the analysis to predominantly 15<sup>th</sup> century rituals, most of which have origins going back before the arrival of the counts of Burgundy.<sup>2</sup>

This study follows Arnade's approach to the ritual acts of the late medieval Low Countries, yet pursues this analysis to the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the first docu-

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1 Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 7 vols. (Brussels: Lamartin, 1899-1932).

2 Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

mentary evidence of public rituals begins to emerge. First, a brief introduction to the political and cultural history of the region will provide the context for the legend of the cult at Cambron. Within this tragic story are narrative difficulties, necessitating a return to the political context, providing an opportunity for an historical analysis of the political context which will dissect the triangularities of ritual, culture, and power to reveal the political motivations and implications for the events narrated in the legend. By examining these implications, this paper will demonstrate how ritual, culture, and power, are interdependent causes and effects in the process by which societies are both the constructed and constructors of themselves.

#### The Political Background of Hainaut

The monastery of Cambron exists in the province of Hainaut. Hainaut the province was formed during Belgian independence from the part of the medieval County of Hainaut that was not claimed by France. The county of Hainaut was formed over a thousand years ago from the union of several ancient Frankish regions, in the border region known as Lotharingia. Lotharingia's border identity was formed in 843 by Charlemagne's grandsons as a third state dividing what would become the modern countries of France and Germany. After the death of the eldest grandson a few years later, his territories became the object of contention between his remaining brothers' French and German speaking kingdoms for over a millennium. Hainaut's position in this no-man's-land shifted numerous times between French and German rulers. From the beginning of the 10th century, Hainaut had retained strong connections with the German, East Frankish rulers, but there were several periods when the rulership of Hainaut was united with a French vassal, the count of neighboring Flanders, which was partly in Lotharingia and partly in France.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the 13th century, Flanders and Hainaut were united under one house. The last ruler of this dynasty, Margaret of Flanders, presented a unique problem of succession. Before becoming countess, she married Bouchard d'Avesnes, a knight of Hainaut. Margaret had a son, John, by this marriage. Margaret's older sister, then countess, opposed Margaret's marriage to Bouchard, and had it annulled by the pope in 1215, forcing her sister to marry William II of Dampierre, a French Nobleman. Margaret had another son by her second marriage, William III. Upon becoming countess of Hainaut and Flanders, Margaret disinherited her eldest son John on account of the questionable legitimacy of his birth. John responded by seeking the support of his brother-in-law, William of Holland, who was also recently elected as German Emperor. The conflict that ensued continued for over a half century, fueled by the political ambitions of the French king and German emperor.<sup>4</sup>

The resolution to this conflict came shortly before the events of Cambron. The heir of the Dampierre line, Louis de Nevers, who had lived his entire life in France, had inherited his grandfather's title to Royal Flanders in 1322. Louis pursued a much more obsequious course towards his French sovereign than his grandfather Robert had, and agreed to the

1 Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 7 vols. (Brussels: Lamartin, 1899-1932).

2 Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

3 For a broader history of Hainaut and the medieval Low Countries more generally, see Henri Pirenne's seven-volume *Histoire de Belgique* or Peter Blok, ed. *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 15 vols. (Haarlem: Fibula van Dishoeck, 1977). For an English language source, albeit oriented towards Flanders, David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London: Longman, 1992).

4 Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 1:235-255 and M. Vandermaesen, "Vlaanderen en Henegouwen onder het Huis van Dampierre 1244-1384," in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 2:399-440.

French King's demand that he end the war between Flanders and Hainaut. On March 6th, 1323, Louis entered into a pact with William, heir of the d'Avesnes and count of Hainaut, ceding to William every title Louis might claim in the county of Hainaut, for which William in turn agreed to disclaim any interest in Flanders. By concluding this treaty, the King of France engineered the cultural division of these regions and ended a half-century of war.<sup>5</sup>

#### Cambron and the Religious Significance of Legitimacy

During the year 1322, Count William sent out one of his sergeants on a mission, a man also named William.<sup>6</sup> The coincidence of their names was not accidental. William the Sergeant was born with a Jewish name that was forgotten upon his conversion. At his baptism, he took the name of his sponsor: Count William.<sup>7</sup> Before becoming his baptism, William had emigrated to Hainaut sometime after 1306, the year in which the King of France expelled all Jews from the Kingdom and seized their assets in an attempt to shore up a major financial crisis. William's name first appears in a charter from the city of Mons, the center of civil administration for central Hainaut in 1310.<sup>9</sup> From continued appearance in charters, several facts about William are known: First, he spans the gap between two major waves of Jewish immigration to Hainaut, the first beginning in 1306-1314, and the second from 1322-1326.<sup>10</sup> During the period from 1314-1322, the Jews in France were briefly welcomed back by Philip the Fair's son, and it appears that most of the Jews in Mons took him up on his offer: William is the only Jew attested in charters in the City of Mons for that period, and the names from the first wave are different from the names of the second group of immigrants.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless,

5 Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 2:3-26 and M. Vandermaesen, "Vlaanderen en Henegouwen onder het Huis van Dampierre 1244-1384," 2:399-440.

6 The documentation for the events of this episode as reported by the monks is gathered from several sources. In every case, minor variations in the reporting of what allegedly took place casts the account in a skeptical light. The earliest report, albeit lacking certain details, is John XXII's letter (translated below), dated March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1329, Arnold Fayen, *Lettres de Jean XXII (1316-1334): Textes et Analyses*, 2 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1908), 279-281. The earliest historical accounts are scattered throughout chronicles of the period. Guillelmus Procurator mentions it already in the 1330s and Jean de Beka and Guillaume Heda record it by 1346. The story also features in Francois Vinchant's extensive *Annales de la Province et Comté d'Haynau*, (Mons: Jean Havart, 1648), 326-328. More recently are Theophile Lejeune "La vierge miraculeuse de Cambron" *Annales du Cercle Archéologique de Mons* 7 (1867):67-95 and Félix Hachez, "La littérature du sacrilège de Cambron" *Annales du Cercle Archéologique de Mons* 27 (1897): 97-152.

7 John XXII's letter elliptically states that he "falsely" received the name of William ("nomen Willelmificti recipiens") but the Francophone Vinchant reports that the count was his patron and sponsor in baptism, *Annales de la Province*, 326.

8 William Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 179-251.

9 Waelput has carefully studied the charters in published and archival sources, noting the existence of two distinct waves of Jewish immigration to Mons. Gerard Waelput, "Les Juifs à Mons au Moyen Âge" *Le Moyen Âge* 107 (2001), 293.

10 Waelput, "Les Juifs à Mons," 290-294.

11 Philip V of France briefly readmitted the Jews of France to their homes from 1315-1322. See William Jordan, "Home Again: The Jews in the Kingdom of France, 1315-1322." in *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, Frank Akehurst and Stephanie Van D'Elden, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997):27-45. Records of William the Jew's presence during this intervening period are mentioned in Waelput, "Les Juifs à Mons," 507-508.

further charters indicating his status as sergeant, and payments to him from the count make it clear that he probably found permanent employment in his patron's retinue.<sup>12</sup>

William's business on behalf of the count took him across the county, and in 1322 he was engaged in business near the town of Chièvres, about a mile from the monastery.<sup>13</sup> Along his way, William stayed at the guesthouse of the monastery of Cambron, a member of the Cistercian order of monasteries. Among monastic houses, the Cistercians hold a unique position at the borders of cultures on account of their unique institutional structure. The Cistercian order, founded in 1098 as a single monastery, branched out in the early 12th century, founding hundreds of branches in France, Spain, England, Italy, and the German Empire by the middle of 12th century in a process known as filiation. It is thought that as early as 1132, the order had acquired a grant of immunity that allowed its branches to operate with a degree of independence from local authorities that would enable its monks to operate across political and ecclesiastical boundaries with relative ease.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 13th century, succeeding papal privileges would grant the order autonomy from local regulations in a process it is tempting to compare to the immunity from local laws enjoyed by many multinational corporations today.<sup>15</sup> In place of these local customs, the Cistercians held meetings every few years at their motherhouse of Cîteaux, in the heart of French Burgundy. These meetings, dominated by French abbots, would decide on the issues faced by the order as a whole, and exerted a tremendous influence in shaping the cultural identity of the individual monastic houses.<sup>16</sup>

12 Waelput, "Les Juifs à Mons," 291.

13 Lejeune says the exact location of the business was "Herimelz, près de Chièvres" but I have been unable to locate the geographical location of Herimelz. Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 69.

14 The early privileges of the Cistercian order and later confirmations are well represented from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on in collections of cartularies such as Cambron's. Jean-Jacques De Smedt's edition, *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Cambron*, (Brussels: Hayez, 1869), follows an original 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript in reproducing ninety such privileges granted from between 1172 and 1351. More specialized documents were also produced, often copied with other institutional texts. Two examples of this type of documentation are held by Western Michigan University as a part of the Dom Edmund Obrecht manuscript collection, manuscript 13 (a 16<sup>th</sup> century copy of the *privilegia* and other legal texts appended to a 15<sup>th</sup> century copy of Usuard's *Martyrology*) and manuscript 22 (a 15<sup>th</sup> century copy of the *privilegia* with other legal texts).

15 Privileges such as Alexander IV's confirmations in 1256 granted numerous immunities to the monastery, such as requiring all litigation against a monastery to also be addressed against the order corporately, or the right to construct churches on lands owned by the monastery without the privilege of the local authorities. De Smedt, *Cartulaire de Cambron*, 53-61.

16 These meetings were first held in the early 12th century and continued to meet every few years to address important developments in the order and promulgate the public decisions of the gathered abbots. The collected decrees of this council were last edited by Joseph-Marie Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab Anno 1116 ad Annum 1786*, 8 vols. (Louvain: Bureau de la Revue, 1933).

William's stay at the monastery was ill fated, however. The account of what happened was told by a single monk who claims to have seen the incident: Jean Mandidier, a lay-brother working in the monastery's carpentry shop claims he saw a miraculous incident: William the Jew was standing in the guesthouse in front of an image of the virgin Mary on the wall. Furious with rage, the Jew was spouting all manner of insults at the image for some time, then took his pike and struck the image five times, thrice in the face, and twice in the chest.<sup>17</sup>

Jean was enraged and readied himself to strike William with his carpenter's axe, but was stopped by another monk, Matthieu de Lobbes, who cautioned him that they should go and report the incident to the abbot. When they had told the abbot, Nicholas de Herchies, he gathered together a large group of monks and they confronted William. They found him still raging in front of the statue, but when they arrived, he saw that the statue had, miraculously, begun to pour forth blood from the wounds it had been dealt. Shocked, they asked William to leave, and he, raging, stripped out of his clothes and fled away from them naked.<sup>18</sup>

Or at least that is the story the monks told. Shortly after this incident, the abbot Nicholas contacted count William about what he claimed had been done, requesting the count to punish his sergeant for this sacrilege. William seems to have taken little note of the complaint about his official and appears to have ignored it entirely. The community at Cambron, however, had recourse to the resources of the order. Abbot Nicholas sent the brothers Jean and Matthieu, the monks who had been closest to the alleged incident, to Pope John XXII, one of the French-influenced Avignon popes.<sup>19</sup> The monks explained their story, but the pope found no reason why William the Jew should be punished the claims of only one eyewitness. Nevertheless, John decreed that if William were subjected to inquisition and incriminated himself, he could be sentenced for blasphemy on the basis of his self-incrimination.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to Hainaut with their papal order, Nicholas the abbot pressed the case against William and the count was forced to give up his sergeant to the torturers William braved this round of torture and interrogation and insisted upon his innocence. Because of his steadfastness in maintaining his testimony, he was released and resumed his work for the count.<sup>21</sup>

The monastery itself was stymied, but news of the alleged sacrilege spread. Over the next four years, nothing came of it, until the message reached an 80-year old retired blacksmith in the village of Estinnes, ten kilometers from the city of Mons and almost thirty from Cambron. This blacksmith, Jean le Flammens, had a vision of the Virgin who urged him to defend his lady's honor by challenging the unpunished sacrilege. Urged on by this apparition, Jean made his way to the city of Mons, where he demanded to see William the Jew. The bailiff who managed the city in the count's absence, tried to diffuse the anger of the situation, but Jean le Flammens insisted he was here to challenge William the Jew. At length, the bailiff convinced the old man to wait until the count himself returned to handle this matter. When William the count returned to the city the old man, the count, and William the Jew met to discuss the challenge. In a ritually charged gesture, the old man threw down his glove in front of William. William was reticent to engage his servant in this affair, but William himself allegedly picked up the glove.<sup>22</sup>

17 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 70.

18 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 70.

19 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 71. The decision to send an envoy to the Avignon Pope is a significant indication of Count William's perceived allegiances during the time of Papal Schism, an observation Pirenne supports on different grounds. Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 2:9.

20 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 71.

21 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 71.

22 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 72.

The day of the fight was set, and William the Jew came in, ready to fight. The old man also came, and the fighting commenced. Initially the younger William overcame Jean le Flamme, so much so that he was nearly prepared to give a deathblow to the old man. The count intervened and ordered both contestants to rest. Returning to the combat, the old man fought with renewed vigor and forced William to submission. Because William's guilt was proven by this trial by ordeal, he was immediately seized and bound. Tied to a stake, William the Jew, the count's loyal servant, burned to death that very same day.<sup>23</sup>

The "champion" of the Virgin, Jean le Flamme, set off at once on an impromptu pilgrimage to the monastery to present his Lady the baton with which he defeated William. Count William is also said to have made a journey to monastery, barefoot, in the fashion of a penitent.<sup>24</sup> After this spontaneous, symbolically charged ritual, the abbot of Cambron seized upon popular enthusiasm in a building campaign to create a shrine for the vindicated image. The humble stone structure was completed quickly, and within two years, the papal curia was being lobbied by none other than the King of France to grant an indulgence to those who would participate in the public rituals surrounding the cult of Notre Dame de Cambron. The answer to the King's requests came in a papal letter to the monastery in Spring, 1329:

To all the faithful in Christ who will read these letters, greetings: The glorious God, rejoicing in the glorification of his saints, takes even greater delight in the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because she, insofar as she became his mother, deserved to be placed higher than all the other saints in heaven. Indeed, our dearest son in Christ, Philip, the honorable King of France, took pains to bring this to our attention: a little while ago certain Jew, falsely receiving the name of William and the sacrament of baptism, had secretly been practicing Judaism under the cover of the Christian faith for a long time. One day, when he was present in Cambron, a monastery of the Cistercian Order, in the Diocese of Cambrai, he was wickedly compelled by a spirit and punctured a certain image of the glorious virgin painted on the wall with five blows. A little while later, the tremendous disgrace of such a detestable act continued to spread among the people, and this Jew, falsely claiming to be innocent and protected from this deed, remained too long unpunished by means of his false oath. And it came to pass that a certain Catholic Christian, of honest and praiseworthy life, Jean Flamme from Estines, a blacksmith of the same diocese, saw that there was no fitting vindication for so detestable an offense. Therefore, he provoked that Jew to a contest over this cause... he knocked down and vanquished the Jew, who, defeated, was tied to a stake in the same place and burned to death, before which he publicly confessed to the abominable crime. Thereafter, a chapel was constructed for the honor and worship of the glorious Virgin... Desiring therefore that this chapel be visited with fitting honors by the faithful in Christ for the praise and glory of almighty God and the reverence of the glorious Virgin, we assent to the devout prayers of the King, who petitioned us in this matter. Therefore, to all who truly confess, do penance, and visit the eight-day feast in person at the chapel, to them, by the power confided in us, we grant mercifully forty days indulgence every year from the mercy of almighty God and the mercy of Blessed Peter and Paul, his apostles. Given

23 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 73-76.

24 Lejeune, "La vierge miraculeuse," 76.

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at Avignon, March 22nd, 1329.<sup>25</sup>

### Stories of Ritual, Culture, and Power

The story of William the Jew, how he was protected by the count in 1322, but given up to his accusers in 1326, and whose death was declared a week-long holiday in 1329 is an example of the cultural influence the King of France had in the county of Hainaut, and in how he sought to use the triangularity of ritual, culture, and power to build a basis of political power in a region drifting away from the orbit of Francophone dominance. Politically, the handing over of William the Jew was a means of attacking William's sovereignty as ruler, and the ritual commemoration established in memory of the event was a cultural lightning rod, channeling the immense power of culture and ritual into the monastic space of the French-monastic institution of Cambron.

William the Jew's initial immunity from prosecution is understandable when the broader context of politics in the county of Hainaut is considered in respect to William's particular status within that polity. As both a Jew and a servant of the count, William was a protected person, and his submission to torture notwithstanding, a method all too often employed in the judicial procedures of the time, he was shielded from the powerful influence of his monastic enemies. Yet when William's protector ran afoul of the King of France, his enemies gained a powerful advocate by providing him with the cultural and ritual power that his political affiliations would not allow.

The legend of Cambron reports that William the Jew willingly accepted Jean le Flamens challenged to a judicial duel. Granted that William's status as a convert is exceptional, judicial dueling between Christians and Jews, is generally thought to have been impermissible. As with other persons exempted from the requirements of military service, Jews, together with

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25 "Universis Christi fidelibus presents litteras inspecturis salute. Gloriosus Deus in sanctis suis de ipsorum glorificamine congaudens, in veneratione B. Marie Virginis eo jocundius delectatur, quo ipsa, utpote mater ejus effecta, meruit altius sanctis ceteris in celestibus collocari. Sane carissimus in Christo filius noster Philippus, rex Francorum illustris, nobis significare curavit quod olim quidam judeus sacramentum baptismatis ac nomen Willelmi ficte recipiens et diutius sub christianitatis nomine judaizans, dum quadam die in monasterio de Camberone, Cisterciensis ordinis, Cameracensis diocesis, existeret, nequam inductus spiritu, quondam ymaginem ejusdem Virginis gloriose in quodam pariete depictam ibidem quodam ense quinque vicibus nequiter perforavit, quodque postmodum, cum de tam abhorrendo scelera contra dictum judeum aliqualis infamia in populo laboraret dictusque judeus, eo mendaciter asserente se facti hujusmodi inculpabilem et immune, per hujusmodi suam falsam negationem remansisset a predicto crimine diutius impunitus, contigit quod quidam catholicus christianus vite laudabilis et honeste, vocatus Johannes Flamens de Lestines, faber prefate diocesis, attendens de tam scelesto flagitio nullam vindictam fieri contentem, prefatum judeum super hoc ad certamen provocavit... divina cooperante gratia, judeum prostravit et devicit predictum et ibidem dictus judeus devictus et ligatus ad stipitem ut cremaretur, publice fuit confessus se oreductyn scelus abhominabile perpetrasset. Deinde vero ob honorem et reverentiam ipsius Virginis gloriose... quedam capella constructa extitit... Cupientes igitur ut eadem capella ad laudem et gloriam omnipotentis Dei ac honorem et reverentiam ipsius gloriose Virginis, a Christi fidelibus congruis honoribus frequentetur, ejusdem etiam regis, nobis in hac parte supplicantis humiliter... omnibus vere penitentibus et confessis... qui per octabas festivitatis easdem immediate sequentes cappellam ipsam devote visitaverint annuatim, quadraginta dies de injunctis sibi penitentibus... de omnipotentis Dei misericordia et beatorum Petri et Pauli, apostolorum ejus, auctoritate confisi, misericorditer relaxamus. Dat. Avin. 11 kal. Aprilis anno 1329" Arnold Fayen, *Lettres de Jean XXII (1316-1334): Textes et Analyses*, 2 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1908), 279-281.



women, serfs, and the clergy, would have fulfilled challenges to duels by means of an appointed champion.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, William's relationship to his Lord implies that he could expect the protection of his Lord's protection, and his acceptance of the duel indicates that he either refused the counts protection, in an attempt to gain recognition of an elevated social status and silence criticisms that he was a crypto-Jew, or was denied it in a severing of the serf-lord relationship. This question of legality addressed in the letter of John XXII, who comments that Jean challenged William to the duel "legally or perhaps illegally."<sup>27</sup> Whatever the case, the very fact of William's duel and the count's passive participation in it indicates a deterioration of the counts role in the social hierarchy. The King of France's support for cultural ritual which commemorates the weakness of his political rival is indicative of the deteriorating relationship between 1322 and 1329.

In 1322, the King of France was pursuing an amicable policy with respect to Hainaut in the months leading up to the 1323 between the counts of French Flanders and Imperial Hainaut. Yet after the treaty guaranteed official peace between the counties, William's loyalties drifted in the direction of Germany. William's sovereign, Henry of Bavaria made a politically sensitive request: to make a survey of the exact border between the kingdom of France and the Empire.<sup>28</sup> William, who had just been freed from the need to appease the King of France, complied. This survey, partisan as it was, could only serve to increase the lands owned by the Empire at the expense of those owned by the King of France.

Yet land was not the only property William was alienating from the King of France. According to the royal ideology expressed by the French monarchs, the Jews as a people were considered to be the personal serfs of the King. This theory had been first proposed in France by Philip the Fair in support of his desire to claim ownership over the property of Jews living in land of his vassals.<sup>29</sup> Concomitant with the status of serf was the commitment to protection, which explains the acceptance of this legal doctrine among the Jews themselves. In 1322 came the second expulsion from France, so the king would certainly not be bothered by a Jew's presence in the border region of Hainaut. Yet by 1326, influential Jews like William living successful and protected lives just a few miles outside of his borders made a living witness to the Empire's ability to effect protection which the Kingdom could not.<sup>30</sup> The tragic spectacle of William's public execution in 1326 also served as a terrifying warning to Jews who might think of shifting their loyalty to a lord other than the King. The annual commemoration of this holocaust would perpetuate this sense of fear and despair and would send the Jews living in the border regions back to the King who was alternately their protector and tormentor.

Yet the terror was also directed more broadly at the people influenced by and seeking to influence the count. Six months after the burning of William, a memorandum was issued by the count to all of his sergeants—the office previously held by William the Jew—instructing them that they were still under orders to collect all tax-

26 For the legal background to Jews as participants in judicial duels, see Bernard Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le monde occidental*, (Paris: Mouton, 1960), 362.

27 "licet forsā illicite," Fayen, *Lettres de Jean XXII*, 280.

28 The document containing this edict is published by Leopold Devillers, *Cartulaire de Hainaut*, (Brussels: Hayez, 1874), 185.

29 For Philip the Fair's formulation, see William Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 133.

30 William Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 244. *Ville de Mons*, 2 vols. (Mons: Hector Manceaux, 1882), 1:52-53.

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es and fees assessed by the count and the aldermen of the city of Mons, without exceptions.<sup>31</sup> Such an order is indicative of the difficulty the count had in collecting taxes after William's death, a severe economic impairment for a ruler. The execution also would have had an impact in matters of foreign policy. Count William was defeated on the eve of receiving an important delegation, including Queen Isabella of England, after she was banished from Paris by her brother, the King of France. Froissart's *Chronicle* begins with this diplomatic mission to William of Hainaut, in the summer of 1326, only a few months after the count's humiliating pilgrimage to Cambron. In the years that followed, the remembrance of this event through ritual pilgrimage would be of strategic importance in the conflict which would become the Hundred Years War.

#### Conclusion

The pilgrimage shrine at Cambron, and its accompanying Carnival-like processions were an artifact of local culture and religious devotion for centuries after their inception. After the French revolution, the abbey's property, including the memorial chapel, were seized during the revolution by looters, possibly from Chièvres, the village a mile away that William the Jew was visiting on the day his life was changed forever. Numerous decorations and commemorative objects in the chapel made their way to disparate places over the years. A statue of the Virgin carved for the chapel around 1550 was moved to the church of Sainte-Élisabeth in Mons. It was stolen from the church only a few years ago in 1998.<sup>32</sup>

Other traces of the past culture—booklets, medallions, engravings—have made their way across the world, including here in Kalamazoo.<sup>33</sup> There is no eight-day remembrance of the Virgin of Cambron today, at least as Pope John XXII described it in 1329. Forgetting is perhaps more convenient in an age that has enough of its own holocausts to remember. Just beyond the border of the past, we may feel safe from the clutches of yesterday's totalitarian monarchs, free from their strangling nooses of ritual, culture, and power, even elevated by our immigration to a new age of postmodernity that promises the tyranny of the past to have no authority in the present.

Yet ritual is everlasting. Even today, Belgium is a country of public festivals. One of the few Northern European countries with widespread Carnival-like celebrations, some would argue that these festive processions, sometimes known by their Flemish name, *Ommegang*, represent a quintessential ingredient in the construction of a Belgian national identity. For those who participate in them, they are moments when the power of ritual creates a culture that fuses the borders of the past and present, and crosses the boundaries of language. One need not speak French or Flemish today to see public ritual creating culture, and even constructing political identities.

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31 Charters 87 and 88, both dated October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1326. Leopold Devilliers, *Inventaire Analytique des Archives de la Ville de Mons*, 2 vols. (Mons: Hector Manceaux, 1882), 1:52-53.

32 Waelput, "Les Juifs à Mons," 506.

33 A copy of a commemorative publication, *L'Histoire Admirable de Notre-Dame de Cambron*, published at Mons in 1760 exists in the Cistercian Studies Collection at the Waldo library.