



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

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For completion by the student:		
Student Name: Catherine Clarke		
Module code: HPMS7004 Module title: Skills for medievalists/Past peoples, present societies: Research methods and skills.	Student ID number: 2016174	Educational support needs: Yes/No
Module tutor: Professor J Burton Dr H Webster Dr A Scott Assignment due date: 18.12.20		
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Commentary Assessment

King Louis VII and Adela of Champagne receiving their son Philip from Christ, from the Roman de rois.



Figure 1: King Louis VII and Adela of Champagne receiving their son Philip from Christ.
Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève, ms. 0782, f. 280 - vue 2

Taken from the *Roman des rois*, this image is from the manuscript that became the foundation of the *Grande Chroniques de France*. Extant in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, it is freely available online, in a digitised format. The original vellum manuscript, spread over eighty folios and containing thirty-six painted and gold-leafed, historiated initials and miniatures, was completed around 1274 and written in vernacular French. It is the history of France from earliest times until 1223 and was produced by a Benedictine monk. Gifted to King Philip III of France, by the abbey of Saint-Denis, it was intended as a guide to kingship, a demonstration of dynastic continuity, and a means of promoting and reinforcing the special bond between the abbey and the Kings of France.

The *Roman des rois* is one of two chronicles created by a monk, believed to be Roger Primat and would have been produced on the instruction of his Abbot, Matthieu de Vendôme. A monk, believed to be Primat, can be seen in the *Roman des rois*, presenting the manuscript to the abbey's patron King Philip III. However, it is likely that the actual commission would have been from Philip's father King Louis IX, who was to be canonised in 1297, some twenty-seven years after his death.



Figure 2: Primat presenting the Roman de rois to Philip III
Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève, ms. 0782, f. 001



Figure 3: Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme and Primat present the Roman des rois to Philip III.
Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève, ms. 0782, f. 326v - vue 1

Louis had been a successful king and under his leadership France had annexed the territories of Aquitaine, Maine and Provence, finally suppressing Angevin ambitions at the battle of Taillebourg in 1242. Considered to be fair and just, Louis created a wealthy, militarily strong and powerful France. He had taken the cross and lead two crusades, the seventh crusade in 1248 and the eighth in 1270. Louis considered his responsibilities as a Christian, to fight the growth of Islam more important than his responsibilities as king. Sadly,

shortly after arriving in Egypt, he contracted dysentery and died in August 1270, leaving Phillip III as his heir.

Whilst Louis was on crusade, Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme had acted as regent, illustrating the important relationship between the abbey of Saint-Denis and the monarchy of France. The abbey, dedicated to the patron saint of Paris and of France, had itself long enjoyed the special protection and patronage of the French monarchy, with a previous abbot (Sugar) also acting as regent whilst Louis VII was on crusade. Furthermore, the abbey served as the repository for the coronation regalia and *oriflamme*, and under Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme in 1264, the royal necropolis at the abbey was developed and enhanced. The *Roman des rois*, particularly through its use of miniatures, was constructed to highlight this close relationship and indeed, one such image depicts Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme as taller than Philip III, forcing him to look up to the abbot, as he and his monks dominate the scene.

The manuscript itself was designed, through its use of text and images, to provide Philip III with a model of kingship and reflected the concerns and agenda of its commissioner Louis IX. Tracing the lineage of French kings all the way back to the Trojans, through the Capetians, Carolingians and Merovingians, it highlights the good deeds and exemplary behaviour of Louis's ancestors, justifying his and Philip's dynastic rights and the virtues of their lineage. Where the actions of their ancestors had been less than admirable, the text and images were adapted to minimise their poor behaviour. One such example is where the rape of Helen is referenced in an image only through Paris's firm grasp of Helen's wrist, rather than anything more graphic.

Previous royal commissions had focused on Old Testament representations of kingship and the *Roman des rois* was a departure from this tradition, but it continued to maintain their central purpose. This purpose is emphasised in the French poetic colophon, at the conclusion of the manuscript. In this, Philip is told explicitly that the manuscript's purpose is to guide and inform him, providing moral certainty and an education in kingship and to further reinforce expectation of its use, it is here that the dominating image of Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme appears.

The text and images have particular focus on Charlemagne and Philip Augustus. The importance of the life of Philip Augustus, as Philip III's namesake, is shown by the inconclusion of three miniatures, rather than simple historiated initials. The first of these miniatures celebrates his birth and shows Philip being delivered by Christ into the arms of his parents from behind a heavenly cloud, whilst observers from the kingdom look on in prayer. It is a celebration of his birth; the longed for, male heir of Louis VII with his wife Adela of Champagne, that secured Louis's dynastic ambitions for the Capetian crown of France.

Adela was Louis's third wife, having had two previous marriages which failed to produce a male heir. Prior to becoming king in 1137, Louis had been married to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who had



Figure 4 : Adela of Champagne
Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève,

brought with her the duchy of Aquitaine. After fifteen years of marriage, Eleanor had only produced two daughters and their marriage was annulled, allowing Louis to marry Constance of Castille, in hope of a future son. This marriage was only to produce daughters too and not only that, Louis had to suffer the humiliation of Eleanor and her second husband, now Henry II of England, enjoying the security of the births of five sons and three daughters and the possession of Eleanor's lands. Hence, following Constance's death in childbirth in 1160, Louis quickly married Adela of Champagne, in desperate hope of a son. Even so, he had to wait until 1165 for the birth of his only son

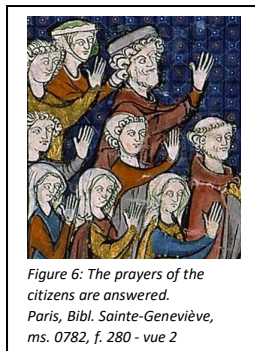
Philip, hence the miniature's depiction of Philip as a gift from God.

In the miniature, Christ can be seen lowering Philip from heaven, symbolised by the clouds, into the arms of his waiting parents. This highlights the miraculous nature of his birth and represents him as a holy gift to the monarchy and people of France. It enforces his divine right to rule and his sacred nature. Furthermore, the fact he is shown wearing the crown of France and carrying a sceptre, illustrates how from birth he was destined for kingship, although he was not to be crowned until 1179. Whilst his first coronation was as co-ruler with his father, owing to Louis's poor health Philip in effect, secured power over France at this time.



Figure 5: Christ lowering Philip from heaven.
Paris, Bibl. Sainte-Geneviève,
ms. 0782, f. 280 - vue 2

The arrival of the *Dieudonné* was also an answer to the prayers of the people of France. In figure six, the figures shown kneeling, hands praying at Philip's birth include noble men and women,



those of lower status and a member of the clergy. Adela and Louis are also shown kneeling in prayer, the whole nation united in a desire for a Capetian heir. The chronicler Gerald of Wales was studying in Paris at the time reports of church bells ringing and crowds cheering at the announcement of Philip's birth, such was the desire for a future king felt by both the King himself and wider society. The danger to France of the anarchy and chaos, experienced by England following the death of Henry I, must have been in forefront of the minds of citizen, nobles, and the church. It was not simply Louis who had been praying for the salvation and hope that Philip's birth offered.

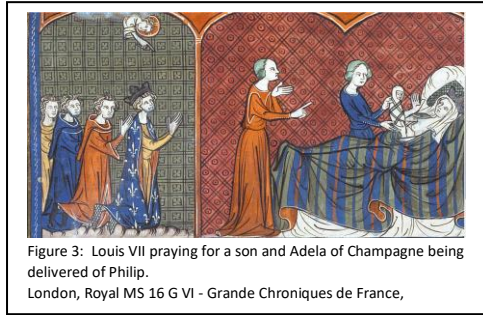
This lack of an heir had also had a political impact on Louis, in his relations with other powerful vassals, such as Henry II of England. With no heir to secure the succession, Louis had been forced into relying on the marriages of his daughters to secure his position, establish a succession and form alliances. The strategically important county of Vexin had to be surrendered as part of the dowry of his daughter Margaret, in the marriage arrangement between her and Henry II's heir, undermining his power and position as King. However, with the arrival of Philip, Henry II and the Angevin's lost their opportunity to inherit the throne of France, whilst France had the prospect of a strong and powerful future king of their own.

Philip was not to disappoint either. His reign, like that of the future Louis IX, was a successful one. Crowned sole King of France in 1180, he too raised France to become arguably the most powerful and wealthy nation in Europe. His own succession was secured by the birth of his son Louis, with Isabelle of Hainaut in 1187, by which time he had enriched the royal finances with the expulsion of the Jews in 1182. This enabled him to build an army, establish a well-equipped and formidable navy, and quash the threats from his own vassals and noblemen, including that posed by Henry II and his sons, thus creating a strong, secure France. Indeed, he used the infighting amongst the Angevin's to strengthen his own position, forcing Henry to return the dowry lands of the Vexin, following the death of his son and even pay homage to him for the lands that he held.

Philip's taking of the cross in 1189, to go on the third crusade alongside Richard I and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa is also reflected in the image of his holy birth and whilst he may have lost lands and battles during his conflicts with Richard during the 1190's, he was to recover them all and more during the reign of Henry's son John, so that by 1204 Normandy and much of Aquitaine was Philip's control. However, his reign was not without challenges and he spent several years battling for control of his lands with King John, in alliance with his nephew Otto IV, Holy Roman Emperor and Count Ferdinand of Flanders, after being out manoeuvred by the papal legate of Innocent III, Vandulf Verracio. Finally, victorious at the battle of Bouvines in 1214, Philip removed their threat to his territories for the remainder of his reign.

The sobriquet Philip Augustus was created by the chronicler Rigord, who wrote *Gesta Philippi Augusti*, during Philip's lifetime, and highlights the prestige that France had achieved under his rule. Furthermore, the image of his birth in the *Roman des rois* reflects the cult like status that surrounded the life of Philip Augustus by the reign of Louis IX and explains why Primat and Abbot Matthieu de Vendôme choose to emphasise his birth with the miniature. The *Roman des rois* became the foundation text for the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, the chronicle that continued to be added to, updated and reproduced in every more elaborate and decorative volumes, for the next three hundred years or more.

However, it is interesting to note that in later copies the depiction of Philip as *Dieudonné* has been replaced with less powerful images of his birth. For example, the manuscript held by the



British Library in its Royal Collection, contains an edition of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* that was commissioned by John II before he was crowned King of France, shows a much more domestic scene. Whilst a larger image than the first, the hand of Christ now points to the birth of Philip to Adela of Champagne and is shown as God answering the prayers of King Louis. It lacks the religious drama and the sumptuous gold leaf of the *Roman des rois*. Instead, this manuscript is full of images

of Philip's battles and campaigns, not highlighting the holy nature of his birth, his ancestry, and his destiny but rather his earthly successes and victories.

This contrast underlines the importance of the original image, in its original context. The image was used to not simply show the birth of a great ruler, but one who was considered a gift from God at the time the *Roman des rois* was written. By the middle of the thirteenth century, following the canonisation of Louis IX, there were other holy French kings to venerate and the military achievements of Philip Augustus were of more importance. Similarly, the original purpose of the manuscript, to guide Philip III to rule justly and wisely, had been lost and instead the purpose of the manuscript was now as an official historiography of France. Without the survival of this single manuscript, commissioned by Louis IX and shaped by the influence Matthieu de Vendôme, the philosophy of kingship that Philip III was expected to follow, and the predominating view of Philip's birth, would have been lost. This single image eloquently expresses the hopes of a father, a king, and a nation at the birth of Philip, marking the start of his successful reign and the role that God played in the realization of those hopes.

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