

## Introduction

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The keynote of the central Middle Ages is expansion, in so many different ways.<sup>1</sup> However, in order to comprehend these processes fully, we need to understand the chief protagonists: those who were actually carrying them out. This can bring us to the outlook and preoccupations – in a word, the ideology – of a vast array of nobles, many of whom hailed from the ‘Frankish core’ of north-western Europe. In Robert Bartlett’s view, the whole period can be characterized by an aristocratic diaspora of ‘adventurous, acquisitive [and] pious’ nobles, pursuing personal and dynastic advantage in regions far removed from their original homelands.<sup>2</sup> As Bartlett himself has pointed out, though, this is not simply a matter of centre and periphery. The concept is equally applicable to aristocratic social and geographical mobility within the Latin West itself, just as it is to what was happening out on the frontiers. The common thread is the construction of a ‘field of interest’ that could be pluralistic in scope, transcending the boundaries of any single political authority. A useful and oft-repeated analogy would be to describe the greatest medieval dynasties as being rather like multinational corporations. In the words of Norman Davies, ‘by the skilful use of war, diplomacy, marriage and money, and by the judicious diversification of their [affairs], [these families] acquired and relinquished lands, thrones and titles with the same unerring sense of self-aggrandizement that drives the great business empires of today.’<sup>3</sup> Provincial dynasticism and power could certainly be far more important, in purely practical terms, than the sorts of formal lordship and government to which they can appear to be subordinated. Indeed, it would not be going too far to emphasize the

<sup>1</sup> See D. Abulafia’s introduction to *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, v (Cambridge, 1999), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1994), 5–59.

<sup>3</sup> N. Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2005), i, 86.

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extent to which aristocratic ambitions shaped the parameters of the emerging European state system, rather than the other way around.<sup>4</sup>

In order to examine all of this, a brief and superficial analysis would not suffice. What is actually required would be a truly Herculean undertaking: it would involve combing through the fine details of *all* these figures (in so far as this is possible), in the hope of discovering the deepest wellsprings that drove their attitude and approach, and hence their conduct. It is fortunate, then, that modern scholarship has such a sophisticated grasp of the nature, uses and limitations of the various tools that are required to explore this field – that is, genres such as biography, dynastic history and prosopography.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in ‘Crusade Studies’ in the near future, the biggest advances will be made not just through archaeological discoveries and the publication of a plethora of Middle Eastern texts, but also through a much greater understanding of the links and connections that tied crusaders to each other, and to their kinsmen, friends and supporters back in the West.<sup>6</sup>

The attraction of all these genres lies precisely in the fact that they deal with the ‘hard currency’ of people’s lives, rather than a world of curious abstractions. Perhaps it is this, more than anything else, that explains why families and dynasticism have never failed to strike a chord in the hearts of the public at large. For the proof of this, one only needs to look at the consistent success of what might be termed ‘epic/dynastic’ books, TV shows and films – and it is worth noting that many of these boast a medieval or a fantasy setting. (That said, we do have to concede that dragons were as rare in the Middle Ages as they are today.) Dynastic history may well be at its most appealing when the family in question is exceptionally mobile, not only up and down the social ladder, but in geographical terms too. This provides an opportunity not just to avoid getting bogged down in a single locale, but also to survey a wide range of different regions through the prism of the same dynasty and its long-term development. In many ways, the Brienne family provides a classic example of this, over the course of a period neatly coterminous with the central Middle Ages (c.950–1356).

<sup>4</sup> For more on these themes, see D. Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900–1300* (Harlow, 2005); and T. N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship and the Origins of European Government* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Writing Medieval Biography: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, ed. D. Bates, J. Crick and S. Hamilton (Woodbridge, 2006); A. V. Murray, *The Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Dynastic History, 1099–1125* (Oxford, 2000); and G. Beech, ‘Prosopography’, in *Medieval Studies: An Introduction*, ed. J. M. Powell (New York, 1992), 185–226.

<sup>6</sup> For a perceptive overview of the recent historiography, with hints about future directions, see C. Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester, 2011), 216–46.

The Briennes have long been acknowledged as ‘une des grandes familles de la féodalité française’.<sup>7</sup> Their greatness lies not so much in what they did in their homeland – the county of Brienne itself, in the Champagne region of north-eastern France – but in what they achieved elsewhere. The dynasty exploded onto the international scene at the very end of the twelfth century. From then onwards, members of the family played a significant part in the politics of places as far apart as central Spain, Aberdeenshire, the Low Countries, the city of Florence, southern Italy and Sicily, the Latin empire of Constantinople, Cyprus, the Holy Land and Egypt. A short list of the main titles that the house of Brienne enjoyed, at one time or another, can serve to illustrate this. Within their old homeland of Champagne, members of the dynasty served as counts of Brienne and Bar-sur-Seine, and as lords of Ramerupt. Within France as a whole, they held the counties of Eu, Guînes and Montfort, the viscounty of Beaumont, and a large number of crown offices. Looking further afield, various branches of the family held estates within the British Isles. This included a claim to the earldom of Buchan and the constablership of Scotland, which they tried desperately hard to activate. Likewise, the Briennes provided not only a short-lived German empress and queen of Sicily, but also a famous line of counts of Lecce and a memorable ‘tyrant’ of Florence. In Greece and the former Byzantine sphere, the dynasty supplied a Latin emperor and empress of Constantinople, and also a duke of Athens, and they continued to claim the duchy for many years after it was lost. Similarly, the family long sought to assert its right to the crown of Cyprus – although, in the end, they were never able to acquire it. Finally, in the Holy Land, the Briennes sired not only several rulers of the kingdom of Jerusalem, but also a countess of Tripoli (and titular princess of Antioch), and a ‘martyred’ lord of Jaffa. Even this list, huge though it is, is far from complete – most obviously because we have not yet mentioned the bishops, abbots and abbesses that the dynasty produced as well.

For all their obvious importance, though, the Brienne dynasty stands in dire need of topical reassessment. It is true, of course, that they have not been completely neglected. The family features in so many developments that it has been touched upon by a great many scholars, in one way or another. For the previous great monograph on the dynasty, however, we have to go back to 1869, to Count Fernand de Sassenay’s *Les Brienne de Lecce et d’Athènes*. As the very title of the book indicates, though, de Sassenay was focused on one branch of the family alone: the senior line.

<sup>7</sup> See the full title of de Sassenay, *Brienne*.

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The others are brought in, as and when necessary, merely to enrichen the main narrative. What this means, in practice, is that a special chapter is devoted to a younger brother who did exceptionally well – that is, to John of Brienne, king of Jerusalem and Latin emperor of Constantinople – but there is hardly any mention of anyone else.<sup>8</sup> It is also worth mentioning that de Sassenay's effort was published before the foundations for all modern studies of the dynasty were laid by the distinguished French scholar, Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville. D'Arbois de Jubainville's oeuvre includes a seven-volume behemoth on the subject of the counts and dukes of Champagne, and also an important essay devoted to the early life and career of John of Brienne. Much like de Sassenay's monograph, these works retain their value to this day. So far as the Briennes themselves are concerned, though, d'Arbois de Jubainville's greatest contribution was his collection of the charters, issued by the senior line, which pertain to French affairs. This remains an indispensable research tool. However, it has to be said that there are a few slips in the text, and it has been possible to track down a number of documents that d'Arbois de Jubainville overlooked.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of his 'catalogue', d'Arbois de Jubainville lamented that the Brienne family 'is still awaiting its historian'.<sup>10</sup> It is amazing to note that this remains true, almost 150 years later, despite the work of a number of recent scholars who have tackled parts and aspects of the dynasty.<sup>11</sup> In this context, it is probably worth mentioning my own biography of John of Brienne.<sup>12</sup> To some extent, then, the aim of the present book is simply to cover the rest of John's family and bring the story of the Briennes up to date. However, there is much more to it than that. In the English language, at least, this book

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–117.

<sup>9</sup> For examples of this, see 14 n. 17, 23 n. 59, 27, 30 n. 103, 34 n. 6, 41, 96 n. 102, 131–2, 142 n. 1, 178 n. 178, 181 n. 189.

<sup>10</sup> He added, rather alarmingly: 'cet historien, nous ne sommes pas en mesure de le devenir'. ('Catalogue', p. 141).

<sup>11</sup> For a few of the most important recent works in the field, see E. Lebaillly, 'Raoul d'Eu, connétable de France et seigneur anglais et irlandais', in P. Bouet and V. Gazeau, *La Normandie et l'Angleterre au moyen âge: colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle (4–7 octobre 2001)* (Turnhout, 2003), 239–48; M. P. Lillich, 'Gifts of the Lords of Brienne: Gothic Windows in Champagne, Donors from Cyprus', *Arte Medievale*, 2nd series, years XII–XIII (1998–9), 173–92; J. Monfrin, 'Jean de Brienne, comte d'Eu, et la traduction des Météorologiques d'Aristote par Mahieu le Vilain' (vers 1290)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, year 140, no. 1 (1996), 27–36; M.-A. Nielen, 'Du comté de Champagne aux royaumes d'Orient: sceaux et armoiries des comtes de Brienne', in *Chemins d'outre-mer: études sur la Méditerranée médiévale offertes à Michel Balard*, ed. D. Coulon, C. Otten-Froux, P. Pagès and D. Valérian, 2 vols. (Paris, 2004), 589–606; and K. Polejowski, 'The Counts of Brienne and the Military Orders in the Thirteenth Century', in *The Military Orders*, vol. v: *Politics and Power*, ed. P. W. Edbury (Farnham, 2012), 285–95.

<sup>12</sup> Perry, *John*.

marks the first attempt at a complete study that examines *all* of the branches of the dynasty, and not just the senior line.<sup>13</sup>

However, this does beg an obvious question about the precise limits of this book. To put the matter as succinctly as possible: who was a Brienne, and where does the dynasty start and stop? Whilst it is obvious that the senior line of the family always thought of themselves as Briennes, it is worth debating how far the same can be said of the various cadet branches. It has to be admitted that, in the last resort, this leads us towards unanswerable questions about how far distant cousins ‘felt’ themselves to be Briennes. Yet there are ways in which we can begin to address this important question. Most obviously, we can look at connections between the lines of the dynasty, and how far this suggests that they thought of themselves as a unit. Furthermore, we can examine onomastic patterns, both of first names and of toponyms, to see what they reveal about cadet branches’ self-designation and identity.<sup>14</sup> We can also explore the manner in which such and similar dynasties constructed their ‘family memory’ to serve specific purposes.<sup>15</sup> Using these kinds of techniques, it is possible to argue that the Ramerupt branch of the dynasty saw themselves as Briennes far more than did, say, the earlier house of Bar-sur-Seine, or the descendants of John, king of Jerusalem and Latin emperor of Constantinople, at a later date.

The truth is that the nature of the central medieval aristocratic family is a tremendously difficult topic, given both wide variations across Latin Christendom as a whole, and changes over the course of the period. In so far as there has been recent debate, it has tended to revolve around the age-old question of whether we should regard ‘Frankish’ dynasties primarily in a narrow, patrilineal way, or as part of a much broader spectrum of kinship (‘lignage’ or *Sippe*, in other words). We are fortunate that the issue has been reassessed, in so much detail, in the Briennes’ homeland of Champagne. In his masterly study of the region’s nobility, Theodore Evergates has concluded that what we should see is not so much a lineal succession of lords but, rather, ‘the nuclear or conjugal family, [which] constituted the elementary form of the aristocratic family long before the twelfth century, and it passed through the millennial divide without

<sup>13</sup> It is sad to note that Karol Polejowski’s *Matrimonium et crux: wzrost i kariera rodu Brienne w czasie wypraw krzyżowych (do początku XIV wieku)* (Gdańsk, 2014) became known to me only when the present work was already in press, and so I have not been able to consult it.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent onomastic study, set within a crusading context, see I. Shagrir, *Naming Patterns in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> For the phrase, see N. L. Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps: The Crusades and Family Memory in the High Middle Ages* (New York, 2012).

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fundamental change'.<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Paul has taken up this idea and sought to develop it. From the 'conjugal unit', Paul argues, 'lines of affinity and kinship could be drawn in various ways', depending on an enormous range of possibilities – and this includes, of course, the immediate family's political aims and priorities.<sup>17</sup> It is worth stressing, however, that the central Middle Ages witnessed a large number of developments whose cumulative effect may be described as sharpening the sense of dynastic identity, privileging the male line in the process. In Champagne, at the very least, this would comprise the crystallization of coats-of-arms and other heraldic devices; the development of what we may call 'true' surnames, as opposed to short-term toponyms; and the progressive tightening of the laws and customs surrounding inheritance.<sup>18</sup> It is reasonable to ask whether, in the light of all this, we risk overstating the complexity and fluidity of dynastic structure. It is possible, at least, that the solution lies in a sort of 'middle ground', with agnatic linearity serving as the spine of the conjugal family, which, in turn, propped up far more extended kin groups.<sup>19</sup>

In this book, the general rule of thumb is to pursue each branch of the Brienne dynasty up until its extinction in the direct male line. It is worth emphasizing, though, that this decision has been taken primarily on pragmatic grounds. To put the matter as simply as possible: a judgement had to be made about where to call a halt to the analysis, and the end of the male line is usually the most convenient place to make such a break. Thus, for instance, the book comes to a close with the catastrophic developments of the 1350s, which witnessed the fall of the main surviving branches of the family: the senior line, and the house of Eu and Guînes. This is not the only paradigm, though, as we can see when we turn to examine the 'other' main branch of the dynasty, the Beaumonts, at almost exactly the same juncture. Whilst the senior line of the house of Beaumont struggled on, in France, only down to 1364, an English cadet branch survived for almost another 150 years, finally dying out in the early sixteenth century. However, it does not make sense to examine the latter period in detail, since – to all intents and purposes – the Briennes' story had really come to an end with the terrible events of the 1350s.

<sup>16</sup> Evergates, *Aristocracy*, 88.      <sup>17</sup> Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> See A. Baudin, *Les sceaux des comtes de Champagne et de leur entourage, fin XIe-début XIVe siècle* (Langres, 2012); Nielen, 'Du comté de Champagne aux royaumes d'Orient', 589–606; and Evergates, *Aristocracy*, 119–39.

<sup>19</sup> See C. Wickham's comments in *Medieval Rome: Stability and Crisis of a City, 900–1150* (Oxford, 2015), 211: 'the importance of female links in a kinship system that was, for the most part, structured by patrilineality'.

It is also worth stressing that this book is only concerned with the Brienne dynasty itself. Large numbers of people bore the name ‘de Brienne’, in one way or another, but often this was simply because they hailed from the territory in question. Accordingly, this book has little to say about the family ‘du Donjon de Brienne’ – that is, what seems to have been the clan of castellans who ran the Briennes’ ancestral stronghold.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, this study does not include the John of Brienne who was the subject of a memorable epitaph in the nearby monastery of Basse-Fontaine:

L'AN MIL DEUX CENS SOIXANTE ET XX / ET TREIZE, AN JANVIER  
ADVINT, / LE DIMANCHE APRÈS LA THIÉPHANIE, / QUE MESSIRE  
JEHANS DE BRIENNE, / CHEVALIERS ET BAILLY JADIZ, / TRESPASSA  
ET AU [ONT?] ICI MIZ: / GARDE DE FOIRES EN SA VIE / ESTOIT DE  
CHAMPAIGNE ET DE BRIE. / PRIONS POUR S'AME A JHESU CRIST /  
MERCY LY FACE ET NOS N'OBLIST. AMEN.<sup>21</sup>

Despite a great deal of optimistic guesswork, there is no clear evidence that either the Donjon family, or this John, were descended from the house of Brienne itself. Rather, it seems, they were subordinate to the ruling dynasty, and took the name from the region at large.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, this book does not cover a wide range of prominent individuals who, from time to time, have been erroneously regarded as members of the Brienne family. For instance, it is still sometimes claimed that a certain ‘Henry of Brienne’ was archbishop of Reims from 1227 to 1240. This was actually Henry of Braine, however, the brother of the count of Dreux – an easy slip to make.<sup>23</sup> A rather more obscure figure, who haunts the darkest recesses of dynastic studies, is a certain ‘Bohemund of Brienne’, sometimes described as the prince of Raška (in what is now southern Serbia and Montenegro). Bohemund’s daughter, or perhaps his sister, may have been the wife of the Venetian doge, Lorenzo Tiepolo – and, in this way, Bohemund could well have been the ancestor of Bajamonte Tiepolo, the leader of a failed *putsch* in 1310. However, this book has nothing to add about Bohemund, despite his curious

<sup>20</sup> See Roserot, *Dictionnaire*, i, 500. <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 133, 249.

<sup>22</sup> For the notion that they might have been cadets, see *ibid.*, i, 249, 500; and A. Baudin, *Les sceaux des comtes de Champagne*, 392.

<sup>23</sup> It is worth pointing out that the form ‘Braine’ is sometimes found, in French vernacular sources, as an alternative spelling of ‘Brienne’. See the *Chronique des comtes d'Eu*, in *RHGF*, xxiii, 443, which probably drew on *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims au treizième siècle*, ed. N. de Wailly (Paris, 1876), ch. 32. For a further example of confusion between the two families, see L. Böhm, *Johann von Brienne: König von Jerusalem, Kaiser von Konstantinopel, um 1170–1237* (Heidelberg, 1938), 70 n. 30, and *Catalogue des actes de Philippe-Auguste*, compiled by L. Delisle (Geneva, 1975), no. 2224.

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toponym, since the weight of evidence strongly suggests that he was not a member of the Brienne family.<sup>24</sup>

Although the broad outlines of this book are chronological, the structure of each chapter is different, so as to bring out the key arguments as coherently as possible. The opening chapter covers the obscure backdrop to the dynasty's subsequent, much greater days. Indeed, the first century of the family's existence is so shadowy that little can be done to reconstruct it. Thereafter, though, it is possible to begin to trace the dynasty's growth in importance as a regional power within Champagne, and the start of its involvement much further afield as a part of the crusading movement. The second chapter focuses on the Briennes' irruption onto the international stage at the very end of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth. It looks, by turns, at the principal architects of the family's rise: that is, Count Walter III; his brother John, king of Jerusalem and Latin emperor of Constantinople; and their notorious cousin, Erard I of Ramerupt. Although the Briennes were established as a major dynasty by the middle of the thirteenth century, the story threatens to become rather atomized at this point, since so many different members of the family were active in a wide range of different locales. The third chapter therefore considers the family's progress region by region. It starts in Champagne, and in France as a whole, before moving out into other parts of the Latin West, including the British Isles, the Low Countries, the Iberian peninsula and Italy. Finally, it turns eastwards, once again, to the Latin empire of Constantinople, Cyprus and the Holy Land. The fourth chapter examines how the rise of the house of Anjou fundamentally altered the rules of the game for the Briennes. The Angevins imposed a unity on so much that had previously been disparate, as the vast majority of the Briennes fell into line behind them. It is worth emphasizing the rewards and opportunities, but also the costs of such service. The final chapter seeks to demonstrate that although the Brienne dynasty effectively came to an end with the catastrophes of the 1350s, the first half of the fourteenth century should not be interpreted as the inexorable build-up to these events. This can be done by surveying the family's fortunes during the career of Walter VI, the last count of Brienne of the original senior line.

This book is not intended to be the 'last word' on the house of Brienne; quite the reverse. Instead, it should be regarded as an overview of the dynasty as a whole, which will allow other scholars to treat the Briennes

<sup>24</sup> L. Brook, 'Bohemund of Brienne, Prince of Rascia, Alleged Ancestor of Bajamonte Tiepolo', in *Foundations: Journal of the Foundation for Medieval Genealogy*, vol. i, no. 3 (2004), 200–7. There is also a reply by J.-F. Vannier in vol. i, no. 4, 300–1.

far more accurately, as and when they encounter them. Indeed, drawing on their own specific areas of proficiency, such experts may well disagree with some of the more contentious judgements that have been made here. However, this would not be a grave disappointment. If the book retains its value as a framework, and generates more discussion, then it will certainly have served its purpose.

A final note to cover a few ‘housekeeping’ chores. Turning, first, to the tricky business of names: despite my very best efforts, it remains impossible to close the fissure between common sense and consistency. Generally, I have employed the standard English usage, if there is one, and anglicized all French names (so ‘Philip Augustus’, not ‘Philippe Auguste’; ‘Walter of Brienne’, not ‘Gautier de Brienne’). If there is no standard English usage, or the name is not French, then it has usually been rendered in its modern form, in the original language. However, even this simple set-up can easily run into problems. For example, most French *literati* are best known, even to English speakers, according to the French version of the name (so ‘Jean de Meung’, ‘Mahieu le Vilain’, and so on). If this approach is maintained for all French authors, though, then we find that we have ‘Jean de Joinville’, who suddenly looks rather odd vis-à-vis all his kinsmen, friends, allies and supporters, whose names have been anglicized. Similarly, the French ‘de’, and the question of whether to translate it, has provided a perpetual headache. It is a relief to record that place names are normally much easier to manage. As a general rule, I have given them either in their most widely recognized form, or simply in their modern one. Whatever the faults of the system described above, it is hoped that it has the virtue of reading as naturally as possible.

All calendar dates have been adjusted, so that the year begins on 1 January. The maps are intended to cover a broad period, and hence the borders are always approximate. Likewise, the genealogies have been simplified. Since it is often very difficult to be sure about the precise order of birth, sons are usually placed before daughters. To save space in the footnotes, I have generally been content to cite by referring to the most convenient edition or collection. This will show where the originals are, which have, of course, been consulted whenever possible. Finally, with regard to pagination: it is worth noting that all Roman numerals are volume numbers, and all Arabic ones are page numbers, unless otherwise stated.

## 1 ‘Between Bar-sur-Aube and Rosnay’ (c. 950–1191)

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If there is one aspect of the history of the Briennes that cries out for further exploration and analysis, then it is their origins, in their homeland, up until their irruption onto the international stage in the early thirteenth century. Curiously enough, this subject has rarely been tackled in detail, not even by de Sassenay. This is partly because it can be obscure, and it is sometimes very difficult to pull the fragments together. Moreover, it is less obviously rewarding than the far-flung and dramatic developments that took place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Yet the family’s beginnings are crucial. In this chapter, then, the aim is to discover who the Briennes really were, and this also provides us with an opportunity to look in detail at their ancestral lands. In other words, this is not merely the backdrop. In many ways, these are the fundamentals for the dynasty’s subsequent, much greater days.

### The Mists of Time

We may begin by resisting all efforts to be precise about the very first counts of Brienne – that is, the Engelberts. Various attempts have been made to draw up a family tree for the early Briennes, covering the period from c. 950 to 1191. Yet in the present work, as Genealogy 1 makes clear, no such endeavour has been attempted for the Engelberts who preceded Walter I. There simply is not enough hard information about them to make such a genealogy worth trying. It is not even clear how many Engelberts we are talking about in the century spanning 950 to the 1040s.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, ‘Catalogue’, pp. 141–3; Roserot, *Dictionnaire*, i, 242, and intro. vol., part 3, no. 3 (Langres, 1942–8); M. Chaume, ‘Notes sur quelques familles comtales champenoises’, 281–3, in his *Recherches d’histoire chrétienne et médiévale* (Dijon, 1947); M. Bur, *La formation du comté de Champagne, v.950–v.1150* (Nancy, 1977), 142; *The Cartulary of Montier-en-Der, 666–1129*, ed. C. B. Bouchard (Toronto, 2004), nos. 28, 34, 36, 44 and 48; and, most recently, A. Baudin, *Les sceaux des comtes de Champagne* (Langres, 2012) 548–9.