The Prince and the Priestess: Artistically Elevating Charles de Valois' Authority in Fifteenth-Century France

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ABSTRACT

The Prince and the Priestess: Artistically Elevating Charles de Valois’ Authority in Fifteenth-Century France

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Charles de Valois (1446-1472) was a prince in fifteenth-century France. During his short lifetime, Charles endeavored to gain more authority while in conflict with his brother Louis XI, who was king. Although a minor political character in French history, Charles did demonstrate his power in several artistic ways. One commission by the young royal was a manuscript now known as the Hours of Charles of France. Two pages of this text, the Annunciation to the Virgin, are decorated with rich imagery and iconography used to exhibit Charles’ desire for greater authority. The manuscript has only been discussed stylistically, and therefore this thesis examines the content of these pages in terms of secular imagery, religious symbolism, and the prince’s connection to the priestly Virgin Mary. These aspects all relate to Charles’ display of authority.

To fully understand Charles’ propaganda, this thesis first examines secular imagery within the manuscript pages. The analysis of worldly symbols of power, such as knighthood, fashion, ornamentation, and architecture, present Charles’ desire for greater wealth and power. In addition, this thesis discusses the Virgin Mary in connection with the prince's political imaging. By looking at religious imagery that supports Mary in her role as priestess, this thesis considers how Charles attaches himself to her heightened power. Through both secular and spiritual characteristics, Charles’ authority was elevated during a period of political uncertainty and monarchical unrest.

Keywords: Charles de Valois, Virgin Mary, priestess, Hours of Charles of France, French Renaissance
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DEDICATION

To my brother, Josh, whose humor kept me sane.
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Introduction

Conspiratorial murders, blood thirsty wars, and cruel deception—all were vivid aspects of life in fifteenth-century France. In order to survive, nobles and royals alike found it imperative to demonstrate their authority over people and lands in a variety of ways. Artistic patronage, both large and small, became one of the most accessible means for just such a demonstration. Social station could be displayed and elevated through propagandistic messages within an artwork. Artists’ identities during this period are still generally unknown, but examining the patron-based narrative of their works gives insight into the significance and purposes of their art.

One such royal who used artistic patronage for political purposes was Charles of France (1446-1472), also known as Charles de Valois, the son of King Charles VII, and brother to King Louis XI. Having grown up during the end of the Hundred Years’ War and feuded with his brother over land ownership and wealth, Charles found it difficult to secure an authoritative status during his short lifetime. In order to establish himself as a prominent prince, Charles used art as an important tool for his pronouncements of power and ambition. This is particularly evident in his commission of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*, two manuscript pages within the *Hours of Charles of France* (1465) by an artist simply identified as the “Master of Charles of France” (Figure 1). These leaves from this unfinished manuscript exhibit Charles’ use of secular and religious imagery to elevate his authority during a period when his manipulative brother was unceasingly trying to strip him of his power.

Although previous scholars have yet to address anything beyond this manuscript’s formalistic aspects and basic iconography, I propose that these pages also convey a desire for

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power. The intent of most scholars has been to determine the specific artist of the manuscript, but it is my intention to decipher the meaning of these pages and how they relate to the patron’s objective. I assert that Charles commissioned this piece to illustrate his princely status and to justify his need for greater prominence. He does this primarily through his connection to and heightening of the Virgin’s power through priesthood authority in the manuscript. Research concerning religious manuscripts and their use as propaganda during this time period has not yet attributed any portion of that power to the Virgin’s priesthood, although it is evident in several works.² Thus the intent of this thesis is to argue that Charles used secular and religious objects in addition to Marian associations in order to elevate his status in the royal family.

This thesis is separated into four sections. The first gives a detailed description of the manuscript. The artist’s mysterious identity is briefly acknowledged, since it has been the sole purpose of scholarship regarding this manuscript. Evidence indicating Charles de Valois as the supposed patron of the Hours of Charles of France is also examined. Then, what is known of Charles’ life is discussed, with an emphasis on the struggles with his brother. These elements will set the foundation to understanding why Charles would have wanted this book of hours to enhance his power.

Section two examines the use of secular iconographical elements in the art that relate to Charles’ desire for power. A discussion of his use of royal objects, activities, and settings is critical. These elements are important to understanding Charles’ authority and how he identified himself as a member of French royalty. All of these features display Charles’ worldly power before delving into a spiritual power with which he wanted to be connected.

The third section relates to the religious aspects of the piece. The Virgin Mary is a particularly important figure in this manuscript. Charles seems to have encouraged the artist to elevate the Virgin to an even greater status than just her role as Mother of God. Through the use of costume, accessories, and significant objects around Mary, the artist puts her in the position of a high priest within the Church. In doing this, he aligns himself with her and hopes to assimilate some of her power.

Finally, it is important to understand the logic behind Charles’ selection of Mary as a symbol of power. In the fourth portion of this thesis, I discuss the reasons for aligning himself with a divine female. Examples of other French kings and princes taking similar female imagery and appropriating feminine qualities to heighten their authority are examined. Hence Charles’ visual strategies were not completely foreign during this era, and in this manner he absorbs the power and prestige of the magnificent Virgin.

The Manuscript

The **Annunciation to the Virgin** is filled with familiar signs that had been represented in previous depictions of the Virgin; however, some of the imagery is not as common. Mary is situated in a flamboyant medieval church, surrounded by other significant saints. She rests on an extravagant cushion while reading from an ornate manuscript. In front of her lie two empty vessels inscribed with Latin symbols. She is clothed in blue robes, while a priest, in a vestment of similar color, administers the sacrament directly above her. Another clergyman holds back

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3 The *Hours of Charles of France* currently resides in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris, but the pages of the Annunciation to the Virgin sit in the Cloisters Collection—an extension of the Metropolitan Museum. Nothing is known of the whereabouts of these pages from 1495-1904, but in 1905 they were acquired by Baron de Decker from Brussels, Belgium. In 1958 he contacted the Cloisters, asking $70,000 for the pages. He had claimed that they were created by Jean Fouquet, hence the large asking price. The original price was rejected since the artist was truly unknown, and after some negotiating, $30,000 for the pages was decided upon.
the veil which conceals the Eucharist, and many figures from the noble class walk towards the priest, in the process of partaking of the host.

On the opposing page, the Angel Gabriel kneels on the ground facing Mary, dressed in opulent garments and hailing the Virgin in his common greeting which begins: “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee.” Angels follow behind Gabriel with musical instruments, singing in celebration of Mary conceiving the Christ Child through the Holy Spirit. The angels are framed in golden architecture, but are also paired with a French hunting château situated in the background. Both pages are surrounded by text that alludes to the Virgin and Jesus Christ.

On the reverse of this leaf is another scene depicting Mary in the church. The Virgin is spinning or weaving golden threads with a multitude of angels observing her task. In the background, the same grand château is pictured, surrounded by vegetation. A frame filled with Latin script, relating to the manuscript’s patron, says “Charles of France, son of Charles VII, ninth Duke of Normandy, in the year 1465. Long may he live.” The same golden architecture found in the other two images bookends the entire page. Angels hold magnificent banners and a royal crest to complete the image.

Even though these leaves contain great creative talent, the artist has been difficult to identify. Two possible attributions are Jean Fouquet and the Master of the Munich Boccaccio, both of whom were working in the French court when the manuscript was designed. Unfortunately, these attributions have recently been refuted—mostly on stylistic grounds. Due to the sudden demise of Charles de Valois, the manuscript was left unfinished and only a few completed leaves of the book remain available for analysis. This lack of material makes the search for a concrete artist even more difficult. The artist has yet to be convincingly identified

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and so the Hours of Charles of France remains attributed to the unknown Master of Charles of France.\(^5\)

Although the artist continues to be enigmatic, Charles de Valois is the confirmed patron of this manuscript. It is possible the book of hours was commissioned when Charles was inducted as the Duke of Normandy in 1465 after imprisoning his brother, Louis XI, for a short period of time. One piece of evidence is the coat of arms, which contains the golden \textit{fleurs-de-lis} of France on an azure field, quartered with the two golden leopards on red ground, representing the Duchy of Normandy (Figure 2). The inscription around the border of the same leaf also states “Charles of France, son of Charles VII, ninth Duke of Normandy, in the year 1465. Long may he live.” Lastly, the French château \textit{Mehun sur Yèvre} stands prominently in the background; this was a favorite residence of the prince, who spent a substantial part of his youth in this castle (Figure 3).\(^6\) These details provide convincing evidence that Charles was in fact the patron of this book of hours.

Although the patron of this manuscript is known, little is written about his life. Charles de Valois was the youngest of fourteen children, born the twelfth of December in 1446 to King Charles VII of France (b. 1403; r. 1422-61) and Marie of Anjou (b. 1404; r. 1422-1461). As an heir to the French throne, Charles was in line behind his older brother Louis. His father ascended to the throne during turbulent times; England had claimed legitimacy to ruling France from a treaty Charles VII’s mentally-unstable father Charles VI had signed.\(^7\) Once the French

\(^5\) Freeman, 116.
\(^6\) Ibid., 111.
monarchy was stabilized and foreign contention seemingly over, war in the French Court erupted. Charles VII and his oldest son Louis, the future Louis XI, were in constant conflict with one another. It is even believed that Louis eventually poisoned his father, who died in 1461 at Mehun sur Yèvre. After their father’s death, it was thought that Charles would ascend to the throne since his brother had been exiled to the court of Burgundy; Louis took the throne nonetheless. Charles was instead granted the Duchy of Berry and became the Dauphin of France.

Charles was dissatisfied with these lands and felt cheated by Louis. At the age of nineteen, he organized a confederacy against his brother called the Ligue du Bien public (the League of Public Weal) which was assembled in the same year that the manuscript was commissioned. Charles was backed by some of the most powerful barons in France, such as Charles, Count of Charolais, the Burgundian heir, and Francis II, Duke of Brittany. Both were irate that Louis seized certain lands of theirs, which were awarded in the Treaty of Arras (1435), signed by the previous king. This led to the War of the Public Weal in 1465 which generated many difficulties for the new King Louis XI. The conflict ended after a decisive victory by Charles, which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Conflans (1465). With this treaty, Charles

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8 Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert, and Gabriele Keck, eds., Splendour of the Burgundian Court, (Brussels: Historisches Museum Berne, 2009), 178. In 1440 Louis joined forces with the nobles opposed to the military reforms put forward by King Charles VII. Despite this disloyalty, once the uprising had been quelled Louis was pardoned and made governor of the Dauphine. Following a final break with his father, however, Louis fled to the court of Philip the Good, where he remained until taking the throne in 1461. Those who believed the new French king would therefore look favorably on Burgundy saw their hopes disappointed: with great cunning Louis was eventually able to force Philip to return to France the towns on the Somme that had been given to Burgundy in the Treaty of Arras (1435).
9 Schindler, 86-88.
10 Freeman, 111.
was granted the much prized Duchy of Normandy. Unfortunately, this success was short-lived since a few months later Louis XI, through devious means, recaptured these lands.

Accounts by wealthy families describe this political uncertainty between these two brothers. Many people were attempting to play both sides of the conflict between Louis and Charles—indicating that Charles had as much political influence as his brother. Unfortunately, after many struggles between the two brothers, Charles died at the age of twenty-six at Bordeaux in 1472. His death insured that Louis’ major opponent was removed. It is speculated that Charles was poisoned by his brother after an attempt by the prince to marry Louis’ enemy’s daughter, Mary of Burgundy, but no concrete evidence solidifies this claim. Charles’ death led to a further reduction in major aristocratic hostility, cementing Louis’ hold on the French throne.

Two specific images further highlight the power struggle within this family. Both are possible portraits of Charles and his family members and are telling of this tumultuous time. The first is by Jean Fouquet, the favorite painter of Charles VII and his sons. In the manuscript page *Trial at Vendôme* (1458) (Figure 4) in the *Munich Boccaccio*, a scene is represented from the treason trial of Jean, Duke of Alençon, who was arrested in 1456 for conspiring with the English. Charles VII is centrally seated on a lavish throne and raised above all others in the scene. Charles de Valois, the favored son, sits to the king’s right, but an awkward space exists between the two figures. This void was allegedly meant for Charles VII’s son, Louis, who was at the

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12 Potter, 194. Several specific accounts of wealthy families are given in this source.
13 Freeman, 111.
14 Ibid.
15 Potter, 251.
time off “sulking” at the Duke of Burgundy’s court due to the hard feelings between him and the king. 17 The strain between Louis, his father, and Charles is thus quite evident in this scene.  

Another image that conveys a similar tension is the Adoration of the Magi from the Chevalier Hours, again done by Jean Fouquet (1460) (Figure 5). Charles VII, kneeling on a fleurs-de-lis tapestry, is in the guise of the head magus. The two other magi stand behind Charles VII and are conspicuously young; they are possible representations of his two sons, Louis and Charles. The background contains a battle scene of French troops sieging a château—creating a conflict in an otherwise peaceful scene. Nicole Reynaud suggests that this image symbolizes the apocryphal account of the three magi, who were rivals before seeing the star which led them to the Christ Child. In the scene, the viewer sees the conflict which preceded the magi’s reconciliation, which is represented by the bloodshed directly behind the Nativity of Christ. This reflects the contention between Louis, his father, and his brother when the manuscript was completed. The contrast with the conflict in the background and the peacefulness in the foreground might have indicated hope for eventual harmony between the three family members. 18 Unfortunately, even after the death of Charles VII, the rivalry between his sons was never resolved. Considering this historical framework, I argue that Charles de Valois commissioned the Hours of Charles of France in order to assert dominion over his brother.

Secular Imagery

Charles de Valois’ ownership of an elaborate manuscript in the fifteenth century conveyed a message of lineage and authority. Princely books of hours provided political links,

17 Marti, 178.
18 Inglis, 131-133.
were status symbols, and showed the personal piety of their owners.19 These books of hours were also considered to be fashionable accessories for one in a higher social station and would have been carried around for all to see—creating a private and public power symbol.20 Although Charles was not the King of France, his manuscript’s detailing and ornamentation reflect that of a king. The vast amount of blue, gold, and scarlet coloring identifies this piece as a royal work. Similarly, the double page image of Étienne Chevalier before the Virgin in the Chevalier Hours by Jean Fouquet (1452) (Figure 6), commissioned by Charles VII’s treasurer Étienne Chevalier, has similar decorative qualities.21 The family devotion to Mary is evident with the king kneeling before the enthroned Queen of Heaven and her Son. The figures are set in an ambiguous church setting, surrounded by angels. This work shows comparable attention to detail, particularly in the extravagant gold architecture and expensive coloring. The Hours of Charles of France uses formal aspects parallel to those of the Chevalier Hours, which serves to align Charles de Valois with his father the king. The stylistic aspects clearly alluded to Charles’ royal birthright.

Along with ornamentation, the clothing also contributes to the manuscript’s richness. In medieval France, a low class laborer would have been associated with “mangier du potage et des chos” (“eating soups and cabbages”) and “estre vestie d’un gros drap de villaige” (“being clothed with a coarse rural cloth”). In contrast, the high lords of France were regarded as the “fourés caherons” (“furred hoods”).22 The language employed in this culture reveals that clothing was a significant sign of one’s position in society. This is evident in the Annunciation to the Virgin. In this piece, Gabriel is clothed in the most detailed of garments (Figure 7). He wears a

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19 Courts, 142-143.
21 Marti, 234.
houpplande, a wide, long, ornately patterned robe with flaring sleeves and pipe-like folds that was usually worn by dignitaries and nobles. Although the cut of the houpplande could be used by several classes, it was the quality of the cloth that distinguished social rank. Textiles such as damask, velvet, and satin were those reserved for the higher nobility.23 Like those in the Burgundian Court where Charles spent much of his time, Gabriel’s robe is made up of expensive fabrics with remarkably elegant, gold patterns.

This sophisticated robe can also be seen in the Très Riches Heures, January page (Figure 8). The patron of this manuscript, Jean, Duke of Berry was the third son of the French king, Jean le Bon (1319-1364), as well as the brother to Charles V (1339-1380) and the regent over Charles VI (1368-1422) while the young king was still a child. The Duke of Berry was known for his extravagant commissions and material possessions in order to display his political aspirations, but his capabilities were usually overlooked in favor of his brother, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (1332-1404). In this particular image, Jean is the main focal point, mainly through the use of his fashion. He is dressed in a deep blue fur trimmed houpplande that is embroidered in golden thread. He also wears a golden collar and a fur cap.24 Jean’s garments are the most handsomely decorated in comparison to those around him. Blue was considered luxurious in the medium of painting and manuscripts, but in textile production it was not an expensive hue and was thought to be common.25 Red, black, and gold were recognized as symbols of higher status.26 Gabriel’s robes, with their complex embroidery, display the great wealth needed for

25 Margaret L. Goehring, "The Representation and Meaning of Luxurious Textiles in Franco-Flemish Manuscript Illumination," In Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and Their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages, ed. Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert, (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2007), 127. However, blue became more popular in the French court and did become its royal color eventually
26 Marti, 234.
such attire. The angel wears scarlet fabrics, which were only worn by rulers and courtiers. The artist’s investment of time, detail, and rich color in Gabriel’s *houpplande* achieves an effect even greater than the Duke of Berry’s in the *Très Riches Heures*.

Fashion continues to be important among the men and woman advancing towards the priest (Figure 9). Each character wears finery reminiscent of the upper class in the fifteenth century. The woman wears a fitted gold and black velvet gown with a banner headdress, or a *hennin*, which was extremely popular among aristocrats and even royalty. The men wear short, fine, golden tunics and black hose, the style for male nobility. Garments in black or dark colors were favored since they amplified the extravagance of jewels and accessories. This fashion statement is evident in the portrait done by Rogier van der Weyden of Philip the Good, a Burgundian duke (1475) (Figure 10). In keeping with this style, the artist for the *Annunciation to the Virgin* placed handsomely dressed figures instead of lower class plebes walking towards the altar. These richly dressed figures align Charles with the other Burgundian aristocrats of the time, thus enhancing his royal rights.

Another element associated with Charles’ power and portrayal of royal lineage in this manuscript is architecture. When examining the structure where the Virgin Mary resides, it is clear that there is no such architectural wonder in existence. The tracery, pinnacles, and extravagant golden color are far too extreme to exist in reality. So, it has been argued by some scholars that the building is to be solely regarded as an anonymous religious structure, but is portrayed in a fantastical Jean Fouquet-like style. Although this argument is partially correct in

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27 Van Uytven, 32; Marti, 234. According to Marti, “by the late Middle Ages purple had ceased to be used as a dyestuff. The most precious colour was kermes (also known as carmine or crimson), a red dyestuff obtained from the dried bodies of kermes insects imported from the region of present-day Turkey.”
28 Boucher, 202-203.
29 Freeman, 107.
that there is no actual building that resembles this structure, it is somewhat limited and does not attempt to examine the edifice’s possible further meaning.

There is some discussion on this topic from Robert Schindler, who states that this construction could hearken back to the framework of the famous Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Figure 11). 30 Although Schindler attempts to identify the church, his only argument to support this claim is the octagonal shape of the central structure and the use of an altar. Other reasons as to why it could be the Dome of the Rock are its connection to Solomon’s Temple. This first temple was built as a representation of the Old Law, which was fulfilled once Mary conceived Christ. 31 In artistic renditions, a domed or polygonal structure as a representation of the Temple of Solomon was known in the Byzantine Empire, and slowly this image travelled to the West. French and Flemish artists were known to paint a domed, circular Temple, but these artists were not depicting the actual Dome of the Rock; this type had only become a pictorial tradition. 32 Even though this structure could possibly have illusions to the Temple of Solomon, it is my suggestion that the ecclesiastical setting here represents the Lateran Baptistery and its associated connection to powerful figures like Emperor Constantine and the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne.

This baptistery, built by Constantine in the fourth century AD, was constructed with an octagonal shape, supported by eight columns, and with an octagonal drum and hemispherical dome atop (Figure 12), whereas the Dome of the Rock has a smooth circular dome resting on a circular drum supported by a ring of columns and piers, and the Temple of Solomon was

30 Schindler, 85.
rectangular in shape.\textsuperscript{33} The church-like structure in the \textit{Annunciation to the Virgin} has an octagonal shape supported by eight columns with an octagonal dome like the Baptistery. Another factor which suggests that this structure represents the Lateran Baptistery is the association with the \textit{Agnus Dei}. During mass, the \textit{Agnus Dei}, a song to the Lamb of God, would have been recited. It represented the Eucharistic sacrifice on the altar of the church, but it also had associations to baptism and the Passover.\textsuperscript{34} In the Lateran Baptistery, the \textit{Agnus Dei} was portrayed as a golden sculpture of three lambs. Although the sculpture is now gone, there are images found of it in the Roman catacomb of Panfilo from 348 and in the cubiculum of Leo in the catacomb of Domitilla.\textsuperscript{35} In Charles de Valois’ manuscript, a golden basin is supported by three lambs (Figure 13). This could be seen as the font of holy water that was used for blessing oneself before entering the church, but the fact that it is not at the entrance of the church indicates another purpose. Indeed, this sculptural inclusion clearly references the \textit{Agnus Dei} of the Lateran Baptistery.

This building’s connection with past royalty is certainly Charles’ purpose for using it in his manuscript. The Lateran Baptistery was supposedly utilized for the baptism of Constantine and later as the baptismal site for Pepin, a son of Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{36} Traditionally, French royalty and nobility desired to connect themselves with these two great monarchs: the first legalized Christianity, the second was the first Holy Roman Emperor and a French monarch. The characteristics of these two rulers inspired kings, particularly those of French origin, who

\textsuperscript{33} Hamblin, 26.
\textsuperscript{34} Olof Brandt, "Deer, Lambs, and Water in the Lateran Baptistery," (\textit{Rivista di archeologia cristiana}, 86, 2005), 137.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 133-134. This was just a myth since Constantine was actually baptized in Constantinople; William D. Wixom, "A Glimpse at the Fountains of the Middle Ages," (\textit{Cleveland Studies in the History of Art} 8, 2003): 11.
associated themselves with these past monarchs in order to fully justify their rule. In using this known architectural symbol of power, Charles connects himself with past kings to advance and legitimize his authority.

Architecture is further employed for Charles’ purposes in the Annunciation to the Virgin with the use of the château Mehun sur Yèvre (Figure 14). To confirm the importance of this structure, there is a comparable example in the Très Riches Heures on a page titled the Temptation of Christ (Figure 15). This scene refers to the scripture in Matthew 4:8 which states, “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.” In this image, Christ stands on a summit while the Devil gestures below to the cities, ports, maritime trade, exotic animals, and, greatest of all, the château Mehun sur Yèvre stands as a definitive symbol of wealth.

Although the same château is shown in the Annunciation to the Virgin, it is displayed with greater prominence in Jean Duke of Berry’s Très Riches Heures. In fact, the building even overshadows Christ himself. This suggests that these objects of wealth, principally Jean’s favorite château, were a temptation fit for a king. Court historian Jean Froissart called Mehun sur Yèvre “one of the most handsomest castles in the world; for the duke had spent upwards of 3000 francs in building and ornamenting it,” and Philip the Bold sent sculptor Claus Sluter

37 Robert John Morrissey, Charlemagne & France: A Thousand Years of Mythology, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2003), 4; Wixom, 15. In 1402, Jean had acquired many coins or medals which represented various Roman emperors, designed by contemporary artists such as the Limbourg brothers or to a painter employed by the duke Michelet Saulmon (active 1401-1415). The most notable of these medals depicted the equestrian portrait of Emperor Constantine. On the reverse side of the medal there is a fountain spouting water with a cross atop it, which is thought to reflect the apse mosaic in the basilica of the Lateran. Since Constantine had commissioned the Lateran Baptistery, which held the Fountain of Life, and the duke found it imperative to connect himself to the power of Constantine, this is not an odd image for this medal.


39 Raymond Cazelles and Johaannes Rathofer, Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures Du Duc De Berry, (New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 171. In the Très Riches Heures, a lion and a monkey are depicted as the exotic animals, which could have reference to Africa as a rich resource.

40 Inglis, 155-160.

41 Cazelles, 17.
there “to visit certain works of painting, images, and carving.” This indicates that the structure had a reputation of representing French culture, wealth, and status. Since Charles was the Duke of Berry and a brother to the king, just as Jean had been, this château connected him with a high social status and his royal lineage. Furthermore, it linked him to his father who prized this structure above all others.

Alongside the château in the background of this manuscript are small scenes representing knighthood. The ideal depiction of the chevalier is a man garbed in armor, riding horses, and carrying javelins—all characteristics exhibited by the knights in this manuscript (Figure 16). During the Middle Ages, knighthood was a prestigious honor and granted leadership to those who attained its glory. Kings and royalty were considered to be warriors and knights, but by the fourteenth century, knighthood was also used as a way of recognizing nobility. To become a knight, one had to be from a noble family. As shown in the *Merlin Continuation*, a book of Arthurian legends, Tor, the bastard son of Pellinor, proves his nobility to Arthur. The peasant who raised him was found not to be his father, since Pellinor, a great chivalric figure, had actually raped his mother. Upon realizing Tor’s lineage, Arthur says: “I believe that if nobility had not come to you from somewhere, your heart would never have drawn you to something as exalted as knighthood.” The chivalric order was a superior caste, which can be concluded since the highest of civil court officials, known as chancellors, were elevated to knighthood once

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42 Inglis, 160.
43 Ibid., 155-160.
45 Gest, 19 and 76.
they were appointed to that position. Charles thus uses this powerful imagery to align himself with knightly qualities and to connect with his royal lineage in order to represent his desired status.

An artistic rendition of this revered knighthood is seen in the Rape of the Sabines page from the Romuléon (1465-1470), the only other known manuscript that was produced for Charles de Valois (Figure 17). The scene is a contemporary rendition from the Roman story of the Rape of the Sabine Women. As told by Livy, the account explains that the Roman state had a shortage of women and that no neighboring cities would assist them. To hide his concern, the Roman leader Romulus prepared to celebrate the Consualia, or the “solemn festival in honour of Neptune.” The Sabine people came to the games, and when the time was right, the Roman men stole the Sabine women away. The parents of these girls were upset, but Romulus told them “that this had happened because of their parents’ arrogance in refusing intermarriage with neighbors.” In the depiction from the Romuléon, Romulus, the founder of Rome is compared to Charles VII, the legendary king of France who finally ended the Hundred Years’ War. The scene depicts the time period, dress, and setting of medieval France—even down to the famous portrait of Charles VII by Jean Fouquet (1450-1455) (Figure 18). Although the story’s usual focal point is the attack on the Sabine women, a jousting match between two knights takes greater prominence. No one in the scene seems to be concerned with the women being assaulted, but all attention is on the representation of the games for Consualia. Knighthood was so prestigious that it was an essential aesthetic element for Charles in this manuscript. By using this

47 William Blockmans and Esther Donckers, “Self-Representation of Court and City in Flanders and Brabant in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” In Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages, ed. Wim Blockmans and Antheun Janse, (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 82-84.
49 Ibid., 18.
50 Inglis, 122.
symbol, Charles proves his noble birth and displays his honorable status in both the *Romuléon* and the *Hours of Charles of France*.

The Virgin and Spiritual Imagery

In addition to the secular imagery, the manuscript’s spiritual elements, primarily connected with the Virgin, further demonstrate Charles’ desire for power. Instead of having Mary portrayed in a purely feminine role, Charles, by way of religious iconography, has her displayed as high priest for the church. In doing this, Charles elevates himself through association with the Virgin. Through the blurring of gender, Charles could appropriately attach himself to the Virgin Mary. In order to fully comprehend why Mary would have been chosen for this purpose, it is crucial to understand the importance of the Virgin during Charles’ lifetime.

Before the medieval era, Mary was represented as the Holy Mother holding the Christ Child on her lap, and she was also the faithful mother who fainted at the foot of the cross. The Middle Ages brought Mary to a higher status as she rose to the title Queen of Heaven who sat above all the saints in Christendom and was known to have infinite love for mankind. This deep charity was augmented when Mary became a protector and savior; her pure beauty attracted and sustained humanity. Also, the Virgin was given great power. She was so close to God that he could refuse her nothing and all of His graces passed through her.\(^\text{51}\) By the twelfth century, Christian participation in the cult of Mary was widespread, and it grew more substantially in the centuries thereafter.\(^\text{52}\) By the beginning of the fifteenth century, Mary was an extremely


prominent figure, having a considerably large following of worshippers since she was the bridge between mankind and salvation.\textsuperscript{53}

Unsurprisingly, Charles desired to be connected to the Virgin since she was such a renowned figure during the Middle Ages. Thus, the artist uses powerful imagery in order to display her prominence. The most basic aspect of Mary demonstrating her elevated status is the clothing she wears. The Virgin is dressed in a blue gown, a color that was common in depictions of Mary. Although a more common color in the Middle Ages, blue was associated with Mary early on to symbolize her role as the Queen of Heaven.\textsuperscript{54} Another instance of this familiar Marian hue is displayed in Jean Fouquet’s \textit{The Melun Diptych} (1453-54) (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{55} The painting depicts Mary as the Queen of Heaven with a regal crown and a blue gown. Furthermore, blue seraphim and red cherubim encircle the child and his mother, in a manner similar to those of the manuscript. Her surroundings and costume are strong indicators of her position, just as the clothing is in the \textit{Annunciation to the Virgin}. Even though the figure of Mary in Charles’ manuscript exhibits a humble obedient servant—Mary before she is crowned—she still exudes regal prominence. Therefore, the Virgin’s clothing raises her status to that of royalty and likewise shows Charles’ royal station.

\textsuperscript{53} Male, 189.
\textsuperscript{55} Kathleen Anne Wellman, \textit{Queens and Mistresses of Renaissance France}, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 2013), 25-57. The model for this painting was Charles VII’s mistress Agnes Sorel put in the position of the Queen of Heaven. She was considered to be the first official mistress in the French court. She also was extremely influential to Charles VII. While he was publically tied to Agnes, Charles was considered to be a great king and other nobility accepted his power. Although she was largely influential, some blame her for the malicious intent that lied behind the relationship of Charles VII and his son, the future Louis XI. In Enguerrend de Monstrelet’s \textit{Chronicle} he notes: “The hatred of Charles VII against Louis came from the fact that the prince had many times blamed and murmured against his father because of Beautiful Agnes who was in the good graces of the king much more than was the queen, a good and honorable woman. The dauphin was full of spite and through spite advanced her death.” The humanist Piccoloini told of an incident that Louis berated Agnes in defense of his mother and then chased her to his father’s bed with his sword. This is supposedly what caused Charles to drive Louis into exile. But a more likely explanation is his son’s history of plotting his father’s death.
This imperial blue color used for Mary is also applied to the priest’s garments in the scene. The placement of these main figures is important, with the priest located directly over the Virgin’s head (Figure 20). This creates a direct line between the priest distributing the Eucharist and Mary in the moment of the Annunciation. The golden hue that radiates from the Holy Mother’s hair and cushioned seat also mirrors the cross sewn upon the priest’s robes, which again unites the two figures. Gold and blue were colors that could connote the wealth of a patron, but they also had significance in relation to holy figures. These hues were symbols of heaven and purity. Both of these shades were difficult to produce as pigments in art; hence they were mostly used for the central figures.56 These colors provide a direct link between the Virgin and the priesthood authority displayed in the background, connecting her to this power.

The last and most significant color that connects these figures is the blood-like red on the Virgin’s garments, which again unifies her with the priest’s task of preparing the Eucharist. The holy doctrine of transubstantiation asserted that the Eucharist mystically transformed into the blood and body of Christ.57 Martha Easton suggests that a connection was made between women and the Eucharist within the doctrine of transubstantiation. She argues that during the Passion, Christ sustained a wound in his side that bled excessively. According to Easton, the blood from this wound also references female genitalia. This makes the blood shed on the cross analogous to a purging of the collective body of Christianity of its impurity. Usually the blood taken from Christ was shown in a chalice or flowing into open mouths to represent the Eucharistic transformation of wine into Christ’s blood during the mass. She further suggests that

56 Frederick Roth Webber, *Church Symbolism: An Explanation of the More Important Symbols of the Old and New Testament, the Primitive, the Mediaeval and the Modern Church* an Explanation of the More Important Symbols of the Old and New Testament, the Primitive, the Mediaeval and the Modern Church*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1971), 95.
Christ’s male body had feminine properties and so the bleeding wound of Christ was also described as a lactating breast from which people would nurse.58

This wound is seen in many manuscripts, but one explicit example is the *Wound of Christ* in the *Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg* dating to the fourteenth century (Figure 21). This striking image shows a comparison between the wound from the side of Christ and female genitalia. The wound or vagina could also be compared to a mandorla, which represented not just the feminine, but the divine and the universal. Easton states that the vaginally signaled wound of Christ was recognized in upper-class private books of hours as a symbol of nourishment and redemption for the faithful. This also indicates how the flowing blood-like garments of Mary signified her relationship with the priest and his powers.59

Although relating Mary to a priest with the Eucharist may seem like a radical feminist conjecture, it is far from a new concept.60 The Virgin employing Christ’s priesthood was “an integral part of her mission,” and her specific role was considered to be higher than that of an ordained priest.61 A specific example of one declaring Mary’s priestly role along with the sacerdotal status of virtuous women is Hildegard of Bingen from the mid twelfth century. Hildegard was a Benedictine nun who adopted a prophetic identity that was acknowledged by the clergy in her monastery as one who could receive divine revelation.62 In her first major treatise, the *Scivias* (1151), Hildegard discusses the larger inquiry of women and the priesthood in

59 Ibid., 397.
60 Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, (London and New York, 1963), 319. From the later fifteenth century, Antonius, the Dominican Archbishop of Florence (d. 1458), called the Virgin “the priestess of justice, because she did not spare her son,” but she was by the Cross, “prepared to offer the Son of God for the Salvation of the world.” Antonius also writes that “through her Son she has absolved us from our guilt and punishment”, an expression that contributed to the discussion of Mary’s priestly function.
62 Ibid., 7.
relation to her revelation on the Virgin and her priestly office. She describes a vision she had of Ecclesia (who is a type of the Virgin) below the crucified Christ, his blood pouring out of his wound and into her chalice, which she then holds at the altar (Figure 22).\textsuperscript{63} Hildegard repeatedly compares the “Eucharistic body of Christ to the creation of the body of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary.”\textsuperscript{64} A bond was developed between the “Eucharistic body reborn” at the mass and the “original body born from a virgin womb.” This produced the compelling image that joins the Crucifixion to the Nativity in the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{65} Hildegard also suggested that through a life of virginity and celibacy, women have the priesthood by virtue. Instead of an earthly husband, they open themselves to the Bridegroom and through Him they have the priesthood with privilege to administer at the altar.\textsuperscript{66} Written for the monks of the monastery, Hildegard’s text demonstrates that Mary was an example and model for priestly duty, even though she was a woman.\textsuperscript{67}

Jacqueline Murray further elaborates on this idea of Mary and the priesthood. It is her suggestion that there are not just two sexes—but three. In Western tradition, men and women were usually defined by physical characteristics and gender roles, but occasionally they could have elements of the other sex. In order to make sense of men acquiring feminine traits or women possessing masculine attributes, there was a third gender, which was assigned to people who deviated from common gender roles. One such deviation of this third gender was the virtue of chastity. This was considered to be a third gender quality, because women were free from the

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 11-13.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 14.  
\textsuperscript{66} Clark, 15.  
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
constraints of their female bodies and also from their gendered subordination. Since Mary was a perpetual virgin throughout her life, she was placed in this category.  

Although a third gender seems surprising in describing the Virgin, some have seen her as neither a man nor a woman in her gender roles. She transcends both genders through her virginity. According to scholar Felice Lifshitz, in the medieval era male saints were given different categories such as: apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, hermits, etc., but women had one label: virgins. The singular form of the term was *virgo*, with which the Virgin Mary was analogous. Even though these titles are gendered, the title of *virgo* was coveted by men just as much as it was by women. Surprisingly, virginity also mattered for men since they desired the earthly rewards that were paired with this title. Chastity in a male enhanced his public power, in that it was proof of his moral control. Consequently, there was a non-physiological understanding of the word *virgo*—which became *virago*—that is, the virile, or manly woman. *Virago* became a multiple gender personae since “it did not convey the message that a holy woman was like a man but she was like a very special woman, namely Mary, who was known as *virgo* but who lived an exemplary life.” Consequently, men and women are reconciled in this theory and become more like one another—one flesh of creation. In terms of this manuscript, the immense spirituality of Mary joins her and her patron Charles into this one flesh, and so he is able to receive the appropriate rewards for both genders.

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71 Ibid., 95.
72 Murray, 45.
To illustrate this third gender concept fully, Christine de Pizan wrote about equality between the male and female sexes during the fifteenth century by giving herself both gender roles (Figure 23). De Pizan was an Italian woman who wrote for several dukes and also for the French court. She wrote during the reigns of Charles VI until Charles VII, and so it is probable that Charles de Valois came into contact with her writings. Most of her works, such as *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405), were commissioned by the aristocracy and combatted the masculine thought of the day. In her writings, Christine de Pizan claims that there is equality in the sexes since both are derived from the will and thought of God—and He makes no mistakes. So, it is madness for men to suggest that women are the inferior sex since God willed their form. She also proposes that all souls are genderless and that all souls are good, noble, and similar to one another. Although she asserts that there are different qualities between the genders, she also argues that it is possible for each sex to claim these qualities. Christine herself says that she has the dual role of having facets of both sexes, a woman in form and a man in virtue. Such attitudes are reflected in the depiction of Mary in the *Annunciation to the Virgin*; she is a model of the third gender. She is not confined to the gender roles of women or men, but she combines the two into one ultimate gender.

Mary’s connection to the priest is significant in displaying her clerical position, but it is not the only allusion to her and Charles’ power. A perplexing accessory in this manuscript that highlights Mary’s complex gender is the presence of two vessels adorned with unidentifiable Latin script (Figure 24). These jars do not contain anything important, but they should in accordance with other Marian imagery. Although the empty vessel is often a sign of Mary’s

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75 Ibid., 43.
virginity and a ready container for the Christ Child, it is unorthodox for jars such as these to not contain the common motif of the lily. Even Martha Freeman, a prominent scholar of this manuscript, notes the strange absence of the usual white lilies, which were a familiar symbol of the Virgin’s purity.\textsuperscript{76} The commonplace occurrence of this symbol in a vessel can be seen in images like the \textit{Annunciation} in the \textit{Petites Heures de Jean duc de Berry} by Jacquemart de Hesdin (Figure 25), from the early fifteenth century. In this example, the contained lilies are put in the central forefront of the picture plain, emphasizing their iconographical importance. The lily was a symbol of virginity and purity and this motif was often associated with Mary.\textsuperscript{77}

The absence of this female symbol hints that Mary has a more masculine persona in this case. This crossing of gender lines is illustrated on many occasions. For example, in a treatise on virginity by Saint Aldhelm, titled \textit{De Virginitate}, Mary’s name appears towards the end of a long list of male heroes who occupy the opening sections of the work, which demonstrates that she was considered to be a bridge between male and female exemplars.\textsuperscript{78} Because of this, Mary’s influence and power could traverse between the spheres of men and women. In the \textit{Hours of Charles of France}, the exclusion of the lilies further blurs the Virgin’s feminine qualities in order to give her a more masculine nature—enabling her to transcend her gender and aiding Charles in his display of power.

The religious setting in which the Virgin resides is also critical in emphasizing Mary’s power in relation to Charles. In the \textit{Annunciation to the Virgin}, Mary is placed purposefully in a church, a French artistic tradition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Contrastingly, in Italy, the location of the Annunciation was in an ambiguous setting, with Mary and the Angel Gabriel separated by a portico. The Flemish tradition often situated the Holy Mother within the

\textsuperscript{76} Freeman, 108.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Lifshitz, 90-95.
domestic sphere. Nevertheless, they were also influenced by their French neighbors.\textsuperscript{79} One Marian scene from 1440 that demonstrates this is the \textit{Madonna in the Church} by Jan van Eyck (Figure 26). This Netherlandish scene, which was greatly influenced by French examples, shows the Virgin crowned in glory, wearing a red gown covered with a blue cloak and lined in fine gold trim. In this painting, Mary has outgrown her venue, as she is exceptionally large; this identifies the Virgin with the cathedral itself. She becomes a personification of the actual church. Mary is bound to the rituals that are contained within the building, which liturgy cannot be performed in a portico or a domestic space. She becomes part of the Eucharistic rite by embodying the space where it is implemented.\textsuperscript{80} Likewise, Mary, in the \textit{Annunciation to the Virgin}, is seated within this holy structure and connected to the liturgy performed in the church—elevating her as well as the manuscript’s patron.

Coupled with the symbolism associated with Mary in a church is the symbolism connected to the building itself. This ecclesiastical structure, now identifiable, adds additional support to the suggestion of Mary as a priestly figure. The structure and sculptural imagery recalls the Lateran Baptistery, as was mentioned previously, but its flamboyant nature suggests more. Since this building was so renowned and considered to be the first baptistery, legend stated that the Fountain of Life was located within the Lateran Baptistery.\textsuperscript{81} This fountain was considered precious in the Christian world and often represented redemption, the Passion, grace, and the Eucharist with the blood from the wound of Christ.\textsuperscript{82} The significance behind the Lateran baptismal font is demonstrated by its attached inscription, now lost, installed by Pope

\textsuperscript{80} Purtle, \textit{The Marian Paintings of Jan Van Eyck}, 10.
\textsuperscript{81} Wixom, 10.
\textsuperscript{82} Evelyn Underhill, “The Fountain of Life: An Iconographical Study,” \textit{(The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs} 17, no. 86, 1910): 100.
Sixtus III (reigned 432-440) but attributed to Pope Leo (reigned 440-461): “This is the Fountain of Life, which purges the whole world, taking its course from the wound of Christ.” As was previously discussed, the wound of Christ has associations with the feminine, or Mary, in connection to the Eucharist, which is also symbolized by the Fountain of Life. This fount is placed directly over the Eucharist and Mary in Charles’ manuscript, which aligns the Virgin with her role as a priestess, and thus continues to give her a greater religious power and consequently gives Charles a display of political power.

An artistic comparison of this fountain is seen in a Carolingian manuscript titled the Gospels of St. Medard of Soissons from the court workshop of Charlemagne. Within this text, the illustration of The Fountain of Life, Paradise or Eden (827) (Figure 27) portrays the Lateran baptismal font, which can be identified by the eight columns, dome, and stags surrounding it. Some scholars claim that this fountain was an allegory for Christ himself, but for others, including Paul Underwood, it is thought to stand for the Virgin’s womb. The Fountain of Life brings forth healing waters which represents the Eucharist. Similarly, Mary’s womb symbolically bakes the bread, Christ, for this sacrament. A concrete link is then created between the architecture in Charles’ manuscript, and Mary, as a priestess, helping others to receive the Eucharist.

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83 Wixom, 10; Erik Thuno, Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome, (Rome: L'erma Di Bretschneider, 2002), 50. The full inscription reads: “The city, a people to be consecrated, here springs into being from fruitful seed which the Spirit brings forth from impregnated waters. Be dipped in the sacred stream, O sinner called to purity: whom the water will receive old, but bring forth new. There is no distinction among those born again, whom one font, one Spirit, one faith make one. From her virginal womb Mother Church gives birth in the stream to her children, whom she conceives through the breath of God. Wouldst thou be pure, cleanse thyself in this bath, whether thou art oppressed by original sin or by thine own guilt. This is the fountain of life, which purges the whole world, taking its course from the wound of Christ. Hope for the kingdom of heaven, ye are reborn in this font; the blessed life does not accept those who are born only once. Let not the number of the kind of his sins frighten anyone; born of this stream he will be holy.”
84 Underhill, 100.
85 Wixom, 11; Brandt, 134-135; Underwood, 49.
86 Underwood, 49; Wixom, 10.
87 Rubin, 146.
A more closely related work in association with the Fountain of Life is the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean Duke of Berry. The page, titled *The Garden of Paradise or Eden*, narrates the Fall of Adam and Eve (Figure 28).88 This image exhibits the earthy paradise with a structure that looks almost identical, but on a smaller scale, to Mary’s setting in the Master of Charles of France’s work. Both manuscript structures are supported by eight columns and are octagonal in shape, like the configuration of the Lateran Baptistery. The architecture in *The Garden of Paradise or Eden* is identified as the Fountain of Life at the center of the Garden of Eden, which supports the thesis that both structures are reminiscent of this famous fountain.89 This setting in the *Hours of Charles of France* further establishes Mary’s role as priestess in connection to Charles’ elevation of power.

Mary’s priesthood authority in relation to Charles continues to be highlighted in the *Annunciation to the Virgin* through the Virgin’s body language. As was previously mentioned, Mary rests on a large pillow while turning the pages of a manuscript. Although this appears to be a traditional representation of Mary, her hand positioning is distinctly unique. During the ritual of the Eucharist, the bread and the wine is blessed, and each portion accompanied by a gesture while raising both elements. This process is completed by the priest holding the Eucharist in a specific manner.90 As the host is lifted, the priest handles the sacred symbols appropriately with his thumb and index finger.91 For example, in *The Elevation of the Host*, a manuscript page from the fourteenth century (Figure 29), a priest and his fellow laymen perform the Eucharistic rite using this gesture. A participant in the liturgy holds the priest’s vestments

88 Cazelles, 70.
90 Rubin, 54-55.
while two other figures hold specific objects that are needed for the Mass. One man carries the sanctuary lamp, which was a large wax candle that was lit whenever the Eucharist was performed. The other clergyman bears the paten, a flat saucer where the bread, or the host, was held.\textsuperscript{92} Lastly, the priest lifts up the host in the correct fashion, with his thumb and index finger firmly in place.

This gesture similarly is depicted in the \textit{Hours of Charles of France}, but not only by the priest. While seated, Mary turns a page of her book with her index finger and thumb—the same fingers that the priest uses when he holds the host. Mary is thus demonstrating that she has the knowledge and power to put her hand in such a position. Just as the Virgin made Christ, or “the Word,” flesh in her womb, she correspondingly holds the “Word of God” in her hands. The “Word of God” transforms into the Eucharist similarly to the body of Christ at the altar.\textsuperscript{93} She imitates the priest’s gesture from the mass, which emphasizes her priestly powers—thus not only raising her own status, but her patron’s as well.

On the reverse side of this page, Mary is visibly weaving at a loom, which again alludes to her role as priestess (Figure 30). This was a frequent manner of representing Mary, especially in Annunciation scenes. Apocryphally, the Virgin was weaving the temple veil. When the Angel appeared to her, he announced that she would weave another tapestry within her body—God’s “chausuble of flesh.”\textsuperscript{94} Subsequently, veils were symbolically put in churches to cover the altars during transubstantiation, as found in the \textit{Annunciation to the Virgin}. According to Elliott Wise, “medieval theologians understood the Virgin not only to possess the royal blood that

ensured her Son a right to the ‘sovereign’ throne of David, but to also possess Levitical ancestry, so that from the ‘fabric’ of her priestly lineage she could sew a ‘worthy’ set of sacrificial vestments for Christ’s bloody Mass on Calvary.” Mary in the act of weaving—literally handling the threads—is physically united with the clergyman on the previous page. This figure accompanies the priest and holds back the veil to the Eucharist. He wears blue garments that reflect the Virgin’s and priest’s robes. Moreover, he grabs the veil that conceals this holy rite, just as Mary holds the unfinished veil. Through this connection, Mary is associated with the Eucharist and the required priesthood for this rite. She is involved in the ceremony, fully participating in the Eucharist just like her male counterparts.

Additionally, the Virgin’s priesthood is visibly connected to the images of ancient prophets in this manuscript. The importance of prophetic figures in relation to priesthood authority is evident in the anonymous Amiens Priests of the Virgin from the early fifteenth century (Figure 31). In this painting, the Virgin, clothed in priestly vestments, grabs her Son’s hand at the altar of a church, while angels, clerical members, and patron look on. According to Wise, an image of Moses resides behind Mary at the altar. The prophet raises his gaze and gesture to heaven while God points with his right hand explaining the rites of the Old Law to his servant. Mary imitates the pose of God and points to the New Law, who is Christ. He lifts his arm like Moses to his mother, who has become an ambassador of the Old Law. The Christ Child grabs the hem of her Mosaic garments, indicating the priesthood that clothes and legitimizes him as the new high priest. Christ co-operates with his mother in this process. Correspondingly, he is being instructed by her just as Moses was instructed by God in his priestly duties.

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95 Ibid., 7.
96 Ibid., 8.
Similarly, Mary is also surrounded by ancient Old Testament prophets in the *Annunciation to the Virgin* (Figure 32). Martha Freeman attempts to identify some figures by vaguely describing them as “prophets with their scrolls foretelling the coming of the Redeemer and a sibyl who prophesies of the Incarnation.”97 The only definitive name she assigns to these statues is the nude Adam, whose sin made the Savior’s sacrifice necessary.98 Beyond this, none of the other figures have been identified. I suggest that the largest figure above Mary’s right shoulder is Moses, who holds the Ten Commandments. The sculpture to her left is likely Isaiah, since he is often seen holding prophesies on scrolls, predicting the coming of Christ. This identification is also supported by the belief that Mary was supposedly reading in Isaiah at the time of Gabriel’s appearance.99 As noted earlier, the figure of Moses goes back to Mary’s Levitical lineage, which was a priestly line.100 Correspondingly, Isaiah connects the Virgin to Christ, a high priest of the Church. By combining these two specific prophets Mary is united with her ancient priestly lineage and with her Son’s priestly power—both are symbols that indicate the Virgin’s acquisition of the priesthood, making her a strong symbol for Charles.

Along with prophets, other women play a significant clerical role in aiding the Virgin’s priestly duties for Charles’ purposes. To the Virgin’s right, women observe Mary and walk towards her, and although no scholars have addressed their participation in the scene, they are vital to its purpose (Figure 33). These women are not dressed in the courtly style worn by the aristocrats in the background. Likewise, they do not meet the generic standards of the sexless angels on the opposing page. Although the women wear the same colors as the angels, they all have individual characteristics, such as different hair color and distinct facial features. This

97 Freeman, 108.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 105.
100 Wise, 8.
individuality reveals that these figures do not belong to the angelic chorus, but their similar vestment colors suggest that these women have pure attributes and heavenly dispositions like the angels, thus demonstrating their elevation above ordinary women.

Incorporating other women or maids such as these alongside the Virgin is not an uncommon occurrence when depicting Mary. Female attendants were in the company of Mary to show their sacrifice and emulation of her. Their presence conveyed the idea that salvation was achieved through purity and spiritual preparation. The women who were able to accompany her had a privileged status, as is noted in this description by the sixth-century poet Venatius Fortunatus:

Then, the Mother of God, the devout Virgin Mary, incandesces and leads the sheep from the virginal flock of the Lamb. Surrounded in the midst of the maiden throng round about, She guides the encampment in her chastity’s resplendent light.

In the case of this manuscript, nothing is known about these unidentifiable women except that they are righteous and worthy, as they stand before the Virgin’s presence in this sacred setting. Even so, they are an important addition to the image in their emphasis on Mary’s and Charles’ power.

Comparing Mary and her maids to images of a priest and his attendants creates a meaningful juxtaposition. In The Elevation of the Host, the priest holds the wafer up as his assistants stand behind him with their liturgical instruments. The priest cannot do this rite alone;

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103 “Inde Dei gentrix pia Virgo Maria coruscat Virginalaque de grege ducit oves Ipsa puellari medio circumdata coetu Luce pudicitiae splendida castra trahit.” Venanzio Fortunato, Opere, compiled and translated by Stefano di Brazzano (Aquileia: Città Nova, 2001), 428, as quoted by Behringer, 70.
104 Ibid.
the support of his attendants is needed to complete the ceremony. In the background of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*, the priest is correctly escorted with aides to help him administer the Eucharist. Likewise, since Mary is given priestly powers, she requires attendants to assist her in executing the sacrament, which she imitates. Just as the priest needs attendants, Mary also has maids to aid her in performing this ceremony.

Although this Marian imagery is important in this manuscript, written text is equally as vital to the glorification of Charles’ power. On the page with the Annunciation, the letters *AE* are joined together in a framing border. Freeman suggests that the letters could have multiple connotations, being either signifiers of Adam and Eve, Alpha and Omega, the word “Ave”, Charles’ mistress Colette de Chambes, or his illegitimate daughter through Colette, Anne. While these explanations could all apply to the meaning behind these letters, one interpretation seems particularly relevant—the word “Ave.” Freeman briefly suggests the “Ave” reference, but she is more interested in reasoning that the *AE* could allude to those people linked to Charles, such as his bastard child or mistress. Nonetheless, the word “Ave” seems to be the most sound argument since it is the first word in Gabriel’s greeting to Mary during the Annunciation.

In contrast, the opposing page has the Greek letters *XP* encompassing it. Freeman’s analysis suggests these could have reference to Christ himself, but decides that it is more likely an untranslatable “cryptic cipher.” She dares not examine the supposed *XP* further, but the most likely explanation behind the *XP* is that it is a reference to Christ. The lettering creates a connection between the two pages—one represents the “masculine” and the other represents the

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106 Freeman, 111.
107 Ibid., 115.
108 Although Freeman deciphers the letters to be *XPC*, I believe that they only represent *XP*. The *XP* is the beginning of a Greek inscription written in Latin letters, spelling out Christ’s name. Also, there is no visual evidence that the monogram has a *C* within it, but the letters *XP* are often the only ones that are used to display the name of Christ in a text or image.
“feminine.” The “masculine” page can be interpreted in this way since it further contains male elements: Christ’s name surrounding the border, the angel Gabriel as the central figure, the knightly scene in the background,¹⁰⁹ and the hunting château.¹¹⁰ While the “feminine” properties of the opposing page consist of: the word “Ave” surrounding the border, Mary as the page’s protagonist, and the female attendants who assist the Virgin.

Even though it may seem that this represents a division between the sexes, the pages actually combine genders as a type of power exchange. As has been argued in this thesis, the “feminine” page predominantly attempts to show the Virgin’s priestly power, whereas the “masculine” page alludes mostly to Charles’ secular power. With the translation of XP as representing the Virgin’s priestly Son, a further link is created between the two leaves. On the male page, above the angel Gabriel, there is one recognizable prophet—Peter (Figure 34). He stands erect with a large key in his hands. Just as Christ gave Peter the priesthood keys, so Peter gives them to Mary. This page, having priestly allusions to both Christ and Peter, provides Mary with further priestly power. Also, once this book of hours is closed, both pages come together, merging the male and the female. In other words, the artist attributes priestly power to both genders in order to fully legitimize Mary’s priesthood. Just as this power elevates the Virgin Mary, it raises Charles’ power through his association with her.

Mary as Male Role Model

Although it has been proposed that the Virgin was elevated in order to glorify Charles, there is still a looming question. Why was Mary chosen as a model for Charles and not a male

¹⁰⁹ Rosemary Woolf, “The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight in Medieval English Literature,” (The Review of English Studies 13, no. 19, 1962): 1. According to Woolf, there are also known allegories in books of instruction in the medieval era that describe Christ as a lover-knight. The story focuses on the knight who gives up his life for the sake of his lady to win her heart. This was often translated to Christ suffering the torments of the Passion so that he may win man’s love.

¹¹⁰ Richard Almond, “A Huntsman’s Home,” (History Today 61, no. 4, 2011): 6. In the Middle Ages hunting was a predominately masculine sport.
saint, or even Christ? Since he was a prince, coupling himself with another male figure would have seemed more appropriate. To better understand this dilemma, the next portion of this thesis will answer this question.

Even though Charles was using the Virgin in order to elevate his power, he was also exploring the narrative to reference his own life. In the same year that the *Hours of Charles of France* was commissioned, the Treaty of Conflans was signed, which ended the battle between Charles and his brother Louis. Because of this treaty, Charles gained the land he desired—the Duchy of Normandy. As discussed earlier, the evidence for this is found in the painted coat of arms, that contains the symbols for the Duchy of Normandy. Additionally, the inscription around the border reads “Charles of France, son of Charles VII, ninth Duke of Normandy, in the year 1465. Long may he live.”¹¹¹ So upon commissioning this manuscript Charles was using the Annunciation scene as a reflection of his own situation. Just as Gabriel announces the birth of Christ to Mary, Charles is declared the charge over the lands of Normandy.

Commissioning an art piece to celebrate a momentous event was customary amongst nobility and royalty in the fifteenth century. In particular, French royalty aligning themselves with the Virgin Mary in these commissions was not unknown. Jean de Berry, who was a model for Charles’ patronage, also used this comparison in order to display his power to potentially be king. According to scholar Jennifer Courts, all of Jean’s commissioned works, particularly his *Petites Heures* text, were created as propaganda for this political gain.¹¹² Around the time that the *Petites Heures* was commissioned, his brother Charles V had died and Jean became a regent of France for the young Charles VI. Jean used this book of hours, ornamented with emblems,

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¹¹¹ Freeman, 111.
¹¹² Courts, 135.
texts, and images, to prove his legitimacy as the true and rightful heir of his ancestor Louis IX, or
Saint Louis.\textsuperscript{113}

An important example of how Jean portrayed himself for propagandistic purposes is
found in his \textit{Petites Heures}. In this depiction, Jean de Berry kneels at an altar in a small chapel
with a book of hours open on a small table, or a \textit{prie-dieu} (Figure 35).\textsuperscript{114} While the duke prays,
heavenly figures descend and he gazes up towards them as evidence of his piety.\textsuperscript{115} On a similar
page, in the same manuscript, the Virgin kneels in prayer in a private chapel, also with a \textit{prie-
dieu} and a book of hours before an altar (Figure 36).\textsuperscript{116} Mary is attentive and aware of the
visiting angel coming in from above. The Virgin’s and the Duke’s gazes mimic one another,
indicating that when these two individuals “attend to their duties in prayer and service,” they
gain divine assistance for their efforts.\textsuperscript{117} There are several other instances with the Duke and
the Virgin in mirror positions throughout the book, demonstrating his obvious connection with
Mary. He associates himself with her in order to legitimize his power and prove his right to be
the next king of France, just as Charles would do in his commission.

Besides Jean de Berry, many other historical figures associated themselves with the
Virgin. In one painting, Mary and Christ elevate their patron in the \textit{Amiens Priesthood of the
Virgin}. Possibly because of the obvious priesthood authority the Virgin holds, this painting is
seldom discussed. In the painting, Mary is depicted in the role of a priest. Although not for
royalty, this scene commemorated the 1438 election of patron Jean du Bois into a literary
brotherhood. Jean, a merchant of textiles, kneels in the right foreground next to the Virgin and
her Son. Wise argues that the artist depicts the moment when Jean is “receiving the mantle” for

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 135-136.
\textsuperscript{114} Purtle, "The Iconography of Prayer, Jean De Berry, and the Origin of the Annunciation in a Church," 229.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 234.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 229-230.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 234.
his new position. Just as the Virgin vested her Son with raiment for his position as high priest, she bestows similar authority on Jean.\textsuperscript{118} In a similar manner, Charles uses Mary’s presence in his manuscript to observe the occasion of receiving the Duchy of Normandy. Both examples demonstrate the higher authority granted to patrons in their commissions by the Virgin’s priestly presence.

Mary’s association with members of nobility is also evident in Jean Fouquet’s \textit{Annunciation} from the \textit{Chevalier Hours} (1452) (Figure 37). Commissioned Étienne Chevalier, the treasurer under Charles VII, it is not surprising that there are some definite similarities between this painting and Charles de Valois’ manuscript. In this image, Mary is placed in an ecclesiastical setting, similar to that of the reliquary church Sainte Chappelle. She occupies the church’s apse, which was reserved for those who were involved in the Eucharist. The Virgin sits on a green rug with a book open to the side of her. Similarly, a green awning lies above the church’s altar, connecting her to the rites and rituals that are associated with the altar. Throughout the text, Mary is an important figure with a critical position in the church. Thus this manuscript, which was readily available for Charles’ use, would have provided a model for his own commission.

Lastly, the \textit{Hours of Mary of Burgundy} by an unknown artist in 1477 (Figure 38) connects the Virgin Mary to her patron as well. Mary of Burgundy was the daughter of Charles the Bold who fought alongside Charles de Valois during the conflict with King Louis XI. It was rumored that she was engaged to Charles, but because of Louis XI’s hatred for Charles the Bold, the marriage never came to fruition.\textsuperscript{119} In a page from her manuscript, Mary of Burgundy sits in the foreground with many costly objects such as pearls, red carnations, a veil, and a prayer book

\textsuperscript{118} Wise, 4.
\textsuperscript{119} Marti, 32.
cloaked in a green cloth, which is much like the Virgin in Charles’ book of hours. The scene behind Mary of Burgundy depicts the Virgin and Christ Child seated in an ecclesiastical setting with the altar directly behind her. It is as if the Virgin acts as priest in this scene by offering her Child as the Eucharist for others to partake. This is just one of many examples of a noble or royal figure connecting themselves with the Virgin Mary, but the fact that Mary of Burgundy had contact with Charles, and possibly saw his manuscript, makes this comparison even more consequential.

Finally, it is important to note that it was not unusual for male royalty to take on female characteristics to display specific qualities or to obtain a certain status. In order to do this, the royal figure would utilize allegories. Allegorical figures were predominantly female, and so men could assimilate a feminine role, but it was always clear that his person was standing in for a more general virtue. The man did not undergo gender reversal but the female goddess or allegorized virtue lost her sexuality and was neutralized as a dynastic sign or concept.120

One example of female allegory attached to a male leader is found in the portrait of King François I by Niccolò Dell'Abate of the early sixteenth century (Figure 39). Dressed to represent a plethora of Greek gods and goddesses, François is garbed in a large plumed helmet, dressed in Medusa inspired armor, sporting a knee-length red tunic, holding a short sword in his right hand and a caduceus with an unstrung bow in his left, and carrying a quiver of arrows and hunting horn slung to his side.121 In short, François is depicting himself as a bearded Minerva. He also

bears the attributes of the gods Mercury, Diana, Cupid, and Mars. To explain his ensemble these verses are inscribed on the painting’s cartouche:

FRancoys en geurre est vn Mars furieux
En paix Minerue et diane a la chasse
A bien parler Mercure copieux
A bien aymer vray Amour plein de grace
O France heureuse honore donc la face
De ton grand Roy qui surpasse Nature
Car l’honorant tu sers en mesme place
Minerve, Mars, Diane, Armour, Mercure

[Francois in war is a furious Mars
In peace Minerva and Diana of the hunt,
A well-spoken, copious Mercury,
A much-loving, true Amor full of grace
O fortunate France, honor this face
Of your great king who surpasses Nature,
For there you will have honored in the same place
Minerva, Mars, Diana, Amor, Mercury.]\(^{122}\)

Therefore the artist has portrayed François I with the head of a man and the bodily attributes of a woman. Although the breasts are minimal in the portrait, when looking at François’ bare arm one can see that it is slender, female, and lacking musculature. Also, the enlargement of his stomach was a sign of beauty for women at this time, since pregnancy was so desired.\(^{123}\) By combining these female and male characteristics, François I was able to adopt positive attributes from both genders. Essentially he was taking on feminine strength and applying it to himself, just as Charles does with the Virgin in his commission.

Other kings followed this tradition, such as François I’s son, Henri II. A medal created in 1552, which celebrated Henri II’s military victory over the Habsburg Empire, shows the influence of François I’s earlier portrait (Figure 40). Above Henri fly the allegories of Victory and Peace who hold a laurel crown accompanied by the words “ET PACE ET BELLO ARMA

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 102.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 104.
MOVET.” Although Henri does not wear the over-sized plumed helmet, the quiver of arrows, or the winged sandals of his father, he still poses with Diana’s hunting horn, Mercury’s caduceus, the enlarged sword of Mars, and Minerva’s Medusan breastplate. Henri continued his father’s use of female symbols in order to show his strength and power as the King of France. Thus, the idea that noble men could take on the attributes of women in order to display a certain personae was clearly acceptable.

Conclusion
Charles de Valois had a great desire to build his authority through the acquisition of lands and by associating himself with persons of power and import. Unfortunately, because of the crisis of the fifteenth century, this desire was difficult to achieve. Thus it was imperative for Charles to assert his power through visual means. Since manuscripts were used as royal French status symbols, Charles commissioned this book of hours in order to enhance his power and position. Through the use of secular and religious iconography, Charles was able to absorb the power and authority of the Virgin herself. As a result, the manuscript assisted him in the power struggle he grappled with his entire life.

Although this manuscript was created at a critical historical moment, little has been done to analyze its context. Scholars have studied this piece but with no attempt to understand its historical import. Since these leaves are associated with a little known patron, there has been less interest in establishing a contextual or theoretical understanding of the work. Even so, the richness of this manuscript alludes to a greater purpose beyond just the commissioning of an ornate work of art. With an analysis of gender in relation to the iconography, the true purpose of

124 Ibid., 102.
125 Courts, 143.
the manuscript becomes clear. It was created to enhance Charles’ power through his association with the Virgin Mary and her authority.

Although this thesis discusses Charles’ use of the Virgin Mary for his own purposes, there are many other works, particularly commissioned during the fifteenth century, which utilize similar imagery and have yet to be discussed in such a context. Mary is a complex character in the history of art and her priestly male role has yet to be fully recognized, particularly in connection to her patrons. It is my hope that through this examination of the *Annunciation to the Virgin* there will be more discussion regarding patrons, such as Charles, in connection to the Virgin Mary in order to enhance their positions of power.
Figure 1. *Annunciation to the Virgin* from *Hours of Charles of France*, Master of Charles of France, 1465.
Figure 2. Annunciation to the Virgin from Hours of Charles of France, Master of Charles of France, 1465.
Figure 3. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*. 
Figure 4. *Trial at Vendôme* from the *Munich Boccaccio*, Jean Fouquet, 1458.
Figure 5. Adoration of the Magi from the Chevalier Hours, Jean Fouquet, 1460.
Figure 6. Étienne Chevalier before the Virgin from the Chevalier Hours, Jean Fouquet, 1452.
Figure 7. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*. 
Figure 8. January from the *Très Riches Heures*, Limbourg Brothers, 1412-1416.
Figure 9. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*.
Figure 10. Portrait of Philip the Good, Rogier van der Weyden, 1475.
Figure 11. *Dome of the Rock*, completed by the order of Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik, 691 AD.
Figure 12. *Lateran Baptistery*, originally commissioned by Constantine, fourth century AD.
Figure 13. Detail of the Annunciation to the Virgin.
Figure 14. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin.*
Figure 15. *Temptation of Christ* from the *Très Riches Heures*, Limbourg Brothers, 1412-1416.
Figure 16. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*.
Figure 17. Rape of the Sabines from Romuléon, 1465-1470.
Figure 18. *Charles VII*, Jean Fouquet, 1450-1455.
Figure 19. *The Melun Diptych*, Jean Fouquet, 1453-54.
Figure 20. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin.*
Figure 22. *Ecclesia at the Cross and the altar* from the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript, Anonymous, twelfth century.
Figure 23. From Compendium of Christine de Pizan’s works, Anonymous, 1413.
Figure 24. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*.
Figure 25. *Petites Heures de Jean duc de Berry*, Jacquemart de Hesdin, 1409.
Figure 26. *Madonna in the Church*, Jan van Eyck, 1440.
Figure 27. *The Fountain of Life, Paradise or Eden* from the *Gospels of St. Medard of Soissons*, Anonymous, 827.
Figure 28. *The Garden of Paradise or Eden* from the *Très Riches Heures*, Limbourg Brothers, 1412-1416.
Figure 29. *Elevation of the Host*, Anonymous, fourteenth century.
Figure 30. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin.*
Figure 31. *Amiens Priesthood of the Virgin*, School of Amiens, fifteenth century.
Figure 32. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin.*
Figure 33. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin.*
Figure 34. Detail of the *Annunciation to the Virgin*.
Figure 35. Petites Heures de Jean duc de Berry, Jacquemart de Hesdin, 1409.
Figure 36. *Petites Heures de Jean duc de Berry*, Jacquemart de Hesdin, 1409.
Figure 37. *Annunciation* from the *Chevalier Hours*, Jean Fouquet, 1452.
Figure 38. *Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, Anonymous, 1477.
Figure 39. *King Francois I*, Niccolo Dell'Abate, early sixteenth century.
Figure 40. *Medal of King Henri II*, Anonymous, 1552.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


