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Aping Nobility: Reinterpreting the MMA "Monkey Cup"

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by

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ART HISTORY

ABSTRACT

The "Monkey Cup" in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) exhibits a unique rendition of the monkeys robbing the sleeping peddler theme. Generally believed to have been created in the second quarter of the fifteenth century in Burgundian territories, the exact origin of the beaker is not known. Based on visual evidence and the socio-historical context, I propose that the "Monkey Cup" was created in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and the attribution should be broadened to the greater circle of the Valois courts. In this thesis, I offer a new contextualized reading of the "Monkey Cup" iconography as primarily a mockery of social climbing. Identifying intriguing motifs, from the peddler's garish dress to carefully constructed analogies between him and the monkeys, I argue that the artist presents the peddler as a representative of the ambitious social climbers. In this way, the "Monkey Cup" can be read as a specimen of a now little known iconography of social derision, reflecting the tensions between the second and third estate in fifteenth-century Europe.

The analysis of the rich afterlife of the "Monkey Cup" shows how the beaker embodies major themes of the Renaissance. The first part of the analysis of the *Nachleben* is focused on the beaker's Medici provenance, which shows the fluidity of the concept of nobility and the Medici's self-fashioning as a virtuous princely dynasty. The second part focuses on the sixteenth-century uniface medal inserted at the bottom of the "Monkey Cup." I argue that it shows how the notion of mimesis, once used by the

"Monkey Cup" artist to deride the peddler's social climbing, was later incorporated by the medalist to glorify the noble and liberal status of art and artist. As such, the "Monkey Cup" is a demonstration of the rising status of the third estate in general and visual artists in particular, a microcosm of the social and cultural history of the Renaissance.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Chao, my rock, and my best friend.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Noa Turel. During the past two years, she has given me unfailing support and guidance, which not only made this thesis project possible, but more significantly, gave me strength and built up my confidence in the field. I have been constantly inspired by her teaching and her passion about Art History, which rejuvenates my determination in the face of hardships and obstacles. I feel grateful to have such a wonderful mentor, and a good friend. I would also like to thank Dr. Heather McPherson, and Dr. Tanja L. Jones from the University of Alabama, who have supported my project with great patience and offered invaluable suggestions that helped make this project better.

My sincere thanks also go to Christine D. McDermott, Senior Collections Coordinator at the Cloisters and Christine E. Brennan, Senior Research Associate at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who kindly granted me the access to see the archival documents on the "Monkey Cup," which helped further my understanding of the object. I am also thankful to Margaret K. Burnham, Objects Conservator, and Dr. Robert Schindler and Dr. Anne Forschler-Tarrasch, curators at the Birmingham Museum of Art for sharing with me their insights on the "Monkey Cup."

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INTRODUCTION

Monkeys robbing a sleeping merchant was a fairly popular pictorial theme in Late Medieval Europe. One of the finest renditions is found on an early fifteenth-century beaker in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), known as the "Monkey Cup" (Figure 1). The exterior facet features thirty-five monkeys, eleven of which are on the ground, fiddling with the merchant and his paraphernalia, and twenty-four of which are cavorting with their loot on three highly stylized trees. The interior facet features two monkeys hunting stags in a rainy forest (Figure 2). The imagery was created using painted enamel technique, so-called because the artist painted the enamel directly on the beaker's surface before firing it.[1]

The provenance of the "Monkey Cup" is not secure, but several clues and documents may nonetheless shed light on the beaker's history. The artist's exquisite skill, the luxurious material, and the secular and jovial subject matter all suggest that the beaker was originally created for a courtly patron. In 1464, the "Monkey Cup" or a similar beaker was described in the inventory of the collection of Piero de' Medici (1416-1469).[2] A silver-gilt uniface medal inserted at the bottom of the beaker, which shows Minerva crowning Vulcan with a laurel wreath (Figure 3), sheds further light on the

[1] See "Beaker with Monkeys," *Metropolitan Museum of Art: The Collection Online*, accessed April 2, 2015, http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/470308.
[2] Eugène Müntz, *Les collections des Médicis au XVe siècle, le musée, la bibliothèque, le mobilier* (Paris: and London: Librairie de l'Art, 1888), 40.

beaker's provenance, as its design derives from Jacopo da Trezzo's portrait medal, designed and modeled by the Italian medalist Antonio Abondio (1538-1591) (Figure 4).[3]

Compared to other renditions of the monkeys robbing sleeping peddler theme, there are several motifs unique to the "Monkey Cup," from details of dress to carefully constructed analogies between the monkeys and the peddler, that suggest a far more specific meaning than has hitherto been recognized. In this thesis, I argue for a new, contextualized reading of the "Monkey Cup" iconography as primarily a mockery of social climbing. I then reevaluate the beaker's complex layered history in the light of this finding to show how this object encapsulates major themes of Renaissance history and art. Recovering the original meaning of the "Monkey Cup," I argue that the artist draws on the theme of mimesis to deride the sleeping peddler's social ambition and his attempt to imitate his superiors, thus reflecting the social tensions between the second and third estates on the background of the rising power of the merchant class. Analyzing the later provenance of the "Monkey Cup," I unearth the rich and layered history charted by the beaker to show how it is a microcosm of the social and cultural shifts of the Renaissance, from the ascent of the nobility of the robe, through the rising status of the artist, to the changing perspective on the concept of imitation.

Extant scholarship on the "Monkey Cup" focuses on three issues: its Burgundian provenance, the theme of monkeys robbing a peddler, and the painted enamel technique. The beaker's Burgundian provenance has been generally accepted, and based on this assumption several scholars have referenced the "Monkey Cup" in illustrating the ritual

[3] Philip Attwood, *Italian Medals c.1530-1600 in British Public Collections* (London: BMP, 2003), 453.

and material culture at Burgundian court.[4] In my opinion, it is equally possible that the beaker was created for any other contemporaneous French court. Many artists of the International Gothic style era, such as the Limbourg Brothers, worked at more than one court during their lifetimes; it is therefore imprudent to arbitrarily assign the object to any particular one. No interpretation of the "Monkey Cup" should be confined to the Burgundian context.

Heinrich Kohlhaussen's "Niederländisch Schmelzwerk" is one of the earliest sources to propose the Burgundian provenance.[5] Kohlaussen notes that the colors on the beaker – white, gold, gray and black – were fashionable at the court of Burgundy, especially during the reign of Philip the Good (r. 1419-67). Moreover, the duke founded Order of the Golden Fleece in 1430 and adopted flint steel and flames as its emblem (Figure 5), and Kohlhaussen argues that the golden rays on the interior of the beaker can be related to the emblem of the Order.[6] However, the flame on the Golden Fleece emblem is curved while those on the "Monkey Cup" are straight.[7] The somber color scheme of black, grey and white was not exclusively Burgundian; grisaille imagery was prevalent in French court circles throughout the fourteenth century, and Charles VI of France (1368-1422) was also portrayed several times in black garments, for instance in a 1405-15 manuscript of Pierre Salmon's *Dialogues* (Figure 6).[8]

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[4] Christina Normore, "Feasting the Eye in Valois Burgundy" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2008), 109-10.
[5] Herinch Kohlhausse, "Niederländisch Schmelzwerk," *Jahrbuch Der Preuszischen Kunstsammlungen* 52 (January 1, 1931): 153–69.
[6] Ibid., 158.
[7] The discrepancy has also been pointed out in Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Secular Spirit: Life and Art at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: Dutton, 1975): 270.
[8] Salmon, Pierre. *Réponses à Charles VI et Lamentation au roi sur son état*, *1405-1415* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscris, Français 23279). For grisaille imagery created in French court circles, see Jean Pucelle, *The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux*, *c.*1324-28, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 54.1.2; Jean le Noir and Workshop, *Psalter and Hours of Bonne de Luxembourg, Duchess of*

Several scholars have also suggested the Burgundian provenance based on a passage in the *Mémoires* of Olivier de la Marche (*c.* 1426-1502), Maître d'hotel and Captain of the Guards at the court of the Burgundian Duke Charles the Bold (1433-1477), as a link between the beaker and the Burgundian court. The passage records a performance that took place during the celebrations of the Duke's marriage with Margaret the York in 1468. On the third night of the feast, seven performers dressed as monkeys came out from a door in a castle model and discovered a sleeping peddler. The monkeys took away his merchandise and started to perform a Morris dance.[9] The beaker and the significantly later performance clearly share a theme. However, since this theme of monkeys robbing a merchant had already been depicted in earlier manuscripts such as the *Smithfield Decretals* (*c.*1300-*c.*1340), it was clearly a familiar trope in courts other than the Burgundian one, and the performance does not effectively demonstrate a connection with the beaker. As I show in Chapter 1, the socio-historical tensions reflected in the "Monkey Cup" were prevalent in all Valois territories.

Stylistic analysis likewise supports broadening the attribution of the "Monkey Cup" to the greater circle to the Valois courts. Close visual comparisons suggests an affinity between the beaker and a particular manuscript, a Book of Hours made for Duke Jean de Berry (BnF, MS. Latin 919), illuminated by Jacquemart de Hesdin and other painters who worked for the Duke in about 1413.[10] On the margins of the manuscript, bears, one of Jean de Berry's emblems, are depicted many times, and several of them

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Normandy, before 1349, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 69.86; and André Beauneveu, *Psautier de Jean de Berry*, 1380, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Français 13091.

[9] Olivier de La Marche, *Mémoires d'Olivier de La Marche: maître d'hôtel et capitaine des gardes de Charles le Téméraire* (Librairie Renouard, H. Loones, successeur, 1885), 153-54.

[10] See the detailed information of this manuscript in Gallica: http://gallica.bnf.fr/Search?ArianeWireIndex=index&p=1&lang=EN&q=Horae+ad+usum+Parisiensem&x=0&y=0.

have postures identical to those of the monkeys on the beaker (Figure 7). The resemblance has an immediacy that suggests that one served as the model for the other or that the artists relied on the same pattern book. Moreover, the stylized cloud band on the interior facet of the "Monkey Cup" is echoed on the *Apocalypse Tapestry* (Figure 8), commissioned by Louis I, Duke of Anjou (1360-1384), and in the Book of Hours of Margaret d'Orleans (1406-1466) (Figure 9), grand-daughter of Charles V, King of France.

As these stylistic affinities suggest, the beaker likely dates to the first, rather than second quarter of the fifteenth century (as it is currently dated in the MMA files). I propose that a first quarter of the fifteenth century dating is most appropriate also based on the chaperon *de cou* worn by the peddler, which was in fashion from the early fourteenth century through the first quarter of the fifteenth century.[11] Members of the high nobility were often depicted wearing this kind of chaperon with dagging at the border in this period, as shown in one of the portraits of the Burgundian Duke John the Fearless (1371-1419) (Figure 10).

The earliest known pictorial rendition of the theme of monkeys robbing a sleeping peddler is found in the early fourteenth-century *Smithfield Decretal* (Figures 11-14).[12] An early literary source of the theme, if one ever existed, remains a mystery.[13] The *Decretal* was dedicated to the University of Paris, but its text and gloss were written in Southern

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[11] See Anne H. van Buren and Roger S. Wieck, *Illuminating Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands 1325-1515* (New York: Morgan Library & Museum, 2011). Even though Van Buren does not make this conclusion in the book, it is clear that the chaperon *de cou* has a much higher frequency in the said period from the comprehensive examples Van Buren provides in the book. For examples, see Fig. 3, 4, 23-b, 75-76, 80, 81 and B. 6, 9, 12, 13.

[12] Fritz Saxl, "Holbein's Illustrations to the 'Praise of Folly' by Erasmus," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 83, no. 488 (November 1943): 276, 277.

[13] H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1952), 216.

France and the border decoration of the folios that contain the monkeys and peddler was executed in London during the second phase of the manuscript's decoration.[14] A comparison between the manuscript and the beaker shows no stylistic connection, therefore the "Monkey Cup" artist probably did not use the manuscript as a model. Unlike on the beaker, the monkeys in the manuscript only fiddle with the peddler's paraphernalia and merchandise, not the man himself. Moreover, only one monkey is sitting on a tree, which is highly simplified, while the other monkeys are all on the ground. These differences are indicative of the more nuanced, culturally specific meanings infused into the "Monkey Cup," which I explore in this thesis.

My research on the "Monkey Cup" is mainly indebted to two bodies of scholarly literature. Studies on the socio-historical context of Late Medieval Europe, especially in France and Burgundy show the rising power of the third estate, and the prevalent tension and conflict between the second and third estates.[15] Among them, the studies focused on the contemporary concept of true nobility have been very important for my understanding of the specific ways in which members of the third estate emulated their superiors.[16] They are also instrumental to my analysis of the afterlife of the "Monkey Cup" in the Medici collection. My interpretation of the "Monkey Cup" as denunciation of the merchant class'

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[14] Alixe Bovey, "A Pictorial *Ex Libris* in the Smithfield Decretals: John Batayle, Canon of St Bartholomew's and his Illuminated Law Book," in *Decoration and Illustration in Medieval English Manuscripts*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2002), 67-91.

[15] Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Richard Vaughan, *John the Fearless: The Growth of Burgundian Power* (Rochester, NY.: Boydell Press, 2002); *Philip the Bold: The Formation of the Burgundian State* (Rochester, NY.: Boydell Press, 2002); *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970); *Valois Burgundy* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975); Peter J. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[16] Jean C. Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages: Studies in Society and Visual Culture* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Charity Canon Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (January 1, 1967): 33-48.

social ambition has been informed by two very important sources: H. W. Janson's *Apes and Ape Lore* and the third volume of J. A. Herbert's *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*.[17] By studying the "Monkey Cup" in conjunction with Janson's study on simians, I was able to understand the various ways the sleeping merchant was reproached and the specific moral deficiencies the artist referenced. Herbert's catalogue provided a rich array of primary stories on simians. These stories, before condensed and abstracted into religious sermons or theories, reflect the most familiar and unaffected opinions contemporary people had about simians.

The thesis is divided into four chapters that explore the original meaning of the "Monkey Cup;" the rich iconology of monkeys, through which the beaker's derogatory meaning is enhanced to the fullest; the implications of the Medici ownership of the "Monkey Cup;" and, finally, how, with the insertion of the Vulcan and Minerva uniface medal, the beaker came to embody the social and cultural history of the Renaissance.

In Chapter 1 "Divesting a Merchant's Social Ambition," I argue that the beaker was created to entertain its noble owners at court by deriding merchants' social ambition. I begin by tracing the socio-historical context in which the beaker was created, showing the tension and conflicts between members of the nobility and the third estate, especially wealthy merchants. I then analyze the specific ways in which the sleeping peddler apes the nobility, and contemporaries' reactions to such activities that breached social boundaries. I also examine the visual cues inserted by the artist that ridicule the peddler. At the end of the chapter, I analyze the concept of true nobility in early fifteenth-century Europe and the importance of noble lineage to one's claim of the noble identity. I propose

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[17] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 1952; J. A. Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol.3 (London: British Museum, 1910).

that the artist evokes the iconography of the Tree of Jesse theme to draw a parallel between the peddler and the monkeys, thus deriding his ignoble genealogy and corrupt morality.

Chapter 2, "The Iconology of Monkeys," goes into further depth in explaining contemporaries' perceptions of monkeys in order to fully understand how the artist censures the peddler's social ambition by paralleling his inappropriate imitation of the nobles with the monkeys' awkward imitation of humans. Moreover, the rich and often negative symbolism and connotations associated with monkeys were used by the artist to reproach the ambitious merchant's character. The analysis of the iconology of monkey shows that the animal has been associated with the dangers of mimesis, understood at that point as superficial imitation, as well as with divine punishment, ill-gotten wealth, and even the devil himself. I examine each connotation and interpret how they all functioned together to denounce the third estate's ambitious imitation of the nobility.

In Chapter 3, I address the implications of the Medici acquisition of the "Monkey Cup" or a similar beaker. To that end, I explore two possible scenarios. The first one considers the possibility that the beaker was a gift or security deposit handed to the Medici from a certain Valois court. This scenario reflects the fluidity of the concept of nobility. The second scenario is that the Medici acquired the "Monkey Cup" or a similar one through their own procurement. This scenario suggests the Medici's emulation of the noble lifestyle and their self-fashioning as a princely court. Analyzing two Florentine prints with the same theme created after the Medici acquired the beaker, I argue that they were derived from the design of the "Monkey Cup." In contrast with the beaker, however, the two prints reproach not the lower class's social ambition, but individual

moral corruption. This reveals how the Medici may have justified their social climbing by their virtue.

In Chapter 4, "The Nobility of Aping," I focus on the silver-gilt uniface medal on the bottom of the "Monkey Cup." I argue that the design of the uniface medal shows the coronation of mechanical arts, and evokes two important art historical themes at once – "ut pictura poesis" and "ars simian naturae." The arts of painting, sculpture and architecture were considered lower and less noble than the liberal arts at the time the "Monkey Cup" was created. Through the course of the sixteenth century, the artist's status was elevated, and artists' mimesis of nature was no longer considered to be negative. Moreover, the Roman god Vulcan was sometimes associated with monkeys, therefore an opportune choice for the "Monkey Cup." I conclude that the uniface medal celebrates the "Monkey Cup" artist's craftsmanship and ingenuity, reflecting a celebratory reading of the existing iconography of mimesis—in stark contrast to the original intention. The present configuration of the beaker, with the uniface medal at the bottom, is thus a material testament to the rising status of artists and their mimetic crafts.

This thesis offers a contextualized interpretation of the "Monkey Cup," and unearths the social tensions between the second and third estates as reflected by the beaker's denunciation of the ambitious sleeping peddler's mimesis of the nobility. It explores the rich afterlife of the "Monkey Cup," and the layered social and cultural history it has charted. The study shows the different roles the beaker played in relation to the social climbing process of the merchant class and the ennoblement of artists and their crafts, and presents the beaker as a manifestation of the rising status of the third estate, a microcosm of the main themes of Renaissance history and art.

CHAPTER 1

DIVESTING A MERCHANT'S SOCIAL AMBITION

When the original owner lifted up the "Monkey Cup" and saw the sleeping peddler, the mischievous monkeys, and the intricate design of the beaker, what would he or she think of the indolent man? In this chapter, I retrace the socio-historical context in which the "Monkey Cup" was created, and argue that the artist incorporated a series of visual cues that not only reveal the sleeping peddler's social ambition, but also humiliate him on several levels. In this way, the "Monkey Cup" embodies the tension between two estates respectively represented by the owner of the cup and the peddler on the cup.

The time-honored notion of three orders, or three estates in Medieval France, was already clearly expounded in the third decade of the eleventh century by Adalbero, Bishop of Laon, and Gerard, bishop of Cambrai.[18] It separated men into three groups: those who pray (clergy), those who fight (nobility) and those who toil. The tripartite scheme was intended to inhibit social mobility, stabilize the disturbing factors in society, and make sure that everyone, especially the third estate, tended to their duty. As an ideal feudal structure ordained by God to be followed by faithful Christians, it provided the theoretical basis for the first two orders' domination of the third. A merchant like the one depicted on the "Monkey Cup," even though he lived off a completely different kind of labor than peasants – the principal component of the third order – still belonged to the

[18] Duby, *The Three Orders*, 13-20.

third estate. All the hassle he had to go through in pursuit of profit would have been the antithesis of a nobleman's leisure and nonchalant lifestyle.

Despite his evident vocation, the "Monkey Cup" peddler does not look like a person from the third estate. An analysis of his clothes shows that he is imitating a nobleman's way of dressing. The peddler wears a knee-length houpeland with gold linings as shown around his sleeves and the corner flipped over by one of the monkeys (Figure 15). The houpeland is adorned with dark red stripes alternating with black and blue dots. Normally, such embellishments were reserved for people with high social standing, while people beneath them wore plain and hardly adorned garments. The stark contrast is readily shown by the illuminations in the *Très Riches Heures du duc De Berry* (Figures 16 and 17). The chaperon *de cou* worn by the peddler was in fashion during the first quarter of the fifteenth century.[19] Anne van Buren's research on the archival record of the wardrobes of the French Kings John the Good (r. 1350-64) and Charles V shows that chaperons were essential items, which the kings also gave to other members at the court.[20] The dagging at the hem of a chaperon, a detail that made it more laborious to manufacture and thus even more luxurious, was a further embellishment favored by courtiers—and apparently, also by the beaker's sleeping peddler.[21]

The peddler's breach of sartorial etiquette would have been severely condemned by the church and secular authorities alike. Already in the early ninth century, Theodulf, Bishop of Orléans (*c.* 798-821) exhorted merchants to pay more attention to their eternal rather than earthly life. He reminds merchants that God has given them the trade in order

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[19] See note 11.
[20] Van Buren and Wieck, *Illuminating Fashion*, 5-7.
[21] Ibid., 2-3.

that they can provide their body and soul with the necessities, and anything that is more than necessary should be avoided.[22] In medieval sermons, the sin of *superbia* often takes the form of unseemly extravagant clothes, as is represented in *The Abbot Condemns Pride and Envy among Men*, an illumination of Gilles li Muisis' (1272-1353) poem.[23] Several of the condemned men in the illumination wear similar clothes to the "Monkey Cup" peddler, including the chaperons *de cou* with the extravagant dagging, knee-length houpelands, and tight hose.

Directly targeting the third estate's sartorial emulation of the nobility in her *Livre des trois vertus* (1405-1406), Christine de Pizan (*c*. 1364-1430) reproaches the wives of merchants for dressing inappropriately like princesses. De Pizan, who was in favor at the court of Charles VI (r. 1380-1422) in Paris, stresses the importance of distinguishing different social ranks in a city like Paris, where social distinctions were more nuanced. According to her text, due to vanity and arrogance, the merchants' wives adorned themselves and their houses in splendid ways that would only befit royalty. She even suggests that the king should impose some new tax on the merchants lest their wives have enough money to adorn themselves like the queen of France.[24] She claims that the rationale for prohibiting the third estate from wearing sumptuous clothes was the good intention to "protect them from such unnecessary and wasteful things," for no matter how

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[22] J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus,* vol. 105, *Theodulfi Aurelianensis Episcopi, Sancti Eigilis Abbatis Fuldensis, Dungali Reclusi, Ermoldi Nigelli, Symphosii Amalarii presbyteri Metensis, opera omnia* (Paris: Excudebatur et Venit Apud J. P. Migne, 1864), 202: "Quid cavere mercatores debeant qui negotiantur. Admonendi sunt qui negotiis ac mercationibus rerum invigilant, ut non plus terrena lucra quam vitam cupiant sempiternam … ita his quoque qui pro necessitatibus suis negotiis insistunt, faciendum est. Unicuique enim homini Deus dedit artem qua pascatur, et unusquisque de arte sua, de qua corporis necessaria subsidia habet, animae quoque, quod magis necessarium est, subsidium administrare debet."
[23] See Van Buren and Wieck, *Illuminating Fashion*, 61, plate 7.
[24] Christine De Pizan, "Of the Wives of Merchants," in *The treasure of the city of ladies, or, The book of the three virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), 136-38.

much they resemble the nobles in appearance, their "real social position would still dog them."[25]

Viewed against this backdrop of social tensions, the "Monkey Cup" peddler would have been perceived as morally flawed. According to Bishop Theodulf's sermon, and echoed in De Pizan's rationale, social rank not only spoke to one's power and wealth, but more importantly it was also believed to convey the essential quality of the person.[26] Attributing a person's inferior status to his or her innate inferiority was a common tactic used by the ruling classes to dominate their subordinates. According to Pope Gregory I's (r. 590-604) discourse on pastoral rule, even though God created all men to be equal, the variation of their merits demands the sinful to be lower in order than the virtuous, therefore men do not possess equal standing, one is bound to be ruled by another. He also reminds those who rule not to forget that their power comes not from rank but good merit, and they should assume more responsibility for the benefit of others.[27] Therefore, the rationale of the tripartite scheme – the clergy, the nobility, and the third estate – was based on virtue, and it was up to the nobility and clergy to protect the morally reproachable third estate and attain salvation for their lost souls. Because of the peddler's innate inferiority, it was unbecoming for him to dress lavishly and, by so doing, he has committed the sin of *superbia*.

Other than flattering its princely owners as innately better and standing on higher

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[25] Ibid., 139.
[26] Also see Duby, *The Three Orders*, 66-68.
[27] J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus,* vol. 77, *Sancti Gregorii Papae I cognomento magni, opera omnia* (Paris: Apud Garnier Fratres, 1896), 34: "quod omnes homines natura aequales genuit, sed variante meritorum ordine alios aliis culpa postponit. Ipsa autem diversitas quae accessit ex vitio, divino judicio dispensator; ut quia omnis homo aeque stare non valet, alter regatur ab altero. Unde cuncti qui praesunt, non in se potestatem debent ordinis, sed aequalitatem pensare conditionis; nec praeesse se hominibus gaudeant, sed prodesse."

moral ground than the peddler, the beaker's appeal to a court audience also had to do with the conflicts between the established second estate and the rising third estate. By 1400, the tripartite social scheme existed only in the form of wishful fantasy. The commercial revolution starting in roughly the eleventh century, featuring money as the primary medium of exchange, had engendered a robust merchant class, whose social power and lifestyle were not necessarily inferior to that of the nobility.[28] Noblemen, whether prominent court rulers or members of the high clergy who basically originated from the aristocracy, relied on merchants to get access to the luxurious exotic products necessary to maintain a noble lifestyle.[29] Quality stones for building royal palaces were imported from Barnack in England, Caen in Normandy, and Carrara in Tuscany; carpets adorning noble households were imported from the Near East; beeswax candles that gave off sweet scents were imported from Russia, Hungary, and Bohemia; the nobility's endless demand for luxury goods made an important contribution to the rise of the merchants and their trade.[30] The "Monkey Cup" peddler may have represented one of the beneficiaries of the Commercial Revolution, which made him affluent enough to afford the sumptuous dress.

With newly amassed wealth and power, many merchants began to encroach upon the realm of the aristocrats, and even posed severe threats to them. As Richard Vaughn points out, conflicts between different social groups and the warfare of class became a

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[28] For commercial revolution, see Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003); for merchant's burgeoning condition during the revolution see Duby, *The Three Orders*, 322-23 and Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization:400-1500* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2000), 252.

[29] Take the city of Bruges for an example, about seventy-five percent of members of the high clergy came from noble families, see Jean Wilson, *Painting in Bruges*, 25.

[30] For a detailed analysis of courtly consumption and its dependence on importation enabled by merchants, see Spufford, *Power and Profit*, 106-39. Jacques le Goff makes a similar observation in *Medieval Civilization*, 252.

salient feature in Europe after the mid-thirteenth century.[31] There were the Battle of Golden Spurs in 1302 between French nobility and Flemish burghers; the Ghent Revolts, first led by Jacob van Artevelde (1290-1345), a politician from a family of cloth merchants, against Philip VI, King of France (1293-1350) and Louis I, Count of Flanders (*c.* 1304-1346) in 1336; and then in 1447, led by influential guild members against Philip the Good's tax imposition for salt; the Ciompi Revolution in Florence in 1378; and the English Peasants' Revolt in 1381 against the heavy poll tax. The person who most effectively attests to the capability of merchants in the political arena, as well as the nobility's financial dependence on the merchants, was the provost of the Paris merchants, Étienne Marcel (1310-1358), one of the key figures in the Jacquerie Revolt.[32] Discontent among Parisians was fermenting due to the high tax burden, misadministration of the Valois monarchs, and the military incompetence of the nobility during the Hundred Years War between France and England. In 1357, assisted by Robert le Coq (d. 1373), Bishop of Laon, and his often-violent supporters, Marcel made demands from the dauphin, the future Charles V (r. 1364-1380), and threatened guild strikes and armed civil rebellions if the dauphin refused to cooperate.[33] The Jacquerie Revolt did not subside until 1358. During its most exacerbated moment, Marcel's supporters murdered two marshals in the dauphin's presence.[34]

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[31] Vaughn, *Valois Burgundy*, 11.
[32] For a close analysis of Étienne Marcel and the Jacquerie Revolt, see Arthur L. Funk, "Robert Le Coq and Étienne Marcel," *Speculum* 19, no. 4 (October, 1944): 470-87.
[33] R. Delachenal, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France: Chronique des règnes de Jean II et de Charles V* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1910), 1:96: "Et là les dis conseilliers de monseigneur le duc requistrent au dit prevost des marchanz que il vousist cesser et faire cesser les autres gens de la dicte ville de l'empeschement qu'ilz avoient mis ou cours de la dicte nouvelle monnoie; les quelz prevost et autres gens respondirent que riens n'en feroient et qu'ilz ne souffreroient point que la dicte monnoie courust. Et oultre furent si esmeuz par toute la dicte ville que ilz firent cesser tous menestereux d'ouvrer; et fist commander le dit prevost par toute la dicte ville que chascun s'armast."
[34] Ibid., 355-56.

To the aristocratic owner of the "Monkey Cup", the sleeping peddler was probably as obnoxious as Étienne Marcel. His sartorial emulation of the noblemen was not only a matter of vainglory, but also had dangerous consequences. Clothes were key forms of communication in the Middle Ages, which spoke to one's status, wealth, vocation and ambition. Parading in sumptuous dresses was an important part of the enactment of a noble lifestyle, which was essential to one's assertion of noble identity. In contrast to Johan Huizinga's well-known depiction of the decadent and futile extravagant life in Late Medieval European courts, scholars today are in agreement that living nobly, *vivre noblement,* was the necessary process through which noblemen were able to hold a grip on their prestigious status and enhance their power.[35] However, as the most straightforward indicator of one's social status, clothes worked both for and against noblemen's cause of *vivre noblement*: on the one hand, aristocrats dressed sumptuously to distinguish themselves from their social inferiors, thus asserting and reinforcing their dominating role, but on the other hand, the parvenus were able to constantly blur the social demarcations by emulating the fashion of their superiors.[36] To the noble rulers, the power displayed through sumptuous dress was no less concrete than the power flaunted by military prowess, therefore, the peddler and the social group he represents, would have been seen as a threat to the nobility's established power.

These tensions are further complicated by the fact that merchants and bankers played crucial roles at princely courts, and their social climbing was at times endorsed by

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[35] Jean Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages*, 13-41.
[36] For the discussion of sartorial emulation and the need to distinguish oneself, see Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

their royal customers.[37] Having lived in the French court for most of her life, Christine de Pizan must have known very well that the functionality of court relied on those businessmen who acquired luxuries for the princes and provided them with financial backing.[38] In her text, De Pizan separates merchants into two categories: one group is comprised of merchants who deal in large quantity internationally and have agents in different countries, and another of those who buy in large quantities but sell in small ones. She dubs the first category "noble merchants" and claims they are not her target.[39] De Pizan's target was rather the kind of merchant depicted on the "Monkey Cup," with his big bundle of merchandise, which is displayed all over the cup. The merchant himself provides nothing but a threat to the court, therefore his presumptuousness is destined to be censured.

Unlike the condemned "Monkey Cup" peddler, the social climbing of noble merchants like Giovanni Arnolfini was welcomed by established aristocrats. Giovanni Arnolfini was an Italian merchant who became rich through business ventures with the French and Burgundian courts. He played important roles in helping Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (r. 1419-1467) acquire six tapestries as gifts for Pope Martin V.[40] He and his wife Giovanna's emulation of the nobility is documented by Jan van Eyck's famous double portrait of the couple (Figure 18). As Margaret Carroll points out, the

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[37] One example is the Crespins of Arras in the late thirteenth century, members of the family were knighted and acquired the title of royal valet due to their financial support of the count, countess of Flanders, and the king of France. See Joseph and Frances Gies, "Cities and Bankers: The Crespins of Arras," in *Merchants and Moneymen: The Commercial Revolution, 1000-1500* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972) 131-38.

[38] Christine de Pizan's father was court physician and astrologer to Charles V, and her husband was a royal notary and secretary. For more information on de Pizan's life, see Sandra L. Hindman, "Christine de Pizan," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 27, 2015. http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T017495.

[39] De Pizan, "Of the Wives of Merchants," 137.

[40] Wilson, *Painting in Bruges,* 64.

Arnolfinis wear clothes suitable for the high nobility, especially Giovanna's fur-lined green gown. Having their portrait painted was also in line with a courtly lifestyle. As Jean Wilson shows in her research, to preserve one's true-likeness through different art forms, such as portrait painting, was a practice initiated by members of the royal families in order to address their concern for dynasty and lineage.[41] More telling is the fact that they had their portraits painted by Jan van Eyck, who was *valet de chambre* and the favorite painter of Philip the Good.[42] The ruler's endorsement of his social climbing is reflected by the fact that Arnolfini was knighted by King Louis XI (r. 1461-83) in 1463, and appointed by Philip the Good as his councilor and chamberlain by 1465.[43] As Carroll points out, in order to struggle against the negative impressions people commonly held about merchants and their trades, and to justify the display of his wealth, Arnolfini resorted to the evocation of his good faith, as embodied by several details in the painting.[44]

In stark contrast, the "Monkey Cup" peddler possesses none of the Christian values or noble qualities embodied by the Arnolfini couple. By showing the peddler sleeping instead of at work, the artist might intend to evoke the notions of "idleness" and "leisure" usually associated with nobility, which would be another aspect of the peddler's

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[41] Ibid., "Genealogy and the Independent Painted Portrait," 43-61.
[42] Margaret Carroll, "In the Name of God and Profit': Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Representations* no. 44 (Autumn 1993): 110; Jean Wilson proposes that considering the gift giving context at the Burgundian court, it is possible that Philip the Good appointed Jan van Eyck to paint the couple as a marriage gift, see Jean Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages*, 64.
[43] Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages*, 64; for the dating, see Kathleen Frances Sewright, "Poetic Anthologies of Fifteenth-Century France and Their Relationship to Collections of the French Secular Polyphonic Chanson," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008), 68.
[44] Carroll, "In the Name of God and Profit," 105-106. As Carroll points out, the details showing the couple's good faith are the historiated mirror in the back, Giovanni's raised right hand in a gesture of oath-taking, the joining hands of him and his wife, and the presence of "fidelity" – as personified by the little dog.

blind imitation. However, the notions are only evoked to reveal the peddler's ineptness and corruption. Sleeping on the ground in a forest would be the antithesis of any kind of courtly behavior, which was based on constant military training. He was not awakened even as the monkeys mussed his hair and stripped him, leaving a very vulgar and obscene image of him with his bare leg and bare feet. Instead of being leisurely, his sleep can only count as languid, suggesting the cardinal sin of sloth. The peddler also seems very comfortable in the wild, which alludes to his uncultivated, even animal-like quality.

Aside from the peddler's emulation of noblemen's clothing and air, his social ambition is also shown in another aspect. To the right of the peddler, a monkey holds a battle axe it just stole from him (Figure 19). A battle axe would have been a very odd item to have in a peddler's paraphernalia. According to the tripartite scheme, those people who bore arms belonged to the second, warring estate. Soldiers without noble lineage were able to be ennobled through military service.[45] Therefore like style and wealth, military service was another possible proof of one's nobility.[46]

However, that distinction, too, was encroached upon. Medieval romances reveal that as early as the twelfth century, there were merchants who pretended to be knights, and knights misidentified as merchants. In *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal*, written by Chrétien de Troyes (*c.* 1135-83), the most celebrated poet in northern France, there is an episode involving King Arthur's nephew, a great knight called Gawain, who judiciously refuses to participate in a tournament. Waiting for the event to pass, he dismounted and relaxed under an oak tree near a tower. The ladies on top of the tower saw Gawain and his shields and mounts, and began discussing:

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[45] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 152.
[46] Ibid., 153.

> "What keeps that knight beneath the oak? … Don't tell me he's a knight! He is a merchant, and he leads these mounts because he's selling steeds… Perhaps he might look like one (knight), but he's not, dear friend… He's a money changer who'll give those poor young men who fought those bags of money he has brought… he's gold and silverplate laid by within those trunks he's brought along… He is a fool who thinks he's wise, because he doesn't realize he will be taken and arrested for common thieving."[47]

The ladies' discussion contains primary information regarding contemporaries' perceptions of knights, merchants, and merchants' social climbing activities. As revealed by the discussion, merchants often disguised themselves as knights by adopting their accouterment, and they were often wealthier than knights who had become increasingly destitute. Gawain had his identity questioned for failing to attend the tournament, which means a knight who did not fight was not considered a real knight. The "Monkey Cup" peddler closely resembles the kind of merchant discussed by the ladies, a make-believe knight who carries an axe but does not fight. Any further doubt about the "Monkey Cup" peddler's true identity is dispersed as the monkeys have already laid it bare. The artist's choice of the weapon furthers the humiliation. The weapons most readily associated with noble knights were swords, spears, and lances. Axes and clubs were considered less elegant and chivalrous.[48] Battle axes were not only uncommon amongst noblemen, they were also the primary weapon used by Vikings when they raided France in the ninth century.[49] The choice of an axe, then, confirms the peddler's awkwardness and vulgarity.

The theme of awkward imitation of the nobility is furthered by the image on the interior facet of the "Monkey Cup." The hunting scene shows a bow-drawing monkey

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[47] Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, or, The Story of the Grail*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 133-39.
[48] Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 36; see also Ruth A. Johnston, *All Things Medieval: An Encyclopedia of the Medieval World* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: Greenwood, 2011), 2:717-19.
[49] Johnston, *All Things Medieval*, 723.

striking a satisfying pose as a hunter. However, a stag running towards the heedless monkey is about to crush into it (Figure 2). Apparently the monkey does not have the vigilance and skill of a worthy hunter, and it is about to be punished for taking up a humanlike activity that it has no capability or merit to handle. Much like fighting, hunting was considered to be a privileged activity restricted to the ruling class in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe. As more and more fields were declared ducal or royal forests, hunting rights were taken away from the third estate. As a result, hunting became an indicator of a person's social status.[50] Hunting was an important sport for the aristocrats, not only as an exciting and healthy pastime, but also as a preparation for war. In his influential treatise *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) advises his prince on the importance of the mastery of war. According to him, a prince should never let his mind stray from military training, and even in peacetime, he should hunt regularly in order to get stronger, be more familiar with the terrain, and thus be better prepared for military endeavors in the future.[51]

However, like many other practices that denoted a superior social standing, hunting also became a source of competition between the new and established aristocrats, as the parvenus considered it as a venue for their ambitious self-fashioning. As pointed out by Richard Almond, even though hunting was officially deemed the privilege of noblemen who were the only estate expected to carry out this exercise, in reality, several French manuscripts demonstrate that hunting was actually a widespread activity often pursued by members of the third estate.[52]

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[50] Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: History Press, 2006), 28.
[51] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. James B. Atkinson (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 247.
[52] Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 90.

There are three trees adorning the base of the "Monkey Cup," one stands behind the peddler (Figure 15), one stems from behind the peddler's big trunk (Figure 20), and another stands in between the monkey who holds the peddler's battle axe, and a monkey who has a dagger fastened around the waist (Figure 19). Each tree has a different emphasis: one on sumptuous clothes and idleness, one on the merchant's trade and wealth, and the other on the military experience and knightly identity. In this way, the "Monkey Cup" artist is apparently alluding to the three ways whereby members of the third estate might climb the social ladder – or tree – and threaten the status of the established noble families. The "Monkey Cup" peddler tries to ape the nobility with his dashing attire, languid idleness, and awkward battle axe. However each of his attempts is cleverly derided.

The "Monkey Cup" artist further derides the peddler's innate inferiority and his vain attempt at emulating his superiors on account of his inferior genealogy by evoking the iconography of the Tree of Jesse. The overall design of the exterior facet of the "Monkey Cup" – a man sleeping on the ground by a tree with other figures on the branches above – is very similar to pictorial renditions of the Tree of Jesse, a popular biblical theme often found on stained glass windows, furniture, as well as in manuscripts. Jesse was the father of King David, the ancestor of Christ.[53] The theme originates from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him."[54] The typical pictorial rendition of the theme shows Jesse sleeping on the ground with a tree rising from his navel or loins (Figures 21 and 22). Other examples, as on the "Monkey Cup,"

[53] Matthew 1: 1-16 (NABRE)
[54] 11:1-2 (NIV).

show the stem rising from behind the center of Jesse's body such as in *Ingeborg Psalter* (Figure 23). The theme of the Tree of Jesse became very popular in the twelfth century, a time that also saw the flowering of genealogical literature in France.[55] In his study of the Tree of Jesse window of Chartres, James R. Johnson makes the compelling argument that the Jesse window alludes to the French Capetian kings' divine lineage and reflects their objectives to create a centralized government and establish a hereditary monarchy.[56]

The relation between the "Monkey Cup" and the Tree of Jesse theme becomes more apparent when the beaker is compared to Israhel van Meckenem's engraving of the theme (Figure 24). There are several noticeable aspects about Van Meckenem's engraving, and all suggest an affinity with the "Monkey Cup." The profusion of convoluted leaves and highly animated figures of the kings are very unusual. Even more uncommon is the print's horizontal composition with the Virgin and Child seated on a branch on the same horizontal level as other four kings, whereas in most cases, the stem of the Tree of Jesse extends upwards. However, if the print was a pattern design for a vessel and jointed at the left and right ends, it would not only explain the horizontal composition, but also give the Virgin and Child a prominent presentation. Therefore, I propose that Van Meckenem's *Tree of Jesse* may have been inspired by an object such as the "Monkey Cup," especially since the artist himself was an engraver who made designs for metalwork. In that case, the trees on the "Monkey Cup" would have recalled chalices with the Tree of Jesse, possibly used in a liturgical context, thus greatly enhancing the

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[55] For the popularity of Tree of Jesse, see James R. Johnson, "The Tree of Jesse Window of Chartres: Laudes Regiae," *Speculum* 36, no.1 (January, 1961), 3; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Tree of Jesse and Indian Parallels or Sources," *The Art Bulletin* 11:2 (Junes, 1929), 216; for French genealogical literature in the twelfth century, see George Duby, "French Genealogical Literature," in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 149-57.
[56] Johnson, "The Tree of Jesse Window of Chartres," 1-22.

parody at the peddler's expense.

Other than visual resemblance, the factor that links the "Monkey Cup" design with the Tree of Jesse theme is the sense of genealogy. By recalling the Jesse Tree design, the artist insinuates that the peddler's descendants are monkeys, therefore he himself is also a monkey. The artist inserted several details to make sure this message was perceived. The bewildering gold hair and humanlike hairline of the monkey who is taking off the peddler's hose can thus be explained as inherited from the peddler. The artist also juxtaposes the peddler's bare feet with those of the monkeys, and his left and right feet replace the exact places where two of the monkeys' feet should be (Figure 15).

As George Duby points out, dynastic feeling was the deep-seated "mental attitude" of established aristocrats.[57] The reason for the "Monkey Cup" artist to take pains to deride the peddler's inferior genealogy was because the standard of noble lineage as the most crucial factor to one's noble identity was being challenged during the time the beaker was created. On one hand, noble birth began to be de-emphasized in favor of virtue and noble lifestyle as the qualities of true nobility.[58] In her study on early fifteenth-century Dutch courtiers' opinion on the nature of true nobility, Jeanne Verbij-Schillings shows that members of the old landed nobility were often criticized for possessing privileged title but no merit. The courtiers also argued that men ennobled in their lifetimes were no less noble than the old aristocrat families, and the essence of being noble resided in one's lifestyle and virtue.[59] Similarly, Charity Canon Willard's study

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[57] Georges Duby, "The Diffusion of Cultural Patterns in Feudal Society," *Past & Present* 39 (April, 1968), 39-40.
[58] For example see, Charity Canon Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967), 33-48.
[59] Jeanne Verbij-Schillings, "On the Nature of True Nobility: Views from Dutch Courtiers in the Early Fifteenth Century," *Showing Status: Representations of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, edit. Wim Blockmans and Antheun Janse (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 139-57.

shows that literature on the concept of true nobility was being translated and circulated in the Burgundian court in the fifteenth century. These works emphasize the importance of the prince's virtue, which was considered by some as nobler than a noble birth.[60]

On the other hand, people of humble origins began to infiltrate into the aristocracy by fabricating genealogies and adopting heraldry of their own.[61] As Willard points out, the discussion on true nobility that challenged the notion of noble lineage unavoidably had to do with the prospering third estate's social ambition.[62] Such is the case with Guyot Duchamp, Chatelain of Argilly from 1437, who claimed that his ancestors were nobles based on the fake ancestral portraits collected by his father.[63] To these social climbers, the "Monkey Cup" sends a clear admonishing message that no matter how well you dress, your descendants are monkeys, not princes.

The "Monkey Cup" artist presents the peddler as an ambitions yet awkward social climber. His disguise has been exposed by the monkeys, and every one of his attempts to ape the nobility, whether through sumptuous dress, idle demeanor, or fabricated military experience has been derided. The artist refers to the iconography of the Tree of Jesse in order to present the peddler's innate inferiority and degenerate lineage, which, to the established members of the second estate, was at the core of the concept of nobility. The beaker's denunciation of the third estate's social ambition is carried to the fullest extent when seen together with the iconology of monkeys.

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[60] Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," 33-48.
[61] For examples, see Laura Jacobus, *Giotto and the Arena Chapel* (London and Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 5-6; and Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 40.
[62] Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," 45.
[63] Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages*, 48.

CHAPTER 2

THE ICONOLOGY OF MONKEYS

Monkeys had a generally bad reputation in the Early Modern era, which can be gleaned from various literary sources across different periods. The Roman writer Ennius (239-169 BCE) voiced his opinion of monkeys: "How similar is the monkey, the very ugly and degraded beast, to us!"[64] Much later but similar to the attitude of Ennius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) described monkeys as "filthy" when he criticized their appearance along with other creatures such as "fierce lions" and "striped tigers" in the sacred setting of a monastery.[65] It is hard to trace the origins and root of humans' hostile opinions about apes and monkeys. However, H. W. Janson was probably correct in speculating that when humans realized their unique power of creation which made them superior to other animals, they could only assume that the half-human, half-beast simian was a debased descendant of themselves.[66] Indeed, the paramount characteristics that have influenced simian symbolism are their resemblance to humans and their propensity to mimic human behaviors. When the "Monkey Cup" was created, the notion of mimesis had primarily bad connotations, but this attitude began to shift and saw a reverse in the sixteenth century, a point to which I return in Chapter 4.

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[64] Recorded by Cicero, see M. Tullii Ciceronis, *De natura deorum: libri tres*, ed. Austin Stickney (Berlin: Weidmann, 1857), 82: "simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis"
[65] C. Rudolph, trans. *The "Things of Great Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990): 11-12.
[66] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 14.

Imitation is the key theme of the "Monkey Cup." The thirty-seven monkeys, most of which are engaged in humanlike actions, echo the merchant's attempts to imitate his social superiors. The monkeys are pestering the poor merchant: one is brushing his hair, one is pulling on his coat, and another is taking off his hose (Figure 15). On the adjacent cliff, three monkeys examine the merchant's bundle, two of them look attentively at each other with their mouths open, making it seem as though they are discussing their finds. The other one kneels on the ground and looks into the bundle (Figure 20). More lively and interesting are the monkeys on the third cliff. In the middle by the tree, one monkey holds the merchant's boot as if examining it or passing it to another above. Obviously stunned by the odor of the boot, a nearby monkey holds his nose. Another seems to be just arriving from stealing the merchant's battle axe. As it walks and holds the weapon, it turns its head to the merchant, makes a face, and moons at him (Figure 21). In between the scrolls above, twenty-four monkeys are in the midst of a revelry with the merchant's paraphernalia. One monkey is trying on the merchant's boot, another opens his purse and takes out his money. Others dance with his trinkets and play musical instruments such as small shawms, lutes, fifes, Jew's harps, and bagpipes.[67] The interior hunting scene shows one monkey blowing a bugle with a dog on a leash; another monkey aims at the stags that run towards it with a bow in its hand at full draw (Figure 2).

The monkeys' resemblance to humans is extraordinary and was exaggerated by the artist. Not only do their activities resemble human actions, they also seem to possess human emotions. This is exemplified by the monkey that holds the battle axe, whose activity reveals his disdain for the merchant. The iconology of the simian has inevitably

[67] The musical instruments are identified and documented by the MMA, Item Description, February 10, 2015, The Monkey Cup, Medieval Department, the MMA.

been focused on its quasi-human nature, which was recorded in Pliny the Elder's (23/24-79) *Natural History*. Pliny mentions the anecdotes of monkeys imitating the activities of hunters, who taking advantage of such propensity, deceived the monkeys and captured them.[68] The story of the hunters and the monkeys was one the most familiar and popular of the folktales associated with monkeys, and it was expounded in Claudius Aelianus' (*c.*170-235) *De Natura Animalium*. It is said that when the hunter saw monkeys sitting in a tree, he put on a pair of boots weighted with lead, knowing that the monkeys would have been observing from above. He then left the scene and hid at a distance, as the monkeys put on the boots and could not move because of the weight, the hunter came and caught them easily.[69]

Another popular method used by hunters to catch monkeys was recorded by Strabo (*c.* 63 BC – 26 AD), a Greek geographer and historian. In a similar scenario, a hunter stands under a tree with watchful monkeys above him. This time he places a bowl with water in it, and rubs his eyes with it. He then leaves the bowl on the ground and walks away before swiftly substituting it with another bowl containing bird-lime. Called upon by their instinct of mimicking, the monkeys come down from the tree and rub their eyes with the bird-lime, their eye lids are shut together, and the hunter comes back, and catches them once again, with ease.[70] There are several other stories that recount the

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[68] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, trans. John Bostock and H. T. Riley (London: George Bell & Sons, 1890), 2:347.
[69] Claudius Aelianus, *De natural animalium libri XVII*, ed. Rudolphi Hercheri (Leipzig: In Aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1864), 423-24.
[70] Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1930) 7:49-51.

deadly fate of monkeys who blindly imitate humans and end up dead or killing their infants.[71]

Monkeys' imitation propensity was deprecated on the basis that it appears to be pursued without possessing or understanding the innate value of the original action. One example that best illustrates this point appears on a late fifteenth-century German painted glass, on which three monkeys are in the process of building a trestle table (Figure 25). The model of their ideal project, a manmade table, stands in the middle of the foreground. Apparently the monkeys are trying to duplicate what they see. However, as they can neither understand the functionality of a table, nor the difference between vision and reality, they make the table with six legs and no matter how hard they try, the table will never be the same as the one they have in mind. This glass roundel, like the stories recounted above, exemplifies the danger and folly of mimesis, an idea associated with monkeys throughout history. In his study of marginalia, Michael Camille argues that the prevalent presence of monkeys in manuscript illuminations, misericords and cathedral door panels signifies "the dubious status of representation itself," and "draws attention to the danger of mimesis."[72]

Such danger is clearly conveyed on the "Monkey Cup." The monkey that imitates the noblemen's hunting practice is about to be crushed. As for the merchant, his imitation of the upper class is being undone by the monkeys. He is being punished for assuming the appearance of a superior status without possessing the corresponding virtues such as

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[71] Two other stories in Janson's book, one with monkey putting a knife on its neck and slitting its own throat without knowing that the man it was imitating used the blunt side of the knife; the other recounts that a mother monkey bathed her cub in boiling water and killed it, see Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore,* 35.
[72] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13.

the vigilance of a noble warrior. It seems that monkeys had a bent for exposing the true features of a deceiver. A thirteenth-century tale records an incidence of a monkey plucking off a Parisian woman's gorgeous headdress, and publicly humiliating her.[73] Similarly, the English scholar Alexander Neckam (1157-1217) refers to a story about a monkey taking off a bald man's wig in a bustling street.[74] To reveal the "Monkey Cup" merchant's true identity, the wicked monkeys take away his battle axe, remove his sumptuous dress, and vigorously display his petty merchandise everywhere. On the princely table for which the "Monkey Cup" was designed, the merchant would have been a laughing stock for the aristocrats.

Furthering the courtly significance of the imagery, the primates on the "Monkey Cup" are Barbary apes, a kind of monkey that does not have a tail. They were regular pets in a court environment and the noblemen and courtiers would have been very familiar with their behavior and appearance.[75] This kind of monkey was imported from Africa through the Mediterranean trade route and was available in large numbers in Medieval Europe. As Janson puts it, the Barbary apes came to be regarded as the "monkey *par excellence*."[76]

Along with hunting dogs, aristocrats kept simians as treasured pets, trained for performance, who could apparently mimic humans, and were thus deemed very entertaining.[77] For example, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250), who

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[73] Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances*, 3:397.
[74] The story is recorded in Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 34; however Janson does not give the specific citation of Alexander Neckam's text.
[75] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 30.
[76] Ibid., 15-16.
[77] Lisa J. Kiser, "Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainment, and Menageries," in *A Cultural History of Animals,* vol. 2, *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, ed. Brigitte Resl (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 120.

kept a wide range of animals in his spectacular menagerie, chose to welcome his fiancée Isabella of England (1214-1241) by holding a spectacle that featured many animal performances, including monkeys walking in parade guided by their Ethiopian keepers.[78] Monkeys were also a symbol of their owner's wealth, and this even applied to clerics. In one of his sermons, Hugh of St. Victor (*c.* 1096-1142) criticizes those clerics who kept monkeys out of vanity: "even though monkeys are the most contemptible, filthy and horrible animals, unfortunately it is allowed, alas, especially for clerics, to keep one in their own houses in order to impress the passing foolish men how rich they are."[79]

The courtly owner of the "Monkey Cup," then, may well have owned Barbary apes as pets. If so, watching effigies of familiar pets humiliating the sleeping peddler must have been very entertaining and satisfying. Many manuscript illuminations show the presence of a monkey or ape in a courtly setting in the company of royalty and courtiers. In such images, the beast is always tamed and docile. For instance, in *Dialogues of Pierre Salmon*, a manuscript contemporaneous with the beaker which was illuminated by the Boucicaut Workshop, several folios show a monkey embracing a dog in King Charles VI's chamber in the foreground (Figure 26). Even though the meaning of the monkey's gesture is not known, the compassionate feeling conveyed by such a gesture is unmistakable. It seems that the pets have been influenced by their owner and know how to behave in the presence of the King. Another example is one of the illuminated pages of the *Gestorum Rhodie obsidionis commentarii* (Figure 27), which shows the author Guillaume Caoursin (1430-1501) presenting the manuscript to Peter d'Aubusson (1423-

[78] Ibid., 107.
[79] L. Bourgain, *La chaire française au XIIe siècle* (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1879), 12, n.4; see also Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets* (Woodbridge, UK and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2012), 55.

1503). It shows a monkey with long tail being threatened by a handsome hunting dog in the foreground, and a monkey and pet dog sit right under the feet of Peter d'Aubusson. It seems as though the monkey is mimicking Caoursin's action in the middleground. The monkeys encountered by the merchant on the "Monkey Cup" are much more mischievous than the docile and lovable ones depicted beside the princes.

In addition to the mimicking propensity shared by different kinds of monkeys, the particular type of primate on the "Monkey Cup," the Barbary ape, had specific negative connotations from Greco-Roman antiquity through the Middle Ages. As early as the second century, Barbary apes were believed to be devilish creatures. Much of the resentment stemmed from the bareness of their posteriors, which were considered to be extremely ugly, and the animal itself was believed to be filthy and vile. According to *Physiologus*, the fundamental zoological compendium that had gained extraordinary popularity since its creation in the second century through the Middle Ages, the tailless monkey represents the devil himself since it has a beginning, but not an "end," and like the devil, who started out as an archangel but became a turncoat, it will not end well either.[80]

An animal's tail had very important symbolic meanings. As Janson points out, men's basic perception of an animal was a creature with a tail, and only men were exempted as God decided to give them free will, that is, an "end" not previously

[80] Francis J. Carmody, "Physiologus Latinus Versio Y," in *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, ed. W. H. Alexander et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944), 12:121: "Habuit enim initium, finem autem non habet (hoc est caudam); in principio autem fuit unus ex archangelis, finis autem eius nec invenitur. Beneque simius, non habens caudam, sine specie enim est; et turpe in simio, non habentem caudam; sicut et diabulus, non habet finem bonum." For general information on *Physiologus,* see Debra Higgs Strickland, "Physiologus," Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online (Oxford University Press, accessed February 24, 2015), http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2089352.

determined. Therefore, the tailless monkey came to bear the implication of arrogance and ambition. Its desire to be like a human is once again paralleled with the devil's imitation of the true God, even though it does not possess any creative power of its own.[81] The monkeys' devilish ambition is suggested in the "Monkey Cup" via the merchant's reproachable social ambition, and once again, the merchant is paralleled with the animal. In several cases, the rears of the Barbary apes on the "Monkey Cup" are immodestly and realistically presented by the artist, which would draw the viewers' attention to the well-known, negative connotations of the monkeys' bare posteriors.

As the bestiary genre developed through later generations, the devilish character of Barbary apes came to be applied to monkeys in general. An English bestiary manuscript from the second half of the fourteenth century records such an instance. During Mass, a lady's pet monkey broke loose from its master and ate the Host. The lady had her pet burnt, and the Host was found intact.[82] Adding credit to the fable, a Dominican friar named John of Chester has been cited as a witness to this miracle.[83] Apparently, the monkey was the devil incarnate, and was eventually vanquished by the triumphant Christ.

God's triumph over evil is also embodied on the interior facet of the "Monkey Cup." As noted in the Introduction, the highly stylized cloud band and rain motif on the rim of the beaker closely resemble those on a folio of the Book of Hours of Margaret of Orléans (Figure 9). The center of the folio shows St. Catherine's torturers on the wheel that is intended for her, and the saint stands by the side and looks above at God and three

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[81] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 19.
[82] Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances,* 3:576; for original text, see MS. Harley 2316, British Library, London: f. 12.
[83] Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances*, 3:574.

angels. The rest of the folio is taken up by the same kind of stylized cloud band and big rain drops as on the "Monkey Cup." In the rain, four swords are smashing the torture wheels. Similarly, in Van Meckenem's woodblock print of *The Plague of Locusts*, the pests are shown issuing down from a stylized cloud band, the shooting rays in the print are also present on the beaker. In these instances, as well as in the "Second Trumpet" from the *Apocalypse Tapestries* (Figure 8), the motif is associated with just and miraculous divine intervention.[84] In this light, the stag knocking into the hapless monkey on the interior facet of the "Monkey Cup" can be interpreted as God's divine judgment and punishment of the arrogant monkey, which by extension, is also applied to the sleeping merchant.

The "Monkey Cup" peddler's wealth and his trade are likewise attacked, as Barbary apes were associated with ill-gotten wealth. This iconology was developed from another popular story about the animal, which originates from classical Greek fables and gained its peak popularity in the twelfth century. The original version tells about the motherhood of she-monkeys. After the mother monkey gave birth to twins, she would love one and hate the other. She ignores the hated one and embraces the loved one tightly and accidentally kills it, while the hated one clings to the mother's back and survives.[85] In the *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder also notes the she-monkeys' tendency to stifle their young out of excessive affection in *Natural History*.[86] In a different version of the fable, the loved child dies in another manner. As told by the text and illumination in the Aberdeen Bestiary, when the mother monkey is pursued by hunters, she carries the one

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[84] For Van Meckenem's woodblock, see F. W. H. Hollstein, *German Engravings, Etchings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1400-1700*, ed. Fritz Koreny and Tilman Falk, (Amsterdam: Van Ghent, 1986), 24: cat. 3.
[85] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore,* 31, and 57: n. 5.
[86] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History,* 2:348.

she loves in her arms while the one she despises clings to her back, but as she becomes exhausted, she drops the one she loves and has no choice but go on carrying the one she despises.[87] As Janson correctly claims, this account hardly qualifies as a story, but only an observation, and he traces the earliest instance that the observation began to bear moral implications. In Boethius Commentary, the loved child is associated with carnal desire – "*voluptas*" – while the neglected child is associated with the good soul – "*bona animae*" – and the mother monkey comes to represent the morally corrupt people who vehemently pursue earthly pleasures.[88]

In medieval bestiaries, the same plot took on different moralizing implications to fit specific social conditions or personal agenda. Starting from the end of the thirteenth century, a time that saw the rise of capitalism and the boom in banking and trading businesses, the mother monkey ceased to be perceived as a generalized sinner, and was associated particularly with rich and greedy men.[89] In several manuscripts produced in the fourteenth century, the mother monkey being pursued by the hunter is compared to the usurer and the miser.[90]

Apart from the similitudes between the usurer and mother monkey, several other Medieval fables feature monkeys and a merchant's profit. For instance, on his way home from Greece, a Flemish merchant's pet monkey throws his owner's ill-gotten money into

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[87] The Aberdeen Bestiary, Aberdeen University Library MS. 24, fol. 12: "Nature symie talis est, ut cum peperit geminos catulos, unum diligat, et alterum contempnat. Quod si aliquando evenerit ut insequatur a venatoribus, ante se amplectitur quem diligit et alterum collo portat quem odit. Sed dum lassa fuerit bipes eunto proicit voluens quem diligit et portat nolens quem odit," accessed on Feburary 24, 2015, https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/12v.hti.
[88] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore,* 33.
[89] Ibid., 36.
[90] Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances*, 616: no. 140, 561: no. 25, and 569: no. 136. For original text, see MS. Additional 18364, British Library, London: f. 57; and MS. Harley 268, British Library, London: f. 7b and 34b.

the sea.[91] Another story tells of a man who lived in Dublin who found a monkey sitting on his money chest and told him that what he hoarded inside the chest belongs to the devil.[92] A similar story from the second half of the fourteenth century with more details recounts a monkey throwing overboard the ill-gotten portion of a merchant's money, which he has attained through selling adulterated milk, and gives him back the rest.[93] Although different in several ways, these stories all feature a monkey who identifies and seizes the merchant's ill-gotten money.

The monkeys appear to have a sense of justice, which is contrary to the established iconology that has been explored so far. In explaining the paradox, Janson suggests that the monkey's conduct can be interpreted as sending the money to the devil, and the second story, in which the monkey claims the money belongs to the devil, further supports his specula-tion.[94] In this light, the monkeys assume the role as demons, the executors of God's divine judgment. On Giotto's *Last Judgment* of the Arena Chapel, the condemned souls, several of whom have committed the sin of avarice, are being tortured by apish demons (Figure 28).[95] The imagery is similar to what the monkeys on the beaker are doing to the reproachable peddler and his ill-gotten wealth.

Another possible interpretation of the "just monkey" story draws on the animal's propensity to expose the fake and pretentious, just as the monkeys with the "Monkey Cup" peddler. Equally prevalent as the story of the "just monkey" casting away ill-gotten money is a short account about a monkey casting a nut away because its rind is bitter.

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[91] Ibid., 374: no. 14; for original text, see MS. Additional 11284, British Library, London: f. 3b.
[92] Ibid., 377: no. 62; for original text see MS. Additional 11284, British Library, London: f. 10b.
[93] Johannes Bromyard, *Summa Praedicantium*, (Venice, 1586), 1:19.
[94] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, *37*.
[95] Laura Jacobus, "Usury, Simony and Avarice," in *Giotto and The Arena Chapel* (London and Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 191-97.

Some of the brief accounts are recorded in the same manuscripts as the "just monkey" story.[96] Both themes feature the monkey throwing away something dishonest and corrupted. In this vein, the two themes resemble the story of monkeys plucking off other's wigs, and can be read in accordance with the creature's propensity to identify and expose the pretension and dishonesty. The monkey's association with ill-gotten wealth and propensity for revealing the deficiencies of others cannot be more appropriate for attacking a parvenu. Not only is the merchant humiliated for his social ambition, but his trade becomes a target for mockery as well. His purse has been taken by one of the monkeys seated on the branch. It fumbles inside the purse with one hand while holding a coin close to its eyes for examination (Figure 29). Maybe it will cast away the coin in the next moment.

The beaker's unique rendition of the monkeys robbing the sleeping peddler theme demonstrates the artist's ingenuity, and also attests to the richness and efficiency of the rhetoric tradition of monkeys. The peddler's imitation of his superiors can be paralleled with monkeys' imitation of humans, which is superficial, awkward, ill-considered, and may lead to fatal consequences. The negative connotations associated with simians, such as the devil and ill-gotten wealth, can also be used to denounce the peddler's character and trade. In this light, the "Monkey Cup" showcases the iconography of social derision, the third estate's social ambition is thoroughly criticized. Ironically, as the next chapter shows, such criticism was not without discrimination, and when the social climber was as

[96] For examples, see *Exempla of Jacques de Vitry,* Harley 463, fol. 11b, fourteenth-century, British Museum; *Fables of Odo of Cheriton*, Arundel 292, f. 15b, late thirteenth-century; John of Hoveden, attrib. *Speculum Laicorum*, f. 10; *Liber Exemplorum Secundum Ordinem Alphabeti*, Additional 18351, fol. 46, late fourteenth-century, British Museum; *Religious Tales*, Arundel 506, fol. 42b, first half of the fourteenth-century, British Museum.

powerful and useful to the ruling class as the Medici, the “Monkey Cup” may have functioned to support the social climber’s cause.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDICI AS VIRTUOUS SOCIAL CLIMBERS

The "Monkey Cup" reflects important socio-historic and cultural shifts of its time. As a sumptuous courtly object, it flattered its owners at the Valois court by making abusive jokes about the ambitious merchant class. Before long, however, by 1464, the same cup or a near identical one was in the collection of an Italian merchant family – the Medici. This part of the "Monkey Cup" provenance has been based on the description of a similar beaker in the inventory of Piero de' Medici (1416-1469). Upon close visual analysis, I argue that the design of two Florentine engravings created around 1470 was based on the "Monkey Cup," which suggests that the beaker was indeed visible in Italy at that time, bolstering the hypothesis that this beaker (or one with an identical iconography) is the one owned by Piero. In this chapter, I investigate how the signification of this object functioned within this new context as well as the broader implications of the beaker's provenance.

On January 20, 1464, several months before the death of Cosimo de' Medici, his son Piero de' Medici had an inventory of his collection compiled. Nine silver-gilt beakers are listed, all with enamel decoration (*smaltato*) on the inside and the outside (*dentro et di fuori*).[97] One beaker seems to correspond to the MMA "Monkey Cup": "a beaker with

[97] Eugène Müntz, *Les collections des Médicis au XVe siècle, le musée, la bibliothèque, le mobilier* (Paris and London: Librairie de l'Art, 1888), 35, 40.

silver-gilt mount and cover, enameled in blue on the inside and outside, with a fair of the Barbary apes, enameled in white, 100 florin."[98] Even though the inventory entry is extremely short, it already shows a close correlation between the Medici beaker and the "Monkey Cup." The only discrepancy between the two objects is the color, and scholars have offered several solutions to this problem by attributing it to the effect of different optical conditions.[99] Another factor that lends a certain validity to this proposition is that there are several blue spots scattered around the MMA "Monkey Cup," some merged with the overall black background, some are revealed as the result of chip losses (Figure 30 and 31). The exact reasons for their existence is yet to be explored. Nonetheless, it suggests the possibility that blue was used during the manufacture process of the beaker.[100]

Regardless of whether the two beakers are one and the same, the fact that Piero de' Medici acquired a beaker so similar to the "Monkey Cup" itself merits close analysis. How did the beaker enter Piero's collection? Did he get it as a gift or as a security for credit from a Valois court? Did he acquire it through his own effort? More intriguingly,

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[98] Ibid., 40: "Uno bicchiere col pie et coperchio d'ariento dorato et smalta d'azzuro dentro et di fuori chon la fiera delle bertucce, smaltata bi bianco;" this beaker was first noticed by Aby Warburg in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of European Renaissance* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 277.

[99] James Rorimer postulates that "to a hasty cataloguer the bluish white and gray-blue monkeys and foliage against a luminous dark ground may have appeared differently," see James J. Rorimer, "Acquisitions for the Cloisters," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* New Series, 11, no. 10 (June 1, 1953), 268; similarly, Philippe Verdier has pointed out that "as the scenes and the scrolls painted in grisaille technique on the body of the cup are executed in a bluish color, optically the background seems to be glazed in a lighter tone than it actually is and to verge upon the blue, see Philippe Verdier, "A Medallion of the 'Ara Coeli' and the Netherlandish Enamels of the Fifteenth Century," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 24 (January 1, 1961), 27. Both scholars seem to promote the possibility that the Medici beaker is none other than the MMA "Monkey Cup."

[100] I would like to thank Margaret Burnham, Object Conservator at the Birmingham Museum of Art, who informed me that artists often combine the colors of black and blue to make the black look darker. Professor Noa Turel also points out the possibility that the enamel could be darkened by the oxidation process of silver.

how did the Medici react to a joke that viciously made fun of an ambitious merchant, considering they were the living example of such a presumptuous merchant? Since there is no information that offers further details on this acquisition, it is necessary to analyze the different possibilities.

The first scenario, that the beaker was given to Piero as a gift from a Valois court would have been interestingly ironic, considering the beaker was intended to please members of the high nobility at the courts by deriding the merchant class. It is highly unlikely that the beaker was an ill-considered gift or that the gifting courtier was intentionally mocking Piero. Underestimating the financial and political power of the Medici family, then the *de facto* rulers of the Republic of Florence, would have been unwise. In fact, both the Royal French and Burgundian courts benefited from a good relationship with the Medici bank.[101]

Since, embroiled in the Hundred Years' War, Paris was no longer a very profitable trading and banking center during the first half of the fifteenth century, not much is known about the business relations between the Medici bank and the French royal court at that time. Many Italian banking houses shifted their business to other places.[102] Nonetheless, the Medici branch at Lyon maintained a stable operation, through which the Medici dealt with prominent customers like the Duke of Bourbon, the Duke of Savoy, as well as the King of France.[103] More conspicuous than the business relations

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[101] For the relationship between the Medici and Royal Parisian court, see Katharine Dorothea Ewart, *Cosimo de' Medici* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1899), 105-38; For the relationship between the Medici and the Burgundian court, see Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, 245-47; see also Marina Belozerskaya, *Rethinking the Renaissance: Burgundian Arts Across Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61.
[102] Raymond De Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank: 1397-1494* (Washington D.C.: Beardbooks, 1999), 279.
[103] Ibid., 293.

between the Medici and the Parisian court, the Medici family, especially Piero's father Cosimo de' Medici managed to balance the delicate power struggles between France, Burgundy, and other Italian city states, and maintained a very good rapport with the French Kings.[104] After Cosimo's death in August 1464, King Louis XI (r. 1461-1483) wrote a letter to Piero de' Medici, in which he explained his gratitude for the great services Cosimo had rendered to the French crown. More importantly, in order to secure the long-term support and service of the Medici bank, the king appointed Piero as privy councilor, and granted him the right to bear the French fleur-de-lis on the Medici coat of arms.[105] Apparently Piero proudly changed the orange Medici *palle* at the center of the escutcheon to a blue ball adorned with three lilies.

The Medici bank and the duchy of Burgundy were also indispensable to each other. The Medici bank established a branch in the city of Bruges in the Burgundian territory in 1439, and actively conducted business with the Burgundian court through the markets there.[106] In turn, the magnificent and extremely expensive noble lifestyle flaunted by the Burgundian dukes needed the monetary and credit supports of the Medici bank. Moreover, they relied on the Medici bank to import wool from England and alum from the Mediterranean and counted on the Medici's supply of silks and other luxuries.[107]

Against this backdrop, one might imagine that a Valois ruler gave the "Monkey Cup" to Piero as a gift or a security against a loan. The choice of sending this particular beaker to the Medici should be seen as the ruler's compliment, an affirmation of the

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[104] Ewart, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 125; also see Michael Levey, *Florence: A Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 187.
[105] Janet Ross, trans. and edit., *Lives of The Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910), 85-86.
[106] For Medici's branch in Bruges, see De Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank*, 326-68; for the branch in Geneva, see 179-289.
[107] Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good,* 245.

Medici's noble status. In this gift, the Medici family would have been invited to join the nobility in reprimanding the presumptuous peddler and taking pleasure in his misery.

The French lilies on the Medici escutcheon most effectively symbolize the family's officially patented nobility. The aristocrats' prejudice against the merchant class was not all equal, and it was not unusual for them to bring a merchant into their circle. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the first decades of the fifteenth century Christine de Pizan distinguished between the petty merchants who buy in large amounts but sell in small quantities and the international "noble merchants" who have agents in every land and deal in great bundles.[108] Without a doubt, the Medici were "noble merchants" according to De Pizan's standard. As Raymond de Roover points out, tax records show that beginning with Cosimo's father, Giovanni di Bicci (1360-1429), the Medici were the richest family in Florence, therefore were certainly superior to regular merchants.[109] Furthermore, De Roover traces the four basic kinds of credit institutions in fifteenth-century Florence – pawnshops, retail banks, money-changers, and great banks such as the Medici, which conducted business in offices and were superior to the other kinds.[110] The gift scenario thus reveals the fluidity of the concept of nobility. The choice of denying or endorsing a social climber's activity was thus boiled down to the calculation of benefit. Nobility could be used tactically either as a prize, or as a charge.

There is also a possibility that Piero de' Medici acquired the beaker through his own effort. As several scholars have pointed out, the Medici family looked to the north, especially to the Valois-Burgundian courts for inspiration when it came to establishing

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[108] De Pizan, "Of the Wives of Merchants," 137.
[109] De Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank*, 6.
[110] Raymond de Roover, "The Medici Bank Organization and Management," *The Journal of Economic History* 6, no.1 (May, 1946), 26.

their aristocratic lifestyle and display of magnificence.[111] The "Barbary ape fair" beaker was one of many artworks with a northern origin in Piero de' Medici's collections. This scenario attests to the far-reaching popularity of French courtly art, which was avidly sought by Italian feudal lords and powerful families. More importantly, the possibility that Pietro purchased the beaker serves as a prism through which one can examine the Medici's self-fashioning as noble and virtuous rulers, thus justifying their activities of social climbing.

The art patronage of the early Medici attests to their elite lifestyle. Enabled by their great economic and political prowess, the Medici's collection rivaled that of a prince, and it grew in scale and splendor through generations, reaching a zenith in the time of Giovanni's great-grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492). As recounted by the Florentine patrician and politician Niccolò Valori (1464-1526/30), when Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan (1444-1476) and Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino (1422-1482) were received at the Palazzo Medici, they marveled at the abundance and variety of Lorenzo's collection, which they believed was unmatchable even for a king.[112]

Acquiring a witty, luxurious object made with exquisite workmanship like the "Monkey Cup" was in line with the Medici family's sumptuous lifestyle. The enameled beaker with the "Barbary ape fair" was worth "100 florins," a price that could buy two slave girls or pay an apprentice boy working at the bank for five years.[113] Nonetheless, it was a fairly common object in terms of price in Piero de' Medici's collection. In his

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[111] Belozerskaya, "Medici," in *Rethinking the Renaissance*, 201-8; Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, 245-47; Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 43-45.
[112] Niccolò Valori, Filippo Valori and Enrico Niccolini, *Vita di Lorenzo de'Medici* (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 1991), 52-54.
[113] Tim Parks, *Medici Monkey: Banking, Metaphysics, and Art in Fifteenth Century Florence* (New York and London: Atlas Books, 2005), 34.

treatise *Trattato di architettura,* which was dedicated to Piero and contains a chapter in praise of the Medici family, the Italian sculptor, architect, and theorist Antonio Averlino Filarete (1400-1469) offers a vivid image of Piero, inflicted by arthritis, being carried into his *studiolo* where he would spend the day with his luxury books, effigies, and images of past emperors.[114] Specifically, Filarete mentions that Piero had a huge collection of silver and gold vases, which he took pleasure in inspecting one by one, and admiring their craftsmanship.[115] Piero's pastime reminds one of the daily routine of King Charles V the Wise (1337-80) as recounted by Christine de Pizan: "After resting, accompanied by his intimate entourage, he [Charles V] took pleasure in inspecting his jewels [*joyaux*] and other treasures."[116]

A more interesting question remains as to what did Piero and other members of the Medici family thought about the beaker's derisive implications against the merchant class, and how they dealt with such messages. Even though the Medici family had little in common with the "Monkey Cup" merchant, one of the many subtle and acute satires of the beaker was bound to stab the Medici at a weak spot, which is the factor of genealogy and noble birth, as conveyed through the beaker's evocation of Tree of Jesse and the parallels between the merchant and the monkeys. Piero's grandfather Giovanni di Bicci

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[114] Antonio Averlino Filarete, *Tractat über die Baukunst* (Wien: C. Graeser, 1896), 666. The treatise remained unpublished until the late nineteenth century, the original manuscript was lost, but several copies have survived, among which it is generally believed that the *Codex Magliabechianus*, 1464-1500, (Florence, Bib. N. Cent., MS. ii. i. 140) is the closest to Filarete's original; see A. E. Werdehausen, "Filarete," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 15, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T028234.

[115] Filarete, *Tractat über die Baukunst*, 668-669.

[116] Christian de Pizan, *Le livre des faits et bonnes moeurs du roi Charles V le Sage*, ed. and trans. Eric Hicks and Thérèse Moreau (Paris: Stock, 1997), 69-70: "Après s'être reposé, il restait un moment avec ses intimes pour se distraire et s'occuper selon son plaisir, en regardant des joyaux ou d'autres trésors."

was a knight and appointed as Gonfaloniere of Justice of Florence in 1421, but he was not an aristocrat, let alone a prince.[117]

Two late fifteenth-century Florentine engravings (Figure 32 and 33) shed further light on the Medici's perception of the "Monkey Cup." The authorship and exact date of the two prints remains unknown. The thick modeling and somewhat coarse crosshatching are in common with early Florentine engravings around 1470.[118] Scholars have suggested that the two prints were contemporary, and the Istanbul print is similar in style and technique to the engravings of Baccio Baldini (1436-1487) produced between 1470 and 1480 (Figure 34).[119] Baldini created a few engravings for the Medici family, such as a lid for a round box with the Medici's coat of arms on it.[120] Vasari described Baldini as "inadequate in *disegno,*" and mentions that he worked from designs provided by Sandro Botticelli (1444/5-1510), who enjoyed the generous patronage from the Medici family, especially Lorenzo de' Medici.[121] Although the two prints differ from each other and were certainly created by different artists, as exemplified in the different handling and many other details, they obviously had a common model. Not only are the postures and placements of the two merchants roughly the same, both prints have fourteen Barbary apes that are engaged in the same activities on the same spots around and above the tree.

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[117] Marlis von Hessert, et al. "Giovanni di Averardo de' Medici," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 16, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T056375pg1; see also Joseph Gies and Frances Gies, "Cosimo de' Medici, Father of His Country" in *Merchants and Moneymen* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), 240.

[118] Linda C. Hults, *The Print in the Western World* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 138.

[119] For the Istanbul print, see Mark J. Zucker, et al., *The Illustrated Bartsch* (Norwalk, CT: Abaris Books, 1993), vol. 24, part 2, 2405.047; for the British Museum print, see 2405.048.

[120] William Young Ottley, *An Inquiry into the Origin and Early History of Engraving upon Copper and in Wood* (London: J. Mcreery, 1816), 1: 353-54.

[121] For Vasari's comment on Baldini, see Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori*, (Florence: A. Salani, 1889), Vol. 3, 317: "non avendo molto disegno, tutto quello che fece fu con invenzione e disegno di Sandro Botticello", il quale, dice altrove."

Even though the two engravings are much more simplified than the "Monkey Cup," several distinctive similarities strongly suggest that the engravings were modelled on the cup. Just as on the beaker, there is a monkey holding the merchant's boot upside down and looking inside; although placed in a different spot, there is also a monkey taking off the merchant's hose; the monkey holding a handful of daggers and another one sitting on the top playing drum and blowing trumpet also derive directly from the beaker (Figures 35 and 36). These similarities can hardly be coincidental, and they suggest the strong possibility that the engravings were based on the design of the "Monkey Cup."

The engraver of the Florentine prints also made significant changes to the original "Monkey Cup" design. There are no embellishments on the two merchants' clothes, nor are there any military weapons. The merchants behave in accordance with their social rank. Moreover, there are no visual clues that juxtapose the merchants and the monkeys as is the case with the beaker, and there is hardly any evocation of the iconography of the Tree of Jesse theme in the engravings. Thus the beaker's derision and condemnation of the merchant class's social ambition are diminished in the engravings. Instead, there are some new motifs invented by the engraver: the British Museum engraving shows a monkey seated on the tree, drinking from a flask, and there is an empty bottle under the sleeping merchant's hand. The Istanbul engraving has a drinking monkey in the same spot, but instead of an empty bottle, there is an inscription on the lower left corner that reads: "Dormi forte maesro pieterlin noi vuoter en tuo ischarzelin eltuo penier che to posa chaminar legier meniano laman presta tua el vino nellatesta."[122] The inscription makes it

[122] As translated by Janson: "Sleep fast, master pieterlin, we shall empty your purse and your basket, so that you may travel light. May your quick hand and the wine in your head guide you," see Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 220. Janson also points out that the word "pieterlin" reveals the northern origin of the monkeys robbing the sleeping peddler theme.

clear that the engraving is an admonition against the folly of drinking. No bottle or flask can be found among the various trinkets on the "Monkey Cup." However, as Janson points out, the beaker itself is a vessel, therefore the notion of drinking is already implied.[123]

In the Italian prints the target of the "Monkey Cup" design has been diverted from an ambitious parvenu to a morally corrupt, humble peddler, thus deflecting the critique of social climbing. Furthermore, this departure may reflect the Medici's self-perception and self-fashioning as morally superior, in itself a justification of their rapid social ascent. The Medici family was renowned for their generous expenditures, whether on architectural project or luxuries. They had to justify their magnificent expenditure and sumptuous lifestyle for the avoidance of being reproached like the sleeping peddler, and their activity was justified by several writers and theorists as harmless and virtuous.

The Italian humanist Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) incorporated the Aristotelian notion of "magnificence" to justify Cosimo de' Medici's extravagant patronage on communal and religious architectural projects.[124] According to Aristotle, magnificence was a virtue not exclusive to noblemen, but to rich men: "great expenditure is becoming to those who have suitable means to start with, acquired by their own efforts or from ancestors or connections, and to people of high birth and reputation, and so on."[125] The same can be argued for Piero and Lorenzo de' Medici's extravagant patronage for arts and luxuries. Seen in this light, the Medici's social ambition might be read as an

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[123] Ibid., 220.
[124] A. D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes* 33 (1970), 166.
[125] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ryoss, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

extension of the virtue of magnificence. Standing on the higher moral ground, the Medici blamed the petty peddler's unsuccessful career on his corrupt morality, as reflected by the print.

The first scenario of the afterlife of the "Monkey Cup" as a gift handed to the Medici family presents a new perspective on the concept of nobility, and reflects the complexity of the interaction between the second and third estates. The second scenario, that the Medici family acquired such a beaker through their own procurement, shows how the family emulated the noble lifestyle of the French princely courts, and justified their social climbing by deflecting the beaker's original meaning of aping nobility to a commentary on immorality. If the negative connotation of mimesis had already been downplayed in this phase, the later provenance of the "Monkey Cup" as explored in the next chapter reflects the reversal of the concept of mimesis from reprehensible to noble.

CHAPTER 4

THE NOBILITY OF APING

The uniface medal inserted at the bottom of the beaker after 1572, showing Minerva crowning Vulcan with a laurel wreath (Figure 3), suggests that the primary notion depicted on the "Monkey Cup" – aping, or imitation – has shifted from the peddler's abhorrent imitation of the nobility to artist's convincing imitation of nature.[126] The uniface medal embodies a crucial theme in Early Modern art history – the rising status of the artist, and of the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, in the early fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With the insertion of the uniface medal at its base, the "Monkey Cup" artist's ingenuity, fantastic imagination, and convincing imitation of nature were highlighted, becoming a new focal point in the object. Having himself originated from the third estate, the same social group as the sleeping peddler, whom he derided, the status of the "Monkey Cup" artist and his craft is now elevated to the rank of nobility.

The uniface medal at the bottom of the beaker seems quite discordant with the original International Gothic style of the "Monkey Cup" (Figure 3). It was derived from the reverse of Antonio Abondio's (1538-1591) portrait medal of artist Jacopo Nizzola (*c.* 1514-1589), who, like Abondio, was also a medalist, engraver, and sculptor (Figure 4). A comparison between Abondio's medal and the uniface one of the "Monkey Cup"

[126] The exact reason for adding the uniface medal and the person who was responsible for it were not known.

illuminates the different messages they convey. Both compositions show Minerva at the forge of Vulcan, in Abondio's medal, Nizzola and Vulcan have the same pointy beard, which suggests the possibility that Abondio intends to portray the artist as the personification of the Roman God. According to Roman mythology, Vulcan was the God of Fire, and worked in a forge.[127] Therefore, a medal referencing to the art of Vulcan is reflexive. Vulcan was often associated with mechanical art and presented in the manner of an artisan in visual art, while Minerva was associated with intelligence and wisdom.[128] Therefore, the juxtaposition of Vulcan and Minerva in Abondio's medal might be read as a compliment to Nizzola, who combined both via his craftsmanship and intellect.

The "Monkey Cup" medalist's choice of adapting Abondio's medal that has Vulcan in it was probably influenced by a passage in Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-1375) *Genealogia Deorum*, in which simians actually had an accidental encounter with Vulcan. The author recounts that after Jupiter banished Vulcan, he ended up living on an island of apes, who raised him up. Even though the introduction of apes into this story originated in a mistake, since a medieval scribe misread "Sintii," the name of the local tribe on the island, as "simii," Boccaccio managed to solve the problem by paralleling Vulcan's ability to create every possible artifact through fire and the simians' nature to imitate everything they see. Boccaccio's text became very influential, and monkeys were still affiliated with Vulcan in some instances in the seventeenth century.

If Abondio's medal complimented Nizzola's art, the artist of the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal pushed that idea further and complimented the mechanical arts in general

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[127] Irène Aghion, Claire Barbillon and François Lissarrague, *Gods and Heroes of Classical Antiquity* (Paris and New York: Flammarion, 1994), 302.
[128] Ibid., 302; for Minerva, see ibid., 193-94. See also Clara Erskine Clement, *A Handbook of Legendary and Mythological Art* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969), 430.

through the beaker. In Abondio's medal, Vulcan holds his hammer, the symbol of his mechanical skill. It is juxtaposed with the olive branch held by Minerva. They are placed close to each other in the center of the medal. In the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal, however, there is no such juxtaposition. Instead, Minerva holds a laurel directly over Vulcan's head, he, in turn, holds the product of his labor – a medal. By crowning the Vulcan with laurel, the medalist as well as the "Monkey Cup" goldsmith, are elevated in status to the rank of practitioners of the liberal arts, such as poets Dante (1265-1321) and Petrarch (1304-74), who were portrayed with laurels on their heads (Figure 37). In this case, the artist of the uniface medal evokes the famous notion first termed by Horace in his *Ars Poetica*: "ut pictura poesis," – as is painting so is poetry.[129]

Renaissance artists and art theorists often reinterpreted the simile of "ut pictura poesis," to advocate for ascribing a liberal arts status to the mimetic arts. In his study of the rising status of artists and the art of painting during the Renaissance, Thomas Puttfarken points out that originally neither poetry nor the visual arts were considered part of the seven liberal arts. Canonized by Martianus Capella in the fifth century, those were grammar, logic, rhetoric, music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy.[130] Poetry was elevated to the status of a liberal art around the early fifteenth century through the achievements of earlier Italian poets such as Dante and Petrarch.[131]

The analogy between the arts of poetry and painting is based on their shared ability to imitate nature, their demonstration of artistic ingenuity, and their license in

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[129] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica,* trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 480.
[130] William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), vol.1.
[131] Thomas Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 27-28.

terms of imagination.[132] The Italian writer and painter Cennino Cennini (*c*. 1370-*c*. 1440) was one of the first to use the simile to argue for the liberal status of painting. In *Il Libro dell' Arte* (*c.* 1390), he claims that painting:

> "(presents) to plain sight what does not actually exist. And it justly deserves to be enthroned next to theory, and to be crowned with poetry. The justice lies in this: That the poet, with his theory, though he have but one, it makes him worthy, is free to compose and bind together, or not, as he pleases, according to his inclination. In the same way, the painter is given freedom to compose a figure, standing, seated, half-man, half-horse, as he pleases, according to his imagination."[133]

As Puttfarken and Sharon Fermor point out, the word imagination, or *fantasìa*, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had little to do with wishful or unconscious thinking, but rather referred to the image-forming capacity of the mind.[134] Puttfarken further argues that Cennini's remark shows the humanistic and noble qualities of painting lie in the artist's capacity to imitate not only what he sees in the eye, but also what he forms in the mind.[135] As such, imitation was what at the heart of artistic creation.

Cennini was prophetic in using the simile to argue for painting's noble status. In reality, neither artistic ingenuity, nor imitation – whether visual illusion or rendition of the mind's eye, would qualify the arts as noble. In the first quarter of the fifteenth century when the "Monkey Cup" was created, artistic ingenuity was highly appreciated at courts.[136] Nonetheless, an object like the beaker, which incorporates a series of well-

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[132] Rensselaer W. Lee, "Introduction," in Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1967), 5.
[133] Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook "Il Libro dell' Arte,"* trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (New York: Dover, 1960), 1-2.
[134] Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting*, 31; Sharon Fermor, *Piero di Cosimo: Fiction, Invention and 'Fantasìa'* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), 29 f.
[135] Puttfarken, *Tian & Tragic Painting*, 31.
[136] Brigitte Buettner, "Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 4 (December, 2001): 598-625.

designed visual puns and jokes that flattered the court rulers and soothed their anxieties about the rising third estate, would not be considered as a liberal product.

The evidence can be seen on Andrea Pisano's relief panel *Daedalus* (1337-1343) on the Campanile of Florence Cathedral (Figure 38). Although created much earlier than the *Monkey Cup*, the relief panel reflects a belief that would be held for generations to come. Daedalus is depicted as a winged figure, and he symbolizes "ingenuity," which according to the parable, is one of the essential similarities shared by poetry and visual arts. However, as Thomas Puttfarken points out, the *Daedalus* relief is presented among liberal and mechanical arts. The placement suggests that "ingenuity" was not exclusively liberal, thus not the key to liberal art, it only means that with ingenuity, practitioners of the mechanical arts can make greater accomplishment. In other cases, ingenuity was considered so unusual and marvelous to be possessed by an artist that it had to be explained by supernatural forces. In his study of the expressions used in early fifteenth-century France that described artists who produced images with remarkable power of memory and imagination, Stephen Perkinson shows that the commentators had to evoke the Grace and power of God in order to justify the artists' remarkable works, otherwise, it would have been deemed as audacious.[137]

If ingenuity was a quality that fell in between mechanical and liberal arts, there was no doubt that, for a long time, the imitative aspect of visual arts was mechanical. In *Didascalicon*, completed in about 1176, Hugh of St. Victor separates works into those created by God, by nature, and by artificer.[138] As the artificer's work is only the imitation

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[137] Stephen Perkinson, "Engin and Artifice: Describing Creative Agency at the Court of France, ca. 1400," *Gesta* 41:1 (2002), 51-67.
[138] Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylon (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), 55.

of nature, Hugh categorizes it as mechanical and adulterate.[139] Artists were often compared to simians based on the imitative nature of their trade. The notion that "ars simia naturae," art is the ape of nature, has a long history, which can be dated to ancient Greece.[140] At the time the "Monkey Cup" was created, this notion was commonly perceived as a denunciation of artists and their craft. As explored in Chapter 2, the rich iconology of simians during this period was overall negative, therefore a parallel of art and ape would indicate that just as apes, artists also had deceptive intentions. Specifically, the art and ape simile was used to criticize the artists' imperfect imitation of the reality and noble truth created by God.[141]

The derogatory connotation of "ars simian naturae" towards artists, was first turned around by Boccaccio, who recounts a story of Epimetheus in *Genealogia Deorum.* Epimetheus is a Greek mythological figure with great ingenuity. He created a clay statue that was so lifelike that he offended Jupiter, the sculptor was then transformed him into a monkey and banished to the Pithecusae islands, then the habitat of apes.[142] As Janson suggests, this story implies that simians were virtually ingenious people with an instinct to imitate nature.[143] Therefore, as an emblem of visual art and artists, the monkey began to bear positive connotations. However, just like Cennini, Boccaccio's laudatory interpretation of artist's imitative capacity was not in the mainstream.

It was not until the Early Renaissance that the status of artists began to rise through the efforts of many humanistic artists after Cennini and their sympathetic art

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[139] Ibid., 56.
[140] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore,* 287.
[141] Ibid., 288.
[142] Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum*, IV: 42.
[143] Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 291

theorists. In his treatise on painting, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) contended the noble and liberal status of the art of painting. His claim is based on the idea that nature is the divine creation of God, and everything found in nature qualifies as science. Therefore, painting, being able to represent nature, should qualify as a science, and as the practitioner of this science of nature, artists can be seen as the daughter (or granddaughter) of nature, thus related to God.[144] Moreover, he points out that painting imitates nature – the work of God, whereas poetry imitates the stories and words of man, as God is unmatchable in his nobility, therefore the art of painting is nobler than the art of poetry.[145] Leonardo evokes the notion of "nobility" several times in the treatise. By claiming the art of painting is noble, the artist is claiming that painters are noble. The painter's almost God-like power to create described by Leonardo was also present in northern Europe around the same time, as reflected by Albrecht Dürer's Christomorphic *Self-Portrait of 1500* (Figure 39). Dürer portrays himself in the similar way to the Eyckian portrayal of Christ as *salvator mundi* in part to show the importance he attached to the art of painting (Figure 40).

Leonardo's treatise, among many other texts and images concerned with the elevation of the status of the mimetic arts and artists, finally achieved favorable result after half a century. Around the time the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal was cast, the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture had gained positions comparable to the liberal arts.[146] In trying to create a noble identity, the behavior and appearance of artists became

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[144] Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci with a Selection of Documents Relating to His Career as an Artist*, ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 13.
[145] Ibid., 20-21.
[146] Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting,* 39.

more refined.[147] Leonardo's description of a painter's demeanor and lifestyle is similar to that of a nobleman who is well dressed and worked at ease in a clean residence furnished with fine pictures and immersed in music.[148] Later, the Venetian painter Paolo Pino (1534-65) made a similar statement that a painter should "dress fittingly," and "never be without a servant."[149] The ultimate image of an artist as a cultivated nobleman would later be exemplified by Peter Paul Rubens's *Self-Portrait with Isabella Brant* (Figure 41). The artist holds a sword, a symbol of nobility, while the couple's sumptuous dress with careful embroidery shows their refined taste. Rubens' countenance and posture convey a sense of confidence and elegance that could not be found in an ordinary person. He was indeed ennobled by Philip III of Spain in 1624, and knighted by Charles I of England in 1630 and Philip IV in 1631 in appreciation of his artistic abilities as well as his refined manner as a diplomat.[150]

The design of the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal evokes two significant contemporary notions of the visual arts at once. With slight variation from the Abondio medal's inscription, the one on the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal reads: "Artibus Quisita Gloria" – art acquires glory. The person who ordered the insertion of the "Monkey Cup" uniface medal, whether a later collector or an art dealer, must have admired the ingenuity and marvelous craftsmanship of the beaker. Court rulers were known for their taste for objects that are not only made of precious materials by masterful artists, but also droll and clever, and the "Monkey Cup" has exactly the desired qualities. In the rare cases

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[147] Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under the Saturn* (New York: The Norton Library, 1963), 93.
[148] Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting*, 39.
[149] Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura* (Venice, 1548), 30: "Vesti onoratamente, né mai stia senza un servitor." http://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/p/pino/dialogo_di_pittura/pdf/dialog_p.pdf.
[150] Hans Vlieghe, "Rubens, Peter Paul," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 13, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T074324.

when the interior of a beaker is also decorated, the design tends to be generic, such as the Burgundian-Netherlandish *Deckelbecher* (*c*. 1420-30), now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, the entire interior is covered with yellow, green and grey hexagonal stars.[151] If painting enamel directly on the outside of the beaker already entails a mastery of technical skills, to apply it in a confined space on the inside where one can barely move one's hand is even more difficult. The design of the interior of the "Monkey Cup" makes the process of drinking a series of surprises. First, the raining motif corresponds very well with the function of the beaker. When one pours water or wine into the beaker, the action would resemble the falling rain. Then, as one starts drinking the liquid, a whole new hunting scene unfolds, the surprise continues as one keeps drinking and lifting the cup, the uniface medal of Vulcan and Minerva would emerge from the water, and serve as a most appropriate celebration of the "Monkey Cup" artist's craftsmanship and ingenuity.

How ironic it is then, that in its final incarnation, the "Monkey Cup" sleeping peddler is deplored for his imitation of nobility on the exterior facet, while artists are crowned for their mimesis of nature on the bottom inside the beaker. The rising status of the third estate as embodied by the "Monkey Cup" reaches the final conclusion with the uniface medal's celebration of the nobility of art and artists.

[151] For detailed information on the beaker, see "Deckelbecher," 1420/30, h. 28.5 cm, d. 12.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Kunstkammer, Inv.-Nr. KK_88, http://bilddatenbank.khm.at/viewArtefact?id=86287&image=KK_88_16.jpg, accessed on April 1, 2015.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is the first extended study to contextualize the MMA "Monkey Cup" and explore the changing social and cultural phenomena the beaker charted in its first centuries. It interprets the "Monkey Cup" as witness of the rising status of the third estate, in particular, the growing power of merchants and the ennoblement of artists and their crafts. It has shown how an art object like the "Monkey Cup" could be exploited and reinterpreted in accordance with the different agendas and concerns of the contemporary patrons in different socio-historical contexts. As such, the "Monkey Cup" is a microcosm of the social and cultural history of the Renaissance.

By identifying the beaker's special motifs, the rich iconology of simians it has been drawn on, and reading them in the socio-historical context, this thesis presents the full potential of the object's symbolic value, showing the "Monkey Cup" imagery as an example of an iconography of social derision. The "Monkey Cup" emerges from this study is more than a luxurious object for display at courts; it was an apparatus that helped implement the ruling class's power by directly disparaging the threatening ascent of the ruled class. This interpretation highlights the social and political concerns of art patronage at Valois courts, and furthers the current understanding of court culture in Late Medieval Europe.

By examining the afterlife of the "Monkey Cup" in the Medici collection, the thesis shows how an object that originally denounced the third estate's social ambitions,

might have been used to promote and justify the Medici merchants' social climbing and endorse their self-fashioning as a virtuous, princely dynasty. The two scenarios that were explored in relation to the beaker's assumption into the Medici collections provide a fascinating window into the interaction between Valois courts and the Medici family on one hand, and the Medici justification of their social climbing on the other.

Building on the humanistic discussions of the liberal status of art and noble status of the artists in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the study of the late sixteenth-century uniface medal at the bottom of the beaker shows how after almost two hundred years, the "Monkey Cup" came to be appreciated primarily for its artistic value. While the "Monkey Cup" artist drew on the notion of mimesis to deride the third estate's social ambition and imitation of its superiors, the later medalist drew on the same notion to praise the "Monkey Cup" artist's craftsmanship and ingenuity, as well as to celebrate the noble and liberal status of art and artist in general.

Contributing to extant scholarship on the "Monkey Cup," which is primarily focused on the theme of monkeys robbing the peddler, the technique of painted enamel, and the sumptuous lifestyle of the Burgundian court, this thesis offers a more appropriate attribution and dating, recovers the beaker's original meaning, and examines its rich afterlife and the different implications it has taken on through the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The rising power of the third estate derided in the "Monkey Cup" had become more and more salient as time advanced. The beaker witnessed the main cultural and social themes through the course of the Renaissance, and the triumph of the third estate, this time represented by artists, is physically inscribed on the medal.

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Figure 1. The "Monkey Cup," *c.* 1400-1425, silver and painted enamel, 7 7/8 x 4 5/8 inches. Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 2. Interior of the “Monkey Cup.” Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3. Uniface medal on the bottom of the "Monkey Cup," silver gilt, *c.* 1600
Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 4. Antonio Abondio, *Portrait of Jacopo Nizzola*, obverse, *Minerva and Vulcan*, reverse, 1572, Italy, cast bronze. British Museum, London.

Figure 5. Albrecht Dürer, *Emperor Maximilian I*, 1519, 29.1 x 24 inches. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 6. "Scene of Charles VI," *Réponses à Charles VI et Lamentation au roi sur son état*. 1405-1415. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Français 23279, f. 5r.

Figure. 7 Comparisons between details from Jacquemart de Hesdin, *Grandes Heures de Jean de Berry*, 1400, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Latin 919, and details from the "Monkey Cup."

8r.

8r.

100r.

100r.

Figure 8. Jean Bondol (designer), "Second Trumpet," *Apocalypse Tapestries*, 1377-82. Château d'Angers, France.

Figure 9. Unknown artist, "Antiphon of St. Catherine," *Horae ad usum romanum*, *c*. 1430. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Latin 1156B, f. 175r.

Figure 10. "Scene of Duke John the Fearless," *Livre des Merveilles*, 1400-1420. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Français 2810, f. 226r.

Figure 11. "Monkeys Robbing Sleeping Peddler," *Decretals of Gregory IX with glossa ordinaria*, *c.*1300-1340. British Museum, Royal 10 E IV, f. 149v.

Figure 12. "Monkeys Robbing Sleeping Peddler," *Decretals of Gregory IX with glossa ordinaria*, *c.*1300-1340. British Museum, Royal 10 E IV, 150 r.

Figure 13. "Monkeys Robbing Sleeping Peddler," *Decretals of Gregory IX with glossa ordinaria*, *c*.1300-1340. British Museum, Royal 10 E IV, 150 v.

Figure 14. "Monkeys Robbing Sleeping Peddler*," Decretals of Gregory IX with glossa ordinaria*, *c*.1300-1340. British Museum, Royal 10 E IV, 151 r.

Figure 15. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.” Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 16. Limbourg Brothers, "January," *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry, c.* 1411/13-1416. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France, MS. 65, f. 2r.

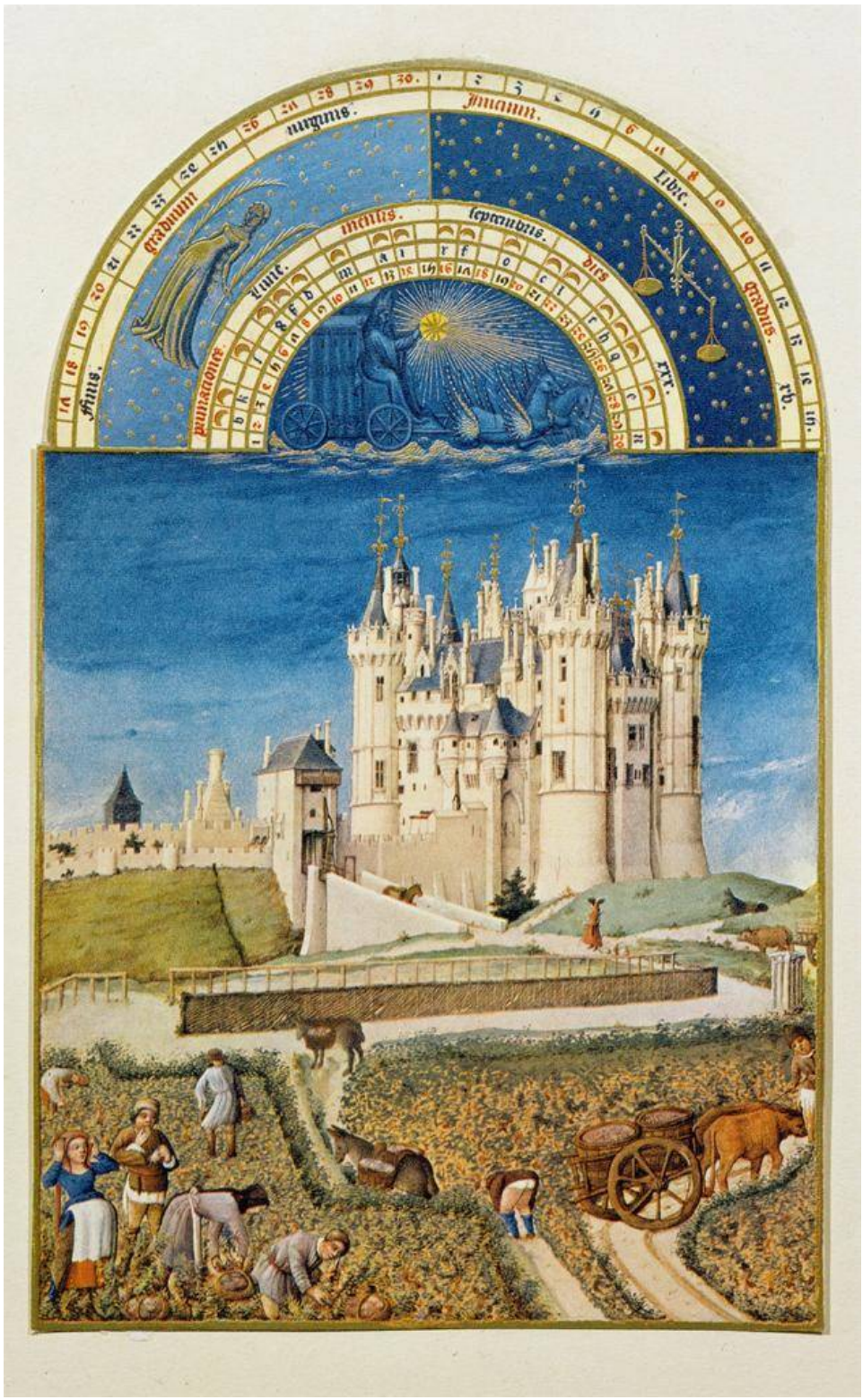

Figure 17. Limbourg Brothers, "September," *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, *c*. 1411/13-1416. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France, MS. 65, f. 9v.

Figure 18. Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife*, 1434, oil on oak, 32.4 x 23.6 inches. Photo© The National Gallery, London.

Figure 19. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.” Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

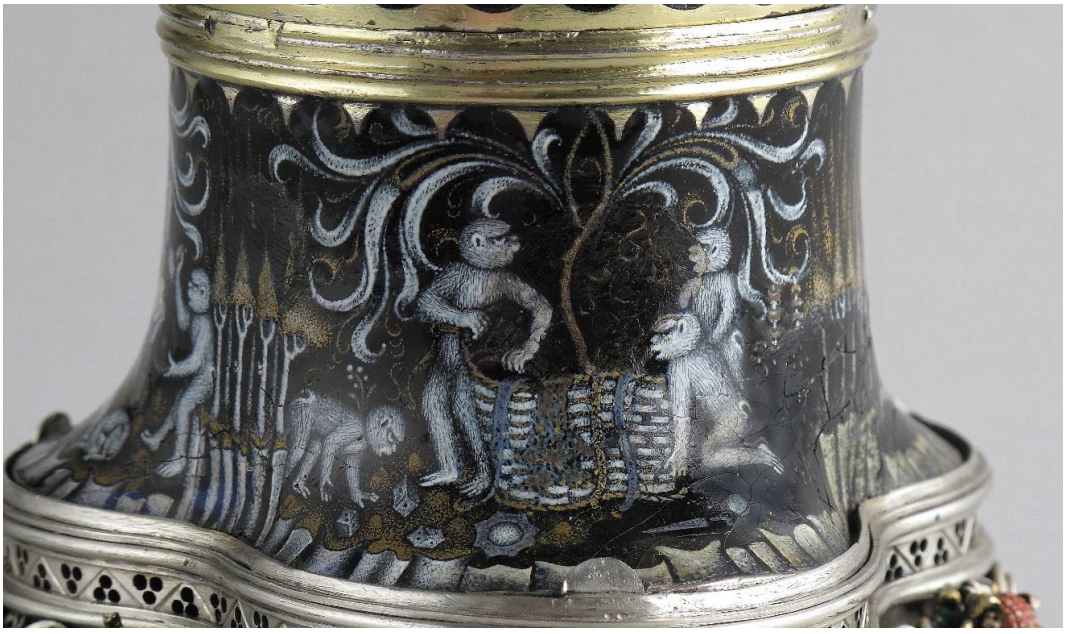

Figure 20. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.” Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 21. “Tree of Jesse,” Liturgical Comb Fragment, 1180-1220, Ivory, German, 3 5/8 x 4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

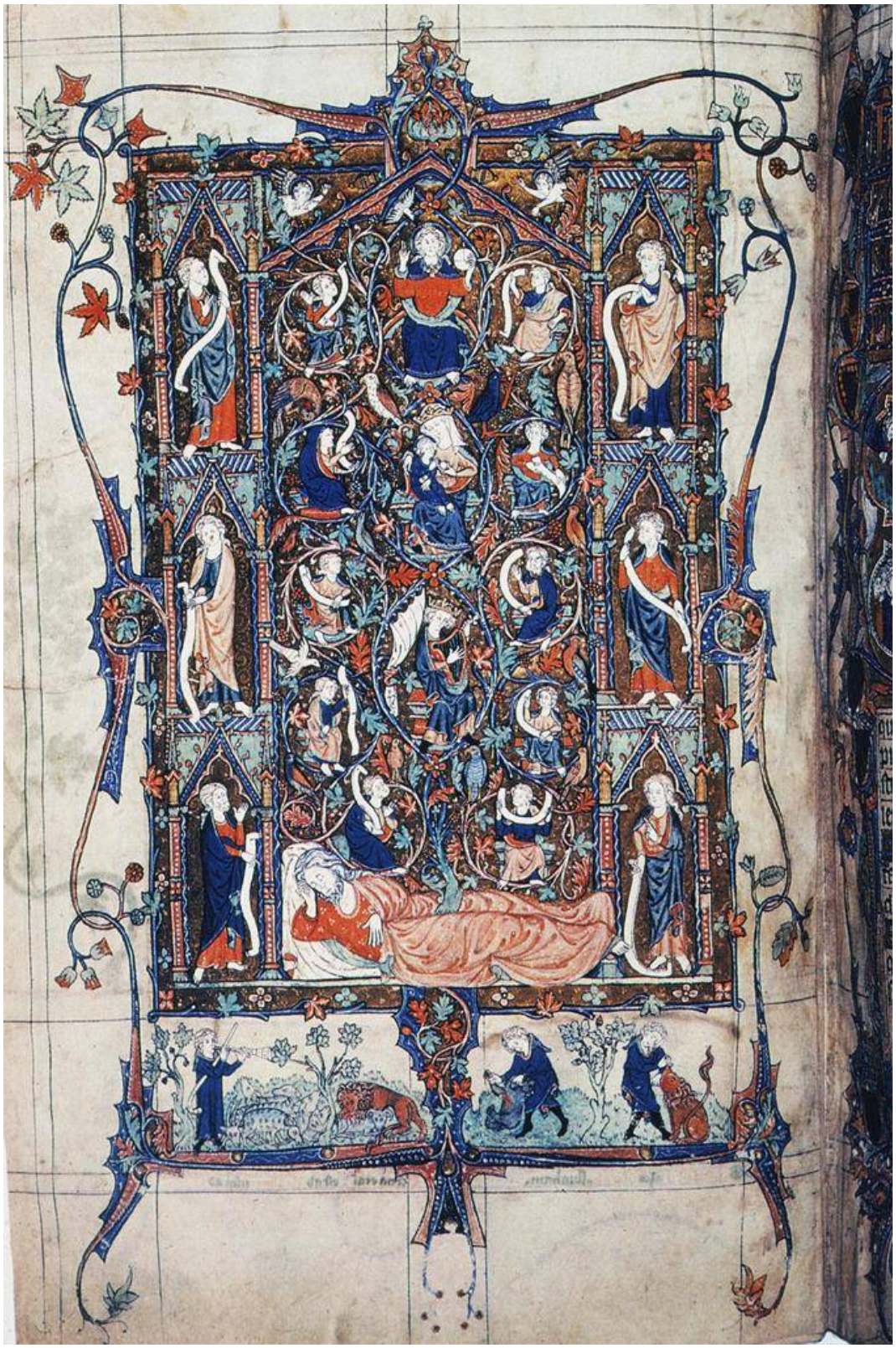

Figure 22. “Tree of Jesse,” *Tickhill Psalter*, 1300-1315.
New York Public Library, MS. Spencer 026, f. 6v.

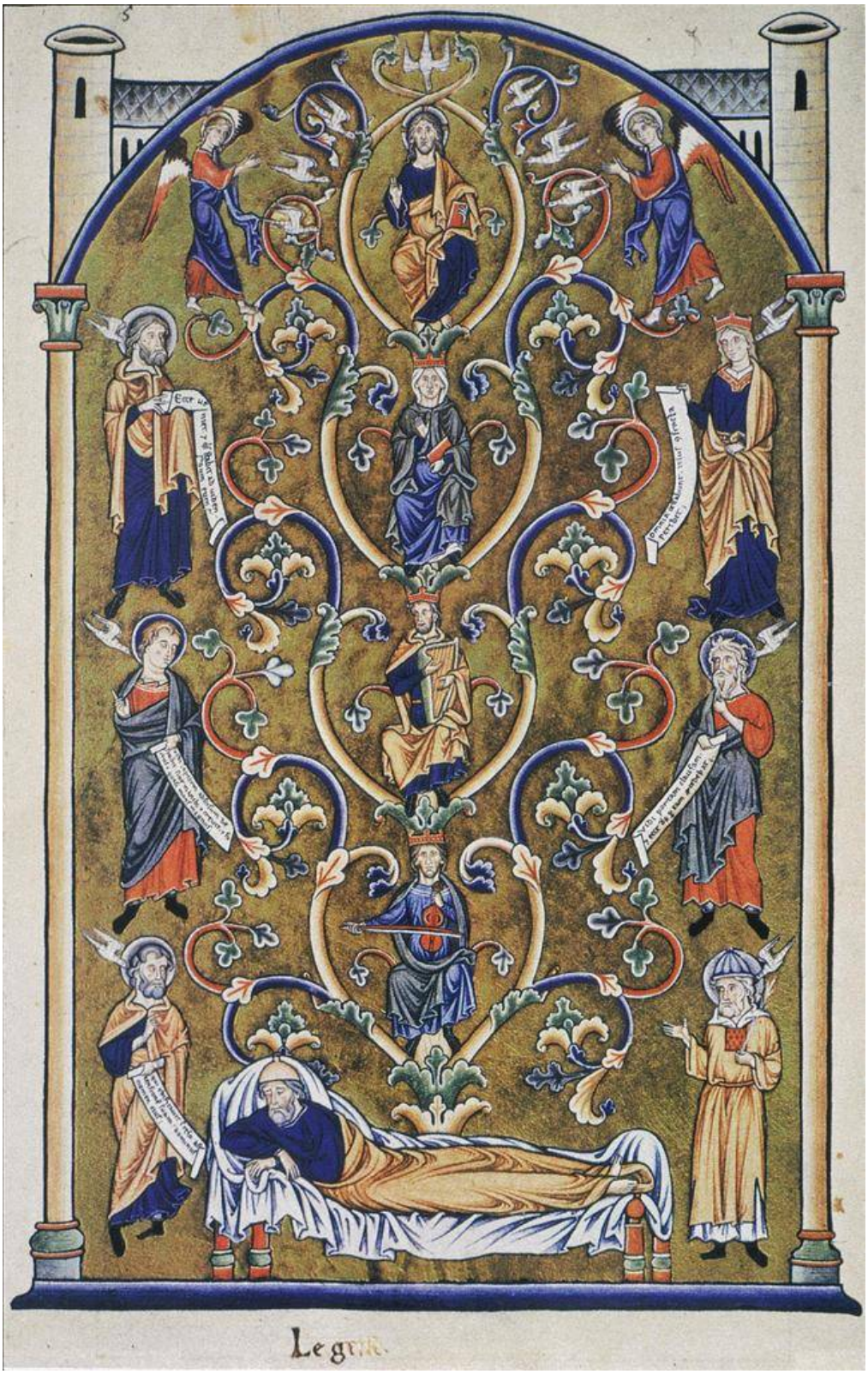

Figure 23. "Tree of Jesse," *Ingeborg Psalter*, *c.* 1195-1200.
Musée Condé, Chantilly, MS. 1695, 14v.

Figure 24. Israhel van Meckenem (*c.* 1440/45-1503), *Ornamental Engraving with the Tree of Jesse*, 4 11/16 x 4 1/16 inches, engraving, German.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 25. *Roundel with Three Apes Building a Trestle Table*, 1480-1500, German, colorless glass, vitreous paint, and silver stain, 10 ¼ x 8 7/8 inches.
The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

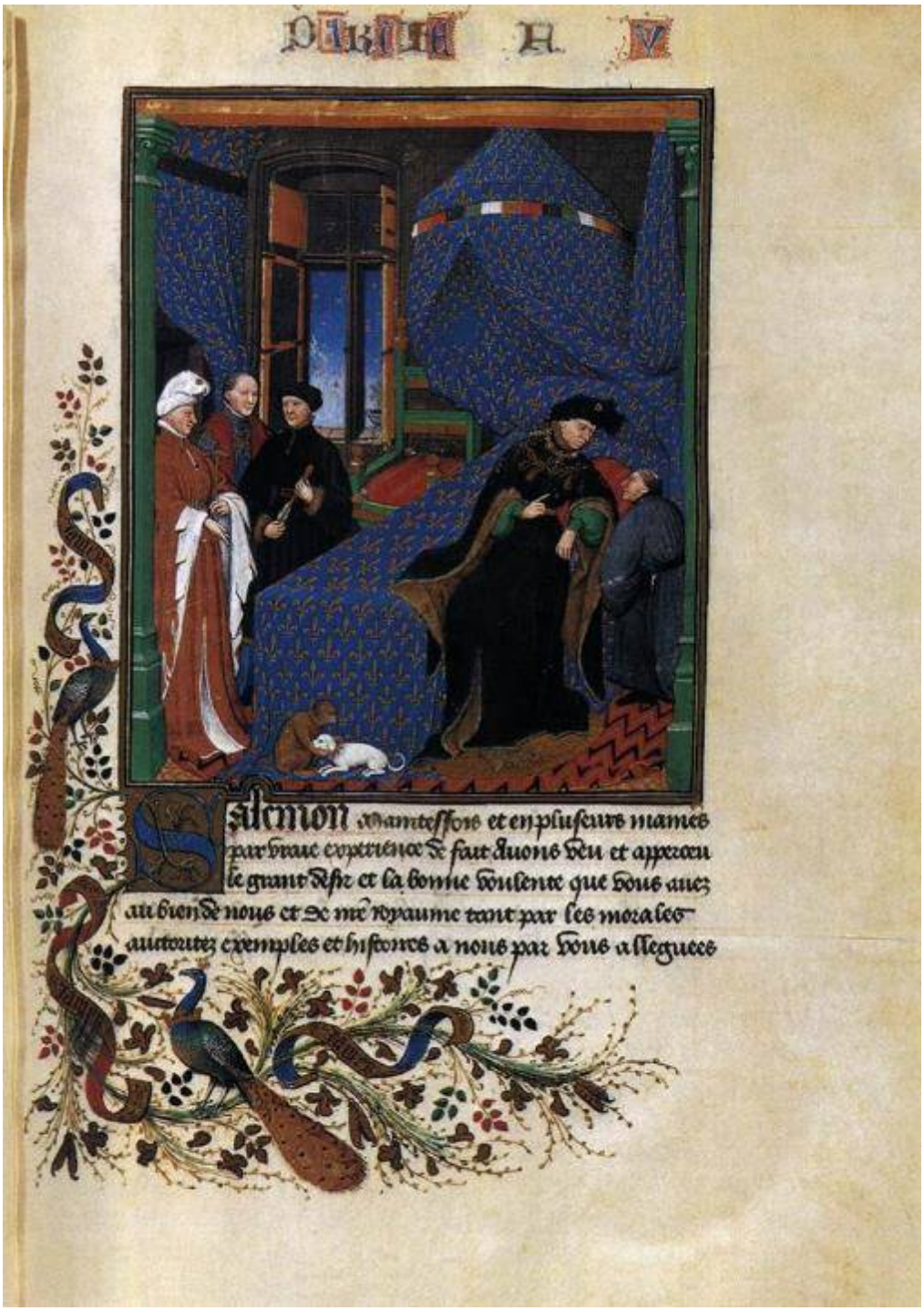

Figure 26. Boucicaut Workshop, "Demands by the King Charles VI," *Dialogues of Pierre Salmon*, 1412. Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva, MS Français 165, f. 4r.
Photo© Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 27. “Guillaume Caoursin Presenting the Manuscript to Peter d’Aubusson,” *Gestorum Rhodie obsidionis commentarii*, 1482-1483. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Latin 6067, f. 3v.

Figure 28. Giotto di Bondone, *Last Judgment*, fresco, *c*. 1305. Arena Chapel, Padua, Italy.
Photo© Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 29. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.” Image© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 30. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.”

Figure 31. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.”

Figure 32. *The Monkeys and the Peddler*, Florence, *c*. 1470-1490, engraving, 10 1/8 x 7 5/16 inches. British Museum, London.

Figure 33. *The Monkeys and the Peddler*, Florence, *c*. 1470-1490, engraving, 11 1/4 x 8 1/4 inches. Topkapi Serayi Museum, Istanbul, h. 2153, f.145.

Figure 34. After Baccio Baldini, *Jupiter*, engraving, 26.2 x 18.5 cm. From *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 24, 2403.002.

Figure 35. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.”

Figure 36. Detail of the “Monkey Cup.”

Figure 37. Raphael, *Parnassus,* 1510-1511, fresco painting, 22 ft wide. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican. Photo© Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 38. Andrea Pisano and Workshop, *Daedalus*, *c*. 1337-43, marble, 33 x 27.2 inches. Campanile, now Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence. Photo© Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 39. Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait of 1500*, 1500. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Figure 40. Copy after Jan van Eyck, *Salvator Mundi*, original 1438. Groeningemuseum, Bruges, Belgium.

Figure 41. Peter Paul Rubens, *Self-Portrait with Isabella Brant*, 1609/10, 70 x 53.7 inches. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich.