

Satirizing the Sacred:  
St. Joseph and Humor in Northern European Art, ca. 1300-1530

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### Abstract

Humor and satire were very much relevant, and even beneficial, for one movement in early modern Christianity, but late medieval theologians and popes were not interested in supporting a devotion that made light of its own saints. Surviving art, however, tells a different story—of Saint Joseph of Nazareth, whose popularity among the laity rose exponentially between ca. 1300 and 1530, while artists and patrons produced and consumed religious images that sometimes highlighted the hilarity of the saint's circumstances with surprising verve. In this study, religious iconography from Germany, France, and the Low Countries is interpreted through the lens of contemporary 'secular' iconographic trends, as well as religious plays, legends, hymns, and jokes. Depictions of Joseph attest to the humorous and bawdy as inextricable parts of the saint's cult, even as he came to be taken more seriously as an object of popular devotion. The material and literary evidence reveals that the saint could be, for his late medieval devotees, a simultaneously beloved, revered, venerated, and hilariously ridiculous figure. These findings reconcile two strands of interpretation that have polarized the saint into distinct early and late manifestations, one comical and derogatory and the other idealized. Scholars of the saint's history, and of early modern history in general, have treated the power and purposes of humor too categorically, incorrectly considering the sober ecclesiastical and the 'irreverent' popular consciousnesses as occupying completely separate realms in the late Middle Ages.

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## CHAPTER 1: Thesis, Methods, and Historiography

### *1.1 Introduction*

This is a study of a saint and of humor, a seemingly antithetical combination. Yet the combination of humor and religion was perfectly logical for the period of ca. 1300 to 1530 in western Europe, before the Reformation and resultant Counter-Reformation, which would turn Saint Joseph of Nazareth into a figure never to be laughed at again. While western Europe during this period was hegemonically Catholic, and believed in the importance of saints as tangible manifestations of God's presence and favor, there was no problem with laughing at a saint like Joseph. This became a method of venerating him, of loving him, while acknowledging his faulty humanity. His sometimes comical faults were, in fact, what made him most important as the head of his holy family. St. Joseph was biblically cuckolded by God Himself, and at a very old age, paired with a very young, pregnant, and intangibly holy virgin. In the Bible he does not fully understand the importance of his role—he remains dumbfounded—until after the child is born. Joseph's lack of enlightenment, his old age, his concern for the mere worldly details of caring for his family in the only ways he knows how, recounted in legends, stories, plays, and hymns—these were easily humorous to a medieval audience familiar with the challenges of parenting and surviving in a difficult world. But Joseph's 'imperfections' were at once his perfections. He needed to be old and chaste, so that Mary might remain pure in the eyes of all. And Joseph's delayed enlightenment regarding the importance of his foster-son allowed medieval Christians to relate to him in a way they rarely could with other

saints, for they, too, remained in search of enlightenment as followers of the Church and of Jesus Christ.

It is my argument, therefore, that St. Joseph could be, for his late medieval devotees, a simultaneously beloved, revered, venerated, and hilariously ridiculous figure. My primary evidence is his religious iconography, which I interpret through the lens of other contemporary ‘secular’ iconographic trends, as well as religious plays, legends, stories, and jokes. It is not my assertion, however, that late medieval images of Joseph were always meant to be humorous, merely that there existed a strong trend of humorous Josephs that were integral and necessary to the popularity of his cult. There exist many images of Joseph from this period that nevertheless appear fully sober in message. I suggest that we move beyond simply using theological writings and church doctrine as bases for our interpretations of late medieval religious imagery—after all, most late medieval images were paid for, intended for, and made by the laity, an audience almost surely more familiar with more vernacular works than those written by contemporary or earlier medieval theologians. But works influenced by theological writings and church doctrine could also contain humorous elements—this apparently did not detract from their religious significance.

This first chapter provides a brief background on studies of St. Joseph to date, and the reasons why this study is necessary in order to comprehend the significance of humor for St. Joseph’s veneration. The most important difference between this study and those preceding it is that it seeks not only to point out the presence of humor in Joseph’s representations, but also to articulate the significance of laughter as part of Joseph’s

veneration itself. I argue that images of Joseph do, indeed, poke fun at the saint, but that this fact in no way detracted from his veneration as a cult figure. The assumptions that funny images of Joseph were either not funny at all, or funny only in a completely degrading manner, are incorrect. Chapter two begins with a discussion of the earliest manifestations of Joseph's cult in religious art, and proposes that these manifestations appeared earlier than prior scholarship has suggested. The chapter links a psalter and a set of ivories to a beloved, and humorous, legend that tells of Joseph's loss of his stockings for a very munificent purpose. This legend and surviving cradle-rocking plays are then linked to one of the earliest preserved altarpieces depicting the strength, and the humor, of Joseph's cult, the Petri-Altar by Meister Bertram of Hamburg. It is my assertion that in this work, theology and humor are in fact intertwined, and that this becomes apparent upon a close reading of the iconography.

Laughter and religion were interconnected throughout the late Middle Ages, as chapter three demonstrates, building upon the case study of the Petri-Altar with a survey of similar comical Josephs. Chapter three reveals more extensively the visual puns and tropes that exist in a variety of Josephine imagery, by placing them within the context of contemporary comedy and satire. Analogies are drawn to secular and 'profane' prints, paintings, and tales. Chapter three examines the nature, power, and purposes of early modern humor, as well as its relationship to the sacred, and documents a variety of the comic elements of St. Joseph's iconography, so that the reader may understand better the humor inherent in the images. The laughter which images of Joseph as a doddering, old, and unfortunately chaste father could elicit was in fact rooted in the reinforcement of

socially advantageous values emphasizing the importance of fidelity and childcare for actual fathers. Following on the conclusions of chapter three, chapter four focuses exclusively on one type of image, versions of the Adoration of the Magi that depict Joseph as the family treasurer, often bordering on miserly keeper of material goods. These may be understood similarly, as humorous, yet because they accord Joseph the roles of both comical miser and responsible caretaker, they are simultaneously proponents of successful behavior in an early modern urban economic environment.

## ***1.2 Historiography and Methods***

Joseph's veneration ascended in the twelfth century, alongside a contemporaneous increase in devotion to the Virgin Mary, but the true flowering of his cult is generally thought not to be apparent until the late fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The iconographic evidence considered in this study, however, shows that strong devotion to Joseph and to his relics appeared much earlier, despite a lack of official theological support. One of the earliest theological texts in praise of the saint was written by the French theologian Jean Gerson (1363-1429), who also composed a Latin poem of 3,000 verses entitled *Josephina*, requesting the establishment of the Feast of the Engagement of Joseph at the Council of Constance (1414-1418). In 1489, Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516) composed a treatise entitled *De Laudibus S. Josephi*.<sup>2</sup> The campaigns of these late medieval theologians,

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Drage Hale, "Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Construction of Male Virtue," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 104; Francis Lad Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1962), 495.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Réau, "Joseph," *Iconographie des saints*, vol. 3, pt. 2 of *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 752-55.

including Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420), finally culminated in the official ecclesiastical establishment of the saint's cult in 1479, with the introduction of Joseph's feast day on March 19<sup>th</sup> into the liturgy of the Catholic Church under the Franciscan pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484). The feast was not fully authorized for the Universal Church, however, until the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, Joseph had become one of the most venerated saints of the Catholic Church. However, scholarship of Joseph's rise through the efforts of ecclesiasts has created an image of a saint who, throughout most of the Middle Ages, was viewed as a solely subordinate and comical figure, often ignorant of the significance of the birth of Christ. His old age and diminution to the role of the simple 'extra' in the Bible and in theological writings ensured that he could not be mistaken as anything more than Christ's foster-father.<sup>4</sup>

Such characterizations, however, were popular even as St. Joseph's cult was rapidly developing and continued, in fact, through the early sixteenth century. This study examines iconography that reveals the ways in which Joseph's humorous and exemplary aspects were mutually supportive, rather than exclusive, particularly through examining the beneficial social function of late medieval humor. While novel, this approach rests upon the groundbreaking scholarship of a number of authors who have contributed significantly to the field of Joseph studies, and who merit mention here. Art historians like Carolyn C. Wilson have revealed that Joseph was taken seriously as an object of

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<sup>3</sup> Teresa Rodrigues, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints: New Full Edition*, vol. 3. (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 185-186.

<sup>4</sup> Réau, "Joseph," 752-55.

veneration even as early as the thirteenth century in isolated towns of Italy,<sup>5</sup> while modern-day theologians like Joseph F. Chorpensing, O.S.F.S., and historians like Paul Payan have unveiled the theological discourse underlying the saint's rise in the eyes of the Catholic church before the official introduction of his feast in the late fifteenth century. In complete contrast to these scholars, who unfortunately tend to ignore the vernacular literary traditions and popular thought surrounding the saint, Johan Huizinga and Louis Réau offer a pre-sixteenth century image of the saint that is mostly derided for his age, simplicity, and care for a child by his wife that is most certainly not his own.

An important contribution to studies of Joseph, particularly for art historical studies, is Sheila Schwartz's dissertation, completed in 1975, which documents the rise in popularity of the apocryphal account of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt and its manifestations in art. The Rest on the Flight is an event from the eighth-century Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, ignored by theological commentators for its 'heretical' origin but frequently mixed with other Apocrypha and vernacular accounts including legends and folk tales, as well as excerpts from the Golden Legend and the Bible. While mystics devoted to Christ's humanity like Pseudo-Bonaventura (*Meditationes de Vita Christi*, c. 1300), Ludolph of Saxony (c. 1300-78), Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471), and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153) used apocryphal material for their intimate accounts of Christ's family life, the miracles performed by the infant Christ in the account of the Rest on the Flight caused them to ignore the narrative. Despite their occasional 'magical' accounts, the New Testament Apocrypha were mainly popularized due to their

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<sup>5</sup> Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2001).

educational function for the wider public, particularly the growing middle class, and were therefore used frequently by Dominicans and Franciscans in their sermons. The appearance of Bible translations in the thirteenth century, prompted initially by Beghard and Beguine devotion, as well as the emergence of secular romances and epics in the mid-twelfth century, probably facilitated their popularization.<sup>6</sup>

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt offered a unique artistic opportunity to depict St. Joseph as an integral member of the Holy Family, and sometimes very prominently as its sole head and provider. The subject first appeared in manuscript illuminations of the second quarter of the fourteenth century, but only attained its complete, autonomous popularity outside of the larger biblical and apocryphal narrative in the sixteenth century, when it becomes the single focus of altarpieces, particularly in Italy. However, according to Schwartz, Meister Bertram's Hamburg Petri-Altar, completed in 1383, marks the turning point of the scene's iconographic significance. She argues that this earliest known appearance of the Rest on a major altarpiece came about from a desire to represent St. Joseph as *nutritor Domini*, the sole caretaker and nourisher of Jesus, and that the image's prominent placement of the saint documents a significant rise in popularity of St. Joseph's cult. Joseph appears first in the Nativity scene, handing the child to the Virgin (fig. 1.1), which Schwartz interprets as a theological demonstration of the saint's importance as the protector of Christ and Mary, "...a rare alteration of the

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<sup>6</sup> Schwartz suggests that secular romances and epics ultimately had a significant impact on the illustration and reception of the apocryphal texts. Schwartz dissertation, 8-19; Hugh of St. Victor condemned the Apocrypha in his *Didascalicon*, IV, 7 and IV, 15; *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, ed. Jerome Taylor (New York, 1961), 107-16.

traditional Nativity iconography, where his role is normally peripheral,”<sup>7</sup> and thus an early manifestation of the saint’s status in art. Similar depictions of the saint passing the Christ child to Mary at the Nativity are found, however, in a group of about a dozen ivories dating as early as c. 1275 from Paris, discussed further below. Whether this motif originated in devotional writings, or whether the motif itself inspired such texts, is unclear and merits reevaluation with respect to Joseph’s most important relic, his *Hosen*, which became the swaddling clothes of the baby Jesus. The presence of a more positive image of Joseph as early as the last quarter of the thirteenth century is quite suggestive of an already strong presence of his cult in the cities of northern Europe. Although Joseph’s feast day was not made official until the late fifteenth century, it may be found in calendars of orders and churches and in martyrologies from as early as the ninth century through the fifteenth.<sup>8</sup>

Schwartz’s desire to establish early depictions of St. Joseph, particularly those on the Petri-Altar, as solely representations of the saint’s theological significance and veneration as a father figure runs against a strong medieval vernacular tradition that pokes fun at the saint’s shortcomings. This is not to say that her arguments are invalid; rather, after a detailed consideration of the scope of Joseph’s iconography, I contend that her belief that the saint’s derision operated separately from his veneration appears to be incorrect. The two are not mutually exclusive, particularly in late medieval society, in

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<sup>7</sup> Sheila Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,” (PhD diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1975), 47.

<sup>8</sup> M. Garrido Bonaño, “San José en los calendarios y martirologios hasta el siglo XV inclusive,” *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 19 (1971), 601-46; Médard Barth, *Die Verehrung des heiligen Josef im Elsass* (Haganau: Éditions de la Société d'histoire de l'Eglise d'Alsace, 1970), 38-40; Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,” 13.

which humor and the bawdy and secular literature and drama intertwined the sacred and the base. Medieval religious drama was inspired particularly by the literary genre of the *fabliaux*, tailored to a bourgeois audience, in which the base and the comical infused stories of mischief and trickery. The trope of the cuckolded old husband unquestionably became combined with the story of Joseph's Doubt, presented in plays like the Trial of Joseph and Mary from the English Ludus Coventriae cycle. Hilarious depictions of Joseph's Doubt appear in the Holkham Hall Picture Bible in the British Museum<sup>9</sup> and in a painted cycle now thought to be a copy of a work by Robert Campin, from the Katarinakirk, Hoogstraten,<sup>10</sup> which shows several events from the apocryphal and biblical life of the saint, including the Miracle of the Rod, the Betrothal, his Dreams, and the Repentance of his Doubt, in which a repentant Joseph kneels before Mary in a overflowing pile of ridiculously large tools (fig. 1.2).<sup>11</sup> According to the Gospel of Matthew (2:19), Joseph's initial doubt of his wife's faithfulness is overcome by his desire to spare her shame, and his virtue is reinforced when the angel reaffirms what he knows to be the correct course.

Nevertheless, the cuckolded and bumbling version of the saint as a figure of comic relief continued in popular thought, manifested both in the plays, as well as in art. Schwartz's example of Conrad von Soest's Wildunger Altar in Bad Wildungen (figs. 1.3 and 1.4), which she argues "...disproves a demeaning intent in the artist's presentation of Joseph, for in the [Adoration] scene, Joseph stands reverently behind the Virgin as the

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<sup>9</sup> British Museum, Ms. add. 47680, fol. 12; W. O. Hassall, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London: Dropmore Press, 1954).

<sup>10</sup> Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 2: pl. 103, no. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Réau, "Joseph," 753.

Magi adore the Child,”<sup>12</sup> itself demonstrates the possibility for Joseph to appear a humorous, beloved, and venerated saint all at once on a high altarpiece. Joseph’s humble depiction in the Nativity scene—crouching on all fours before a cooking pot—cannot be a humble enactment of Byzantine *proskynesis*, as Schwartz suggests.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Meister Bertram’s depiction of Joseph passing the child to Mary (fig. 1.1) is accompanied by his prominent portrayal in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, in which he rips into a piece of bread or wineskin with his teeth and is presented in exact parallel to the ass by his side (fig. 1.5). The comparison, as demonstrated in this study, is not a first in medieval art, and a number of these humorous iconographic trends appear in other late medieval depictions of Joseph, particularly those which focus upon the saint’s age and chastity, and therefore cuckoldry. The most detailed iconographic examination of St. Joseph in Netherlandish art, Marjory Bolger Foster’s dissertation completed in 1978, includes such humorous depictions among her catalogue but attempts to sanitize them of any disrespectful interpretations. Of the Hoogstraten panel depicting Joseph’s Repentance of His Doubt (fig. 1.2), she writes that Joseph is characterized at most as “...a well-meaning old fellow whose understanding of events in which he is involved is limited.”<sup>14</sup>

These arguments, which are primarily supported by theological texts of a kind little read by the laity, discount the widespread influence of more ‘popular’<sup>15</sup> literature

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<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,” 65.

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,” 66.

<sup>14</sup> Marjory Bolger Foster, “The Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1550,” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1978), 249; Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2: pl. 103, no. 82.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Popular’ culture in the sense not only of that associated with the ‘lower’ classes, but the culture of the many who do not belong to the highest political or religious leadership; see Gerhard Jaritz, “Bildquellen zur mittelalterlichen Volksfrömmigkeit,” in *Volksreligion im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1990), 206; Norbert Schindler,

within late medieval religious culture. Schwartz concedes that Joseph functioned as a base figure of ridicule in German Nativity plays, but her assertion that such “coarse entertainment for the lower classes that flourished in the absence of a strong ecclesiastical authority...exerted no influence upon the higher levels of literature and art,”<sup>16</sup> must be incorrect. Recent research into Joseph’s function in the plays, examined here in chapter two, in fact discounts the assumption that Joseph was solely a figure of comic relief in them. Schwartz’s decision to consider the veneration of St. Joseph exclusively with respect to its confirmation in “theological circles” therefore cannot account for all aspects of his characterization in images and texts. This dramatic “coarse entertainment” was presented by lay actors in townhouses or in churches,<sup>17</sup> and was directed by laymen of the local parish, often for a burgeoning middle class of increasingly wealthy craftspeople and merchants.<sup>18</sup> Instead of considering the higher ranking orders of the Church to constitute the hegemonic group in the formation of Joseph’s cult, the saint’s literary and artistic characterizations must be considered as products of a sharp increase in lay devotion and involvement in religious thought, particularly after the rise of the preaching orders in the thirteenth century. The chapters below adopt such a viewpoint, arguing that late

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“Spuren in die Geschichte der ‘anderen’ Zivilisation. Probleme und Perspektiven einer historischen Volkskulturforschung,” in *Volkskultur. Zur Wiederentdeckung des vergessenen Alltags (16.-20. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Richard van Dülmen and Norbert Schindler (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1984), 23-24, 53, 74-77; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), XI.

<sup>16</sup> Schwartz, “The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,” 84.

<sup>17</sup> Leopold Schmidt, “Formprobleme der deutschen Weihnachtsspiele,” *Die Schaubühne, Quellen und Forschungen zur Theatergeschichte* 20 (1937): 11; Eckehard Simon, “Das schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel: Ein neu entdecktes Weihnachtsspiel aus der Zeit 1417-1431,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 94 (1975): 47; Eckehard Simon, “The Home Town of the *Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel* (ca. 1420) and Its Original Setting,” *Euphorion* 73 (1979): 316.

<sup>18</sup> Manfred Brauneck et al., eds., *Theaterstadt Hamburg: Schauspiel, Oper, Tanz Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 17.

medieval art, when viewed in relation to contemporary literature, reveals that Joseph could be considered dually buffoonish and saintly—marked by baseness and unparalleled loyalty—as the divinely ordained foster-father of Christ, spouse of Mary, and ultimate cuckold. In its examination of the earliest depictions of St. Joseph, including Meister Bertram’s Petri-Altar, chapter two will respond as well to Schwartz’s unilateral assumptions made in her article on St. Joseph’s function in Bertram’s altarpiece.

Despite Schwartz’s strictly theological interpretations, her work and extensive research into ecclesiastical thought relevant to the veneration of St. Joseph, as well as the work of Brigitte Heublein and Paul Payan, provides a seminal basis for this study. Heublein’s book on the ‘misunderstood’ Joseph, *Der “verkannte“ Joseph: Zur mittelalterlichen Ikonographie des Heiligen im deutschen und niederländischen Kulturraum*, provides an excellent documentation of the origins of Joseph’s northern medieval iconography, particularly that which evokes the importance of his biblical dreams, in the iconography of antiquity. She notes the ambiguity of Joseph’s characterization in the Bible, the Apocrypha, and theological writings, but seeks to minimize any remnants of Joseph’s ironic or “bad image”<sup>19</sup> as a miser or bumbling caregiver. Paul Payan, too, describes Joseph’s doddering behavior in literature and art as at most evidence of his being “...humble, un peu inquiet et peut-être un peu triste de ne pas avoir pu assurer le confort de sa famille.”<sup>20</sup> Payan writes a comprehensive history of Joseph’s conceptualization in church doctrine and devotion as the epitome of fatherhood,

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<sup>19</sup> Brigitte Heublein, *Der ‘verkannte’ Joseph: Zur mittelalterlichen Ikonographie des Heiligen im deutschen und niederländischen Kulturraum* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1998), 260.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Payan, *Joseph: Une image de la paternité dans l’Occident médiéval* (Lorrai: Aubier, 2006), 388.

to become the intercessor for the well being of the medieval family and the Church at large.

The theological and ecclesiastical motivations behind Joseph's rise in veneration are documented extensively in an entire series of journals published by the research center of St. Joseph's Oratory of Montreal, the *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, which itself forms the unparalleled backbone of these and all future Joseph studies, as its contributors vary from contemporary theologians and priests to scholars of history, religion, and art. One of the most notable contributors to the history of Joseph studies is Joseph F. Chorpenning, O.S.F.S., who charts the history of the veneration of St. Joseph with remarkable detail, albeit emphasizing the writings of theologians and ecclesiastical literature on the saint as the hegemonic discourse. Chorpenning, as well as a number of authors in his most recent edited volume, *Joseph of Nazareth Through the Centuries*, writes on the importance of St. Joseph for the changing characteristics of the late medieval family, but his examination of the socio-economic currents motivating such changes is cursory at best, and sometimes inaccurate, while his implication that theologians were the sole motivators behind Joseph's acceptance as a role model for lay families is limited. According to Chorpenning's reasoning, popular piety toward the saint only truly flourished after the official introduction of St. Joseph's feast at Rome in 1479 and the following increase in theological literature on the saint in the sixteenth century. It is notable, however, that the early campaigns of theologians like Jean Gerson (1363-1429), chancellor of the University of Paris, and the Franciscan preacher St. Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) were not merely in favor of "rescu[ing] St. Joseph from the relative

neglect of earlier periods;”<sup>21</sup> they were intended to correct ‘mistaken’ conceptions of the saint that had been fostered by the apocryphal gospels, drama, other forms of literature, and art. These characteristically more ‘popular’ vernacular art forms should be considered as an integral part of the saint’s cult, especially since they continued far into the sixteenth century, the period during which the most important early modern texts on the saint appeared, at least according to Chorpenning’s viewpoint.

One of these texts is the *Summa of the Gifts of Saint Joseph* (*Summa de donis S. Joseph*) of 1522, published at Pavia by the Dominican friar Isidoro Isolano. This and other theological texts document a strong cult dedicated to St. Joseph in northern and central Italy, which Carolyn C. Wilson, in *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, has shown existed in more than just localized form during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Isidoro praised St. Joseph as the ideal intercessor as champion of the Church Militant and the restorer of peace in Italy, in response to the crises of plague, invasion, and attack that damaged the north particularly. Wilson’s research reveals that by 1522, churches, confraternities, and altars dedicated to St. Joseph had sprung up around northern and central Italy. In 1528, Parma adopted Joseph as its patron saint, while in 1521, Bologna was engaged in renewing the earliest known church dedicated to St. Joseph, its Benedictine church of San Giuseppe in Borgo Gallera, in existence by the twelfth century. Wilson’s book is primarily engaged with correcting a long-standing misconception in the history of scholarship that Joseph was primarily or exclusively a Counter-Reformation saint, seriously venerated only in later sixteenth-century and

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph F. Chorpenning, O.S.F.S., *Sermon Texts on Saint Joseph by Francis de Sales* (Toronto: Peregrina, 2000), 27.

seventeenth-century Spain, France, and the New World.<sup>22</sup> Her research reveals that intense cult activity existed in Italy before the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the event typically considered to mark the emergence of St. Joseph's highest veneration. In her brief mention of the iconography of St. Joseph in northern Europe, however, she superimposes her sober interpretations of late fifteenth-century Italian iconography upon images of the saint that are at once playful, comical, or base, providing an incomplete portrait of the saint reliant upon Schwartz's interpretations.

Scholars like Wilson and Schwartz contributed an important corrective to interpretations of Joseph's depiction and cult that focused exclusively on his derision. Johan Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages*, first published in English in 1924, contends that the late fourteenth and fifteenth-century veneration of the saint was more "subject to the influences of popular fancy rather than of theology."<sup>23</sup> Huizinga includes three poems that he interprets as entirely irreverent towards the saint, characterizing him as ridiculous and foolish. Schwartz rightly focuses on the poems' inclusion of Joseph's humility and devotion, but should not have discounted Huizinga's claims entirely. Louis Réau likewise falls into the trap of total derision, claiming that the verses of the French poet Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406) indicate that Joseph, "le rassoté (the fool or the weary)," had little respect in the late Middle Ages.<sup>24</sup> Peter Burke states that a major change in the way Joseph was perceived only took place in the seventeenth century, with

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<sup>22</sup> An excellent documentation of the rise of St. Joseph's cult in seventeenth-century Spain is Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of St. Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: a Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1954), 168.

<sup>24</sup> Réau, "Joseph," 754.

the saint marginally significant until then. The scholarship of Wilson particularly demonstrates that this is clearly not the case.

The arguments of this study align most closely with the interpretations of Joseph's character in art and literature by Cynthia Hahn, V. A. Kolve, and Stephen Wright, although their conclusions neglect to consider the interrelationship of humor and veneration. Cynthia Hahn writes:

In late medieval art and literature, Joseph was most often portrayed in one of two mutually exclusive roles. In some Gothic representations he was depicted as an old, tired buffoon, a butt of jokes. Alternatively, he was conceived of as the hard-working foster-father of Christ, the worthy companion and helpmate to Mary, and the strong, capable head of his household.<sup>25</sup>

The following chapters will demonstrate that both characterizations are true with respect to Joseph's depiction in late medieval and Renaissance art, but these two seemingly disparate roles are in fact not at all "mutually exclusive." More recent scholarship of medieval drama, like that of Stephen Wright in the field of German drama and Kolve in the field of English literature, see Joseph's two facets as evidence of his relatable function as the "natural man,"<sup>26</sup> allowing for the possibility that comedy and exemplarity could overlap. This study is inspired especially by the suggestions of these scholars of medieval drama and aims to develop these ideas by considering the often-ignored aspects of Joseph's iconography, particularly those most ambiguous like the motif of the 'miserly' Joseph storing away or ogling the Christ child's treasures from the Three Magi (figs. 1.6-1.8), discussed in chapter four. It seeks also to reinforce these

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<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Hahn, "'Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee': The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych," *Art Bulletin* 68, no.1 (1986), 55.

<sup>26</sup> V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1966), 247.

claims with an explanation of why humor was so relevant at all to Joseph's role as a model father for late medieval families. A full consideration of the conflicting scope of Joseph's iconography reveals much about Joseph's function as an exemplar, whether playfully derided or venerated in the most sober of circumstances.

This study does not attempt to fully document the history of Josephine doctrine; the aforementioned works have already accomplished that in great detail. Although an iconographic study, and thus based upon Erwin Panofsky's principles of iconographic and iconological interpretation,<sup>27</sup> this work will tend to avoid interpreting northern painting as solely visualizing the theologically complex, oriented toward the intellectual and aesthetical elite. Rather, depictions of Joseph will be considered in relation to their associated popular practices and beliefs, an approach that seems appropriate to the period under consideration, when the influence of Scholasticism with its inherent theological and philosophical interests was in general decline. Craig Harbison importantly notes:

No surviving literary sources from the fifteenth century suggest that the ordinary lay viewer or patron was unusually concerned with the religious subject matter and [theological] symbolism of a visual image...none of these documents [of works for public locations or monasteries] indicate that the specific theological meaning or symbolism of the many details found in these works was as minutely predetermined as modern scholars have at times supposed.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The iconographic method, or "iconographical analysis in the narrower sense," elucidates artistic subject matter and 'concealed' symbolism by comparing a single work to other visual and literary examples. "Iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense," or "iconological interpretation," combines this symbolism with the known historical context of a work in order to reveal the mentality of an artist, culture, or period in general. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). Erwin Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 64, no. 372 (Mar., 1934): 117-127.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Harbison, "Iconography and Iconology," in *Early Netherlandish Painting: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research*, ed. Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Hank van Veen (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 380.

James Marrow also contradicts the common modern assumption that the presentation of symbolic meaning through recondite symbols was considered the most important artistic achievement of fourteenth and fifteenth-century art. Period discussions of devotional works of art in fact focus on how an image works in relation to the beholder, rather than what it depicts specifically. Narratives of Christ's life and devotional handbooks, the actual remnants of this period's popular religious beliefs, reveal this shift in interest from the theologically recondite to personal practice, particularly in visualizing one's own personal response to religious events.<sup>29</sup> As early as 1965, Sixten Ringbom related this visionary tendency in the late medieval religious experience to images, arguing that such experiences sought primarily to commune, in a very visceral and direct manner, with Christ and the saints in their most humanized form. From about 1450 to 1550 especially, *Andachtsbilder*, images like the *Virgo lactans* that have been isolated from a narrative in order to convey the emotional core of the story, were increasingly portrayed with added anecdotal and genre-like motifs. According to Ringbom, these changes were the result of a desire to make static images like that of the Virgin and Child more emotionally accessible to late medieval viewers. Another way that this was accomplished was through increased interest and skill in depicting physiognomy and a sense of the subject's psychological interior. Fifteenth-century Italian theorists like Leon Battista Alberti discussed solutions to this problem—for example, how the painter could distinguish

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<sup>29</sup> James H. Marrow, "Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 16, no. 2/3 (1986): 150-69.

between laughter and crying—but the Italians admired Netherlandish painters most of all for their practical solutions to rendering the intimate details of an emotional response.<sup>30</sup>

The humanization of Joseph, even in his most playful or bawdy forms, is thus directly symptomatic of this desire for direct contact with the Heavenly Family. Artistic forms could stimulate this sense of personal engagement in a number of ways. Depictions of emotional and gestural responses to such events as the Passion of Christ encouraged a similar response in the viewer, while illusionistic art—that which could “eradicate or deny the distinction between the painted image and that which it represents”<sup>31</sup> by “lavishing attention upon the materiality of people and objects and depicting both in light-filled, spatially coherent contexts”<sup>32</sup>—served the primary purpose of establishing a tangible connection between the beholder and the divine subject. Marrow suggests that in similar form, the direct iconic gaze of the divine subject of a work of art would not only stimulate a spiritual dialogue with the viewer, but admonish him to present an appropriate response. Devotional treatises like the *Vita Christi* of 1374, by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony, the *Meditationes de Vita Christi* of Pseudo-Bonaventura, dated to c. 1300, and Thomas à Kempis’ *De Imitatione Christi* of c. 1418-27 admonish their readers to react physically during their meditations upon the body of Christ, for example, and to experience Christ and the saints as viscerally as they possibly

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<sup>30</sup> Sixten Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 50-51; Leon Battista Alberti, *Trattato della pittura*, ed. H. Janitschek, *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte XI* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1877), 120; Bartholomaeus Facius, *De viris illustribus*, Florence, 1745, 49; Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), note 2.

<sup>31</sup> Marrow, “Symbol and Meaning,” 161.

<sup>32</sup> Marrow, “Symbol and Meaning,” 158.

can.<sup>33</sup> Depictions of the Holy Family thus facilitated this kind of devotion, inviting imitation of their actions. Theologians like St. Augustine (354-430), Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth-early sixth century), St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Bonaventura (1221-74) each expressed an interest in the meaningfulness of the image for spiritual meditation. In his treatise entitled *On the four kinds of things on which one can meditate (De quatuor generibus meditabilium)*, Geert Grote (1340-84), the founder of the Modern Devotion, writes that physical images are useful in experiencing one's faith in the most human of terms, a kind of meditation that allows the worshiper to use his imagination to elaborate on the Bible. He writes that both St. Bernard and St. Bonaventura "...taught that it is permissible in meditation to attribute more or different things to Christ's earthly life than are actually found in the scriptures.... We may picture any event as though it occurred today."<sup>34</sup> Grote believed that this kind of 'appropriation' encouraged a proximity to Christ and the saints that aided in one's spiritual salvation.<sup>35</sup> At the very least, these images offered something akin to the longed-for experience of spiritual closeness with Christ and the saints, a foretaste of the unity with Christ and spiritual love experienced in the bliss of the afterlife.<sup>36</sup> Mystics aimed while still on earth to achieve an experience of this same unity through the highest form of prayer, that of a physically experienced yet passive unification with Christ. All of these variations in intensity of experience are what Sixten Ringbom describes as the 'empathic approach' to late medieval image theology,

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<sup>33</sup> Marrow, "Symbol and Meaning," 156-65.

<sup>34</sup> Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Hank van Veen, *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 128-29.

<sup>35</sup> Ilario Tolomio, *Il Trattato "De quatuor generibus meditabilium"* (Padua: Antenore, 1975), 56; Ridderbos, *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Reindert Leonard Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994).

which is not guided by a need for edification or adoration alone, but a “deep emotional experience.”<sup>37</sup>

The viewer’s experience of sanctity in art was therefore not focused upon the mere search for ‘concealed’ theologically complex symbolism. Much of the symbolism that is so recondite to the modern viewer was in fact common knowledge for the late medieval laity, varying, of course, according to their social standing and associated level of education.<sup>38</sup> Historical analyses of late medieval religious life indicate that the laity were more interested in trying “...to ‘see’ the consecrated host as a vision of the Christ Child, and going on both real and imaginary pilgrimages and processions, mingling superstition and personal desires with more officially recognized activities.”<sup>39</sup> Through its attention to anecdotal detail and naturalism, the *Vita Christi* literature indicates that the reader was meant to follow Christ on a pilgrimage through life. Reindert Falkenburg connects these themes with late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century paintings that are intended to aid in one’s meditation upon this pilgrimage. Travel motifs including the walking stick, basket, and pilgrim’s garb become popular especially in images of the Flight into Egypt or the Rest on the Flight, while Joachim Patinir’s world-view landscape offered a path for the imagination to go on pilgrimage within the world of Christ’s infancy.<sup>40</sup> The agency of viewing such images in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance becomes clearer with an understanding of contemporary theories of vision,

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<sup>37</sup> Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), xv.

<sup>39</sup> Harbison, “Iconography and Iconology,” 401; Jacques Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Plon, 1963).

<sup>40</sup> Reindert L. Falkenburg, *Joachim Patinir: Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1988).

which accorded a very active role to the eye in the process of seeing.<sup>41</sup> According to medieval theories of sight espoused by Alhazen (965-1040), John Pecham (d. 1292), and Roger Bacon (1214-1294), the act of seeing implied the eye's taking an imprint of the thing seen.<sup>42</sup> This intimates that the viewers of religious imagery would engage in a very active and personal discourse with the figures and things represented: "Whether one followed the theory of extromission, which involved the eye sending out rays in order to see, or intromission, which described the object as sending rays to the eye, vision was a far more active and dangerous sense than it is for us today."<sup>43</sup> 'Seeing' and experiencing the Holy Family's journey during the Flight into Egypt were, therefore, one and the same. Images of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were experienced as if present within one's own life. Late medieval images and artists were thus highly aware and encouraging of the beholder's reaction, and most significantly, public religious images were most often patronized not by the clergy, but by wealthier members of the laity. In her examination of the fabrication and marketing of south Netherlandish sculpted altarpieces, Lynn Jacobs importantly reminds us that the concerns of the laity were the main impetus behind an altarpiece's imagery. Works executed for a church's high altar were primarily used for

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<sup>41</sup> Danielle Jacquemart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 144-45; Michael Camille, "Obscenity Under Erasure: Censure in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts," in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 143.

<sup>42</sup> David C. Lindberg, "Alhazen's Theory of Vision and Its Reception in the West," *Isis* 58, no. 3 (Autumn, 1967): 321-341; Bruce Eastwood, "Alhazen, Leonardo, and Late Medieval Speculation on the Inversion of Images in the Eye," *An International Review of the History of Science and Technology from the Thirteenth Century* 43, no. 5 (1986): 413-46;

<sup>43</sup> Camille, "Obscenity Under Erasure," 143.

and pertinent to the religious salvation of the congregation, while for the clergy, they served as props for the liturgy and as a form of religious propaganda.<sup>44</sup>

Images of Joseph from the period of about 1300 to 1530, therefore, were meant to be highly conscientious of the life and experiences of the lay viewer, and were intended to reach him or her on the most personal level possible, for viewing and devotion were understood to constitute an infusion of the individual's reality and person. The fact that Joseph's imagery often highlighted his most human, even base, characteristics as the foster-father of Jesus, to the point of hilarity, makes sense when we consider that such altarpieces, panel paintings, and prints were most often intended for a lay audience concerned with such an active form of 'seeing' within the context of their own imperfect lives, rather than of recondite theology espoused by the Church's higher authorities.

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<sup>44</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

## CHAPTER 2: The ‘Domestic’ Joseph and the Earliest Evidence of His Cult

### 2.1 *Humanity and Exemplarity*

St. Joseph’s earliest iconographic manifestations are explored in this chapter, which focuses particularly upon the scholarly debate surrounding the saint’s ‘domestic’ actions in art and literature. Joseph’s preoccupation with matters of childcare in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art is apparent in scenes of the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Flight into Egypt, in which he is depicted cooking porridge, warming the baby’s diapers, preparing the baby’s bath, passing the freshly swaddled child to Mary, or holding or knitting his stockings to form the baby’s swaddling clothes. Scholars including Erwin Panofsky, Johan Huizinga, Ruth Mellinkoff, James Snyder, and Charles Cuttler consider these motifs derisory, viewing them as highlighting Joseph’s obliviousness to the significance of the birth of Christ. Yet the more recent scholarship of Carolyn Wilson and Sheila Schwartz stresses the necessity of rethinking “...any modern assumption of an artist’s intent to ridicule Joseph in scenes that portray the saint cooking or performing other charitable and parental acts, such as that depicted in the *Nativity of Philip the Bold*” (fig. 2.1).<sup>45</sup>

A reconciliation of these disparate perspectives is possible if we recognize that such portrayals of Joseph are intentionally ambiguous, and that humor and exemplarity are dual facets of his character at this time for both lay and clerical audiences. Joseph’s dual significance in fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century German cradle-rocking plays (*Kindelwiegenspiele*) provides one way to reconcile the character’s seemingly

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<sup>45</sup> Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 2001), 66.

paradoxical characteristics. Contrary to the claims of earlier scholarship, Rosemary Drage Hale, Stephen Wright, and Pamela Sheingorn have demonstrated in various ways that the comical role of Joseph in the medieval German Nativity plays was not intended exclusively as mere debasement for the purpose of comic relief. The character's utmost familial piety as well as humor in these plays, apparent in the ridicule the midwives, wet nurses, and chorus of Jews bestow upon Joseph for his fulfillment of the typically 'maternal,' domestic duties, attest to an inherent duality in the saint's late medieval perception. His actions, in fact, indicate his function as an attainable model of domestic responsibility for his lay audience. Joseph's centrality and duality in the plays thus provides an interpretive framework for the saint's simultaneously exemplary and comical behavior in the visual arts.

The link between iconography and dramatic performance is explicit in the frequent appearance of motifs depicting Joseph cooking (figs. 2.2-2.3, for example).<sup>46</sup> Sheila Schwartz interprets these images as references exclusively to Joseph's increasing theological importance as *nutritor Domini*, and therefore to his role as a model for the priestly protectors of Christ and *Ecclesia*. However, it is equally important to consider that motifs depicting Joseph cooking were closely tied to his dramatic portrayal, because "neither the Gospels, canonical or apocryphal, nor literature prior to the fourteenth century, mention Joseph cooking."<sup>47</sup> The plays, along with other forms of literary evidence like contemporary books of manners, such as Wernher der Gärtner's late

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<sup>46</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 2: plate 72, n. 157 and plate 78, n. 180.

<sup>47</sup> Marjory Bolgar Foster, "The Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1550," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1978), 49-50.

thirteenth-century *Meier Helmbrecht*, provide an interpretative framework for Joseph's simultaneously exemplary and comical behavior in iconography, allowing for a reevaluation of the truly multi-faceted nature of the saint's character in late medieval devotion, a figure who unites hilarity with exemplarity.

In order to understand Joseph's complex prominence in art, prior misinterpretations of medieval mass culture must be set aside, particularly that:

...the German miracle plays...were essentially coarse entertainment for the lower classes that flourished in the absence of a strong ecclesiastical authority. As such, they exerted no influence upon the higher levels of literature and art. Moreover, they remained themselves uninfluenced by the contemporary veneration of Joseph, then being confirmed in theological circles.<sup>48</sup>

The belief that Joseph's cult was unilaterally developed and shaped by the 'higher levels of literature and art' fostered by theological circles, and that such literary and artistic productions could be considered separately from more 'popular' devotional trends, must also be reconsidered. Schwartz attributes the centrality of devotion to the Holy Family and to Joseph as its head, and the resultant desire for images of that family in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to the combined ecclesiastical efforts of Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly, Bernardino of Siena, and St. Antoninus.<sup>49</sup> This chapter shows, however, that depictions of a prominent Joseph holding the Christ Child appear as early as c. 1275 in a group of Parisian ivory tabernacles, and evidence of Joseph's veneration may appear as early as c. 1200 in a manuscript illumination from the upper Rhine. These objects may be associated with the highly popular legend of Joseph's *Hosen* and their

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<sup>48</sup> Sheila Schwartz, "The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt," (PhD diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1975), 84.

<sup>49</sup> Schwartz, "The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt," 104.

role as the Christ child's swaddling clothes, and with popular devotion to this relic at Aachen, discussed below. Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* and Pseudo-Bonaventura's *Meditationes de Vita Christi* are early examples of a devotional trend in personal piety contemporary with the ivories, which emphasized the domestic life of the holy family, in which Joseph played a prominent role as caretaker. The interaction of these devotional texts with artistic and dramatic trends is a complex phenomenon in the discussion that follows.

In the late medieval towns of northern Europe, sanctity and morality were not only shaped by 'official' theological thought. The 'coarse entertainment' of the laity in the form of dramatic performances and apocryphal legends was in fact central to contemporary religiosity and conceptions of moral responsibility. Religion and 'secular' life could not exist without each other, meaning that saintly exemplars like Joseph could take shape in response to everyday concerns. Late medieval drama, an entertainment form of social and religious edification, must be viewed in a similar light. Viewers and performers included even the wealthiest, highly educated members of burgher society, particularly since these performances revolved around the marketplace, the central hub of the town square and its associated church. The Brabantine *landjuweel*, a competition of the land's most skilled *rederijkerkamers* (rhetoricians' chambers) performed on the host city's streets, awarded its highest prizes not to the best moralizing *spel van sinne*, but to the most successful comic play. These *facetiae*, though written by and for an audience including the wealthy and educated, explored the most common social interrelationships in ways that could be downright lewd, exploiting common literary and artistic puns like

the familiar sexual entreatment of a male market-goer to ‘unbutton his purse.’ As Elizabeth Honig notes, these *facetiae* presented the audience with their very own dilemmas, thus “...holding up the mirror to every spectator and his or her deepest concerns...[laughter] rebounds back on the viewers who laugh at it, for they find that they are laughing at themselves.”<sup>50</sup>

Medieval drama ultimately operated within the social space of daily life, frequently even employing actual buildings for settings. From the fourteenth century on, Netherlandish Passion cycles were performed among the town square’s surrounding buildings, thus unifying the biblical tales with the everyday realm. Sacred and secular were inextricably intertwined in that the market and church were both sites for dramatic performance as early as the tenth century. Even for later performances of the sixteenth century, such as those that took place at the *landjuweel* or during imperial, princely, or ducal triumphal entries, the church and its surrounding market square remained the culminating point for processions of *tableau vivants*, moving floats with actors, props, and sometimes paintings.<sup>51</sup>

Piety during the fourteenth century, the period in which Joseph came to the forefront in art and literature, both oral and written, was rapidly changing, due to the influence of the preaching orders and the privatization of devotion. The new concerns of lay and clerical devotion allowed for humanity, and even human frailty, to take a more central role in art and literature, as these media functioned effectively as tools, facilitating

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 60.

<sup>51</sup> William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800-1576* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 120-40; Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*, 60-68.

a more tangible and realistic experience of the divine. The rapid development of naturalism, or an interest in illusionism, in art of the early fifteenth century, evident most strikingly in the paintings of Jan van Eyck, is symptomatic of this trend in devotion. Works like van Eyck's *Virgin with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin* of c. 1435 were intended to inspire what Erwin Panofsky called "contemplative immersion" because of their removal from the specificity of a continuous narrative or historical context.<sup>52</sup> Depictions of the Holy Family at Rest, seeking nourishment from the trials of their flight into Egypt, were most suitable for contemplation because their isolation from a wider historical context allowed the viewer to fill in his own details. The fourteenth-century *Andachtsbild* was a devotional image of religious figures isolated from their narrative contexts or "an augmentation of a representational image,"<sup>53</sup> intended to incite an emotional response. Fifteenth-century devotional imagery took the *Andachtsbild* to the next step by implicating the viewer in a direct experience of "humanely appealing sentiments."<sup>54</sup> The means to this end was pictorial illusionism, which made depicted people, things, and events appear continuous with reality, placing the venerated in the realm of the devotee. The fifteenth-century introduction of additional figures and elements into half-length formulas of the Virgin, Man of Sorrows, Salvator Mundi, and Holy Face or Vera Icona,

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<sup>52</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "'Imago pietatis'. Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzenmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrix'," *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1927), 264.

<sup>53</sup> Sixten Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 57.

<sup>54</sup> Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 57.

for example, had major implications for creating “...subtlest emotional relationships expressed with a minimum of dramatic scenery.”<sup>55</sup>

The humanization of the saints in art served the same devotional interests. As Leo Steinberg has noted, images denoting what he calls the ‘humanation’ of Christ, such as those in which the genitals of the baby and of the adult Christ are quite obviously highlighted, are a part of this greater devotional trend. These images allude particularly to the sexuality of Christ, an aspect of his human form that renders him explicitly human, and thus sharing in our somatic suffering and pleasure.<sup>56</sup> Christ’s imperfection itself—his experience of our own faulty humanity—allows him to redeem humankind. Richard Rambuss rightly notes that without the acknowledgement of Christ’s human sexuality, whether implicitly in text or in image, his unmatched purity and chastity could not be understood as the highest triumph over the challenges posed by the appropriation of earthly flesh.<sup>57</sup> Despite Joseph’s human faults, which frequently become comical in art and drama and ultimately foster relatable sympathy, he repeatedly chooses the correct course of action in the grand scheme of things. He therefore functions as an effective model for all Christians, especially for the laity. The choices put forth to Joseph’s

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<sup>55</sup> Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 55-59; James H. Marrow, “Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 16, no. 2/3 (1986): 150-63. According to Sixten Ringbom, the *Andachtsbild* “has both an iconographical and functional meaning: iconographically it applies to a figure or group isolated from a narrative context, and functionally it denotes a pictorial aid to ‘contemplative absorption’...an *Andachtsbild* in the iconographical sense could also be used for other purposes...A typical *Andachtsthema* such as the *Arma Christi* could as an image of indulgence serve as a recipient of prayers...That an *Andachtsbild* could be employed to symbolize a theological concept or a mystery of faith otherwise difficult to express in a picture, shown by the fact that the ‘Man of Sorrows’ at times stood for the mystery of the Eucharist.” Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 55-56.

<sup>56</sup> Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and In Modern Oblivion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11-24.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 63.

character in religious drama reflect those of everyday life; the mirror is in turn cast upon the audience. Thus, Joseph's faulty humanity, and the comical developments of his story evident in contemporary art and literature, should be reevaluated as evidence of a true flowering of his cult and his role as a model for the Everyman, and not as a mark exclusively of derision, as so many have argued. The common belief that Joseph's cult does not develop significantly until the late fifteenth century, put forward by scholars like Francis Lad Filas,<sup>58</sup> should be reconsidered, particularly in light of Joseph's earliest depictions as dually humorous and exemplary.

## ***2.2 Joseph's Hosen and Early Iconographic Evidence of His Cult***

Early evidence of St. Joseph's popularity in art and society is not only found in a group of Rest on the Flight into Egypt miniatures dating from the second quarter of the fourteenth century, discussed by Sheila Schwartz.<sup>59</sup> A close iconographic link to early devotion to the saint appears in what remains of a group of about a dozen ivories executed in Paris around 1300, with the earliest example, in the Skulpturensammlung of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, now dated to ca. 1275 (fig. 2.4). What appears as an anecdotal detail commonly shared by the group, the motif of Joseph holding the Christ child at the Nativity (figs. 2.5-2.9), is in fact probably connected to the holy relic of Joseph's stockings and Jesus' swaddling clothes, the *Hosen*. The legend of the *Hosen* may have an even earlier representation in a manuscript illumination from the Upper or High Rhine depicting the Flight into Egypt, from the Freiburg Psalter, and assigned a date

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<sup>58</sup> Francis Lad Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1962), 495.

<sup>59</sup> See chapter one; Schwartz, "The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt."

of c. 1200 (fig. 2.10).<sup>60</sup> Hanging from Joseph's staff are not only his characteristic drinking flask, discussed in this study as well, but also what appears to be a pair of socks or boots tied together by a rope. The image has never before been tied to the motif of Joseph's stockings, perhaps because of its assigned date, which pre-dates the earliest known images of the motif, and even the earliest fixed date tied to the relic itself—its placement in the Marian shrine of Aachen cathedral in 1238-39.<sup>61</sup> The motif's strangeness may be explained only by its clear similarity to later images depicting the *Hosen*.

The motif of Joseph holding or passing the Christ child in the ivories' Nativity scenes was widely popular, as it appears in a variety of examples of different media from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century northern Europe, including the Petri-Altar at the Hamburg Kunsthalle (fig. 2.11), discussed below, a shrine from Tournai (fig. 2.12),<sup>62</sup> a manuscript in Brussels (fig. 2.13),<sup>63</sup> and a woodcut illustration from Utrecht for the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (fig. 2.14).<sup>64</sup> Joseph's relic itself appears in many Nativity scenes, including such examples as the Nativity of Philip the Bold (fig. 2.1), an early fifteenth-century altarpiece from Bad Münstereifel (fig. 2.15), the Sterzing altarpiece, dated to 1456-58 (fig. 2.16), a Cologne triptych from c. 1420 (fig. 2.17), and a

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<sup>60</sup> Moritz Woelk, ed. *The Magi: Legend, Art and Cult* (Cologne: Museum Schnütgen, 2014), 116; Ulrich Kuder, "Mittelalterlicher Bildgebrauch. Überlegungen zum ersten Blatt eines Psalters aus der Zeit um 1200," in *Die Schönheit des Sichtbaren und Hörbaren: Festschrift für Norbert Knopp zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Matthias Bunge and Norbert Knopp (Wolnzach: Kastner, 2001), 61-85; Detlef Zinke, ed., *Verborgene Pracht. Mittelalterliche Buchkunst aus acht Jahrhunderten in Freiburger Sammlungen. Katalog der Ausstellung des Augustinermuseums Freiburg in der Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg, 8. Juni—28. Juli 2002* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Augustinermuseum, 2002), 54-61.

<sup>61</sup> Ursula Demand et al., "Kleiner Weg-Weiser durch die Domschatzkammer Aachen," (Aachen: Domkapital zu Aachen, 1995), 42.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Art*, plate 40.

<sup>63</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2: plate 67, n. 143.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Art*, plate 42.

carved altarpiece from Brabant (fig. 2.18), dated to the sixteenth century. The *Hosen* are portrayed in a variety of ways, whether in the process of being removed, cut, or simply lying on the ground or over the baby's crib, and they are sometimes depicted as boots instead.<sup>65</sup>

The prevalence and widespread fame of the relic at Aachen has been largely ignored among Joseph studies, although it was reportedly visited frequently by pilgrims after its appearance at Aachen's cathedral. Josef de Coo's 1965 article on Joseph's *Hosen* in painting, pilgrim medallions, and literature sought to expose the relic's significance for late medieval pilgrims and the devout of northern Europe, and his findings contribute greatly to this investigation. Various mystical writings, Christmas hymns, and fourteenth- through sixteenth-century chronicles mention the holy stockings themselves and their exhibition at Aachen, and they appear also on several pilgrim flasks and medallions.<sup>66</sup> Beginning in 1349, the four great holy relics of Aachen, the swaddling clothes/stockings of Joseph, the tunic Mary wore when Christ was born, the loincloth of Christ, and the shroud of John the Baptist (fig. 2.19) were all displayed by the cathedral during the 'great pilgrimage,' which took place every seven years. Since 1238-39, the relics had been kept in a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the cathedral (fig. 2.20), but the precise date of their arrival remains unknown.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Josef de Coo, "Das Josefshosen-Motiv im Weihnachtslied und in der bildenden Kunst," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 30 (1965): 58-89.

<sup>66</sup> Josef de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert: Ein Weihnachtsmotiv in Literatur und Kunst," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 30 (1965): 144-84.

<sup>67</sup> Ursula Demand et al., "Kleiner Weg-Weiser durch die Domschatzkammer Aachen," (Aachen: Domkapital zu Aachen, 1995), 42.

Joseph's stockings were represented in a wide range of sacred and secular literature from Germany, the Netherlands, and France, and represented in images both as the main subject and as a lesser detail, but were frequently present nonetheless. Josef de Coo documents a number of these examples in his article on the prevalence of Joseph's relic in devotional thought and as a common pilgrimage goal. The *Hosen* were not always depicted straightforwardly as two separate cloths; sometimes only one cloth is shown, and sometimes Joseph raises his leg to evoke the legend (fig. 2.21). Sometimes they more closely resemble boots or shoes than cloth, and sometimes merely a cloth is apparent. Jean Gerson's early fifteenth-century writings attempted to negate the role of the *Hosen*, as well as downplaying depictions of Joseph performing menial activities, which may account for the ambiguity of many depictions of Jesus' swaddling clothes. At the very least, Gerson's disapproval of such motifs indicates to us that any argument that denies the base nature of many of Joseph's activities depicted in art is unfounded. The *Hosen*'s frequent appearance in the more accessible media of prints and pilgrimage medallions attests to their widespread popularity, while their presence in more expensive and personalized commissions indicates their high status in the art and devotion of wealthier members of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Hans Multscher's Nativity from the Wurzach Altar, executed 1437 (fig. 2.22), includes the stockings draped over the baby in the manger, while in Rogier van der Weyden's Columba Altarpiece (fig. 2.23) of c. 1460, placed in the baptismal chapel of St. Columba in Cologne, two distinct cloths, unquestionably Joseph's *Hosen*, are spread out upon the manger as well.<sup>68</sup> Many other

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<sup>68</sup> de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 144-85; Josef de Coo, "Addenda zum

examples from across northern Europe reinforce the popularity and effectiveness of this theme. In an Adoration of the Magi (fig. 2.24) from the Small Carrand Diptych, created by a Franco-Flemish painter c. 1385, Joseph's bare leg indicates that he has already removed one of the *Hosen* and must now warm his feet over some coals. Sometimes, Joseph warms the baby's swaddling clothes over a fire instead (fig. 2.25), as in an Adoration of the Magi by Hieronymus Bosch.

Gertrud Schiller suggests that the removal of Joseph's stockings ultimately derives from the biblical story of Moses removing his shoes in reverence for the appearance of God in the Burning Bush.<sup>69</sup> But Josef de Coo posits the origin of the stockings legend in a misunderstanding of the Latin *fasciae* and *fasciolae*, which by the early ninth century could mean "swaddling clothes" and had acquired a meaning near to "legwear."<sup>70</sup> The varied representations of the relic likely had something to do with the multiple connotations of the Middle High German *Hose*, which meant any sort of leg or foot covering, including stockings, pants, or shoes. The Middle Dutch variation, *laarzen*, could have meant boots, gaiters, or some other sort of outdoor shoe, which in the fifteenth century could have included pattens. The Middle French *chausse* typically translated to "stocking," while the Latin *caliga* could translate to "boot" or to a kind of outdoor foot covering, like *laarzen*.<sup>71</sup> These varying translations could well account for the frequent presence of pattens lying immediately next to Joseph in early Netherlandish Nativity scenes, as in the Portinari Altarpiece (fig. 2.26) and in a Nativity by Petrus Christus (fig.

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Weihnachtsmotif der Josefshosen," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 43 (1972): 249-61.

<sup>69</sup> Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 1:80-81.

<sup>70</sup> de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 153; Heinrich Joseph Flosz, *Geschichtliche Nachrichten über die Aachener Heiligthümer* (Bonn: Marcus, 1855), 313.

<sup>71</sup> de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 153.

2.27). Of the artists working in the Netherlandish regions, only Rogier van der Weyden (in the Columba Altarpiece) and perhaps Hans Memling, who both had connections to Germany, depict the *Hosen* in their more Germanic, cloth-like form.

The detailed quality and size (16.8 cm x 15.1 cm (opened) x 2.1 cm) of the ivory tabernacles with the motif of Joseph passing the swaddled child to Mary indicate that these pieces were probably commissioned or bought by members of the rich bourgeoisie or aristocracy of thirteenth-century Paris for their private devotional practices. Their size and shape reveal that they functioned like portable altarpieces, to be placed on top of an altar, table, or pillow, or held in one's hands like a Book of Hours. The size and quality of each piece tended to determine who could afford to buy one. Although ivory, like gold, was costly and rare, those who could afford a cheaper Book of Hours in the thirteenth century could probably also afford to purchase a small ivory plaque, ranging in size from four to six inches, for their personalized devotion.<sup>72</sup> Many thirteenth-century ivory tabernacles were dedicated to the Virgin and depicted scenes from her life and that of Christ, and while small devotional diptychs appear to have been made exclusively from ivory, other tabernacles were made using a variety of materials, including silver gilt. Although none made from mixed materials survive, it is possible that they did exist.<sup>73</sup> Painted and wooden versions, like the Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold's small Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych of c. 1400 (fig. 2.1), would have fulfilled a similar devotional function. Concurrent with the popularity of these small, portable tabernacles,

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<sup>72</sup> Harvey Stahl, "Narrative Structure and Content in Some Gothic Ivories of the Life of Christ," in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 95-97.

<sup>73</sup> Charles T. Little, "Ivoires et art gothique," *Revue de l'Art* 46 (1979): 61-62.

and likely driving it, was the widespread increase in devotion to the Virgin Mary, beginning in the twelfth century, and the resultant popularization of the Book of Hours.<sup>74</sup> By 1270, Paris had emerged as a major capital city and the center of illuminated manuscript and ivory production.<sup>75</sup>

Ivory carving continued to flourish in Paris up to the early fifteenth century, and the fact that as many as twelve of the tabernacles depicting Joseph holding the child exist today indicates that the original production of this type was probably much higher. As Richard Randall points out, iconographic motifs and styles were transmitted among the ivory trade using terracotta impressions, allowing for reproductions to arise quickly in different centers of carving.<sup>76</sup> Although only a few examples of German small tabernacles, executed in wood rather than ivory, are extant, centers of ivory carving also existed in Cologne and the Upper Rhine. Ivories that have been attributed to Cologne workshops often have Parisian characteristics, which may be explained by the influential presence of French carvers working in the city. However, the ivories' portability, like that of manuscripts, renders geographic attributions difficult to pin down. Iconographic, stylistic, and compositional influence probably transmitted both ways, although much of the thirteenth-century evidence in woodcarving, the craft for which German carvers are best known, has disappeared. The few surviving Cologne and Upper Rhine examples of

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<sup>74</sup> Roger Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1997).

<sup>75</sup> Peter Barnet, "Gothic Sculpture in Ivory: An Introduction," *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8-15.

<sup>76</sup> Richard H. Randall, *Masterpieces of Ivory from the Walters Art Gallery* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1985), 180.

wooden tabernacles,<sup>77</sup> as well as some ivory examples, attest to the German tradition of carving these objects.<sup>78</sup>

Henk van Os notes Joseph's particular importance in the Parisian ivory group in his prominent depiction twice in the scenes of the Nativity and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. In the latter he carries the typical basket of sacrificial doves. The Nativity, however, van Os considers "...particularly interesting for the Virgin is allowing Joseph to hold the child for a moment....The writer of the *Meditationes* describes this event, and adds that we, too, may follow Joseph in longing for this privilege."<sup>79</sup> Van Os highlights an important point in drawing our attention to a primary purpose of contemporary devotional texts, like the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* of c. 1300, written by a Franciscan friar for a nun of the Poor Clares. The reader of such literature is often urged to experience the described events by transporting her or himself into the story. A key component of this kind of meditation, desirable as early as the twelfth century according to the sermons of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), was the use of one's imagination to elaborate on events of Christ's earthly life, even the visualization of things that could not have taken place in order to facilitate a greater spiritual proximity to God.<sup>80</sup> The author of the *Meditationes* writes, "And of the saintly old Joseph the Blessed Bernard relates that he often held the child Jesus on his knees, laughing and playing with

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<sup>77</sup> Antje-Fee Köllermann and Iris Wenderholm, *The Bode-Museum* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2006), 72.

<sup>78</sup> Charles T. Little, "Gothic Ivory Carving in Germany," *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 81-93.

<sup>79</sup> Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300-1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>80</sup> Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Hank van Veen, *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 128-29.

Him, and comforting Him.”<sup>81</sup> However, images cannot be entirely explained by referencing contemporary devotional literature, particularly since such spiritual writings were frequently inspired by images. The author of the *Meditationes* himself uses depictions as a source of his writing, and St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Bonaventure all mention the usefulness of images for one’s spiritual meditation.<sup>82</sup> A more reasonable association between text and image is proposed by Peter Barnet, who attributes the increase in popularity of ivory tabernacles and diptychs around 1300 to the greater role afforded to personal worship, evident in texts like the Franciscan *Meditationes Vitae Christi*: “The small scale of devotional ivories provided imagery for private prayer and contemplation and, like the Book of Hours, ivory carvings were popular with both the clergy and the laity.”<sup>83</sup>

Van Os himself notes the difficulty of assigning an exact origin for a specific iconographic motif, citing the commonly represented motif of Mary worshipping her child on bended knee after the birth, with the baby lying naked on the ground in the midst of a burst of supernatural light. This motif is frequently attributed to the *Revelations* of St. Bridget of Sweden (1303-73), written in the third quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>84</sup> However, the influence of devotional literature upon images could not have been unidirectional. Visions were and are frequently formed from things already seen and familiar to an audience, leading to a common problem overlooked in many iconographic

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<sup>81</sup> Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, trans. and ed., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 55.

<sup>82</sup> Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Hank van Veen, *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 128-29.

<sup>83</sup> Barnet, “Gothic Sculpture in Ivory,” 14.

<sup>84</sup> van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300-1500*, 4.

analyses. Jean Gerson expressed the usefulness of images as incentives for meditation, and Henry Suso (c. 1300-66) wrote that it was necessary for the mystic to rely on his imaginative vision, to go beyond images themselves, in order to partake of Christ's body in the most visceral manner possible. Ringbom rightly notes that this common practice in mystical devotion "...should make us wary of explanations of iconographical innovations by reference to verbal or literary formulations of religious concepts and experiences."<sup>85</sup> In one of her visions, the mystic St. Theresa of Avila experienced Christ "as it is painted after the Resurrection."<sup>86</sup> Swarzenski has shown that the German *Andachtsbild* of the Christ and Sleeping St. John likely inspired associated literature among a group of fourteenth-century nuns from the Rhineland, rather than deriving from it.<sup>87</sup>

The depiction of Joseph passing the child to Mary in the ivory tabernacles is more simply explained not as a derivation from devotional literature specifically, but rather as a similar result of contemporary popular devotional practices, particularly imaginative elaborations of Christ's life. The motif could have, in some instances, inspired related narrative moments in devotional literature, in which Joseph himself plays a role in the human aspects of Jesus' infancy that were so valued at the time. Most probably, the prominence of the Aachen relic was involved in the development of this kind of scene, whether in the imagination of the artist, writer, or devotee, since this we at least know to have been a popular pilgrimage goal, as Josef de Coo has shown.<sup>88</sup> The ivories which

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<sup>85</sup> Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 19. Ringbom suggests that St. Bridget of Sweden may have also modeled parts of her *Revelations* on contemporaneous works of art. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1: 46, note 277.

<sup>87</sup> H. Swarzenski, "Quellen zum deutschen Andachtsbild," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 4 (1935): 141-44.

<sup>88</sup> de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 144-85

most closely imitate altarpieces in format—the polyptychs (figs. 2.4-2.9)—appear to afford Joseph the most active parenting role. Though in ivory examples in diptych form (fig. 2.28)<sup>89</sup>, Joseph is not depicted passing or holding the child, he is still prominent, most often gazing toward Mary and the child with an alert sensitivity, rarely asleep, and never disengaged.

The repetition itself of the motif of Joseph passing the child in the ivories indicates that the action carried meaning, particularly within this precious medium. Unlike woodcuts and engravings, the expensive medium of ivory was most often carved not with a mind to mass reproduction but with a specific patron on the receiving end, or a wealthy individual interested in carefully selecting a singular precious piece.<sup>90</sup> Looking at the function of the tabernacles themselves suggests that they were carefully carved not only with a mind toward beauty, but with the intention to stimulate meditation as part of the typical devotional practices of the time. Thus, Joseph’s prominence was somehow crucial to the viewer’s experience.

The bases of ivory tabernacles frequently included a space for holding relics, but many are now lost, and it remains unknown whether any examples from our group held relics themselves. Considering the great importance of Joseph’s relics, and of relics in general in the late medieval period, enhances our understanding of the saint’s significance in devotion as early as the thirteenth century. A relic’s presence or depiction, when combined with painted or carved scenes of Christ’s life and with the

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<sup>89</sup> Peter Barnet, ed., *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1997), n. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Sears, “Ivory and Ivory-Workers in Medieval Paris,” in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 18-37.

ritual of prayer and meditation, would have facilitated an exclusive contact with the sacred, a kind of “metaphysical reality...regarded not only as a preparation for or foretaste of heavenly life, but also a basis for [the owner’s] social prestige.”<sup>91</sup>

The iconography of relics was not only an effective tool for the ‘salvatory gaze’ of the viewer through his meditation; the “automatism of salvation”<sup>92</sup> carried a powerful religious and politically propagandistic role as well, particularly in more public forms of art like altarpieces. As in the tabernacles, illuminations, and panel paintings, the Hamburg Petri-Altar’s iconographic reference to Joseph’s role as swaddler of the baby (fig. 2.11) reflects a desire to symbolically link the parish to the Germanic spiritual and imperial center of power at Aachen. The connection symbolically legitimizes an ideological continuity rooted in the history of the Holy Roman Empire, along with its ninth-century Carolingian ancestry. The new center of the Holy Roman Empire during the fourteenth century, Prague, provides a revealing example of how the cult of relics flourished among the aristocracy and radiated throughout courtly and civic life in late medieval cities.

Relics were of utmost importance in Bohemian circles. The Czech Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316-78) continually acquired hordes of relics in imitation of his virtuous predecessors, particularly Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor and therefore Charles’ predecessor. The emperor’s avid collecting practices resulted in frequent, lavish public ceremonies and exhibitions of his relics in Prague’s New Town

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<sup>91</sup> Ridderbos, van Buren, and van Veen, *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, 143.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Lentz, “‘As far as the eye can see...’: Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 361.

Square as well as in St. Vitus Cathedral. Charles IV's institution in 1354 of a 'jubilee year,' a year-long feast repeated every seven years in honor of the Virgin's tunic (translated from Trier to Prague Cathedral), was unquestionably influenced by his experience in 1349, on the day before his coronation as King of the Romans, of the ceremony of the 'great pilgrimage' in Aachen. Prague's emulation of Aachen is likewise confirmed by the fact that the two cities granted the same number of indulgences to their pilgrims,<sup>93</sup> as well as by a rendition of the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse in Charles IV's Holy Cross Chapel, in emulation of the ceiling design at Aachen.<sup>94</sup> In addition to legitimizing Charles IV as the continuation of a glorious line of Holy Roman Emperors, his acquisition of relics "...closed a long chapter of Přemyslid history and triumphantly confirmed Charles's promotion of Bohemia to the centre of the empire."<sup>95</sup>

The crown jewel of Charles' relic collection was a gift on May 1356 from his nephew, the French Dauphin Charles V, in the form of two thorns from Christ's Crown of Thorns kept in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. This gift was symbolic of a dynastic linkage and support with the French Valois dynasty, but it also allowed the emperor to create a viable architectural competitor in spiritual power and legitimacy in the form of the Holy Cross Chapel, where Charles kept his collection of the Passion relics. In

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<sup>93</sup> Zoë Opačić, "Architecture and Religious Experience in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Prague," in *Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument: Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im Europäischen Kontext*, ed. Jiří Fajt and Andrea Langer (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009), 139-43.

<sup>94</sup> Jiří Fajt and J. Royt, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Great Tower at Karlštejn Castle. Ecclesia Triumphans," in *Magister Theodoricus Court Painter to Emperor Charles IV: The Pictorial Decoration of the Shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, ed. Jiří Fajt, trans. Joanne P.C. Domin, et al. (Prague: National Gallery Prague, 1998), 132.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Crossley, "The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones, Richard Marks, and A. J. Minnis (York, U.K.: York Medieval Press, 2000), 123.

planning the location and layout of his chapels at Karlštejn and the Wenceslas Chapel at St. Vitus, Charles considered the Sainte-Chapelle as a prototype. Charles' interaction with the royal chapel, built by Louis IX between 1241 and 1248 to house the Capetian dynasty's own Passion relics, was extensive; he spent his childhood and the majority of his adolescence in Paris under the protection of his uncle, Charles IV. The Parisian chapel was constructed with two stories, the lower dedicated to the Virgin and used for the celebration of the Mass for the members of the royal court. The upper level served as a grandiose reliquary, infiltrated by light and colored stained glass, designed for the exclusive use of the sovereign and his queen. In addition to the Crown of Thorns, splinters from the Cross, Christ's vesture, part of Longinus' spear, and Stephen's sponge were kept in the chapel on an altar.<sup>96</sup>

As the first palace chapel in which a king kept a prominent relic of Christ exclusively for himself, the Sainte-Chapelle became an ideal for all other private reliquary chapels. The French chronicler Gauthier Cornut legitimized this exclusivity by claiming that possession of the Crown of Thorns "...extended to the realm itself. The relic had become a source of joy (*causa laetitiae*) for the Gallican Church (*Ecclesia Gallicana*) and for all French people (*tota gen Francorum*)."<sup>97</sup> Charles IV's Passion

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<sup>96</sup> Jiří Fajt notes similarities between the Sainte-Chapelle and the Holy Cross Chapel beyond their shared emphasis upon the Passion relics: in the Lesser Tower of the castle, the Chapel of Our Lady was originally dedicated for the chapter's services. This more public space led to the Chapel of the Holy Cross in the Greater Tower, an exclusive space for the emperor and his closest clerics, including the Archbishop. Highlighting the importance of the crown of thorns, a metal thorned 'crown' encircles the walls of the chapel as well. See Fajt and Royt, "The Pictorial Decoration of the Great Tower at Karlštejn Castle. Ecclesia Triumphans," 128-31.

<sup>97</sup> Beat Brenk, "The Sainte-Chapelle as a Capetial Political Program," in *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin, Kathryn Brush, and Peter Draper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 197.

relics, including those present in the Reliquary Cross of the Bohemian kingdom, were similarly present for the well being of all Czech people. However, his presentation of Prague's Passion relics to his people was markedly different from the exclusivity of the French monarchy's Passion relics, an aspect likely influenced by the aforementioned public displays at Aachen's cathedral. A grand, public procession and display of Passion relics occurred during the Feast of the Holy Lance in the New Town Square.<sup>98</sup>

Charles V's demonstration of allegiance through his gift of a relic was particularly important for Charles IV, as the French typically ranked their ruler as equal to the Holy Roman Emperor because of their claimed dynastic linkage to Charlemagne. This sensitive issue is rendered visible in Charles V's *Grandes Chroniques de France* (Paris, BN, Ms. Fr. 2813) in a section describing the emperor's visit to Paris in 1377-78. According to the illumination on folio 467, Charles V sent his uncle a black horse to ride from Saint-Denis to Paris, rather than the traditional imperial white horse, as a gesture that France would not accept subservience to the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>99</sup> Genealogical and spiritual links to Aachen thus carried substantial political value for northern Europe's monarchs.

The power of relics during this period extended also to images; depictions of relics linked "time and timeless."<sup>100</sup> Zoë Opačić suggests that the cycle of paintings depicted on the walls of the Prague cloister of Na Slovanech, the Benedictine Emmaus monastery, were created in association with the grand, public procession and display of

<sup>98</sup> Zoë Opačić, "Architecture and Religious Experience in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Prague," 145-46.

<sup>99</sup> Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France, 1274-1422* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 128-29; Iva Rosario, *Art and Propaganda: Charles IV of Bohemia, 1346-78* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2000), 35-40.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Crossley, "The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia," 123.

Passion relics during the Feast of the Holy Lance. The Holy Lance appears in several scenes, as does the Crown of Thorns, evidently linked to the public display of the lance and the two thorns of the Crown in Charles Square. According to Opačić, pilgrims visiting the relics in New Town Square could have visited the cloister after the main ceremony:

There the images would have played an integral part in the experience and understanding of the relic display and of the pilgrimage to the New Town undertaken in its honour. Tangible relics and symbols of worldly power would have been placed in the historical context of the visible Biblical narrative and its landscapes beginning with the demise of the Antichrist and the restoration of the True Cross. The paintings' typological juxtapositions also added an allegorical and moral "sensus" to the liturgical ceremony of the Holy Lance and Nails.<sup>101</sup>

The integration into these scenes "...of biblical imagery and religious ceremony may have been driven by the same desire to excite devotional feeling"<sup>102</sup> as the actual presentation of the relics in the New Town ceremony. The symbolic presence of the Josephine Aachen relic in German, Netherlandish, and French Nativity scenes would have performed a similar devotional function for the late medieval viewer, certainly reminding him of Joseph's significant role as swaddler of the child, but also of northern Europe's spiritual center at Aachen, the Frankish node of power north of the Alps, and the north's answer to the papal hegemony of Rome. Aachen's continual spiritual, as well as political, presence in the minds of the devout and of the various northern principalities was evident in the continued success of the 'great pilgrimage' and other pilgrimages to Aachen. The Burgundian Duchess Margaret of York traveling there after her marriage to Charles the Bold in October of 1454. The stated main purpose of her visit was to place

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<sup>101</sup> Opačić, "Architecture and Religious Experience in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Prague," 145.

<sup>102</sup> Opačić, "Architecture and Religious Experience in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Prague," 146.

her wedding crown on the head of the cathedral's statue of the Virgin, but she would have unquestionably seen the *Hosen* there as well.<sup>103</sup>

Aside from the Valois dynasty's desire to link themselves to Frankish imperial origins at Aachen, Joseph's prominence in the Parisian ivories is substantiated by the early presence of his cult in France, already by the time of Louis IX (1214-1270). The French crusader Jean de Joinville brought Joseph's girdle back from the Holy Land in 1254, and built a chapel dedicated to the saint to house this relic. According to Joseph Chorpenning, the shrine was a popular pilgrimage site, but its location is unclear, although it was probably located somewhere in Paris.<sup>104</sup> Further evidence of Joseph's French popularity is a chapel dedicated to him in the Avignon collegiate church of St. Agricola, allegedly initiated by Gregory XI, who was the elected pope at Avignon from 1370-78. According to Chorpenning, the chapel was connected to a confraternity and sodality dedicated to the saint.<sup>105</sup>

The presence of Joseph's cult by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century in French regions with strong court connections allows us to revisit the Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych (fig. 2.1), which is now considered a product of the Mosan region by a Netherlandish artist, although it was probably created for the Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold (1342-1404), the youngest son of the Valois King John II (the Good, 1319-64) and his wife Bonne of Luxembourg. The iconography of the stockings in the painting and its relationship to the Burgundian duke has never been explained, and has led to its disassociation with his

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<sup>103</sup> Maryan Wynn Ainsworth, ed., *Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 175.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph F. Chorpenning, O.S.F.S., *Sermon Texts on Saint Joseph by Francis de Sales* (Toronto: Peregrina, 2000), 33.

<sup>105</sup> Chorpenning, *Sermon Texts on St. Joseph*, 33.

courtly milieu, simply because the stockings legend was elided in ecclesiastically authorized accounts. Marjory Foster writes:

It was much more difficult for the serious painter to incorporate the *Hosen* into a painting of the Nativity without diminishing its pious effect...it is significant that they [the artists] all avoided showing Joseph in the somewhat awkward act of removing his hose, as a few earlier and more naïve artists had done.<sup>106</sup>

Foster's footnotes indicate that the painter of the Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych is her example of such earlier, more "naïve" artists, and she neglects to discuss the work's commission for the Burgundian duke. Furthermore, from what we glean from the surviving examples, artists did not shy away from depicting the relic or Joseph involved in the act of removing his pants, no matter how humorous the subject, because it was this very 'ridiculous' act of piety that resulted in the perpetuation of a relic from Christ's childhood and family life, the very subject of early modern prayer and fascination. Prominent pieces of public ecclesiastical art including the Sterzing altarpiece of 1456-58 (fig. 2.16), the altarpiece by the Meister von St. Sigmund (fig. 2.21), and a Westphalian silver relief (fig. 2.29) from 1457 all include a Joseph at the Nativity who is 'caught in the act' of removing his pants.<sup>107</sup>

Writings of the time can inform us about the reception of such imagery—whether it was ridiculed, despised, beloved, or venerated—but we must once again avoid the common pitfall of relying solely upon the most 'official' dialogues with respect to Joseph's history. Jean Gerson, who fought against Joseph's less idealized representations in contemporary drama and art, was one of Philip the Bold's many advisors, but this fact

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<sup>106</sup> Marjory Bolgar Foster, "The Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1550," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1978), 34.

<sup>107</sup> de Coe, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 144-85.

clearly did not influence the duke's artistic commissions.<sup>108</sup> By the end of the fourteenth century, due to Rome's validation of Bridget of Sweden's visions, interest in her writings began to spread at Europe's major universities, including the University of Prague.<sup>109</sup>

However, careful reading of Bridget's text reveals much about preexisting devotional thought with respect to Joseph's veneration and the importance of his relics to the public.

Bridget describes her vision of Mary at the Nativity as such:

And at once she began to wrap him carefully, first in the linen cloths and then in the woolen, binding his little body, legs, and arms with a ribbon that had been sewn into four parts of the outer woolen cloth. And afterward she wrapped and tied on the boy's head those two small linen cloths that she had prepared for this purpose. When these things therefore were accomplished, the old man entered; and prostrating on the earth, he adored him on bended knee and wept for joy.<sup>110</sup>

This section affords Joseph an important role during the birth of Christ, but it is what the account seeks to 'cleanse' from her interpretation of the birth that reveals the most information. Speaking to Bridget, the mother of God tells her: "But at once I wrapped him in the small clean cloths *that I had prepared long before*. When Joseph saw these things, he marveled with great gladness and joy from the fact that I had thus, without help, given birth."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Art*, 46; Josef de Coo, "Robert Campin: Weitere vernachlässigte Aspekte," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1991): 79; Palémon Glorieux, "Saint Joseph dans l'oeuvre de Gerson," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 19 (1971): 423-25.

<sup>109</sup> Kaspersen notes that the library of the Hamburg Jakobi-Kirche contains an accumulative manuscript collection of c. 1407-09 that includes Bridget's *Sermo Angelicus*. His argument that the program of Meister Bertram's Buxtehuder Altar of c. 1415 was influenced by this is perhaps correct. Søren Kaspersen, "Der St. Petri-Altar zu Hamburg. Eine Analyse des heilsgeschichtlichen Zyklus Meister Bertrams," in *Beiträge und Mitteilungen: Verein für katholische Kirchengeschichte in Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein*. (Husum: Matthiessen, 1993), 34 and 8-80.

<sup>110</sup> St. Bridget of Sweden, *Revelations*, book 7, chapter 21; Marguerite Tjader Harris, ed., *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (Rome: Order of St. Birgitta, 1990), 204.

<sup>111</sup> St. Bridget of Sweden, *Revelations*, book 7, chapter 22; Harris, ed., *Birgitta of Sweden*, 204.

The account's insistence on the newness of Christ's swaddling clothes and Joseph's passive role is obviously a conscious refutation of the legend of Joseph's stockings, but as de Coo points out, Bridget must have seen the relic herself, since her pilgrimage to Compostella involved a stop at the holy site of Aachen. Her canonization in 1391 by Pope Boniface IX was confirmed at the Council of Constance, the same meeting at which Jean Gerson fought for Joseph's ecclesiastical status and negated both the stockings' legitimacy and Joseph's domesticity in contemporary plays and art.<sup>112</sup> It is in accordance with this 'official' line of discourse that Hans Nieuwdorp writes of Joseph in the Antwerp-Baltimore polyptych:

His action serves not only to underline the impoverished circumstances under which the Son of God came into the world, but also illustrates the popular view of Joseph, forced into a submissive, nurturing and thus unmanly role. His figure is contrasted with the grandeur of the Incarnation, in which Mary is the central figure and the embodiment of the greatest mystery of all.<sup>113</sup>

Does it matter not at all that Mary herself, the panel's central figure, gazes toward Joseph and not to the baby behind her, or that this arrangement was intended for the devotion of the Burgundian duke? Rather than simple derision, such depictions must have also carried significant weight for Joseph's veneration. The following section argues that humor and sanctity functioned hand in hand in art and in dramatic performances, and that Joseph's 'demeaning' role as bumbling *Hausvater* was in fact also respected. It is important to note that the locations from which this imagery arose were among the earliest places of localized celebration of St. Joseph, evident in his name's

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<sup>112</sup> de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 150.

<sup>113</sup> Hans Nieuwdorp, "The Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych: A Portable Altarpiece Belonging to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy," in *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300-1500*, ed. Henk van Os, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 140.

inclusion in thirteenth-century martyrologies and in the local celebration of feasts.<sup>114</sup> In the thirteenth century, Hermann-Joseph of Cologne called for the establishment of St. Joseph's universal feast in an office dedicated to the saint and composed for Liège's Benedictine Abbey of St. Lawrence. Likewise, a late thirteenth-century missal from the Lower Austrian monastery of St. Florian includes a Votive Mass dedicated to the saint's nourishing role, entitled *De sancto Joseph nutritoris Domini*.<sup>115</sup> Jean Gerson's conscious desire to sanitize devotion to Joseph in his effort to promote his official cult reveals the strength of contemporary movements emphasizing his familial role. It confirms the presence of a significantly developed undercurrent that we should consider in relation to preexistent Joseph imagery, rather than ignoring it in favor of that which was institutionally recognized.

The writings of the visionary and Dominican nun Margareta Ebner (1291-1351), whose visions weren't officially validated by the institutional church at the Council of Constance, but were influential nonetheless, provide one example of the influence of the *Hosen* legend. In 1344, Margareta wrote that she had received a tiny statuette of Jesus in a cradle. She took the child from the cradle and her visions began, unending until her death in 1351. Her visions recount that the Christ child answered a number of her questions regarding his life, but the most interesting for us is her question: "kint mins, ist daz auch war, daz dich Joseph want in sin hosen, wan daz was mir ie wider gewesen?" ("My child, is it also true, that Joseph wrapped you in his stockings, as I always thought it

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<sup>114</sup> M. Garrido Bonaño, "San José en los calendarios y martirologios hasta el siglo XV inclusive," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 19 (1971): 601-46; Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 486-94.

<sup>115</sup> Wilson, "St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Art," 6; Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 533; Joseph Seitz, *Die Verehrung des heiligen Joseph in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung bis zum Konzil von Trent* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1908), 339.

to be?”), to which the child responds, “er want mich in waz er gehaben moth, er het nit daz mir zem” (“He wrapped me in what he had to, he had nothing else for me but them”).<sup>116</sup> A number of other sacred and secular sources dating after Margareta Ebner, including *Das Marienleben* of 1382, written by a secular priest, and the Magdeburg *Schöppenchronik* of 1414, mention the Josephine relic, excerpts of which Josef de Coo has assembled. In an extant print dated to 1468 from *Die großen Aachener Heiligtümer* (fig. 2.30), held in Munich’s Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, the four holy relics of Aachen are displayed for the viewer, with the swaddling clothes described as, “Joseph’s stockings, in which Jesus was wrapped and laid in the crib.”<sup>117</sup>

The Antwerp-Baltimore polyptych (fig. 2.1) has been linked to its ducal owner, Philip the Bold, firstly through its origin at the Chartreuse de Champmol near Dijon, the Carthusian monastery founded by Philip, and the site he chose to become his family mausoleum. The duke invited many artists, particularly from the Netherlands, to his court, which traveled frequently to his various residences throughout the Burgundian regions.<sup>118</sup> By his marriage to Margaret of Male, heiress of Flanders, the Burgundian duchy inherited the rich lands of the Flemish countship and cities, including Rechel, Antwerp, Mechelen, and the counties of Artois, the Franche-Compté, and Nevers.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik* (Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1966), 100; de Coo, “In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert,” 154; Hans Wentzel, “Eine Wiener Christkindwiege in München und das Jesuskind der Margareta Ebner,” *Pantheon* (1960): 277; Rosemarie Rode, “Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Kind-Jesu-Visionen,” (PhD diss., Universität Frankfurt am Main, 1957), 75.

<sup>117</sup> de Coo, “In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert,” 154-59, my translation.

<sup>118</sup> Sophie Jugie, *The Mourners: Tomb Sculptures from the Court of Burgundy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Nieuwdorp, “The Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych: A Portable Altarpiece Belonging to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy,” 137-50.

<sup>119</sup> Willem Pieter Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), xi, 1.

Among his forty castles, Philip spent his time mostly in Ypres, but he frequented Paris and Dijon as well for his artistic commissions. The polyptych's commissioning arose thus within similar French aristocratic circles of patronage as the earlier ivories depicting Joseph holding the swaddled child—from a workshop familiar with making delicate, transportable devotional shrines useful for meditation upon the life of Christ and the saints. The artist remains unknown, although there are a number of artists' names preserved in the ducal archives. The work was initially attributed to Melchior Broederlam because of his close association with Dijon through his painting of the Chartreuse de Champmol's high altarpiece (fig. 2.31), but the fact that the polyptych is transportable negates the necessity of an artist present in Dijon. Jean Malouel (c. 1370-1416) is another Netherlandish artist to whom this work has been assigned, and his extant examples seem stylistically closer to the mark, but there remain many other less well-known possibilities. Both Snyder and Nieuwdorp have used what the latter describes as the “unusual motif of Joseph's stockings in the Nativity scene”<sup>120</sup> to pin down the artist's origin, both assuming that only those surrounding Aachen and the Lower Rhine region were familiar with the stockings legend, and therefore that its representation is merely a product of the artist's birth region rather than associated with the duke's own devotion.<sup>121</sup> One need only read Josef de Coo's article to gain perspective as to the widespread presence of the *Hosenlegende* in art. Furthermore, the profusion of the duke's commissions, as well as their expense (evident in the polyptych's extensive gold leaf),

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<sup>120</sup> Nieuwdorp, “The Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych: A Portable Altarpiece Belonging to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy,” 137-50.

<sup>121</sup> James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, and the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), 55.

suggests rather that the duke may have had more control over the purchase than these authors suggest. Also of note is Joseph's prominent and charmingly humorous placement on the Chartreuse's high altarpiece (fig. 2.32), as well as on another, small wooden retable of c. 1400 commissioned for the ducal oratory there (figs. 2.33-2.35) and catalogued by the Mayer van den Bergh Museum as Franco-Flemish, as by an anonymous Netherlandish or Lower Rhenish artist, or as by a follower of Melchior Broederlam. The interior of the shrine once held a sculpted Madonna and child, much like the earlier Parisian ivory group.<sup>122</sup> A pattern of prominently placed and blatantly humanized depictions of the saint is notable in these extant ducal commissions, attesting to a strong Burgundian interest in Joseph outside of the lower Rhine region.

The personalization of the duke's polyptych is further evident on the right, outer, panel of the piece, which depicts a St. John the Baptist opposite St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, an appropriate choice for a traveling shrine, as Nieuwdorp rightly points out. Rather than appropriating his name-saint to flank him as his patron in public commissions, Philip was known for his devotion to John the Baptist, the patron of the Valois dynasty. Claus Sluter carved the saint next to him on the portal of the Champmol monastery church, across from the Virgin and Child and his wife Margaret.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Collections du Chevalier Mayer van den Bergh* (Anvers: Bellemans, 1904), 19; *Catalogue du Musée Mayer van den Bergh* (Brussels: Librairie nationale d'art et d'histoire, 1933), 35; Josef de Coo, *Museum Mayer van den Bergh. Catalogus I. Schilderijen, verluchte handschriften, tekeningen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Antwerp: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, 1978), 120; Josef De Coo, *Museum Mayer van den Bergh. Catalogus II. Beeldhouwkunst, plaketten, antiek* (Antwerp: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, 1969), 141; Dominique Deneffe, Famke Peters, and Wim Fremout, *Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting in the Low Countries*, ed. Cyriel Stroo (Brussels: Brepols, 2009), 84.

<sup>123</sup> Nieuwdorp, "The Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych: A Portable Altarpiece Belonging to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy," 144-49; Kathleen Morand, *Claus Sluter: Artist at the Court of Burgundy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

There is therefore no reason to consider our unknown artist's rendition of St. Joseph as anything less than desired by the duke for his own personalized devotion as he traveled between his many residences. The presence of the Aachen relic attests to a Josephine devotion, probably the duke's own, but also functions as a politically pertinent link to the foundation and origin of the Holy Roman Empire. It should not be forgotten that the claims of the Valois dynasty to Charlemagne's lineage were of utmost importance, attested by the aforementioned *Grandes Chroniques de France* of King Charles V, Philip the Bold's father.

Philip the Bold's interest in the Aachen relic, and therefore in St. Joseph, is evidenced by the saint's warming of the baby's swaddling clothes on the small painted, wooden tabernacle from the Champmol ducal oratory. The artist of this work effortlessly blended Joseph's labor and unmatched devotion to the child in the Nativity scene (fig. 2.34) with the saint's playfully ridiculed characteristics, evident in the Flight into Egypt scene of the lower right-hand corner (fig. 2.35), in which Joseph's visage is placed just behind the ass's ears. Such bestial parallels are a common trope in Joseph's depictions, including on the Petri-Altar (fig. 2.36), but they are often combined with more elevated iconographic motifs. The clarity of this contrast is discussed in chapter three, in which the functional role of humor for 'earnest' devotional practices is explored more extensively. For now, a superficial comparison of the duke's piece (fig. 2.1) to the earlier ivory tabernacles (figs. 2.4-2.9) reveals a strong similarity between the two, with Joseph's prominence as swaddler of the Christ child apparent in each of the two Nativity scenes. We may conclude from this parallel that Joseph's role as swaddler of the baby was

conducive to one's meditation upon Christ's infancy, and was therefore an important leitmotif as early as c. 1275 in regions of France associated with the aristocracy and the Burgundian court. Iconographic evidence of devotion to Joseph's *Hosen* and domestic role as caretaker is spread throughout the Netherlands and Germany in examples from as late as the early sixteenth century. The following section on Meister Bertram's Hamburg Petri-Altar, completed in 1383, analyses one of these examples within the context of its German literary parallels, revealing the nuances of Joseph's early modern perception as *Hausvater* and caretaker of Christ.

### ***2.3 The Hamburg Petri-Altar and the 'Domestic' Joseph***

Meister Bertram's images of Joseph (figs. 2.11 and 2.36) are representative of an inherent tension in the saint's early modern characterization, which is reflected in equally polarized interpretations of his function in the Hamburg Petri-Altar's New Testament cycle. His unprecedented prominence and ambiguity have never been adequately explained, particularly his active participation in the scenes of the Nativity and the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (figs. 2.11 and 2.36), which contrasts with many of his earlier representations as a peripheral spectator. However, despite his apparent importance in the Petri-Altar, Joseph's prominent appearance, particularly in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36), can also be characterized as comical, and even derisive.

Through an examination of Joseph's central role in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German Nativity plays alongside Meister Bertram's seemingly paradoxical presentation of Joseph in the Petri-Altar, the subtlety and social relevance of the

altarpiece reveal important aspects of late medieval piety. An iconographical analysis of Bertram's New Testament scenes reveals parallels to these highly popular plays, which were often performed by lay actors in townhouses or in churches,<sup>124</sup> and directed by men of the parish.<sup>125</sup> The Petri-Altar's theological complexity<sup>126</sup> would not have precluded an interest in the vernacular concerns of the laity, a burgeoning middle class of increasingly wealthy merchants and craftspeople in Hanseatic Hamburg. With this group's growing importance in the fourteenth century, as well as the thirteenth-century rise of the mendicant orders, the clergy was interested in facilitating an expansion of lay piety.<sup>127</sup> This would certainly have been the case for the parish church of St. Peter, the *Marktkirche* in the very heart of the medieval city.<sup>128</sup> Like 'historical bibles,' manuscripts that were mass-produced in German fourteenth-century towns and provided a German adaptation of the biblical narration enriched with apocryphal and profane ingredients,<sup>129</sup> the Nativity plays were important for the piety, edification, and entertainment of the late medieval viewer. The main goal of such publications was to reconcile biblical with non-biblical history, allocating salvation to its proper place within

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<sup>124</sup> Leopold Schmidt, *Formprobleme der deutschen Weihnachtsspiele* (Emsdetten: H. and J. Lechte, 1937), 11; Eckehard Simon, "Das schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel: Ein neu entdecktes Weihnachtsspiel aus der Zeit 1417-1431," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 94 (1975): 47; Eckehard Simon, "The Home Town of the Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel (ca. 1420) and Its Original Setting," *Euphorion* 73 (1979): 316.

<sup>125</sup> Manfred Brauneck et al., eds., *Theaterstadt Hamburg: Schauspiel, Oper, Tanz Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 17.

<sup>126</sup> Christian Beutler, *Meister Bertram: Der Hochaltar von Sankt Petri* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 26-41; Elizabeth Healy Dube, "The Grabow Altar of Master Bertram von Minden" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1982), 81-89; Stephanie Hauschild, *Meister Bertram: Der Petri-Altar* (Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2002), 21-23.

<sup>127</sup> Bruno Reudenbach, "Der Hauptaltar aus St. Petri von Bertram von Minden," in *Das Mittelalter in Hamburg: Kunstförderer, Burgen, Kirchen, Künstler und Kunstwerke*, ed. Volker Plagemann (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2000), 188.

<sup>128</sup> Christian Beutler, *Meister Bertram: Der Hochaltar von Sankt Petri* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 5-7.

<sup>129</sup> Reudenbach, "Der Hauptaltar aus St. Petri von Bertram von Minden," 188.

world history. The *Weltchronik* is a particular form of historical bible that attempted to describe the natural history of humanity from its creation up to the respective point in time of publication.<sup>130</sup> This continuity of the past with the present, which is reflected in art, for example, in representations of biblical figures in medieval dress, is "...usually attributed to a prevailing belief in the eternity of God and consequent emphasis upon divine continuity in human history."<sup>131</sup> However, Mary Carruthers suggests that "the medieval institution of *memoria* by means of which texts of past authors are constantly related in and through present minds"<sup>132</sup> is just as important. The medieval text itself was the primary support of *memoria*, since it could document not just an original source (for example, the Bible), but its entire community of authors and commentators over time as well.<sup>133</sup> *Weltchroniken* and other related late medieval 'historical bibles' exemplify a longstanding German tradition of sacred history, and like these texts, the plays also created a poignant continuity from the biblical past to the present. The biblical drama was rendered up-to-date by its very presence in the midst of the modern town.

Contrary to the claims of earlier scholarship, Joseph's humorous role in the German Nativity plays was not intended exclusively as mere debasement for the purpose of comic relief.<sup>134</sup> The character's humor and exemplarity in these plays attests to an

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<sup>130</sup> Beutler, *Meister Bertram: Der Hochaltar von Sankt Petri*, 27.

<sup>131</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 239.

<sup>132</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 239.

<sup>133</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 240.

<sup>134</sup> Stephen K. Wright, "Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope: Gender and Transgression in Medieval German Drama," *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 2 (May, 1999): 149-66; Rosemary Drage Hale, "Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Construction of Male Virtue," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 101-16; Pamela Sheingorn, "The Maternal Behavior of God: Divine Father as Fantasy Husband," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 77-100.

inherent duality in the saint's fourteenth- through sixteenth-century perception, indicative of his function as an attainable model of domestic responsibility and familial piety for his lay audience. Joseph's centrality and duality in the plays thus provides an important window into understanding his ambiguously prominent and humorous portrayal in the Petri-Altar. Because the iconography, and perhaps also the ordering, of Bertram's scenes bespeaks a relationship to drama, the study of these dramatic texts permits the conclusion that Bertram intentionally portrayed Joseph as a model for the laity. The very fact of the saint's centrality and prominence on the high altar of this church, comical attributes included, should preclude a stark division between these equally important facets of his character for any inclusive (and accurate) exegesis of the altarpiece's New Testament scenes.

Sheila Schwartz first identified Bertram's depictions of Joseph as the key to unlocking the Petri-Altar's social significance, suggesting that Joseph's importance signifies his role as a model for the church's priests, the earthly guardians of *Ecclesia*, and therefore of the Virgin, identified with the church in Marian theology. She discusses Joseph's prominence in the redemptive scheme, based on his role as nourisher and protector of Mary and Christ, apparent in the iconography of the Nativity and the Rest on the Flight into Egypt.<sup>135</sup> However, her strictly theological argument presupposes a kind of sober veneration much more akin to the saint's seventeenth-century cult, particularly in Italy, France, and Spain, and she neglects the humanity and humorous nature of the saint in these scenes.

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<sup>135</sup> Sheila Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," *Gesta* 24, no. 2 (1985): 147-56.

Paul Portmann importantly notes the discrepancies in Bertram's fourteenth-century depictions of wife and husband, particularly the approachability of Joseph that contrasts with the withdrawn, unattainable holiness and graceful reserve of Mary. We see in Mary "...less warmth and full-blooded humanity...it is evidently she who represents the spiritual, heavenly side, like God the father and the angel in the 'Annunciation'...Joseph must be made to keep his distance."<sup>136</sup> Although Joseph is certainly not belittled by his presentation of the Christ Child, his grimace and lack of a halo in both the Nativity and the Rest on the Flight into Egypt seem to indicate that Bertram intentionally included an element of degradation in Joseph's characterization that is not to be found in his depiction of Mary. This debasement is even more apparent in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, where Joseph appears to tear into a wine-skin or piece of bread with his visibly protruding front teeth (fig. 2.37).<sup>137</sup> His portrayal on the same diagonal, performing the same action, teeth bared, as the ass in the lower left corner (fig. 2.38) is derisive, but like the Christ child at Mary's breast, the two are feeding in what appears to be a charming familial scene. Nevertheless, careful examination of the composition (fig. 2.36) reveals that the baby looks toward Joseph, while Mary casts her eye, perhaps not without incredulity, toward the dull beast below who mirrors the

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<sup>136</sup> Paul Portmann, *The Nativity: Master Bertram* (New York: Taplinger, 1961), 15.

<sup>137</sup> The ambiguous object is perhaps a piece of bread, but the presence of the symmetrical loops on either side render it closer in appearance to a wine-skin. See Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 155. The fact that Joseph complains about the empty skins in chapter 20 of the apocryphal account of Pseudo-Matthew, from which the Rest on the Flight into Egypt is derived, is further indication that the object is likely a skin of some sort. The account is discussed extensively below. See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages* 8 (Grand Rapids, M.I.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), 376-77.

behavior of her less gracefully portrayed, self-nourishing husband. The common visual parallel of Joseph with the ass, as well as the ox, is likewise humorously apparent in two folios of the Chevalier Hours from the first quarter of the fifteenth century (figs. 2.39 and 2.40), in which a perplexed or anxious Joseph, ass, and ox lean over the shed's wooden fence to view the baby. This same parallel appears in an Austrian or Hungarian altarpiece of c. 1440 (fig. 2.41)

Joseph's apparent humanity is constructed through his juxtaposition with the haloed, aloof, and graceful, otherworldly nature of Mary in the Nativity scene (fig. 2.11), but his boorish characteristics in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36) may be explained through an analysis of what would have been considered 'appropriate' behavior within a late medieval German social context. In order to understand this framework of cultural acceptability, it is useful to discuss the influence of *Tischzucht* manuals, or books of manners, which were popularized by the expanding German middle- and upper-class in the thirteenth century, a group aspiring to behave in concordance with the rules of conduct espoused by the nobility. The "...adherence to a prescribed behavioral code enabled individuals to recognize their common ground and define themselves as a community visibly distinct from other social groups (such as peasants) for whom such rules did not matter."<sup>138</sup> Artistic depictions and literary descriptions of peasants behaving as "...boorish louts barely distinguishable from

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<sup>138</sup> Jacqueline Jung demonstrates the influence of these books of manners upon the depiction of the apostles in the mid-thirteenth-century Last Supper of the Naumburg Cathedral choir screen. See Jacqueline E. Jung, "Peasant Meal or Lord's Feast? The Social Iconography of the Naumburg Last Supper," *Gesta* 42, no. 1 (2003): 51.

animals”<sup>139</sup> and in ways that contradict the manner books’ ‘acceptable’ behavior placed this group under scrutiny and within the realm of the comical ‘other.’ Books like Wernher der Gärtner’s late thirteenth-century *Meier Helmbrecht* established a subjugated, liminal space that was activated by and for the reader, reinforcing his dominance and place within a higher social stratum.<sup>140</sup> According to a German translation of a twelfth-century poem on manners, the *Facetus*, the unrefined peasant or ‘rude person,’ who chews on his bread for too long, should be compared to the ass, as is Joseph in Bertram’s *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. Likewise, the “...vigorous engagement with food was condemned both by the lay authors of courtesy books and by clerical instructors in comportment.”<sup>141</sup> Hugh of St.-Victor’s (1096-1141) *On Instruction of Novices* shows that restraint and control while consuming food and drink are indicative of good comportment, but are likewise morally crucial, as ‘restless agitation and disorder in one’s limbs signifies an intemperate soul.’<sup>142</sup> Joseph’s depiction with visible front teeth is likewise a common allusion to baseness in medieval art, and sometimes wickedness as well, particularly when combined with hostile facial expressions. Hugo van der Goes’ shepherds expose their teeth while racing toward the Christ child (fig. 2.42), in clear contrast with the holier figures, who exhibit an aristocratic comportment. The base nature of Robert Campin’s *Bad Thief* is likewise apparent in his opened mouth, while animal-like savagery is represented by the exposed teeth of Christ’s torturers in the Idar-Oberstein Altarpiece of c. 1390 (fig. 2.43), a *Mocking of Christ* by the workshop of

<sup>139</sup> Jung, “Peasant Meal or Lord’s Feast? The Social Iconography of the Naumburg Last Supper,” 51.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 127.

<sup>141</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 50.

<sup>142</sup> Hugh of St.-Victor, *De institutione novitiorum* cap. XVIII; Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 50.

Lucas Cranach the Elder (fig. 2.44), a Crowning with Thorns by Jan Polack (fig. 2.45), a Carrying of the Cross by the Master of Cappenberg (fig. 2.46), and a Passion tapestry of c. 1518 (fig. 2.47).<sup>143</sup>

In the Middle Ages, one's external appearances were thought to correspond to inner character, with physiognomy determined by one's astrological horoscope. If a person's features were considered imperfect, this indicated an inclination toward specific vices, which "in theory that unfortunate person, if wise and virtuous, could struggle and successfully resist.... Since, however, the virtuously wise were (as everyone agreed) but few, most people assumed that... character and behavior... were controlled by their physical features."<sup>144</sup> A medieval understanding of physiognomy was therefore closely related to the classical one, with physicians often widely versed in the Aristotelian thought of the popular scientific 'physiognomies'.<sup>145</sup> The anonymous Aristotelian treatise *Physiognômonika* of the third century B.C. supports the interrelatedness of appearance, inner character, and status, as do Chaucer's Pardoner's, Reeve's, and Miller's Tales, revealing the widespread late medieval popularity of such 'medical' thought. Chaucer alludes, for example, to the Reeve's cowardly heart through his description of his extraordinarily tiny legs, while the Miller's broad, knotty shoulders are an indication of his shamelessness, immodesty, loquaciousness, and irascible nature.

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<sup>143</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Others in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2: I.49, VI.4, VI.13, VI.12, VI.2.

<sup>144</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Others in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1:116.

<sup>145</sup> Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 56-90; Elizabeth C. Evans, "Physiognomy and the Ancient World," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 59, no. 5 (1969): 1-101; François Loux, *L'ogre et la dent: Pratiques et saviors populaires relatifs aux dents* (Paris: Berger Levrault, 1981).

According to Aristotelian thought, “the signs of an irascible person are these: a broad figure with shoulders large and wide, powerful and strong extremities, a courageous appearance, and a florid complexion.”<sup>146</sup> The appearances of Hellenistic statues of peasant men and women, fishermen, and shepherds corroborate the *Physiognōmonika*’s interpretations. According to the treatise, a stooped posture signified cowardice, wickedness, and a slavish character, while curly hair was a sign of cowardice. Short, stubbly beards that contrasted with the well cared for beards of the philosophers associated man with the monkey, a mischievous, ridiculous, and disgraceful animal. H.P. Laubscher associates a Hellenistic sculpture of an Old Fisherman in London with these characteristics, and in his *Idylls*, Theokritos drew a direct and derisive parallel between a shepherd whose beard is like that of a billy-goat and the animals he herds.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, big ears that stick out were thought to signify stupidity and indecency, and typically belong to blathering idiots. Thick and wide lips, as well as stumpy or lumpen noses with large nostrils, denoted stupidity and an array of other negative features. A large, fleshy nose signified lower intelligence, while a thick nose was the mark of a squalid person. Most importantly for our purposes, according to the *Physiognōmonika*, a visibly open mouth, particularly showing teeth, was a mark of a silly, wicked person, typically associated with thick-wittedness and stupidity.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Anonymi de Physiognomonia liber Latinus*, ed. R. Foerster, *Scriptores physiognomici* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), II: 121 ff.; Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, 80.

<sup>147</sup> Theokritos, *Idyll* 1.87; H.P. Laubscher, *Fischer und Landleute: Studien zur hellenistischen Genreplastik* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1982), 53.

<sup>148</sup> Laubscher, *Fischer und Landleute*, 49-57; Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 88.

In classical Greek society, the ideal male nude embodied strength, civic and military commitment, and integrity. That which is ‘beautiful and good’ was equated with the word *kalós k’agathós*. The ‘uglies,’ however, embodied everything that did not fit the elevated ‘beautiful’ and were characterized by the term *aischros*, that which is shameful and ugly.<sup>149</sup> This ancient conception of ugliness also could encapsulate “...mundane reality, the irrational, evil, disorder, dissonance, irregularity, excess, deformity, the marginal: in short, the Other.”<sup>150</sup> *Kalos* and *aischros* have also been linked to polarities of class, the aristocracy and the members of the lower classes, barbarians and slaves, the ‘others’ on the underside of society.<sup>151</sup> A physiognomical understanding of ugliness therefore carried with it connotations of the lower classes or peasantry. As Athanassoglou-Kallmyer points out, the dialectic of beauty and ugliness has always been shaped historically by issues of hierarchy, power, and value: “Beauty was equated with dominant ‘high’ culture and hegemonic social, moral, racial, and aesthetic ideologies. Ugliness, much like evil, was linked to marginality, the politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised, the racially Other.”<sup>152</sup>

The depiction of Joseph tearing into his wine-skin or piece of bread with his teeth (fig. 2.37) is certainly not characteristic of any ideal of appearance or comportment espoused in the *Tischzuchten*, and his face alludes to a simpler mind. The image’s content

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<sup>149</sup> David Walsh, *Distorted Ideals in Greek Vase-Painting: The World of Mythological Burlesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 246.

<sup>150</sup> Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, “Ugliness,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 281.

<sup>151</sup> Robert F. Sutton, Jr., “The Good, the Base, and the Ugly: The Drunken Orgy in Attic Vase Painting and the Athenian self,” in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 181.

<sup>152</sup> Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, “Ugliness,” 283.

would have perhaps "...heightened the immediacy of the scene and given it an ethical dimension directly relevant to the viewers' own lives."<sup>153</sup> His behavior contrasts strongly with allusions to eating in devotional *Andachtsbilder* of the Virgin and Child, in which the consumptive imagery of a table laden with fruit and flowers or a piece of fruit cut open evoked the spiritual tasting of 'sweetness' by the beloved and the loving soul in the Song of Songs' *Hortus conclusis*. The sensory appeal never extended to the Virgin or child, however, with "the actual act of eating or smelling...hidden from sight even after 1500."<sup>154</sup> Though allusions to the eating of fruit and smelling of flowers proliferate in the sixteenth century, the deeds themselves are rarely depicted.<sup>155</sup>

Because of his boorish characteristics, Ruth Mellinkoff and Charles Cuttler interpret Bertram's Joseph as *solely* derisive and comical. Mellinkoff accurately notes the correspondence in shape between the wine-skin/roll into which Joseph bites and the Virgin's breast, from which the baby feeds. She writes:

Master Bertram's portrayals of Joseph arouse different reactions from historians. Although many think they are ennobling portraits, I reject that point of view. Bertram never portrayed Joseph with a halo, and although some writers have interpreted Bertram's Joseph in the *Nativity* of the Petri Altar as the pious helper

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<sup>153</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 52.

<sup>154</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 4.

<sup>155</sup> Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion*, chapter 1; Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 33; Adolph Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral* (Baltimore: W. W. Norton & Co., 1959), 59-60. "The early Fathers of the Church had interpreted the Song of Songs as the loving union between Christ and the Church or between Christ and the human soul. Later on, some passages were occasionally related to the Virgin Mary...this change, in keeping with the growing worship of the Virgin, may well have contributed its share to the popularity enjoyed from the later twelfth century onwards by the representation of the Triumph of the Virgin, who also typifies the Church." The motif of the union between Christ and the Virgin, or *Sponsus-Sponsa*, rose in popularity with the growing cult of the Virgin in the twelfth century, as a new emphasis was placed on her dual nature as the mother and the Bride of Christ, interchangeable with *Ecclesia*.

of the Virgin, handing the Child to her, other characterizations by Bertram suggest belittlement.<sup>156</sup>

Cuttler curiously characterizes Bertram's depiction of Joseph as "...an early stage of Joseph's transformation into a comic figure," noting mistakenly that Joseph appears to pull "...the stopper out of [his] water bottle with his teeth."<sup>157</sup>

However, contrary to the opinions of Mellinkoff and Cuttler, and despite the evident humorous nature of Joseph's depiction, the saint's centrality and active behavior as provider in the Nativity (fig. 2.11), the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36), and in Bertram's *Harvesthuder Altar* (fig. 2.48), which probably originally constituted part of the Petri-Altar's interior shrine, must not be discounted. Meister Bertram's scenes present us with an interesting tension between the character's paternal exemplarity and base humanity, and it is this tension that has incited such polarized interpretations of the social meaning inherent in the artist's depiction of Joseph. In order to reconcile the discrepancies and gaps in past scholarship concerning the altarpiece, which characterize Bertram's Joseph as either a holy, revered saint, having attained full cult status as the *nutritor Domini* and protector of Mary, or as a bumbling, comical, and oblivious old fool, it is necessary to first examine Sheila Schwartz's arguments in depth. To Schwartz's credit, she argues convincingly for a fourteenth-century theological interpretation of Joseph's social significance as visualized on the Petri-Altar, the foundation of which this study does not seek to contest. However, after a full consideration of the late medieval

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<sup>156</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:226.

<sup>157</sup> Charles D. Cuttler, *Northern Painting from Pucelle to Bruegel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 55.

viewer's encounter with these images of Joseph, it is apparent that Schwartz's interpretation is only one side of the story.

While Schwartz's discussion of the altarpiece's relevance to the clergy is strong, she interprets the iconographic program from an exclusively theological and clerical point of view, thus ignoring the importance of the Petri-Altar's iconographic involvement with the laity, and therefore its full social significance. In fact, the concerns of the laity were most often the main impetus behind an altarpiece's imagery. Works executed for a church's high altar were primarily attentive to the religious salvation of the congregation, while for the clergy, they served as props for the liturgy and as a form of religious propaganda.<sup>158</sup> The civic activities of the two brothers who may have commissioned the Petri-Altar exemplified the fluid mergence of ecclesiastical and lay interests. Christian Beutler has suggested that these men were Wilhelm Horborch (1330/32- ca. 1384) and his brother Bertram Horborch, primarily because Wilhelm was canon of the Hamburg cathedral, while his brother was a patron of the Petri-Kirche and chief Burgomeister of Hamburg. Wilhelm was particularly invested in soliciting papal protection of Hamburg's merchants from beach robberies, and Bertram Horborch took part in the amicable settlement of the revolt of Hamburg's craftspeople in 1375. Furthermore, both Wilhelm and Bertram Horborch apparently met Charles IV in Lübeck in 1375, while Bertram the painter was there. Their meeting in Lübeck was perhaps the moment of the Petri-Altar's

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<sup>158</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

commission, indicated by the sculptural shrine's year of completion, 1379, inscribed on the back of the altarpiece.<sup>159</sup>

Schwartz grounds her interpretation in the fact that for the priesthood, Joseph's marriage to Mary, and his role as her protector, was often exalted as a model for the marriage of Christ and *Ecclesia*.<sup>160</sup> Joseph became the model for priests, bishops, and even the pope, who were viewed as the visible spouses and protectors of the Church, the institution instrumental to humankind's salvation.<sup>161</sup> Schwartz therefore asserts that the priests of the Hamburg parish church would have identified with Joseph as local, earthly protectors of *Ecclesia*. Her claim is reinforced by her adoption of Christian Beutler's proposal that there was originally a central *Sponsus-Sponsa* panel in the interior shrine depicting the mystical marriage of Christ and the Virgin.<sup>162</sup> This was unlikely, however, to have been the case, although Beutler was mostly correct in his dating of the Crucifix.<sup>163</sup> Carbon dating of the Christ figure and dendrochronological analysis of the

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<sup>159</sup> Both brothers had connections abroad, particularly to Prague and to the papacy, first in Avignon, later in Rome. As mayor of Hamburg between 1366 and 1396, Bertram maintained the city's relationship to Prague and the papacy in the form of installments. Wilhelm was trained in theology and law in Paris and Bologna, and in 1371, he was appointed by Charles IV to build the law faculty at the newly founded University of Prague. Beutler, *Meister Bertram*, 68-72.

<sup>160</sup> Louis Réau, "Joseph," *Iconographie des saints*, vol. 3, pt. 2 of *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 752-55.

<sup>161</sup> Marcel Lalonde, "La signification mystique du mariage de Joseph et de Marie," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 19 (1971): 562-63.

<sup>162</sup> Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 152.

<sup>163</sup> The question of whether or not the central niche of the interior shrine initially had its current Crucifixion scene is an issue of controversy. The Hill of Calvary is certainly not from Bertram's time. It was made in 1596 by J. Rogge, as indicated by an inscription on its back. Hauschild and Sitt, *Der Petri-Altar von Meister Bertram*, 37. Perhaps the replacement of the original middle panel, as well as the biblical scenes' overpainting by Gilles Coignet in 1595, was part of a Protestant reworking of the Catholic medieval scheme, an idea first suggested by Lisch in 1873 and taken up again by Christian Beutler in 1984. G. C. F. Lisch, "Der Altar in der Kirche zu Grabow," 201; Georg Syamken, *Die Dritte Dimension: Plastiken, Konstruktionen, Objekte. Bestandskatalog der Skulpturenabteilung der Hamburger Kunsthalle* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1988), 106. Beutler noted that the body of Christ appears actually older than the work itself, and on stylistic grounds, he dated the Crucifixion group to c. 1260. Beutler suggested that the

cross indicate that the Crucifix was made between 1278 and 1311 in northern Germany. It therefore could have been taken out of another context and inserted into the newly produced Hill of Calvary in 1596. However, X-ray examination and carbon dating of the wood panel behind the Crucifixion group indicated no marks of re-working or change,<sup>164</sup> and research from a restoration in 1982/83, which Beutler should have considered, indicated that the figures of Mary and John are of the same date as the other shrine figures. The fact that the Hill of Calvary and the cross do not accord with the date of creation of Bertram's shrine, and the fact that the figures of Mary and John would not have satisfactorily filled the vertical space of the middle niche before the addition of the Hill (and we can safely assume that the 1596 addition served the purpose of repositioning these figures), suggests that other figures were likely to have been originally placed within the niche as well.<sup>165</sup> Two propositions have been made: either a *Sponsus-Sponsa* scene over a Crucifixion, or a Nativity scene below a Crucifixion. A Nativity scene and Crucifixion would have corresponded quite well with the overall theme of typology and redemption through the birth and death of Christ in the altarpiece's painted scenes. Interestingly, the Harvestehuder Altar (fig. 2.48) contains an interior shrine of the Nativity that fits exactly within the dimensions of half of the Petri-Altar's central niche

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group must have been taken from another context during the altarpiece's Protestant reworking, and that what it must have supplanted was an original *Sponsus-Sponsa* theme, a ceremonial Coronation of the Virgin. Beutler, *Meister Bertram*, 13-16. Beutler dated the Crucifixion group to c. 1260 based on the accentuated physicality of the figures, particularly the delineation of Christ's chest, ribs, and stomach.

<sup>164</sup> For a full analysis of the dating, see Hauschild and Sitt, *Der Petri-Altar von Meister Bertram*, 35-37.

<sup>165</sup> Norbert Wolf, *Deutsche Schnitzretabel des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2002), 199.

(63 x 72.5 x 12 cm).<sup>166</sup> The sculptural interior depicts Mary lying in bed with her arms outstretched, across from a very pronounced figure of Joseph as *Hausvater*. He holds a porridge bowl and a small cooking pot. Between them is the crib with the ox and ass, but the baby is now lost.<sup>167</sup> Perhaps the exact match in dimensions is a coincidence associated with production practices, or perhaps this is the clue to the answer of what constituted the Petri-Altar's original central niche. However, Joseph's nurturing role and his unusual centrality within the scene provide a perfect match to his prominent depiction in Bertram's painted New Testament scenes, to be discussed extensively below.

Furthermore, although the Harvestehuder Altar is loosely dated to 1410 based on dendrochronological analysis of its right wing,<sup>168</sup> when its central shrine and two outer wings were initially brought together, slight discrepancies in style and execution, as well as large discrepancies in condition, were observed, indicating that the wings and shrine were perhaps not originally paired.<sup>169</sup> The painted figures are significantly different in style from those of the Petri-Altar, and are therefore most often attributed to Bertram's workshop.<sup>170</sup> It is likely that when the interior shrine of the Nativity was taken out of its

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<sup>166</sup> According to Georg Syamken, Max Hasse first orally proposed that the Harvestehuder Altar's interior shrine, with a Crucifixion scene above it, originally constituted the Petri-Altar's central sculptural niche. The second possibility of a Crucifixion with a *Sponsus-sponsa* scene above it would have resembled the high altar of the Braunschweiger Brüdernkirche. See Syamken, *Die Dritte Dimension: Plastiken, Konstruktionen, Objekte. Bestandskatalog der Skulpturenabteilung der Hamburger Kunsthalle* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1988), 107, 115.

<sup>167</sup> Stephanie Hauschild, "Der Harvestehuder Altar," in *Goldgrund und Himmelslicht: Die Kunst des Mittelalters in Hamburg*, ed. Uwe M. Schneede, et al. (Hamburg: Döllig & Galitz, 1999), 130.

<sup>168</sup> Martina Sitt, "Bertram von Minden (um 1345-1415)," in *Goldgrund und Himmelslicht: Die Kunst des Mittelalters in Hamburg*, ed. Uwe M. Schneede, et al. (Hamburg: Döllig & Galitz, 1999), 75.

<sup>169</sup> Johann Martin Lappenberg, ed., *Von den Arbeiten des Kunstgewerbes des Mittelalters zu Hamburg* (Hamburg: Meißner, 1865), 8-10.

<sup>170</sup> Syamken, *Die Dritte Dimension*, 115.

original context, new wings were appended. The style of the Harvestehuder Altar's sculpted Mary and Joseph appears to match that of the Petri-Altar's sculptural shrine.

Joseph's portrayal as *Hausvater* in the Harvestehuder Altar shrine, with porridge bowl and cooking pot in hand, does not accord well with the proposition that he was intended exclusively as a figure with whom the priests of the Church of St. Peter could identify. Yet Schwartz argues that the cooking pot in the Nativity scene (fig. 2.11), Joseph's presentation of the Christ child to Mary, and his atypically dominant, protective portrayal in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36), are symbolic of the saint's newfound prominence in the redemptive scheme of salvation history as *nutritor Domini*, an important role that became increasingly venerated in the fifteenth century.<sup>171</sup> She asserts that Joseph's presentation of the child is grounded in Joseph's lineage, which fulfilled the prophecies of the Savior's birth from the House of David; according to Jewish law, a child's lineage was traced through the male line.<sup>172</sup> The importance of Christ's Davidic lineage is indeed apparent in Bertram's image, in which the stable has been transformed into a ruined structure, perhaps as a reference to the Messianic prophecy of Amos 9:11: "In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." The prevalent motif of the ruined hut represents the fallen house of David, from which the son of David is born.<sup>173</sup> Paul Portmann notes that where the hut lacks a

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<sup>171</sup> Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 150; Dorothy Gillerman, ed., *Transformations of the Court Style: Gothic Art in Europe 1270-1330* (Providence, RI: Department of Art, Brown University, 1977), 56, no. 16; Raymond Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1 and 3 (Paris: A. Picard 1924), 128, no. 142.

<sup>172</sup> Réau, "Joseph," 752-55; Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 151-52.

<sup>173</sup> Lotte Brand Philip, "The Prado *Epiphany* of Jerome Bosch," *Art Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (Sept. 1953): 269.

post, Joseph is placed as the symbolic buttress and sustainer of the structure; as the human father and protector of Jesus, he has raised the ruins of the Davidic line. Joseph's physiognomic relationship to both Noah and Isaac (figs. 2.49-2.50) in the Old Testament panels of patriarchs is likewise a visual indication of his continuation of this holy line.<sup>174</sup> The motif of placing a holy figure before or in place of a structural support is in fact quite common, and occurs frequently in depictions of Joseph, even those in which the artist appears to ridicule him. Joseph's placement at a pillar of the ruined shed of various Nativity scenes, including Rogier van der Weyden's *Columba Altarpiece* (fig. 2.51) and Robert Campin's *Dijon Nativity* (fig. 2.52), certainly alludes to his ancient Davidic lineage, from which new life springs in the form of the Christ child. A clear visual analogy appears in the sprigs of new growth arising from the ruins in the *Columba Altarpiece*. The motif may arise from images of Marian devotion, like the structural relations Jan van Eyck's *Madonna in the Church* (fig. 2.53) establishes between the Virgin and the church. Carol Purtle writes:

There is a very clear parallel between the fluted folds of the Virgin's robe as it meets the floor and the fluted base of the only free-standing column visible in the church. Further, it is clear that the two structural piers supporting the church crossing come to rest squarely on the shoulders of the Virgin. Thus, the Virgin is seen as a larger and more substantial "column" than the one present at her side; further, she is so placed as to support the weight of both nave and apse on her own shoulders.<sup>175</sup>

According to Schwartz's interpretation, Meister Bertram's choice to represent the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, rather than the Flight into Egypt itself, provided him with

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<sup>174</sup> Paul Portmann, *Meister Bertram* (Zürich: Rabe Verlag, 1963), 146.

<sup>175</sup> Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 147.

the opportunity to highlight Joseph's important role as protector of Mary, or *Ecclesia*, and by extension, protector of the Church of St. Peter. She claims that Joseph's role as a model for the clergy of the Hamburg church is specifically realized through his painted physiognomical similarities to Bertram's carved effigy of St. Peter on the Petri-Altar's sculptural interior.<sup>176</sup> To support her suggested link between Bertram's Joseph and the Hamburg church's titular saint, she draws a connection between the apparently similar haircuts and beards of the painted Joseph and sculpted Peter, neglecting to note that many of the altarpiece's male protagonists, both painted and sculpted, are realized with similar hairstyles. The painted images of Noah, Isaac, and Joseph are visually similar, and one need only compare Joseph's beard and hair to those of the sculpted Matthew or Bartholomew to see an equally apparent similarity.

The story of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt itself is not told in the Bible, but rather in the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, likely written in the eighth century.<sup>177</sup> The scene of the Rest on the Flight was not represented in art until the fourteenth century.<sup>178</sup> In chapter twenty of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Mary becomes fatigued from walking under the hot desert sun, and the Holy Family stops to rest under a palm tree:

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<sup>176</sup> Portmann, *Meister Bertram*, 176; Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 152. Portmann first noted the physiognomical relationship between the two figures.

<sup>177</sup> The apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew was written in Latin, probably in the eighth century, although it draws upon earlier material. The oldest known manuscript copy dates to the eleventh century. The text was known earlier as the *Liber de Infantia* or the *Historia de Nativitate Mariae et de Infantia Salvatoris*. The second-century Protoevangelium of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, two other apocryphal accounts, apparently influenced sections of the Pseudo-Matthew text. See J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 84-87; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10-11; Frederick M. Biggs, "Vercelli Homily 6 and the Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," *Notes and Queries* 49, no. 2 (2002): 176-178.

<sup>178</sup> Sheila Schwartz, "Symbolic Allusions in a Twelfth-Century Ivory," *Marsyas* 16 (1972-73), 36.

And as the blessed Mary was sitting there, she looked up to the foliage of the palm, and saw it full of fruit, and said to Joseph: I wish it were possible to get some of the fruit of this palm. And Joseph said to her: I wonder that thou sayest this, when thou seest how high the palm tree is; and that thou thinkest of eating its fruit. I am thinking more of the want of water, because the skins are now empty, and we have none wherewith to refresh ourselves and our cattle. Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: O tree, bend thy branches and refresh my mother with fruit. And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary: and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed...then Jesus said to it: Raise thyself, O palm tree, and be strong...and open from thy roots a vein of water which has been hid in the earth, and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from thee. And it rose up immediately, and at its root there began to come forth a spring of water exceedingly clear and cool and sparkling.<sup>179</sup>

Schwartz interprets Bertram's elimination of the bending palm, the spring, and the child's miraculous role in his scene as indicative of the intention to highlight Joseph's role as the heroic provider and protector of Mary, since a literal depiction of the textual narrative itself would prioritize Mary's desire for food over Joseph's wish for water.<sup>180</sup> While Jesus nurses quietly at Mary's breast, Joseph passes a canteen toward her. However, in contemporary northern depictions of the Flight into Egypt, motifs from the Pseudo-Matthew account were often included, as in Melchior Broederlam's Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.32). In this image, the spring appears, as an idol falls from its base, likewise in reference to the apocryphal account of the journey of the Holy Family. As recounted in chapter twenty-three of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, when Mary and Jesus walked into a temple in Egypt, "all the idols prostrated themselves on the ground, so that all of them were lying on their faces shattered and broken to pieces; and thus they plainly

<sup>179</sup> *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 376-77.

<sup>180</sup> Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," 152.

showed that they were nothing.”<sup>181</sup> Bertram’s choice to represent a specific instance in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, rather than the biblical Flight into Egypt, in an original manner indicates the impact that this vernacular narrative had on art of the time and highlights his originality.<sup>182</sup>

Schwartz interprets the cooking pot in the Nativity scene (fig. 2.11) as a reference to Joseph’s increasing importance as *nutritor Domini*, and therefore to his role as a model for the priestly protectors of Christ and *Ecclesia*. This, however, neglects the equally important fact that motifs depicting Joseph cooking were popular in Northern art between the years of 1370 and 1450, and are generally associated with contemporary drama, because “neither the Gospels, canonical or apocryphal, nor literature prior to the fourteenth century, mention Joseph cooking.”<sup>183</sup> Portrayals of Joseph performing household chores like cooking or preparing the baby’s bath are often apparent in art of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, as in the Hohenfurth altarpiece (fig. 2.54), an example from the central Rhine valley (fig. 2.55),<sup>184</sup> and in the *Nativity* of Philip the Bold (fig. 2.1). Contrary to popular belief, the image did not so quickly lose

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<sup>181</sup> *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 377; James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, and the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), 73.

<sup>182</sup> J. K. Elliott writes, “Much medieval art is indecipherable without reference to books such as Pseudo-Matthew.” See Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 84.

<sup>183</sup> Marjory Bolgar Foster, “The Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1550,” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1978), 49-50; Leopold Schmidt, “Sankt Joseph kocht ein Müselein: Zur Kinderbreiszene in der Weihnachtskunst des Mittelalters,” in *Europäische Sachkultur des Mittelalters: Gedenkschrift aus Anlass zehnjährigen Bestehens des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs*, ed. Harry von Kuehnel (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 143-66; Rosemary Drage Hale, “Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Construction of Male Virtue,” in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 106; Wilhelm Creizenach, *Geschichte des neueren Dramas* (Halle, Saxony-Anhalt: Max Niemeyer, 1911), 1:216; Émile Mâle, “Le Renouveau de l’art par les mystères,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* XXXI (1904): 285-86.

<sup>184</sup> Hale, “Joseph as Mother,” 106.

“...its appeal as Joseph was transformed from aged, bumbling cuckold to robust provider and intercessor for the Church.”<sup>185</sup>

The complexity of Joseph’s increasing status can be seen in Nativity scenes of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Northern art, in which Joseph is variously portrayed as a peripheral spectator or as caretaker of the Virgin and Christ child. This ambiguity has resulted in various interpretations of images of Joseph’s preoccupation with practical matters of care. Joseph’s domestic behavior in art is often thought to indicate his derision, highlighting the character’s obliviousness to the enormity of the birth of Christ.<sup>186</sup> However, Carolyn Wilson assumes Meister Bertram’s fourteenth-century depiction of Joseph to be a precursor to Italian images of Joseph of the later sixteenth century, claiming, based on Schwartz’s theological interpretation, that “understanding this panel’s programmatic message forces us to rethink critically any modern assumption of an artist’s intent to ridicule Joseph in scenes that portray the saint cooking or performing other charitable and parental acts, such as that depicted in the *Nativity* of Philip the Bold” (fig. 2.1).<sup>187</sup>

One way to reconcile these seemingly antipodal perspectives is to consider the possibility that such portrayals of Joseph are intentionally ambiguous, and that humor and exemplarity are dual facets of the complex understanding of the character at this time. It is unnecessary to separate Joseph’s derisive portrayal and comparison with the ass in the

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<sup>185</sup> Hale, “Joseph as Mother,” 106.

<sup>186</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: a Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1954), 168-70.

<sup>187</sup> Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 2001), 66.

Rest on the Flight into Egypt, or his domesticity in the Nativity scene and on the Harvestehuder Altar, from his prominent role as the literal support of the Davidic line (represented by the ruined shed in the Nativity scene, fig. 2.11). Above him stands the ruined shed, reinforcing his importance in the redemptive scheme. Recent scholarship concerning Joseph's duality and significance in late medieval Nativity plays provides the key to reconciling the character's seemingly paradoxical characteristics, particularly where his domesticity is concerned.

By viewing Meister Bertram's St. Joseph through the lens of late medieval religious drama, it becomes apparent that his unprecedented prominence, coupled with his humorous behavior in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36), formulated a model to which the laity could relate, but also one to whose virtues they could aspire. The iconography, and possibly also the ordering, of Bertram's New Testament scenes reveals a close association with the Nativity plays. Therefore a study of the plays, and of how Joseph, as the central character, was portrayed in them, suggests that Bertram's Joseph may be understood as an analogous character, an attainable model of familial piety and domestic responsibility.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century French, English, and German Miracle Plays, dramatizations that frequently combined biblical verses with apocryphal legends, portrayed Joseph as a silent, but respectable spectator at the Nativity. Around the thirteenth century, however, the plays became permeated with more humorous aspects, and Joseph was endowed with a more active, speaking role.<sup>188</sup> By the fourteenth and

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<sup>188</sup> Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 152-53.

fifteenth centuries, Joseph's character was transformed into a comical and central figure. The Petri-Altar's contemporary Nativity plays include four that fit what Louise Berthold has characterized as *Kindelwiegenspiele* (Cradle-rocking plays) because they share the central motif of Joseph rocking the cradle and singing to the baby.<sup>189</sup> In all four, Joseph is cast as the protagonist in the unfolding drama. He is a blatantly humanized figure of comic relief, ridiculed by the midwives, wet nurses, and chorus of Jews for his clumsy fulfillment of the maternal duties such as cooking the porridge, bathing and singing to the baby, and offering refreshments to visitors. Meister Bertram's inclusion of the cooking pot in the Nativity scene, as well as in the original interior shrine, now the Harvestehuder Altar, partly reveals the analogous nature of Joseph's artistic depiction to his characterization in contemporary religious drama. The motif of cooking porridge for the Christ child is the most commonly shared, central action in the *Kindelwiegenspiele*, and recurs in other Nativity plays as well.<sup>190</sup>

Further possible links between the Petri-Altar and the Nativity plays are apparent in the sequence of scenes. The Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.36), with Bertram's dominant figure of Joseph, abruptly concludes Bertram's idiosyncratic image cycle. This same scene concludes *Kindelwiegenspiele* like the *Schwäbisches Weihnachtsspiel* of c. 1420, the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel* of c. 1450, and the *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel* of 1511. These plays certainly all had traveling variations, as well as common source

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<sup>189</sup> Louise Berthold, "Die Kindelwiegenspiele," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 56 (1932): 209. The existing manuscripts classified as *Kindelwiegenspiele* are the *Ludus in cunabilis Christi* of the *Erlauer Spiele* from Kärnten (Gmünd, early 15<sup>th</sup> century), the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, of Friedberg, dated between 1450 and 1460, and the *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel* of 1511 (Bozen, South Tyrol), written by Vigil Raber. Eckehard Simon added the *schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel* to Berthold's category. See Simon, "Das schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel," 45.

<sup>190</sup> Schmidt, "Sankt Joseph kocht ein Müselein," 147, 159-64.

material. Given their similarities, the manuscripts of the *Hessische* and *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiele* are thought to share a common fourteenth-century precursor from which they both derived.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, two Nativity play scripts categorized by Berthold as *Dreikönigspiele* (Three Kings plays) conclude, like Bertram's painted cycle (fig. 4), with the successive Massacre of the Innocents and Flight into Egypt, episodes following the Nativity.<sup>192</sup> These plays are the *Ludus trium magorum* of the fifteenth-century *Erlauer Spiele* and the fourteenth-century *St. Galler Weihnachtsspiel*.<sup>193</sup> The latter is one of the oldest known Christmas plays. The script's linguistic analyses have dated its origins to the last quarter of the thirteenth century.<sup>194</sup> In 1922, Alfred Rohde noted a connection between Bertram's Massacre of the Innocents and a fourteenth-century Easter play from Maastricht,<sup>195</sup> and suggested that Bertram's image is a visual conflation of two specific parts of the performed scene. Herod's dialogue with his soldier in the Maastricht play is represented in the painted image, as is the character of Rachel on

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<sup>191</sup> Rudolf Jordan, "Das Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel vom Jahre 1511 und das Hessische Weihnachtsspiel," *Jahrbuch des k. k. Staats-Obergymnasiums in Krumau* 30 (1902-03): 31; Berthold, "Die Kindelwiegenspiele," 210; Simon, "The Home Town of the *Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel*," 304-20.

<sup>192</sup> The two scenes are switched in the *St. Galler Spiel*; Alfred Rohde first noted this play's relationship to the Petri-Altar: Alfred Rohde, "Das geistliche Schauspiel des Mittelalters und das gemalte Bild bei Meister Bertram von Minden," *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 15 (1922): 173-179.

<sup>193</sup> Berthold, "Die Kindelwiegenspiele," 209. For the texts, see: Karl Ferdinand Kummer, *Erlauer Spiele* (1882; repr., Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1977), 15-30; Franz Joseph Mone, *Schauspiele des Mittelalters* (Karlsruhe: C. Macklot, 1846), 132-81.

<sup>194</sup> Joseph Klapper, "Das St. Galler Spiel von der Kindheit Jesu. Untersuchungen und Text," *Germanistische Abhandlungen* 21 (1904): 35; Berthold, "Die Kindelwiegenspiele," 209. The *St. Galler* and *Ludus trium magorum* of the *Erlauer Spiele* are characterized by Berthold as *Dreikönigspiele* because the three magi play a dominant role.

<sup>195</sup> For the text, see Moritz Haupt, ed., "Mittelniederländisches Osternspiel," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 2 (1842): 303-350.

the far right, who is horrified by the slaying of the innocents and subsequently sinks into prayer.<sup>196</sup>

Although no existing fourteenth-century Nativity play can be definitively linked to Hamburg and Bertram, one or more versions of the *Kindelwiegenspiele* would probably have been performed there, perhaps at Hamburg's most important parish church. The earliest documentation of any religious drama in Hamburg is a passion play from 1466,<sup>197</sup> attesting to a preexisting tradition. The extant plays also shared common precursors and traveled widely.<sup>198</sup>

The 'mothering' role of Joseph in late medieval German Nativity plays was not intended as mere debasement for the purpose of comic relief, as Rosemary Hale, Stephen Wright, and Pamela Sheingorn have demonstrated.<sup>199</sup> In the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel* of Friedberg, dated between 1450-60, in a nod to the famous Aachen relic, an impoverished Joseph sacrifices his old, worn stockings to swaddle the Christ child. He then proceeds barelegged to an inn to solicit help with the cooking of the baby's porridge. He meets the maids Hillegart and Gutte there, who scorn him, demanding, "What do you want, old goat-beard?"<sup>200</sup> Hillegart and Gutte then begin to beat the old, barelegged Joseph. After this initial confrontation, however, it is Joseph who ultimately mediates a

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<sup>196</sup> Rohde, "Das geistliche Schauspiel des Mittelalters und das gemalte Bild bei Meister Bertram von Minden," 177-78.

<sup>197</sup> The earliest documentation of religious drama in Hamburg is a passion play from 1466: Bernd Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit* (München: Artemis Verlag, 1987), 1:400; Brauneck et al., eds., *Theaterstadt Hamburg*, 17.

<sup>198</sup> Reudenbach, "Der Hauptaltar aus St. Petri von Bertram von Minden," 188.

<sup>199</sup> Wright, "Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope," 149-66; Hale, "Joseph as Mother," 101-16; Sheingorn, "The Maternal Behavior of God," 77-100.

<sup>200</sup> "Was wiltu, alder zegenbart?" *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, line 615. For the text, see Richard Froning, ed., *Das Drama des Mittelalters* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 902-39.

second fight between the two kitchen maids, and as a result, he, the two women, and their landlords enthusiastically direct their attention to singing, leaping about, and rocking the cradle, an action derived from the liturgical origins of the *Kindelwiegenspiele*.<sup>201</sup> He therefore serves as an important "...bridge to the act of joyous worship within the drama."<sup>202</sup> As Wright indicates, the very fact that it is the chorus of Jews and the kitchen and nursemaids who chastise Joseph for his feminine activities should indicate that the audience was fundamentally on his side.<sup>203</sup>

The ability of the dramatized and painted Joseph to adopt attributes categorized as 'maternal,' while still functioning effectively as a paternal, 'masculine' model of sanctity and familial piety for medieval German fathers, can be explained briefly using Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performativity,' outlined in *Gender Trouble* of 1990. According to Butler, gender, and therefore notions of 'maternity' or 'masculinity,' exist only as unnatural, discursive social constructs which 'congeal' through a continuous process without beginning or end. Gender is not a product of 'being,' but is rather a culturally constructed effect of 'doing' one's identity through a series of acts that conform to expected social roles. The character of Joseph in the plays and in the Petri-Altar therefore exemplifies the concept of gender performativity, as he behaves in fluid ways, crossing gendered roles as an active participant in the construction of his identity,

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<sup>201</sup> *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 648-715; Martin Walsh, "Breikochoer Josef: The Medieval Origins of a Grotesque Comic Motif in the German Christmas Play" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the *Société Internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval*, Elx, 2004).

<http://www.medievalists.net/2010/12/22/breikochoer-josef-the-medieval-origins-of-a-grotesque-comic-motif-in-the-german-christmas-play/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>202</sup> Walsh, "Breikochoer Josef." <http://www.medievalists.net/2010/12/22/breikochoer-josef-the-medieval-origins-of-a-grotesque-comic-motif-in-the-german-christmas-play/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>203</sup> Wright, "Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope," 158.

essentially adopting a medieval form of pious ‘drag.’ Because gender is a cultural construct, as Butler asserts, it follows that a male body such as Joseph’s may effectively adopt traits considered to be ‘feminine,’ in an act of gender parody. However, the fact that gender is a culturally ‘congealed’ and perpetuated construct likewise means that it “... ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness.”<sup>204</sup> Because individuals can understand that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to do one’s gender, it is possible to ‘perform’ contrary to social expectations. The dissolution of the binaries of masculine/feminine or maternal/paternal through “...a stylized repetition of acts [entailing]...bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds...”<sup>205</sup> is therefore only socially acceptable within artistic, literary, or other cultural frameworks in which the ‘subject’ exists in a liminal, subjugated space.<sup>206</sup> Thus, if Joseph’s domestic, ‘mothering,’ or ‘maternal’ characteristics as cook, bather, host, and nurse in the Petri-Altar and in the plays were to function as integral aspects of his effectiveness as a role model for late medieval male viewers, his comical nature was absolutely inextricable from his ability to fulfill this function and purpose acceptably and effectively.

A fourteenth-century northern European audience would have understood Joseph’s behavior as cook, bather, host and nurse to be categorically ‘feminine’ because of the existing socially constructed gender roles, substantiated for today’s viewer by an extant period text, *Le Ménagier de Paris*. Commissioned in 1392-94 by a wealthy member of the Parisian *bourgeoisie* for his fifteen-year-old bride, the book instructs its

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<sup>204</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178.

<sup>205</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

<sup>206</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8-33, 164-80; Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 127.

young reader on proper feminine behavior, including how to successfully manage the household and please her husband, thus providing insight into late medieval gender roles from a male perspective. The wife is instructed on how to properly ‘perform’ her feminine duties, including the planning and execution of dinners, the hiring of servants, and the proper entertainment of guests. The manual likewise illuminates her expected maternal role as nurturer, caretaker, and instructor of her future children.

Joseph’s passing of the swaddled child to Mary in Bertram’s Nativity scene (fig. 2.11) mirrors the father’s task in period religious drama as bather and swaddler of the baby,<sup>207</sup> acts that can be understood from a late medieval perspective as categorically maternal and feminine. Although this does not accord with Sheila Schwartz’s elevated interpretation of Joseph as presenter of the Christ child and continuer of the Davidic line, revealed by the ruined shed, it is much more plausible, given the iconographic influence of drama, which she ignores. Furthermore, the image of the ruined shed appears in other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century scenes of Joseph performing household chores, such as a Nativity scene from the Bad Wildungen Altar by Conrad von Soest of 1403 (fig. 2.56), another Nativity scene by the Steirischer Meister of 1460-70 (fig. 2.57) and an Adoration of the Magi from the Schloss Tirol Altar of 1370-72 (fig. 2.58), indicating that Joseph’s more domestically maternal characteristics were not perceived as separate from his important genealogical role.

Meister Bertram’s knowledge of the *Hosen* relic is substantiated by the text of a fourteenth-century hymn, *Von der bort Christi*, that was sung by members of the

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<sup>207</sup> Schmidt, “Sankt Joseph kocht ein Müselein,” 147, 159-64.

Confraternity of the Holy Cross of St. John in Hamburg, a group of which Bertram and his wife, Grete, were documented members.<sup>208</sup>

*Her Joseph hadde sorge noch,  
sine hosen dat he ut toch  
Maria nam de in ere hant  
unse heren se dar in want.  
Dat wil ik in de warheit tehen,  
de sulve hose ist to sehen  
To Aken in der goden stad,  
da men se gewiset hat  
Vor mennigen pelgrim openbar,  
unde godes windeldecke sin aldar.*<sup>209</sup>

[At first] Joseph was hesitant  
to take his stockings off.  
Maria took them in her hand,  
and in them, she wrapped our Lord.  
This I assume to be accurate,  
as these same stockings can be seen  
in the godly town of Aachen.  
Before many pilgrims, there it is known:  
God's swaddling clothes with his altar are presented.

Because we can be certain that Bertram was familiar with this important story of Joseph, and because of the widespread fame of the 'great pilgrimage,' his depiction of Joseph passing the swaddled Christ child to Mary in the Petri-Altar's Nativity scene was likely influenced by it as well. The connection between this motif on the Petri-Altar, the ivories, and several other examples discussed above has not been remarked upon, but their iconographic similarity in terms of both parents' gestures is significant. The

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<sup>208</sup> Bertram and his wife were listed as deceased members in the confraternity's death and inventory book of 1414-15. For the text, see: Jens Christian Jensen, "Meister Bertram: Quellen und Untersuchungen." *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte* 44 (1958): 159.

<sup>209</sup> Hymn no. 543, *Von der bort Christi*, lines 62 and 63; Philipp Wackernagle, ed., *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zum Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1867), 398; de Coö, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," 155.

*Hosenlegende* was clearly at the forefront of popular devotion, appearing in a wide geographical and chronological range of artworks throughout northern Europe.

Joseph's initial hesitation and anxiety in the fourteenth-century hymn indicates his flawed humanity, yet also suggests that he is perhaps not fully aware of the magnitude of the child's importance. In the end, however, he does the right thing, and assumes the role of the responsible parent and loving father, sacrificing his dignity in the face of poverty for his foster-son's benefit. Although Joseph's donation of his stockings in the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel* incorporates an important element of comic relief, the audience would have been familiar with the importance of this act, and certainly with the relic in Aachen as well. This is further indication that Joseph was not perceived as exclusively a bumbling old fool, merely worthy of ridicule. His humorous, boorish humanity, most evident in the Rest on the Flight, as well as his 'feminine' portrayal as cook and nurse and his clearly active, paternal role as provider in the Petri-Altar, are all reflective of this inherent tension in the saint's early modern perception.

The humorous and flawed aspects of Joseph's character, above all, showed his humanity, but a humanity also marked by the exemplary virtues of unparalleled familial love, responsibility, and piety. His characterization in the plays, "...while denigrating or demeaning the image of the Biblical character, more Homer Simpson than dignified Patriarch,"<sup>210</sup> should therefore be considered as existing "...not necessarily in binary

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<sup>210</sup> Walsh, "Breikocher Josef." <http://www.medievalists.net/2010/12/22/breikocher-josef-the-medieval-origins-of-a-grotesque-comic-motif-in-the-german-christmas-play/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

opposition to the newly sanctified Joseph of the late medieval theologians.”<sup>211</sup> Joseph’s centrality in both the plays, and in the Petri-Altar, seems to have carried deep social meaning; as an honest, loving husband who faces the challenges of the everyday, whether poverty, cold, hunger, or thirst, to provide for his family, he was an important figure to which his lay viewers could relate, and one whose virtues they could aspire to emulate. Although he is at times portrayed in the plays as a bumbling old man, his attentive caring nature is highly valued by Mary, who clearly considers him loyal and dear to her.<sup>212</sup> In the *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel*, Joseph devotes himself entirely to the care of her child:

*Ich pin der, der euch trostn soll.  
Ich will dir daz kind helfen ziechn.  
Du solst sechn, daz ich von dier nit bill fliechn.  
Was ich nur guetz han, daz will ich dir gebnn,  
Dieweill ich han daz lebmm,  
Und ich will dir stetz wesn pey.*<sup>213</sup>

I am the one who should comfort you.  
I will help you raise the child.  
You will see that I will not run away from you.  
Whatever I have, I will give to you  
as long as I shall live,  
and I will always be by your side.<sup>214</sup>

Rosemary Hale has suggested that Joseph’s maternal behavior in the plays should be interpreted as an imitation of Marian virtues, thus bringing “...Incarnation theology

<sup>211</sup> Walsh, “Breikocher Josef.” <http://www.medievalists.net/2010/12/22/breikocher-josef-the-medieval-origins-of-a-grotesque-comic-motif-in-the-german-christmas-play/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>212</sup> In the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, Mary sings, “*Ioseph, liebebe nebe my nut prius.*” *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, line 719; Wright, “Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope,” 156-58; This interpretation is radically different from earlier interpretations of Joseph’s role as caretaker in art, previously discussed in this chapter. See Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 168-70.

<sup>213</sup> *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 816-21; Walther Lipphardt and Hans-Gert Roloff, eds, *Die geistlichen Spiele des Sterzinger Spielarchivs* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1980), 3: 392.

<sup>214</sup> *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 816-21; English translation from the Middle High German in Wright, “Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope,” 156-57.

into the context of the laity's everyday life,"<sup>215</sup> further supporting his role as a model for human fathers:<sup>216</sup>

Joseph's *imitatio Mariae* is an essential element in the cradle-rocking plays and rituals. His performance's relation to the plays' reflective image of the family is critical to our understanding of the ordinary worshipper's *imitatio Mariae*. Mary was primarily responsible for the Child's nourishment; Joseph could not nurse Him. Hence he is depicted preparing food, rocking Him, warming the bath—all manifestations of a paternal *imitatio Mariae*. The cradle play was a ritualized presentation of the Incarnation carrying with it the image of Christ's childhood with two parents: it portrayed a family that was holy, but human. Even behind the humorous abuse of Joseph there was thus an admonition to imitate Mary. Joseph's behavior taught the male worshipper that he was obligated to care for and nurture the infant in imitation of Mary....The stereotype of incompetence may have been the source of merriment and humor, but the comic scenes were thoroughly based on an imitation of Mary's maternal behavior.<sup>217</sup>

The feminized, maternal Joseph is both comical and exemplary at once. His maternity, perhaps an *imitatio Mariae*, is based upon his unparalleled familial piety and devotion to the Christ child and his Virgin mother, and is therefore worthy of emulation. The combination of this facet of his character with his humorous attempts to provide for the child in the best way he possibly can ensures his sustainability as a role model, as well as his successful gender parody within the social framework of the Nativity play. Joseph's bumbling seems rather similar to the last three decades' slew of 'Mr. Moms' on TV and in film, a trend symptomatic of the evolving nature of female responsibility in the workplace. Pamela Sheingorn asserts that women, too, would have related to Joseph's

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<sup>215</sup> Hale, "Joseph as Mother," 104.

<sup>216</sup> Hale describes the complexity and tension of Joseph's 'popular' character in religious drama as a development of the fifteenth century, leading into the flowering of his cult in the sixteenth century and its pinnacle in the seventeenth century. This dating is certainly due to the fact that the earliest surviving *Kindelwiegenspiele* manuscripts date to the fifteenth century; however, some of these are thought to have fourteenth-century precursors. This same tension that took form in drama seems apparent in Joseph's depictions in the Petri-Altar, perhaps suggesting that the phenomenon began sooner. See Hale, "Joseph as Mother," 104; Réau, "Joseph," 753.

<sup>217</sup> Hale, "Joseph as Mother," 106-07.

humanity in dramatic performances, as he “...resembles the actual husband of the medieval female viewer,”<sup>218</sup> but it seems that Joseph’s behavior would not have functioned successfully as comic relief or as a model for the laity unless it stood in contrast with typical characteristics of ‘masculinity.’ Would Mrs. Euphemia Doubtfire be so hilariously admirable without her straggly alter ego?

#### **2.4 Conclusion**

The tension between Joseph’s apparent, and even humorous, human frailties combined with his exemplary status as a familial role model is shared with late medieval *Kindelwiegenspiele*. This relationship accounts for the saint’s paradoxically humorous and elevated prominence in Meister Bertram’s New Testament schema, and provides an opportunity for reconciling the discrepancies and gaps in previous scholarship, which characterize Joseph as either a holy, revered saint, having attained full cult status as the *nutritor Domini* and protector of Mary, or as a bumbling, comical, and oblivious old fool. It is unnecessary to separate Joseph’s exemplary piety and familial devotion from the baser aspects of his character, visualized in fourteenth- through sixteenth-century art and dramatic performance. Joseph’s prominence in the Petri-Altar, human and saintly attributes included, manifests his important social role as a sustainable and attainable model for the laity, capable of emulation within the context of everyday life. The relatability of the saint, most of all, would have functioned as a tangible connection

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<sup>218</sup> Sheingorn, “The Maternal Behavior of God,” 86.

between the real and the sacred, fostering a popular piety distinctive to early modern devotion.

Joseph's status in the Petri-Altar, dually bumbling and prominently revered, is shared by such royal commissions as the Antwerp-Baltimore polyptych and the small retable from the ducal oratory of the Chartreuse de Champmol. These objects attest to the strong presence of Joseph's cult in northern Europe, but also to a distinctive form of venerating him that valued the lesser, even humorous, facets of his story above all else. The group of Parisian ivories discussed in this chapter may mark the earliest appearance in art of a link to Joseph's holy relic, and thereby to his cult, around 1275, although the Freiburg Psalter's date of c. 1200 hints to the possible presence of the *Hosenlegende* at an even earlier date. The *Hosen* were probably valued politically for their ties to Aachen, the spiritual epicenter of northern Europe and of the Frankish dynasty. But most importantly, they were valued as part of Joseph's story. Joseph's pants (or lack there-of) were marked by humor in the plays, tales, and art of northern Europe that were never merely making fun of the saint, but rather celebrating the hilarity of his actions and circumstances as part of the most sacred of Christian histories.

## CHAPTER 3: Early Modern Humor and St. Joseph

### 3.1 *Sacred Laughter: The Character, Power, and Purposes of Humor*

Joseph's loss of his pants in the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*, as well as in images like the Bargello Diptych (fig. 3.1), did not exist in a cultural vacuum. While tied closely to the *Hosenlegende* and the veneration of the saint's stockings at Aachen, a supremely holy affair, they are simultaneously funny. This chapter reveals the visual puns and tropes shared by such representations of the saint by placing them within the context of contemporary comedy and satire, drawing analogies to secular and 'profane' prints, paintings, and tales. It examines the nature, power, and purposes of early modern humor, as well as its relationship to the sacred, and documents a variety of the comic elements of St. Joseph's iconography, so that the reader may understand better the humor inherent in the images.

Variations of derision, satire, and the ridiculous exist in the iconography of St. Joseph, of course, as they did in the cradle plays. An artist's inventiveness in portraying something funny, which becomes increasingly apparent during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, should be considered analogously to the poetic license of an actor or writer. The German poet Jörg Wickram's (c. 1505-60) tale in *Das Rollwagenbüchlein* of a cradle play gone wild, which apparently happened quite frequently, highlights both the freedom of the actors and the extent to which the sacred could become screamingly funny:

In the bishopric of Cologne it happened once during Christmastime, on Christmas Eve, that they cradled the child that night; and they took a large choirboy, who was to be the little child, and laid the baby Jesus in a cradle, and Mary rocked it. And the babe began to cry fiercely. As the child did not wish to keep silent, the Joseph ran swiftly to him and wanted to cook a porridge or pap and give it to him to eat, with which to silence him. But however faster he cooked, the child cried

out that much more. Because nothing would silence him, the good Joseph took a spoon full of hot porridge, ran with it to the cradle, and thrust the spoon into the child's throat and burned his mouth so badly that all crying and wailing left him. The child sprang swiftly out of the cradle, grabbed the Joseph by the hair, and they beat each other. But the child was too strong for the good Joseph; he threw him to the ground and went at him to such an extent that the people who were in the church had to come to his aid.<sup>219</sup>

Contemporary with these riotously funny tales and plays, in which Joseph is beaten and scorned for his faulty attempts to do housework, as well as his “goat-beard” and the loss of his pants, is the hugely popular theme of the ‘Battle for the Pants’ depicted on misericords, prints and broadsheets, and in satirical writings. The similarities between the humor of Joseph’s representation and that of these more secular portrayals indicate the degree to which ostensibly sacred figures were shaped by popular preoccupations with gender relationships.

The ‘Battle for the Pants’ is often shown symbolically by a married couple tugging on a pair of men’s breeches, but sometimes the woman rides the man like a donkey or attacks him with a weapon associated with household chores—this could be a spoon, a spindle, a distaff, a washing paddle, or a piece of furniture. During the fifteenth century, the image of the man ridden by the woman increased in popularity as “...a visual metaphor of the abasement and humiliation to which men were liable as a consequence of their susceptibility to the seductive attraction of women...[and] to satirize marriages in which the woman had usurped her husband’s ‘natural’ position of authority.”<sup>220</sup> The theme was influenced particularly by the popularity of the thirteenth-century legend of

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<sup>219</sup> Jörg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*, CVIII-XXXI; Heinrich Kurz, ed., *Jörg Wickram's Das Rollwagenbüchlein* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1865), 182-83.

<sup>220</sup> Keith P. F. Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 103.

Aristotle and Phyllis, which tells of how the philosopher was so overcome with foolish infatuation that even he succumbed to allowing a woman ride him like a beast.

The subjects of the ‘Power of Women’ and the ‘Battle of the Sexes’ appear frequently in both literary and visual form in the Low Countries and France, and especially on misericords. The widespread destruction of church furniture in Germany makes it difficult to know how often the subjects appeared in churches there,<sup>221</sup> but their frequency in the German portable arts suggests that it was once prolific as well. On a mid-sixteenth-century misericord from Hoogstraten’s collegiate church of St. Catherine (fig. 3.2),<sup>222</sup> a woman and a man, who is obviously pant-less, struggle between themselves for the breeches. In many woodcuts satirizing wifely insubordination, such as those by Erhard Schön, the inversion of marital order is apparent by the presence of a sword, a purse, or a pair of pants in the woman’s hand. Such articles are stolen by the wife of Hans Sachs’ carnival play “The Angry Wife,” and quite clearly symbolize domination, which the woman appropriates in the ‘topsy-turvy’ world depicted by such plays and images.<sup>223</sup> The man, who often carries cooking pots or diapers, like Joseph, performs the ‘woman’s work’ and is therefore stripped of the power intrinsically tied to notions of medieval manhood.

The satirical ‘Battle of the Sexes’ developed during a time when marriage was considered spiritually inferior to celibacy. But towards the end of the fifteenth century

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<sup>221</sup> Anne H. Van Buren, “Thoughts, Old and New On the Sources of Early Netherlandish Painting,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 16, no. 2/3 (1986): 93-112.

<sup>222</sup> Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Belgium-Netherlands* (Tournhout: Brepols, 2010), plate X, NH-11.

<sup>223</sup> Walter Gibson, “Some Flemish Popular Prints from Hieronymus Cock and His Contemporaries,” *Art Bulletin* 60 (1978): 673-81.

and the early sixteenth century, with the flood of reformatory discourse into the cities and towns of northern Europe, marriage and parenthood began to attain greater status, particularly as the concept of the urban family developed toward the more modern, nuclear form. The role of the husband or father became increasingly important during the fifteenth century, with the family's financial state more directly linked to his fiscal responsibility.<sup>224</sup> Fifteenth and sixteenth-century prints and paintings especially mock the husband and father who cannot provide for his family because of his own failings, and it is easy to see how the 'Battle for the Pants' became increasingly relevant in this setting. The social developments underlying these changes in familial ideals and anxieties toward the roles of the sexes are treated more extensively in the following chapter, but the proliferation of the 'Battle of the Sexes' itself should be noted first, as well as its close relationship with the development of Joseph's iconography. Israhel van Meckenem (c. 1445-1503), a German printmaker and goldsmith, produced a prolific number of engravings on the topic for his buyers, who apparently avidly collected images of the theme. In "The Hen-pecked Husband" of 1480 (fig. 3.3), the pant-less husband does the spinning, while the wife puts on the trousers and prepares to strike him with her spindle.<sup>225</sup> Images of this subject appeared on church capitals and in manuscripts as well.<sup>226</sup> Their presence in religious environments, written and built, suggests that the sacred was considered a realm of both humorous play and veneration, much like the plays

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<sup>224</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>225</sup> Janetta Rebold Benton, *Medieval Mischief: Wit and Humour in the Art of the Middle Ages* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), 83-86.

<sup>226</sup> Lilian M. C. Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), figs. 527-43; Alixe Bovey, *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2002), 53-55; Benton, *Medieval Mischief*, 86.

of Christmastime and Shrovetide. St. Joseph's pant-less condition in literature and art occupied this same realm.

Chapter two already presented many of the images of Joseph drying or warming the baby's swaddling clothes, holding his stockings which would become the baby's diaper, or presenting the freshly swaddled child to Mary. To highlight the close relationship between such images of the saint and more secularized, satirical iconography, the enigmatic, marginalized figure of Joseph drying the baby's diapers in an Adoration of the Magi by Hieronymus Bosch (fig. 3.4) serves well. Scholars including Walter Gibson and Larry Silver agree that Bosch developed his iconography for his aristocratic patrons and buyers in part through his imaginative fusion of common secular and sacred tropes with earlier medieval marginalia. In 1949, Dirk Bax showed that Bosch's forms, rather than being derived from the working of the subconscious, appeared frequently as visual puns and metaphors, much like contemporary and earlier prints and manuscript marginalia. Not only the Church's teachings, but popular thought in the form of folklore, for example, formed the artist's sources. Many of Bosch's details are related to carnival exuberance and folly, as well as to their associated sensual overindulgence.<sup>227</sup> Whether the artist's inclusion of such references in his work functioned exclusively as an attempt to moralize against overindulgence remains a topic of debate, but the most convincing arguments—those of Walter Gibson, Larry Silver, and Keith Moxey—are informed by late medieval courtly artistic traditions, which seems appropriate considering that Bosch's patrons were primarily of the aristocracy. As in the margins of medieval

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<sup>227</sup> Dirk Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch: His Picture-Writing Deciphered* (1949; repr., Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1979).

Books of Hours, Bosch's religious paintings mix fantastic and sexualized imagery—like lascivious wild men and hybrid monsters, or *mischwesen*, composed from parts of reptiles, insects, birds, and amphibians—with religious imagery, like the birth of Adam and Eve in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* or the *Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

Although *The Garden of Earthly Delights* was fabricated in triptych form, a format typically reserved for altarpieces, its central theme derives directly from the courtly tradition in its depiction of a luxurious Garden of Love, popular in late medieval romances like the *Roman de la Rose*, as well as in such visual sources as painted panels, prints, manuscript marginalia, and calendar page illuminations.<sup>228</sup> The art from which Bosch developed his ideas, often dependent upon the notion of the 'World Upside Down,' is considered emblematic of a widely popular, satirical, and entertaining form of humor, satirizing and inverting relationships between the sexes and between the lower levels of society and the clergy and aristocracy. Importantly for this study, this imagery arises not solely from the margins of chivalric romances, but also from the marginalia of missals, prayer books, and psalters. Moxey aptly notes:

Bosch used the satirical and entertainment value of the notion of the 'world upside down,' as well as that of fabricated monsters, in order to demonstrate the humanist artist's new claim to artistic freedom...[his] appreciation of the subversive potential of these 'world upside down' reversals, the way in which, for example, inversions of scale might be used to marginalize the activities of humans by centralizing the presence of birds and fruit, thus suggesting that the former are captive to their sensual desires, enabled him to extend the principle so as to organize certain sections of the composition and even the central plan as a whole.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006); Walter Gibson, *Hieronymus Bosch* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).

<sup>229</sup> Keith Moxey, "Hieronymus Bosch and the 'World Upside Down': The Case of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*," in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 124.

Bosch's placement of the St. Joseph in the corner of his Prado *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 3.5), far away from the main event of the Adoration and engaged in the process of drying diapers, not only accords with preexisting Josephine iconography but exposes the satire inherent in such depictions of the saint. The marginalization of a holy figure central to popular devotion, particularly on an altarpiece of the Upper Rhine region close to Aachen, simultaneously calls attention to the evil present in the main scene: the figure inside the shed, who is understood to represent King Herod or the Antichrist.<sup>230</sup> The small figures surrounding the doorway to the outside world, a toad, a figure in a pointed hat (denoting Judaism or *Synagoga*), and a demonic, simian-like figure may function as commentary on the virtue and corruption presented in the main scene.

Imagery satirizing the diaper-washing husband abounds in popular prints. Engravers like the German artist known as the Housebook Master, who, like Bosch, worked during the third quarter of the fifteenth century on the Middle Rhine, brought the satirical marginalia of medieval manuscript illumination to the center in the form of humorous prints of the henpecked husband, the peasant being ridden by his wife, and parodic coats of arms referencing the lower classes' attempts to emulate the higher orders.<sup>231</sup> A woodcut by Erhard Schön of 1533, entitled *There is No Greater Treasure Here on Earth Than an Obedient Wife Who Covets Honor* (fig. 3.6), exhibits the characteristic humiliation of the husband who is made subordinate to his wife. Notably, the husband's humiliation results from his own lack of capability in the role of husband,

<sup>230</sup> Gibson, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 114.

<sup>231</sup> Moxey, "Hieronymus Bosch," 129.

to which the text above the image refers. The foolish husband bemoans his ill luck for the wrong reasons:

Oh woe, oh woe is me, poor fool  
 How I must work to pull this cart!  
 And why? Because I took myself a wife.  
 Would that the thought had never crossed my mind!  
 A shrewish scold has come into my house;  
 She has taken my sword, my pants, and my purse.  
 Night and day I have no peace,  
 And never a kind word from her.<sup>232</sup>

To which the wife responds:

Hey, dear boy, what you say is true,  
 But be quiet or I'll hit you over the head.  
 If you want a beautiful and pious little wife  
 Who obeys you at all times,  
 Then stay at home in your own house  
 And stop carousing about.  
 ...If you will not work to support me,  
 Then you must wash, spin, and draw the cart  
 And be beaten on your back.<sup>233</sup>

The fool, dressed in ass's ears toward the right of the image, tells the young man nearby who is considering marriage to avoid it at all costs, and that he should seek out loose women instead. The laundry basket in the cart that the husband pulls refers to his humiliation as *Windelwascher*, or diaper-washer, a popular term that derogatorily referred to a henpecked husband. A woodcut dated 1536 by Hans Schüffelein (fig. 3.7) references the role as well, and once illustrated a lost poem by Hans Sachs entitled "Ho, Ho, Diaper Washer."<sup>234</sup> In Dutch, the German *Windelwascher* became the character Jan

<sup>232</sup> Quoted in Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives*, 108 and adapted from Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 52-53.

<sup>233</sup> Quoted in Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives*, 109.

<sup>234</sup> Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives*, 106.

de Wasscher, who was reduced to minding the baby, washing everything, and receiving beatings from his wife.<sup>235</sup> It is safe to say that Joseph himself subsumes the role of *Windelwascher* and is therefore open to similar derision for his subservience to his wife, and yet we cannot necessarily blame him, for whose wife could approximate Mary? His old age, by comparison to the youth of Mary, as well as his status as the impotent, ultimate cuckold are similarly satirized in contemporary images, like the *Hoogstraten Tableau*, discussed below.

The humor of the ‘World Upside Down’ flourished within the aristocratic court centers of the High Middle Ages, and apparently arose from the desire or need for social order, an affirmation of a society’s cultural values in the face of chaos. Keith Moxey and Michael Camille suggest, however, that the satire of traditional sex roles, chivalric attitudes, or the clergy could occur only in circumstances in which the status quo was not actually questioned: “Indeed, it could be argued that the importance of the manuscript margins...lies in the way that they supported and reinforced the assumptions of the classes and occupations of those who commissioned them.”<sup>236</sup> Peasants were a particularly popular embellishment for the aristocratic owner of a manuscript, whether in the margins of the Hours or the illuminations of a calendar sequence, because of their relegation to their ‘proper’ place in the mind of their beholder.<sup>237</sup> The calendar of the

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<sup>235</sup> David Kunzle, “World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broad-Sheet Type,” in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 48-49.

<sup>236</sup> Moxey, “Hieronymus Bosch,” 130; Michael Camille, “Labouring for the Lord: The Ploughman and the Social Order in the Luttrell Psalter,” *Art History* 10 (1987): 423-54.

<sup>237</sup> Bosch’s shepherds of the Prado *Adoration of the Magi* mirror another satirical type that appears frequently in the art of the aristocracy: the bad or lazy peasant or the shepherd who ignores his flock, thus inviting the wolf, who frequently doubles as a signifier of the Devil, as in an English bestiary of c. 1200 at

*Très Riches Heures* of the Valois Duke of Berry, left incomplete upon the death of the artists, the Limbourg Brothers, and their patron in 1416, is an expanded illustrative version of the cycle of the months established over the two previous centuries. In the February scene we see an array of “uncultured, boorish, and vulgar”<sup>238</sup> peasants who expose their underskirts and genitalia to their aristocratic viewer (fig. 3.8). According to Jonathan Alexander, the socio-historical situation of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as well as that of the Duke Jean, explains these images’ strong contrasts between the behavior of the peasants and that of the aristocracy. The *Jacquerie* of 1358, during which northern French peasants rose up and massacred landowners and their deputies, had been ended with brute force not long before the date of this manuscript, and the duke was particularly well known for embezzlement and over-taxation of his lands, according to Froissart.<sup>239</sup> The Limbourg Brothers’ inclusion of the duke’s numerous castles within the calendar scenes, according to Alexander,

...repeatedly...[calls] attention to his [Jean’s] enormous landed wealth and the military power necessary to protect it not only from the national enemy, the English, but also from rival feudal lords, such as his nephew, Jean sans Peur, duke of Burgundy, and last, but perhaps not least, from the peasants themselves.<sup>240</sup>

The marginal imagery in the Luttrell Psalter documents the productivity and riches of the lord of the manor’s estates, celebrating a healthy economy, but often

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Aberdeen (fig. Alexander 16). This type contrasts particularly with the frequently represented image of the Good Shepherds of Bethlehem, those who are vigilant in a world full of evil, “keeping watch over their flocks by night” (Luke 2:8). Peasant laziness is depicted in Psalters and Books of Hours as “both a sin against God and a moral iniquity.” Jonathan Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse: Ideological Representations of Medieval Peasant Labor,” *Art Bulletin* 72, no. 3 (Sep., 1990), 447.

<sup>238</sup> Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse,” 439.

<sup>239</sup> Froissart, *Chronicles*, ed. Geoffrey Brereton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 361-70; Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse,” 440.

<sup>240</sup> Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse,” 440.

exhibiting a degree of nostalgia as well. As the medieval aristocracy was gradually losing its former political power, marginal imagery documented this decaying social class's fear "of the lower orders, and...their wish to retain the signs of rank, blood, gesture and manners, all of which subjected their courtly bodies to a pseudo-spiritual code of ethical chivalric behaviour and, in turn, subjugated all other bodies beneath them."<sup>241</sup> Camille emphasizes the fact that "the inversion and release of liminality works only for those in power, those who maintain the status quo and have something at stake in resisting change."<sup>242</sup> While peasants are quite active in the margins, their presence as a subjugated social stratum operating within this liminal space negates their adoption of any power of their own.

Most notable, particularly for this study, is the interaction of what we would consider today as 'irreverent' commentary in the margins of manuscripts or churches on sacred events depicted 'center stage' in these images. Camille studies this interaction of the margins with the center, not just in terms of their meaning, as Lilian Randall has successfully accomplished, but with respect to the margin's function in conveying meaning for the whole. The center, according to Camille, is dependent upon the margins for its existence because "...things written or drawn in the margins add an extra dimension, a supplement, that is able to gloss, parody, modernize and problematize the text's authority while never totally undermining it."<sup>243</sup> Courtly conventions like the service of ladies were satirized in the margins of manuscripts as well, with the marginalia

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<sup>241</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 100; Lilian Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

<sup>242</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 127.

<sup>243</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 10.

of romances often self-referential, functioning as a spectacle for the delight of the courtly viewer, while satirizing the very social practices of the aristocracy. In a book owned by the French aristocrat Guillaume de Termonde (1278-1312), for example, the ‘arrow in the hindquarters’ motif provides an ironic commentary on the tale of Arthur in the center.<sup>244</sup>

By interpreting marginal and monstrous forms as crucial to the visual product as a whole, Camille is able to adduce the images’ ability to convey meaning to both lay and clerical viewers simultaneously. In his discussion of a procession of monstrous creatures on the south door of St. Pierre at Aulnay-de-Saintonge, Camille draws an important distinction between ‘ambiguity’ and the ‘ambivalent’: “while ambiguous things cannot be defined in terms of any specific category, things that are ambivalent belong to more than one domain at a time.”<sup>245</sup> The marginal imagery in monastic foundations and cathedrals therefore existed in two interpretive spaces. For the monks at Aulnay, the violent and greedy procession over the south door could have signified the “vulgar rabble” of the illiterate layfolk traveling on pilgrimage. But for the laity, the same images, particularly the ram-Bishop and harp-playing ass, “were critiques of ecclesiastical illiteracy and greed...For medieval audiences different animals had different class associations; they could refer both up as well as down the social scale and to those both inside and outside the monastery.”<sup>246</sup> The ass, fox, wolf, and sow of Aulnay also appear in parodic animal fables popular in the oral tradition, but they are particularly powerful within the ecclesiastical context: “One of the most powerful statements that the monstrosities of

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<sup>244</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 90-100.

<sup>245</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 67.

<sup>246</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 70.

marginal art make is that they violate the taboo that separates the human from the animal. Christianity held it essential that man and nature were ‘discontinuous’, but marginal art constantly mixes them up.”<sup>247</sup>

This ‘ambivalence’ is latent in many of the images that adorn churches, altarpieces, paintings, and manuscripts—any of the spaces in which sacred and secular concerns intertwined in the late Middle Ages—and this phenomenon was a constant for any God-fearing individual. Humor was consequently present where the most sincere devotion could be as well, like in the Betrayal and Annunciation miniatures of Jeanne d’Evreux’s Book of Hours, (fig. 3.9) in which the bas-de-page includes a bawdy mock-joust on goats, the object of which is to “pierce the barrel” in the center, a visual pun on the vagina or womb. The expression, “aforer le tonel a quelqu’une (to broach someone’s barrel),” is common in Old French *fabliaux* in the discussion of sex.<sup>248</sup> But this scene does not detract from its related central image across the page in the Annunciation scene; rather, it explains what occurs at that moment, when Christ is incarnated in Mary’s womb. Similarly, the playful game of Froggy in the Middle mirrors the Betrayal and Mocking of Christ on the opposite page. We can interpret the late medieval view of an image of Joseph cooking or drying diapers analogously. While the goal of this study is to recover the humor apparent in such images, interpretations like those that Sheila Schwartz proposed of Joseph being depicted as *nutritor Domini*, for example, may be entirely valid for the clergy’s view of the same image.

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<sup>247</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 70.

<sup>248</sup> Roy J. Percy, “Modes of Signification and the Humor of Obscene Diction in the *Fabliaux*,” in *The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas D. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 166-67.

Prior scholarly work often treated the power of late medieval humor too categorically, as in the work of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who considered the sober ecclesiastical and the ‘irreverent’ popular consciousnesses as occupying exclusive realms in the late Middle Ages. The humorous and bawdy were thus deemed appropriate to the laity and irrelevant to the sacred. With an understanding of late medieval joke-making, however, we are able to perceive humor in prayer books and churches not as subversive, but rather “at once against the law and on the side of the law,”<sup>249</sup> according to Howard Bloch, who wrote on the genre of medieval *fabliaux*. The restorative nature of the joke, according to Mary Douglas and Sigmund Freud, makes it “frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general.”<sup>250</sup> Laughter in the late Middle Ages operated within the controlled and acceptable framework of society, creating freedom from fear and the ‘other.’ This is made manifest particularly in the gargoyles of Gothic cathedrals, once “...intended to turn away evil...[then] tend to become mere comic masks; by the fifteenth century the process is complete and, instead of threatening, they are intended to amuse.”<sup>251</sup> René Girard writes about laughter and crying as closely related, in that both respond to a loss of control on some level.<sup>252</sup> For carnival revelers, for example, “...their

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<sup>249</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 125.

<sup>250</sup> Mary Douglas, “Jokes,” in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1975), 96; Douglas, like Sigmund Freud, sees jokes as forms of subversion. Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Translated by Joyce Crick. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

<sup>251</sup> Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), 213.

<sup>252</sup> René Girard, “Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis,” in *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 121-34, 33.

festivity celebrates the suspension of all hierarchy and social control.”<sup>253</sup> The loss of social order and control, writes David Smith, is at once socially recuperative because it “...evokes a special kind of sociable laughter, one that at its best frees us from the norms, fears and constraints that ordinarily rule our lives. But to the extent that it entails reversal, it’s also deep laughter, in that it means defeating some of our deepest fears.”<sup>254</sup>

In the iconographic inversions of the marginalia, we see this loss of social order occur in the form of donkeys dressed like monks and knights fleeing snails (a clever play of words in Middle High German, in which *schnell* can translate to “fast” or “valiant”). While the world is turned upside down for the aristocratic reader and laughter is elicited, the chaos is simultaneously contained, in a kind of inoculation from fear, including that of actual societal upheaval, as Jonathan Alexander suggests occurs with peasant imagery. In a way, therefore, apotropaism could be at work. But laughter’s freedom comes from many sources and is not always easy to explain, and variations in kinds of laughter and humor must be taken into account. Satire, writes David Smith, may be qualified as ‘insider’s laughter’:

...it ridicules the deviant: the outsider as one who doesn’t measure up...[while] satire can be mixed with or replaced by comedy, defined as the outsider’s laughter, targeted at the norms themselves. This was the main point of turning the world upside down. From a comic perspective ‘the world’ represents not just the customary, but all the rules and hierarchies that keep us apart in order to keep us in order. Unlike satire, comedy is tolerant of diversity, and its plots tend to reconcile divisions, often by ending in weddings, a recurrent feature of carnival.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> David R. Smith, “Sociable Laughter, Deep Laughter,” in *Parody and Festivity in Early Modern Art: Essays on Comedy as Social Vision*, ed. David R. Smith (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 1-10.

<sup>254</sup> Smith, “Sociable Laughter, Deep Laughter,” 4; According to Bakhtin, this loss also entails “free and familiar contact among people.” Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 123.

<sup>255</sup> Smith, “Sociable Laughter, Deep Laughter,” 3.

Smith's categorizations of satire, or 'insider's laughter', and comedy, 'outsider's laughter'—if such fluid and interchangeable concepts may be categorized as such—both appear in late medieval characterizations of Joseph. But the laughter of 'comedy' allows us to explain a particularly useful form of humor, in that it is socially recuperative in its reconciliation of divisions. Joseph's hilarious bumbling, faulty, yet morally good humanity binds not only the holy figures and subsidiary characters in the rocking of the Christ child in the cradle plays, but it also joins the saint to his audience by creating a pathway of relation. One of the most popular books during the late Middle Ages, the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus Voragine, compiled c. 1260, emphasizes the necessity of venerating saints not only for God's influence in one's life, but for additional reasons which focus explicitly on human weakness in the need for assistance, hope, and imitation:

Again, in that procession we ask for the protection of all the saints. Several reasons for this have already been noted, but there are other general reasons for which God has commanded us to pray to the saints: our neediness, the saints' glory, and the reverence due to God. The saints can know about the prayers of their supplicants, because in that eternal mirror they perceive whatever pertains to their joy or to our aid. Therefore, the first reason is our neediness, which may be due to a lack of merit, in which case, our merits not sufficing, we pray that others may supply for us. Or we may be deficient in contemplation, and since we cannot look upon the supreme light in itself, we pray to be able at least to see it in the saints. Or our shortcomings may be in our loving, because it is not uncommon for imperfect man to feel himself more drawn to one particular saint than even to God. The second reason is the glory of the saints, for God wills that we invoke the saints in order that, obtaining what we ask for through their intercession, we may enhance their greatness and by glorifying them join in praising them. The third reason is the reverence due to God, in that we sinners, because we offend

God, do not dare, so to speak, to approach him in his own person, but can implore the support of his friends.<sup>256</sup>

It is precisely the imperfections of the saints, by comparison to the perfection of God and Christ, which allow them their functionality. In Joseph's case, however, even his perfections—his readiness to care for the most blessed child who is not his own, and his old age, which in itself was perfect in assuring Mary's purity—were approached as humorous during the late Middle Ages. Therefore, to consider Joseph the way medieval people often did themselves—as a funny character—detracts nothing from his exemplarity and holiness. The extent to which artists, poets, and playwrights emphasized the hilarious conditions of Joseph's character had much to do with the humor of the time, which could be extremely bawdy by our standards, but the ultimate source for this hilarity was based on that which was considered religious fact: Joseph was an old man with a young, beautiful, virginal wife and her child was not his own, yet he took care of the baby despite his incomplete awareness of God's true mission. Joseph's sociable humor in art rendered the saint tangible for his devotees, in the same manner that the rising interest in naturalistic depictions of religious themes encouraged the accessibility of the holy to the devout.<sup>257</sup> The comedy of St. Joseph not only functioned, but flourished, in religious culture because of the reasons that Voragine outlines—the figure's very human role of parent and husband, and his all-important approachability created through humor, made him into an ideal saint.

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<sup>256</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1: 288-89.

<sup>257</sup> See chapter one.

As a model of parenthood and piety, Joseph's humorous aspects created a supreme avenue of empathic identification and self-affirmation, and were thus integral to—in fact, inextricable from—the saint's elevation and veneration as a cult figure. This is apparent in the continued use of humor in the northern iconography of the saint, from the thirteenth century through the sixteenth, as this study attests. This more culturally pertinent interpretation of St. Joseph is appropriate to early modern religious culture and notions of humor, which was often so focused on the inversionary. And as scholars like Aaron Gurevich and Michael Camille have rightly demonstrated, no strict separation between the Church and the social dynamics of popular culture actually existed, despite the earlier and much endorsed thought of Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>258</sup> Bakhtin's influential *Rabelais and His World* qualified the laughter of the carnivalesque, the 'World Upside Down', and the grotesque of the medieval festival as the 'low' popular cultural sphere of the common lay folk who were allegedly rebelling against the 'high' official culture of the dominant church and state. The lower class's employment of humor, parody, and folklore supposedly fortified them with strategies of resistance to the 'norm' imposed from above. According to Bakhtin, the propensity of the lower classes for the scatological is an example particularly of the desire to rebel against the upper class's desired decorum.<sup>259</sup> Bakhtin understood carnival behavior as an expression of medieval popular culture, which he equated with a culture of laughter. The source of carnival was, to him, the desire of 'popular culture', or the lower classes, to invert sociopolitical reality

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<sup>258</sup> Aron Gurevich, "Bakhtin and His Theory of Carnival," in *A Cultural History of Humour*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>259</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1984), 368-436.

in a culture supposedly dominated and strictly restricted by the Church (and its associated educated classes) who suppressed laughter.<sup>260</sup> In fact, however, reversal and transgression appear to have permeated the festal behavior and humor of the clerical and lay higher and lower orders.

Many depictions of St. Joseph may also be qualified as satirical, in that the laughter they elicit is the ‘insider’s laughter’ at the outsider—while jokes about Joseph’s old age and imperfections in caring for the child, for example, might stir the hearts of the youngest of men (old age claims all), his confusion about the true nature of God’s plans, as well as the fact that his young wife carries a child that is not his own, are often used in the satirical mode. While it is never exactly clear to us what specifically the artist intends to mock in paralleling Joseph with the ass of the Flight, Nativity, or Adoration scenes, the parallel is a common one in late medieval art, and the human dressed in ass’s ears or being ridden/driven like a beast of burden is cast as the fool and outsider. This could be the old man whose young wife ‘places horns on his head’ (makes him into a cuckold), or the base peasant or vagrant who is hopelessly unenlightened. The fact that Joseph sometimes appropriated some of these characteristics should not be a shock for historians of late medieval culture. Sometimes, a comical depiction of Joseph might have been developed in pure fun. This approach may well be present in personal prayer books—although the contained inversion of the marginalia ultimately did work in reinstating the

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<sup>260</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 96.

status quo, it was also simply funny. It should not be forgotten that play, illusion, and fantasy are central to the creation and origins of art itself.<sup>261</sup>

But what is play? Johan Huizinga's thought-provoking study on the fundamental significance of play to civilization, which went beyond the standard biological interpretation that the act of playing merely serves physiological purposes, provides an analysis that aptly explains one way that humor and sacrality could overlap. He points to the irreducibility of the fun itself of playing, which "...resists all analysis, all logical interpretation."<sup>262</sup> Laughter, he writes, is not always bound up with play and fun, because play itself can be quite serious, whether in sports, chess, children's games, contests, exhibitions, or performances. But laughter does arise from the fun of these actions, even when they are 'played' in earnest. It is from this fact, we could say, that the association of laughter and seriousness, or earnestness, arises. Huizinga's line of inquiry itself disproves his theory that play and seriousness formed two exclusive 'moods' in the Middle Ages.<sup>263</sup> Out of play come laughter, the joke, the comic, wit, and folly; such things can thus arise from a situation of earnestness.

Although, as Huizinga writes, play is "...a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own,"<sup>264</sup> it has 'real' consequences:

It adorns life, amplifies it and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual—as a life function—and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spiritual and social associations,

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<sup>261</sup> Paul Barolsky, "In Praise of Folly," *Parody and Festivity in Early Modern Art: Essays on Comedy as Social Vision*, ed. David R. Smith (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 11-16.

<sup>262</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 3.

<sup>263</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 6.

<sup>264</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8.

in short, as a cultural function. . . . It thus has its place in a sphere superior to the strictly biological processes of nutrition, reproduction and self-preservation.<sup>265</sup>

In festival and ritual, exhibition can be equally ‘play’-ful, no matter its degree of seriousness, and therefore adds to the group’s well being. It creates order, bringing “a temporary, a limited perfection” into “an imperfect world and into the confusion of life.”<sup>266</sup> It creates a powerful illusion, which Huizinga notes means literally ‘in-play,’ from *includere*, and it temporarily suspends all ‘real-life’ ill will or vendettas, even class distinctions. This functional ‘play’ takes place in the inversions of carnival festivity, as well as in smaller inversions like that of the “Boy Bishop” of Constance, the original setting for the *Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel* of c. 1400. The play incorporated a choir-boy from the cathedral school who had been selected to be the *schuler bischoff*. Equipped with cope and crosier, he temporarily reigned supreme over the ludic cradle play’s performance several times a day and the festivity of the Twelve Days of Christmas.<sup>267</sup>

Further linking play and seriousness, and demonstrating that the two are in fact not each other’s antithesis, is ritual. As Huizinga notes, “The ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play . . . particularly insofar as it transports the participants to another world.”<sup>268</sup> Like play, according to Romano Guardini, liturgy is “zwecklos aber doch sinnvoll.”<sup>269</sup> Representation and display in a performance can constitute play in that

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<sup>265</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

<sup>266</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

<sup>267</sup> Eckehard Simon, “The Home Town of the *Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel* (ca. 1420) and Its Original Setting,” *Euphorion* 73 (1979): 304-20.

<sup>268</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 18.

<sup>269</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 19.

they involve "...a stepping out of common reality into a higher order."<sup>270</sup> A sacred performance, whether a Christmas play, or the liturgy from which such a dramatic form arose, actualizes an ideal through more than just symbolism. A rite is representation, and thus more than merely imitative, particularly for the late medieval mind—the principle of transubstantiation during the Mass denies this outright. Worshipers ‘play’ the sacred event, in effect actualizing a higher order much as the contest participant displays something out of the ordinary or particularly admirable. Similarly, in play, "...the distinction between belief and make-believe breaks down. The concept of play merges quite naturally with that of holiness....The ritual act...will always remain within the play category, but in this seeming subordination the recognition of its holiness is not lost."<sup>271</sup> By extension, laughter and the comic, arising from play and fun, though not always present therein, can emerge easily from ‘sober’ holiness, particularly in performance and ritual. Along with play, it produces an exhilarating freedom from the ordinary, and is therefore socially beneficial for all involved.

The Feast of Fools, a festival typically celebrated on Innocent’s Day (December 28<sup>th</sup>) or on the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1<sup>st</sup>), typifies an instance in which the clergy themselves sanctioned societal inversion, when the lower ranks of clergy were allowed to run wild. Despite many accounts of clerical participation in such celebrations, the *festum stultorum*, *festum fatuorum*, and *asinaria festa* were suppressed by the Church hierarchy as early as 1207, the year that Pope Innocent III condemned deacons who wore

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<sup>270</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13.

<sup>271</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 25-27.

masks or participated in other revelries.<sup>272</sup> The problem particularly incensed Jean

Gerson, writing as Chancellor of the University of Paris:

Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the Hours of the Office. They dance in the choir dressed as women, panders or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the altar while the celebrant is saying mass. They play dice there. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap through the church, without a blush at their own shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts; and arouse the laughter of their fellows and bystanders in infamous performances with indecent gestures and verses scurrilous and unchaste.<sup>273</sup>

The playful carvings on Rouen's *Portail des Libraires* also reveal the clergy's ability to harness the humor of the inversionary for themselves, and as Camille notes, "...even in the more orthodox Prophet's Play performed at Rouen...probably by the lesser clergy—there is an *ordo* of Baalam, while the ass that is called for is played by what we would call a pantomime horse!"<sup>274</sup>

Anthropologists have considered the liberation, parody, and social inversion of religious rituals and festivals crucial to the reinforcement of a functioning society. The 'World Upside Down' could have what Terry Castle describes as an 'inoculating' rather than 'infectious' effect on society and the city in that through the containment of transgressive actions, the city's institutions could be strengthened.<sup>275</sup> Mahadev L. Apte's study of humor, laughter, and reversal in ritual groups categorizes reversals into three types that accord with medieval celebrations: that of status, behavior, and sex. A kind of 'immunity' is granted to those doing the reversal, such as friars dressing as women and

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<sup>272</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), 1:287-95.

<sup>273</sup> Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 1:294; Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 92.

<sup>274</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 93.

<sup>275</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 88-99.

wealthy burghers ‘playing peasant’; in other words, their performance, although it transgresses social norms, does not provoke punishment or censure while it is contained within an already allocated space or time.<sup>276</sup> The creation of set spaces and times by society *for* societal inversion to take place seemingly occurs because the result of such temporary disorder is ‘innocuous’ or apotropaic. It serves to drive dangerous disorder from the collective cultural consciousness.

Humor in its most outrageous forms was central to the religious and civic life of the late Middle Ages. The most bawdy, raucous behavior during religious festivals like carnival and kermis were likely considered, even by the clerical and civic authorities, to serve an important overall function. Considering humor as exclusively characterizing low, popular, secular culture ignores its broader societal, emotional, and religious implications during the late Middle Ages. Humorous forms and visual puns graced the column capitals, walls, misericords, and exteriors of great cathedrals, and proliferated throughout religious books, as Lilian Randall and Michael Camille have uncovered and translated for us. The idea that the humor of prints, panels, plays, and stories would infuse religious representations of St. Joseph, a figure whom God himself deems a cuckold on some level, accords well, therefore, with an already-acknowledged, strong medieval trend of ‘holy laughter’.

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<sup>276</sup> Mahadev L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 155-61.

### 3.2 *Joseph, the Beast, the Peasant, and the Fool*

A small, painted wooden retable of c. 1400 in the Mayer van den Bergh Museum, discussed in chapter two for its depiction of St. Joseph drying the holy diaper (fig. 3.10), presents a second, even more blatantly humorous image of the father in its scene of the Flight into Egypt (fig. 3.11). It might be argued that for reasons of space, the artist compressed the composition so much that Joseph's head was overtaken by the ass's ears, but the artist certainly could have raised the terrain of the right-hand side instead to present the saint's face more clearly. The image is therefore nothing less than a demonstration of satirical humor at its finest, comparing the poor, weary foster-father with the ass, and thus with the popular contemporary type of the Fool, in contrast with the youthful perfection of his wife. The type of the Fool is most often depicted as a human wearing ass's ears, as in a series of eight woodcuts of fools from Ulm (fig. 3.12).<sup>277</sup> Contemporary artistic and literary treatments of derided characters, particularly the peasantry, reveal just how popular and clear the hilarious meaning of a comparison between beast and human could be for a late medieval audience.

The Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold commissioned a number of devotional images of St. Joseph that intertwine humor with the sacred, including the pant-less Joseph who knits his stockings together in the Antwerp-Baltimore polyptych (fig. 3.13) and the guzzling Joseph of the Chartreuse de Champmol's high altarpiece (fig. 3.14).<sup>278</sup> The

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<sup>277</sup> Christa Grössinger, *Humour and Folly in Secular and Profane Prints of Northern Europe, 1430-1540* (London: Harvey Miller, 2002), no. 63.

<sup>278</sup> Oscar Mayer Van den Bergh, *Collections du Chevalier Mayer van den Bergh* (Anvers: Bellemans, 1904), 19; *Catalogue du Musée Mayer van den Bergh* (Brussels: Librairie nationale d'art et d'histoire, 1933), 35; Josef De Coo, *Museum Mayer van den Bergh. Catalogus I. Schilderijen, verluchte handschriften, tekeningen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Antwerp: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, 1978), 120; Josef De Coo, *Museum Mayer*

*Windelwascher* and ‘fool’ Joseph of the Mayer van den Bergh piece fits well into this collection. The smaller retable was probably commissioned by the duke for his private oratory chapel at the Chartreuse de Champmol, and has been variously attributed to a follower of Melchior Broederlam, a Franco-Flemish artist, and to an anonymous Netherlandish or Lower Rhenish artist. Like the Parisian ivories discussed in chapter two, the interior of the shrine once held a sculpted Madonna and child.

More than any other figure, the peasant or rustic was ridiculed in late medieval society, and his most common characteristic was considered to be his affinity to animals, both in terms of physical appearance and morals. French *fabliaux* and German *Schwankliteratur* characterized peasants as easily tricked and cuckolded because of their bestial stupidity. As the type of the rustic or *vilain*, peasants represented the base and the ridiculous. In a fourteenth-century short poem by Jean de Condé, entitled “Des Vilains et des Courtois,” the rustic epitomizes how not to act, in clear contrast with the virtuous, chivalric knight.<sup>279</sup> German literature before 1400 tended to describe the rustic as boorish or exhibiting uninhibited, frenzied behavior, but often having a normal shape and appearance, while in French literature he was characterized as hideous because of his

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*van den Bergh. Catalogus II. Beeldhouwkunst, plaketten, antiek* (Antwerp: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, 1969), 141; Dominique Deneffe, Famke Peters, and Wim Fremout, *Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting in the Low Countries*, ed. Cyriel Stroo (Brussels: Brepols, 2009), 84.

<sup>279</sup> Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 133; Stanley Leman Galpin, “Cortois and Vilain: A Study of the Distinctions Made Between Them by the French and Provençal Poets of the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Centuries” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1905), 8-9. Further studies of literary treatments of peasants include Fritz Martini, *Das Bauertum im deutschen Schrifttum von den Anfängen bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Haale: M. Niemeyer, 1944), 41-102, 135-213; Hilde Hügli, *Der deutsche Bauer im Mittelalter dargestellt nach den deutschen literarischen Quellen vom 11.-15. Jahrhundert* (1929; Reprint, Nendeln: Kraus, 1970); Heide Wunder, “Der dumme und der schlaue Bauer,” in *Mentalität und Alltag im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Cord Meckseper (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985), 34-51; G. G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village* (Cambridge, 1925; Reprint, New York: Dover, 1989), 231-52.

dark skin, attributed to proximity to the ground. Peasants were depicted in art in a variety of ways, some "...as a familiar subordinate, lowly in a normal way (ill-dressed, bent over, dark), while others rendered him as a disturbing inhabitant of a world apart, subhuman,"<sup>280</sup> and in any of these cases they could be presented as animals, "although usually the grotesque peasant is rendered as a wild animal while the toiling peasant in the fields is likened to a draught animal."<sup>281</sup> In the marginalia of the Luttrell Psalter, laboring peasants are likened to their draught animals, while wild *babewyns* provide commentary on their presence (figs. 3.15 and 3.16).<sup>282</sup> Christa Grössinger, who writes on humor and folly in secular prints of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in northern Europe, writes:

Of all classes of society it was the Peasant who was made to look and act the Fool...they were portrayed as boorish and vulgar...[while] in medieval literature the concept of the good ploughman culminated in the person of *Piers Plowman*...towards the end of the fifteenth century some of the sermons warned more and more frequently of changes in society and attempts by peasants to elevate their station in society, coinciding with the decline of chivalry and its social order. In general, the peasant was praised as long as he kept to his lowly position and fulfilled his tasks, as ordained by God. This fact was most noticeable at the time of the Peasants' Revolt in Germany [in 1525], when, as long as the peasants remained God-fearing and steadfast like Job in their submission to hardships, Luther spoke of them as the 'salt of the earth' and the 'Volk', whereas, once they took up arms to actively defend their rights, everyone including Luther condemned them.<sup>283</sup>

It cannot be pure coincidence that the characteristics for which peasants and rustics were ridiculed from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, including bestial foolishness and intemperance with drink and food, were those that also colored

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<sup>280</sup> Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 139.

<sup>281</sup> Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 140.

<sup>282</sup> Camille, "Labouring for the Lord," 423-54, plates 83 and 85; Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 140.

<sup>283</sup> Christa Grössinger, *Humour and Folly in Secular and Profane Prints of Northern Europe, 1430-1540* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2002), 89.

humorous depictions of St. Joseph, although his character may be dignified in the same image. To see the similarities between ridiculous portrayals of peasants and fools with images in which Joseph is also ridiculed only requires a brief survey of the derided character types. By the second half of the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, although rustics were derided in prints and paintings by the same bestial qualities as they were in earlier images, extreme exaggeration frequently rendered their debasement even more explicit. Even members of the bourgeoisie became implicated in the lack of decorum, as in a group of prints by Sebald Beham, in which they are "...pulled down to the animal level of the peasants, and all turn out to be fools. Thus, most of all, low, animal nature characterizes peasants; either they are tied to their animals working in the fields, or they feast like animals let loose."<sup>284</sup> Peasant intemperance was shown particularly by comparing their eating and drinking habits with those of animals: "Their eating habits were contemptuous, for their consumption of food and drink was out of control, resulting in sickness."<sup>285</sup>

Jonathan Alexander's discussion of the peasants' derision in the Duke of Berry's early fifteenth-century *Très Riches Heures* rightly emphasizes the Limbourg Brothers' frequent, and sometimes subtle, comparisons between the peasantry and beasts of burden in the calendar cycle miniatures. The September miniature (fig. 3.17), for example, which was designed by the Limbourgs but completed by Jean Colombe after their death, places a peasant "at the very center of the page and flanked by brute beasts, a donkey and a pair of oxen. His role as constructed in this representation is analogous to theirs, both

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<sup>284</sup> Grössinger, *Humour and Folly*, 101.

<sup>285</sup> Grössinger, *Humour and Folly*, 101.

in his task and in his unselfconscious behavior, with his stockings falling down and his underclothes showing.”<sup>286</sup> Similar “mooning” peasants are shown in the March miniature (fig. 3.18) and in the February miniature (fig. 3.8). According to D. Fehling, the presentation of the posterior should be interpreted as a submissive action by inferiors to their superiors.<sup>287</sup> The loss of one’s stockings as something worthy of mockery, as we have already seen in the ‘Battle for the Pants’ imagery, was also, of course, taken up by writers and artists in the representation of St. Joseph. We need only remember the pantless Joseph of the *Hessische Weihnachtsspiel*.

The increasing ridicule of the peasant in art and literature from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries was a trend that Walter French ascribed to a greater contrast between city and country than in the earlier Middle Ages. During the high medieval period, the distance between urbanity and rusticity was more frequently also a pleasant one, with poets like Neidhart von Reuenthal (c. 1190-1236/37) and Tannhäuser (d. after 1265) contrasting the joys of a natural life in the country with the affectation of courtly life: “Their portrayal of the country folk was humorous but not unsympathetic. They did, however, protest against the peasants’ affectation of court life, especially as regards their manner of dress, which contrasted sharply with their actions.”<sup>288</sup> Increasing hostility towards the peasantry appeared in the manner books of the thirteenth century, which attempted to safely distance the aristocracy and upper classes from the lower classes, particularly by ridiculing the latter’s behavior through drawing parallels with the

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<sup>286</sup> Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse,” 442.

<sup>287</sup> Detlev Fehling, *Ethologische Überlegungen auf dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde* (Munich: Beck, 1974), 28; Alexander, “Labeur and Paresse,” 442.

<sup>288</sup> Walter French, “Kulturgeschichtliches in the Fastnachtspiele of Hans Sachs” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1918), 15.

behavior of the beasts with which they lived and worked.<sup>289</sup> As in the calendar scenes of the *Très Riches Heures*, the bliss of uninhibited country life and the satisfying ‘otherness’ of the peasantry for the more elevated elites appeared in a number of fourteenth-century courtly commissions that depict buffoonish peasants laboring or behaving like beasts and fools while nobles leisurely move about their land, like the cycle of the months on the walls of the Torre d’Aquila of the Buonconsiglio Castle in Trent (fig. 3.19), painted by a fifteenth-century Bohemian artist before 1407.<sup>290</sup>

As seen in the Mayer van den Bergh retable, Burgundian devotion to St. Joseph and its associated humor appears in the Book of Hours of Philip of Burgundy (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 76), made for Philip the Bold’s grandson by the artist Jean le Tavernier, who was active in Oudenaarde c. 1434-69. The manuscript has been dated to 1454. The many large miniatures of the Book of Hours allowed for further personalization of the ducal commission, with Philip himself appearing as the youngest magus, Caspar, in the Adoration scene (fig. 3.20). In keeping with meditational traditions of the time, the setting is rendered in contemporary fashion to facilitate the reader’s devotion, with Mary’s throne becoming a tester bed, typical of aristocratic lyings-in (fig. 3.21).<sup>291</sup> Joseph is depicted in the background as the domestic host of the kingly retinue, seated at a table with a jug of wine, his typical attribute in the Nativity plays and many

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<sup>289</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>290</sup> Enrico Castelnuovo and Francesca de Grammatica, eds., *Il Gotico nelle Alpi, 1350-1450* (Trento: Castello del Buonconsiglio, Monumenti e collezioni provinciali, 2002); see Hans-Joachim Raupp, *Bauernsatiren: Entstehung und Entwicklung des bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst, ca. 1470-1570* (Niederzier: Lukassen, 1986), 40-81 for the figure of the peasant in early prints.

<sup>291</sup> Lorne Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools* (London: National Gallery, 2008), 187-90; Henk van Os, ed., *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), plate 2.

images of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt. His pose and the angle of his head closely mirrors the beast by his side, and his expression appears to be one of confusion or weariness, yet he is also conspicuously placed at the site of the post supporting the old shed, the continuously recurring analogy for the ancient House of David.<sup>292</sup> In the Nativity scene (fig. 3.22)<sup>293</sup> he is even more prominent as he warms the swaddling cloth that he will use to diaper the naked child. Henk van Os describes the saint as “too busy to adore the Child as fervently as Mary does. Joseph fans a fire with a lappet of his cloak in order to keep Jesus warm.”<sup>294</sup> Reading the composition, however, we see that Joseph gazes concernedly toward his wife, a motion that is probably intended to encourage the actual devotee to do the same.<sup>295</sup> Rather than identifying Salome, the midwife whose hand withered after questioning Mary’s purity, as the owner’s “recognizable model for his own behavior,”<sup>296</sup> Joseph’s acts are far more conducive to the duke’s devotion and imitation. In his haste to bypass Joseph as the viewer’s object of identification, probably because of the saint’s seemingly menial actions and confused appearance in the Adoration scene, Henk Van Os misses the significance of the saint’s action and of its relation to the holy relic at Aachen, but rightly notes the link between the fire and Mary’s purity.<sup>297</sup>

The parallels between Joseph and the ass in Jean le Tavernier’s Nativity scene are easy to miss for the non-medieval eye, but for someone exposed to the visual and

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<sup>292</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>293</sup> Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, fig. 3.

<sup>294</sup> Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 21.

<sup>295</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>296</sup> Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 21.

<sup>297</sup> Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 21.

dramatic language of derision, an audience that grew especially large in the fifteenth century with the circulation of cheaper, mass-produced satirical prints and broadsheets, the humor would have been explicit. Early Netherlandish parallels between ass and saint are even more apparent in a Book of Hours from Utrecht (fig. 3.23)<sup>298</sup>, dated to c. 1415, and a painting from the circle of Rogier van der Weyden (fig. 3.24)<sup>299</sup>, in which Joseph and the ass are engaged in the same, bestial behavior of watering themselves. Joseph is presented in true ‘rustic’ fashion.

Like Neidhart and the Middle High German poets, artists like the Limbourgs and the anonymous master of the Trent fresco cycle served an aristocratic audience rather than the more heterogeneous, urban mixture of patricians, merchants, and artisans of the early modern cities for which comic plays like the *Fastnachtspiele* were performed. Their adopted view of the lower classes was perhaps somewhat functionally different in serving the class for whom the waning of the feudal era was most detrimental. The rise of an art market, as opposed to private commissions, for broadsheets, prints, and paintings that ridiculed character types like the peasant, the poor, the vagabond, the profligate, the miser, the money-changer, and the henpecked husband, however, documents the extent to which an interest in humorous ‘types’ permeated the burgher classes. The unbounded hilarity of comic literature including the *Fastnachtspiele* and Nativity plays rose in popularity as well. In addition to the popular satirization of peasants, rogues, Jews, *Landesknechten*, artisans, and innkeepers, no authoritative figure

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<sup>298</sup> *The International Style: The Arts in Europe around 1400* (Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1962), plate XLVII, n. 71.

<sup>299</sup> Dirk De Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994), 347, n. B4.

was safe from ridicule, including the priest, noble, and merchant. St. Joseph was not exempt from this overwhelming persistence of the comical, as his iconography attests. Much can be learned about the humor of these characters from writers like Hans Sachs and Sebastian Brant. Walter French, who surveyed Sachs's *Fastnachtspiele* in 1918, describes the playwright as one who adopts the viewpoint of the casual observer of the common man, while simultaneously leading the audience to a thoughtful, idealistic conclusion: "This dual point of view on the one hand accounts for the gross caricatures of the priest, the peasant, and the like, and at the same time makes plausible the evidences of an attitude of mind which, on many subjects, is modern rather than medieval."<sup>300</sup> Ridicule and play frequently appeared in such comic literature and art in "satiro-didactic"<sup>301</sup> form, but it is equally important to note that sometimes there was no underlying idealism or moral, but rather a simple desire to arouse laughter, an act that has a function in and of itself.

The popularity of the peasant in chivalric poetry developed particularly into a means of parodying courtly ideals. Humor in the peasant genre was characterized in earlier medieval literature and art by a kind of "double-edged sword...while on the one hand mocking aristocratic cultural institutions such as love service, tournaments and feasts, it offered the reader or listener a vicious satire of uncouth manners and obscene sexual conduct attributed to the peasantry."<sup>302</sup> A prime example of such humor exists in the German Heinrich Wittenwiler's poem *The Ring*, written c. 1400, which tells the story

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<sup>300</sup> French, "Kulturgeschichtliches in the Fastnachtspiele of Hans Sachs," 15.

<sup>301</sup> French, "Kulturgeschichtliches in the Fastnachtspiele of Hans Sachs," 35.

<sup>302</sup> Keith P. F. Moxey, "Sebald Beham's Church Anniversary Holidays: Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 12, no. 2/3 (1981-82), 127.

of the peasant wedding of Betsy Wagglebottom and Berty Driprnose, whose manners, ugliness, and vulgarity are even more amusing because of their attempts to imitate chivalric behavior. By the fourteenth century, the theme of the raucous peasant wedding had already been established,<sup>303</sup> with many of its characteristics, such as the parallels between the behavior of the unruly, gluttonous peasants with their beasts of burden, having appeared earlier in the thirteenth-century manner books discussed in chapter two. Carnival plays like those of Hans Sachs, which “most often deal with ugliness and deformity, lapses in manners, as well as sexual and scatologically offensive behavior,”<sup>304</sup> were already an established form of humorous entertainment as well.

Carnival behavior itself merged the human with the animal. The costumes worn by carnival revelers were frequently of animals, peasants, and devils, and it is these three types which Ekehard Simon most closely associates with the bawdy spirit of carnival. In one carnival play, ‘Dame Shrovetide’ is accused of “turning people into animals: foolish calves, apes, jackasses, and pigs...when people disguised themselves as animals, it is likely that they also behaved in the lewd ways that the medieval mind associated with beasts.”<sup>305</sup> Sebastian Franck writes that “some crawl on all fours like animals/ others sit on eggs hatching fools.”<sup>306</sup> The comparison between human and ass was particularly

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<sup>303</sup> George Fenwick Jones, *Wittenwiler's Ring and the Anonymous Scots Poem Colkelbie Sow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956); Moxey, “Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor,” 127.

<sup>304</sup> Moxey, “Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor,” 128.

<sup>305</sup> Ekehard Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 202.

<sup>306</sup> Sebastian Franck, *Weltbuoch: Spiegel und bildtmiss des gantzen erdtbodens von Sebastiano Franco Wördensi in vier bücher* (Tübingen, 1534), fol. 131r; Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 202.

ubiquitous in the exhibition of foolishness. Wickram's charming tale of the monk who brayed like an ass makes this apparent:

In Poppenried there lived a monk, who oversaw its parish. He had an exceedingly abrasive voice; when he stood on the pulpit, whoever had not heard him before thought he had lost his senses. One day he had been crying out rather pitifully when a godly old widow in the church beat her hands firmly together and wept bitterly; the monk observed this well. After the sermon was finished, the monk asked the woman what had moved her to such devotion. "Oh dear sir," she said, "my beloved, deceased husband, as he parted from this life, knew well that I must share his goods and property with his relatives; therefore he bequeathed me in advance a handsome young ass. But not very long after my blessed husband's death, the ass died too. This morning, as you began to cry out on the pulpit with such a great and painful voice, you reminded me of my darling ass; he had rather the same voice as you." The monk, who himself had expected a kind compliment from the old woman, or a praise greater than that of which he was worthy, found a disdainful answer, just like her comparison between himself and an ass. Thus it befalls in common all those greedy for commendation; when they think to obtain great praise, sometimes the greatest of mockeries comes instead.<sup>307</sup>

A great number of German depictions that affiliate Joseph with his bestial companions exist, including the Petri-Altar (fig. 3.25) and the Adoration of the Magi by the school of Martin Schongauer (fig. 3.26)<sup>308</sup>, discussed in chapter two, as well as an Adoration by the Master of St. Barbara (fig. 3.27), in which the pose and actions of the bent-over saint and ass are unquestionably mirror images. The humor of this image is likewise apparent in Joseph's persistent drilling into a piece of wood, analyzed below. Artists often render the parallels between ass and saint through compositional construction, but these are most clear when the two exhibit similar behavior. In more subtle examples, Joseph's comparison to his beastly companion is merely apparent in their portrayal on the same diagonal, looking in the same direction, and often with similar

<sup>307</sup> Jörg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*, LXIII; Kurz, ed., *Jörg Wickram's Das Rollwagenbüchlein*, 114-15.

<sup>308</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2:XI.28.

expressions. Examples of this method include a pen drawing from the circle of Jan van Eyck (fig. 3.28),<sup>309</sup> a Nativity in pen of c. 1510 by Hans Baldung Grien (fig. 3.29),<sup>310</sup> and the Adoration and Nativity from the Chevalier Hours (figs. 3.30 and 3.31), illuminated by the Boucicaut Master in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. A particularly humorous dialogue of looks between a marginalized Joseph and anthropomorphized ass appears in an engraved Adoration (fig. 3.32) by the Master B.R., who worked in the lower Rhine region during the late fifteenth century.

Depictions of an ungraceful, self-nourishing or ‘guzzling’ Joseph abound in early Netherlandish, German, and French art, and again, the visual vocabulary of these presentations derives from the base behavior of the animal-like rustic. An engraving of the Flight into Egypt by Martin Schongauer (fig. 3.33) depicts both Joseph and the ass in the process of nourishing themselves in true bestial fashion, while a painting of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt of c. 1500 (fig. 3.34) by a follower of Martin Schongauer presents a hilarious St. Joseph and ass whose facial expressions, both with mouths open and a dumb, uncomprehending stare, could not have failed to amuse, since a presentation of this specific kind was considered demonstrative of baseness.<sup>311</sup> However, as with the Petri-Altar discussed in chapter two, Josephine humor could function as something more than merely derisive joke making. In the Buxtehude Petri-Altar, executed c. 1410 by Meister Bertram’s workshop, Joseph is depicted in the Nativity scene in the process of gulping down the contents of his canteen (fig. 3.35). The same motif appears in Melchior

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<sup>309</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, plate 167, n. 302.

<sup>310</sup> James H. Marrow and Alan Shestack, eds., *Hans Baldung Grien: Prints and Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University, 1981), 20b.

<sup>311</sup> See chapter two.

Broederlam's scene of the Flight into Egypt (fig. 3.14), which Charles Cuttler interprets as a mere space-filling device.<sup>312</sup> According to Ruth Mellinkoff, Broederlam's Joseph is "...barely squeezed into the picture, almost an afterthought,"<sup>313</sup> an interpretation that neglects the saint's frequent and prominent depictions in Philip the Bold's commissions. She does note that "...an excessive love of drink was attributed to Joseph and elaborated in some of the German dramas, and it is sometimes reflected in the visual arts,"<sup>314</sup> but is quick to dismiss the Buxtehude Petri-Altar's Joseph as "...a peasant boor who drinks too much."<sup>315</sup> The image of Joseph "guzzling" can, in fact, be related to the Nativity plays, and to one specific line in the *Schwäbisches Weihnachtsspiel*. Toward the end of the play, when Mary asks Joseph to take her and Jesus to Egypt, Joseph replies:

*Maria, daz will jch gar gern ton,  
wen dein kind geit gar guten lon.  
dar um so will ich nehmen die wiegen uf den ruggen,  
aber sie wirt mich gar übel trucken.  
doch so will ich us meiner fleschen  
meinen alten goder weschen.*<sup>316</sup>

Maria, I will do that very gladly,  
for your child gives a very good reward.  
And so I will put the cradle upon my back,  
but it will weigh me down quite heavily.  
And I'll wash my old windpipe

<sup>312</sup> Charles Cuttler, *Northern Painting from Pucelle to Bruegel: Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), 55. The presence of the falling idol in the background is evidence of the scene's indebtedness to the popular Pseudo-Matthew account. See James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, and the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Larry Silver and Henry Luttikhuisen (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 73. Both Bertram's Rest on the Flight into Egypt and Broederlam's Flight into Egypt are influenced by this apocryphal text, and likely also by religious drama.

<sup>313</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Others in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1:82.

<sup>314</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:226.

<sup>315</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:226.

<sup>316</sup> *Schwäbisches Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 215-20; Eckehard Simon, "Das schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel: Ein neu entdecktes Weihnachtsspiel aus der Zeit 1417-1431," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 94 (1975): 39.

with a drink from my bottle.<sup>317</sup>

In the *Ludus in cunabilis Christi* of the *Erlauer Weihnachtsspiel*, Joseph also drinks and offers wine to visitors, Mary, the midwife, and even the child to help him sleep.<sup>318</sup> In the *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel*, Joseph drinks frequently himself and offers the midwife a drink of “*gueth wein, dapey magstu woll frelich sein.*”<sup>319</sup> Also analogous to Joseph’s character in the *Kindelwiegenspiele* is the appearance of Joseph’s canteen in the Nativity of Philip the Bold (fig. 3.13), as well as its inclusion in the Hamburg Petri-altar’s Nativity and Rest on the Flight into Egypt scenes (figs. 3.25 and 3.36). In a relief sculpture of the Flight into Egypt of c. 1520 (fig. 3.37),<sup>320</sup> part of the Bamberg Cathedral’s high altarpiece by Veit Stoss, a prominent Joseph takes a swig from his canteen, and this scene reappears in the Flight into Egypt miniature of a Middle Dutch *Speculum humanae salvationis* of c. 1400 (fig. 3.38).<sup>321</sup> French examples of the scene include the Chartreuse de Champmol high altarpiece by Melchior Broederlam (fig. 3.14), a fourteenth-century illumination from a Rouen Book of Hours (fig. 3.39),<sup>322</sup> and an illumination in a Book of Hours by the Bedford Master and his associate, dated c. 1410-15 (fig. 3.40).<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> *Schwäbisches Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 215-20, English translation from the Middle High German in Stephen K. Wright, “Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope: Gender and Transgression in Medieval German Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 2 (May, 1999): 154.

<sup>318</sup> “*Tunc Joseph bibat et det Marie et puero.*” *Ludus in cunabilis Christi* of the *Erlauer Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 45-50. Karl Ferdinand Kummer, *Erlauer Spiele* (1882; repr., Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1977), 8.

<sup>319</sup> Translates to, “Good wine, which will cheer you up.” *Sterzinger Weihnachtsspiel*, lines 877-878. Walther Lipphardt and Hans-Gert Roloff, eds., *Die geistlichen Spiele des Sterzinger Spielarchivs*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1980), 3:396.

<sup>320</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: XI.34.

<sup>321</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: XI.33.

<sup>322</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: XI.31.

<sup>323</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: XI.32.

Aside from equating Joseph's behavior with that of the uncouth, intemperate, animal-like rustic, Joseph's drinking and conviviality in the Nativity plays is implicit in his important role as the faulty, yet well-intentioned caretaker of Christ and Mary.<sup>324</sup> He is not only a drinker, but a devoted father, provider, and host, and in these characteristics he is a model of familial love and responsibility for late medieval fathers. His self-nourishing, rustic behavior in examples like the Buxtehude Petri-Altar and Bamberg Altar does not appear to encompass the complexity of his character in the contemporary plays, and thus may have appeared less admirable. The common view of such intemperate behavior, evident in medieval manner books, satirical writings by Hans Sachs and Sebastian Brant, and depictions of drinking and eating which appear mostly when peasants behave badly, was less accepting. Sebald Beham's prints of church anniversary holidays (figs. 3.41 and 3.42), for example, depict a boisterous group of carousing, eating, drinking, vomiting, and shamelessly dancing peasants, which clearly differs from representations of the more restrained burgher and aristocratic classes by Hans Schäufelein (fig. 3.43). Keith Moxey indicates that juxtaposing visual and literary characterizations in fact reinforce each other, in that the aspirations of the urban, wealthy middle class "...which are still defined in terms of a fading ideal of chivalry are opposed to those of a social class that is supposedly without a code of behavior. Both were convenient fictions necessary for the efficient function of a hierarchically organized society."<sup>325</sup> For the owner of such imagery, the peasantry is depicted as unruly, as dancing with abandonment was regarded as a vice in Nuremberg city ordinances.

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<sup>324</sup> Wright, "Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope: Gender and Transgression in Medieval German Drama," 156.

<sup>325</sup> Moxey, "Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," 119.

Moreover, the peasants' intemperance categorizes them as fools, and they are thus frequently depicted with the ass's ears typical of that character type. A woodcut illustrating Sebastian Brant's chapter "On Dancing" of his *Ship of Fools* (fig. 3.44) shows a group of figures dancing around the Golden Calf, symbolic of their unrestricted sensual pleasures. Similarly, a broadsheet titled *The Nose Dance at Fools' Town*, dated to 1534, is accompanied by verses written by Hans Sachs, who likewise connects the greed, drunkenness, and dancing of the peasants with their foolishness:

One day I found much enjoyment  
 In going to a peasant *Kirchweih*  
 At a village called Fools' town  
 There I found many greedy peasants  
 All full to the gills  
 Eating and drinking and shouting  
 The maids sang to the bagpipe music  
 While the youths ran and sprang about  
 Throwing one another down on their backsides  
 So that many of them were badly hurt.<sup>326</sup>

The offense of the peasantry is not their social class, but their folly, which is central to the satirical texts of Sachs and Brant.<sup>327</sup> Yet in such writings and analogously, in associated works like Sebald Beham's *Large Peasant Holiday*, the lower classes tend to be characterized most frequently as the fools for their stupidity and unruly behavior. In Dürer's woodcut illustration to chapter 47 of Brant's *Ship of Fools* (fig. 3.45), the fool himself, wearing the typical ass's ears, takes the place of his beast of burden, accompanied by the text:

Some men persist in folly's road  
 And draw a cart with heavy load

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<sup>326</sup> Quoted and translated in Moxey, "Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," 114-15.

<sup>327</sup> Moxey, "Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," 107-20.

The right cart awaits in heaven's abode.<sup>328</sup>

The image of the cart-pulling fool is closely associated with German carnival celebrations, during which humans were substituted for beasts in a symbolic inversion of the social order, intended to invoke folly. In plays and ritual actions like these, prosperous members of the upper and middle classes would dress up like the peasantry and wear ass's ears and exhibit the kinds of obscene behavior depicted by artists like Sebastian Beham. Craftsmen and even sons of the leading families of Nuremberg also dressed up as peasants during carnival, with the city's Shrovetide plays filled with dirty, lewd peasants who were meant to personify the 'Shrovetide fool.' According to Simon, "This disguise feeds on a long literary tradition, going back to Neidhart, that saw the peasant as the antipode of the courtier: the rustic is uncouth, ignorant, rude, and gluttonous in his use of food and sex."<sup>329</sup> Moxey attributes such mockery of, and at times hostility towards, the peasant class and the strong desire among the aristocracy and burghers to situate them in their proper, lower, social state chiefly to their fear of the class's strength in the decline of the feudal era, and particularly post-1525, the year of the German Peasants' Revolt.<sup>330</sup>

However, many of these characterizations probably continued to exist not solely due to hostility and a desire to humiliate, as Hans-Joachim Raupp and Keith Moxey

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<sup>328</sup> Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, trans. and ed. Edwin Zeydel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 170; Quoted in Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives*, 102.

<sup>329</sup> Simon, "Carnival Obscenities in German Towns," 203.

<sup>330</sup> Moxey, "Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," 128.

assert,<sup>331</sup> but due to a simultaneous kind of fascination. Like the character of St. Joseph, the figure of the peasant could be regarded with a warmer form of humor, despite his brutish character and appearance, or more aptly because of it. The peasant's 'otherness' was reassuring to the viewer or reader who considered himself 'higher' in social status, because the peasant's faulty attempts to imitate the dress or behavior of the higher social spheres only reaffirmed his 'lower' existence in society. The crisis for the burgher viewer, whom René Girard would call the 'disciple' in his discussion of 'triangular' desire, only occurs when the rival or 'mediator'—in this case, the peasant—rises in social standing, thus coming closer to the 'disciple's' same desire, higher status. In this case, a crisis of indifferentiation is reached, in which there is no longer a stable hierarchy or class system upon which the city-dwelling viewer can count.<sup>332</sup> Someone must be subordinated to reinstate the desired status quo—thus, the continued increase in popularity of prints, paintings, and plays portraying the peasant during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after the collapse of the rigidly hierarchical feudal era.

Although in the German Shrovetide plays, the peasant was generally presented as an uncouth, comic figure, Walter French has noted that Hans Sachs' peasant could also retain some dignity as a figure constantly plagued by over-taxation and foul treatment, not only due to his own stupidity but also to the advantages and evil of others. He was therefore, in addition to being a boorish lout, a "comic exemplar of 'natural man'"<sup>333</sup> in

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<sup>331</sup> Moxey, "Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor," 107-30; Hans-Joachim Raupp, *Bauernsatiren: Entstehung und Entwicklung des bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst, ca. 1470-1570* (Niederzier: Lukassen, 1986).

<sup>332</sup> René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 1-52.

<sup>333</sup> French, "Kulturgeschichtliches in the Fastnachtspiele of Hans Sachs," 37; Margaret D. Carroll, "Peasant Festivity and Political Identity in the Sixteenth Century," *Art History* 10, no. 3 (Sept., 1987), 293.

his base, animal-like instincts but his innate goodness as well. The character of the peasant was thus entirely analogous to that of Joseph in the Nativity plays, and in many contemporary artistic depictions, as I have suggested. The Shrovetide plays and prints of peasant themes by the German Little Masters give their characters insulting names like Herman Hirnlos and Velle Mistfinck, but this derision did not preclude the peasant's morphing into a powerful emblem of the 'natural man' and even becoming a source of political identity. Stephen Goddard describes Sebald Beham's peasant as manifesting a variety of characteristics; he appeared as "...a rural bumpkin spouting rustic wisdom [fig. 3.46], as a lewd and uncouth lout [fig. 3.47], and as a strong and simple fighter in the Peasant Revolt [fig. 3.48]."<sup>334</sup> Barthel Beham, Sebald's brother, frequently presented the peasant in a more dignified, subdued manner (fig. 3.49), an understanding enhanced by the lack of a script which so often accompanies Sebald's peasant figures.

Like the early modern development of the Wild Man, the peasant in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was regarded in some instances as a kind of proto-nationalistic emblem of northern robustness, fecundity, vigor, and exuberance because of his earthiness and important nourishing function as the base of civilization. The Brabantine *landjuweel*, despite being run by the prominent burghers, celebrated the farmer as the "most necessary...and most honorable, nevertheless, very little valued"<sup>335</sup> in their rhetorical competitions. In the peasant representations of Pieter Breughel the Elder,

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<sup>334</sup> Stephen H. Goddard, *The World in Miniature: Engravings by the German Little Masters, 1500-1550* (Lawrence, K.A.: Spencer Museum of Art, 1989), 17.

<sup>335</sup> Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 56.

“...the boundary between profound contempt and profound sympathy is imperceptible.”<sup>336</sup>

Notable, too, is the presence of the peasant as a civic figure of pride in town halls. The sculptural program of the Überlingen *Rathaussaal*, in the place of personifications, depicts four peasants performing different tasks, one each from Cologne, Regensburg, Constance, and Salzburg (fig. 3.50).<sup>337</sup> Perhaps less of a civic symbol, but an object of fascination on some level, the lower level of the wall paintings in the Basel *Haus zum Tanz*, painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in the 1520s, displayed an array of peasant dancers exhibiting their ‘innate’ character in exuberant, unrestrained dance. Stephen Goddard suggests that the frieze’s context, the midst of a program composed mainly of classical architecture and figures from classical mythology and ancient history, places “...the peasant dance on par with the grandeur of classical antiquity and thus presents it in a positive light.”<sup>338</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that the “positive light” of such an image was probably still motivated by an upper-class fascination for the base, much like the engravings of the Little Masters, whose primary patrons were the urban patriciate and educated merchants.

Margaret Carroll has convincingly argued that some sixteenth-century images of the peasantry, particularly of peasant festivity at weddings or church festivals, “may have served as important political gestures in validating a culture of resistance to foreign papal

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<sup>336</sup> Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>337</sup> Raupp, *Bauernsatiren*, 77-79.

<sup>338</sup> Goddard, *The World in Miniature*, 211.

and imperial control.”<sup>339</sup> In the 1420s, the widely influential Tacitus’ *Germania* was found in a German monastery, perhaps in Hersfeld or Fulda, although the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) had known of its existence previously. An ethnographic account written c. 98 AD of Germanic tribes ranging geographically from modern-day Bavaria to the Netherlands, it was first published in Venice in 1470 and in Nuremberg in 1473, and described ‘Germany’s’ early inhabitants as rustics who especially enjoyed celebrating quite liberally with copious amounts of food and drink.<sup>340</sup> The writings of sixteenth-century scholars including Aventinus (Johannes Turmair, 1477-1534), Johannes Agricola (1494-1566), and Johann Boemus (c. 1485-1535) translated, mined, and embellished upon this account as a means of defining a kind of Germanic political identity rooted in their native lands’ indigenous folklore. Goddard notes that the humanist Sebastian Franck, who happens to have been the Behams’ brother-in-law, “played an active role in recuperating a sense of the German past, and he described church anniversaries and other details of village folklore with enthusiasms, at times with references to pagan antecedents.”<sup>341</sup> Although the Behams’ images certainly could have invoked negative feelings toward the peasantry amongst their upper-class viewers, peasant intemperance and overindulgence could also be viewed positively due to their ties to indigenous Germanic culture and its associated *joie de vivre* in excessive feasting and drinking. Johannes Agricola states that although burghers would claim higher

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<sup>339</sup> Carroll, “Peasant Festivity and Political Identity,” 295.

<sup>340</sup> Larry Silver, “Forest Primeval: Albrecht Altdorfer and the German Wilderness Landscape,” *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 13, no. 1 (1983): 4-43.

<sup>341</sup> Goddard, *The World in Miniature*, 16.

nobility than peasants, their only difference is that they live inside the city walls.<sup>342</sup> He writes of the benefits of rustic exuberance:

It is a joyful and good thing to live well. To eat and drink lavishly is praiseworthy when it happens rarely. But when it happens daily, then it should be punished. We Germans observe Carnival, St. Burchard's feast, St. Martin's, Whitsun and Easter as seasonal occasions when people should be happy and gorge themselves: St. Burchard's eve, because of the new cider, and St. Martin's, because of the new wine. Then the fattened goose is roasted, and the whole world rejoices. At Easter people cook pancakes. At Whitsun they make wreathes of greenery in Saxony and Thuringen, and they drink 'Whitsun beer' for a good eight days. In Saxony they also celebrate 'Panthaleon' with ham, bacon, sausage and garlic. On church anniversaries, four or five German villages gather together, but it only happens once a year. Therefore it is praiseworthy and honorable, since people come together for this so that they might live amiably and honorably among each other.<sup>343</sup>

After lecturing on Tacitus at the Vienna University, the German humanist Conrad Celtis (1459-1508) published an edition of the *Germania* in 1500 as well, while a number of other literary humanists took interest in debating the origins of Germanic culture, stirred on by the discovery of other texts describing the northern lands, their people, and particularly their forests.<sup>344</sup> Christopher Wood describes Celtis as the *Germania*'s first "creative reader....The key intellectual maneuver was the conversion of the forest from the blight into the pride of the land. The forest became at once a hazardous wilderness and a stage for chivalric heroism; it sheltered the satyr, the wild man, even...the Druid priest."<sup>345</sup> For the Roman geographers, the forest became the source of Teutonic strengths. In the first century, Pomponius Mela wrote of the Germanic lands:

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<sup>342</sup> Carroll, "Peasant Festivity and Political Identity," 291.

<sup>343</sup> Iohannes Agricola, *Sybenhundert und funfzig Teütscher Sprichwörter/ verneuwert und gebessert*, Hagenau, reprinted in *Die Sprichwörter Sammlungen*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1971), v. 1, no. 342, p. 291-92; Quoted in Carroll, "Peasant Festivity," 291.

<sup>344</sup> Silver, "Forest Primeval," 14.

<sup>345</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, 130.

Germany is inhabited by a hardy and robust people who find in war an outlet for their natural ferocity and in strenuous exercise an employment for the vigour of their bodies. They take pleasure in braving the cold and go about naked until the age of puberty... When they reach manhood they cover themselves with a skin or a garment made of the bark of trees.<sup>346</sup>

It was this fascination with the brutal wildness of the northern forest, admired particularly by the Italians in the work of artists like Albrecht Altdorfer, that became particularly attractive to the German humanists for the assertion of an identity distinct from the Italians, whose own version of the rustic fantasy was well known in the legacy of Virgil and Horace. Particularly after the publication of Aeneas Silvius' *Germania* in 1496, when Tacitus' text finally drew widespread attention, the Germans were able to assert their better existence and origins against the hegemony of Rome and the papacy's unchecked exploitation through indulgences. Rather than the pastoral or georgic retreat, the wild forest had produced a people innocent of excess and hypocrisy; the *Germania* "staged simple contrasts between the piety, familial coherence and military virtue of the German tribes on the one hand, and the corruptions of city life on the other."<sup>347</sup> It was in this context that the preexisting figures of the Wild Man and the rustic could be seen in a positive light as emblems of an indigenous Germanic identity. A broadsheet by Hans Schüfelein, Dürer's pupil, illustrates a kind of hirsute Wild Family version of Adam and Eve with an uprooted tree (fig. 3.51), the Wild Man's typical attribute. Accompanying the image is a poem by Hans Sachs, first published in 1530, entitled the "Lament of the Wild Forest-People over the Perfidious World." The Wild Man, like the primeval

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<sup>346</sup> Pomponius Mela, *Libri de situ orbis tres*, ed. Vadian (Vienna, 1518); Quoted in Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, 128.

<sup>347</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, 158.

German, was assigned the virtues of marital fidelity and hospitality, much like St. Joseph.<sup>348</sup>

The Wild Man was already beginning to be seen in a more positive light in fifteenth-century northern Europe, as the personification of the local landscape, particularly where it was most wild. Like the peasant in northern European art and literature, the Wild Man was considered the fascinating antipode to the civilized, courtly ideal. He was particularly prevalent in the fifteenth-century descendents of the earlier medieval courtly arts, appearing as the subject of playing cards, engravings, and drypoints by artists like the Master E.S. and the Housebook Master. While on love-caskets and ivories, the Wild Man's unchecked, lustful behavior frequently contrasted with that of the chivalrous knight, his completely unrestrained, animal-like nature was also imbued with the simplicity of Christian humility. While he was the opposite of the refined courtier or member of the burgher class, the Wild Man's function as an antitype to civilization meant that he eschewed corruption, and thus led an existence closer to what Tacitus described in his account of the indigenous German tribes who lived in forest groves rather than Roman cities, wearing pelts and worshiping Hercules, Mercury, and Mars.<sup>349</sup> Altdorfer's unusual specificity in his rendition of the pagan idol as Mercury in his painted *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (fig. 3.52) may have something to do with contemporary humanist studies of the 'Germanic' before the coming of Christ.<sup>350</sup> Even

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<sup>348</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, 157; Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Nuremberg: A Renaissance City, 1500-1618* (Austin: University of Texas, 1983), no. 50.

<sup>349</sup> Silver, "Forest Primeval," 4-43.

<sup>350</sup> According to Larry Silver, "Although there is no proof that Altdorfer had direct contact with the members of this Celtis circle, circumstantial evidence suggests the likelihood that Altdorfer's Regensburg environment was oriented toward Celtis and the Vienna University." See Silver, "Forest Primeval," 17.

the Wild Man's raw, unchecked lust, like that of the peasant, could be viewed in a positive light, particularly on a marriage chest, where he could appear as a paradigm of fertility and eroticism.<sup>351</sup>

Even as an object of derision and a confirmation of the beholder's superiority, therefore, the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Wild Man and peasant could embody the uncorrupt virtues of humility, honesty, hospitality, fidelity, and piety, many of which came from the same aspects for which they were also derided. Their lack of decorum and affinity to animals remained worthy of laughter for the superior eye, yet the resulting aspects of their 'otherness' could be simultaneously viewed as virtuous. Ultimately, the Wild Man and peasant were considered exceptional figures, eliciting the viewer's fascination, which could result in either fear or marvel. It is with these complex cultural figures in mind that we should understand the humor of the artistic and dramatic St. Joseph, who, like the Wild Man and the peasant, frequently mirrors the animal in his lack of full intelligence and capability, his bumbling, and his uncivilized behavior in his exuberant partaking of beer and wine (which he doesn't hesitate to share in the Nativity plays, like the ideal host). Stephen Wright has suggested a plausible link between Joseph's behavior as reveler and host in the Nativity plays and the popular folk tradition of the *Kinderbier*, a celebration given by a newborn's father that involved copious amounts of beer and wine.<sup>352</sup> Either way, Joseph's virtues in the form of his hospitality,

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<sup>351</sup> Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 166-73.

<sup>352</sup> Wright, "Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope: Gender and Transgression in Medieval German Drama," 156; "Kinderbier," in *De Katholieke Encyclopaedie*, ed. P. van der Meer, et al. (Amsterdam: Joost van der Vondel, 1945-55), 15: 408-09.

fidelity, piety, and purity are obvious to the viewer in his comic presentation, even while he remains the object of laughter.

### ***3.3 The Bawdy and the Chaste Saint***

The Biblical fact of poor, old St. Joseph's purity and marriage to a teenage wife who happens to carry a child that is not his own, but rather that of the omnipotent Father, resulted in a variety of comic depictions. Unarmed with any familiarity with popular medieval humor, however, the joke can fall flat for today's viewer. The centrality of the erotic and bawdy in late medieval comic art and literature is overwhelming by today's standards, and frequently occupies what we would consider the realm of base or 'low' humor, yet it permeated aristocratic commissions and courtly themes like the Garden of Love. Its recurrence in prints, like the Beham brothers' engravings, probably appealed to the moneyed classes who purchased such objects as well. The same jokes and puns that appealed in these and other images, as well as in the *fabliaux*, *facetiae*, and other comic tales of the time, unquestionably factored into artistic creations that made fun of Joseph's cuckoldry and old age, particularly in juxtaposing his bumbling, foolish nature against that of his young, pregnant, divinely elevated wife. The juxtaposition of the 'Unequal Couple' itself was a highly popular theme in late fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth-century prints and paintings, so we must look to this trend to understand the humor of these depictions of the Holy Family. But it should also be remembered that laughing at St. Joseph's imperfections returns us to his perfections—his old age and

purity, ensuring the purity of Mary, and his readiness to care for the Christ child—thus, the comic ultimately did not truly detract from the saint’s exemplarity.

The strength of late medieval bawdy humor, like that which appears in the Master of St. Barbara’s Adoration, in which Joseph drills persistently into the makings of a mousetrap (fig. 3.27), or the Holy Family at Work miniature of the Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 3.53), lay not in a situation’s sexualization but in the success of what Howard Bloch aptly defines as a linguistic substitution or deflection, in this case made visual. The erotic effect of medieval comic literature like the Old French *fabliaux* lay not within the act of sex itself—this rarely itself occupies more than one or two lines, while the tales do not concern themselves with varying types of sexual activity. Rather, the act of watching sex, or of displeasure in watching sex, in addition to imagining it, serves as the source of erotic stimulation.<sup>353</sup> Genitalia are frequently the subject of discussion, either directly or indirectly, as in the *Facetiae* of Poggio Bracciolini, first published in 1470 and probably written for the pleasure of intellectuals, since the basest of stories is written in good Latin. Most of the satire in his collection is directed toward corrupt clerics, stupid peasants, and female sexual insatiability. In one *facetia*, a virtuous woman makes a clever bawdy joke:

Matrona è nostris honestissima mulier, quaerenti tabellario. Nunquid literarum ad maritum dare uellet? aberet enim longius Reipublicae legatus. Quomodo inquit possum scribere, cum uir calamum detulerit secum, mihi pugillare uacuum reliquerit. Faceta atque honesta responsio.

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<sup>353</sup> R. Howard Bloch, “Modest Maids and Modified Nouns: Obscenity in the Fabliaux,” in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 293-307.

A very virtuous woman of my acquaintance was asked by a postal runner if she didn't want to give him a letter for her husband, who had been absent for a long time as an ambassador for Florence. She replied: "How can I write, when my husband has taken his pen away with him, and left my inkwell empty?" A witty and virtuous reply.<sup>354</sup>

The highest form of eroticism in the *fabliaux*, and in many other comic tales, tends to arise from "a profuse celebration of the body, and especially of the sexual organs. Indeed, the creators of the comic tale derive as much pleasure from the description of genitalia as they do from any sexual act."<sup>355</sup> The tales themselves contain "a good deal of transgressive joy in the use of words to describe body parts. Pleasure is to be derived, for example, from the repetition of forbidden words."<sup>356</sup> Most often, however, 'naughty' body parts are discussed using euphemisms that are quite frank, such as the "tool" worn by the apprentice of the blacksmith in "Du Fevre de Creeil." The blacksmith's erotic stimulation arises from imagining his wife's pleasure in his apprentice's penis:

Et pensa, se sa fame set,  
 Qui tel ostil mie ne het  
 Com Gautiers lor serjant porte,  
 Ele voudroit miex estre morte  
 Qu'ele ne s'en féist doner. (1.233)

[And he thought that if his wife knew,  
 His wife who hardly disliked such a tool  
 As Walter their apprentice wore,  
 She would prefer to die  
 Than not to have him give it to her.]<sup>357</sup>

<sup>354</sup> *Faceta responsio mulieris pugillare uacuum habentis*, 488; Barbara C. Bowen, ed., *One Hundred Renaissance Jokes: An Anthology* (Birmingham, AB: Summa Publications, 1988), 9.

<sup>355</sup> Bloch, "Obscenity in the Fabliaux," 297.

<sup>356</sup> Bloch, "Obscenity in the Fabliaux," 297-98.

<sup>357</sup> Quotation and translation from Bloch, "Obscenity in the Fabliaux," 297.

This trend toward “linguistic deflection...[which] both acknowledges a taboo and makes it more acceptable,”<sup>358</sup> excites the *fabliaux*’s characters by the “turning of language from a proper signification to an improper one or metaphoric one.”<sup>359</sup>

Wordplay on the sexual organs guides the *fabliaux*, with words like *osti* (instrument), *tuiel* (tool), *mailluel* (mallet), *bordoun* (staff), *bon bourdon* (good stick), and *fuisil* (twig) among the most frequently used words for the penis and *afère* (business), *bourse* (purse), *sac* (sack), *sachet* (little sack), *forel* (satchel), and *maillaus* (change purse) used for the testicles. The female genitalia are discussed as a fountain, a hole (*pertuis* or *treu*), a doorway, a ring, a wound (*plaie*), and a little mouse (*sorisete*).<sup>360</sup> The example of the purse or *bourse* as a metaphor for the male genitalia is particularly common, as in

“Boivin de Provins,” in which the *bourse* has a dual meaning:

Ses braies monte; s’a veü  
De sa borse les deux pendanz:  
“Hai las!” fet il, “chetiz dolanz,  
Tan tai hui fet male journée!  
Niece, ma borse m’est copée;  
Ceste fame le m’a trenchie.

He lifts his pants; he saw  
The two straps of his purse:  
“Alas,” he said, “woe is me.  
I’ve had such a bad day!  
Niece, my purse has been cut.  
This woman cut it off.”<sup>361</sup>

<sup>358</sup> Jürgen Beyer, “The Morality of the Amoral,” in *The Humor of the Fabliaux*, ed. Thomas D. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 36. Various other theories are discussed by Bloch, “Obscenity in the Fabliaux,” 300.

<sup>359</sup> Bloch, “Obscenity in the Fabliaux,” 300.

<sup>360</sup> Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 110-14; Roy J. Percy, “Obscene Diction in the Fabliaux,” 167; Bloch, “Obscenity in the Fabliaux,” 301.

<sup>361</sup> Quoted and translated in Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, 74.

The expressions *marteler* (to hammer), *percier* (to pierce or penetrate), and *ferir un cop* (strike a blow) are among the most frequent figurative expressions used in the discussion of sex. In the unequivocally erotic allegory of *La Saineresse*, a woman tells her husband of the “treatment” she received from one who he supposes to be a visiting blood-letter:

Par .iii. rebinées me prist,  
 Et à chascune fois m’assist  
 Sor mes rains deux de ses peçons,  
 Et me feroit uns cops si lons;  
 Toute me sui fet martirier,  
 Et si ne poi onques sainier.  
 Granz cops me feroit et sovent;  
 Morte fusse, mo nescient,  
 S’un trop bon oingnement ne fust.  
 L’oingnement issoit d’un tuiel,  
 Et si descendoit d’un forel  
 D’une pel moult noire et hideuse,  
 Mais moult par estoit savoreuse.

He made three attempts at me,  
 and each time he placed  
 two of his lancets on my thighs,  
 and struck me such a hard blow;  
 I surrendered myself completely to being tormented,  
 and yet I could not once let blood.  
 He struck me with great and frequent blows;  
 I would have been dead, it seems to me,  
 had it not been for an exceedingly fine ointment.  
 The ointment came from a pipe,  
 and ran down from a satchel  
 with a very black and hideous skin,  
 but it was extraordinarily delicious.<sup>362</sup>

The most common ‘linguistic deflections’ that permeate these tales were equally popular in the secular arts in the form of visual puns, which would have been easily

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<sup>362</sup> Quoted and translated in Percy, “Obscene Diction in the Fabliaux,” 179-80.

recognizable to one familiar with the bawdiness of late medieval humor. One of the most obvious meanings of the mouse for the late medieval viewer was sexual, a fact that Meyer Schapiro noted in his seminal article on the Mérode Altarpiece. Yet Schapiro attempts to reconcile his Augustinian and Gersonian theological interpretation of the mousetrap as the devil's bait, a metaphor for Joseph's role as Mary's husband, with the object's blatant sexual connotations in a manner that ultimately cleanses it of its full complexity. While rightfully noting the object's "double character," his appeal to the humanist language of Erasmus and Alciati, who focus upon the lascivious, destructive, and evil nature of the female vagina or womb, detracts from its obvious meaning to the most common viewer.<sup>363</sup> Joseph's use of his drill on a passive piece of wood (fig. 3.54), a blatant depiction of *percier* or screwing, draws attention to his chastity and impotency as an old man, but this is not incompatible with the theological meanings of the image as a whole. Joseph's cuckoldry is made manifest in the central scene (fig. 3.55), which depicts the moment of the Incarnation, with the nude Christ child with a cross on his shoulder floating through the unbroken glass window, symbolic of Mary herself, towards his Virgin mother. According to Aristotelian medieval medical theory, conception occurs the moment when the soul, the *anima*, given by the father, finds its corresponding body in the mother, and that is exactly what is depicted in this moment.<sup>364</sup> The freshly extinguished candle on the table magnifies the consummation of this marriage.<sup>365</sup> The

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<sup>363</sup> R. Riegler, "Maus," in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Bächtold-Stäubli (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934-35), VI: 31-59; Meyer Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli', the Symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece," *Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (Sept., 1945): 185-87.

<sup>364</sup> Martin Kemp, "'Il Concetto dell' Anima' in Leonardo's Early Skull Studies," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 115-134.

<sup>365</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934): 117-27.

other candle above the hearth, which remains lighted, perhaps refers to Mary's unconsummated marriage with her earthly husband in the right wing.

In the Master of St. Barbara Adoration (fig. 3.27), in which Joseph is quite clearly paralleled with the ass by his side, the old man's drilling away or pounding (*martier*) at a passive piece of wood, perhaps in an attempt to trap the elusive furry 'mouse', would have been understood as unquestionably funny. His attempts to make a mousetrap also appear in a Nativity in Berlin by a North Guelders or Cleves master (fig. 3.56),<sup>366</sup> in which Joseph is surrounded by his unused tools. Like the mouse/vagina trap, the 'tool' and 'stick' are readily taken up in images of Joseph the carpenter at work that also mock his lack of sexual prowess as an old, chaste cuckold living with his young, beautiful wife. In the "Repentance of Joseph's Doubt" scene of the *Hoogstraten Tableau* (fig. 3.57), Joseph kneels before his pregnant wife, surrounded by an overflowing pile of useless, oversized tools. His pouch, tools, knife, and sword are likewise presented rather limply or in amusing locations on Joseph's person in the Holy Family at Work scene of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 3.53), the depiction of Joseph going to work from the Master of the View of St. Gudule's *Life of Joseph* (fig. 3.58), and the *Doubt of Joseph* in the Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre Dame of Strasbourg (fig. 3.59).<sup>367</sup> The Strasbourg *Doubt of Joseph* is rather reminiscent of contemporary prints satirizing the young, sword-wielding dandy's advances on the chaste, knitting girl whose cat rests conspicuously near her ring-shaped basket of yarn. The *Doubt of Joseph* has been attributed recently to the Master of

<sup>366</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2: plate 56, n. 110.

<sup>367</sup> Louise O. Vasvari, "Joseph on the Margin: The Merode Tryptic and Medieval Spectacle," *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995): 164-89. Vasvari documents these images in her brief analysis of the humor evident within them, but she neglects to address the fact that they also document Joseph's centrality, religious importance, and veneration as his cult developed.

the Little Garden of Paradise, also known as the ‘Upper Rhenish Master,’ and the painter of the Frankfurt Städel’s charmingly diminutive garden scene of Mary and Jesus surrounded by saints and their various attributes (fig. 3.60). Humor and play are prevalent, and sometimes irreverent, throughout this tiny panel. St. George’s dragon lies prostrate and belly-up in the sun, while St. Michael’s chained-up ape/devil glares boldly at his master, the bored courtier, who chats lackadaisically with a third saint who nonchalantly wraps his arms around a tree (presumably Sebastian). The artist blends the humor and charm of more secularized gardens depicting the romping nobility (figs. 3.63 and 3.65) with a devotional scene of Mary and Christ in the *hortus conclusus*, a kind of fusion that exists in countless scenes of St. Joseph during this period, as this study argues. The link between the *Little Garden of Paradise* panel and the *Doubt of Joseph* is partially evident through the artist’s inclusion of a tiny potted bush reminiscent of a walled garden in the Strasbourg scene, certainly a symbol of (or play on) Mary’s virginity, but the similarities are most obvious in the panels’ fusion of sacred and secular themes.

Despite what we would consider the ‘crudeness’ of the humorous visual puns surrounding Joseph, the impotency of the saint could be simultaneously charming, as in a Holy Family engraving of c. 1508 by Lucas van Leyden (fig. 3.61)<sup>368</sup> in which he cares attentively to his wife while the stand-in for his manhood lies uselessly limp. The visual pun on Joseph’s ‘dagger and pouch’ is even more explicit in the charming Holy Family at Supper miniature from the Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 3.62). Satires on male sexuality that use the sword, dagger, purse, and tool to humorous effect appear frequently

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<sup>368</sup> Ellen S. Jacobowitz and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), n. 16.

in northern European art of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. Swords and daggers were common phallic symbols, especially in late fourteenth and fifteenth-century secular prints, in which they are often depicted dangling or shooting out from between a man's legs, like in Master E. S.'s *Love Garden with Chess Players* (fig. 3.63),<sup>369</sup> Dürer's *The Promenade* (fig. 3.64),<sup>370</sup> and the Master of the Love Gardens' *Large Love Garden* (fig. 3.65).<sup>371</sup> Manuscripts, paintings, sculptures, tapestries and murals, as well as marriage chests, ivories, and jewelry, all depict the medieval Garden of Love, one of the most popular themes in the secular arts as the setting for trysts in the chivalric romances, but also for the union between Bride and Bridegroom in the biblical Song of Songs. The erotics of love abound in these scenes and are emphasized in visual puns, particularly in the 'foreplay' of making garlands and playing games, but quite frequently in the presence of the Fool, identified by his characteristic hood with ass's ears. His genitalia are often exposed or emphasized by the placement of his dagger.<sup>372</sup> In Sebald Beham's *Buffoon and Two Bathing Women* (fig. 3.66) and the Master of the Banderoles' *The Fencing Room* (fig. 3.67), upon which Beham's scene is probably based, the pant-less figure of the Fool appears to have potency problems, which the surrounding women offer to fix by inviting him into the bath. The humor of the inscription in the Master of the Banderoles'

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<sup>369</sup> J.P. Filedt Kok, ed., *The Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet, or The Housebook Master, ca. 1470-1500* (Amsterdam: Rijksprentenkabinet/Rijksmuseum, 1985), fig. 58.

<sup>370</sup> Goddard, *The World in Miniature*, fig. 39.

<sup>371</sup> Kok, ed., *The Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet*, fig. 46.

<sup>372</sup> Keith P. F. Moxey, "Master E. S. and the Folly of Love," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 11, no. 3/4 (1980): 125-48.

scene is made visually apparent to even those who could not read the Latin in the satirical scene on the left of men who fence vigorously.<sup>373</sup>

The January miniature of the *Très Riches Heures* (fig. 3.68) is an image which Michael Camille describes as incomparably phallic, although, as we have seen in the prints, its visual ‘deflections’ or substitutions were common. In this case, the aristocratic viewer, the Duke of Berry, sits before his hearth amidst an array of fashionably dressed, young male attendants, whose tools and sacks are readily apparent and, in the case of the cup-bearer in the bottom left corner, rather erect. Camille notes the affinity between this particular character and Ganymede, Jupiter’s beautiful boy cup-bearer, a classical allusion that was popular in medieval poetry. The naked, androgynous image of Aquarius in the opposing upper right corner of the miniature, a personification that was synonymous with Ganymede in the Middle Ages, reinforces the image’s wit.<sup>374</sup>

The theme of the Unequal Couple, which gained particular popularity in northern Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, allowed for ample visual ingenuity in mocking the type of the old, impotent cuckold who marries or lusts after a young girl, and it is with many of these images that we may compare the humor of Joseph’s underused, or erotically placed, tools. The theme has ancient roots in Greek verse, but the Roman playwright Plautus (d. 184 B.C.) provides the oldest known written source. A number of

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<sup>373</sup> Goddard, *The World in Miniature*, 162-68, plate 44 and fig. 40.

<sup>374</sup> Like Gerhard Jaritz, Camille rightly calls attention to the scholarly neglect of the eroticized medieval male body. Michael Camille, “‘For Our Devotion and Pleasure’: The Sexual Objects of Jean, Duc de Berry,” in *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, ed. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 12-16; Gerhard Jaritz, “Young, Rich and Beautiful: The Visualizing of Male Beauty in the Middle Ages,” in *...The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Ful Many Ways...Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, eds. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebök (Budapest, 1999), 52-61.

fourteenth-century literary versions of the theme exist, including Boccaccio's *Ameto*, which tells of the young Agapes, whose marriage to a repulsive, old man, rife with snoring and impotent love-making, drives her to seek her pleasure with a handsome, younger man. But one of the most popular tales of the old cuckold and his young wife is that of the fruit tree and the blind man, which appears in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and at least two fifteenth-century German manuscripts. A German version from c. 1425-76 tells of how the old, blind man's young wife climbs into a fruit tree with her young, male friend, whom she enjoys while her husband wraps his arms around the trunk, thinking he is preventing the young man from climbing up. All of a sudden St. Peter and Jesus walk by and decide to restore the old man's sight, forcing the wife to explain herself. But the old cuckold's stupidity saves the day, since he gratefully accepts her tale that her only intention had been to restore her husband's vision.<sup>375</sup>

Many carnival plays, tales, and sayings, called *Spruch* in German, have addressed the theme of the old cuckold and fool, and both Erasmus in his *Praise of Folly* and Hans Sachs include sets of Unequal Couples. In Sachs's poem *Zweierlei Ungleiche Ehen*, written in 1533, a young woman encourages the lust of an old man in order to gain his money. He, like so many other old people in Sachs's work, wears the fool's cap with ass's ears to signify his stupidity. A drawing by Urs Graf, the *Lustful Old Fool and Woman with Baby: Allegory of Fiddling* (fig. 3.69),<sup>376</sup> depicts to particular effect the often recounted theme, with the old, pant-less fool with his hood and spoon a perfect

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<sup>375</sup> F. Holthausen, "Die Quellen von Chaucers 'Merchant's Tale'," *Englische Studien* 43 (1910-11): 170-76; Alison G. Stewart, *Unequal Lovers: A Study of Unequal Couples in Northern Art* (New York: Abaris Books, 1977), 23.

<sup>376</sup> Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*, fig. 2.

exaggeration of Joseph's most frequently depicted comical attributes. Another allusion to the old fool's impotency appears in the sagging purse in a woodcut of 1519 of an old man and a young wife (fig. 3.70),<sup>377</sup> designed by Hans Wandereisen, and in an etching of 1520 of an old fool embracing a young woman by Lucas van Leyden (fig. 3.71).<sup>378</sup> The affinities with Joseph's limp purse and dagger in Lucas' engraving of the Holy Family (fig. 3.61) are particularly notable, and all contrast clearly with more erect equipment of the foolish, young dandies in Dürer's illustration to Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff, Old Wife and a Young Fool* (fig. 3.72),<sup>379</sup> dated 1494, and Niklaus Manuel's drawing, *Old Woman, Young Man and a Demon* (fig. 3.73), of c. 1515.<sup>380</sup>

The erotic and bawdy not only abound in late medieval art and comic tales, but took center stage in the exuberance of religious civic celebrations. The *facetiae* of the Brabantine *landjuweel* discussed in chapter two were filled with familiar erotic puns like the sexual entreatment of male market-goers to unbutton their 'purses'. The bawdy was popular amongst even the most wealthy and educated classes, who participated as the writers, performers, and members of the rhetorical competition's audience.<sup>381</sup> In his study of the social significance of Shrovetide and carnival, what Sebastian Franck described as those "three mad days"<sup>382</sup> immediately before Lent, and their associated hilarities for the late medieval German city, Eckehard Simon employs accounts written by town authorities who tried to keep the revelry in bounds, as well as chroniclers,

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<sup>377</sup> Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*, fig. 3.

<sup>378</sup> Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*, fig. 39.

<sup>379</sup> Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*, fig. 32.

<sup>380</sup> Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*, 11-68, fig. 37.

<sup>381</sup> Honig, *Painting and the Market*, 60.

<sup>382</sup> *die drey unsinnige tag*; Simon, "Carnival Obscenities in German Towns," 194.

playwrights, and satirists. Such town-wide celebrations began in the thirteenth century and continued to increase in ‘madness’ until the Reformation, with town authorities intensively involved in promoting and sustaining them, insisting each year that the various guilds and performers participate, lest they be fined. The town government likewise financed the stage plays, dances, tournaments, and games, each a particular social expression of the city’s prosperity. Yet they also apparently could not control the widespread obscenities of revelers; the Nuremberg constabulary was ordered to prevent the public from employing “bawdy words and indecent gestures,”<sup>383</sup> while many cities, including Nuremberg, insisted that only the upper classes could wear masks to conceal their identity.<sup>384</sup>

Sebastian Franck’s *Weltbuch*, published in 1534 and based on the theologian Johannes Boemus’s *De omnium gentium ritibus*, which describes carnival behavior at Mainz, reveals the centrality of the bawdy and erotic in carnival’s ritual games and practices. Franck attests that people frequently “ran through the streets naked, completely bare, without any shame.”<sup>385</sup> Revelers were also wont to carry around a likeness of their genitalia, while in 1492 in Nördlingen, Hanns Geyr of Kemnaten and Michel Geissler of Augsburg costumed themselves, one cross-dressing as a woman, and

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<sup>383</sup> *unczymliche wort und unordeliche geperde*; Bayerisches Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Rep. 60a: Verlässe des Inneren Rates (Ratsverlässe), no. 113, fol. 12v; Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 196.

<sup>384</sup> Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 196.

<sup>385</sup> *etlich lauffend nackend on alle scham gar entplösst durch die statt*; Sebastian Franck, *Weltbuoch: Spiegel und bildniss des gantzen erdtbodens von Sebastiano Franco Wördens: in vier bücher* (Tübingen, 1534), fol. 131 v; Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 198.

proceeded through the city streets performing “unchaste acts in front of the people.”<sup>386</sup> Outside of carnival, this was considered a very severe offense. In 1348, the Nuremberg council exiled Ulrich the purse-maker for five years for exposing his “tool” (*geschirr*) to some ladies.<sup>387</sup> Apparently just as common were the practices of cross-dressing, dressing as old people, or wearing clothes backwards or upside-down. An ordinance of the Goslar council in 1450 insisted that “no man is to dance in a woman’s dress and no woman in a man’s outfit.”<sup>388</sup> In 1482, the Franciscans of Ulm apparently also ran about the streets in womens’ clothing during Shrovetide. Like exposing oneself in public, cross-dressing was considered a severe infraction outside of carnival, particularly for women.

Throughout all of these activities and rituals, and their underlying strand of social inversion, obscene behavior—in various forms including lewd behavior and gluttonous eating and drinking—was at the forefront of Shrovetide. But despite Bakhtin’s desire to link carnival revelry to the folk, exclusive of the town authorities, church and council played an integral role, reminding the guilds each year of their respective roles in the upcoming carnival days, thus supporting a not-so-separate framework for societal inversion and release. Religious plays, inclusive of lewd behavior, occupied central stage, while these and other performances conveyed relevant political and moral

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<sup>386</sup> Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 200; Hans Moser, “Zur Geschichte der Maske in Bayern,” in *Masken in Mitteleuropa. Volkskundliche Beiträge zur europäische Maskenforschung*, ed. Leopold Schmidt (Vienna: Verein für Volkskunde, 1955), 114.

<sup>387</sup> Werner Schultheiss, ed., *Die Acht-, Verbots- und Fehdebücher Nürnbergs von 1285-1400* (Nuremberg: Nuremberg City Council, 1960), 86; Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 201.

<sup>388</sup> Uvo Hölscher, “Goslarsche Ratsverordnungen aus dem 15. Jahrhundert,” *Zeitschrift des Harz-Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 42 (1909): 66; Simon, “Carnival Obscenities in German Towns,” 207-8.

messages to their audience.<sup>389</sup> Lübeck's wealthy merchant class occupied the center of carnival dancing in the streets, their abundance attesting to the city's past and future prosperity. Hilarious, obscene, and bawdy behavior during carnival was thus part of the city's continuous religious and civic functioning and prosperity.

Bawdy jokes were the norm in late medieval humor, transcending class distinctions and boundaries between secular and sacred, which, as we now know, did not really exist during this period. Just as Joseph's impotent hardware and cuckoldry could be made funny by an artist familiar with the satirical arts, so could the secular iconography of the Love Garden infiltrate fifteenth and sixteenth-century Flemish *Andachtsbilder* of the Virgin and Child, as Reindert Falkenburg has shown. Falkenburg interprets the appearance c. 1500 in devotional painting of the table or surface laden with fruit (fig. 3.74),<sup>390</sup> an iconographic element common to secular, courtly images of the Garden of Love, as "a consequence of the traditional interplay between depictions of profane and religious gardens, as a result of the association of the *hortus conclusis* in the Song of Songs with a Garden of Love." Rupert of Deutz (before 1070-1129) and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) in his influential sermons on the Song of Songs interpreted Christ and the Virgin, personified as *Ecclesia*, allegorically as the Song of Songs' Bride and Bridegroom, who savor their union and consumption of each other's sweetness in the *hortus conclusis*. Therefore:

By analogy with the secular Garden of Love iconography the table laid with fruit associates fruit consumption with the sweet play of lovers and underlines the

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<sup>389</sup> William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 120-40; Honig, *Painting and the Market*, 60-68.

<sup>390</sup> John Oliver Hand, *Joos Van Cleve* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), fig. 51.

reference to the enjoyment, the ‘tasting’ of bridal love. On the other hand, it serves as a *prie-dieu*, and focuses the attention of the viewer on prayer and meditation: spiritual activities which to our modern sense of religious decorum have nothing in common with the sensual enjoyment of ‘tasting’ love.<sup>391</sup>

We are reminded again of the wide gulf between the modern and late medieval understanding of the relationship between what we would consider secular concerns, like sexuality, and the sacred, a good thing to consider in an encounter with a hilariously lewd, yet virtuous, medieval depiction of St. Joseph.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The iconographic trends in private devotional and public images of St. Joseph discussed in this chapter may be explained not only with recourse to the functional roles of humor. I suggest that their development and popularity had much to do with the nature of late medieval religious practices. Even the most public form of religious image, the altarpiece, was typically commissioned by a member of the laity, and decorated with respect to the laity’s salvation and devotional concerns, despite the piece’s liturgical function as a prop for the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>392</sup> Thus, even more secularized, comical iconography relevant to Joseph would not be out of place on an altarpiece, whether in a parish church or cathedral. Rather than focusing specifically upon symbolism rooted in the theological, the late medieval religious experience of images hinged upon a desire to commune with directly and respond to Christ and the saints in

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<sup>391</sup> Reindert Leonard Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 15.

<sup>392</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

their most humanized form. Northern painting was admired by the Italians particularly for its ability to render the intimate details of an emotional response, as an encouragement for the viewer's own visceral experience of the depicted subject. What Sixten Ringbom terms the 'empathic approach' to religion is evident in late fourteenth and fifteenth-century painting's increased attention to anecdotal detail, illusionism, and naturalism. Like the *Vita Christi* literature that described the intimate details of Christ's human life, and encouraged the reader to experience them for himself, the viewer of religious images desired to immerse himself in the depicted event, surrounded by Christ's life, family, and sufferings. Humanization of Christ and the saints in literature and art was key to this accessibility for the devotee.<sup>393</sup> St. Joseph's humanization in art, to the point of allowing the comedy of his virtues and faults to arise for the artist and beholder, is therefore perfectly symptomatic of this larger trend in late medieval devotional practices. Humor and the sacred intertwined in the margins and *bas-de-pages* of Books of Hours and Psalters and in the carvings of cathedrals, while the end of the fifteenth century particularly saw the increasing interdependence of sacred and secular art. Humor's relevance to Joseph's veneration was therefore entirely appropriate to the time and, I suggest, functioned much like illusionism in northern painting, in that it served to familiarize the saint to the viewer and devotee desiring to experience the divine in human terms. It cannot be overstated that the presentation of Joseph's humor and faults in painting arose from his biblical virtues that were taken as truths—his chastity, old age,

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<sup>393</sup> See chapter one for an analysis of late medieval devotional practices and their relationship to images and texts. Sixten Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 12; James H. Marrow, "Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Later Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 16, no. 2/3 (1986): 156-65.

and care for the Son of God. Jokes about his cuckoldry and bumbling not only introduced socially binding mirth for those doing the laughing. They provided an affective pathway to the virtues of Christ's foster-father and family, encouraging an unequivocally tangible experience of Christ's life that went beyond theology.

## CHAPTER 4: The Miserly Saint

### 4.1 *The Middle Class pater familias*

Among fifteenth-century theologians, Saint Joseph became closely associated with the humble poor and working classes in a positive sense, supported by the ideals of Franciscanism and the Brethren of the Common Life, and reflected in the theological writings of Jean Gerson and Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, who relied upon the earlier devotion to the saint of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). In his *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Bernard emphasized Joseph's humility as complementary to that of his wife, which was the reason for her honor as mother of the Redeemer. The notion of humility as the remedy for man's pride through the Savior's human birth, as well as theological fascination with the sacrality of the poor and humble, is correlated with an increase in depictions of Joseph as a workingman or as counterpart to the shepherds in scenes of the Adoration of the Shepherds (fig. 4.1).

But a St. Joseph of extraordinary relevance to contemporary societal concerns likewise grew from the rising centrality of the nuclear family and responsible *pater familias* in the increasingly urbanized market economy of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century town, with its growing lay middle class with economic power and political clout, and the resultant waning of clerical power. Jean Gerson believed St. Joseph to be the epitome of responsibility as head of his household, and thus appealed to him, as well as his Holy Family, as a model for lay families in their daily dealings with the social and economic pressures of life. Joseph himself, directed by his dreams, led the flight of the Holy Family from the danger of Herod, and afterward, Joseph's diligence as a carpenter

allowed him to successfully provide for the mother and child. Gerson insisted that instead of a doddering old man, Joseph was a strong, handsome man of about thirty-six when he married Mary, who was about thirteen or fourteen. He viewed Jesus and Mary as subject to Joseph, who adopted a God-given role analogous to the head of the Church. The role extended to heaven as well, according to Pierre d'Ailly, as one of Joseph's twelve privileges.<sup>394</sup> At the Council of Constance, Gerson implored the Church Fathers to officially establish the feast of St. Joseph, and to invoke him in prayers for the reunification of the Church after the Western Schism.<sup>395</sup>

According to Sheila Schwartz, based upon the writings of the theologians Christian of Stavelot (mid-ninth century) and Paschasius Radbertus (785-865), depictions of Joseph placing the Magi's gold into the family chest can be understood to refer to his privileged role as 'treasurer' of the family, and thus of the royal Davidic line of Christ (figs. 4.2).<sup>396</sup> In his sermon on St. Joseph, St. Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) emphasized the saint's role as the wise manager of his family's fortunes, and thus as a model of deportment for real fathers. Nevertheless, satirizations of Joseph as "miserly keeper of the goods"<sup>397</sup> are also prevalent in fifteenth-century art (figs. 4.3 and 4.4).<sup>398</sup>

Chapter three suggested that the laughter which Joseph elicited as a doddering old

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<sup>394</sup> Anthony-Joseph Patrignani, *A Manual of Practical Devotion to the Glorious Patriarch St. Joseph* (1865; Rockford: Tan Books, 1982), 44.

<sup>395</sup> Brian Patrick McGuire, "Becoming a Father and a Husband: St. Joseph in Bernard of Clairvaux and Jean Gerson," *Joseph of Nazareth through the Centuries*, ed. Joseph F. Chorpeneing, O.S.F.S. (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's Press, 2011), 49-61.

<sup>396</sup> Sheila Schwartz, "The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt," (PhD diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1975), 74; Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), II:XI.39 and XI.37.

<sup>397</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1: 227.

<sup>398</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: XI.38.

cuckold was in fact rooted in the reinforcement of socially advantageous values emphasizing the importance of fidelity and childcare for actual fathers. Depictions that render Joseph as the family treasurer, often bordering on miserous keeper of material goods, may be understood similarly, as humorous, yet they are simultaneously proponents of successful behavior in an early modern urban economic environment.

The concepts of exemplarity and baseness in the early modern period are perhaps not as inherently polarized as one might think. If we try to understand the iconography of St. Joseph as embodying the actual concerns of his viewers, we can perceive him as a reflection of prevailing tensions between self and other in a time of flux, particularly for the laity, socially and economically. Joseph's depicted role as caretaker and provider for his family provided a goal for the Christian family, but sometimes also took on the anxieties of a changing social order as well. The prevalence of the nuclear family in a newly urbanized society—indeed its importance for the financial stability of the new money economy—became linked to individual responsibility, particularly for the *pater familias*, as loyal father, teacher, provider, and treasurer. Chapters two and three of this study focused on Joseph as comically befuddled provider and loyal, chaste husband. This chapter addresses an imagery that likewise edifies, while embodying Christian anxieties rooted in the origin of the money economy during the twelfth century. A strain of images depicting Joseph as dually responsible treasurer and obsessive keeper of the Magi's gifts at once reflects contemporary sermons on the importance of the lay father as family accountant, as well as anxieties regarding personal profit in the shadow of an earlier medieval worldview of attention to goods as the source of corruption. Joseph's ties to the

Old Law and earlier medieval images highlighting his ‘Jewishness’ are not forgotten by early modern artists, and the saint’s early modern iconography as keeper of the treasure is sometimes clearly tied to depictions of Avarice, a Christian personification closely linked with the infamous Judas Iscariot and medieval conceptions of the ‘miserly Jew’. Yet these ties do not render Joseph into an evil foil. It is my contention that his audiences were not so unilateral in their assignments of meaning. Late medieval artists, their patrons, and their viewers were concerned with spiritual edification, but in a period of socio-economic flux, older semiotics of clear-cut antagonism towards personal profit could no longer function. Therefore, what we today perceive as ambiguity in the imagery of St. Joseph is perhaps more akin to a spectrum of arrayed ideals and concerns regarding the function of the *pater familias* in the late medieval urban money economy.

#### **4.2 *Treasurer or Miser?***

Erwin Panofsky describes Joseph in the Adoration scene of Meister Francke’s St. Thomas Altarpiece of 1424 (fig. 4.2) as “...an amiable caricature of the Philistine’s thrift and caution...[he] confiscates the precious gifts for which, he thinks, the Infant Jesus would have little use and which would be safer in the family’s traveling chest.”<sup>399</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff supports this view, adding, “The deprecation is, I suggest, intensified because of Joseph’s placement on the stool, in a dorsal position—scarcely an image to be venerated.”<sup>400</sup> Joseph’s portrayal as “miserly keeper of the goods” is in fact widespread

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<sup>399</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1:70.

<sup>400</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:227.

in art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as in Master E. S.'s engraving of the mid-fifteenth century (fig. 4.3), and in an epitaph painting for the Nuremberg patrician Clara Imhoff (fig. 4.4), in which Joseph is shown in the background, reaching into the family chest. In an Adoration of the Magi from the Preetz Altarpiece (fig. 4.5), a work by a pupil of Meister Francke dated to c. 1435, Joseph is much smaller in size than the rest of his cohort, placed again with his back to the viewer, while he packs away the treasure into his chest. Similarly, an Adoration of the Magi from the central Rhineland, dated to c. 1440, depicts a small, marginalized Joseph pointing to the treasure and hovering nearby the chest (fig. 4.6), while a c. 1460 carved altarpiece from Erfurt depicts a Joseph poking his hand into a gilded box of gold coins (fig. 4.7). This was clearly once a popular subject, yet although deprecatory, Joseph's representation is not necessarily "scarcely an image to be venerated," as Mellinkoff insists. As these were representations of a beloved saint of the laity, they should perhaps be understood as rather more nuanced, according Joseph the roles of both comical miser and responsible caretaker at once.

In contrast to the assertions of Panofsky and Mellinkoff, Sheila Schwartz argues that Joseph's role as "keeper of the Child's treasure"<sup>401</sup> in such scenes is solely indicative of his importance. In accordance with the theologians Christian of Stavelot and Paschasius Radbertus, the offering of gold to the infant Jesus in scenes of the Adoration of the Magi should be interpreted as a reminder of the child's royal lineage. As the keeper of this gold in Meister Francke's Adoration scene (fig. 4.2), Joseph is therefore

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<sup>401</sup> Sheila Schwartz, "The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt," (PhD diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1975), 74.

the guardian of the Davidic line (and ultimately Jesus), and the devoted helpmate of Mary.<sup>402</sup>

While this line of theology stood behind late medieval preaching on the admirable quality of St. Joseph as responsible financial manager of his family's wealth, which buttressed his importance as a model for the late medieval *pater familias*, those who saw or owned images that depicted the saint as preoccupied with material goods were probably all familiar with an extensive visual history that strongly associated worldly wealth with moral depravity. As Michael Camille correctly notes, "There were two basic pictorial conventions for showing a person's ownership of things in the Middle Ages. The first had negative connotations and shows a figure who places things in a chest, hiding them, as it were, from public view as personal possessions."<sup>403</sup> The vice of Avarice is typically shown in this way, as on the entrance portals of the cathedrals of Chartres and Amiens (figs. 4.8 and 4.9). The second pictorial convention "...is used to suggest items for display in a public rather than a private context and presents them hanging on a rail,"<sup>404</sup> as in the *Manesse Codex* of c. 1300 (fig. 4.10).

The image of Avarice storing her goods in an open chest was, we can assume, well-known, if it once appeared in such a prominent position on the entrance portals of Gothic cathedrals. Its affinity with Joseph's imagery as keeper of the goods is undeniable, yet we should not assume that because of this, Joseph was intended to be portrayed in a solely derogatory fashion, as Panofsky and Mellinkoff suggest. But neither was this

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<sup>402</sup> Gérard Mercier, "Saint Joseph dans les commentaires bibliques et les homélieures du IXe siècle," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 19 (1971): 232-53.

<sup>403</sup> Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1998), 52.

<sup>404</sup> Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 53.

imagery understood to be completely praiseworthy in its strong connotations of worldliness. Rather, like the images of Joseph discussed in chapter three, the materialistic, ‘burgher’ Joseph was probably intended to poke fun at the saint’s well-known affinity for the earthly cares of the Holy Family. This kind of joke could have been useful in such late medieval characterizations of the saint in order to bridge the gap between his new and very necessary, functional role as responsible financial manager and the negative associations of his focus on material wealth. Images like the Adoration scene from the Blankenberch Retable of c. 1430/40 (fig. 4.11), like the treasure chest imagery, provide examples of charmingly humorous characterizations of the saint as keeper of the treasure and perplexed head of the household. In such works, Joseph is again the smallest figure present and barred from the rest of the Adoration figures by some sort of barrier. He receives the Magus’s precious gift, holds the treasure, or glances toward it with a longing look of desire or incredulity. Images in which Joseph holds the treasure himself are not unlike depictions of Avarice in German prints as well (fig. 4.12).<sup>405</sup> Not only is Joseph marginalized through his small size and partition from the main scene, but he is often depicted as darker in complexion than the three holy figures from Europe (excluding Balthasar and Caspar, from Africa and Asia respectively), a significant touch that can be tied to artistic examples of derision of ‘the boor’ or ‘the peasant,’ discussed in chapter three. These characterizations can be seen in the Adoration scenes from the Blankenberch Retable (fig. 4.11), an altarpiece dating to c. 1420 in Sankt Maria zur Wiese, Soest (fig. 4.13), a south Netherlandish triptych of c. 1410-20 (fig.

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<sup>405</sup> David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

4.14), and the Adoration from Braunfels (fig. 4.6). Bewildered or desirous Josephs continued to be popular from the fourteenth through the early fifteenth centuries. In an Adoration by Meister Arnt von Kalkar and Zwolle of the lower Rhine (fig. 4.15), a seemingly perplexed Joseph holds the treasure and stands away from the main scene, but close to the braying donkey, while an Adoration by the Master of the Holy Kinship (the Elder), an Infancy Altarpiece of 1445 by Dieric Bouts, and a small altarpiece from Mecheln each portray a Joseph overwhelmed by and ogling the lavish gifts (figs. 4.16-4.18). The ogling gets humorously worse in commissions from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as in two Cologne Adorations, one from c. 1480/90 by the Meister der Verherrlichung Mariens (fig. 4.19) and a second from c. 1515-20 by Bartholomäus Bruyn the Elder (figs. 4.20 and 4.21), as well as in a Swabian Adoration of the Kings from c. 1490 (fig. 4.22) and in a Würzburg Adoration of the Kings from c. 1480/90 (fig. 4.23), in which once again Joseph, the ass, and the ox are the marginalized companions. The increased production of scenes of the Adoration of the Magi by Antwerp artists during the early sixteenth century likewise propagated the ‘ogling Joseph’ motif, discussed further below.

Late medieval images of wealth and preoccupation with worldly goods were most frequently tied to contemporary anti-Semitism, and especially to the evils associated with misery and lending money at interest. Jews, in particular, were often represented as the embodiment of corruption because of their professional associations with money. In the medieval period, Jewish families tended to gravitate towards professions like commerce, medicine, and law because of their exclusion from the guilds of skilled laborers. Owning

land was made quite difficult by the Christian hegemony, with the death of the Jewish owner often resulting in the property being taken from his heirs. Jewish involvement in money lending began after the year 1000: “As the economy heated up...the expansion required capital in the form of loans. Christians were prohibited from lending at interest...The Jews were also prohibited from taking interest from other Jews, but they were not enjoined from lending at interest to non-Jews.”<sup>406</sup> Christian envy towards such financial profit also arose from Jewish exemption from tithing to the Church. In time, the Church became increasingly intolerant of the practice of lending money at interest and equated it with the mortal sin of avarice, while civil rights were gradually taken away from the Jewish population.<sup>407</sup>

In the Middle Ages, usury, the practice of lending money at interest, was thought to constitute a socially disruptive ‘sin against nature’ primarily because it allowed the unnatural growth of money through interest. The writings of Dante Alighieri, Peter the Chanter (late 12<sup>th</sup> century), Robert of Courçon (d. 1219), and Thomas of Chiobham (d. 1230s) describe usury as a practice so morally depraved that it was considered to be a ‘sin against nature’ worse than lusty transgressions, both of same and opposite sex; Peter, Robert, and Thomas all link prostitution with usury.<sup>408</sup> Since the ninth century, the Jewish

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<sup>406</sup> Henry N. Claman, *Jewish Images in the Christian Church: Art as the Mirror of the Jewish-Christian Conflict, 200-1250 C.E.* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 120.

<sup>407</sup> Claman, *Jewish Images in the Christian Church*, 121; James Parkes, *The Jew in the Medieval Community* (London: Soncino Press, 1938).

<sup>408</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Summa*, par. 147, II, 351; Robert of Courçon, *Summa*, XX, 10-11; Thomas of Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, 509; See Jacques Le Goff, “The Usurer and Purgatory,” in *The Dawn of Modern Banking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 35; Jacques Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages*, trans. Patricia Ranum (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 50; Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona, *The Usurer’s Heart: Giotto, Enrico Scrovegni, and the Arena Chapel in Padua* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 59, 67-68; In his *Inferno*, Dante allocates those who committed male-male lust to the seventh circle of the violent, almost at the bottom of

religion had been traditionally represented by the female figure of *Synagoga* in Crucifixion scenes.<sup>409</sup> Christian medieval depictions of Jews and Jewishness developed to include not just the conquered *Synagoga* (fig. 4.24), but the damned Jewish community demarcated by their Phrygian cap-like hats (fig. 4.25)<sup>410</sup> and yellow rings, as well as hooked noses in some cases. The Christian idea of the Jewish usurer and miser was also frequently associated with the biblical traitor Judas Iscariot. Links between Judas and the Jews appear in the Gospel of John, in which the author portrays Judas as the disciples' corrupt treasurer. The image of Judas as the evil holder of the moneybags is linked to the devil in the Gospels of Luke (22:3) and John (6:70; 13:2 and 27), and synagogue and devil are linked in the Book of Revelation (2:9 and 3:9). In European Passion Plays, Judas is portrayed as a Jew and a moneylender and linked to the devil. Medieval depictions of Judas often bear the same physiognomic traits that stereotypes of 'the Jew' also have, such as the elongated nose.<sup>411</sup>

Regardless of dress and physiognomy, the most common attribute of caricatures of 'the Jew' in literature and art is his occupation with money and earthly goods, particularly in early modern prints, which had a wide following among the burgher

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hell. See Dante, *Inferno* cantos 14-16; Laurence Binyon, trans., *The Divine Comedy*, in *The Portable Dante*, ed. Paolo Milano (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 73-89. However, these men are also grouped with others who committed violence 'against nature,' including usurers, particularly Enrico Scrovegni's father, Reginaldo. Notably, Dante groups sodomites who have made atonement in *Purgatory* with the other 'unnatural' sins of lust, at the level just beneath redemption and salvation. See Dante, *Purgatorio* canto 26; Binyon, trans., *The Divine Comedy*, 321-26.

<sup>409</sup> Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 156; Adam S. Cohen, *The Uta Codex: Art, Philosophy, and Reform in Eleventh-Century Germany* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 57.

<sup>410</sup> Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1996), plate 13.

<sup>411</sup> Hugh Fogelman, "Judas-Jew-Satan-Devil," [http://jdstone.org/cr/files/judas\\_jew\\_satan\\_devil\\_1.html](http://jdstone.org/cr/files/judas_jew_satan_devil_1.html), accessed 11/6/14.

classes. In a German single-leaf woodblock print (fig. 4.26),<sup>412</sup> the inscription, ‘The Jew calculates night and day how to cheat the Christians’, underlies an image of a Jewish household accepting pledges and calculating the holdings acquired, presumably from charging excessive interest. A woodcut from the 1491 poem *Jüdischer Wucher*, published in Nuremberg by Hans Folz, presents a similar scene of a Jewish pawnbroker too busy counting his money to engage fully with the task of receiving further pledges (fig. 4.27).<sup>413</sup> Like other derided figures including the peasantry, the Jew was also frequently affiliated with farm animals, specifically the pig; a relief on a southern buttress from Regensburg cathedral depicts an allegory of gluttony in which a large sow suckles two young Jews like piglets (fig. 4.28).<sup>414</sup>

The humor of Joseph’s ‘avaricious’ depictions probably also arose from this tradition of derision and caricature. But the saint’s Jewishness was likewise important as a typological statement of his ties to the Old Law, biblically fulfilled by the birth of Jesus and the arrival of the New Law. The most obvious way to cast Joseph as a Jew was to depict him with a Jew’s hat (fig. 4.29).<sup>415</sup> Although frequently pointed, the style of hat also varied, sometimes becoming more turban- or hood-like, sometimes more rounded with a narrow brim. Mellinkoff’s images of typical Jews’ hats are culled from various visual examples of the twelfth through fifteenth centuries.<sup>416</sup> But the inclusion of a Jews’

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<sup>412</sup> Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art*, 312, n. 7.

<sup>413</sup> Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art*, 310, n. 5.

<sup>414</sup> Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art*, 333, n. 6.

<sup>415</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Others in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2: III.89.

<sup>416</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:62.

hat in an image of Joseph did not render it exclusively derogatory,<sup>417</sup> and neither did the exclusion of a halo. Mellinkoff suggests that adding a halo to Joseph's Jew's hat might have been necessary to establish a difference from the evil typically associated with Jewishness.<sup>418</sup> But this seems simplistic, not to mention it assumes that late medieval audiences were incapable of understanding fully the nuances of their religious imagery, a myth that scholars like Carol Purtle have convincingly disproved.<sup>419</sup> Jewish hats without halos appear in late medieval images of holy figures that Mellinkoff herself includes in her collection, as in a Deposition scene (fig. 4.30) from the Holkham Bible of c. 1325-30.<sup>420</sup> In Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of c. 1505, the Madonna with Joseph and Five Angels (fig. 4.31), no one is given a halo.<sup>421</sup>

The iconography of the vice of Avarice was, however, widely understood to be affiliated with evil, and the 'avaricious Jew' was a popular figure for Christian contempt. Yet one should not assume that Joseph's greedy behavior in the aforementioned images consigned him to pure derision among contemporary audiences. As a Christian saint of high popularity in the late Middle Ages, such images could not have been exclusively negative, and were never entirely derogatory. Depictions of the saint ogling the Magi's precious gifts or storing them away into the family's chest still connoted a preoccupation with worldly wealth that had long been attached to the symbolism of avarice, but the iconography was safely distanced enough from that of the condemned, who often clutch

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<sup>417</sup> Jacqueline E. Jung, "The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen," *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*, ed. Mitchell B. Merback (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151.

<sup>418</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:80.

<sup>419</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>420</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: III.94.

<sup>421</sup> Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2: III.96.

their purses as they are led by demons to the torments of Hell (fig. 4.32).<sup>422</sup> As discussed above, it seems probable that late medieval images of Joseph could present a spectrum of ideals and concerns regarding the function of the *pater familias* in the late medieval urban money economy. We can perceive this kind of spectrum as well in late medieval Jewish imagery, in which an “iconography of rejection”<sup>423</sup> prevalent in earlier medieval depictions of Jewishness sometimes seems to disappear entirely. In the Passion sequence of the thirteenth-century west choir screen of the Naumburg Cathedral, for example, the bearded Chief Priest’s lack of a mustache is the only remaining identifier of his Jewishness, while Judas is depicted as tall and attractive, much like the other apostles, and lacks his typical moneybag. This cycle displays what Jacqueline Jung describes as a “...refusal to cast the Jews consistently and unambiguously as malevolent ‘others’,”<sup>424</sup> in which the Jewish characters of the Passion “conduct themselves according to the legal conventions and behavioral codes of thirteenth-century Saxon laypeople.”<sup>425</sup> This strategy, she argues, critiques not just the Jewry, but also the main audience of the choir screen reliefs, the Christian laity. She writes, “...rather than acting as demonizing devices aimed at channeling fear and hostility onto a collective religious ‘other,’ the depictions of Jews at Naumburg were designed so as to compel beholders to turn scrutiny

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<sup>422</sup> Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art*, plate 13.

<sup>423</sup> Debra Hassig, “The Iconography of Rejection: Jews and Other Monstrous Races,” in *Image and Belief: Studies in Celebration of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25-46; Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 145-178.

<sup>424</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 148.

<sup>425</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 148.

back upon the self.”<sup>426</sup> This choice, she believes, is surprising and singular, and so she posits that the choir’s patron, Bishop Dietrich II von Wettin (acting 1242-72), chose to de-emphasize the antagonism of the Jewish characters because he “...depended on the financial resources of local Jews for the construction of his church and the defense of his territory against the heavy-handed incursions of his half-brother, Margrave Henry the Illustrious of Meissen (1218-88).”<sup>427</sup> But this cycle was not intended to be viewed by Jews. Her more convincing hypothesis, that such similarities between Christian and Jewish characters “make plain that the line between good and bad social behavior was understood to be a fine one,”<sup>428</sup> highlights the potency of the artist’s choices and the screen’s message in moving beyond simple anti-Judaism: “culpability rests on the deeds and motivations of individual agents acting within a highly structured world.”<sup>429</sup>

I believe that the ambiguities between Christian and Jew in the Naumburg choir screen are perhaps not so singular as Jung suggests, particularly among artistic examples of the two following centuries. Joseph’s hoarding of the goods in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century examples should probably be understood to poke fun at miserly practices, likely associated with the socially constructed Christian ideological quality of Jewishness. But while such ideology was still rooted in a past that decried the moral evils of concerning oneself with personal profit, these images were created during the

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<sup>426</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 149.

<sup>427</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 148.

<sup>428</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 165.

<sup>429</sup> Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” 165.

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when people were also adjusting to the new moralities of the growing urban market economies. Elizabeth Honig's study, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*, argues that:

...in Antwerp at least, one of the greatest challenges to the early modern mentality was coming to terms with the unruly growth of a market economy—with the beginnings of capitalist social and economic organization, with the reconciliation of new market-generated values and older social and moral values, and with the function of the commodity as object of desire and problematic container of value.<sup>430</sup>

Antwerp was one of the leading cities of trade and production during the early sixteenth century, the moment when an early form of capitalism was flourishing as the economy's dominant structure of organization.<sup>431</sup> For “people whose ways of thinking had been shaped by centuries of medieval social economy, the new phenomena were...mysterious and even threatening, clashing with deeply held moral standards.”<sup>432</sup> The merchant, for example, only fit into traditional medieval ideas of economic and social responsibility (which were closely linked) if his interests focused on mutual aid and brotherly love, excluding “personal initiative and acquisitiveness.”<sup>433</sup> Personal profit against the well-being of one's “brothers,” a medieval concept of family that included one's fellow Christians, was a grave sin under the medieval social order, forbidden by the Bible (Deut. 23: 19-20). But by the seventeenth century, the idea of the modern family

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<sup>430</sup> Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) ix.

<sup>431</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 77.

<sup>432</sup> Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*, 6.

<sup>433</sup> Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*, 6.

unit had been codified, and those outside of it—one's neighbors, one's friends—were more akin to “strangers,” against whom personal profit was more acceptable.<sup>434</sup>

The changing social and economic order of early modern towns unquestionably facilitated the birth of the idea of the nuclear family.<sup>435</sup> Devotional interest in the immediate and extended family of Christ, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, also increased as the modern notion of the family structure evolved. John Hand associates the growing interest in Jesus' family with “the popularity of the cult and veneration of Saint Anne, the growing debate over the doctrine of the immaculate conception of her daughter, the Virgin Mary, and a shift in the status of Joseph.”<sup>436</sup> All are unquestionably related, but the rapidly changing social climate of northern Europe seemingly manifested itself most clearly in the varying nature of St. Joseph's iconography.

In the late medieval period, the church's established hierarchy ranking celibacy above marriage came under attack by those who were angered by the moral lapses of monks and nuns, who hypocritically believed themselves superior to the married laity, while having children of their own. This fifteenth and sixteenth-century phenomenon foreshadowed the Reformation and its ideology of the superiority of the family unit over celibate life, as the traditional monastic orders tried unsuccessfully to tighten their ranks

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<sup>434</sup> Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*, 8; Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury From Tribal Brotherhood To Universal Otherhood*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

<sup>435</sup> David Herlihy, "The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, Sentiment," *Journal of Family History*, VIII (1983): 116-130.

<sup>436</sup> John Oliver Hand, *Joos van Cleve: The Complete Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 49.

and reaffirm their obedience to their Rule.<sup>437</sup> Pamela Sheingorn associates this change with the widespread appearance of altarpieces and stained glass windows depicting the Holy Kinship, particularly in parish churches. In many altarpieces, the Holy Kinship is divided into smaller scenes representing nuclear units, as works that "...were certainly meant to champion marriage and the family and to implicitly challenge the superiority of celibacy and the convent."<sup>438</sup> Citing the work of Lawrence Stone, who describes the late medieval decline of more extensive networks of kinship and clientage that dominated the feudal era and their replacement with the nuclear family unit in the early modern period, Sheingorn rightly accords the popularity of images of the nuclear families of Jesus' line to their reflection of contemporary family values in which authority belonged exclusively to the lay father. Yet I disagree with Sheingorn's assertion that as holy fathers rose in status during the late Middle Ages, they did so "...at the expense of holy mothers."<sup>439</sup> St. Joseph's rise in status, at least, was a complex one. While it is true that "*theological* attention to Joseph in the course of the fifteenth century resulted in a new understanding of him as both husband of Mary and protector of her virginity,"<sup>440</sup> this important role had been present in the minds of the devout as early as c. 1275, perhaps c. 1200,<sup>441</sup> and certainly was of interest to the many pilgrims who had seen or heard of Joseph's holy stockings after their appearance at Aachen during the early thirteenth century. Joseph

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<sup>437</sup> Steven E. Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>438</sup> Pamela Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship: Gender and Family History," in *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2004), 287.

<sup>439</sup> Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 287.

<sup>440</sup> Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 287. The italics are my own.

<sup>441</sup> See chapter two.

was simultaneously beloved and ridiculed as a cult figure, for many of the reasons already discussed in this study, probably as early as the 1200s and unquestionably as late as the sixteenth century, before his distinctly sober role as a counter-Reformation saint became predominant. While Joseph's status continued to increase in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly as the nuclear form of family with its fatherly head became predominant, images of the *Anna Selbdritt* depicting Anne, Mary, and Jesus, which so often highlighted Anne's role as teacher of the Virgin, remained highly popular in art. And while Joseph's addition to "the matriarchal, earthly Trinity of Anne, Mary and Christ, in which Anne was typologically paired with God,"<sup>442</sup> transformed the family unit to "a patriarchal earthly Trinity featuring Joseph,"<sup>443</sup> one could argue that the original image of the *Anna Selbdritt* was never matriarchal according to medieval cultural norms, even if it relegated the human fathers of Jesus' ancestry to the background. Furthermore, it should be noted that, in neither image nor in text is St. Anne's wisdom tempered by satire, despite the debate over Mary's conception. Although the saints served similar functions, with St. Anne's exemplary role as teacher in many devotional images reflecting the real lives of the late medieval ladies who taught their own daughters to read,<sup>444</sup> it was the male exemplar of fatherhood who was brought down to a human level of relatability instead.

Although I do not believe that it diminished the status of the saintly women of Christ's lineage, St. Joseph's inclusion in fifteenth and sixteenth-century scenes of the

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<sup>442</sup> Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 296.

<sup>443</sup> Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 296.

<sup>444</sup> Pamela Sheingorn, "'The Wise Mother': The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary," *Gesta* 32, no. 1 (1993): 69-80.

child's immediate family reflected the lay father's suddenly enormous importance as financial provider for his family, particularly in an urban middle-class environment. Wickram's *Der Jungen Knaben Spiegel* of 1555 and a series of books that he also published in the 1550s focus particularly on the new importance of the father's role as provider, reflecting "a new concern with the family and...the relationships between parents and children."<sup>445</sup> The ideal father teaches his children to never be idle and to work "according to their God-given talents. The daughters learn from their mother to spin, sew, embroider, knit, and weave. ...The boys are sent to school to receive a thorough education,"<sup>446</sup> so that they in turn can provide for their own wives and daughters.

Joseph's appearance in art as a father preoccupied with work and worldly goods, whether performing his trade (fig. 4.33) or stockpiling his family's wealth (fig. 4.4), probably had something to do with his role as a proponent of such ideals, even if he sometimes directly mirrored the behavior of Avarice or the 'avaricious Jew'. The urban father of the early modern money economy had a different role with respect to earning money than did his ancestors of the earlier feudal age. Although "the essential characteristics of a feudal ruling class and a feudal state (in the Marxist sense of the word) remained"<sup>447</sup> in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, feudal restrictions on the production of commodities were essentially nonexistent. Coupled with low rents, this set the stage for later developments toward a capitalist economy. Enormous wealth came

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<sup>445</sup> Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480-1599* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 209; Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 294.

<sup>446</sup> Chrisman, *Lay Culture*, 210; Sheingorn, "Appropriating the Holy Kinship," 294.

<sup>447</sup> Rodney Hilton et al., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1976), 26.

to a growing middle class, particularly “...monopoly companies of merchants like the Merchant Adventurers and the Merchants of the Staple.”<sup>448</sup>

Individual fiscal responsibility during this period, the accumulation of material wealth, became not just morally acceptable, but also admirable for the head of the household. The rise in popularity of prints and paintings that satirize and ridicule beggars, gamblers, drunks, and other indigents is symptomatic of these evolving values in early modern Europe. Beggars and the poor were no longer primarily a means to salvation for those who performed charitable acts toward them. In the twelfth century this worldview was prominently announced on the portals of pilgrimage churches like Saint-Lazare in Autun, whose western entrance boasts a depiction of the morally instructive legend of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:20) (figs. 4.34 and 4.35). While Lazarus, who was destitute and sore-ridden in his earthly life, rests in the bosom of Abraham for eternity, Dives suffers the torments of Hell for his miserly ways. In contrast, by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, books like the *Liber vagatorum* described various categories of deceitful beggars,<sup>449</sup> while prints like Bartel Beham’s *Twelve Vagrants* of c. 1524-25 (fig. 4.36) provided a visual counterpart, depicting such fallen ‘types’ as the gambler with his cards and dice.<sup>450</sup> Larry Silver ascribes the rise of such derogatory imagery to the “widespread municipal problems from wandering beggars...[that] were the result of a gradual shift in care for the poor and needy away from the auspices of the Church and into the hands of private civic

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<sup>448</sup> Hilton et al., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, 26.

<sup>449</sup> Theodor Hampe, *Die fahrende Leute in der deutschen Vergangenheit* (Leipzig: Diederichs, 1902), 66.

<sup>450</sup> Lawrence A. Silver, “Of Beggars: Lucas van Leyden and Sebastian Brant,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 39 (1976): 256; F.W.H. Hollstein, *German Engravings, Etchings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1400-1700* (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1954), II: 249.

organizations.”<sup>451</sup> But the underlying social change that produced such a problem was the shift of wealth from the countryside (the stage for relative economic stability among the peasantry during the feudal era) to the urban centers, where the rising middle classes of merchants and artisans could profit from early precursors to capitalistic exchange.<sup>452</sup> In chapter 21 of the *Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality* of 1520, Martin Luther’s writing suggests that the figure of the poor indigent had come to embody the wickedness of the time, particularly through the mendicant orders’ association with his lifestyle:

No one living among Christians ought to go begging.... No outside beggars should be allowed in, whatever they call themselves, whether pilgrims, friars, or mendicant orders. In any case, they are compelled today to provide for the same number of vagabonds and wicked rogues under the name of the mendicant orders.... In my view, nowhere else is there so much wickedness and deception as in mendicancy.... Besides this, there are the common beggars and those who beg alms in the name of a patron saint, and then the professional pilgrims.<sup>453</sup>

Images addressing contemporary social concerns and the virtues and vices, like those of Hieronymus Bosch, warn especially against the distribution of alms to the undeserving and ill-intentioned, including the professional ‘pilgrim’ and beggar. Dirk Bax notes the extent to which such indigents were held in disdain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

Bosch frequently illustrates the case of an indigent who has become destitute or remains so through his own fault: through extravagance and wastefulness, licentiousness, addiction to drink and gluttony, stupidity, folly. Extravagance for a beggar or poor minstrel is not the wastefulness of which the rich are guilty, but

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<sup>451</sup> Silver, “Of Beggars,” 257.

<sup>452</sup> Martha White Paas, “Family Labour Strategies in Early Modern Swabia,” in *The European Peasant Family and Society: Historical Studies*, ed. Richard L. Rudolph (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>453</sup> John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 460; Silver, “Of Beggars,” 255.

the lack of thrift found among the poor that is, the squandering of meager earnings or savings on wanton feasting.<sup>454</sup>

Contrasting with this line of thought is the earlier association of worldly wealth with the need for spiritual redemption, evident in high medieval poetry like *Der arme Heinrich* by Hartmann von Aue, written in the late twelfth century, in which Lord Heinrich's extensive material wealth is contrasted with spiritual richness:

unser bluome der muoz vallen  
 sô er aller greenest waenet sîn.  
 an hern Heinrîche wart wol schîn:  
 der in dem hoehsten werde  
 lebet ûf dirre erde,  
 der ist der smaehste vor gote.  
 er viel von sînem gebote  
 ab sîner besten werdekeit  
 in ein smaehlîchez leit:  
 in ergreif diu miselsuht.<sup>455</sup>

Our flower must fall  
 Just when it seems in finest green.  
 In poor Lord Heinrich this was seen:  
 Who highest stands in worth and show  
 And station on this earth below  
 Oft bears God's scorn, and feels His hand.  
 Lord Heinrich fell at His command—  
 Fell from his high, illustrious place  
 Into a state of dire disgrace:  
 He fell a prey to leprosy.

Although most of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century preaching concerning money was negative, those who squandered it fell prey to the most disgrace, “whether it came from learned scholars like Erasmus or Thomas More or from the satirical urban

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<sup>454</sup> Dirk Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch: His Picture-Writing Deciphered* (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1979), chapter 6.

<sup>455</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich*, lines 110-119; M. O’C. Walsh, *A Middle High German Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 58-61.

rhetoricians (rederijkers), who also castigated brothels and drinking.”<sup>456</sup> Those without money were “looked down upon as social inferiors and suspected of deceitfulness, even in displaying their infirmities, by an urban burgher class.”<sup>457</sup> Paintings and prints by Bosch, Lucas van Leyden, and Pieter Brueghel the Elder vilified the poor and unproductive bands of wanderers, vagrants, and false pilgrims as sinful parasites, and such images were popular purchases among the burgher class as foils to their success.

The middle-class money economy of the early modern urban centers did not entirely suppress older fears about the morality of profit, however. Usury was still considered a mortal sin in late medieval canon law. Bosch’s invented pictorial genres attest the fact that the morality of monetary concerns was at the forefront of urban life. The artist, for example, amplified the tradition of the “...*Ars moriendi* temptation series to the full-scale painted subject, excerpting the temptation by avarice to an independent image, even within a larger triptych structure traditionally reserved for church or chapel altarpieces in Netherlandish art of the fifteenth century.”<sup>458</sup> Paul Vandebroek has explained the old man in Bosch’s *Death of the Miser* in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. (fig. 4.37) to be a usurer, because his treasures include “the trappings of nobility held in pawn for actual noblemen.”<sup>459</sup> The ‘rich miser’ figures prominently as

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<sup>456</sup> Lawrence A. Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 81; Keith Moxey, “The Criticism of Avarice in Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Painting,” in *Netherlandish Mannerism: Papers Given at a Symposium in Nationalmuseum Stockholm*, ed. Görel Cavalli-Björkman (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1984), 27-31.

<sup>457</sup> Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, 60.

<sup>458</sup> Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006), 243.

<sup>459</sup> Paul Vandebroek, *Jheronimus Bosch. Die Verlossing van de wereld* (Ghent: Ludion, 2002), 104-7; Anne Morganstern, “The Pawns in Bosch’s *Death and the Miser*,” *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 33-42; Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 240-42. The figure of the miser also appears in Hans Holbein’s *The Dance of Death* series cut as woodblocks in Basel ca. 1525 and published in Lyons in 1538.

one of the ‘ten asses’ of a poem of c. 1522, *Vanden. X. Esels*, which is a catalogue of ten men who because of their folly should wear ass’s ears. The author of this satire with a moral purpose was likely its publisher, an Antwerp printer named Jan van Doesborch, who was a colleague of Quentin Massys in the city’s Guild of St. Luke.<sup>460</sup> While misers were ridiculed or shamed in art and writing, Quentin Massys’ *Moneychanger and His Wife* (fig. 4.38) reveals another side to the issue of money. The most common interpretation of the painting is that it depicts a banker or moneylender as an embodiment of the evils of materialism. James Snyder writes that it “...serves as a criticism of the changing values in a society devoted to commerce and finance. Traditional religious values are here discarded or ignored...Religious ritual and the routine of prayer have been replaced by the monotonous rites of the business world.”<sup>461</sup> Some have viewed the wife as a representative of the spiritual path in contrast to her husband’s activities. Yet the original frame’s inscription, “You shall have just balances and just weights” (Leviticus 19:35), may have more to do with his “careful balancing of coins with weights in the scales...[which] shows that he performs neither a frivolous nor an overtly avaricious activity.”<sup>462</sup> Larry Silver writes, “These two figures must thus be seen against what we detect as a fuller spectrum of conduct, ranging from gossip in the street, visible out the door, to contemplative meditation in a private chamber, visible in the foreground mirror.”<sup>463</sup> The artist Marinus van Reymerswaele and his followers produced a series of

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<sup>460</sup> Lawrence A. Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), 22.

<sup>461</sup> James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, and the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*, ed. Larry Silver and Henry Luttikhuisen (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 442.

<sup>462</sup> Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, 74.

<sup>463</sup> Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, 74.

images after this painting which are more clearly satirical because of the tax collectors' or bankers' grotesquely caricatured faces or archaic costumes (figs. 4.39 and 4.40). While the numerous copies of these works could be bought more cheaply, the original patrons of such scenes by Massys or Marinus van Reymerswaele probably ranked equal to or above those depicted in financial prosperity.<sup>464</sup> Most likely, such images varied in their intended meanings; while Massys' *Moneychanger and His Wife* conveyed fiscal responsibility, 'copies' and variations sold on the lower end of the market could convey a more avaricious bent for a different sort of audience.

While the morality of money was still an issue of concern, it is clear that financial sustainability had become a positive attribute of the successful and responsible head of the middle-class household in early modern Europe. Such a shift from the earlier medieval view of wealth as the property of the morally corrupt miser was obviously not a clean one. Late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century imagery and writing reveal a worldview marked by confusion with respect to the morality of personal profit, not unlike today. The so-called "genre subjects" that emerge from this period were revolutionary for the history of secular arts in that they engaged the new money economy and urban problems associated with early modern life. But these subjects were closely tied to their contemporary religious counterparts. St. Joseph, who had become the primary model for the early modern *pater familias*, reflected and embodied this moral tension in images depicting his preoccupation with worldly goods, even as his cult continued to grow across

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<sup>464</sup> Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, 79-80.

western Europe. While tied to the iconography of the vice of Avarice, such images still reflect Joseph's important role as head of his nuclear household.

The burgeoning early sixteenth-century art market and export trade in Antwerp produced an unusually high number of paintings of the Adoration of the Magi. High local interest in these scenes has been associated with the nature of the city at this time:

...Antwerp, the great commercial crossroads of European trade, liked to compare itself to the central significance assigned to Bethlehem in the Gospels, the gathering point for the three magi from all parts of the globe... the three kings are usually shown in Antwerp Adorations as stemming from Asia and Africa as well as Europe, although Europe's monarch is given seniority in age and in placement, kneeling closest to the Christ Child... this colorful, crowded image of exotic figures in picturesque ruins perfectly suited their repeated market production.<sup>465</sup>

Also characteristic of these Antwerp Adoration scenes is Joseph's especially active role and prominent placement. Quite frequently, he is shown in a state of humorous astonishment (figs 4.41),<sup>466</sup> ogling the Magi's gifts in a manner that appears somewhat avaricious, but is not a deadly sin in the cultural context of a society in which personal financial success was becoming virtuous. This motif was by no means original, as variations on the theme appear in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century images of the Adoration of the Magi, but its popularity in early sixteenth-century Antwerp was probably symptomatic of the city's changing values. Dan Ewing notes the importance of the "cargo-carrying motif" (fig. 4.42) in these numerous Adorations produced for sale in

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<sup>465</sup> Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 436.

<sup>466</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, fig. 59.

the marketplace; the Magi carry cargo like the merchants of Antwerp who came from the four corners of the globe.<sup>467</sup> Notable too is:

...the striking number of Antwerp merchants of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who were named after one of the three kings. A significant number of these men were the sons of merchants, perhaps named Gaspar, Balthasar, or Melchior by their parents in the hopes and assumption they would become businessmen—an interesting and convincing demonstration of what might be called the civic iconography of the Adoration of the Magi in Antwerp.<sup>468</sup>

The Antwerp artists' renditions of Saint Joseph, which capture the complexity of his position as his status grew along with interest in Christ's family, should probably be understood similarly. The early sixteenth-century paintings of the Antwerp artist Joos van Cleve render St. Joseph in a variety of ways that capture his uniquely humorous role as the uncomprehending, and at times avaricious, foster-father who simultaneously was assigned the highest role of *pater familias* in the model Christian family. As in the other Antwerp Adoration scenes, the Joseph of Joos van Cleve's Adoration of c. 1517-18 (fig. 4.43)<sup>469</sup> gazes dumbfounded toward the elaborate gold gifts held by two of the Magi in the foreground, as he moves toward the treasure already resting behind the child's mother. The playfulness of this composition is likewise evident in its borrowing from Italian compositions; the two Antwerp burghers in the background mimic in gesture and color the classical figures of Aristotle and Plato in Raphael's famous *School of Athens* fresco in the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura.

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<sup>467</sup> Dan Ewing, "Art, Market, and Market Effect in Antwerp," lecture delivered at the Smith College symposium entitled "Antwerp, Artwork, and Audiences," November 1994; Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 46-47.

<sup>468</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 47.

<sup>469</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, fig. 37.

Joseph's appearance in Joos van Cleve's *Holy Family with Saint Anne* (fig. 4.44)<sup>470</sup> in Brussels is likewise apparently Italianate, perhaps via the influence of Quentin Massys, in its use of a loggia-like background and a triangular composition in its arrangement of figures. But most striking for our purposes is its awareness of "the grotesque heads of Leonardo da Vinci which must have been available in some form in Antwerp. The use of a pure profile is Italianate and Joos might well have known one of the few extant examples, also derived from Leonardo, the *Portrait of an Old Man* of 1513 by Massys (fig. 4.45)."<sup>471</sup> John Hand rightly notes that Joseph's "grin, coupled with the folds of flesh under the chin and beaked nose, combine to create a face that borders on caricature."<sup>472</sup> Along with Joseph's bared teeth, which was still a motif closely linked with boorishness and derision,<sup>473</sup> these physiognomic traits were used exclusively for humorous or derisive purposes, appearing most often in caricatures of wicked Jews (fig. 4.46), as in compositions of the Mocking of Christ (fig. 4.47). But the humor of Joseph's presentation, also in this case, would not have detracted from the scene's function as a non-narrative devotional scene of the Holy Family, a type of composition that was extremely popular at the turn of the sixteenth century. Joos van Cleve himself was "a major force in the creation and dissemination of depictions of the Holy Family that reflect a change in religious sentiment and a response to the need for a new type of nonnarrative devotional image."<sup>474</sup> While many of such images by Joos van Cleve and Quentin

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<sup>470</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, fig. 49.

<sup>471</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 52.

<sup>472</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 52.

<sup>473</sup> Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art*, plate 14; see chapter two.

<sup>474</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 53.

Massys focus on a setting of fruit and flowers arrayed before the Virgin and Child,<sup>475</sup> Joseph joins the pair in others in an unprecedented manner. He is present as the head of his family, but in a uniquely prophetic role that draws upon his ties to the Old Law. In the New York version of Joos van Cleve's compositions (fig. 4.48) he wears a Jewish head-covering and removes his spectacles, often symbols of moral shortsightedness, to gaze upon his wife and foster-child while holding a roll of text on which is written the beginning of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-1:55). In the London National Gallery's *Holy Family* (fig. 4.49),<sup>476</sup> he wears another hat related to the flatter, brimmed Jews' hats and holds a book from which he reads, with spectacles donned. As the representative of the Old Law, of time before Christ, it makes sense that the spectacles would be present as a marker of his incomplete enlightenment. But this does not negate John Hand's assertion that Joseph is characterized as "a man of learning, a reader of texts."<sup>477</sup> Joseph is simultaneously an ideal of early modern urban fatherhood, as the educated, literate head of the household.

The more humorous images of Joseph as family 'treasurer', miserously packing away the Magi's treasures into the family's chest or ogling the precious gifts with a hint of worldly greed, were apparently some of the most popular in early modern Europe, however. The paintings, sculpture, and prints with variations of these motifs that survive originate from as far north as Antwerp to as far south as Siena, a city that, like Antwerp, was a central hub of trade between northern and southern Europe as an early pilgrimage

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<sup>475</sup> Reindert Leonard Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994).

<sup>476</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, fig. 54.

<sup>477</sup> Hand, *Joos van Cleve*, 53.

stop on the Via Francigena to the tomb of St. Peter in Rome. The Sienese artist Bartolo di Fredi (c. 1330-1410) produced an elaborate altarpiece with a central scene of the Adoration of the Magi taking place outside the walls of Siena in which humor is also present (fig. 4.50). Although a halo is present behind Joseph's head, the saint's 'boorishness' is marked not only by his darker complexion by comparison with the holy figures who surround him,<sup>478</sup> but by the way in which he clings with rapaciousness to the Magus's gift, holding it away from the crowd and simultaneously glaring in concern at their proximity and unruly state, not unlike the Meister der Verherrlichung Mariens' St. Joseph in his Cologne Adoration of the Magi of c. 1480/90 (fig. 4.19). The Florentine artist Gherardo Starnina's Adoration of the Magi similarly depicts a Joseph preoccupied with examining the gift of gold coins (fig. 4.51). Pieter Brueghel the Elder's Joseph in the London National Gallery Adoration of the Magi (fig. 4.52) is perhaps not only concerned with Mary's purity, as some have argued, but also with the fabulous golden ship in his direct line of sight, held by Balthasar. An earlier iteration of this scene appears as part of Bartholomäus Bruyn the Elder's Adoration of the Magi from Cologne, dated to c. 1515-20 (figs. 4.20 and 4.21).

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The 'imperfect' facets of Joseph's character as a father and husband—his chastity, his old age, his cuckoldry in caring for the Son of God, and, as chapter four has addressed, his fascination with worldly wealth—arose from his virtues, in biblical life

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<sup>478</sup> See chapter three.

and as a model *pater familias* for the laity. Joseph's preoccupation with worldly treasure, like his cuckoldry and bumbling, emerged during a time in which socially binding mirth was essential to religious life, as chapter three examined. Particularly during the rise of an early modern money economy in places like Antwerp and Nuremberg, the increasing importance of personal financial solidity for late medieval families stood in contrast to a fading earlier worldview of wealth as the equivalent to moral depravity. The 'miserly' Joseph became popular during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a humorous play on the saint's lack of enlightenment regarding the most valuable thing present in his life—his foster son—and the iconographic type, of course, played off of his Jewishness and ties to the Old Law as well. Yet the saint was at once all-important as *the* model for lay fatherly heads of their own nuclear families. Most relevant to their roles as urban household heads was Joseph's role as responsible financial manager, as Bernardino of Siena highlighted in his sermons to the laity. Joseph's imagery as keeper of the goods was functional, yet not completely devoid of mockery, a kind of seeming ambiguity that attests to the presence of conflicting worldviews regarding the growing money economy at the end of the Middle Ages. Joseph's imagery, as a highly popular saint for the laity especially, became akin to a mirror for these ongoing social changes.

## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Whenever scholars have interpreted late medieval representations of Joseph as humorous or comical, they have concluded that the images must have been intended as solely deprecatory. Carolyn C. Wilson's *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Art and Society: New Directions and Interpretations* seeks to revise such generalizing assessments, aiming to "...dispense at last with the seemingly compulsory repetition of the notions that St. Joseph's cult either did not exist during the Renaissance or was merely a local phenomenon and that Joseph was typically portrayed as a figure of no consequence or of derision."<sup>479</sup> Pamela Sheingorn urges:

Art historians should take Wilson's critique seriously, especially her observation that too often characterizations of Joseph as a figure of fun, an object of derision, or a negative exemplum rely on interpretations of facial expression, gestures, and behaviors that have been reached without thorough investigation of the range of possible meanings available at the time the objects were produced and received. Her work of careful contextualization offers a salutary corrective to a tendency toward overgeneralization.<sup>480</sup>

Yet Wilson's study is unfortunately also marked by overgeneralization in her desire to cleanse Joseph's image of its inherent comic aspects. The problem with understanding the humor associated with Joseph's cult is that it is distinctive to the culture of early modern Europe; it intertwines religion with laughter, and satire with respect. Late medieval and early modern society did not separate inversion, satire, and social release in the form of laughter from religious life; in fact, feast days, liturgical

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<sup>479</sup> Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>480</sup> Pamela Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent: Fragments of the Biography of Joseph the Carpenter," in *Framing the Family: Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden and Diane Wolfthal (Tempe, A.Z.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 162.

plays, and medieval prayer books incorporated behavior and imagery that we tend today to classify as exclusively secular.

Supporting Wilson's efforts in sanitization, yet aware of the contradictions that arise in Joseph's early modern characterization (when viewed through a modern-day lens), Sheingorn herself seeks to reconcile Joseph's 'marginalization' with his veneration. Her conclusion revolves around the idea of 'bricolage.' She analyzes two narratives recounting the biblical story of the twelve-year-old Jesus at the temple: Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Jesu puero duodenni* (Jesus at the Age of Twelve), of c. 1153-1157, and a selection from Philip the Carthusian's *Marienleben* (Life of the Virgin Mary) in a fifteenth-century *Weltchronik* (History of the World)<sup>481</sup> manuscript, Getty 33. Sheingorn interprets these texts as 'fragments,' through Sergei Eisenstein's twentieth-century theory of montage, analyzing the construction of Joseph's character as it appears in separate 'scenes.'<sup>482</sup> According to Eisenstein, "Each one of these little subsidiary scenes is seen only from one angle, showing only one sharply characteristic feature."<sup>483</sup> Additionally, according to Sheingorn, Aelred of Rievaulx's allegorization of Joseph as the Holy Spirit stands in contrast to his assertion that Joseph did not have access to the divine knowledge

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<sup>481</sup> The *Weltchronik* is a late medieval genre of literature that attempted to describe the natural history of humanity from its creation up to the respective point in time of publication. The main goal was to reconcile biblical with non-biblical history, allocating salvation to its proper place within world history. This continuity of the past with the present is "...usually attributed to a prevailing belief in the eternity of God and consequent emphasis upon divine continuity in human history." See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 239.

<sup>482</sup> Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 162-63.

<sup>483</sup> S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, *Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 144; Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 163.

bestowed upon Mary by God. Sheingorn thus argues that in this text, and at this stage of Joseph's character construction:

...these features, when placed side by side, do not cohere as aspects of the same person. Claude Levi-Strauss has suggested that 'Mythical thought appears to be an intellectual form of 'bricolage', by which he means the juxtaposition of pre-existing fragments...I am especially interested in the way that bricolage retains the rough and uneven edges of fragments rather than smoothing them to create a seamless whole, while the process of transforming Joseph into a dominant male is underway.<sup>484</sup>

Sheingorn further asserts that these contrasting fragments of Joseph's biography ultimately serve the purpose of advancing "specific ideologies by offering models of character and behavior, and to create, in the case of Joseph, Christian male subjects as particular kinds of fathers."<sup>485</sup> Joseph becomes the patriarchal parent for Aelred as the 'nutritious,' or foster-father, to Jesus, thus offering a model of service to others for the celibate clergy. Philip the Carthusian's early fifteenth-century *Marienleben* primarily describes Joseph as "*keusch und rein*" (chaste and pure), which, according to Sheingorn, casts him as a suitable, but passive, companion to the Virgin Mary. However, Joseph's acceptance of the social institution of marriage allows him to assume the role of patriarchal head of his family, and in Philip's text, Joseph performs this role by ensuring that the family is housed and by functioning as its spokesperson. Like Aelred's text, the manuscript therefore functions as a montage, juxtaposing fragments.<sup>486</sup> Based upon her theoretical analysis of these two texts, Sheingorn concludes:

The construction of Joseph as a model for fatherhood in the *familia* of the monastic community (as implied by Aelred) points toward the affinity that Jean

<sup>484</sup> Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 170-71.

<sup>485</sup> Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 163.

<sup>486</sup> Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 169-79.

Gerson and other Parisian clerics of his day felt for Joseph, and ultimately to Joseph's high stature in the eyes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century popes. (This trajectory is, of course, oversimplified.) But the construction of Joseph as model father in the secular family resists any attempt at a linear formulation. I am tempted to say that there are as many "Josephs" as there are "families." A large part of the ambiguity that we cannot resolve in any individual construction of Joseph results from the juxtaposition of fragments whose edges cannot be smoothed.<sup>487</sup>

But the material evidence of Joseph's construction as model father for the laity indicates that the saint's seemingly antithetical components of fool and role model did in fact cohere, at least for a lay audience. Even Joseph's most venerated relic, the holy stockings at Aachen, became closely intertwined with the humorous stories of the pantsless, bumbling caretaker of Christ. Likewise, Joseph's avaricious behavior in art as caretaker of the holy family's worldly wealth served as a bridge to the real world of early modern urban Europe, to a time in which the medieval morality of money was nuanced with the primacy of financial sustainability, a positive attribute of the successful and responsible head of the middle-class household. In the same altarpiece, Conrad von Soest's Wildunger Altar, Joseph is a humorous, central, and venerated saint all at once, as he crouches on all fours before a cooking pot (fig. 5.1) and stands reverently behind the Virgin at the Adoration of the Magi (fig. 5.2). Similarly, Meister Bertram's depiction of Joseph passing the child to Mary (fig. 5.3) is accompanied by his prominent portrayal in the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, in which he rips into a piece of bread or wineskin with his teeth and is presented in exact parallel to the ass by his side (fig. 5.4).

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<sup>487</sup> Sheingorn, "Constructing the Patriarchal Parent," 171.

To conclude, I wish to return to a work that exemplifies early modern lay devotion to St. Joseph and to the Holy Family as “marriage model,” as Cynthia Hahn describes it: the Mérode Triptych (figs. 5.5 and 5.6). In her article, “‘Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee’: The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” Hahn rightly discusses Joseph in the work as himself an important focal point for personal devotion, rather than as a subsidiary figure veiled in symbolic meaning. Her article is an excellent model for its assertion that “while symbols are not extraneous to the meaning of the painting, they should be understood as subservient to the devotional purpose.”<sup>488</sup> Hahn argues that “Joseph’s role... has a spiritual value equal to his importance in the composition. The reevaluation of Joseph as powerful and dignified *pater familias* will lead to an understanding of the triptych as a vision of the sacral quality of marriage and the family.”<sup>489</sup>

Despite its desired function as a corrective to past overreliance in scholarship on theological symbolism for the interpretation of meaning, and thereby, purpose, Hahn’s work reads much like Meyer Schapiro’s<sup>490</sup> and Charles Minnott’s much earlier contributions. Charles Minnott read an allusion to Isaiah 10:15 in the right panel’s combination of an ax, saw, and rod: “Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood.”

Interpreted through Jerome’s *Commentary on Isaiah*, therefore, the objects are

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<sup>488</sup> Cynthia Hahn, “‘Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee’: The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” *Art Bulletin* 68, no.1 (1986), 54.

<sup>489</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 55.

<sup>490</sup> Meyer Schapiro, “‘Muscipula Diaboli’: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece,” 27, no. 3 (1945): 182-187.

understood to represent “God’s methods of retribution to evil-doers, idol-worshippers, and heretics.”<sup>491</sup>

Hahn herself argues for a close association between the depicted tools and Ambrose’s *Commentary on St. Luke*, casting Joseph as a figure of God the Creator, the “good artisan of the soul.”<sup>492</sup> She argues for further theological symbolism in the specific type and positioning of the depicted ax, embedded in a log:

...for it is clearly not a tree-felling instrument. Ambrose, however, emphasizes the trimming of the tree rather than its felling. The Mérode implement’s straight upper edge, its lower edge with angled recession, and its short handle identify it as a trimming ax, and it is embedded in a rude, untrimmed log that is strikingly out of place in the tidy workshop. A carpenter uses the trimming ax by grasping it close to the head with one or both hands and pushing it downward, as Joseph does in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves...or he can swing it in short, close strokes toward himself. The artist’s representation of a trimming ax recalls the celestial artisan’s task as Ambrose described it—the trimming of the sinful soul.<sup>493</sup>

Even the mousetraps, one on the table and one on the windowsill, as we learn from Meyer Schapiro, have been invested with Augustinian metaphorical meaning as the snare for the devil. The inclusion of Joseph, therefore, serves to highlight his marriage to Mary only in the sense of its successfulness as a trick to fool the devil: “Joseph as the alleged father masked the extraordinary and divine nature of Christ’s birth.”<sup>494</sup>

And yet the most common analogies in the late medieval world with respect to mousetraps, drilling, holes, prominent (or noticeably small) tools, and the coupling of old men with young women had nothing to do with the theological writings of ancient

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<sup>491</sup> Charles Illsley Minnott, “The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece,” *Art Bulletin* 51, no. 3 (1969): 267-271; Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 58.

<sup>492</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 59.

<sup>493</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 59.

<sup>494</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 57.

Church Fathers and much to do with humorous sexual themes, as discussed in chapter three. Hahn writes, “The small size of the triptych, the intimacy of the imagery, and the depiction of the Virgin as the Madonna of Humility all indicate that the painting is intended as a focus for private devotion.”<sup>495</sup> Given these facts, it should not be so difficult to imagine that the Ingelbrechts from Mechelen (Mâlines) might have found some humor in Joseph’s carpentry imagery as well.<sup>496</sup> The surviving copy of Robert Campin’s Life of St. Joseph, the Hoogstraten panel depicting Joseph’s Repentance of His Doubt (fig. 5.7), itself hints to a more humorous reception on the part of the artist and audience. The prominent ax that appears in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 5.8), which Hahn uses as an example of the theologically significant trimming ax, is probably intentionally phallic, at least in that image, especially given the small set that Joseph is endowed with in the scene of the Holy Family at Rest (fig. 5.9). Joseph’s drilling of holes into a passive piece of wood in Robert Campin’s work, likewise, parallels this intentionally hilarious activity in the Galleria Colonna’s Adoration of the Magi by the Master of the St. Barbara Legend (fig. 5.10), in which a mousetrap is also present. Most notably for the Mérode Altarpiece specifically, the trapping of the elusive ‘mouse’ is exactly what is missing in Joseph’s panel, while the central panel depicts the most important consummation of father (God) and mother (Mary) in Christian history.

Early modern humor, when present, did not necessarily detract from religious significance, as chapter three demonstrated. As a prominent figure and responsible

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<sup>495</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 54.

<sup>496</sup> Louise O. Vasvari, “Joseph on the Margin: The Merode Tryptic and Medieval Spectacle,” *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995): 164-89. Vasvari suggests that the Joseph of the Mérode Altarpiece is intended to be funny, but I believe she goes too far by neglecting Joseph’s manifested centrality and theological importance in the work and in general for this period.

caretaker/laborer in the Mérode Altarpiece, Joseph does indeed perfect the marriage model of the Holy Family, as Hahn argues. But Joseph himself was never understood by the laity (and probably the regular clergy) to be perfect, which is precisely why he was so beloved and revered. Joseph's imperfections in the Bible, plays, legends, hymns, and art—his old age, cuckoldry, drinking, and bumbling as he attempted to care for the Son of God despite his incomplete enlightenment—were the reasons why he was so appealing as a model figurehead of fatherhood.

It is time, therefore, to move beyond this all-too-common assumption and summary of Joseph's evolution:

In medieval art and literature, Joseph was most often portrayed in one of two mutually exclusive roles. In some Gothic representations he was depicted as an old, tired buffoon, a butt of jokes. Alternately, he was conceived of as the hard-working foster-father of Christ, the worthy companion and helpmate to Mary, and the strong, capable head of his household...already in the thirteenth century, this more dignified, yet still humble image was not confined to monastic attention, and by the early fifteenth century it came to be championed and expanded by internationally important figures such as Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly, and Bernardino da Siena. In late medieval art as well, an ineffective, aged Joseph is replaced by the hard-working, vigorous provider.<sup>497</sup>

When we look to evidence beyond the theological writings of such giants as Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly, Bernard of Clairvaux, Ambrose, and Augustine, we see that these “mutually exclusive” roles in Gothic representations did not exist, nor was there a break in the early fifteenth century towards more ‘sober’ representations of Joseph because of the saint's ecclesiastical champions. Joseph's comical and virtuous nature was reconciled by the character of late medieval humor. The Joseph of the Mérode Altarpiece is championed as a prime example of the reverence given to St. Joseph at the ‘birth’ of the

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<sup>497</sup> Hahn, “The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,” 55-56.

Renaissance, and indeed it is. But his importance should not be reconstructed solely from elevated theological discourse. Much of this level of thought was irrelevant to the needs and concerns of the laity. Jean Gerson's insistence that Joseph was a strong, handsome man of about thirty-six when he married Mary clearly fell flat in the eyes of most people, and his arguments were relatively contemporary! Bernard of Clairvaux's claim that "Joseph was a man of high value...[who] had the privilege to know the secrets of heaven and to have there his part"<sup>498</sup> should not be taken as evidence that:

Although a strong tradition had arisen out of the Gospel episode of Joseph's doubt concerning Mary's virginity, a doubt which implied that Joseph was ignorant of God's plan for salvation, by the twelfth century it was clearly asserted that Joseph was privy to the true meaning of Mary's role.<sup>499</sup>

The Joseph of the Mérode Altarpiece is a prime example of early modern devotion to the saint because he is marked by a fusion of theological and secular discourses. Joseph himself is perhaps a blend of the two; it is impossible to say just how familiar Robert Campin and the Ingelbrechts were with the ideology of Ambrose and Augustine. A theological advisor was probably not consulted for a work of this format and this date.<sup>500</sup> But we can say that *fabliaux* in the French vernacular, for example, were very popular and widespread during the early fifteenth century.

If humor appealed to the Duke of Burgundy in his personal tabernacle depicting a barefoot St. Joseph knitting his stockings together (fig. 5.11),<sup>501</sup> or in the retable he commissioned for his oratory chapel (figs. 5.12 and 5.13), it probably could have

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<sup>498</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Oeuvres mystiques*, trans. Albert Béguin (Paris, 1953), 926.

<sup>499</sup> Hahn, "The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych," 58.

<sup>500</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>501</sup> Cynthia Hahn herself notes the humor of the Antwerp-Baltimore polyptych in a footnote; see Hahn, "The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych," 55, note 6.

appealed as well to the Ingelbrechts and may have intentionally appeared in their commission approximately twenty years later. Such images of Joseph reveal to us a distinctively early modern manner of religious veneration, one that could blend ridicule with reverence, and sanctity with satire.

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## Figures



1.1 Meister Bertram von Minden, Nativity, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



1.2 Copy after Robert Campin, Joseph's Repentance of his Doubt, The Life of St. Joseph, St. Katarinakerk, Hoogstraten



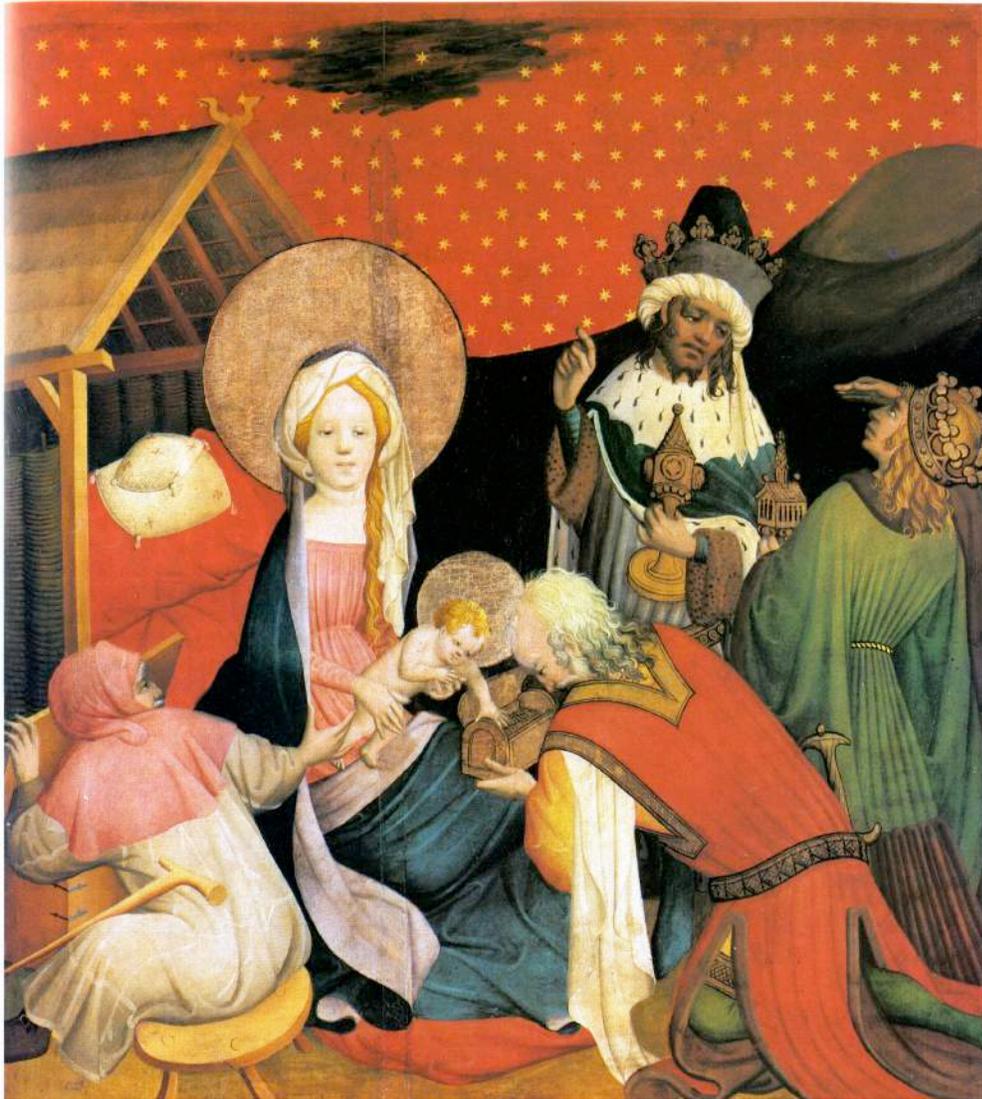
1.3 Conrad von Soest, Nativity, Wildunger Altar, Bad Wildungen



1.4 Conrad von Soest, Adoration of the Magi, Wildunger Altar, Bad Wildungen



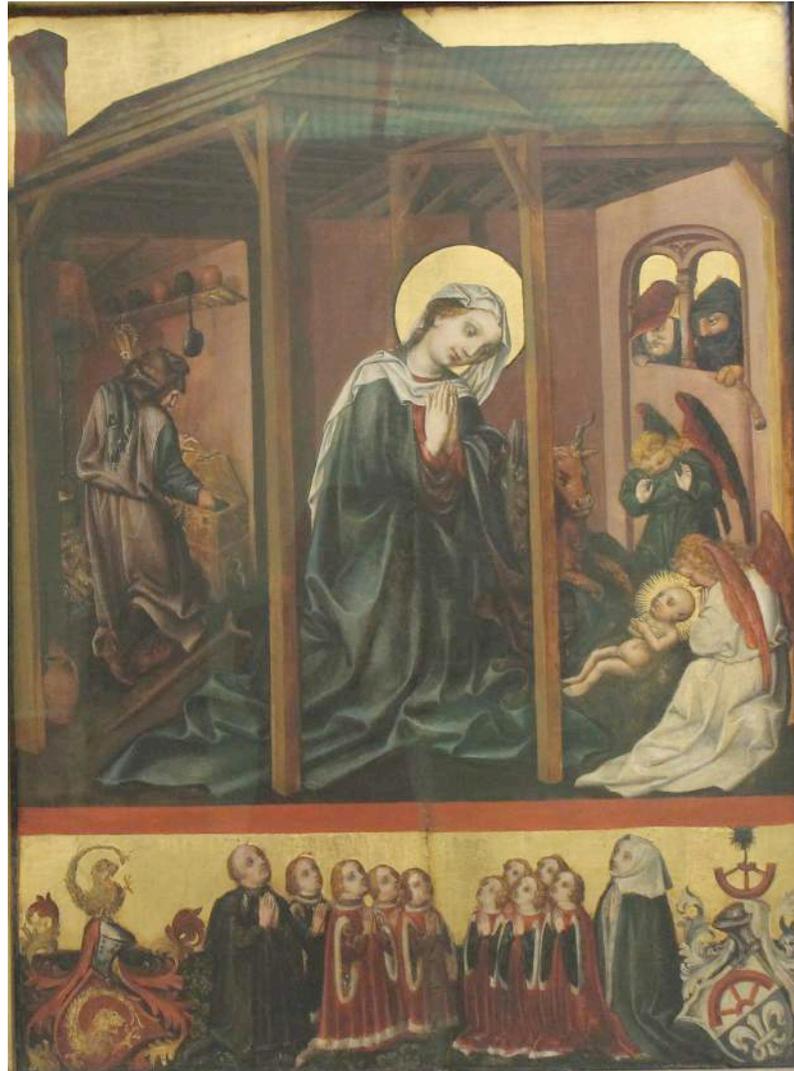
**1.5** Meister Bertram von Minden, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



1.6 Meister Francke, Adoration of the Magi, St. Thomas (Englandfahrer) Altarpiece, 1424, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



1.7 Master E.S., Adoration of the Magi, engraving, mid-fifteenth century, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection



**1.8** Meister des Tucher-Altars (?), Epitaph Painting for Clara Imhoff, c. 1438, loan from the Church of St. Sebald, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg



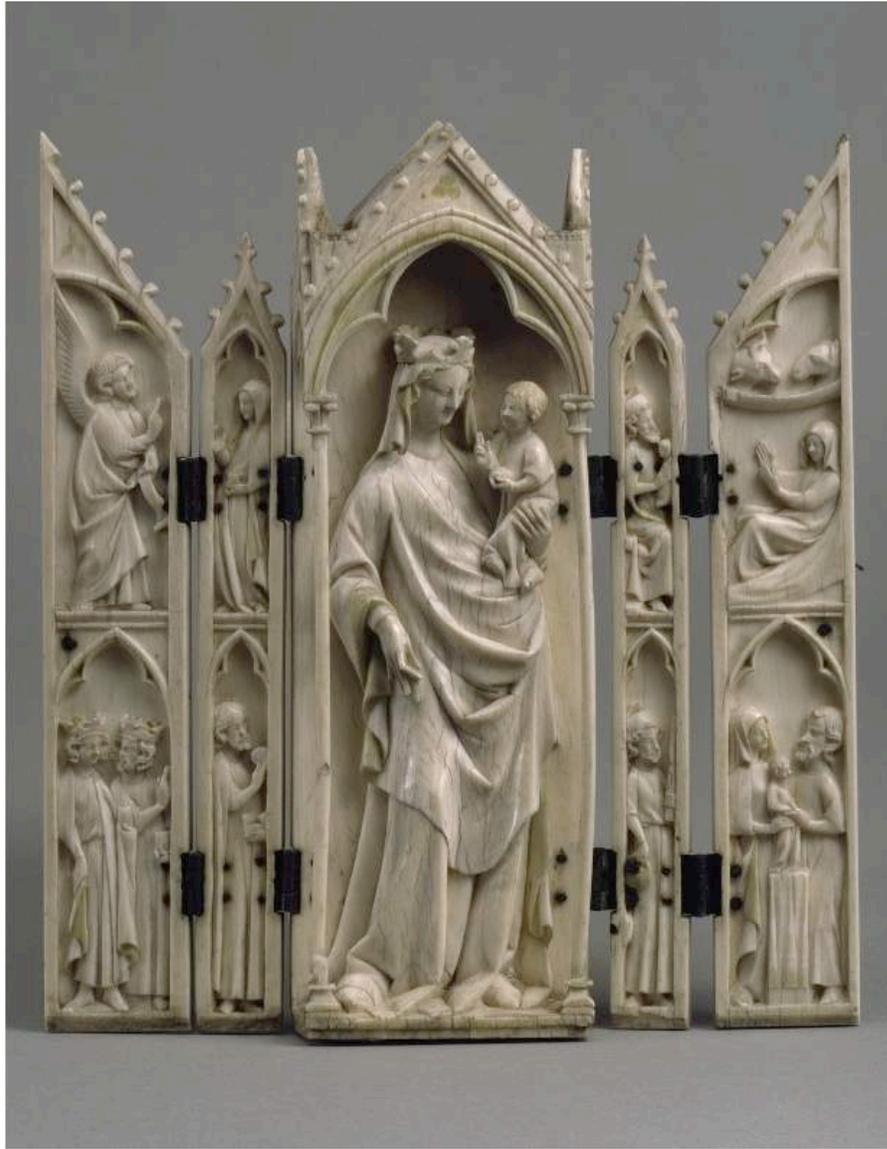
2.1 Nativity, Netherlandish, from the Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



2.2 Nativity, Rouen, Bib. de la Ville, ms. 3024



2.3 Nativity, London, Brit. Mus., ms. Add. 18213



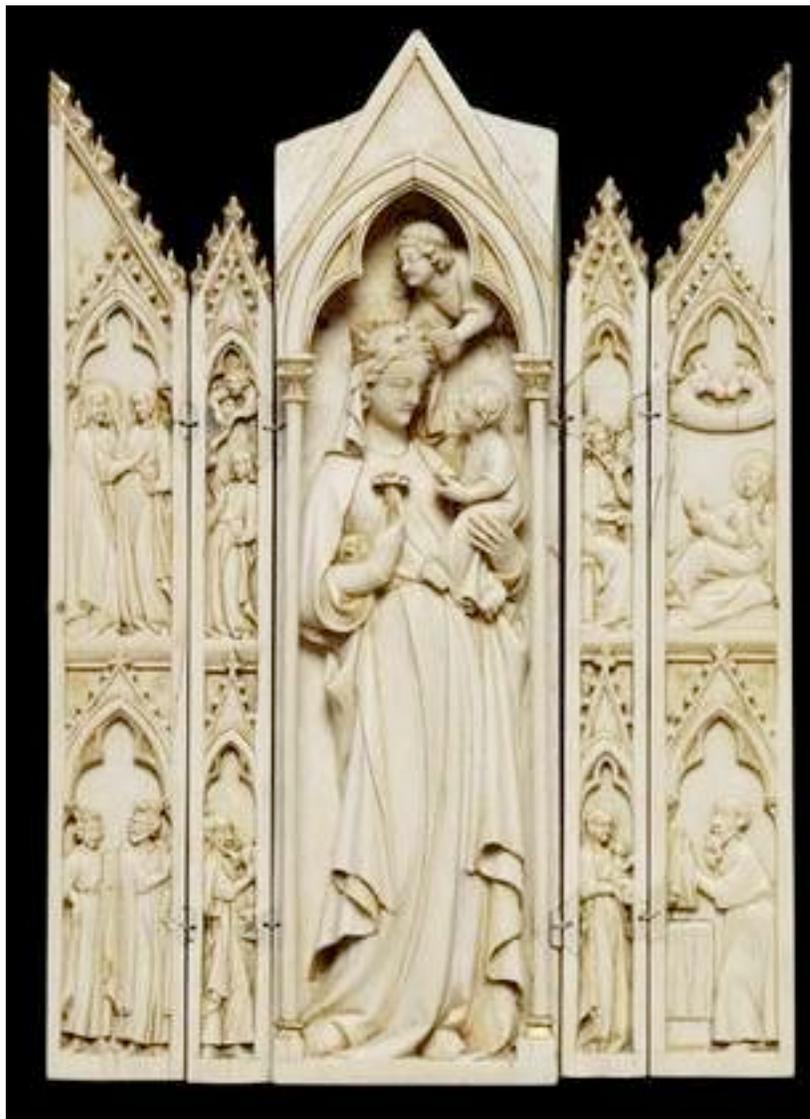
2.4 Ivory tabernacle, Paris, ca. 1275, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung, Ident Nr. 627



**2.5** Ivory tabernacle, France, ca. 1300, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 17.190.290



**2.6** Detail of Nativity, ivory tabernacle, France, ca. 1300, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 17.190.290



2.7 Ivory tabernacle, France, ca. 1300-1350, Victoria and Albert Museum, London



**2.8** Ivory tabernacle, France, first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna



**2.9** Ivory tabernacle, France, first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia



2.10 Freiburg Psalter, Upper or High Rhine, c. 1200, Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i. B., Historische Sammlungen, Hs. 24, fol. 10v-11v



2.11 Meister Bertram von Minden, Nativity, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**2.12** Nativity from a shrine dedicated to the Virgin, Tournai, silver-gilt repoussé, restoration of ca. 1350-75, Tournai, Cathedral Treasury



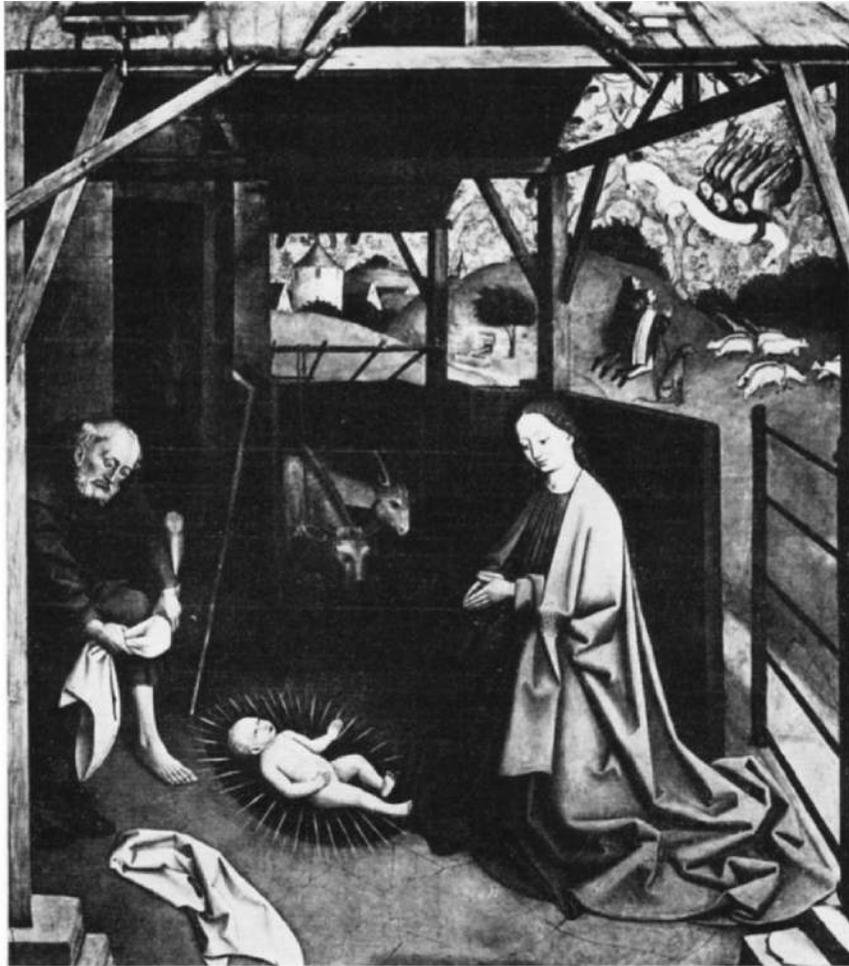
**2.13** Nativity, Brussels, Bib. Royale, ms. II, 7831



**2.14** Nativity, woodcut, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, Utrecht, ca. 1470-71, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California



**2.15** Westphalian workshop, Nativity, Münsterreifel Altar, early fifteenth century, Bad Münsterreifel



**2.16** Nativity, Sterzinger Altar, Master of the Sterzing Winged Paintings, 1456-58,  
Städtliches Museum, South Tyrol



2.17 Master of the Holy Kinship, the Elder, detail, Triptych of the Holy Kinship, c. 1420, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne



**2.18** Detail of a Nativity scene from a carved altarpiece from Brabant, 16th century, Sankt Maria zur Wiese, Soest



2.19 Gerhard Altzenbach, Aachen's most important relics, Cologne, c. 1615



2.20 Shrine of the Virgin Mary holding the four holy relics of Aachen Cathedral



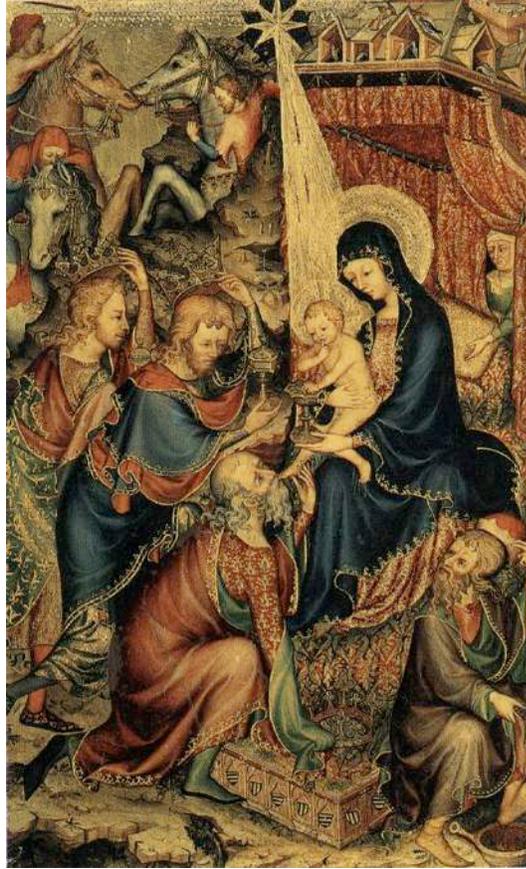
2.21 Meister von St. Sigmund, Nativity, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne



2.22 Hans Multscher, Nativity, Wurzach Altarpiece, 1437, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin



2.23 Rogier van der Weyden, Columba Adoration of the Magi, before 1464, Alte Pinakothek, Munich



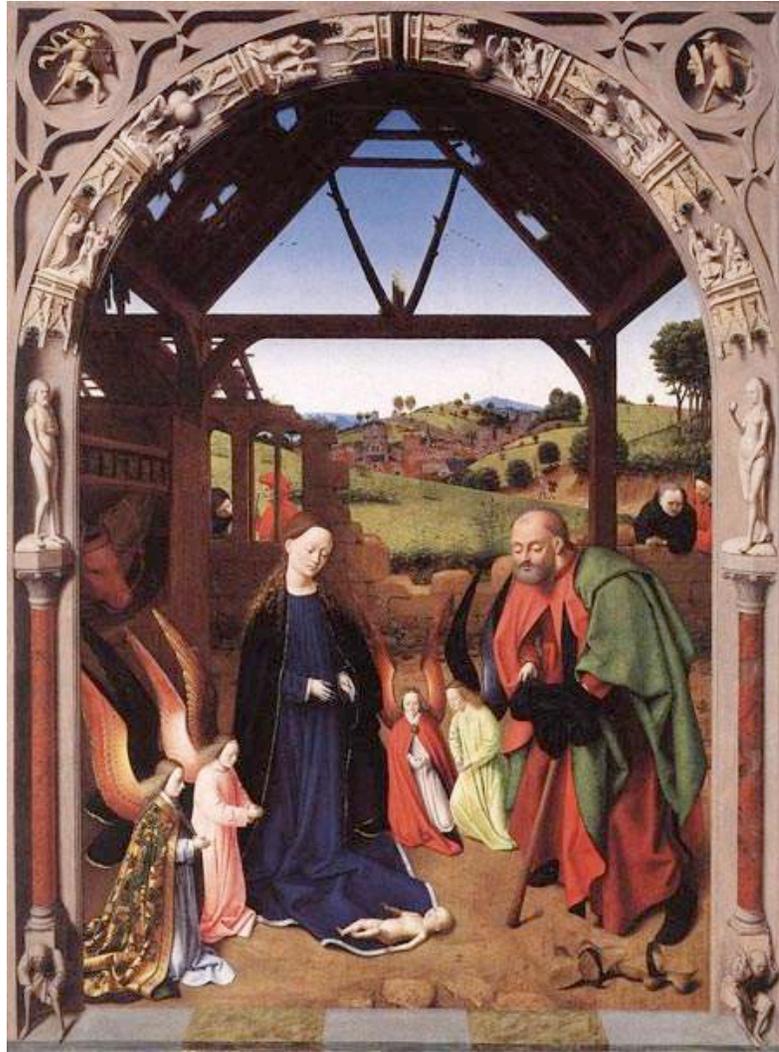
**2.24** Franco-Flemish painter of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Adoration of the Magi from the “Small Carrand Diptych,” c. 1355-1360, Museo Nazionale, Palazzo del Bargello, Florence



**2.25** Hieronymus Bosch, detail, Adoration of the Magi, c. 1510, Museo del Prado, Madrid



2.26 Hugo van der Goes, Portinari Altarpiece, 1465-76, Uffizi, Florence



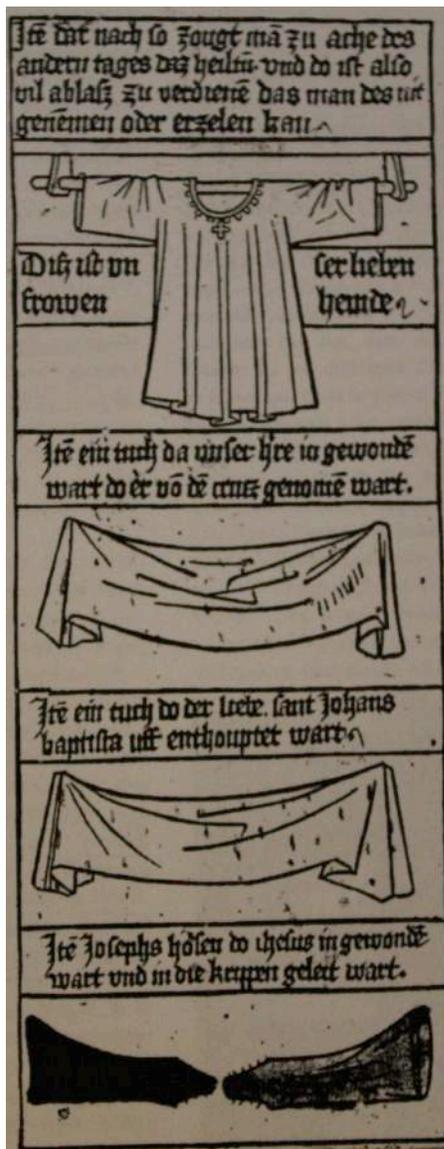
**2.27** Petrus Christus, *Nativity*, c. 1450-55, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



**2.28** Ivory diptych, early 14<sup>th</sup> century, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts



2.29 Westphalian silver relief, 1457, Rhynern parish church



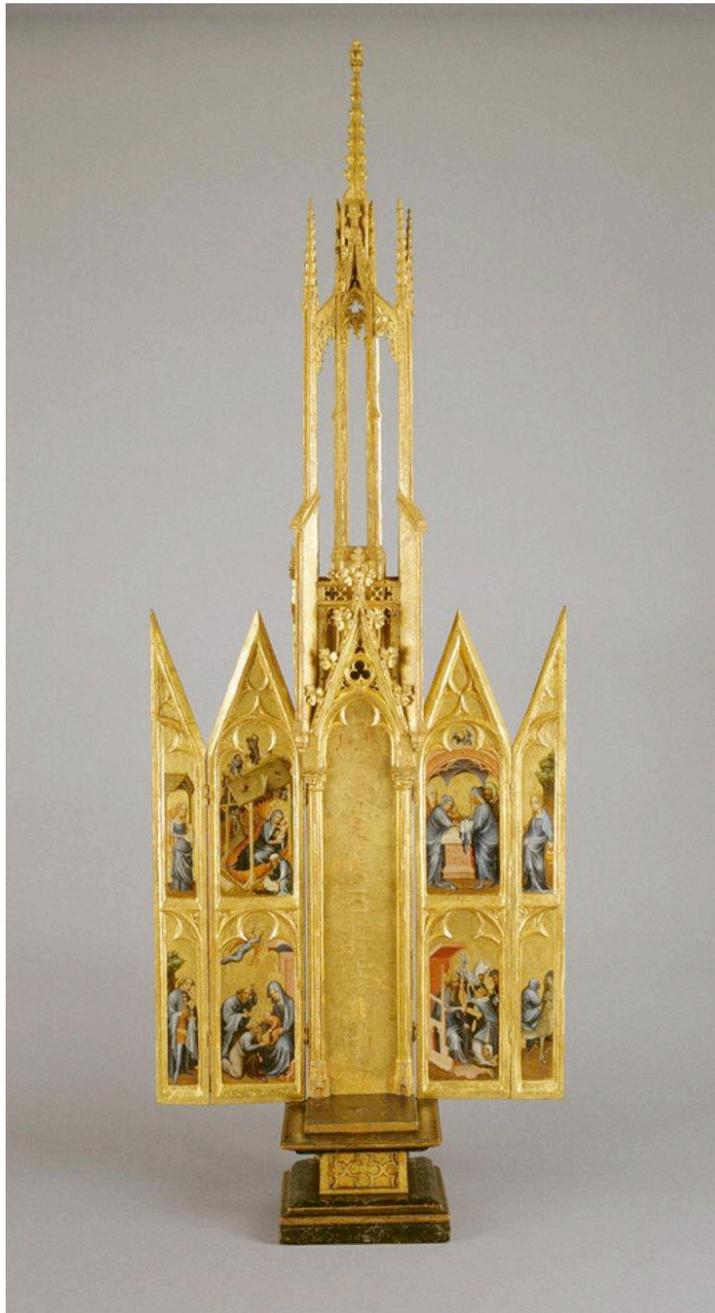
2.30 Detail from *Die großen Aachener Heiligtümer*, woodcut, 1468, Staatliche  
 Graphische Sammlung, Munich



**2.31** Melchior Broederlam, high altarpiece of the Chartreuse de Champmol, 1390s,  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



2.32 Melchior Broederlam, Presentation at the Temple and Flight into Egypt, detail of the high altarpiece of the Chartreuse de Champmol, 1390s, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



**2.33** Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



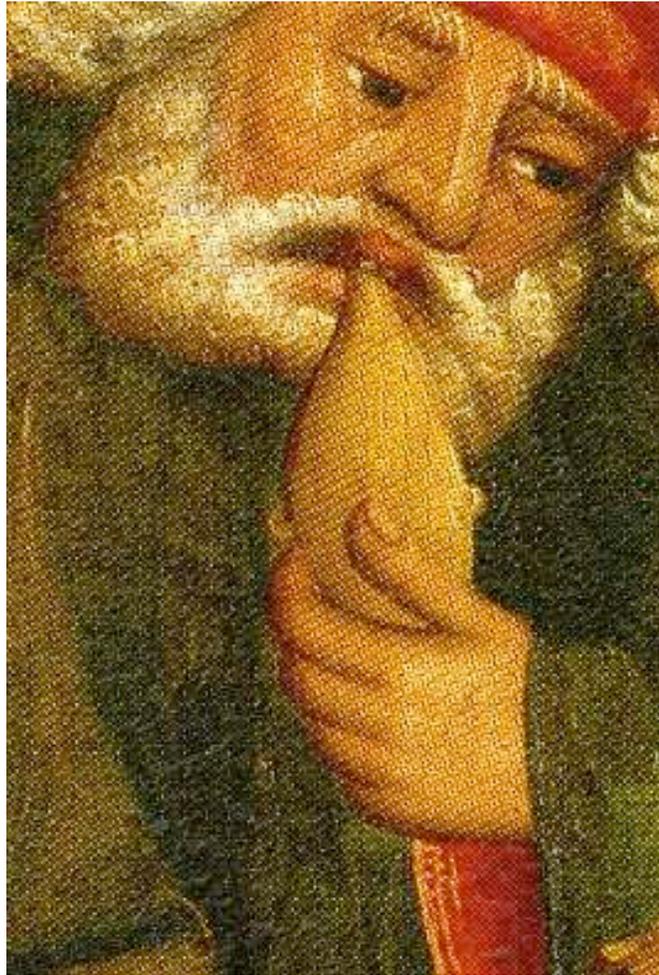
**2.34** Joseph drying diapers, Nativity, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



**2.35** Flight into Egypt, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



**2.36** Meister Bertram von Minden, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**2.37** Detail, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



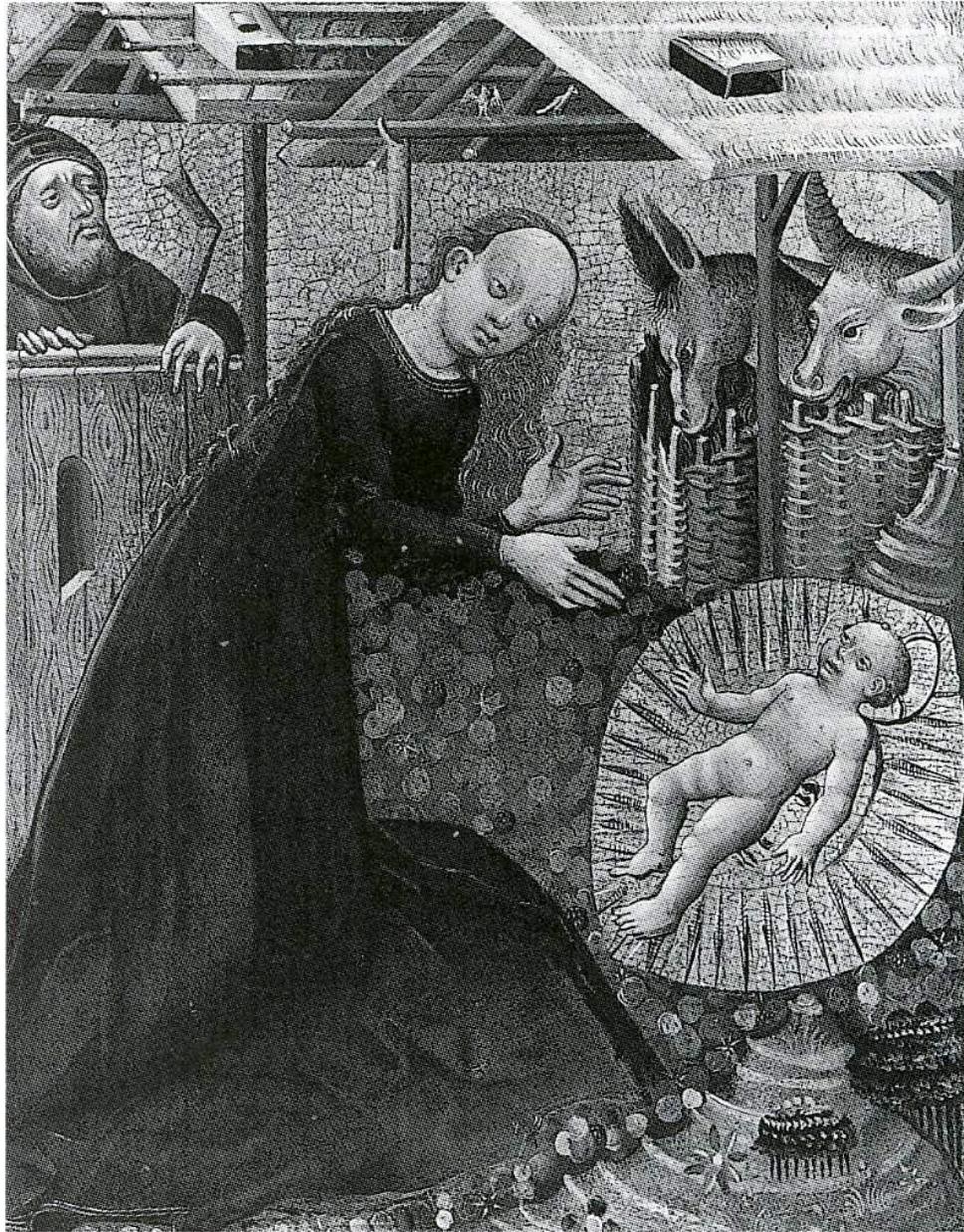
**2.38** Detail, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



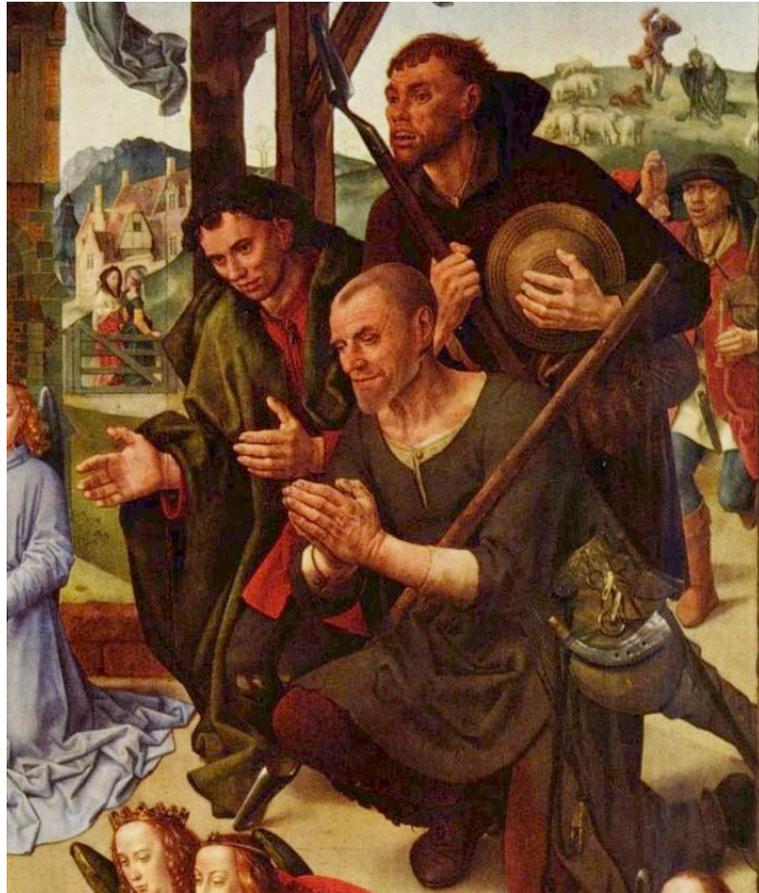
**2.39** Adoration of the Magi, detail of folio 68 recto of the Chevalier Hours, Paris, illuminated by the Boucicaut Master, first quarter of the fifteenth century. London, British Library MS. Add. 16977



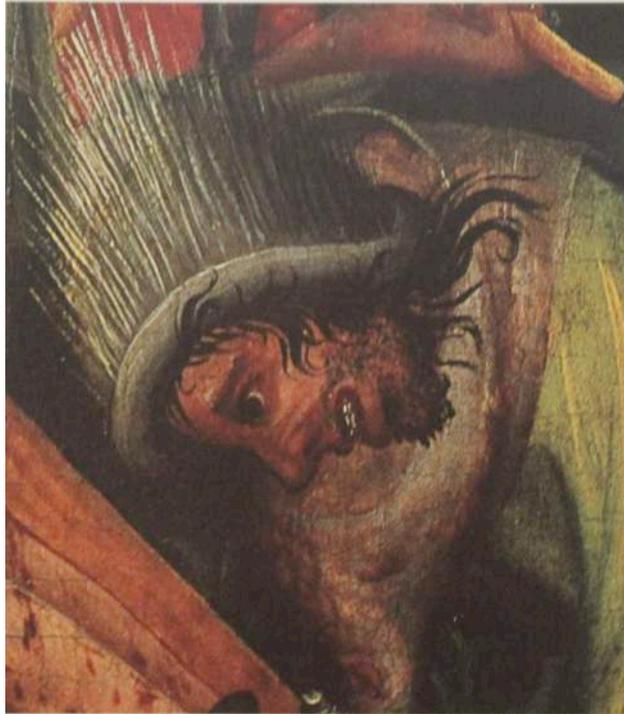
**2.40** Nativity, detail of folio 57 recto of the Chevalier Hours, Paris, illuminated by the Boucicaut Master, first quarter of the fifteenth century. London, British Library MS. Add. 16977



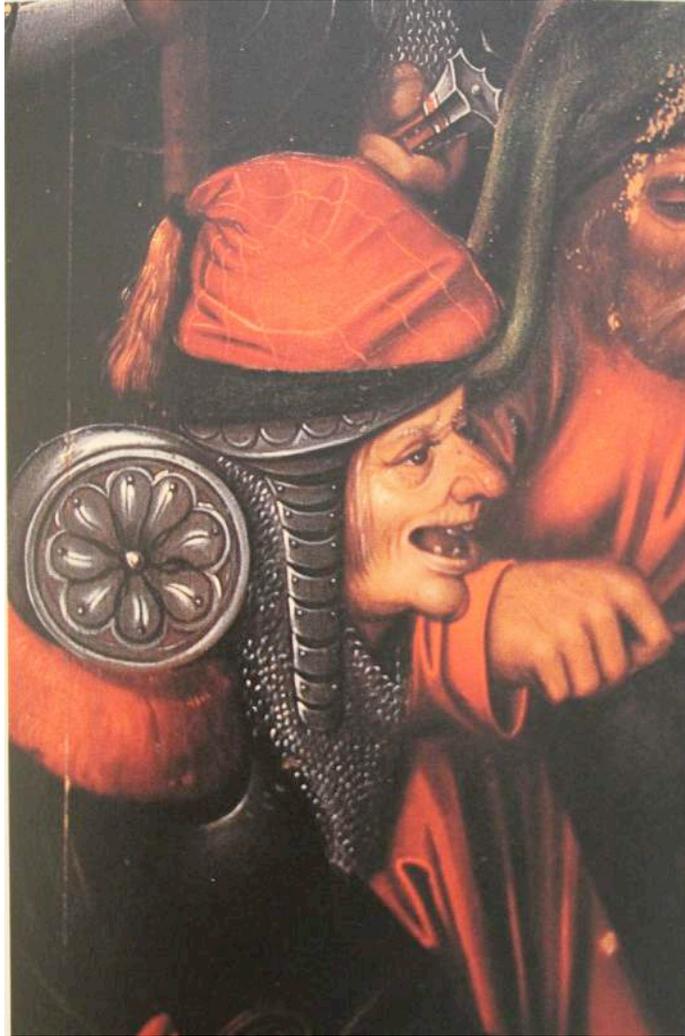
**2.41** Nativity, panel from an altarpiece by an anonymous Austrian or Hungarian artist, c. 1440, Esztergom Christian Museum, Hungary



**2.42** Hugo van der Goes, detail of the Portinari Altarpiece, 1475-76, Uffizi, Florence



**2.43** Detail of the Nailing of Christ to the Cross, Wing of the Idar-Oberstein Altarpiece, c. 1390, Idar-Oberstein



**2.44** Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder, detail of the Mocking of Christ, Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe



2.45 Jan Polack, *Crowning with Thorns*, c. 1490-1492, Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich



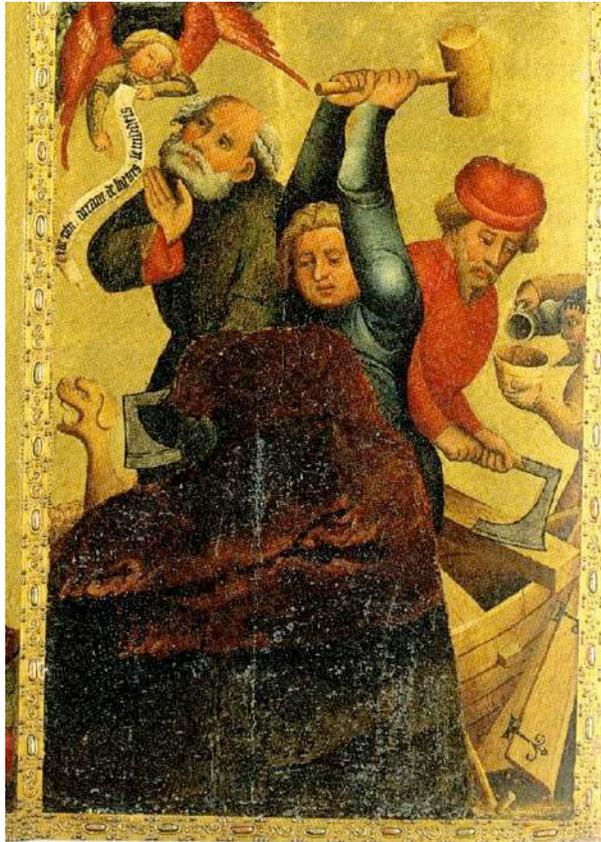
**2.46** Master of Cappenberg, detail of the Carrying of the Cross, panel of an altarpiece, Liesborn, c. 1510-1515, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster



2.47 Detail of the Betrayal and Arrest of Christ, Passion tapestry, Germany, c. 1518, Augustinermuseum, Freiburg im Breisgau



2.48 Meister Bertram von Minden and workshop, Harvesthuder Altar, c. 1410, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**2.49** Meister Bertram von Minden, *The Building of Noah's Ark*, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**2.50** Meister Bertram von Minden, Isaac Blessing Jacob, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83,  
Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**2.51** Rogier van der Weyden, Columba Altarpiece, before 1464, Alte Pinakothek, Munich



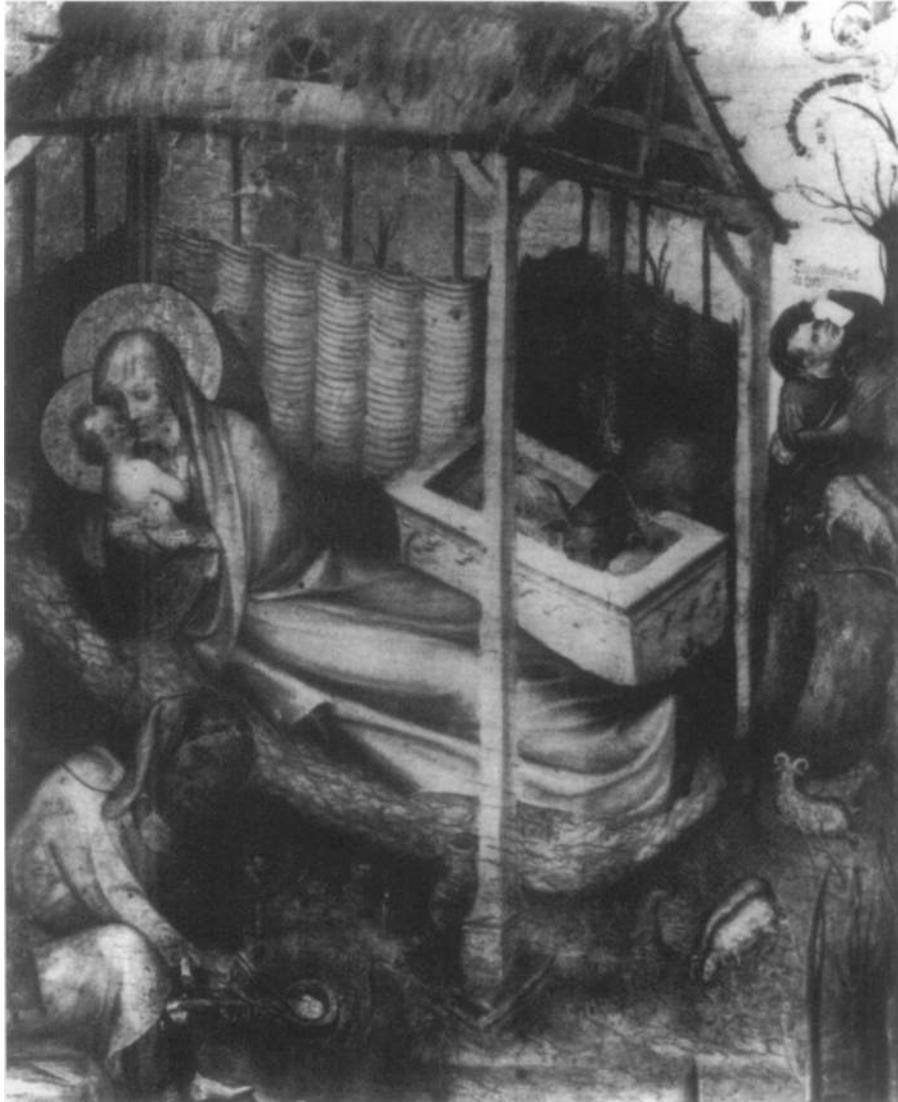
2.52 Robert Campin, Nativity, c. 1425, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



**2.53** Jan van Eyck, *Madonna in the Church*, c. 1438-1440, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin



**2.54** Master of the Vyšší Brod Cycle (Hohenfurth Master), Nativity, Vyšší Brod Cycle, c. 1345-1350, Prague



**2.55** Nativity scene from a painted retable, central Rhine Valley, c. 1410, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht



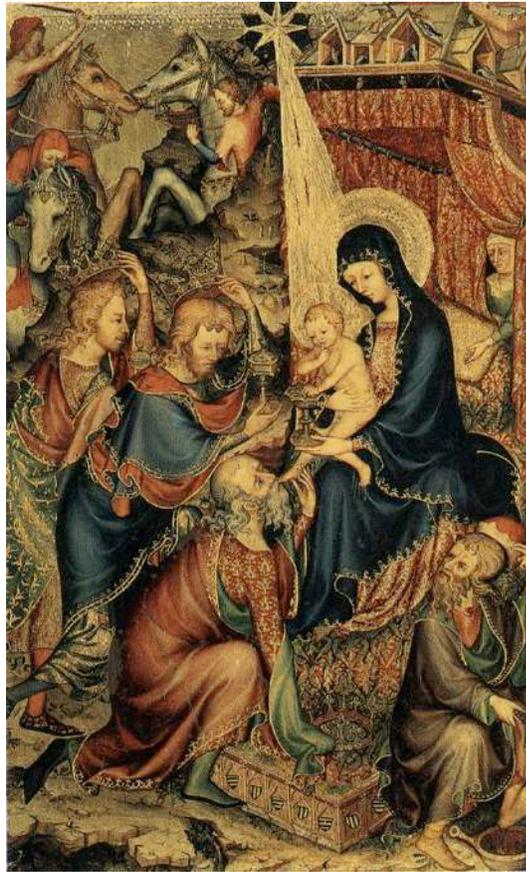
2.56 Conrad von Soest, Nativity, Bad Wildungen Altar, 1403, Bad Wildungen



**2.57** Nativity, Steirischer Meister, 1460-70, Stiftsgalerie, St. Lambrecht



**2.58** Adoration of the Magi, Schloss Tirol Altar, 1370-72, Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck



**3.1** Franco-Flemish painter of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Adoration of the Magi from the “Small Carrand Diptych,” c. 1355-1360, Museo Nazionale, Palazzo del Bargello, Florence



**3.2** Misericord from the collegiate church of St. Catherine, Hoogstraten, mid-16<sup>th</sup> century



**3.3** Israhel van Meckenem, Hen-pecked husband, 1480



**3.4** Hieronymus Bosch, Adoration of the Magi (interior wings), c. 1510, Prado Museum, Madrid



**3.5** Hieronymus Bosch, detail of the Adoration of the Magi, c. 1510, Prado Museum, Madrid

Kein edler schatz ist auffder ert, Dann ein frums weib die chz begert.  
Der arm göhe.



**Die frau spricht.**  
Lieber nestill ist ober wort  
Schweyß still ich soll die in das hart  
Wiltu ein schöner frumie fremlein han  
Das die allere ist vnderst  
So bleib dabey in deinem hauff  
Vnd lauff nicht alle löber auß  
Tracht gar vnd hauffen lauffen/  
Junge leyden vnd wasser lauffen  
Vnd sterben bey weyblicher er  
Ist schöner jungen frauen schweer  
Wiltu mit arbayten vnd mich erretzen  
So mußt du machen stillen vnd betzen  
Vnd mußt die luffen dein bald abeten.

**Der gefelle.**  
Was sage je darv junckfraw seyn/  
Wolt je zu d'allo Sy man fern  
Vnd selbe haben in er hande  
Schweyß stüch richen vnd erment  
Ist wolt beissen schone vñ schneide  
Das fünd vnd möcht ich ve niche leide  
Wolt ich mich mit euch reuffen vñ schlaf  
Villeyde mußt ich in einen waagen gen  
Wie diler man im forren leyden  
Vnd alle freud vnd fümmeyl meyden  
Sol ich mein freu leyden verzeren  
Ist spülen mußt ich fochen vnd betzen  
Ich wolt ebe weybenemen verschmerzen.

**Die junckfraw.**  
Gefel glaube mit bey meiner chz  
Solches gewalte ich niche begert  
Wann je wolt nach eben ringen  
So sey ich man in allen dingen  
Vnd wenn je mich allem gewert  
Was einer frauen sügebirt  
Zu lieb vnd luyd notdürfft vnd eben  
So wolt ich anders niche begert  
Dann alker erzen wollen thun  
Daran sol je kein zweiffel han  
In ewem dienst wil ich mich vben  
Vnd such in flantz frumdschafft leyden  
Wilt auch mit keinem wort betzen.

**Die Herrin.**  
Güt dich bey leyb zu junger knecht  
Ich arme nemin sag die rechte  
Man sag vil gütes von der Le  
Sy hie vil hülicher das wech  
Du mußt leyden stiß in den tode  
Vil angst stog kummer vnd auch not  
Das die kein mensch niche wenden kan  
Jusstu doch stüch wil fremlein schan  
Die gerten thun den wellen dem  
Für vnd ein fordein mit wein  
Darnach magst du se faren lan  
Vnd ein andere nemin an  
Ist eweyd mußt ewig han.

**Der weiff man.**  
Gefel ich wil dich besser leyden  
Güt dich nicht an ein netzen leyden  
Süt dich allere vil büren list  
Du wolt betrogen zu allen frist  
Ist die ein fremlein zu der Le  
Ist geb wie es dir mit je gebe  
So bleib bey je in lieb vnd leyde  
Vnd stiß gedung alle set  
Ob die be gegnet kummer vil  
Gedend die es leybettes wil  
Ist sie im schweyß erma angefrucht  
Wie ist am ersten oberst spucht  
Gedult vnd leyden ist con per  
Durch die wir kumen an das er  
Da die Engel wohnung han  
Ist spricht Albrecht Glockend.

3.6 Erhard Schön, There is No Greater Treasure Than an Obedient Wife Who Covets Honor, woodcut, 1533, Schlossmuseum, Gotha



**3.7** Hans Schüffelein, Diaper Washer, woodcut to lost poem, “Ho, Ho, Diaper Washer”  
by Hans Sachs, 1536, Coburg, Kupferstichkabinett, Kunstsammlungen Veste Coburg



3.8 Limbourg Brothers, February, *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry, before 1416



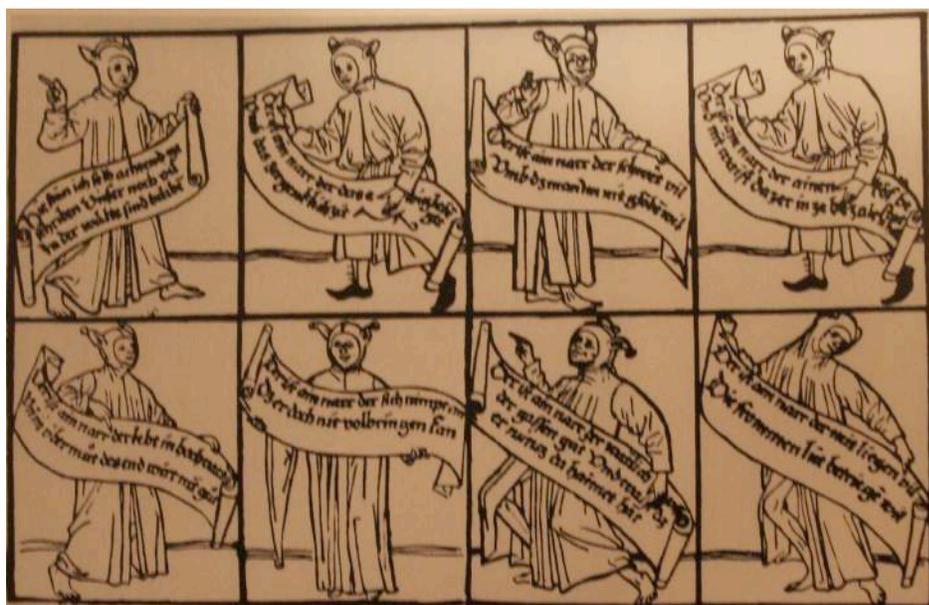
3.9 Jean Pucelle, Betrayal of Christ and the Annunciation, Book of Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux, 1324-28



**3.10** Joseph drying diapers, Nativity, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



**3.11** Flight into Egypt, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



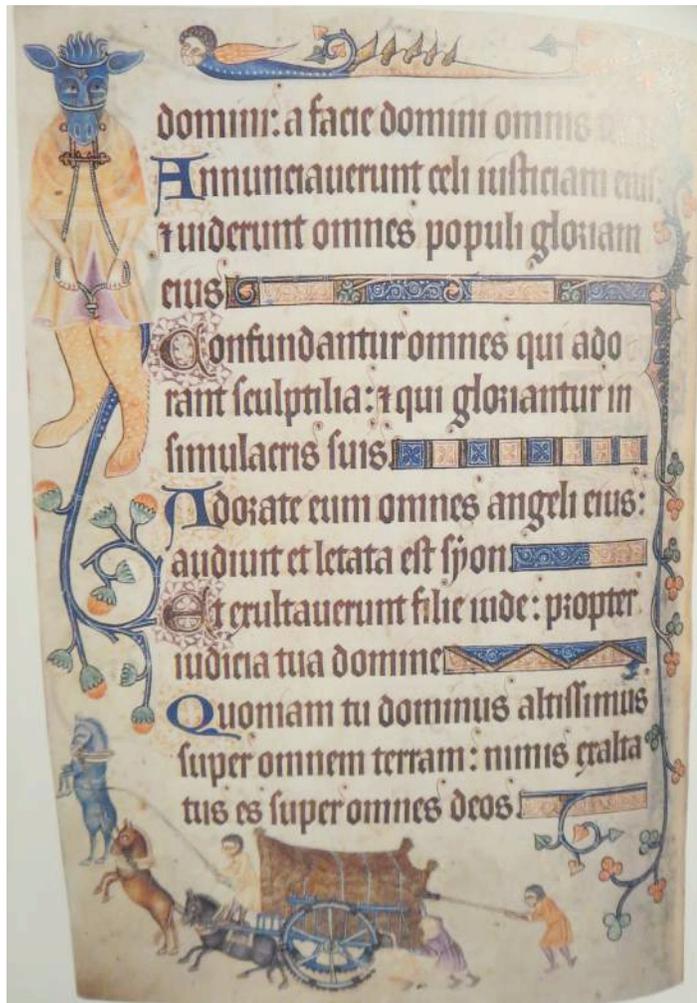
3.12 'He is a Fool,' series of 8 woodcuts of Fools, Ulm, c. 1480



**3.13** Nativity, Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych of Philip the Bold, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



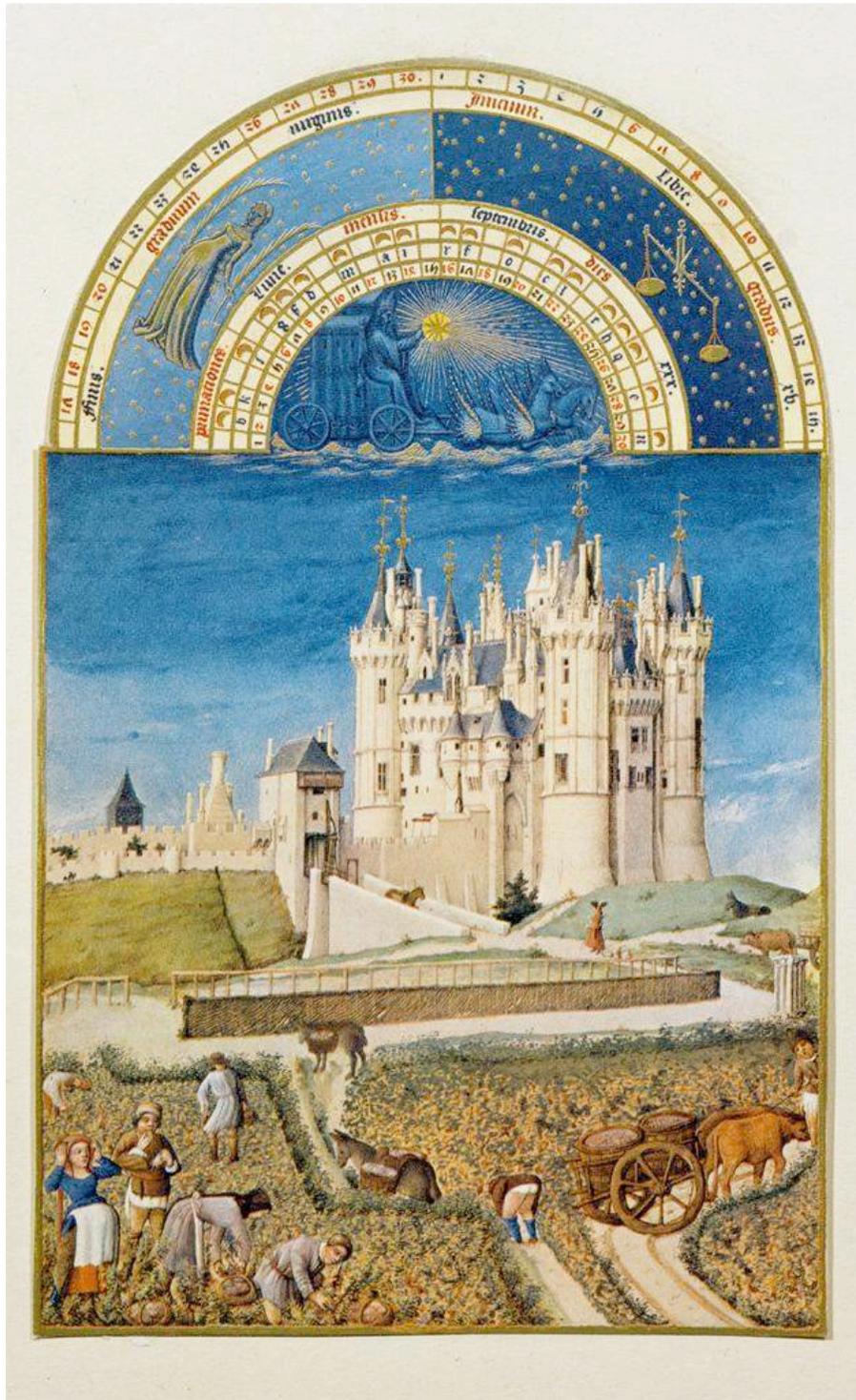
**3.14** Melchior Broederlam, Presentation at the Temple and Flight into Egypt, right side of the altarpiece of the Chartreuse de Champmol, 1390s, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



**3.15** Laboring peasants and an ass-man-babewyn, Luttrell Psalter, c. 1335-40, British Museum Ms. Add. 42130, fol. 173v



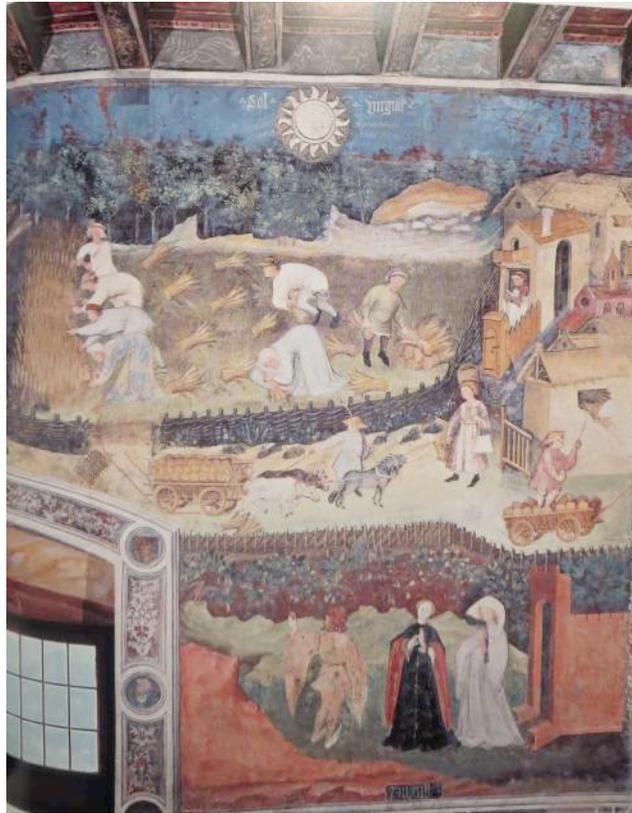
3.16 Reaping, Luttrell Psalter, c. 1335-40, British Museum Ms. Add. 42130, fol. 172v



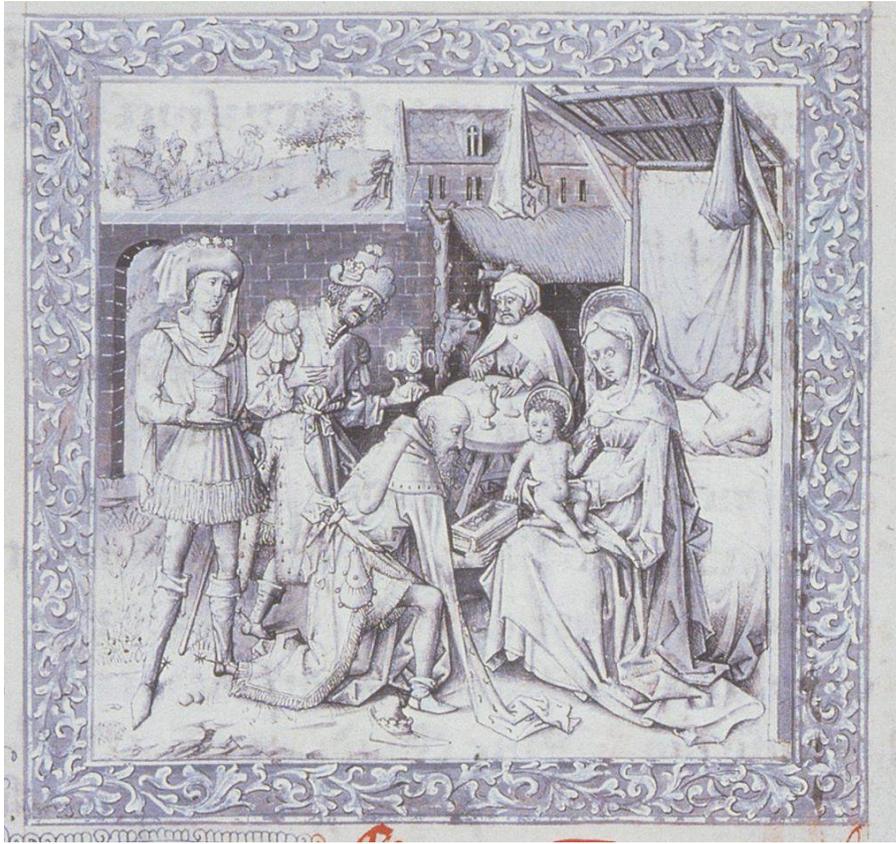
3.17 Limbourg Brothers, September, *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry, before 1416



3.18 Limbourg Brothers, March, *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry, before 1416



**3.19** Bohemian artist, Cycle of the Months, before 1407, Torre d'Aquila of the Buonconsiglio Castle, Trent



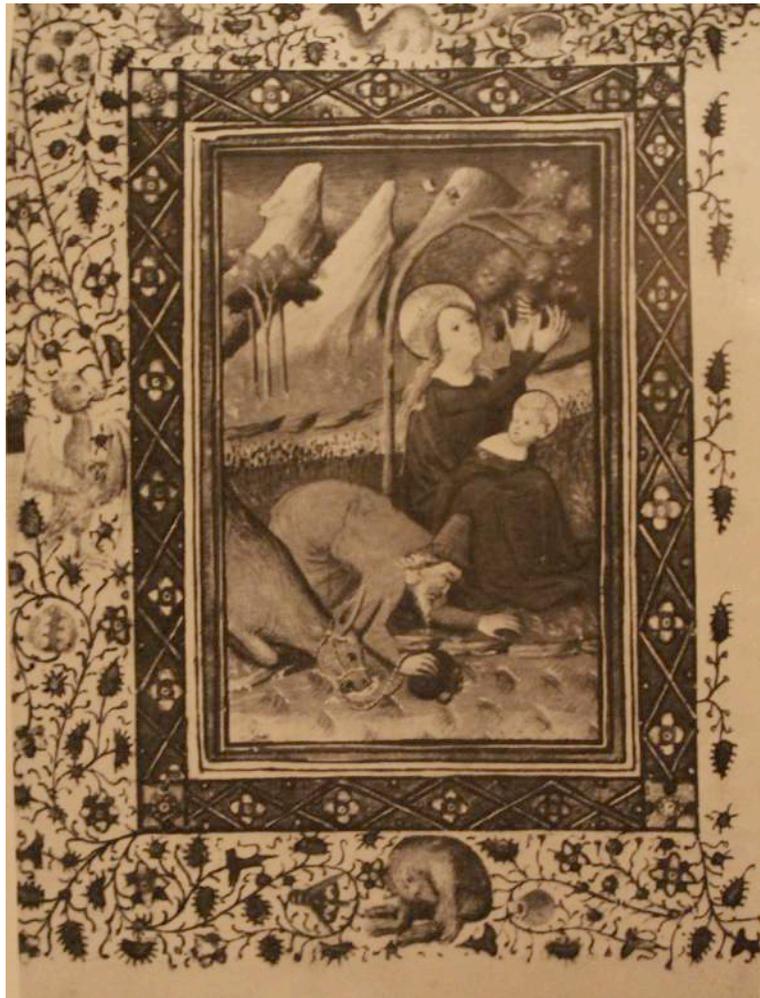
**3.20** Jean le Tavernier (active in Oudenaarde ca. 1434-69), Adoration of the Magi, Book of Hours of Philip of Burgundy, 1454, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 76, fol.



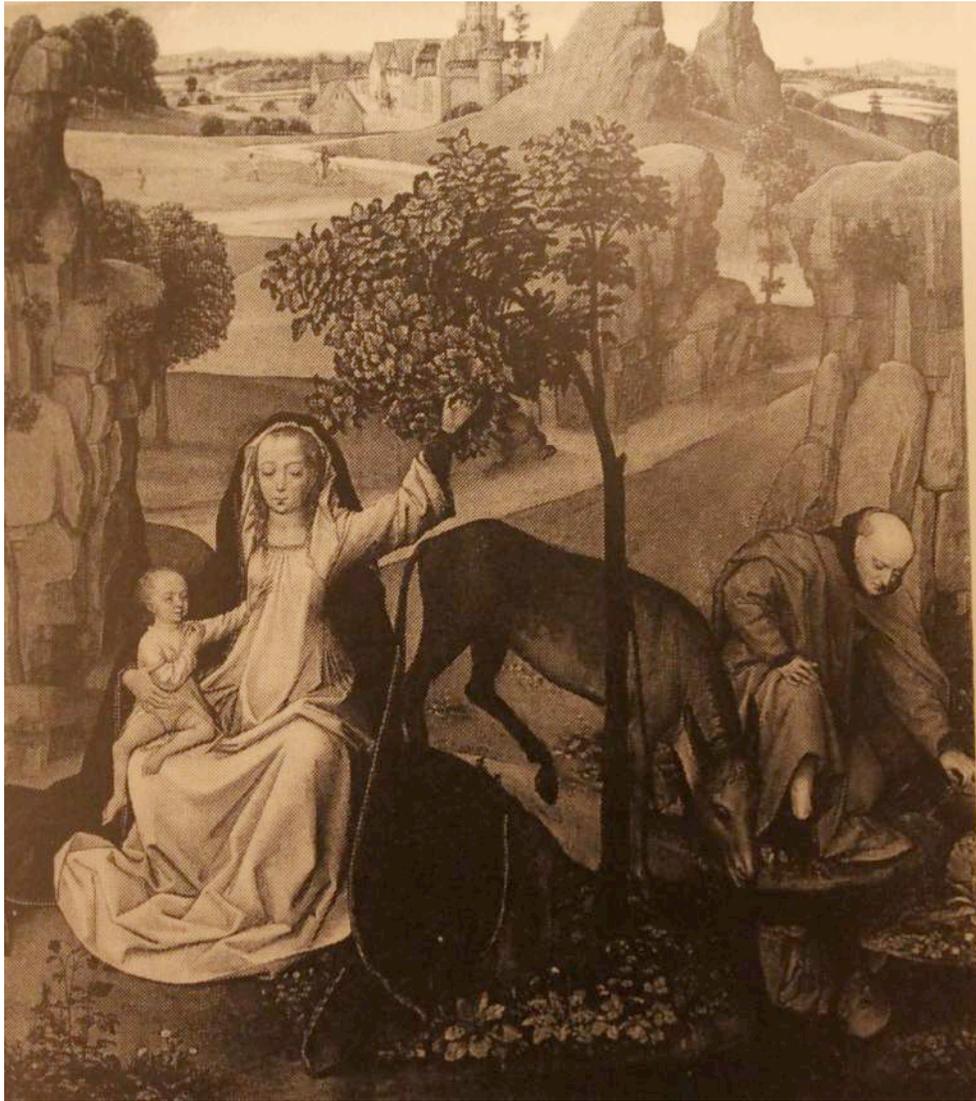
**3. 21** Christine de Pisan presents her book to Isabelle de Baviere, *La Cité des Dames*, c. 1405, Ms. 9393, fol. 3



**3.22** Jean le Tavernier, Nativity, Book of Hours of Philip of Burgundy, 1454, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 76, fol. 12r



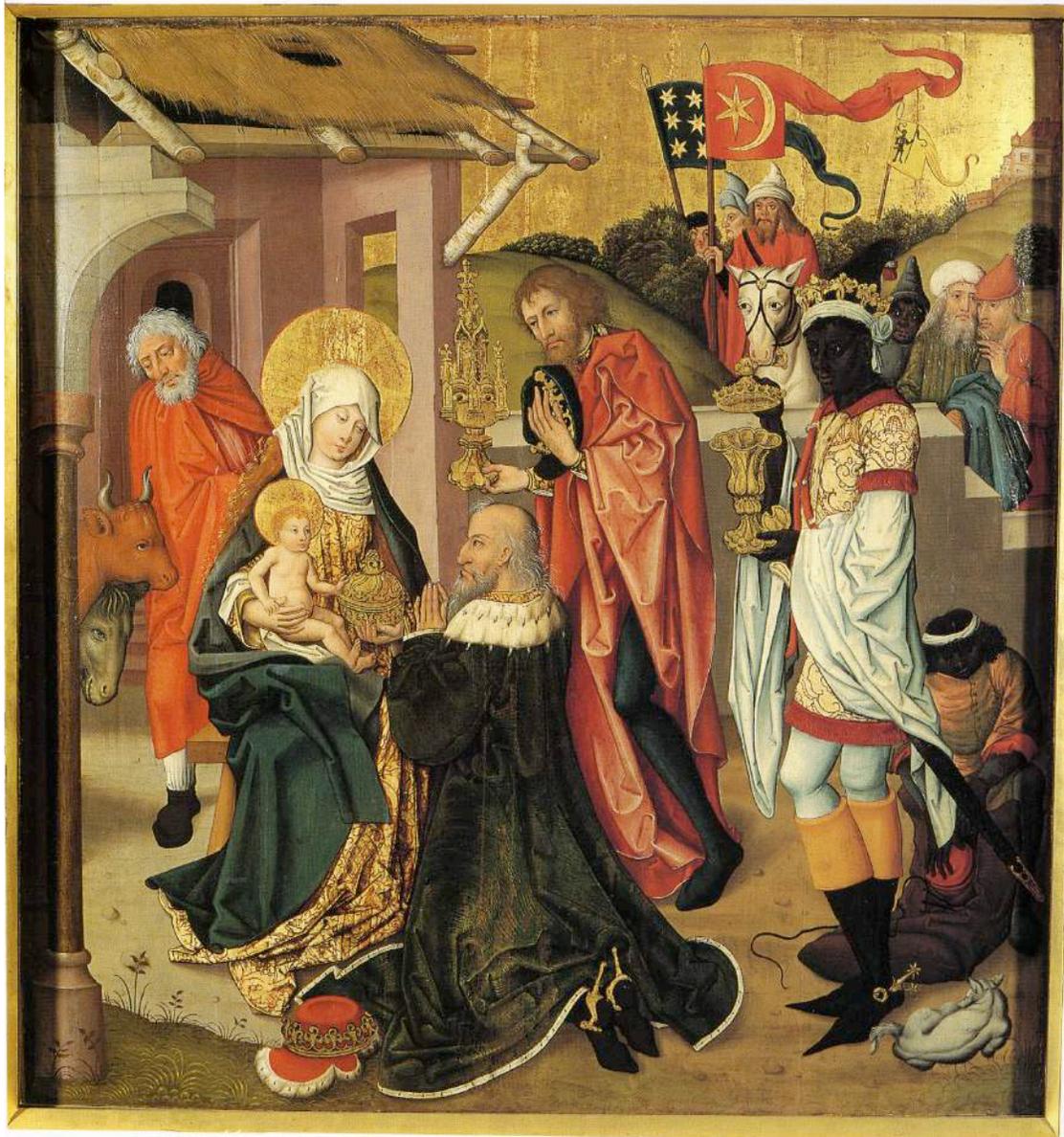
**3.23** French Flemish artist, Book of Hours for use of Rouen, in Latin with a French rubric, c. 1425, Walters Art Gallery, ms. W. 211



**3.24** Circle of Rogier van der Weyden, Rest on the Flight, panel of the Polyptych of the Childhood of Christ, Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, inv. 474 and 99



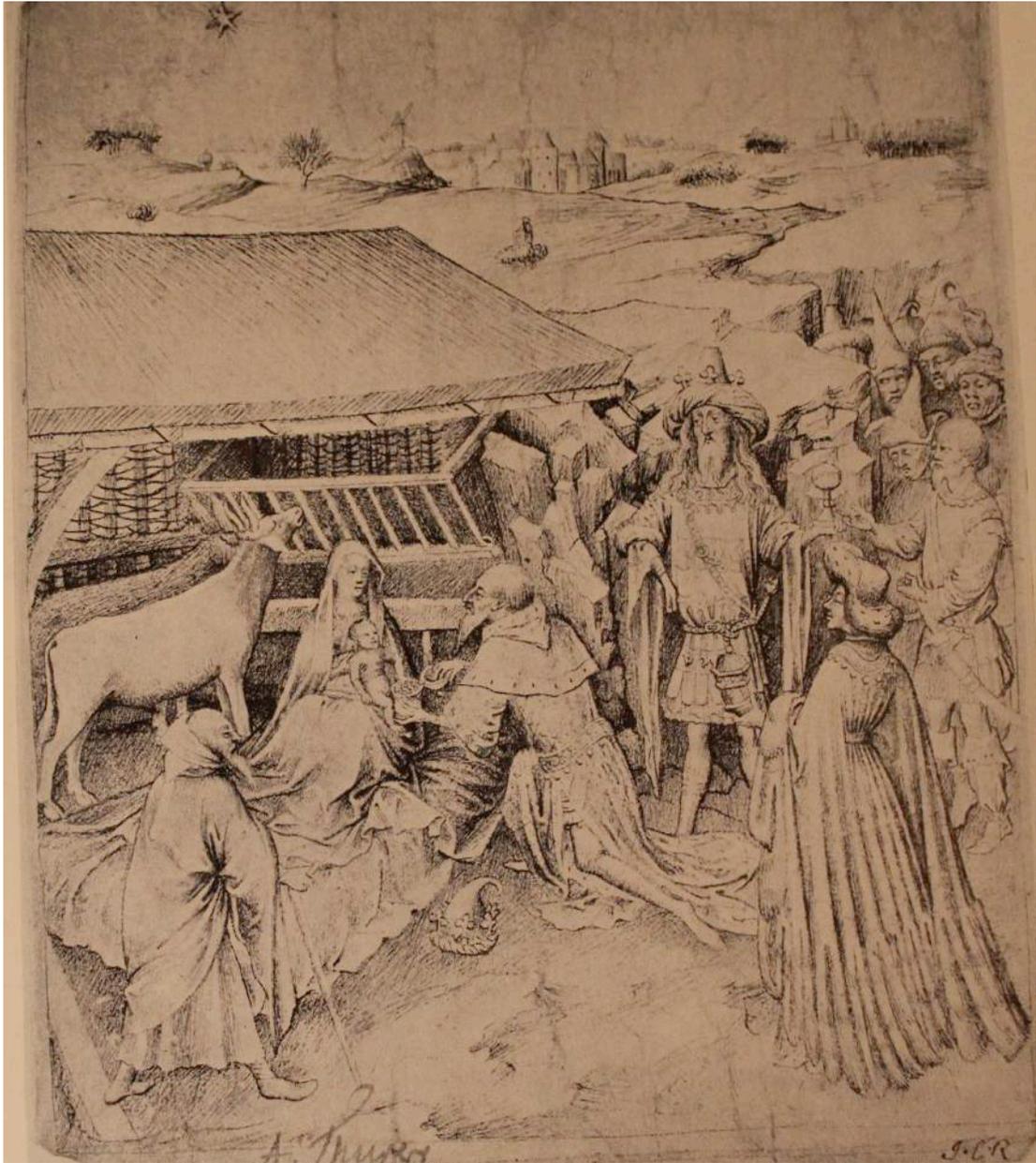
**3.25** Meister Bertram von Minden, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



3.26 School of Martin Schongauer, Adoration of the Magi, c. 1475, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar



**3.27** Master of St. Barbara, Adoration of the Magi, central panel of a triptych, Galleria Colonna, Rome



**3.28** Circle of Jan van Eyck, Adoration of the Magi, pen on vellum, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



**3.29** Hans Baldung Grien, *Nativity*, c. 1510, pen, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt



**3.30** Boucicaut Master, Adoration of the Magi, detail of folio 68 recto of the Chevalier Hours, Paris, first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, London, British Library MS. Add. 16977



**3.31** Boucicaut Master, Nativity, detail of folio 57 recto of the Chevalier Hours, Paris, first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. London, British Library MS. Add. 16977



3.32 Master B.R., Adoration of the Magi, late 15<sup>th</sup> century, lower Rhine



**3.33** Martin Schongauer, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c. 1475, engraving, Cleveland Museum of Art



**3.34** Follower of Martin Schongauer, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c. 1500, oil on panel, The Courtauld Gallery, Samuel Courtauld Trust, London



**3.35** Meister Bertram von Minden, Nativity, High altar of the Petri-Kirche in Buxtehude, c. 1410, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**3.36** Meister Bertram von Minden, Nativity, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**3.37** Veit Stoss, Flight into Egypt, relief sculpture, part of the Bamberg Altar, c. 1520, Bamberg Cathedral



3.38 Flight into Egypt, *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Middle Dutch, c. 1400. London, British Library MS. Add. 11575, folio 25 recto



**3.39** Flight into Egypt, detail of the Rouen Book of Hours, 14<sup>th</sup> century. Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale MS. 3024, folio 53 verso



**3.40** Bedford Master and associate, Flight into Egypt, detail from a Book of Hours, Paris, c. 1410-1415. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery MS. W. 265, folio 90 recto



**3.41** Sebald Beham, Large Peasant Holiday, detail, woodcut, 1535



**3.42** Sebald Beham Large Peasant Holiday, detail, woodcut, 1535



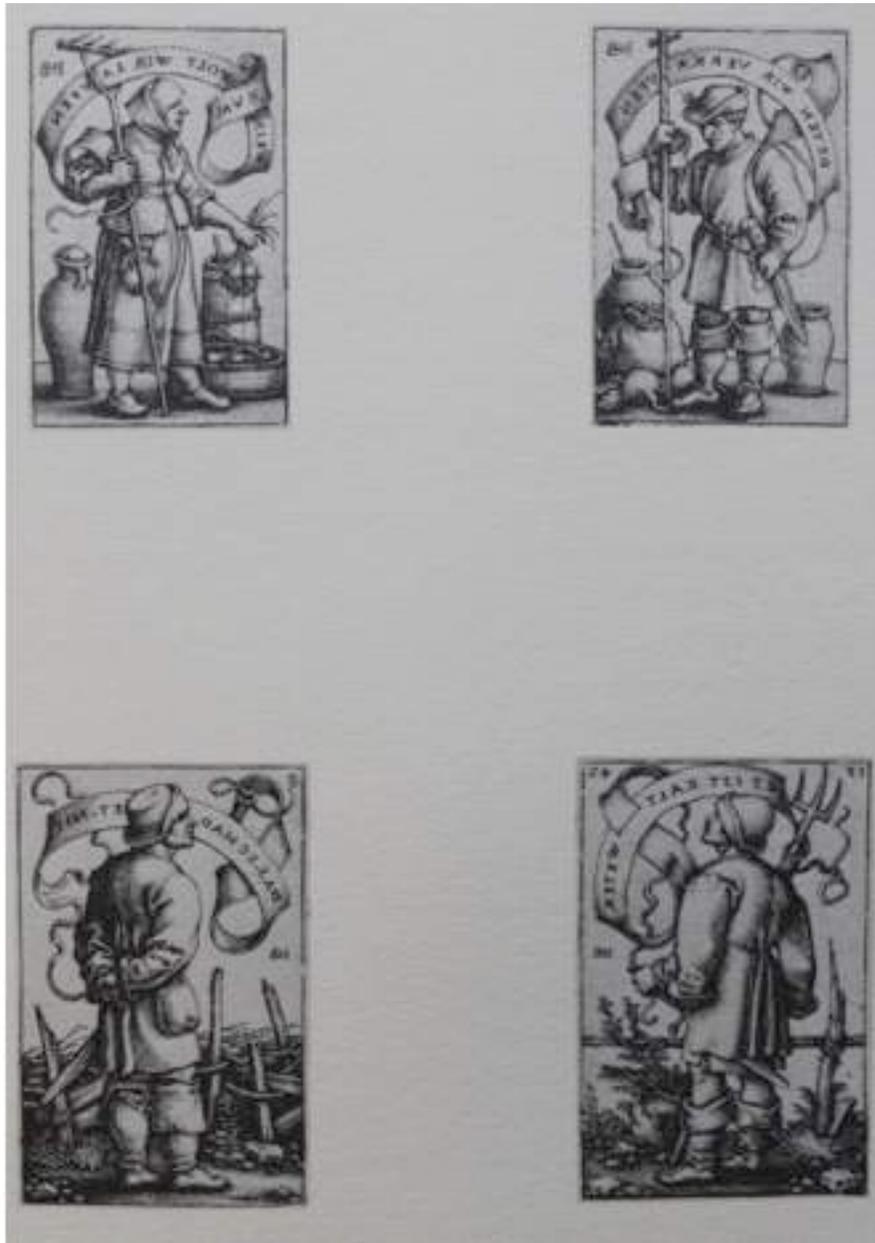
3.43 Hans Schuffelein, Dance Leaders and Torchbearers, woodcut, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



**3.44** Albrecht Dürer, Dance around the Golden Calf, woodcut illustration to Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (Basel, 1494), chapter 61, "On Dancing"



3.45 Albrecht Dürer, On the Road to Salvation, woodcut illustrating chapter 47 of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (Basel, 1494)



**3.46** Sebald Beham, *The Market Peasants and The Weather Peasants*, c. 1542, engravings, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri



**Fig. 3.47** Sebald Beham, Peasant Festival, 1546, engravings, Cincinnati Museum of Art, Albert P. Streitmann Collection



**Fig. 3.48** Sebald Beham, Standard-bearer and Drummer, 1544, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Felix M. Warburg and His Family, 1941, 41.1.90



**Fig. 3.49** Barthel Beham, Peasant with a Pitchfork, engraving, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William A. Sargent Fund, 54.148



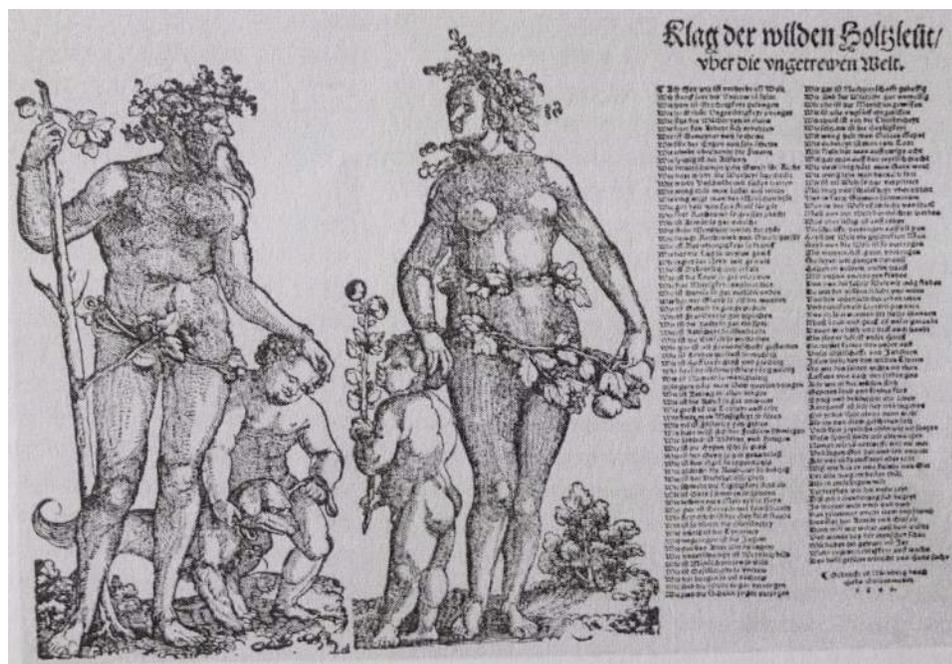
77a.) Der Bauer von Köln



77b.) Der Bauer von Regensburg



**3.50** Peasants as Personifications of German Towns, wood sculptures by Jacob Russ, 1494, Überlingen Rathausaal



3.51 Hans Schuffelein, Family of Wild People, 1530, woodcut with text by Hans Sachs



**3.52** Albrecht Altdorfer, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1510, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin



3.53 Master of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Holy Family at Work, from the Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves, c. 1434-40, Morgan Library and Museum, New York



**3.54** Robert Campin, Joseph Drilling with Mousetraps, Mérode Altarpiece, c. 1425, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York



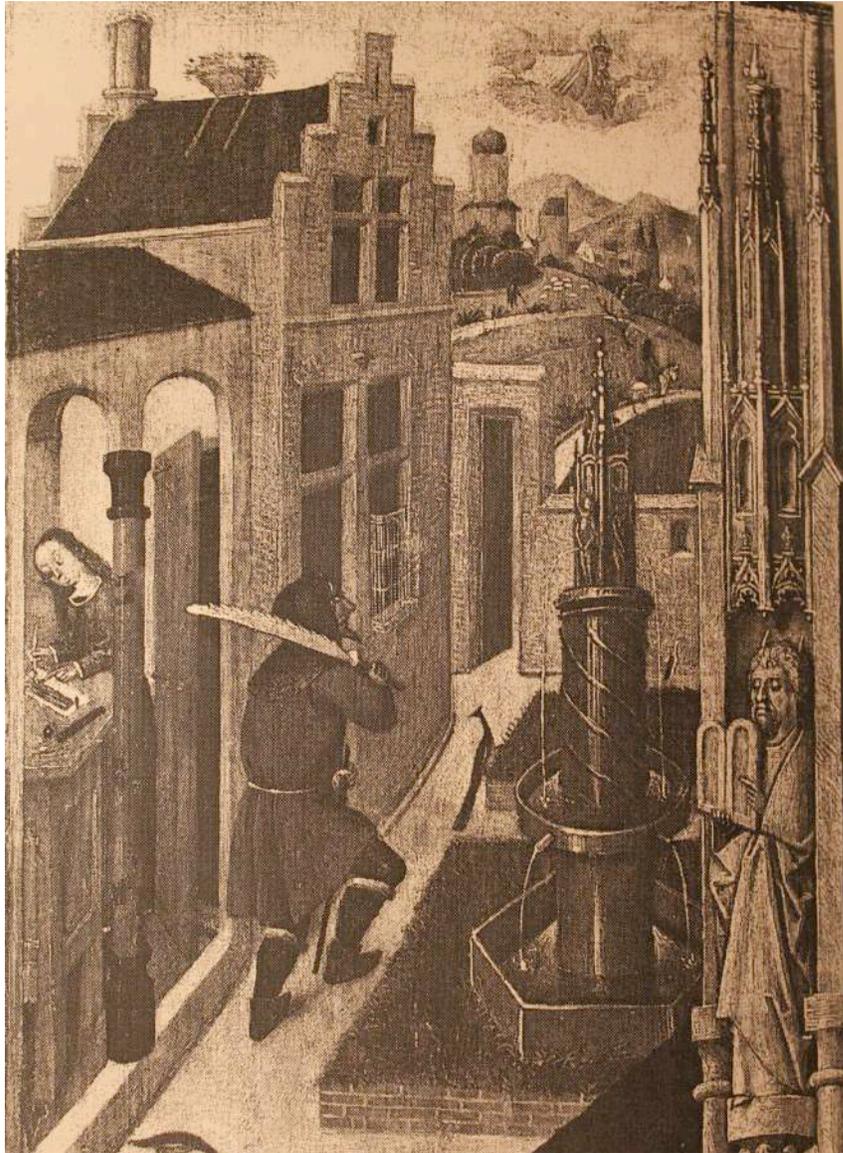
**3.55** Robert Campin, Mérode Altarpiece, c. 1425, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York



**3.56** North Guelders or Cleves Master, Nativity, c. 1410-15, Berlin Deutsches Historisches Museum



**3.57** Copy after Robert Campin, Joseph's Repentance of his Doubt, The Life of St. Joseph, St. Katarinakerk, Hoogstraten



**3.58** Master of the View of Sainte-Gudule, Life of Joseph, detail: Joseph Going Off to Work with Mary in Background, Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels



**3.59** Master of the Little Garden of Paradise and His Workshop, The Doubt of Joseph, Strasbourg, c. 1430, Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre Dame, Strasbourg



**3.60** Master of the Little Garden of Paradise, *The Little Garden of Paradise*, c. 1410-1420, Upper Rhenish, Städel Museum, Frankfurt



**3.61** Lucas van Leyden, Holy Family, engraving, c. 1508



**3.62** Master of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Holy Family at Supper, from the Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves, c. 1434-40, Morgan Library and Museum, New York



**3.63** Master E.S., Love Garden with Chess Players, engraving, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



3.64 Albrecht Dürer, *The Promenade*, engraving, Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection



**3.65** Master of the Love Gardens, Large Love Garden, engraving, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



**3.66** Sebald Beham, Buffoon and Two Bathing Women, 1541, engraving, Metropolitan Museum of Art (41.1.99), New York



**3.67** Master of the Banderoles, The Fencing Room, engraving, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna



3.68 Limbourg Brothers, January, *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry, before 1416



**3.69** Urs Graf, Lustful Old Fool and Woman With Baby: Allegory of Fiddling, drawing, Kupferstichkabinett, Basel



3.70 Hans Wandereisen, Old Man and Young Wife, 1519, woodcut



**3.71** Lucas van Leyden, Old Fool Young Woman, 1520, etching with engraving



3.72 Albrecht Dürer, Old Wife and Young Fool, from Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, 1494, woodcut



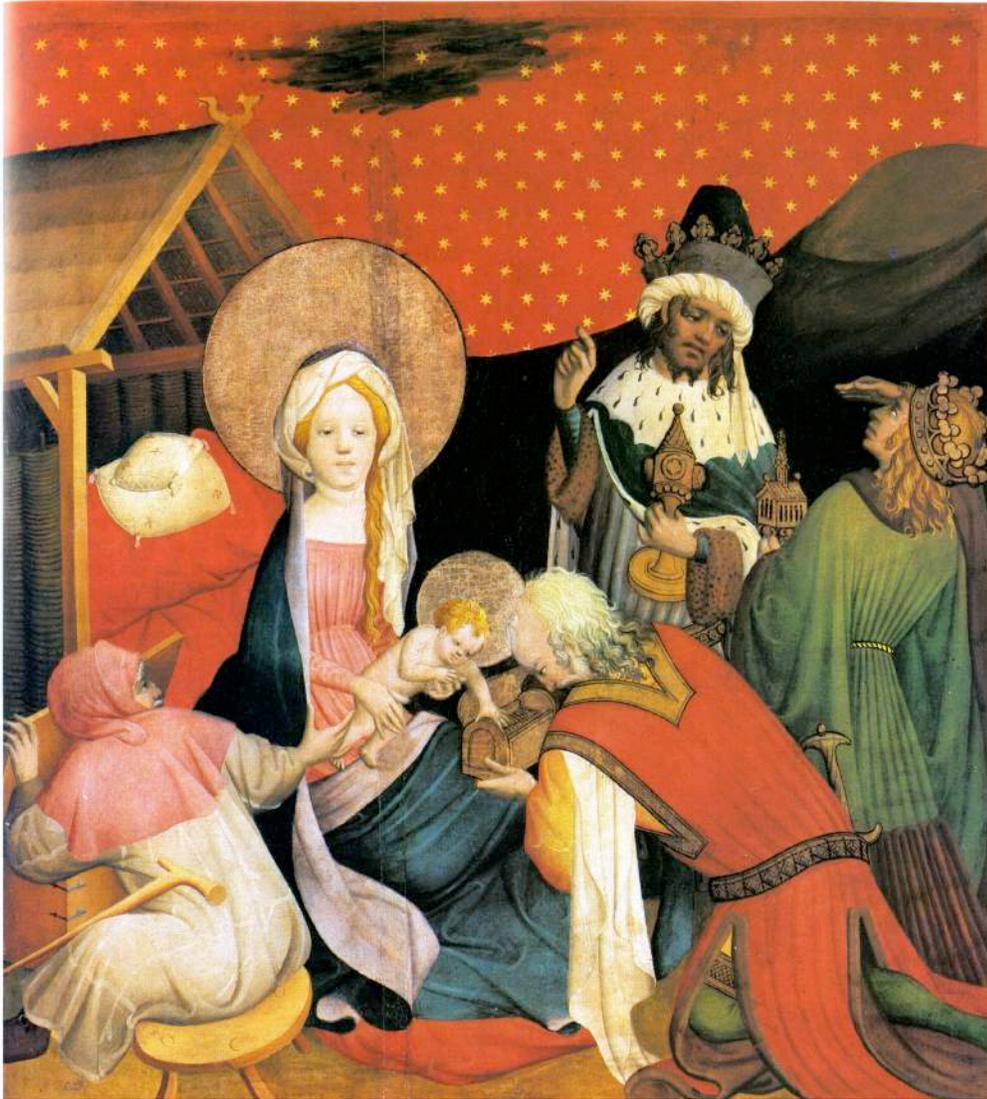
**3.73** Niklaus Manuel, *Old Woman, Young Man, and Demon*, c. 1515, Kupferstichkabinett, Kunstmuseum, Basel



3.74 Joos van Cleve, Holy Family, c. 1512-13, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



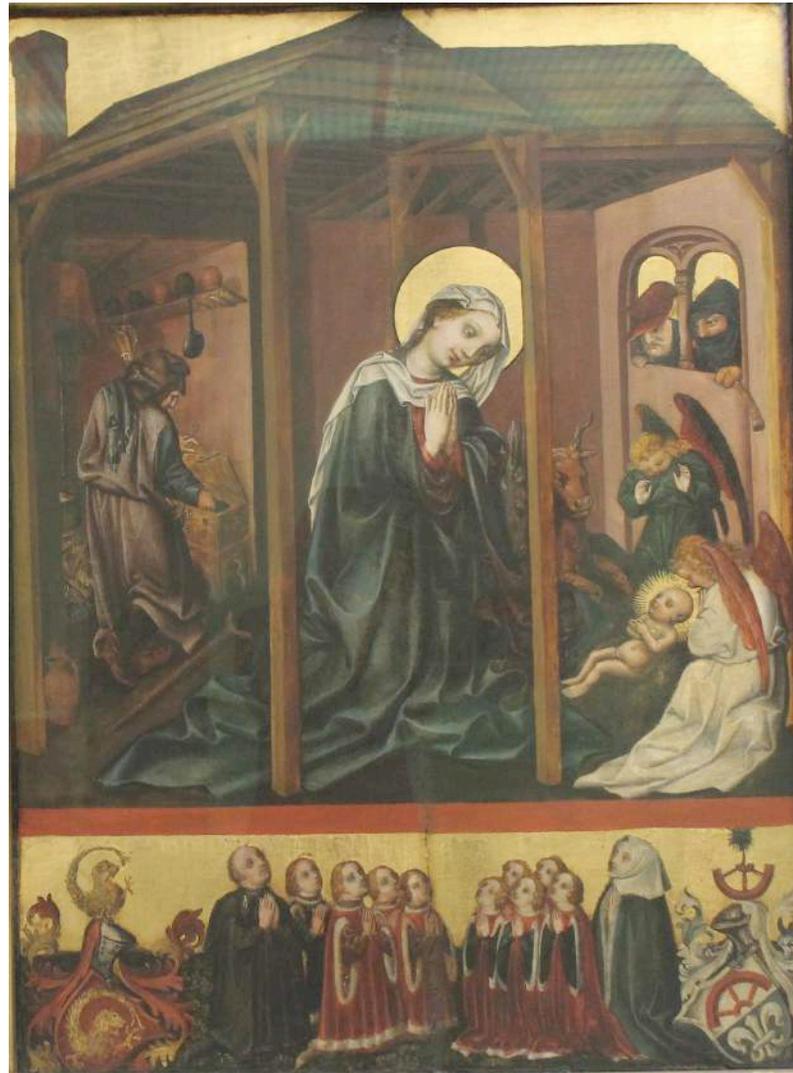
4.1 Hugo van der Goes, Portinari Altarpiece, 1475-76, Uffizi, Florence



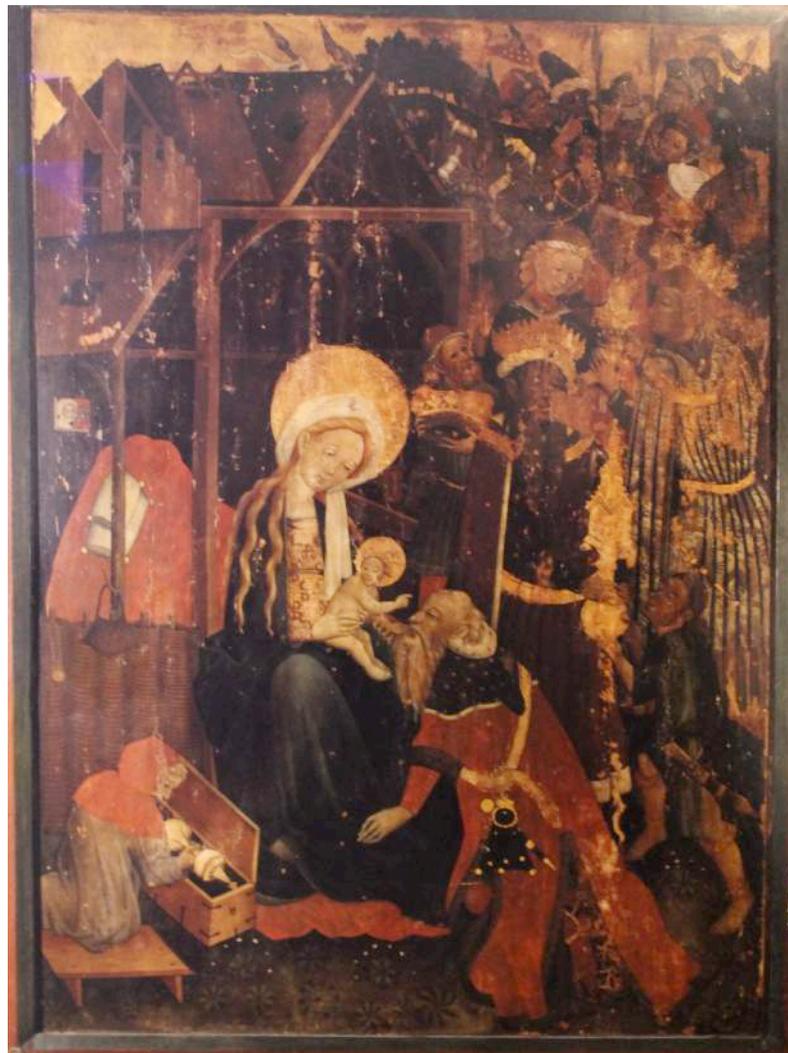
4.2 Meister Francke, Adoration of the Magi, St. Thomas (Englandfahrer) Altarpiece, 1424, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



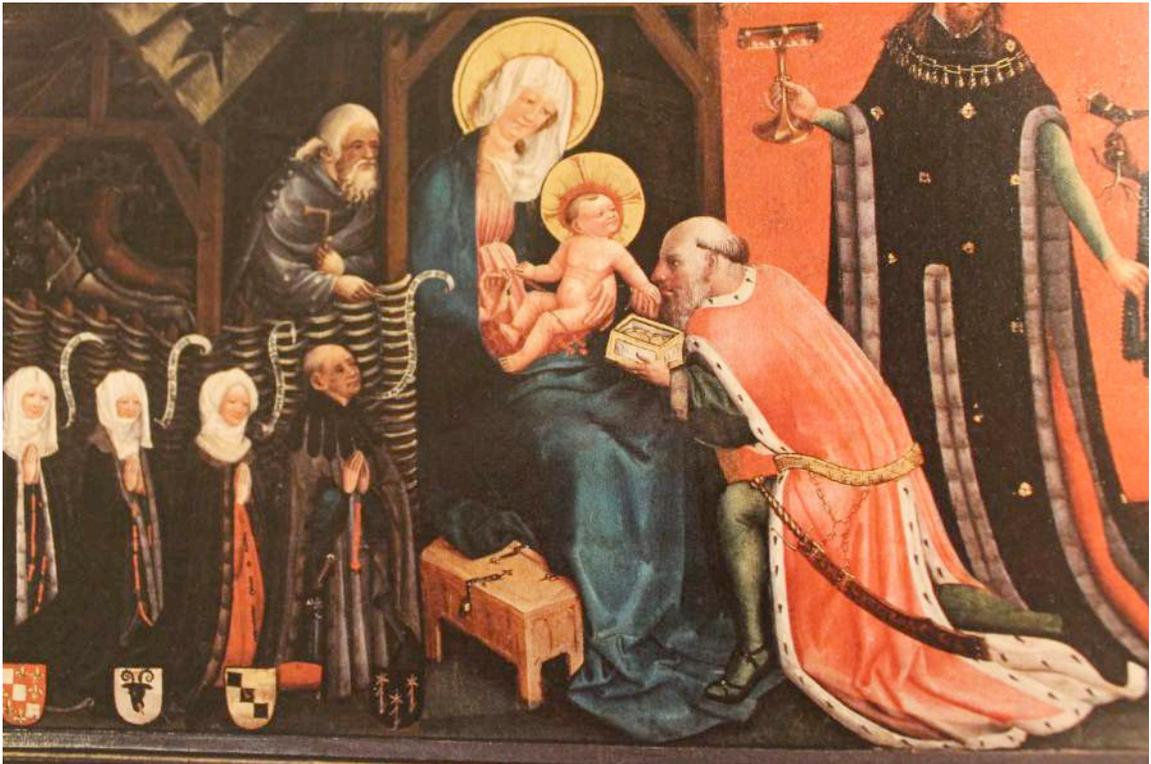
**4.3** Master E.S., Adoration of the Magi, engraving, mid-fifteenth century, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection



4.4 Meister des Tucher-Altars (?), Epitaph Painting for Clara Imhoff, c. 1438, loan from the Church of St. Sebald, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg



**4.5** Pupil of Meister Francke, Adoration of the Magi, Preetz Altarpiece, c. 1435, Preetz Abbey, Holsten, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen



**4.6** Detail, Adoration of the Magi from the central Rhineland, c. 1440, Schloss Braunfels, Braunfels



4.7 Detail, Adoration of the Magi, carved and polychromed limewood altarpiece from Erfurt, c. 1460, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg



**4.8** Personification of the Vice of Avarice, Chartres Cathedral



**4.9** Personification of the Vice of Avarice, Amiens Cathedral



4.10 Manesse Codex, c. 1324-40, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, *Codex Palatinus Germanicus* 848



**4.11** Circle of the Master of the Fröndenberger Marienretabels (after Conrad von Soest), detail, Adoration of the Magi, Blankenberch Retable, c. 1430/40, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster



4.12 The Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins, c. 1470, German artist



**4.13** Adoration of the Magi, from an altarpiece, c. 1420, Sankt Maria zur Wiese, Soest



**4.14** Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi, South Netherlands, c. 1410-20, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne



**4.15** Meister Arnt of Kalkar and Zwolle, Adoration of the Magi, lower Rhine, ca. 1480-85, Schnütgen Museum, Cologne



**4.16** Master of the Holy Kinship, the Elder, Triptych of the Holy Kinship, c. 1420, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne



4.17 Dieric Bouts, Infancy Altarpiece, 1445, Museo del Prado, Madrid



**4.18** Small altarpiece with Adoration of the Magi, Mecheln, c. 1500, Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen



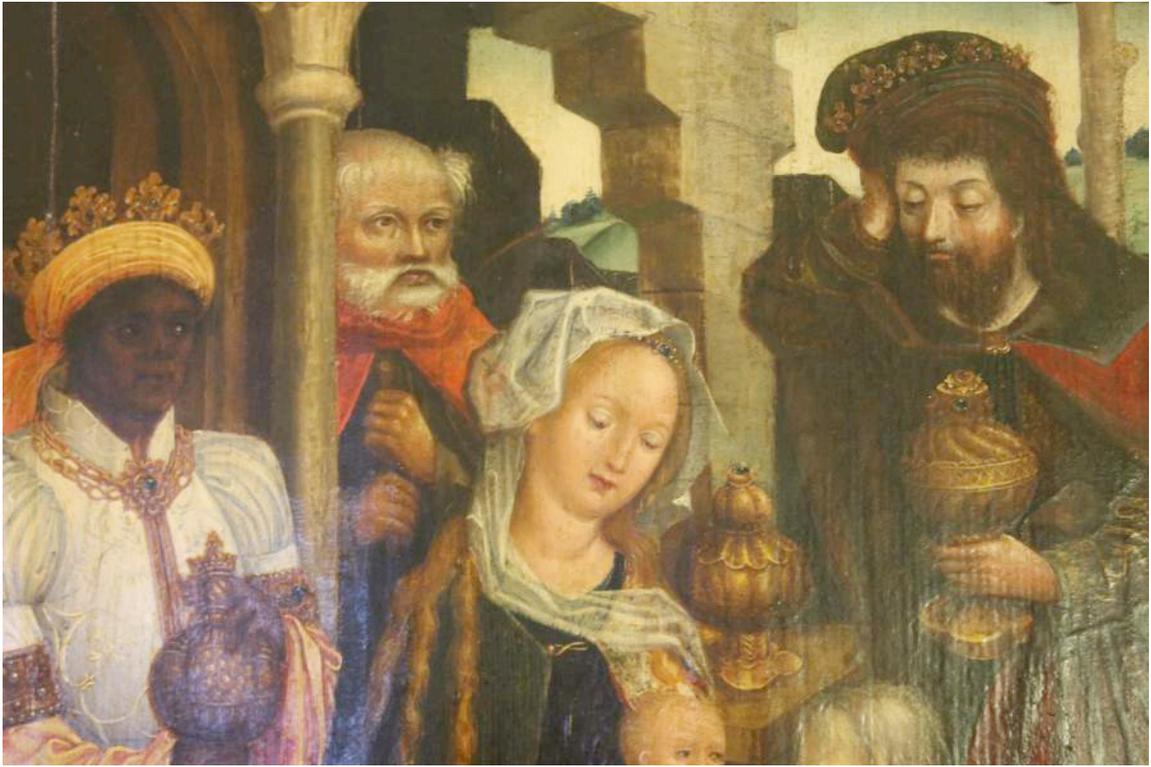
**4.19** Meister der Verherrlichung Mariens, Adoration of the Magi, Cologne, c. 1480/90, Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen



**4.20** Bartholomäus Bruyn the Elder (from Wesel?), Adoration of the Magi, Cologne, c. 1515-20, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne



**4.21** Bartholomäus Bruyn the Elder (from Wesel?), detail, Adoration of the Magi, Cologne, c. 1515-20, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne



**4.22** Adoration of the Magi, detail, part of a winged altarpiece from Swabia, c. 1490, Martin-von-Wagner Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Würzburg



**4.23** Adoration of the Magi, painted wing of an altarpiece from Würzburg, c. 1480/90, Martin-von-Wagner Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Würzburg



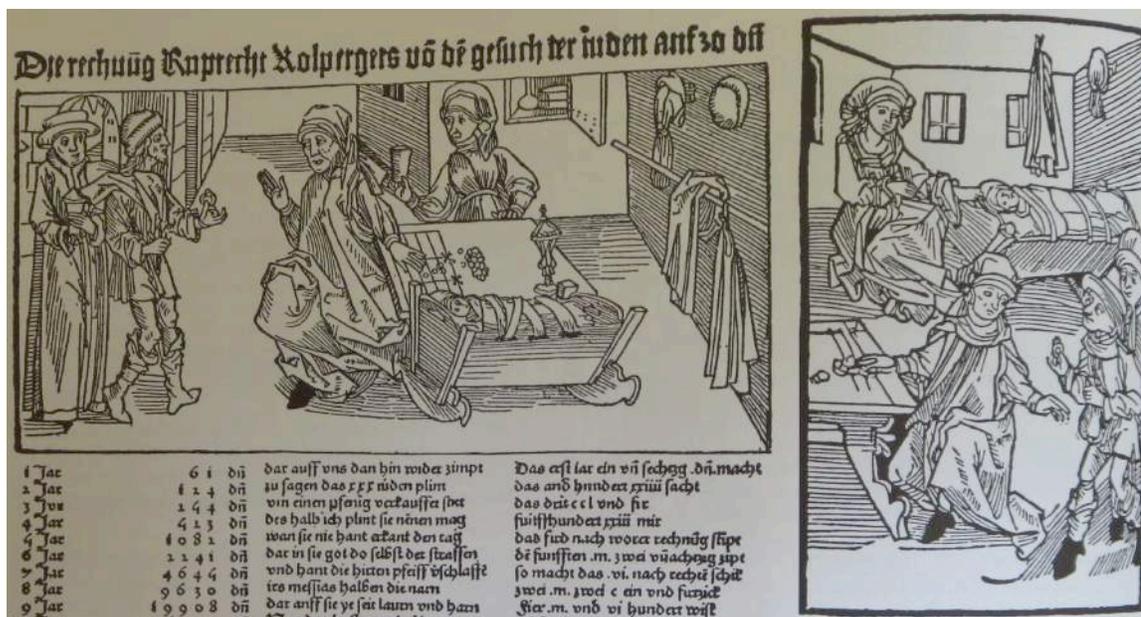
**4.24** *Mors* and *Synagoga*, from the Uta Codex, 1015-20, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek  
Cod. Lat. 13601



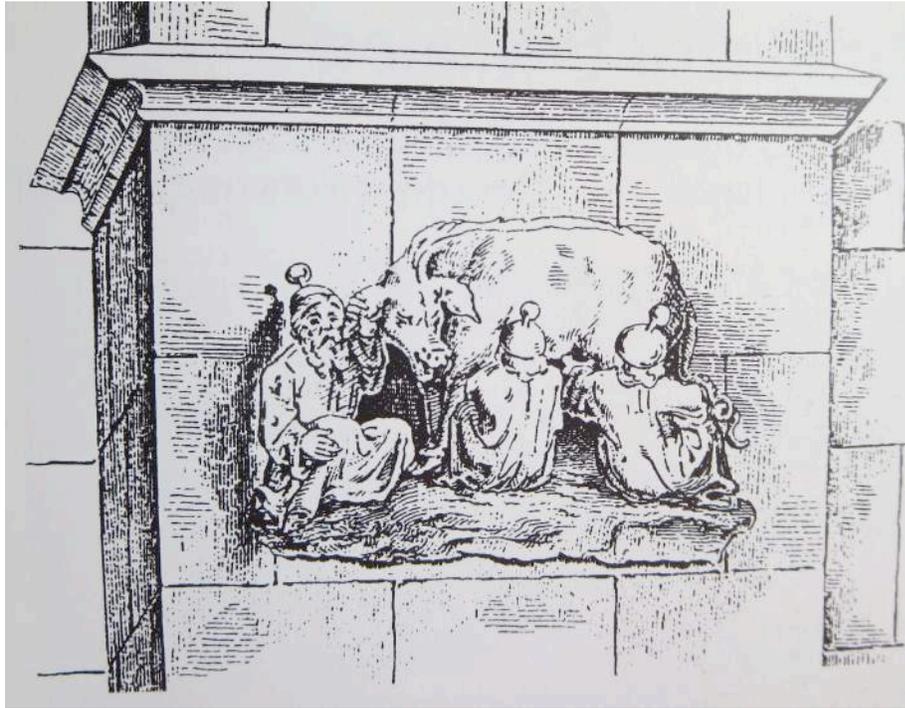
4.25 Herrad of Landsberg, detail of Hell, from the *Hortus deliciarum*, c. 1185, Paris, BN, folio 255 recto



4.26 German single-leaf woodblock print against Jewish merchants



4.27 Woodcut at beginning of the poem *Jüdischer Wucher*, published in 1491 by Hans Folz in Nuremberg



**4.28** Allegory of Gluttony, Regensburg Cathedral, relief on a southern buttress



**4.29** Joseph, detail of Nativity, single leaf from a gospel book, Saxony, c. 1170-1190, Cleveland Museum of Art



**4.30** Deposition, Holkham Bible, England, c. 1325-1330, London, British Library MS.  
Add. 47682, folio 33 recto



**4.31** Albrecht Dürer, *Madonna with Joseph and Five Angels*, c. 1505, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



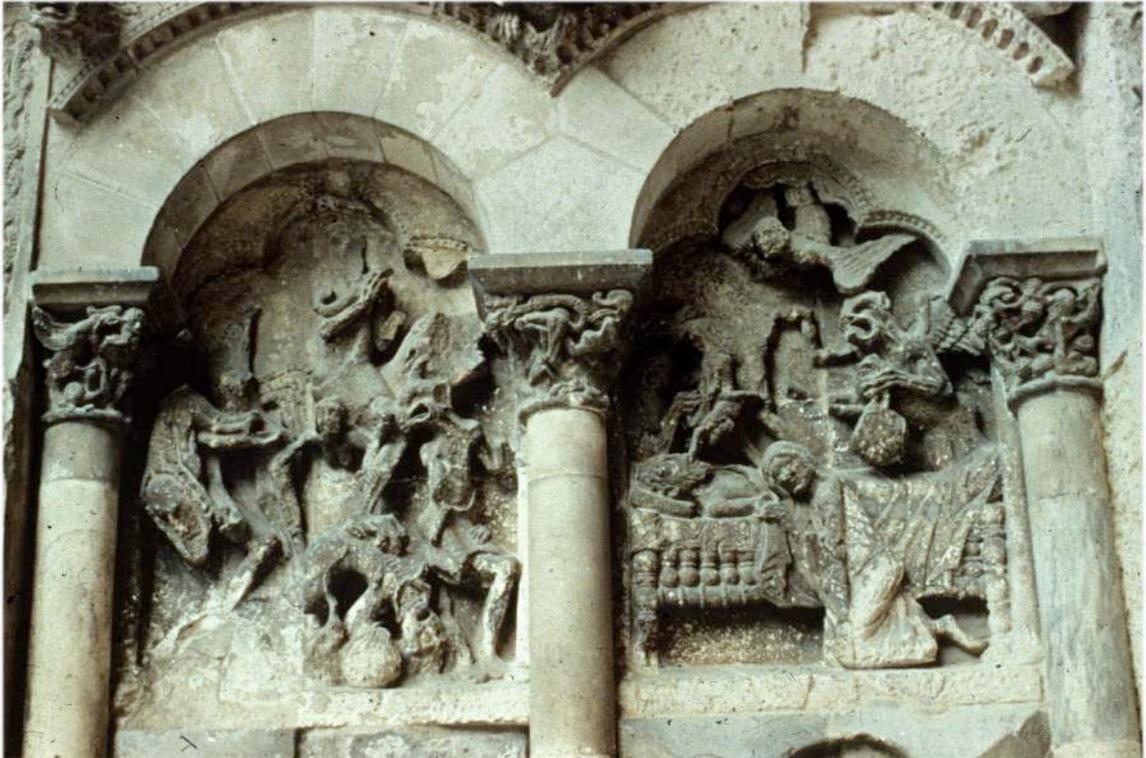
**4.32** Herrad of Landsberg, detail of Hell, from the *Hortus deliciarum*, c. 1185, Paris, BN, folio 255 recto



**4.33** Albrecht Dürer, *The Sojourn of Mary and Joseph in Egypt*, from the *Life of the Virgin* series, c. 1501-2, woodcut



**4.34** Lazarus with Abraham (left) and Lazarus and Dives in their earthly lives, left wall of south porch, Autun Cathedral



**4.35** Eternal punishment for Dives and eternal reward for Lazarus, left wall of south porch, Autun Cathedral

**Orve dem man Jung vnbesindt. Und mer verthut dann er gervindt.  
 Aduf darnach bleyben arm. Adan vndt nit v ill den es erbarmbt.**



Das ich hit alsd nackent ston  
 Vnd in dem land müß betin gon  
 Das i a die Alchamey gruben  
 Die wolt ich mir nye weeren lon

Do ich iang was ich sach nit an  
 Die straff vnd toit mich nit daran  
 Vmß das ich nichts gileret han  
 Des bin ich yetz an bettel man

Do seit do ich diem solt  
 Was ich pfaffen vnd layen holt  
 Ain yeder sat mich wo er wolt  
 Des nynt ich yetz den bettel solt

Mein vater schickt mich aoff si lere  
 Ich solte werd in ain grosser here  
 Ich hab verlossen nag vnd er  
 Der bettel weisen ich nitly nre:



Ich bült ging hübschen frawen noch  
 Die man mir als mein güte als noch  
 Des müß ich yetz leiden sichmoch  
 Dillich nag ich der bettel roch

Au allen diensten was ich ereg  
 Soult vnd vngchosam alweg  
 Niems maule vn dißte het ich nit pfleg  
 Des gang ich yetz den bettel steg

Zu spilen sünd all mein begie  
 Wueßel vnd Karten liebten mir  
 Es bringt mir kain nuch das ich spie  
 Groß armüt ligt mir vor der thie

Allweg man mir sün rem riet  
 Es halffan mir kain straffnech giet  
 Daromß ich yetz groß armüt nyet  
 Ich gang vnd ting der bettel liedt



All nit lag ich in allem schlaf  
 Wie wol huß hielt dem was ich ghaß  
 In mir gar nye kain sparen was  
 Yetz sig ich an der bettel gass

Ich wolt bey allen meinen tagen  
 Vll schreien vnd mit yedem schlagen  
 Mit wermüt groß lob erlagen  
 Des müß ich den bettel sack tragen

Ich wolt allzeit in meinem hauß  
 Vol sin vnd lesen in dem sauß  
 Vnd wolt die reicken zeren auß  
 Die seigt mich yetz die bettel lauß

Ob ich schon bettel das findt nit waz  
 Ich hab ererb von alter her  
 Daromß ist ra mir nit so schweg  
 Als ob ich ruch geworfen were

Das mancher vmbß almüßen god  
 Dar sü bringt in des hungers not  
 Wo seyen fra wem oder man  
 Die wend nit arges sahen an  
 Suchen narang durch gottes ere  
 Darumß so habe von mir die lere  
 Laßt euch beuolhen sin arm leue  
 Wan an got der het in dyser zete

**Beschluß.**  
 Ward arm geboren in die welt  
 Ain yeder kan nit haben gelde  
 Das er in lauff was er müß han  
 Ist er dan so am frumner in an  
 Es das er argß wöll vnder ston  
 So will er ehie betlen gon  
 Vnd der ist warlich gerecht vnd gü  
 Der in ym hat ain solchen mü

Wer sein nechsten böser namß  
 Vil lieber er in armüt kam  
 Es stat geschiden sicherlich  
 Hat got lob den nechsten als dich  
 Je solt rüch vber die armen  
 Die in dyser zeit erbarmen  
 Wan ich halt das für wol gethan  
 Es vuercht ihdu. u. Sulen gon.

**Wanns Suldenmunde.**

4.36 Barthel Beham, Twelve Vagrants, woodcut, c. 1524-25



**4.37** Hieronymus Bosch, *Death of the Miser*, c. 1500, panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection



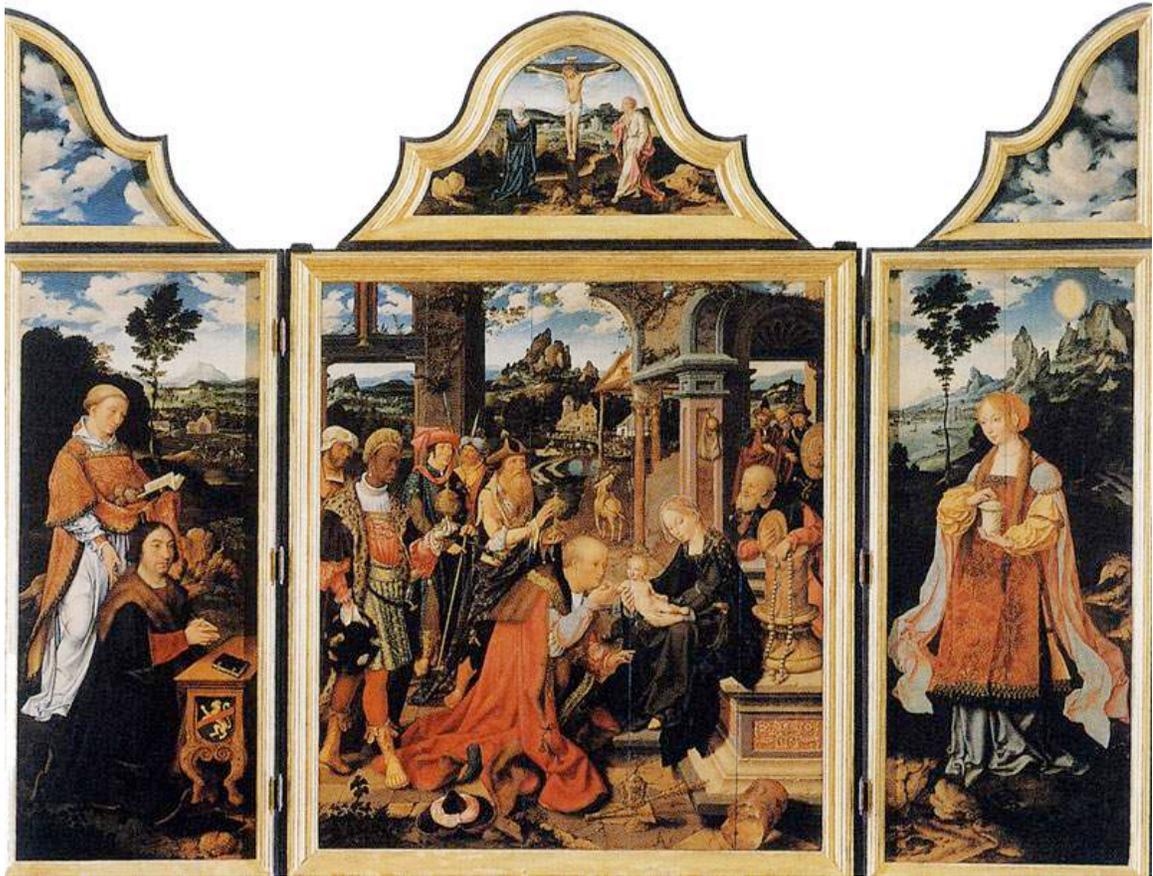
4.38 Quentin Massys, Money Changer and His Wife, 1514, panel, Musée du Louvre, Paris



4.39 Follower of Marinus van Reymerswaele, *The Misers*, 1548-51



**4.40** Marinus van Reymerswaele, *The Banker and His Wife*, 1538, panel, Museo Nazionale, Palazzo del Bargello, Florence



4.41 Joos van Cleve, Adoration of the Magi altarpiece, Church of San Donato, Genoa



**4.42** Master of the Antwerp Adoration, Adoration of the Magi, c. 1515-20, panel, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp



4.43 Joos van Cleve, Adoration of the Magi, c. 1517-18, panel, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden



4.44 Joos van Cleve, Holy Family with Saint Anne, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels



4.45 Quentin Massys, Portrait of an Old Man, 1517, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris



4.46 Miniature in German book of weapons, *Uffenbachsches Wappenbuch*, Strasbourg, c. 1400-1410, Frankfurt am Main, Historisches Museum, Inv. no. C 10154



4.47 Hieronymus Bosch, *Carrying of the Cross*, c. 1515, panel, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent



4.48 Joos van Cleve, *The Holy Family*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



4.49 Joos van Cleve, *The Holy Family*, National Gallery, London



4.50 Bartolo di Fredi, Adoration of the Magi, panel from an altarpiece, 1385-88, tempera on panel, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena



**4.51** Gherardo Starnina, Adoration of the Magi, Florence, first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai



4.52 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1564, National Gallery, London



5.1 Conrad von Soest, Nativity, Bad Wildungen Altar, 1403, Bad Wildungen



5.2 Conrad von Soest, Adoration of the Magi, Bad Wildungen Altar, 1403, Bad Wildungen



5.3 Meister Bertram von Minden, Nativity, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



5.4 Meister Bertram von Minden, Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Petri-Altar, c. 1379-83, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



**5.5** Robert Campin, Mérode Altarpiece, c. 1425, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York



**5.6** Robert Campin, Joseph Drilling with Mousetraps, Mérode Altarpiece, c. 1425, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York



5.7 Copy after Robert Campin, Joseph's Repentance of his Doubt, The Life of St. Joseph, St. Katarinakerk, Hoogstraten



5.8 Master of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Holy Family at Work, from the Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves, c. 1434-40, Morgan Library and Museum, New York



**5.9** Master of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Holy Family at Supper, from the Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves, c. 1434-40, Morgan Library and Museum, New York



**5.10** Master of the Legend of St. Barbara, Adoration of the Magi, central panel of a triptych, Galleria Colonna, Rome



**5.11** Nativity, Netherlandish, from the Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



**5.12** Joseph drying diapers, Nativity, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp



**5.13** Flight into Egypt, Mosan/South Netherlandish tabernacle, c. 1400, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp