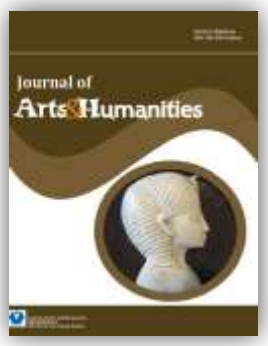

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Knight, Horse, and Groom Called to the Rescue: Secular Figures in the Goldenes Rössl[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of the secular figures in the Goldenes Rössl, a resplendent sculpture that Queen Isabella gave to her husband, King Charles VI, in a French court ceremonial in 1405. The sculpture, which was designed primarily to encourage the king's private religious devotion, includes several components that might have had a bearing on the king's sense of his own reality. I look at the reasons that account for the work's unusual combination of secular and religious elements and try to distinguish between those aspects of the sculpture that were meant to encourage devotion and those that represent the queen's personal motivations. I discuss the import of the secular figures, which add to the traditional meaning of the personal prayer to Mary and Jesus. I first approach the sculpture using a comparative iconographic method, in order to decipher the significance of these secular figures. I then analyze historic sources to elucidate the queen's uncertain political status within the French court. I also integrate current studies on the king's mental illness in order to evaluate his condition and to the way he related his wife. I delineate the sculpture as a healing object, alongside the queen's political and personal motivations for presenting the gift and interpret the layers of significance inherent in the statue's content and context.

Keywords: Charles VI, Gift-Giving, Isabella of Bavaria, Late Middle Ages, Mental Illness, Sculpture.
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1.0 Introduction

The figure of King Charles VI of France (reigned 1380–1422), with a knight by his side, kneeling in prayer before Mary and the infant Jesus is at the center of a sculpture that the king received as a gift from his wife, Isabella (1370–1435), on January 1, 1405 (Fig. 1). Commonly known as the *Goldenes Rössl*, the sculpture was presented during a traditional exchange of gifts (known as *étrenne*) in the House of Valois, which succeeded the Capetian dynasty in 1328. The queen offered this work to her husband, who suffered from a severe mental illness that impaired the French monarchy during most of his reign, as a demonstration of her fidelity and as a device to assist with his recovery.

Fig. 1: The *Goldenes Rössl*, Haus Papst Benedikt XVI-Neue Schatzkammer und Wallfahrtsmuseum, Altötting, ca. 1405. Photo © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München.

Fig. 2: *Brussels Hours,* Brussels, Bibl. Royale, Ms. 11060-1, fol. 10, 11, ca. 1390, *Jean de Berry Kneeling Before The Virgin and Child*. Photo © Royal Library of Belgium.

The sculpture was designed primarily to encourage private religious devotion (Swanson, 1995). Beginning in the eleventh century, a wish for a personal relationship with God without the mediation of clergy led to individual daily prayer, in which the faithful used decorated Books of Hours and Psalters. The importance of the decorations accompanying the prayer texts in these books was discussed at length by the theologians of that era, including Jean Gerson (1363–1429), who justified the inclusion of such imagery as a necessary starting point for religious devotion (Quoted in: Nash, 2008, 271).

The cult of Mary and related forms of worship, which enjoyed considerable growth from the thirteenth century on, was the inspiration for many sculptures and paintings. Mary was perceived as a compassionate figure very close to God, who would look favorably on prayers and requests. Portraits of the patrons who commissioned Books of Hours show the subjects praying to an image of Mary holding the infant Jesus.

The traditional way of portraying such a meeting was by depicting the owner of the book or the patron of the work kneeling in prayer in front of the Virgin and Jesus, either alone or accompanied by a saint. Prior to the fifteenth century, other secular figures were generally not included in the portrayal. Moreover, there was also a clear separation between the patron and the holy figures. There were different ways of creating this separation in Books of Hours: the images could be set in different spaces or frames could enclose the worshipper and the holy figures, as can be seen in a Book of Hours commissioned by John, the Duke of Berry (Above fig. 2). In the *Goldenes Rössl*, alongside the traditional figures of Mary and Jesus and the king, we find images of several secular individuals from the royal court. The knight near the king and the horse and groom, which suggest the reality of the king's life, represent a unique and innovative addition to the familiar theme. Clearly, in presenting Charles with the *Goldenes Rössl* Queen Isabella sought to ease the difficulties that beset her in connection with her relationship to the king and the court.

A book about the *Goldenes Rössl* with contributions from several different authors was published in 1995 in connection with an exhibition of the restored sculpture at the Bayerische Nationalmuseum in Munich. The volume includes studies by, among others, Rainer Kahsnitz, Willibald Sauerländer, and Hermann Fillitz. Sauerländer discusses the figures of the child-saints and their meaning and the gift as a plea for the king's recovery, Fillitz examines the dress and symbols of the king and his companion, and Kahsnitz focuses on Mary and the child-saints.

Subsequent studies by Jenny Stratford and Brigitte Buettner examine the social and historical aspects of the ceremonious exchange of gifts in the House of Valois. Stratford discusses the sculpture in the context of the French royal family's collection, as documented in Charles VI's inventory records. Although she does discuss the place of the *Goldenes Rössl* within the collection in the royal house, she does not elaborate on its iconographic aspects (Stratford, 2000). Buettner deals with the sculpture in her essay on the custom of the New Year's gift exchange at the Valois court, her methodology relying on anthropological and social considerations. She contends, first, that the queen wanted to depict her husband as a hero because his episodic mental illness rendered him unable to reign for extended periods of time and, second, that the piece was created in a plea for the king's recovery (Buettner, 2001). We find a reference to gifts as political tools in Tracy Adams' 2011 article. In that paper, she examines the gifts the queen granted during her regency in the context of the *étrenne* tradition and mentions the *Goldenes Rössl* as an example of a gift with political overtones. She argues that the queen suggested a comparison between her coronation and the coronation of the Virgin; thus, the image of the Virgin on the *Goldenes Rössl* was meant to embrace both the holy and the mundane (Adams, 2011).

An interesting and as yet unstudied feature of this sculpture is the presence of the secular figures and their inclusion in the overall iconography. No study has yet examined the meaning entailed in the secular elements, the knight, the groom, and the horse, and although Adams refers to the political ambitions that preceded the commissioning of the sculpture, the piece has never been looked at in the light of political events in the realm. I argue that the queen ordered a devotional sculpture replete with the components representing the king's reality in order to aid in his recovery. Isabella married Charles when he was sane and, according to Froissart's *Chronicles*, there was great affection between them (Froissart, 1961, 277–278). When he became ill, Isabella had to contend with his difficult episodic condition, which was manifested in bouts of rage, a refusal to acknowledge her as his wife, and a hiatus in marital relations. Moreover, apart from periodically losing him as a spouse, she had to take on the roles he assigned to her when he was sane. She began filling different positions and from 1402 served as the head of the regency council and was regent to the dauphin. She had to deal with the king's uncles, John of Berry (1340–1416) and Philip the Bold (1342–1404) and his younger brother, Louis of Orléans (1372–1407), who all vied with one another for control of the monarchy. Yet, her hold on these positions was oftentimes tenuous, as I detail later.

In order to elucidate the significance of the secular figures and understand the queen's motivations for her gift, I first approach the sculpture using a comparative iconographic method to decipher the significance of the secular figures. I then analyze historic sources to elucidate the queen's political status in the French court and the periodic alternating changes in the king's attitude toward her. In addition, I integrate a gender-oriented approach and contemporary studies on the king's mental illness in order to evaluate his condition and the difficulties the queen, as his spouse, had to contend with. This study can add to our knowledge of the ways that sacred and secular features were integrated into a multi-layered complex object. It will also contribute to the study of female patronage in the Late Middle Ages and will support other findings concerning the different ways women in positions of limited power promoted themselves through the ritual of gift giving.

In this essay I explore the reasons that account for this unusual combination of secular and religious elements in this sculpture and try to distinguish between those aspects that were meant to encourage devotion and those that represent personal motivations. I discuss the import of the secular figures, which add layers onto the traditional meaning of the personal prayer to Mary and Jesus. I deal with each figure individually in order to demonstrate how the secular images were meant to ease the

tortured soul of the king. I also examine the way in which the gift helped to impart a message to the king and elucidate the means by which the queen enhanced her relationship with her husband during a period of political instability in the kingdom.

2.0 The horse and the groom

The *Goldenes Rössl*, which figures a "meeting" between Mary with the infant Jesus and the king, is divided into three tiers. At the top level, the figure of Mary, holding baby Jesus, is seated beneath a jewel-encrusted arbor; around them are three child-saints representing John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Saint Catherine. In the middle tier, we see the king and a knight, both wearing armor, iron boots, and spurs (Fig. 3). The king has a sword at his side, and the knight is holding the royal helmet. A horse and groom are standing alone on the bottom tier, which takes up about a third of the height of the sculpture (Fig. 4). The relative size of this third tier hints at the significance of those figures in connection with the entire scene.

Fig. 3: The *Goldenes Rössl*, Haus Papst Benedikt XVII- Neue Schatzkammer und Wallfahrts museum, Altötting, ca. 1405, *The King and the Knight before the virgin and Child (detail)*. Photo © Bayerisches National museum München.

Fig. 4: The *Goldenes Rössl* , Haus Papst Benedikt XVII- Neue Schatzkammer und Wallfahrtsmuseum, Altötting ca. 1405, *The Groom and the Horse (detail).* Photo ©Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München.

In medieval times horses served a range of needs. They were beasts of burden, a means of transportation, and companions in arms for knights going into battle. A knight and his horse acted together on the field. Descriptions of horses in bestiaries emphasize their speed and strength, which were exploited by fighting men, and they are described as becoming excited by the smell of battle, biting those whom they recognize as enemies (Hassig, 1995; Baxter, 1998).

This raises a question as to whether the horse on the *Goldenes Rössl* is armed for battle or if it is meant to serve its noble owner in a time of peace. A look at illustrations of the royal family and their horses from the same period allows us to draw some relevant conclusions. In the illustration for the month of August in the calendar *of Très Riches Heures* (ca. 1412–1416) by the Limbourg brothers, we see a group of noblemen and noblewomen on their way to a hunt (below Fig. 5). The horses are drawn in great detail, with special attention to the portrayal of their paraphernalia – the bridles, saddles, and saddle blankets. All in all the images of the horses in the miniature and the horse in the sculpture are quite similar, but those in the illustration have fewer girth straps. The saddle on the horse on the *Goldenes Rössl* has two additional girth straps and it is set higher on the withers.

These differences in the saddlery suggest that the two portrayals represent different types of horses, and there are as well slight differences in the shapes of their bodies. The sculptured horse's head is larger compared to his body, his mane is richer and more prominent, and his legs are thicker than those of the horses in the illustrations. Comparing the horse in the sculpture to the war horses depicted in the January illustration of the Duke of Berry's Book of Hours lends support to the idea that the horse on the

Goldenes Rössl is in fact a warhorse (Fig. 6). The illustration in the duke's book shows a tapestry portraying the Trojan War featuring a white horse with its mouth opened as if it were neighing. The horse's stance and its bared teeth suggest a sense of intensity and convey the heat of battle with horses fighting along with their riders. As Anne Payne observes in her study on animals in medieval literature, fables often assigned warrior-like qualities to horses. Many of the fables emphasize horses' vigorous nature, both in war and in times of peace. The smell of battle excited them, as did trumpets sounding the charge. They knew their enemies and attacked them with their teeth, as shown in the illustration above (Payne, 1990, 57).

Fig. 5: The Limbourg Brothers, *Très Riches Heures,* Chantilly, Musee Conde Ms. 65, fol. 8v, ca. 1412-16, *August.* Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/René-Gabriel Ojéda.

Fig. 6: The Limbourg Brothers, *Très Riches Heures*, Chantilly, Musee Conde Ms. 65, fol. 1v, ca. 1412-16, *Janruary.* Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/René-Gabriel Ojéda.

Development of equipment for knights and the differences in the nature of the horses required for them can help us determine which type of horse is imaged in the statue. From the thirteenth century on there was a growing demand for strongly built horses that could carry an armor-clad knight with ease, and suitable breeds were brought from Spain and other places across the continent. Fourteenth-century armor could weigh as much as 250 lb (about 113 kg) and the saddlery was designed accordingly. The saddle, which was fashioned for comfort, was fastened by two straps in the front and two at the back, and its front end was raised so that the rider would not slide forward in the heat of the battle (Bumke, 1991, 176-177).

These observations suggest that the horse in the *Goldenes Rössl* is a warhorse rather than a hunter, and its appearance in a work of art intended for devotional purposes may be an extra-religious element in this composition. On the other hand, during the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern period animals often bore religious symbolism that was tied to fables, moralizing allegories, and sermons.

What religious interpretation might one give to the horse in the *Goldenes Rössl*? A depiction of a mounted knight in a religious context appears in an illustrated copy of the *Summa de Vitiis* by William Peraldus. In a setting that was rather unusual before the Reformation, this image shows an armed, mounted knight with tags of Christian virtues attached to his armor and his weapon (Fig. 7). The illustration refers to the *miles christianus*, a Christian allegory based on military imagery from the New Testament, which in medieval times was associated with the crusading knight (Wang, 1975). This depiction of the Christian knight was meant to glorify and praise, but also to direct and delimit the actions of swordsmen on a battlefield. As early as in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the faithful are asked to take up the divine weapons, the sword and armor, to fight "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness… (Eph. 6:12)." "The weapons are spiritual vessels which the faithful use to prepare for the gospel of peace" (6:15).

Fig. 7: Summa de Vitiis, London, British Library, Harley Ms. 3244, fol. 28r, ca. 1236- 1250, A Knight's Battle with Vices. Photo © The British Library Board.

Thus the theme of a knight on horseback might easily relate to the imagery of the Christian knight. But the horse in the sculpture is posed differently than the one depicted in the *Summa de Vitiis* illustration. The groom is holding the horse, his legs spread in an effort to restrain the animal. The horse is balanced on his front legs, which are firmly on the ground, whereas his hind legs are spread as if in stride. The sense derived from this scene is one of holding and restraining, but unlike in the *Summa de Vitiis* illustration, here the horse is held by a groom rather than by a knight. The groom's presence severs the connection between the sculptured horse and the imagery of the Christian knight. Thus the horse's iconographical significance in this piece and its inclusion in the overall scheme are not religious. The groom and the king's horse function as they would in the king's court, the role of the figure holding the horse being to take care of it until the king finishes his prayers and sets out on the road again.

The layers of secular meaning become even more apparent when we examine the sculpture's hierarchic composition. The Virgin, baby Jesus, and the saints are on the topmost tier, representing the metaphysical world. Beneath them are the praying king and his knight companion, and on the lowest tier we see the horse and the groom that serve the king's need for mobility. The division into tiers reinforces the separation of the classes. The groom is the smallest figure. His physical distance from the king suggests a rank lower than the knight holding the helmet. Thus, I suggest that the groom and the warhorse represent the real world and their function is to remind Charles of his normal reality.

As I detail later on, Isabella commissioned the object with figures the king would be able to recognize and identify with in order to please him and to help him to hold onto his sanity, and in that way to demonstrate her loyalty.

3.0 The knight and the king as a knight

Let us now take a look at the middle tier and see if the knight imaged next to the king represents another element from the king's life. The king and the knight flank a podium holding a prayer book and are similarly accessorized. Alongside the similarities there is a difference in the design of the knight's cloak, which looks more like the groom's cloak than the king's. Another telling element that indicates a connection between the groom and the knight is the three-leaf flower decoration that appears on both their blue cloaks. This strengthens the impression that the man next to the king is a courtier who stands in the king's service in his everyday life. His face, with a wrinkled forehead, long hair, and prominent cheekbones suggests that this is a particular knight, a familiar of the king, whom the artist intended to portray realistically. Rainer Kahsnitz believes that this figure may represent the man who was entrusted with tending to Charles (Kahsnitz, 1995, 83). Although I agree with his supposition that the figure represents an actual person, in my opinion the figure's knightly attire and his holding of the helmet suggest that this is a nobleman who serves the king as a bodyguard. The French kings were surrounded

by knights attending to their needs in every waking moment. Those who came from minor nobility were in charge of managing the royal household, whereas knights of high nobility served as the king's bodyguards and made up the core of the royal troops in battle (Contamine, 1998, 98-99).

The knight is positioned next to Charles in a prominent place on the middle tier. He does not take the place of a saint, so he is not found, as saints generally were placed, behind the praying king. His role in the overall imagery is determined by his social status and his function as a knight in the French court. These observations of the knight's role in the imagery as an actual person in a religious artwork, a secular individual and not a saint, reinforce the idea that the queen commissioned this object with the hope that it would assist with the king's recovery. As I show in the next paragraphs, the people who were the closest to the king believed that this encounter with images related his normal life would help him hold onto his sanity.

4.0 The gift as a healing object

Examining another gift the king received helps to clarify whether other realistic elements in such a work of art were introduced in the hope that they would help the king to regain his sanity. Portrayals of royal court events appear in manuscript illustrations from around the same time, for example, a depiction of the presentation of a commissioned book to the king or a member of the high nobility. A scene of the gifting of a book in the presence of courtiers is depicted in *Demandes et Reponses au Roi Charles VI*, a book commissioned by Pierre Salmon, the king's advisor, in the year 1409. The illustration shows the king sitting on an ornate chair decorated with fleurs-de-lis, receiving the book from his advisor (fig. 8). The depiction in *Demandes et Reponses* is exceptionally detailed. The illustrator expanded the scene to show other rooms in the palace, where everyday life is continuing uninterrupted. Anne Hedeman suggests that the author intended this illustration to draw the king's attention to the spirit of the written text and that his goal was to guide the king into ruling France properly. At the request of the king's advisor, the Boucicaut Master who created this illustration drew numerous details with which the king would have been familiar, including garments and carpets. Such items, all listed in his inventory, were inserted into the imagery in order to remind Charles of the reality of his life after a period of illness (Hedeman, 1996, 125). Embedding such realistic elements in the illustration was meant to please Charles' eye and soul. Thus, the author led the king as best as he could from illustration to text, while attempting to create an image consistent with the reality of the king's life when he was well. As the *Demandes et Reponses*, the *Goldenes Rössl*, commissioned four years earlier, was made in the shadow of the king's illness. Adding everyday features was meant to cheer the king's spirit and create an image of a possible reality.

Fig. 8: Boucicaut Master , Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 23279, fol. 53, 1409, *Salmon Presents his Manuscript to Charles VI*. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

From the summer of 1392 until his death 30 years later, Charles VI suffered forty-three episodes of insanity of varying lengths, which were documented in the chronicles of Saint-Denis, as well as in a chronicle by Juvenal des Ursins (1388–1473) about his reign (Autrand, 1986, 308). These episodes were sometimes accompanied by bouts of violent rage, as in the first episode in which the king attacked members of his own entourage, thinking that they were traitors trying to turn him over to the enemy. In the throes of his illness, Charles tried to hurt his brother, Louis, did not recognize his wife, and did not remember that he was married and had children. He insisted that his name was George and wanted his symbol to be a lion impaled on a sword (Autrand, 1986, 312).

The king's illness was a terrible blow for all of the French people. In her biography of Charles VI, Francoise Autrand notes that in accordance with the custom of that time, the doors to the king's room were open and his relatives and senior courtiers could come in and witness his condition (Autrand, 1986, 312). No one believed that these severe episodes of madness were the result of natural causes, but, rather, blamed his illness on sorcery or necromancy. Some of the rumors spread at the Court of Burgundy accused Louis's wife, Valentina Visconti (1368–1408), of witchcraft (Veenstra, 1997, 81). Moreover, the summer of 1392 was hot and dry, which caused heavy damage to agriculture and commerce. Merchants suffered their worst losses in more than 20 years. Under these circumstances the king's illness was perceived as a divine warning, perhaps a punishment for the heavy taxes or the king's inability to end the dispute between feuding factions among his supporters (Tuchman, 1979, 499).

Undoubtedly the king's illness put a heavy burden on the queen. The passion and love between them turned on his part to hostility and rejection. Froissart documented the first meeting between the couple, which led to a quick decision to marry, and Charles's enthusiasm (Froissart, 277-278). Isabella made several attempts to plead publically for divine help for her husband. In the winter of 1393, there were festive parades in the streets of Paris by order of the queen and the council. The queen vowed that if her husband recovered she would give the child she was carrying to a convent, and, indeed, her daughter Marie, who was born in August of that year, lived her life in the nunnery of Poissy from the age of six (Pintoin, 1841, 93, 95). In January 1396, Isabella ordered prayers to be held all across France for the ailing king (Verdon, 1981, 74).

In light of all this, we can assume that the gift of the *Goldenes Rössl* was meant to assist with Charles's recovery and the queen's initiatives were later imitated by the makers of the *Demandes et Reponses* in depictions of the king's normal reality. The introduction of the knight, who seems to be a familiar of the king, a member of the court charged with guarding him, the matching mantle of the knight and the groom, and the everyday scene of the horse and groom are some of the features apparently introduced to help the king recognize the reality of his life and cling to sanity. Considering Charles's refusal to accept his identity as the king of France during his illness, depicting him in a cloak adorned with a fleur-de-lis seems designed to remind him of his own identity.

The location of the *Goldenes Rössl* in the *Tour du Coin*, one of the towers in the Bastille is of some significance in understanding how the king received the statue. Some of the court's most precious objects were moved to this fortress, which was near the Hotel Saint Pol, the king's residence at the beginning of the fifteenth century. A document from 1409 teaches us that the king used to visit his collections, which were scattered in various royal accommodations in Paris (Stratford, 2000, 122). Whether or not Charles prayed and meditated in front of the *Goldenes Rössl* the fact that the king to see his precious object, to open the cupboard and touch the little figures (including his own image) is a relevant factor. A disposition to treat images as living things is expressed in different documented modes of behavior, for example, in a ritual of nuns holding a Christ Child statue, and so on (Johnson, 2002, 66). The tactile encounter with the sculpture could raise erotic stimuli as well as religious and magical associations. In our example the king could communicated with both the saints and to the figures representing his own normal reality by gazing, praying touching, and kissing. This possibility speaks to the power of the sculpture to influence his tortured soul.

5.0 Isabella's political motivations

Let us turn now to a consideration of the political role of the queen in the court as the spouse of a suffering King. In order to appreciate the political significance of the sculpture, one must understand the queen's position in the royal court, which can lead to some thoughts about the visual language employed in the piece. I suggest that the personal and political motivations of the queen can be deciphered in terms of a gender reading. Isabella's specific political role, the political intrigue in the royal court, and the impact of Charles's illness on his queen must all be taken into account. In my opinion the offering of the *Goldenes Rössl* was a strategy employed by the queen acting as a female in the face of the political turbulence of the times.

As I noted above, Isabella gave the king the *Goldenes Rössl* in a gift-giving ceremony that had its origins in a pagan practice, which became a semi-official tradition during the reign of Charles VI. The popular custom of exchanging gifts on January 1 was turned into a ceremonial during a period that was both socially and politically unsettled. It was a time of peasant revolts and their ruthless suppression by the Valois family, a time when the Hundred Years' War raged, and a period during which Charles's various relatives vied for dominance. Despite these struggles and perhaps even because of the divisive events, the Valois family maintained its custom of gift-giving throughout the fifteenth century (Buettner, 2001, 602). Isabella participated in the tradition and between 1385 and 1420 gave away 91 presents and received 51; in that same period Charles gave 93 gifts (Hirschbiegel, 2003, 198).

The *Goldenes Rössl* surpassed all the queen's earlier gifts to her husband in size, richness, and technical complexity, a clear indication of the enormous importance that this sculpture held for Isabella (Stratford, 2000, 111). This notion finds support when one notes the nature of the queen's gifts to the king up until 1405. In 1390 she gave Charles a small gold clasp with a ruby and three large pearls, in 1391 her gift was another decorated clasp, and in 1392 she gave him a gold necklace (Hirschbiegel, 2003, 350,359,365).

The rivalry among the king's relatives for dominance in the royal council and the queen's position as a mediating figure have been described by, among others, Famiglietti, Adams, and Gibbons, who all relied on extant letters, ordinances, chronicles, and administrative papers. Isabella took her first steps into politics when she negotiated with the king's relatives on several occasions. Her success in mobilizing the dukes led the king to trust in her loyalty and to depend on her ability as a mediator (Gibbons, 1996, 54). On July 1, 1402, Charles increased her authority beyond that of an intermediary in quarrels and empowered her to deal with government business in his "absence" with the help of the dukes and as many councilors as she wished (Famiglietti, 1986, 27; Adams, 2010, 17). However, on April 26, 1403, he imposed limitations on her authority in a new royal ordinance, which decreed that any final decision would be made by a majority of the members of the royal council (Famiglietti, 1986, 28). Most scholars accept that the ordinance of April 1403 diminished her power, but Adams offers a different opinion. She argues that the queen's role was not sufficiently defined in the 1402 ordinance. She was a substitute for the king when he was "absent," but did not have any real authority over the royal council (Adams, 2010, 99). Adams' argument takes into account the problems the queen experienced while trying to fulfill her role as she confronted male relatives whose power was immeasurably greater than her own. Even though by the terms of her authority, she could call upon the army to enforce her decisions, she never did so because she knew that it was loyal to one or the other of the dukes (Adams, 2010, 25).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the queen could not possibly have been content with the new decree. The 1402 ordinance demonstrated that the king trusted her to be the only person who could protect the interests of his royal family, whereas the 1403 ordinance implies that he had less confidence in her. It was not the first time that Charles changed his mind and modified or reversed his decisions. Records of his promise to marry his eight-year-old son, Louis, duke of Guyenne to the as yet unborn daughter of his brother Louis and Valentina Visconti (Collas, 1911, 238, 242) was turned over when he signed an agreement to marry him instead to Margaret of Burgundy, the granddaughter of Philip the Bold. The

signed promise upset Louis d'Orleans' plan to marry the dauphin into his family, but he eventually managed to obtain a letter from the king that seems to have restored all of his former prerogatives (Archive National, Paris, J 468, no. 12, in Famiglietti, 1986, 223 note. 71). Famiglietti suggests that the king's brother counted on the Charles's impaired memory and that he manipulated him into writing the letter (Famiglietti, 1986, 32). Additional examples of such reversals can be found in Famiglietti's *Royal Intrigue*, including his naming Philip the Bold *souverain gouverneur des aides en Languedoil* without taking the title away from Louis, upon whom he had bestowed it several months earlier (Famiglietti, 1986, 27).

Charles is described by modern historians as a puppet king, a poor sovereign at the mercy of relatives thirsting after power (Perroy, 1965, 194-195). He was called "*le Bien-Aimé*" (the beloved) and historians adopted the viewpoint of his contemporaries, who generally assumed that when he made wise decisions he was probably sane, whereas during his descents into madness he was manipulated by individuals in whom he put his trust. Modern psychological studies maintain that he was suffering from either bipolar disorder (Bourgeois & Haustgent, 2003, 370-376) or schizophrenia (Famiglietti, 1986, 205 not. 2). One way or another, from 1392 on Charles's conduct was characterized by periodic psychotic episodes, delusions, and aggressive behavior that disrupted his personal life and seriously impaired his functioning as the ruler of his kingdom.

The focus of historians on the king's lack of ability to exercise his authority during his reign does not take into account the effect of his mental disorder on his wife and his children. Recent scholarship in the field has related to the impact of mental illness on family members as the disorder presents them with obstacles and engenders feelings of shame, anxiety, and frustration. As described in *National Schizophrenia Fellowship* (1975): "Perhaps only those who have faced it (schizophrenia) in their own households can fully grasp what it can mean, the problems of managing the unmanageable, of coping with the inexplicable alterations between a known and loved person and an apparent stranger…" (Atkinson, 1986, 77). Nothing had prepared Isabella for the tragedy of her life and as Yann Grandeau phrases it: "Prince Charming turned into the beast; it was the reverse of the fairy-tale" (Grandeau, 1979, 126). Charles's bouts of madness became more frequent with each passing year, and, as mentioned above, during his periods of insanity he did not recognize his wife. Nevertheless, since seven out of their twelve children were born after 1392, we can assume that they did have a marital relationship during the periods of sanity (Gibbons, 1996, 61). Coping with her husband's mental disorder must had been a terrible burden on her as it is in all such cases (Johnston & Planansky, 1968), but Isabella also had to deal with the complex political confrontations involved in her role and responsibilities in her husband's court.

Contemporary chroniclers describe the course of Charles's illness as alternations between sane and insane periods. Famiglietti portrays the period from the king's first psychotic episode until his death in light of the primary sources and in terms of modern psychiatric observations. He contends that Charles's decisions during the periods that he was thought to be "sane" were influenced by schizophrenic reasoning with its disordered logic, so that the decisions he made caused confusion and tended to destroy any stability that the government might have achieved. "He was always there to undo what others had done" (Famiglietti, 1986, 20). Taking into account all the details of the king's illness and his unstable decision-making, one realizes what the queen had to deal with. She was, however, a clever woman with managerial abilities, who took her queenly responsibilities very seriously. In consideration of the exclusion of women from the French royal succession and the extensive debate regarding the late medieval use of the Salic law (Tailor, 2006), it is important to note the role of French queens in the Late Middle Ages. The coronation ceremony underscored their moral obligation to act as intercessors before the king on behalf of the citizenry. The queen's political functions were manifested by the scepter, ring, and rod that were bestowed upon her as symbols of her involvement in the public sphere (Tailor, 2006, 555). Moreover, her role as a consort and a mother responsible for the continuation of the lineage was made explicit by various elements in the coronation ceremonial that related to fertility (Parsons, 1998, 8–9). One of her duties was to supervise her children's education. The king attached great importance to her role as a mother and guardian of the

children. In the middle of 1405, members of the king's court accused her of not attending to her children's education. This came to the king's attention and it was said that he took this kind of accusation seriously, even questioning the dauphin on the matter (Pintoin, III, 291). In light of this episode, it becomes clear that even her position as the dauphin's guardian was not guaranteed.

Queen Isabella employed artists and acquired works of art in her own right. Accounts reveal that in the first years of the fifteenth century she purchased a large number of luxury objects from Parisian goldsmiths for private use and for a significant number of gifts (Adams, 2011, 475). Several medieval scholars emphasized the political role of gifts, as they forge bonds between giver and recipient, are apt to smooth the way toward alliances, and are able to manifest loyalties and suggest power (Stratford, 2000; Buettner, 2001; Christys, 2010). Adams emphasizes the political role of the queen's gift-giving by summarizing all of the items she gave in comparison to her husband in light of the politics of gift-giving during that period (Adams, 2011, 481). From the point of view of gender, presents as political tools were not exclusive to women, as male patrons from the royal family used them as such as well. Yet, how could Isabella choose to show her loyalty and tie her husband to her. Probably, she took her responsibilities as a queen and guardian of the dauphin very seriously; further her controlling role as mediator in the council was important to her. Owing to his mental instability, the king had been under the influence of various relatives and there were frequent changes in his thinking and his orders. From that perspective it becomes clear that the *Goldenes Rössl*, apart from any other considerations, was also a political instrument.

Let us consider, finally, how this work of art demonstrated the queen's loyalty. Indeed, the very act of giving the gift was an expression of fidelity. Stephen Perkinson contends that members of the Valois family commissioned gifts for each other using the family's heraldry or the personal heraldry of the recipient in order to express their allegiance. He also notes that including the recipient's image in the gift was another way for the Valois to express loyalty (Perkinson, 2009, 73). If, indeed, the queen wanted to prove her fidelity, she chose an excellent way of doing so. Her gift gave the king a three-dimensional image of himself, which, unlike painted portraits, enhanced the sense of realism. The pleasure the king could derive from looking at his own image and other figures he was familiar with from his life at the court he ruled was an added bonus to the hope that upon receiving the gift Charles would consider her a loyal wife and a queen worthy to rule France by his side.

6.0 Conclusion

The *Goldenes Rössl* is a resplendent object that represents a complex set of desires, motivations, psychological intents, and devotion. The queen chose a visual language that combined holy figures with images from Charles's life at court together with the kneeling king dressed as a knight. Introducing these images added layers to the religious aspect common in religious works of art. In a society where the nobility considered wit and ingenuity as virtues, the queen had to search for a new, perhaps unique, way to portray a well-known subject (Pizan in: Buettner, 2001, 604).

Exchanging gifts is a custom that crosses cultures and ages and has its roots in basic social and human needs: the need to belong, the need to give and receive, and the need to acquire social confirmation. This system is part of the social infrastructure that underpins good relations among individuals in a society. In late medieval French court society, this custom was part of a ritualistic system that embraced every stage in an individual's life. Gifts were given in the palace's public space, which underscores the public manner in which they were unveiled to the audience to become objects of interest and admiration.

Every gift exchanged between the king and queen was a transfer of an object that spoke to the status of each in relation to the other. Marcel Mauss wrote that a system of giving and receiving is a part of the social infrastructure aimed at maintaining good connections between people (Mauss, 1990, 3–4, 82). The sociologist Aafke Komter notes that gift-giving is a contradictory phenomenon with a double

meaning. It is supposedly voluntary, free of personal interest, but it also involves ambitions and constraints. The giver always expects something in exchange for the gift – respect, appreciation, or a better position (Komter, 2005, 34). In French society of that period, the gift was a symbol of the giver's loyalty toward the recipient. At a time when her roles as the dauphin's guardian and as a ruling figure in the royal council came into question, the urgency of demonstrating her loyalty was greater than ever. Her choice of a sculpture including a life-size image of the king was a bold choice, which was probably met with awe and appreciation on the part of the king as well as the royal family and the courtiers.

To better understand the significance of the *Goldenes Rössl* for the giver and the recipient required research that went beyond the traditional methods in the field of art history. I introduced gender-oriented methods and looked at the king's mental illness through the lens of modern psychiatry. These channels combined with a re-reading of primary sources allowed me to delve beyond iconography based on a comparison of form and elucidate additional layers of meaning. In light of these findings images of King Charles VI and Queen Isabella as flesh and blood beings emerge – suffering, struggling, and hoping for the best. Isabella could imagine the king looking at this gift, gazing at his own image and touching the little figures as he imagined receiving the blessing of Mary and Jesus. She knew he would find interest in the special figures in that scene and marvel at the sculpture's wit and ingenuity. The "story" she told her husband in this sculpture was one of recovery and of looking forward to the next step, the descent down the stairs and toward the horse waiting to carry him into the future.

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