Perspectives. Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem (auparavant HSLA, édition française), paraît une fois l'an. La Rédaction accepte des articles ayant trait aux sciences humaines et plus particulièrement à la littérature, la stylistique littéraire, les arts et l'histoire. Toute correspondance doit être adressée à la Rédaction de *Perspectives*, Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem, Mont Scopus, 91905 Jérusalem, Israël. La Rédaction se réserve le droit d'apporter de légères modifications aux mss. acceptés pour la publication. *Perspectives. Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem* ne publie pas de comptes rendus.

Prochain numéro :
Vichy après Vichy

Articles proposés à adresser à :
Thierry.Alcoloumbre@biu.ac.il

Prix du numéro : 20 €
Adresser les chèques à Éditions Magnès, Université Hébraïque,
B.P. 39099, 91390 Jérusalem, Israël. Fax : 972-2-5633370
E_mail : sales@magnespress.co.il

Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem
Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines

Volume publié avec le soutien du Forum Européen de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem, Centre Desmarais de Recherche sur la Culture Française, des Fonds de la Maison de France, de la Fondation SCOPUS UHJ abritée au sein de la FJF et des Amis français de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem

N°25 • 2018

LE CANTIQUE DES CANTIQUES

PERSPECTIVES

Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem

ÉDITIONS MAGNÈS
Université Hébraïque, Jérusalem

THE KISS OF THE LIPS.
Spirituality and exegesis to the Song of Songs in Laval's portrait praying to Mary and the Infant*

DAFNA NISSIM

The point of departure of this paper is an illuminated bifolio from a Book of Hours made for Louis of Laval, the governor of Dauphine, Genoa, Champagne and Touraine (1485, BnF, lat. 920, 50v-51r). The bifolio depicts the patron, flanked by his distinguished courtiers, as he prays before the Virgin and Child, attended in turn by a group of angels (*fig. 1*). Measuring the horizontal distance from the curved left border of folio 51r to Laval's mouth and from the right border of folio 50v to the infant's head reveals that when the owner turned the pages, he could manipulate the image in a way that he could see himself kissing the head of the Infant. In contrast to actual kisses of the worshiper on the surface of a devotional object that could eventually cause erosion of paint,[1] in this instance the owner could "activate" the kiss by moving the pages to the right point, gazing at the encounter and reflecting on its meaning. In this paper, I will elaborate on exegesis to the *Song of Songs* by late medieval theologians who linked the kiss of the maiden and her beloved to the mystical union between

* This article was first delivered as a paper at 2018 conference of the Israeli Forum for Early Modern Studies at the Hebrew University, Israel. This essay consists of elements of my dissertation pursued under the careful counsel of Katrin Kogman-Appel. I also thank Sara Offenberg for her devoted reading and many advices.

1. Examples of maculation of parts of devotional images are detailed in: Kathryn M. Rudy, "Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges, and Carrying Talismans: Considering Some Harley Manuscripts Through the Physical Rituals They Reveal," *British Library Journal* (2011): 1–56, at pp. 21–30.

the devotee and God. In contradiction to Origen's discussion on the biblical text wherein his allegorical meaning of the physical-erotic love described in the *Song of Songs* was influenced by Platonic and Gnostic attitudes towards separation of body and *anima* and the primacy of the soul over the flesh,[2] late medieval exegesis understood it as "*a spiritual union which ultimately takes place between God and the resurrected Christian – both body and soul.*"[3] I will discuss the interpretations of the *Song of Songs* by late medieval theologians and examine the iconography of the illustration in order to reveal channels of influence of the biblical text and its medieval exegesis on the significance and use of the illustration.

Jewish and Christian interpretation of the *Song of Songs* flourished side by side from late antiquity, owing to two linked problems perceived in the biblical text unbefitting a sacred book – it does not mention God, but rather passionately describes corporeal and affectionate love between a maiden and her absent lover.[4] Traces of three levels of interpretations can be found in midrashic compositions edited around the sixth or seventh century – *Song of Songs Rabbah* – as well as in two of Origen's works – *Commentary* and *Homilies to the Song*. In these texts, the erotic love poem was expounded on literal, allegorical, and mystical levels.[5] Whereas literal interpretation is scarcely found in commentaries to the *Song of Songs* from the high Middle

2. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 115.

3. E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 142.

4. Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

5. Tamar Kadari, "Rabbinic and Christian Models of Interaction on the Song of Songs," in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, eds. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 65–82.

Ages, allegorical and mystical exegesis were the main methods of interpreting the text. In the following, I relate to several compilations of theologians who belonged to Cistercian and Victorine monasteries in the twelfth century who linked the erotic poem to monastic practices of contemplation. Their aim was to direct their members towards incorporation with the divine. The influence of these writers on lay devotion, where the worshiper was experiencing a private mode of connection with the divine, proliferated in the next three centuries with the aid of pastoral guidance, sermons, and visionary collections, motivating commoners as well as the nobility to practice different forms of devotion and link a gesture of kiss to notions of mystical union with Christ/God.

Scholars of medieval spirituality relate the new interest in the *Song of Songs* to "*the evolution of Western man's psychological life, especially in the awakening to the life of the sentiments.*"[6] Social and theological processes starting in the early thirteenth century empowered all Christians, not just those who were affiliated with the church or the Mendicants specifically, to enjoy a direct relationship to God and an understanding of the direct conscious of his presence by means of prayer, devotion and meditation.[7] Moreover, theologians and female mystics such as William of Saint Thierry (1085 – 1148), Marguerite Porete (1250 – 1310) and others, applied in their writing rhetoric of inner dialogue where the soul explores its relation to God. Based on awareness of God's incomprehensibility by humans, his inaccessibility by human rational understanding alone, their

6. Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 51.

7. Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200 – 1350* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 12–13.

writing tends to describe sensorial experience and emotions.[8] The yearning words of the bride: "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*" (Cant. 1:2) became a launching point for ample interpretations in this context, with the mystical union among the main goals.[9] The writing of Cistercians and Victorine theologians linking the intimate dialogue between man and God to the *Song of Songs*, stamped the spiritual with an erotic veil. Together with the language of love that was systematically stressed out in the high Middle Ages and took over the dominance of intellectual mysticism led by Dionysius,[10] it enabled monks and, later, lay devotees to activate emotional processes, perception, and memories in order to attain the desired union.[11]

The emotion of desire embedded in the *Song of Songs* remains a primary theme throughout the book.[12] The bride, as the narrator of several sections in the text, longingly expresses her passion to be kissed by her bridegroom. In chapter three, she describes

8. Niklaus Largier, "Inner Senses–Outer Senses: The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism," in *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter/ Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages*, eds. C. Stephen Jaeger, Ingrid Kasten et. al. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 3–15, at 4.

9. Early Christian interpreters of the *Song of Songs* understood the love story as a union between God and his community (the church). In the late Middle Ages exegesis on the love poem emphasized the union between Christians and the divine, focused on in this paper.

10. Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 123–124.

11. For more on the roles of perception and memory in monastic thought, see Mary Carruthers various writings, for example: Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Idem, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Idem and Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, c2002).

12. Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 28–29.

her nightly journey by which she seeks her absent lover with disappointing results. "*By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets and in the broad ways, I will seek him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not*" (Cant. 3:1–2). The voice of the male lover that mingles with hers describes his beloved with ample graphic details – her curved hips, her neck, and round breasts. Together they create an enduring plot of unsatisfied yearning. Although the theme of physical and emotional desire between the two lovers is explicitly expressed in the *Song of Songs*, commentators of religious affiliation could stress its link to the longing for God's presence presents in the psychological structure of human religious life. Carey Walsh argues that spiritual and sensual yearning share in common a similar human experience – longing for otherness – may it be God, lover, the good life, or something else. Desire itself profoundly directs our attention to the "other" who is beyond the comfort zone of the self.[13] Walsh's psychological penetration into one of the Bible's basic themes clarifies the choice of Christian writers to read the *Song of Songs* allegorically as a love song between Christian adherents and their God. This choice can be traced not only in the genre of exegesis (some examples of which will be discussed below) but also via instructions on how to consume the *Song of Songs*. Hugh of Saint Victor (1096 – 1141) suggested focusing throughout the reading on God himself. He associates this practice with everlasting joy ("totam in gaudium") and sweetness ("dulcedo").[14] Ann Astell suggests that reading the *Song of Songs* contemplatively directed the Victorine reader to focus on God and to find "*a single tenor behind each of the poetic images, a single, summary word behind all the words, a transcendent*

13. Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, pp. 30–32.

14. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, 77.

Signified."[15] A similar approach is represented, as we shall see, in the texts of other monastic theologians in the late Middle Ages.

Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153) and a prominent leader in the reform of Benedictine monasticism that led to the formation of the Cistercian Order, wrote the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, a famous and most influential work. The text consists of 86 sermons written over eighteen years, probably originally delivered to the monks of Clairvaux.[16]

> "*'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,'" she said. Now who is this 'she'? The bride. But why bride? Because she is the soul thirsting for God...Therefore if a love relationship is the special and outstanding characteristic of the bride and groom, it is not unfitting to call the soul that loves God a bride. Now one who asks for a kiss is in love. It is not for liberty that she asks, nor for an award, not for an inheritance nor even knowledge, but for a kiss.*"[17]

As we see, Bernard interprets a key phrase from the text and links between the yearning woman and her absent lover to the desire of worshipers for mystical union. The quotation opens a discussion on the nature of desire between the worshiper and his God.[18] As Bernard articulates it, the desire of the bride to be kissed in the *Song of Songs* reflects the soul's love and yearning for God. Under his hands, the corporeal longing for the kisses of

15. *Ibid,* 79.

16. On the history of the text, see Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved*, pp. 123–124.

17. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh and intro. M. Corneille Halflants (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), VII, 2, 38–39.

18. As opposed to mystical writers who inserted allusions or echoes of biblical fragments in the exegesis to the *Song of Songs*, we find a straightforward approach in authors such as Bernard, who cites a verse from the first chapter and directly interpret it; On different approaches of inserting phrases from the Bible into mystical texts, see: Kees Waaijman, "Intertextuality: On the Use of the Bible in Mystical Texts," *Mystical Texts, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, No. 1 (2010): 1–7.

the lover becomes "*the guiding theme for his exploration of union with God.*" [19]

Usage of erotic imagery which aids to delineate the process of union between God and the supplicant is offered as well by William of St. Thierry (1085 – 1148), Bernard's fellow Cistercian and an influential author himself. "*The kiss is an affectionate external union of bodies and a sign of and spur to an inner union. By the ministry of the mouth, it seeks not so much a union of bodies as of spirits through a mutual exchange.*"[20] The literal significance of the kiss aids the writer in delineating the engagement between the adherent and the object of union wherein the two participants draw each other's' breaths into themselves as becoming one in a mutual mingle. He provides a determination of a real kiss, which explains its adequacy as a metaphor for mystical union. According to William's definition, physical bodily mingling constantly includes a higher degree of bonding. It is the first step in his thought towards linking the kiss to infusion of spirits in the mystical union.[21]

The two Cistercian writers directed their interpretation towards a monastic audience that traditionally read the Bible in study, prayer, meditation, and liturgy. Erotic vocabulary is restricted by admonitions and guidance on how to consume its imagery. Bernard explicitly enjoins his brothers: "*beware, lest you conclude that we see in this union of the Word and the soul something corporeal or perceptible,*"[22] while Pseudo-Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) justifies the carnal vocabulary as part of a "machine" that guides the worshiper to a higher love through the words of love.[23]

19. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 126.

20. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and profane*, 57.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

22. Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved*, pp. 128–129.

23. "...because while he names the members of the body, he thus calls the soul to love." Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, 36.

Canalize carnal experience into spiritual practice presupposes that the devotee is a sensual being. In Bernard's composition, we find 473 instances of forms of the verb "experience". In addition to the multiple usage of this term, he also speaks of feeling, tasting, and learning by experience.[24] But even though he liberally employs terms donating to corporeal, sensual human experience, he directs them all to the daily routine of monastic experience that involves contemplation and penitence.[25] His concept of experience is based on Christian contemplation on the human Christ. First, the worshiper has to love the physical being of the Son who came to earth, suffered, and died on the cross. Then, he can transcend from love of the physical to the love of the spiritual.[26]

Richard of Saint Victor underscored God's power to lift the adherent up "to divine things by ecstasy" owing to his virtue of love.[27] His systematized mystical theology deployed in *Benjamin Minor* and *Benjamin Major* defines and directs contemplation. One framework is knowledge acquired by the senses, imagination, and reason. Although *Benjamin Major* is not an exegesis of the text of the *Song of Songs* the author links three verses to ecstatic exaltation capable of launching the devotee beyond his rational faculties. The third cause – exceeding exultation – is parallel to "*Who is she that cometh up from the desert flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved ?*"[28] This example, representative of many others, shows that discourse on the symbolism of the

24. Kilian McDonnell, "Spirit and Experience in Bernard of Clairvaux," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 3–18, at pp. 14–15.

25. *Ibid.*, 7.

26. Gordon Rudy, *The Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 46.

27. *Benjamin Major*, book V, in *Richard of Saint-Victor: Selected Writings on Contemplation*, trans. and intro. Clare Kirchberger (London: Faber and Faber LTD, 1957), 190.

28. *Ibid.*

Song of Songs was employed in mystical texts of theologians in late medieval monastic thought and that the language of the love poem was a vivid source for interpretations directing to the desired mystical union.

So far, I have discussed exegetical texts on the *Song of Songs* which were compiled for a monastic audience. However, contemplation on the ascent towards God flourished from the twelfth century on and influenced lay communities, among them the French nobility. Processes of "democratization" and "secularization" increasingly inspired more Christians to strive for personal awareness of God's presence.[29] It was a gradual process but at the conclusion of the period, people of all ranks sought out new ways to devote themselves and contemplate on Christ.[30] Hints to the involvement of mystical thought in the religious life of the French royalty can be traced by the presence of a Victorine compilation in the Royal library and *Louis XI's Book of Hours* in the library of the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris. Hugh of Saint Victor's *the Treatise on the Soul* was translated into the vernacular in 1368 for Charles V. The bookish king must have read them in the company of his spiritual advisors. Dominican and Franciscan were serving the Royal family alternately as part of a religious entourage helping Valois members with their religious lives. The texts I have previously discussed were part of the Mendicant's spiritual knowledge. Their close relationship with the royal court enabled them to influence their patrons' daily conduct, including their spiritual facet.

29. The two terms were selected by McGinn to describe social and theological changes that led the laity to seek new private channels to the divine. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200 – 1350*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 12–13.

30. The proliferation of Books of Hours, for example, testifies to a growing desire of lay patrons to include private devotion in their life.

Louis of Laval was a descendant of one of the most powerful noble houses of fifteenth and sixteenth century France. Positioning themselves as a balance factor between the duke of Brittany and the Kings of France, members of the family succeeded in acquiring repute in royal service positions. During the final decades of the Hundred Years War, they refused to switch their allegiance from the French crown to that of the English crown as other noble houses in their vicinity did. They maintained support for the campaign of Charles VII (1403 – 1461) with a considerable body of soldiers. In return, the King rewarded them after his triumph over the English troops with both honors and better administrative positions.[31] Laval was the brother of Guy XIV (died 1486), entitled as Count of Laval after the King elevated the barony to a county in 1429.[32] Louis consolidated his power with several administrative roles – he became *Grand Maitre des Eaux et Forets du Roi*, he served the King, Louis XI (1423 – 1483), as one of his counselors, and he was entrusted with the position of the governor of Dauphine, Genoa, Champagne and Touraine.[33] His position guaranteed him access to the Royal court. In this light, Valois' relationship with the Abbey of Saint Victor might well have been a channel for transfer of mystical teachings like the Mendicant friars were in the Royal court that Laval was a prominent member of.

Cistercian and Victorine's interpretations on the kiss of the bridegroom in the *Song of Songs* describe a state of infusion with the divine. In the last centuries of late medieval Catholic liturgy these were associated with the use of devotional objects. Interpolation of sacredness and secularity, spirituality and sensuality constitute the *coeur* of medieval liturgy and devotion. In Catholicism,

31. For more on the political history of the House of Laval, see: Malcolm Walsby, *The Counts of Laval: Culture, Patronage, and Religion in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century France* (Ashtage, 2007; London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

32. *Ibid.*, 21.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

objects were used as sites where sensual devotion was performed as a sign of the essence of holiness inherent in matter. During the Eucharist, for example, worshipers were required to fully engage in the liturgy by gazing at the lifted Host, praying with the priest, and activating the senses of touch and taste while receiving and digesting the wafer. Geert Grote (1340 – 1384) recommends that congregants have greater physical contact with Christ through engagement with the object of the *Pax* transmitted to them by the priest, after kissing it. "*Take up the Pax reverently and devoutly because you are in contact with the body of the Lord through the mouth of the priest... When the Pax comes, be prepared to receive it as the body of Christ, and then lift up your desire and prepare yourself so that even though you are not up to eating the sacrament carnally you may eat it spiritually.*"[34] The accentuation on venerating the physical body of Christ encouraged sensual devotion. Rupert of Deuz (1075 – 1129), a Benedict theologian, expressed his longing for the presence of Christ's body when he described his encounter with a sculpture of the Crucifixion on the altar: "*I recognized Jesus with open eyes upon me. This was not enough for me. I wanted to touch him with my hands, embrace and kiss him.*"[35] The evolving desire to handle images of Christ resembling a real body can be traced (as previously mentioned) in the use of prayer books where signs of wear reveal a tendency to touch and kiss the image of Christ and other venerated figures.[36]

The possible kiss of Laval's mouth on Baby Jesus' head occurs in a specific place and with particular attendants. In order to

34. *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings*, intro. and trans. John Van Engen (New York, 1988), p. 72.

35. Vibeke Olson, "Blood, Sweat, Tears, and Milk: 'Fluid' Veneration, Sensory Contact, and Corporeal Presence in Medieval Devotional Art," in *Binding the Absent Body in Medieval and Modern Art*, ed. Emily Kelley (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 11–31, at 12.

36. Rudy, "Kissing Images."

understand the meaning of the figures surrounding both Laval and his subject of worship and to see how it reflects on mystical union, I will turn now to the figures of the two entourages. The group behind the Duke represents actual courtiers that mark his distinguished position. His entourage forms a human screen of standing silent figures. They refrain from participating in the prayer and with their severe expressions; they underscore both the significance of Laval as a secular sovereign and that of the sacred event. Moreover, they are detached from the experience, observing it from a distance but not via their own multisensory engagement.

The angels on the left folio are portrayed as young hallowed creatures with shining curly hair, dressed in white mantles. To better understand their significance, an examination of the different kinds of celestial creatures in the aforementioned book is needed. The artist with his virtuoso hand depicted various types of angels throughout the manuscript. On fol. 147v, for example, he represented Christ crowning Mary as the Queen of Heaven (fig. 2). The Virgin dressed in a blue mantle kneels on her knees in a humble gesture of prayer while rows of various angels surround the throne. On the upper end of the composition, we can trace angels colored in red and blue hues, lifting their wings upwards; the center of the composition is occupied by angels dressed in white mantles whose appearance seems more human-like than the creatures above; the lowest rows exhibit angels who sing and play musical instruments. The theme of Christ and Mary enthroned is exhibited in two other folios which similarly represent angelic attendants (51v, 177v).

Artists might have designed the figures of celestial creatures according to the discourse of medieval theologians on their nature and role in this world and the next. Bernard of Clairvaux relates to the celestial hierarchy and suggests that the different names of heavenly creatures were revealed to us in order to understand the

nature of each order.[37] He elaborates on their nature in respect to their proximity to humankind or god. In this dichotomic view, angels are celestial creatures "*sent to serve those who are to obtain salvation,*"[38] while the highest rank consists of Seraphs who sit close to God's throne, "*burning with love, shining with knowledge.*"[39] A similar differentiation can be found in the figures of angels hosted in the manuscript. Angels in the upper rows are represented as less human, colored in blue and red hues, which symbolize knowledge and love, while angels in the lower part of the composition are articulated as creatures that appeal to human identifications.

The depiction of the lowest ranked angels as holding and playing musical instruments stems from conceptions of celestial music prevalent in late medieval thought. Theologians were engaged by questions as to how celestial music can be transferred into terrestrial arena since its transference translates unheard music into a voice grasped by corporeal senses.[40] The traditional role of singing angels was to praise the Deity (*laudes dei*). Texts from the Scriptures that describe the praise of angels were used in the composition of liturgy – near the opening hymn *Te deum*, in the preface to the Mass, in a variety of forms of daily Office,

37. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*, trans. John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 147.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 149.

40. In his group of texts entitled *De canticis* (1363–1429), Jean Gerson praises the inaudible divine music which he regarded as metaphors for the love and knowledge of God; see Joyce L. Irwin, "The Mystical Music of Jean Gerson", *Early Music History* 1 (1981): 187–201, at pp. 188–189. Other theologians discuss the indescribable nature of angelic singing; see, for example: Oliver Huck, "The Music of the Angels in Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth-Century Music," *Musica Disciplina* 53 (2003 – 2008): 99–119.

and on Marian feasts.[41] Music was a vehicle that helped to mediate between the person in prayer and God. It was inherent to the practice of Christian liturgy and almost every service was performed with a musical enhancement, be it chants, melodies or polyphonic music.[42] In the time of Charles V, both the Royal court and the Burgundian court employed singers and chaplains who performed the divine service. It was their duty to sing each day mass, vespers, and the lesser hours in the chapels of the French Royal family, thus prayers to Mary as other invocations were accompanied by music.[43]

Depictions of Mary attended by angelic musicians in West European art found favor different audiences in the aforesaid period. The scene in *Étienne Chevalier's Book of Hours* (ca. 1454) reflects how singing angels were represented as a bridge between human beings and the Virgin in the second half of the fifteenth century (fig. 3). Arranged in three groups, the angels surrounding Mary and the Infant sit under a circular niche decorated with gothic sculptures while Chevalier and his patron Saint on the other side of the bifolio are attentive to the angelic music. The vicinity of Chevalier to the angelic choir, some playing the lute and other instruments, while the two angels in the center are kneeling on one knee, one hand holding their elbows and the other swinging censers, demonstrates the interpolation of earthly and heavenly spheres. The visual representation of the singing angels in proximity to the crowned Mary in a sacred space can be interpreted in terms of ecclesial music modeled on angelic

41. Rastall, "Heaven: The Musical Repertory," *The Iconography of Heaven* (1994): 162–96, at pp. 165–166.

42. Gabriela Ilnitchi, "Music in the Liturgy", in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, eds. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), pp. 645–672.

43. Craig Wright, *Music at the Court of Burgundy 1364 – 1419: A Documentary History* (Henryville, Pa.: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1979), 70.

music. As opposed to angels grasping liturgical devices or playing musical instruments, the angels in the front rows of the choir are portrayed as juvenile creatures, dressed in white cloaks and free of wings, resembling the angels in Laval's bifolio.

Illustrating Mary with musician angels reflects divine music, and access to Mary through prayer accompanied by song. A panel painting of the Sienese painter Domenico di Bartolo (1400 – 1445) represents the Madonna of Humility surrounded by angel musicians (fig. 4). Appealing to the ocular sensitivity of its audience, Domenico employs the use of perspective, words, and musical score, which aims at activating the imagination and inner senses. The figures of singing and playing angels and the polyphony drawn on the painting surface known as 'Adoramus te Christe', urge the attentive viewer's participation in their sacred singing and actuates his senses towards an ever-sublime consciousness.[44] The Madonna of Humility, a thematic expression of Franciscan piety, serves in this instance not merely as a representation of Mary with her choir of praise but signals the observer to participate in the heavenly music through sensual interaction to gain the blessing of the Virgin.

However, in Laval's representation, the vertical pose of the angels, their downwards gaze and their closed mouths allude to their silence. The pictorial program does not follow the theme of Mary surrounded by musical angels. The observer's expectation to be encountered by a celestial choir performing divine music (due to the resemblance between angels on this folio and musician angels on folio 147v) is left without response. In contradiction to Domenico's painting, this illustration prevents us from activating the inner sense of hearing. I argue that the silent posture of the

44. Andrew Ladis, "The Music of Devotion: Image, Voice, and the Imagination in a Madonna of Humility by Domenico di Bartolo," in *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period: Essays in Honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*, ed. Katherine A. Mciver (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 3–26.

angels encouraged by the same gesture of Laval's attendants reflects the concept of mystical union previously mentioned. This layer of meaning is linked to the spiritual role of angels in human kind's general salvation and to mystical union with God in particular.

Spiritual writers discussed at length the role of angels in human ascent to God. Although celestial creatures are not present in the biblical text, theologians from late Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages who interpret the *Song of Songs* linked the nine orders of angels to human spiritual consciousness. A comprehensive source for angelic-human interaction is Thomas Gallus' *Extract on the Celestial Hierarchy* (1238) and *Prologue to the Third Commentary on the Song of Songs,* written in 1243. The first presents the seminal work of Dionysius of Areopagite on angels to Latin readers; the influence of the compilation in the following centuries is demonstrated by its inclusion in the University of Paris' studies corpus. Gallus develops the Dionysius' concept that angels function as signs or symbols that convey the human spirit back to God.[45] In the *Prologue* he fully develops the formulation of angelic spirituality and he transfigures the angelic hierarchy into the field of human anthropology, nature, and destiny.[46]

In a chapter of the *Prologue* entitled "On the Spiritual Arts", Gallus delineates the stages by which the seeker ascends through prayer and contemplation.

> "*And so after that the soul is turned to know and consider and seek wisdom and reason of all things, (Ecclesiastes 7:25, Vulgate 7:26) longing to be separated from the whole universe of being and to be successfully united, beyond any substance, with the Bridegroom. So Dionysius says, 'But my discourse now ascends from the lowest to the final, transcendent things, so that as our discourse ascends, its capacity is diminished. And after ascending beyond all, it will be totally without voice, totally united with that ineffable One about whom nothing can be spoken.' Such a mind asks for a kiss, that is, a conjunction or union beyond mind...*"[47]

45. *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspective on the Ways of Angels*, trans. and intro. Steven Chase (New York and Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2002), pp. 218–219.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236.

Gallus's link between Dionysius' description of the silent character of this spiritual step and the act of the kiss reveals the honored exegesis he bestows upon the allegorical kiss. The moment represents the death of the intellect, when all speech ceases, as the very same lips which speak are now engaged in the act of a passionate connection.[48]

Since the twelfth century, Christian mystical theology has emphasized the role of love in human yearning for God, a notion embedded in Gallus' *Prologue*.[49] Gallus opens with a quote from Jeremiah indicating two paths to acquire knowledge of God: an intellectual process ascends from the sensual world and a higher degree of knowledge whose practical aspects are exposed in the *Song of Songs*. In his chapter on the angelic soul he describes nine degrees of ascent to God with emphasis on the role of intellectual knowledge and on divine knowledge gained by love. In the ninth order "*the intellect is not able to be drawn into sublime ecstasies or into the excesses of all these lights, but only the highest love, which can unite the soul to God... In this order a bed is laid out for the Bridegroom and Bride.*"[50] The *Prologue* offers a framework for union with the divine, wherein angelic hierarchy is essential for apprehension of this process while the *Song of Songs* is a guiding text for the last stages of ascension.

47. *Ibid.*, 248.

48. *Ibid.*, 235.

49. On knowledge, mystical union, and love, see: Bernard Mcginn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56, No.1 (1987): 7–24.

50. *Angelic Spirituality*, 246.

Bonaventure (1221 – 1274) also offers a comprehensive theoretical synthesis on methods of spiritual ascent in several of his works. Written approximately twenty years after Gallus' *Prologue*, his *Journey of the Mind to God* delineates a six-stage process by which the soul rises towards God. In the last chapter, he suggests his audience: "*...if one be perfect, it is proper that all intellectual activities be relinquished, and the whole apex of affection be transferred and transformed into God.*"[51] He builds his first six chapters on a vision of the six-winged Seraphs of Francis of Assisi, his ancestor. In Bonaventure's work, an angel from this order represents love, a fundamental force driving the soul towards contemplation and ascension. Until this point, Bonaventure has described how the senses and the intellect are the means by which the adherent ascends towards the divine. Ultimately, the soul reaches the seventh stage where the intellect is reposed and the worshiper is united with the divine in affection.[52]

Relinquishment of the intellect, language, and words is manifest in the figures of the musician-like angels rooted in place for a silent moment, reflecting the gesture of the Duke's entourage. Moreover, the bifolio illustration marks the end of the cycle of prayers to Mary, the *Obsecro te* and *O intemerata*. Placing it at the very end of the sequence, the artist stresses the image's role in Laval's devotion. It is the perfect place for activating a kiss between the portrayed mouth of the Duke and the Infant, resting and silently contemplating the divine encounter, attended by angels and courtiers.

The iconography of this artwork reflects a Christian spirituality infused with contemplation on the divine union with God

51. St. Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind Into God* (Christian Classic Ethreal Library, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 26. http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Bonaventure%20Journey%20of%20the%20Mind%20Into%20God.pdf (Accessed January 2018)

52. *Angelic Spirituality*, pp. 51–52.

derived from exegesis to the *Song of Songs*. As people who first conducted *vita activa* alongside *vita contemplativa,* members of Valois' family and high-distinguished courtiers acquired and engaged in devotional books and objects which marked prestige, sophistication and a devotional persona. Spiritual interpretation of the *Song of Songs* was a fundamental key, available to the French high nobility through their relationship with the Mendicant Orders that populated their ecclesial offices. It appears likely that Laval, portrayed before Mary and Christ Child, functioned as a surrogate to the actual Duke, assisting him in his ascent to God through an arena of pure love and silence.

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Figure 1 – *Laval Prays in front of the Virgin and Child*, 1485, BnF, lat. 920, 50v-51r. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 2 – *Crowning Mary in Heaven*, 1485, BnF, lat. 920, 147v. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 3 – Jean Fouquet, *Étienne Chevalier Prays in Front of the Virgin and Child*, 1452 – 1460, The Hours of Étienne Chevalier, Musée Condé, detached leaf. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly) / René-Gabriel Ojéda.

Figure 4 – Domenico di Bartolo, Madonna of Humility, 1433, Pinacoteca Nationale, Siena. Photo © Alinari Archives, Florence/Reproduced with the permission of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.