



SACRED FOLLY

A New History of the Feast of Fools

MAX HARRIS



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A NEW HISTORY OF
THE FEAST OF FOOLS

MAX HARRIS

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

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*In memory of Bob Potter
who in yet another gift of friendship
encouraged me to write this book*

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ABBREVIATIONS

Backman	Backman, <i>Religious Dances in the Christian Church</i>
Bevington	Bevington, ed., <i>Medieval Drama</i>
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CAO	Caesarius of Arles, <i>Caesarii Arelatensis opera</i>
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
Chambers	Chambers, <i>The Mediaeval Stage</i>
Chérest	Chérest, “Nouvelles recherches sur la fête des innocents et la fête des fous”
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae</i>
<i>DMF</i>	<i>Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330–1500)</i>
Doursther	Doursther, <i>Dictionnaire universel des poids et mesures anciens et modernes</i>
Du Cange	Du Cange, <i>Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis</i>
EETS,ES	Early English Text Society, Extra Series
EETS,SS	Early English Text Society, Special Series
Fassler	Fassler, “The Feast of Fools and <i>Danielis Ludus</i> ”
Grenier	Grenier, <i>Introduction à l’histoire générale de la province de Picardie</i>
H&M	Heffernan and Matter, eds., <i>The Liturgy of the Medieval Church</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Leber	Leber, ed., <i>Collection des meilleurs dissertations</i>
<i>Lives</i>	Plutarch, <i>Lives</i>
L&S	Liddell and Scott, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
Mansi	Mansi, ed., <i>Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>Monumenta Boica</i>
<i>MGH,SRM</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica . . . , scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>NGDMM</i>	<i>The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i>

<i>OCD</i>	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
Ogden	Ogden, ed., <i>The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays</i>
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus [...] series Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus [...] series Latina</i>
REED	Records of Early English Drama
Rigollot	Rigollot, <i>Monnaies inconnues des évêques des innocens</i>
Rolls Series	Rerum Britannicorum Medii Aevi Scriptores (Rolls Series)
<i>SPCCS</i>	Chrysologos, <i>Sancti Petri Chrysologi collectio sermonium</i>
<i>SPCSS</i>	Chrysologos, <i>Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons</i>
T&C	Twycross and Carpenter, <i>Masks and Masking</i>
Tilliot	Tilliot, <i>Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de la fête des foux</i>
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
Tydeman	Tydeman, ed., <i>The Medieval European Stage</i>
Villetard	Villetard, ed., <i>Office de Pierre de Corbeil</i>
Young	Young, <i>The Drama of the Medieval Church</i>



Places where a Feast of Fools was celebrated



Prologue

A Letter from Paris

On 12 March 1445 the faculty of theology at the University of Paris issued a letter to the prelates and chapters of France.¹ We feel compelled, they wrote, “to describe how much we abhor and how much we execrate a certain kind of ritual of merriment, which is called by its organizers the Feast of Fools.” The origins of the feast, the theologians insisted, lay in ancient pagan rites of the kind condemned long ago by the apostle Paul and the blessed Saint Augustine. The Kalends of January were an especially potent influence. By the cunning plans of demons, the “foul and ungodly” rites associated with these Greek and Roman New Year festivities had survived for centuries under cover of the Christian feast of the Nativity. Now called the Feast of Fools, they were still being celebrated during Christmas week “in churches, in consecrated places, and by persons set apart for the service of God.”

In what has since become the most frequently quoted description of the Feast of Fools, the Paris theologians went on to summarize the abuses they associated with the feast: “Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and

1. *PL* 207:1169–76. For summaries of the letter in English, see Chambers, 1:293–95; Backman, 52–53. The letter is dated “anno Domini 1444, die XII mensis Martii,” equivalent to 12 March 1445 in the modern calendar. Until 1564 the French New Year began at Easter (Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *Oxford*, 785).

monstrous visages at the hours of office. They dance in the choir dressed as women, panders or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the horn of the altar [*cornu altaris juxta*] while the celebrant is saying mass. They play at 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 rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gestures and verses scurrilous and unchaste.”²

The theologians then took pains to refute arguments in favor of the Feast of Fools that were based on the propriety of innocent recreation or on the tolerance of “our predecessors” for such festivities. Finally, the letter closed with a number of “conclusions,” intended to hasten the abolition of the “damnable and pagan Feast of Fools [*festum fatuorum*].” Under no circumstances should “a bishop or an archbishop of fools” be elected. Nor should such “a bishop or archbishop of fools” be allowed to bear the insignia of episcopal office, such as the pastoral miter and staff, or to have a cross and staff carried before him, as an archbishop does “when walking or riding through his province.” Nor should an *episcopus* or *archiepiscopus fatuorum* be permitted to celebrate the divine office, to give blessings when reading the lessons at matins, or to bless the people at other times. All these things are offensive to God, contrary to episcopal dignity, and in any case have been forbidden by papal decretals and by general councils of the church. For similar reasons, there should be no “pope of fools.” A *papa fatuorum* should not conduct divine service bearing papal insignia, bless the people, or mimic any other privileges of papal office. To do so is to profane “ecclesiastical dignity and hierarchical order.”

Furthermore, clergy should not use the pretext of the Feast of Fools to celebrate the divine office without wearing clerical vestments. No one should be allowed to lead *choreas* (“group dances in line or circle patterns,”³ sometimes accompanied by singing) in church during divine service or to eat or drink around the altar while mass is being celebrated. To do any of these things is to pollute the temple of God and to despise “the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist.” Outside the church, priests should not shed their clerical dress and, dressed as laymen or fools, further diminish the reputation

2. PL 207:1171; translation from Chambers, 1:294. “The horn of the altar,” by analogy with biblical practice (Exod. 27:2; 1 Kings 1:50), signifies a corner of the altar.

3. Brainard, “Dance,” 883. For a brief discussion of the vocabulary of medieval ecclesiastical dance, see Backman, 13–14; for a more general discussion of medieval dance terms, see Brainard, “Dance”; for an extended study of the French *carole*, for which the medieval Latin *chorea* often served as a synonym, see Sahlin, *Étude*.

of the clergy by their behavior. Even less should they adopt masked or painted faces, put on women's clothes, or take part in theatrical plays or other games involving impersonation, especially in a public place or in the presence of a large crowd. Laymen taking part in such plays, or at least in those designed to prompt ridicule or mockery, should not dress as monks or other ecclesiastical figures. All these abuses smack of the kind of sport enjoyed by pagans during the Kalends of January. Rather than take part in them, Christians should avoid them or flee.

Published in French translation by Jean-Baptiste Thiers in 1686 and Jean-Bénigne Lucotte du Tilliot in 1741,⁴ in German translation by Guido Maria Dreves in 1894,⁵ and in English translation by E. K. Chambers in 1903,⁶ the list of abuses contained in the central paragraph of this letter has too often been regarded as an accurate description of the Feast of Fools at all times and everywhere. In fact, like many ecclesiastical condemnations of controversial behavior before and since, the letter is an exaggerated product of its immediate cultural environment. When it comes to questions of supposed misbehavior in church, disapproving clerics are often unreliable witnesses.

The same may be said, with important qualifications, of scholars. Chambers is the most influential example. For more than a century, those who have written about the Feast of Fools have been both indebted to and led astray by Chambers's collection of materials on the subject in the first volume of his *Mediaeval Stage*.⁷ We remain indebted because his is still the most complete collection available of translated, paraphrased, or summarized data culled from the archives. We have been led astray for at least three reasons.

First, Chambers separated the data from their liturgical context. Not only did he divide the Feast of Fools from the liturgical drama of the Christmas season, treating the former in volume one under the general rubric of "Folk Drama" and the latter in volume two under the general rubric of "Religious Drama," but he further separated both from their place in the corporate worship of the Christmas season. To the liturgy as such, in which both the liturgical drama and the Feast of Fools were deeply embedded, he paid scant attention.

Second, Chambers packed a great deal of material, culled from archival sources stretching over several centuries, into a dense sixty pages of annotated revelry. Much of this material was taken from ecclesiastical documents

4. Thiers, *Traité*, 441; Tilliot, 8–9. For the wide circulation of Tilliot's book, see Leber, 9:231–32.

5. Dreves, "Geschichte," 581.

6. Chambers, 1:294.

7. Chambers, 1:274–335.

attempting to restrict excesses or entirely to suppress the Feast of Fools: the letter from the Parisian theologians is the best-known example. By privileging ecclesiastical opposition, Chambers exaggerated the disruptive character of the Feast of Fools and minimized its positive contribution to the seasonal liturgy.

Third, Chambers overlooked significant changes that took place over time, both in the Feast of Fools itself and in official attitudes toward the feast. Although he arranged his material in approximate chronological order within each city or region, he did so more as a matter of convenience than as evidence for any historical development. By isolating his material from its historical context, Chambers distorted its interpretation. It was no accident that the Feast of Fools arose in the second half of the twelfth century and encountered powerful opposition in the first half of the fifteenth century. The date of the theologians' letter is pertinent to any serious evaluation of the charges it brought against the Feast of Fools.

In short, Chambers created the impression that the Feast of Fools was no more than a cluster of folk (and thus, in his view, pagan) customs having little or no connection with the Christian liturgy other than to disrupt it, that it met with almost constant disapproval from church authorities, and that it was always and everywhere rowdy, raucous, and intrusive, "an ebullition," as he put it, "of the natural lout beneath the cassock."⁸ He would have done well to heed the quiet warning of Aimé Chérest in 1853 that historians of the Feast of Fools "should not generalize from what was, in truth, exceptional."⁹ The same may be said of scholars who have relied on Chambers's narrative. Tales of clerical excess have grown more outrageous almost with each retelling.

A recent summary description of the Feast of Fools goes like this: "In the annual Feast of Fools at Christmastime, every rite and article of the Church no matter how sacred was celebrated in mockery. A *dominus festi*, or lord of the revels, was elected from the inferior clergy—the curés, subdeacons, vicars, and choir clerks, mostly ill-educated, ill-paid, and ill-disciplined—whose day it was to turn everything topsy-turvy. They installed their lord as Pope or Bishop or Abbot of Fools in a ceremony of head-shaving accompanied by bawdy talk and lewd acts; dressed him in vestments turned inside out; played dice on the altar and ate black puddings and sausages while mass was celebrated in nonsensical gibberish; swung censers made of old shoes emitting 'stinking smoke'; officiated in the various offices of the priest wearing beast masks and dressed as women or minstrels, sang obscene songs in the choir;

8. Chambers, 1:325.

9. Chérest, 65.

howled and hooted and jangled bells while the ‘Pope’ recited a doggerel benediction. At his call to follow him on pain of having their breeches split, all rush violently from the church to parade through the town, drawing the *dominus* in a cart from which he issues mock indulgences while his followers hiss, cackle, jeer, and gesticulate. They rouse the bystanders to laughter with ‘infamous performances’ and parody preachers in scurrilous sermons. Naked men haul carts of manure which they throw at the populace. Drinking bouts and dances accompany the procession. The whole was a burlesque of the too-familiar, tedious, and often meaningless rituals; a release of ‘the natural lout beneath the cassock.’”¹⁰

The author of this paragraph is a respected historian, but her summary is a gross misrepresentation. Some of the details are borrowed uncritically from the theologians’ damning letter or from Chambers’s own hostile judgments. Others reappear later in this book: most are shown to be false. More importantly, the notion that all the most shocking (or titillating) details from multiple sources can be combined to give a true picture of the Feast of Fools at any single time or place is shown to be hopelessly misguided.

To their credit, a few scholars have begun to challenge the prevailing view of the Feast of Fools inherited from Chambers. Jerome Taylor has pointed out that the Feast of Fools took place “in far fewer cathedrals than is widely supposed” and that it was “by no means everywhere rowdy.” David Hughes has observed that where the Feast of Fools did take place, its surrounding liturgies were composed as “means of guiding the celebrators’ energies into constructive channels.” And Nick Sandon has voiced the justifiable suspicion that “some of the wilder excesses said to have been committed” at the Feast of Fools “lay more in the wishful imagination of later commentators than in fact.”¹¹ But no one has tackled the more ambitious task of rewriting the history of the Feast of Fools as a whole, locating the feast in its liturgical context, balancing the scales between disruption and innovation, and paying careful attention to the development of the feast over time.¹²

I do so here. I begin, in part one, by looking at several activities that have been mistakenly identified as precursors to or early examples of the Feast of Fools. The most important are the Kalends masquerades, but I also include courtly pranks and clerical mimicry in imperial Constantinople, outdoor

10. Tuchman, *Distant*, 32–33.

11. Taylor, “Prophetic,” 32; Hughes, “Music,” 139; Sandon, *Octave*, 69.

12. Dreves, “Geschichte,” was an early and remarkably balanced attempt to write a brief history of the Feast of Fools. Heers, *Fêtes*, is marred by frequent errors and a complete lack of documentation.

rites in papal Rome, and Herod games in Germany. By giving these their due, I clear the way for a study of the Feast of Fools itself. The Feast of Fools was a specific liturgical festivity, not just any exuberant activity that took place in or near a church at or around the New Year. Nevertheless, by bearing witness to a tolerance of playfulness in early medieval churches, a few of these other activities prepare the reader for some of the more surprising features of the Feast of Fools. So does the liturgical ball game that I discuss in chapter 5. Although the game was a contemporary rather than a forerunner of the Feast of Fools, its history so closely parallels that of the Feast of Fools that a brief account of the one serves as a helpful introduction to the more complex history of the other.

In part two I explore the way in which the Feast of Fools took shape in northern France. Early reports began to appear in the second half of the twelfth century. Although the most reliable mention nothing untoward, the turn of the century brought a series of complaints from Pope Innocent III. Partly in response to these complaints and partly in a burst of liturgical creativity, a few bishops in northern France introduced reforms, accommodating and even expanding the Feast of Fools within an orderly liturgical context. At their most innovative in the early thirteenth century, these reforms bore fruit in such masterpieces of liturgical art as the Sens and Beauvais offices of the Circumcision, the Beauvais *Play of Daniel*, and the Laon *Office of Joseph*.

In part three I document—as well as the scattered records allow—a long period of local ecclesiastical support for the Feast of Fools in France, extending from the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century. Although such support was never uniform, it was punctuated only occasionally by reports of disorder and restraint. Some of these reports arise not from the records themselves but from scholarly misinterpretation of the records. Others are grounded not in the ecclesiastical Feast of Fools but in the independent activities of groups of young laymen or early festive societies (*sociétés joyeuses*). A few, especially toward the end of the fourteenth century, bear credible witness to clerical excess. In chapter 15 I examine the very few references to the Feast of Fools outside France.

In part four I tell the story of the suppression of the Feast of Fools. Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, launched his first attack in 1400. The ecumenical Council of Basel condemned the feast in 1435. Three years later, Charles VII of France declared a modified version of the council's decrees to be binding in France. In 1445 the university theologians of Paris issued their own denunciation. Although pressure continued to mount,

resistance by some cathedral chapters was strong and persistent, allowing the Feast of Fools to survive well into the sixteenth century.

In part five I consider the proliferation of lay festive societies in France between about 1450 and 1560. These societies staged mystery plays and *sotties* (fools' plays), organized festive parades and raucous charivaris, ate and drank together, and in many cases enjoyed considerable civic prestige. Many were led by an elected "king" or "prince of fools." Because the cultural dominance of these societies followed the partial suppression of the clerical Feast of Fools, Chambers mistakenly considered them "a second tradition of Feasts of Fools."¹³ So did Victor Hugo, whose description of "the Feast of Fools" in the opening chapters of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has done much to popularize this misconception.¹⁴ Festive societies enjoyed various relationships with the surviving Feasts of Fools, ranging from amicable to hostile and from close to distant, but nowhere did the clerical feast significantly influence the lay societies. The two were distinct phenomena.

I return to the letter from the Paris theologians in chapter 19. For now, readers can take heart from the promise that the history of the Feast of Fools is richer and more complex than either Chambers or the Parisian theologians were prepared to admit.

13. Chambers, 1:373.

14. The animated Disney movie based on Hugo's novel has only added to the confusion.

CHAPTER 1

The Kalends of January

The fifteenth-century Parisian theologians were right in one regard: the history of the Feast of Fools begins with the Kalends of January.

In ancient Rome, the first day of each month was known as the *kalendae* (Kalends). After 153 BCE, when the date on which new consuls took office was fixed at 1 January, the Kalends of January ushered in not merely a new month but a new political and calendar year.¹ Civic rituals included a solemn procession of the two new consuls to the Senate, where each sacrificed a bull to Jupiter and where, too, under the empire, the senators swore an oath of allegiance to the emperor. Domestic rituals included New Year's Eve visits to friends and relatives, the exchange of gifts (*strenae*) of real or symbolic value, the expression of good wishes for the coming year, and offerings to the domestic gods of the hearth.²

The January Kalends, unlike other classical festivals sometimes invoked as precedents for the Feast of Fools,³ not only survived into the Christian era

1. Meslin, *Fête*, 23; Scullard, *Festivals*, 52.

2. Ovid, *Fasti* 1.63–294; Meslin, *Fête*, 23–50; Johnston, “Lares.”

3. The Bacchanalia, Saturnalia, and January Kalends are the feasts most commonly invoked as classical influences on early modern festivals of inversion. For the argument that only the January Kalends exercised such an influence, see Harris, “Claiming.”

but did so on an increasingly grand scale. Extending from New Year's Eve until 3 January and expanding outwards to "all the towns of the Roman world," the festival of the Kalends grew, according to its most careful historian, Michel Meslin, into "a gigantic popular kermess, . . . a fiesta spilling over the whole Christian empire." It was arguably "the largest popular festival in all the empire."⁴

Libanius (314–ca. 393), a distinguished Greek writer and teacher of rhetoric in Antioch and an unabashed member of the pagan Greek upper class, wrote two appreciative essays describing the Kalends of his day. One is a general encomium in praise of the festival;⁵ the other sets out the main events of the festival in chronological order.⁶ Celebration of the festival, Libanius wrote in the first essay, is coterminous with Roman rule. It flourishes in the plains and in the hills, on the lakes and on the rivers, even—weather permitting—on board ships at sea. Everywhere there are banquets and outbursts of laughter. So many gifts are exchanged that the roads are full of packages in transit. Family members are moved to reconciliation. Slaves are treated liberally. Even in the jails, he has been told, prisoners crack a smile. In the second essay he notes that the Kalends are the only feast "common to all those who live under the Roman empire."⁷ On the last day of the old year, gifts to fill the table for the evening's banquet are sent from house to house. Few sleep that night. Most people pass the time with "songs, leaping dances [*pēdēmata*], and jests."⁸ Some bang on the doors of shopkeepers to keep them awake. In the morning, people decorate their doors with laurel branches. Breeders lead their horses to the temple to petition the gods for victory in the chariot races. Attendants scatter money into the crowd. Those who have drunk too much the night before spend the day asleep, but "those . . . who are sharper in their wits" occupy themselves with the business of gift giving.⁹ On 2 January people stay home. Rules are relaxed. Masters and slaves play dice together. If a slave proves lazy or tipsy, the festival excuses him, and he is not reproached. Even the poor do their best to eat well. On 3 January crowds fill the hippodrome to watch the chariot races, after which they again eat, play dice, and get very little sleep.

4. Meslin, *Fête*, 51, 69–70.

5. Libanius, *Orationes* 9 (*Eis tas kalandas*), in *Libanii opera*, 1, pt. 2, 391–98.

6. Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 13.5 (*Kalandōn*), in *Libanii opera*, 8:472–77; trans. Gibson, 436–41. For French translations of both essays, see Libanius, *Discours*, 2:196–202; for commentary, see Quiroga Puertas, "Fiesta."

7. Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 13.5.2; trans. Gibson, 437.

8. Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 13.5.6; translation adapted from Gibson, 439.

9. Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 13.5.9; trans. Gibson, 439.

By Libanius's time, the more overtly pagan elements of the official ceremonies—the temple sacrifices and the related civic rituals—were on their way out.¹⁰ But other features of the Kalends celebrations still roused the ire of Christian preachers. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), as the fifteenth-century Parisian theologians were so keen to recall, railed against “the din of silly and disgraceful songs” and the “disgraceful junketing and dances” that characterized “this false feast day.” He challenged his congregation not to take part: “Are you going to join in the celebrations of good luck presents [*strenae*] like a pagan, going to play at dice—and get yourself drunk?” To do so, he told them, would be to associate with demons, for “demons take pleasure . . . in idle songs, they take pleasure in the trifling spectacle, in the manifold indecencies of the theaters, in the mad frenzy of the chariot races.”¹¹ Everything associated with the traditional feast of Kalends was condemned as “pagan” by the preachers: no moral distinction was drawn between the “indecencies of the theaters,” on the one hand, and the exchange of gifts, on the other hand.

Surprisingly, however, no historical evidence of Kalends revelers wearing masks, cross-dressing, disguising themselves as animals, mocking the powerful, making house-to-house visits, or otherwise behaving like stereotypical medieval clerical fools survives from the pagan Roman Empire. Rather, the first signs of such practices appear shortly before 400, some eighty years after Christianity had first gained privileged status under Constantine I and at about the time that it became the official state religion under Theodosius I. Indeed, Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter have insisted that the Kalends masquerades of the early Christian empire are the first evidence of seasonal folk play involving masks anywhere in Europe.¹² Character masks were used in the formal theater of both Greece and Rome, and wax death masks of ancestors were worn in state funeral processions by costumed actors hired for the purpose; but neither of these traditions appears to have spilled over into pre-Christian seasonal folk play.¹³ Even the Germanic tribes of northern Europe left no written evidence of masking activity other than for military purposes. What visual and material evidence has survived is sparse and inconclusive; it, too, may well pertain to the arts of war.¹⁴ By contrast, the

10. For the decline of official Roman paganism, see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions*, 1:372–75.

11. Augustine, *De calendis Ianuaris II* (Sermon 198), in *PL* 38:1024–26; Augustine, *Sermons*, 6:73–76. For an alternative translation, see Augustine, *Sermons to the People*, 151–60.

12. T&C, 14.

13. For the role of the mask in Greek and Roman comedy, see Wiles, *Masks*, 68–187; Nicoll, *Masks*, 17–134. For the use of ancestral death masks in funerals, see Balsdon, *Life*, 126–27.

14. T&C, 16–21.

January Kalends of the Christianized Roman Empire provide a proliferation of evidence for the popular use of masks in seasonal festivities.

It is possible, therefore, that generations of Christian preachers, up to and including those in fifteenth-century Paris, were mistaken in their insistence that the New Year masquerading traditions of their day had pagan roots. Seasonal masquerades may have existed in southern Europe before the late fourth century and entered the written record only when Christian preachers took objection to them, but the lack of prior evidence is striking. Even the emperor Theodosius I's detailed and repressive edicts against paganism, issued in 391 and 392, make no mention of Kalends masquerades.¹⁵ A few years earlier, in 389, he had simply ordered "the Kalends of January" to be "set aside . . . as a customary rest day."¹⁶ As far as we can tell from the available records, Kalends masquerades arose in a Christian context.

John Chrysostom (ca. 344/54–407), at one time a student of Libanius in Antioch and later bishop of Constantinople, was among the first to complain of New Year masqueraders. Preaching in Antioch sometime between 386 and 398, he denounced the "demons marching in procession [*pompesantōn*] in the marketplace, . . . the all-night devilish celebrations . . . , the tauntings, the invectives, the nightlong dances, this ridiculous comedy," and the drunkenness of the revelers.¹⁷ Chrysostom was a hostile witness, not an unbiased observer. Rudolph Arbesmann suggests that the marching "demons" were festive participants "wearing masks of gods."¹⁸ As far as one can tell from similar accounts elsewhere, the masqueraders were engaged in carnivalesque mockery of the gods rather than in pagan devotion.

Peter Chrysologos (d. ca. 450), bishop of Ravenna, also complained of seasonal impersonations of pagan gods. In one sermon on the Kalends of January, he described how "the pagans today bring out their gods. With planned defilements and premeditated disgrace they pull them hither and thither . . . and drag them about." While some were hauling portable images of the gods through the streets, others were mimicking the gods in masks and costumes: they "mock the gods," "play the role of idols," and dress themselves "as the sacrilegious characters of idols."¹⁹ The parade may have been a parody

15. *Codex Theodosianus* 16.7.4–5, 16.10.10–12; Pharr, *Theodosian*, 466, 473–74. For discussion of the edicts, see Williams and Friell, *Theodosius*, 119–25; King, *Emperor*, 77–82.

16. *Codex Theodosianus* 2.8.19; Pharr, *Theodosian*, 44.

17. John Chrysostom, *En tais kalandais*, in *PG* 48:953–62 (cols. 953–54); translation adapted from Arbesmann, "Cervuli," 114.

18. Arbesmann, "Cervuli," 114. Christian rhetoric of the time embraced the apostle Paul's insistence that "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons" (1 Cor. 10:20).

19. Peter Chrysologos, *De kalendis Ianuariis* (Sermon 155), in *SPCCS*, 961–65; *SPCSS*, 1:261–64.

of “the long line of images” of Roman deities that played a prominent role in the procession (*pompa*) which traditionally preceded chariot races and other spectacular games.²⁰

Chrysologos’s assertion that the masqueraders were “pagans” may have been largely correct; or it may have been little more than a standard rhetorical dismissal of those with whom the bishop disagreed and whose practices he could not control. Twycross and Carpenter believe that Christian masqueraders in Ravenna were “representing the gods . . . in order to guy them, just as carnivals in some places today lampoon political figures.”²¹ Although Chrysologos insisted that Christians were “defiled” by their involvement with “these pagan spectacles,” he knew that some of his congregation disagreed: “But one of you says, ‘This isn’t the deliberate pursuit of godlessness, these good luck visits are just for fun; this is a celebration of a new beginning, not a superstition from the past; this is just New Year, not the threat of paganism.’”²²

In another sermon Chrysologos complained that the Kalends revelers “fashion [*figurant*] Saturn, make [*faciunt*] Jove, form [*formant*] Hercules, exhibit [*exponunt*] Diana with her slaves, lead [*circumducunt*] Vulcan around roaring out tales of his obscenities, and there are even more.”²³ The verbs here are ambiguous: *facere* can mean to make or to impersonate; *figurare* can mean both to fashion and to represent; so can *formare*. Both *exponere* and *circumducere* could, in the context, have had as their objects either a sculpted image or a costumed actor. Since Chrysologos also complained that “they turn men into women” and “a human being is changed into an idol,”²⁴ it is probable that some (or all) of the processing deities took the form of men disguised as both gods and goddesses.²⁵ Their “masks” were made from basic raw materials. “There is not enough charcoal,” Chrysologos reports, “that can blacken the faces of such gods: and so that their appearance may reach the level of utter and complete terror, straw, skins, rags, and dung are procured from all over the world, and anything connected with human shame is put on their face.” The masqueraders engaged in house-to-house visits, including Christian homes on their itinerary. Chrysologos grieves, “This is what Christians

20. Tertullian, *Spectaculis* 7.

21. T&C, 27.

22. SPCCS, 963–64; SPCSS, 1:263–64; translation from T&C, 37.

23. Peter Chrysologos, *De kalendis Ianuariis* <*Secundus*>, in SPCCS, 967–69 (967); SPCSS, 3:264–66 (264). Formerly attributed to Severian of Gabala (d. ca. 408) (Severian, *Homilia de pythoni-bus et maleficiis*, in PG 65:28), this sermon is now included among the works of Chrysologos. On the question of authorship, see Olivar, *Sermones*, 334–38.

24. SPCCS, 968; SPCSS, 3:265.

25. T&C, 34.

gaze at, what Christians look forward to, what they allow into their homes, what Christians welcome in their homes.”²⁶

Asterius of Amasea (now Amasya, northern Turkey) (fl. 400) also preached against house-to-house New Year visits.²⁷ “The common vagrants and the jugglers of the stage, dividing themselves into squads and hordes, hang about every house,” he told his congregation on the feast of Epiphany (6 January) in the year 400. “The gates of public officials they besiege with especial persistence, actually shouting and clapping their hands until he that is beleaguered within, exhausted, throws out to them whatever money he has and even what is not his own. And these mendicants going from door to door follow after one another, and, until late in the evening, there is no relief from this nuisance.”²⁸ Asterius makes no mention of masks or costumes, but it is hard to believe that the identity of the supplicants, especially with their connection to “the stage,” would not have been disguised in some form.

The pressure on the householder to provide money suggests a possible origin for the custom of New Year masquerades. Gift giving during Kalends, here as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, served not only as a sign of affection among family and friends but also as an almost obligatory means of currying favor with the powerful. Asterius complained about this at length: “It is but a new form of bribery and servility. . . . For the more eminent and respectable man shames one into giving. A person of lower rank asks outright, and it all moves by degrees toward the pockets of the most eminent men.”²⁹ Some of the less “eminent and respectable” in the community may have taken it on themselves to reverse the traditional upward flow of *strenae*, organizing masquerades as a way of persuading the wealthy to dispense largesse down the scale.

According to Asterius, Roman soldiers stationed in Amasea incorporated political satire into their masquerades. “They learn vulgarity,” he complained, “and the practices of actors. . . . They make sport of the laws and the government of which they have been appointed guardians. For they ridicule and insult the august government. They mount a chariot as though upon a stage; they appoint pretended lictors [*doruphorous*] and publicly act like buffoons. This is the nobler part of their processions [*pompeias*]. But. . . does not the

26. *SPCCS*, 968–69; *SPCSS*, 3:265–66.

27. Asterius, *Homilies*, 38–43 (also *PG* 40:215–26); Asterius, *Ancient*, 111–29.

28. Asterius, *Homilies*, 40–41 (*PG* 40:220); Asterius, *Ancient*, 119–20. For the date of the sermon, see Asterius, *Homilies*, xviii, 228–29.

29. Asterius, *Homilies*, 40 (*PG* 40:220); Asterius, *Ancient*, 118. Cf. Maximus of Turin, *De Kalendis Ianuariis* (Sermon 98), in *Sermones*, 390–92 (391), trans. *Sermons*, 221–23 (222): “How unjust this is in its very wickedness—that an inferior is expected to make a gift to his better and that one who perhaps borrows in order to give is forced to give to someone who is rich!” For a history of *strenae*, see Meslin, *Fête*, 31–34, 39–46, 64–66, 77–79.

champion . . . loose his tunic to his ankles, twine a girdle about his breast, use a woman's sandal, put a roll of hair on his head in feminine fashion, and ply the distaff full of wool, . . . and changing the tone of his voice utter his words in the sharper feminine treble?"³⁰ Some commentators suggest that the soldiers also elected a mock emperor, that it was in his person that they mocked "the highest authority," that the *doruphoroi* were imperial bodyguards, that there was a plurality of men dressed as women, and that the "women" belonged to the mock emperor's "court" or even to his "harem."³¹ Whatever the specific details of the mockery, the show was probably mobile: it was mounted on a chariot, and Asterius's use of "pompeia" strongly suggests some kind of processional display. Perhaps it was a parody of the official New Year's Day military parade,³² in which case the soldiers' chariot would not have been the only entry.

Another common feature of Kalends masquerading was the use of animal masks. The first hint of this practice comes from Pacian of Barcelona (ca. 310–ca. 390). In a small work called *Cervus* (Stag), unfortunately now lost, Pacian censured a custom known as "cervulum facere" (doing the stag). Later he complained that his treatise had only served to popularize the custom: "I think they wouldn't have known how to do the Little Stag if I hadn't shown them by censuring it."³³ Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–397), whose influence over Theodosius I may have contributed to the emperor's edicts against paganism, linked the stag to the season of Kalends: "In the beginning of the year, by folk custom, the stag frolicked about."³⁴ Neither of these references explains the custom, but later references suggest that it involved seasonal house-to-house visits by a group of maskers, at least one of whom was dressed as a stag.³⁵

A contemporary sermon erroneously ascribed to Maximus of Turin (ca. 380–ca. 468) attacked the Kalends as a time when "a man weakens himself into a woman," presumably by cross-dressing, or when men "transform themselves into farm animals, or into wild animals, or into monsters."³⁶ In his

30. Asterius, *Homilies*, 41–42 (PG 40:222); translation adapted from Asterius, *Ancient*, 122–23.

31. Datema, in Asterius, *Homilies*, 230; Arbesmann, "Cervuli," 115; T&C, 34.

32. Datema, in Asterius, *Homilies*, 229.

33. Pacian, *Paraenesis, sive Exhortatorius libellus, ad poenitentiam*, in *PL* 13:1081–90 (col. 1081); translation from T&C, 28. For an alternative translation, see Pacian, "Penitents," 71. Pacian, "Paraenesis," 364, mistakenly renders "cervulum facere" as "act the wanton." Pacian's lost *Cervus* is mentioned in Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 106, in *PL* 23:598–720 (col. 705); Jerome, *Illustrious*, 140.

34. Ambrose, *De interpellatione Job et David* 2.1, in *PL* 14:796–850 (col. 813); translation from T&C, 29.

35. Arbesmann, "Cervuli"; T&C, 28–33.

36. Maximus of Turin, *De calendis Ianuariis* (Sermon 16), in *PL* 57:254–58 (col. 257). On the question of authorship, see Arbesmann, "Cervuli," 105 n. 69. Maximus's two authentic sermons on the Kalends of January (Sermons 63 and 98, in *Sermones*, 266–67, 390–92; *Sermons*, 155–56,

first sermon on the Kalends, Chrysologos complained of those “who have made themselves equal to beasts, put themselves on a level with asses, made themselves up as cattle, masqueraded as demons.”³⁷ In his second sermon he complained that “human beings are dressed as beasts, they turn men into women.”³⁸

Wearing animal masks and dressing as women for New Year masquerades may have had no ritual connotation, pagan or otherwise. Like the charcoal, straw, skins, rags, and dung used to mask and costume the processional “gods” in Ravenna, “clothes of the other sex” and “skins of domestic or hunted animals like cattle or deer” may have been used simply because they were the cheapest and most readily available forms of disguise.³⁹ The goal of the masqueraders may have been little more than lively annual merrymaking and a profitable collection.⁴⁰ If the bishops condemned the masquerades as pagan, so much the better: “demonic” costumes would more effectively frighten householders into making a contribution.

By the first half of the sixth century, evidence of Kalends masquerading began to appear in what is now southeastern France. The most vocal episcopal opponent of Kalends masquerades at the time was Caesarius of Arles (470–542). In one sermon he reprimands those who “execute dances and pantomimes [*ballationes et saltationes*] before the very churches of the saints” and others who “practice that most sordid disgrace of [masquerading as] a heifer or a stag [*annicula vel cervulo*].”⁴¹ In a second sermon Caesarius complains that “even some who are baptized... assume false forms and monstrous appearances.” Specifically, he rebukes those whose game of “playing the stag” requires them to “change their appearance for that of wild animals. Some are dressed up in the skins of farm animals; others put on the heads of wild animals, celebrating and leaping about.” Moreover, “men are clothed in the tunics of women.” Some of the men, as in Amasea, appear to have been soldiers: “By a most unseemly change they make their manly strength

221–23) warn against feasting, drunkenness, dancing, gift giving, and auguries but make no mention of masquerades.

37. *SPCCS*, 965; *SPCSS*, 1:264.

38. *SPCCS*, 967–968; *SPCSS*, 3:264–65.

39. T&C, 38. Some men, of course, may have enjoyed dressing as women.

40. For striking modern parallels, consider the Cajun Mardi Gras maskers of rural Louisiana (Lindahl and Ware, *Cajun*) and the blue devils of Trinidad’s Paramin Mountain (Harris, *Carnival*, 197–200).

41. Caesarius, *Sermo in parochis necessarius* (Sermon 13), in *CAO*, 1:64–68 (67); translation adapted from Caesarius, *Sermons*, trans. Mueller, 1:74–79 (77–78). Following a MS variation, Mueller reads *annicula* as *anicula*, a diminutive form of *anus* (old woman), and so translates “anicula vel cervulo” as “old hags and stags.” Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 106–11, challenges this reading at some length, arguing in support of *annicula*, which he defines (108) as “a female yearling livestock.”

womanish by means of girlish fashions, not blushing to put the arms of a soldier into the tunics of women. They show bearded faces, but want to appear like women.”⁴² In a third sermon Caesarius complains of cross-dressed men, of those who “sing the praises of vices along with disorderly gestures and immodest songs,” and of those who are “clothed in the manner of wild beasts and . . . become like roe deer or a stag.” In this instance he adds a reminder to the members of his congregation that they “should not permit a little stag, a heifer [*anniculam*], or any other kind of monster to come before your homes,” so confirming that the stag and his companions were in the habit of making house-to-house visits.⁴³

Caesarius’s biographer William Klingshirn finds it “difficult to see any pagan intentions in these activities.” Suggesting that episcopal opposition to the Kalends may have had more to do with the festivities’ evasion of church control than with any genuine remains of paganism, he notes that the traditional exchange of gifts “permitted donors to bypass the church’s mechanisms for alleviating poverty, that is, the giving of alms.”⁴⁴ Klingshirn’s comment is particularly telling if, as I suggested earlier, the masquerades stemmed in part from a lower-class urge to establish an alternative, downward flow of seasonal gifts.

Moreover, as Klingshirn points out, Caesarius labeled “pagan” not only the surviving “phenomena of Gallo-Roman religion” but also “all other ritual activity that evaded his control, much of which was arguably Christian or religiously neutral in intention, if not in appearance.”⁴⁵ Caesarius preached no less vehemently against those who celebrated “the birthday festivals of the martyrs . . . by getting drunk, dancing, singing shameful songs, performing choral dances [*choros ducendo*], and pantomiming [*saltando*] in devilish fashion.”⁴⁶ In Klingshirn’s view, these popular practices were “clearly no more than an alternative form of Christian devotion.” Songs and dances were performed “at Christian holy places . . . , on Christian holy days . . . , and

42. Caesarius, *De kalendis Ianuariis* (Sermon 192), in *CAO*, 2:779–82 (780); translation adapted from Caesarius, *Sermons*, 3:26–30 (27–28), and T&C, 29.

43. Caesarius, *Sermo sancti Sedati episcopi de kalendis Ianuariis* (Sermon 193), in *CAO*, 2:783–86 (783–84); translation adapted from Caesarius, *Sermons*, trans. Mueller, 3:30–34 (31–32). The sermon’s name reflects its former attribution to Sedatus of Nîmes, circa 500. Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 110, again corrects Mueller’s translation of *anniculum*. See T&C, 29, for the conclusion that the masquerade went from house to house.

44. Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Making*, 217–18.

45. *Ibid.*, 201.

46. Caesarius, *Sermo castigatarius contra eos qui in festivitibus . . .* (Sermon 55), in *CAO*, 1:241–44 (242); Caesarius, *Sermons*, 1:271–75 (272); translation adapted from Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Making*, 224.

in honor of Christian holy men and women.”⁴⁷ The performers “were not rejecting Christianity in favor of paganism, as Caesarius charged, but were rather adapting Christian ceremonies to their own patterns of religious expression.”⁴⁸

To appreciate his point, one need only think of the wide range of traditional dances, mimetic and otherwise, still performed in front of (or even inside) churches as an act of Christian devotion on patronal saints’ days and other Christian festivals throughout the Spanish-speaking world.⁴⁹ Masks, whether animal or otherwise, are used in these dances for legitimate mimetic effect. When female roles are played by men, it is largely because the men (taught by the church) consider it immodest for women to play the roles themselves. Depending on the role, cross-dressing may also be played for comic effect, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Klingshirn’s characterization of popular Kalends and saints’ day performances as “an alternative form of Christian piety” reminds us that those who hold ecclesiastical power often denounce as pagan any religious activities that challenge their own control.

From about the same time that Caesarius was attempting to reform the diocese of Arles, the *Life of Hilarius of Mende* (d. ca. 540) reports that a group of villagers, as part of their customary January festivities, “decked themselves out in the heads of stags to resemble in their appearance wild beasts.”⁵⁰ Hilarius’s biographer thus provides evidence that Kalends masquerades were moving north through the countryside of southeastern France. Mende, at the southern end of the Massif Central, is about a hundred miles to the northwest of Arles. In 534 and 536 respectively, the two cities were incorporated into the southward expansion of the Kingdom of the Franks.⁵¹

Subsequent references to Kalends masquerades in Frankish territory appear largely as prohibitions in sermons, penitential manuals, and decrees of church councils. The decree of the Synod of Auxerre, issued sometime between 561 and 605, is typical: “It is not permitted to play the heifer [*vetolo*=*vitula*] or the stag at the Kalends of January.”⁵² Similar language appears in a

47. Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Making*, 224.

48. Ibid., 198–99. For the argument that the definition of medieval liturgy should include such popular devotional practices, see Flanigan, Ashley, and Sheingorn, “Liturgy.”

49. Harris, *Carnival*; García Rodero and Caballero Bonald, *Festivals*; Esser, *Behind*.

50. *Vita B. Hilari episcopi*, in *Acta sanctorum*, October, 11:638–39 (638); translation from Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 92.

51. For the final conquest of Burgundy (534) and the acquisition of Provence (536) by the Franks, see James, *Franks*, 92–96. For the historical background to the life of Caesarius, see Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Making*.

52. Clercq, *Concilia*, 265. For the reasons for reading *vetolo* as *vitula* (heifer) rather than *vetula* (old woman), see Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 93–95, 106.

sermon by Eligius of Noyon (d. 660): “No [Christian] during the Kalends of January . . . should impersonate heifers or stags or [other] jests. Nor should he [take part in] nighttime feasts, the exchange of gifts, or excessive drinking.”⁵³ References to Kalends masquerading thus reached what is now northern France: Noyon is some eighty miles northeast of Paris. “Well over a dozen penitentials of Frankish origin”⁵⁴ contain a canon expressly forbidding Kalends masquerades of this kind. Although the Kingdom of the Franks, at its most extensive, stretched from the Atlantic deep into modern Germany and from the North Sea south into Italy as far as Rome, the majority of these penitentials come from northern France.

Although there are fewer references to Kalends impersonations outside the Kingdom of the Franks during this period, those that have survived tend to be less formulaic. In Constantinople, the antiquarian John Lydos (ca. 490–ca. 565) noted that it was customary on 3 January for crowds to make fun of the chief magistrates “not only by word of mouth, but also by impersonating them.”⁵⁵ The Council in Trullo, meeting in Constantinople in 691, decreed that during Kalends and other public festivals there should be no “public dances by women, in which men are clearly incited to passion.” Nor should any “man put on women’s clothes, nor a woman the clothes that are proper for a man. Nor should comic, satyric, or tragic masks [*prosōpeia*] be worn. Nor should they invoke the hated name of Bacchus, while squeezing grapes in winepresses, or provoke laughter by pouring wine into pitchers.”⁵⁶

On the Iberian peninsula, Martin of Braga (ca. 510/20–579) complained of the “diabolical” customs of “loading tables with food, decorating with laurel branches, watching the foot [*pedem observare*], pouring [libations of] grain and wine on a log in the hearth, and throwing bread in the spring” during the Kalends.⁵⁷ Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) complained that at the

53. Audoenus of Rouen, *Vita Eligii episcopi* 2.16, ed. Bruno Krusch, in *MGH, SRM* 4:634–761 (705). Of another occasion, when Eligius attacked “diabolical games and wicked dancing” in a village near Noyon (*Vita* 2.20, in *MGH, SRM* 4:711), Fouracre, “Work,” 83, writes, “The accusation of pagan affinities is here a subjective concept, hurled at the subjects to ‘explain’ Eligius’s differences with them.”

54. Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 95.

55. Lydos, *Liber* 4.10 (74); translation from Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 115.

56. Council in Trullo 62, in Joannou, *Discipline*, 1, pt. 1, 198–200; see also Balsamon, *Canones . . . in Trullo*, in *PG* 137:501–874 (cols. 726–27); Mansi, 11:97; translation adapted from Hefele, *History*, 5:232; Skedros, “Canons,” 296. The Council in Trullo derives its name from its meeting place, the domed room (*trullus*) of the imperial palace. It is also known, from its supplementary status to the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils, as the Quinisext Council. The council met sometime “between 1 September and 31 December, probably in October 691” (Joannou, *Discipline*, 1, pt. 1, 98).

57. Martin of Braga, *Pro castigatione* 16; *Opera*, 198; “Reforming,” 81. For commentary, see McKenna, *Paganism*, 98–104. *Pedem observare* refers to the superstition that moving the left foot first was unlucky. See, e.g., John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Sermon 12, in *PG*, 62:87–94 (col. 92): “A superstitious person says, ‘When my damned slave was handing me my sandals,

Kalends of January, “even the faithful assume monstrous appearances and are changed into the character of wild animals; others make feminine gestures and feminize their male faces. . . . They all make a great noise, with leaping and clapping dances [*saltantium pedibus, tripudantium plausibus*]; and, what is still more shameful, both sexes dance together in sung dances [*chori*], with dulled senses, intoxicated with wine.”⁵⁸

One of the last Frankish prohibitions against the Kalends appears in the compendium of penitential decrees compiled by Burchard of Worms (ca. 965–1025): “Does anyone play the stag or the heifer, as the pagans used to do and still do [*et adhuc faciunt*] on the Kalends of January?”⁵⁹ While we cannot be certain, in any given instance, that such injunctions testify to a living custom rather than to the clerical habit of copying outdated prohibitions, Burchard’s insistence that the custom of playing the stag on the Kalends was still practiced in his time should not be taken lightly.

Moreover, the absence of later formulaic prohibitions against disguising oneself as a stag or a heifer does not mean that other forms of Kalends games passed out of fashion. Seasonal festivities are remarkably malleable. Over a hundred years later, in the middle of the twelfth century, Kalends masqueraders (or something very like them) were in the habit of invading the great church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople during the Christmas season. In the first half of the same century, Roman choirboys conducted masked house-to-house visits on the Kalends of January in the vicinity of the papal residence. We will consider these festivities from Constantinople and Rome in chapters 2 and 3.

Even later, probable evidence of Kalends games is found in Paris in the second half of the twelfth century, at about the same time and place as the first recorded reference to the Feast of Fools. In a sermon delivered

he held out the left one first: now frightful disasters and gross insults threaten.’ Or, ‘When I was leaving home, I extended my left foot first: a sure sign of misfortunes’” (translation from Leyerle, “John Chrysostom,” 259). For the custom of pouring libations on the Kalends log, see Johnston, “Lares.” For Martin of Braga’s possible indebtedness to Caesarius, see McKenna, *Paganism*, 89–90.

58. Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.41 (47); translation adapted from Backman, 35. Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 105 n. 69, points out that the opening phrase of Isidore’s complaint is borrowed from a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (*CAO*, 780). Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Making*, 281–85, documents the widespread influence of Caesarius’s sermons, adding (283) that later preachers “would not have quoted from Caesarius’ anti-pagan sermons unless they believed that their congregations were engaged in similar practices.” Caesarius’s first biographers (*Vita* 1.55, in Klingshirn, *Caesarius: Life*, 37) report that the bishop sent copies of his sermons “to clerics located far away in Frankish lands, Gaul, Italy, Spain, and other provinces.”

59. Burchard, *Decretorum* 10.39, in *PL* 140:538–1058 (col. 839). For a summary discussion of other such decrees and penitentials in the intervening centuries, see Arbesmann, “Cervuli,” 95–101. For a collection in English translation, see McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval*.

in Paris around the middle of the twelfth century, Richard of St.-Victor (d. 1173) complained of popular “fortune-tellings, divinations, deceptions, and feigned madnesses” associated with the feast of the Circumcision (1 January). “Today,” he proclaimed, “having been seized up by the furies of their bacchant-like ravings and having been inflamed by the fires of diabolical instigation, they flock together to the church, and profane the house of God with vain and foolish rhythmic poetry in which sin is not wanting but by all means present, and with evil sayings, laughing, and cacophony[.] . . . and many applaud with the hands of priests, and the people love these things.”⁶⁰

Margot Fassler sees in this sermon the first evidence of the Feast of Fools in Paris,⁶¹ but it seems to me more likely that Richard was describing unscripted invasions of the church by urban Kalends customs. Whether “feigned madnesses” and “bacchant-like ravings” allude to costumed masqueraders is uncertain, but there is no doubt that “fortune-tellings [and] divinations” were familiar Kalends superstitions. Members of the clergy applauded and perhaps joined in, but they do not appear to have initiated the activities. The early Feast of Fools, by contrast, was a scripted addition to the seasonal liturgy, initiated and controlled by the clergy.

A few years later, sometime between 1168 and 1175, Maurice of Sully, bishop of Paris, began a Circumcision sermon with a brief comment on the habits of “bad Christians” who, on this day, “take part in bad games [*malvais geus*] and put their trust in New Year’s gifts [*estrenes*].”⁶² Aimed at lay Christians rather than at clergy, the bishop’s condemnation of “bad games” almost certainly had Kalends rather than Feast of Fools activities in mind. The Feast of Fools, as we shall see, was designed in part to provide an absorbing liturgical alternative to secular Kalends masquerades. It was first mentioned by name (*festum stultorum*) in the Parisian liturgist John Beleth’s *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, composed between 1160 and 1164.⁶³

Not until about 1260 do we hear a confident assertion that traditional Kalends masquerades were a thing of the past. Jacob of Voragine (ca. 1229–1298) affirmed in his *Golden Legend* (ca. 1260): “Once upon a time [*olim*] many superstitions were observed by country folk and pagans in these Kalends, which the saints had great difficulty uprooting even from Christians. . . . They used

60. In *Circumcisione Domini*, in *PL* 177:1034–39 (col. 1036); translation from Fassler, 73. Migne ascribes the *Sermones centum*—the collection to which this sermon belongs—to Hugh of St.-Victor (d. 1142). Jean Chatillon, in Richard, *Liber*, 49–50, 77, argues for their probable authorship by Richard of St.-Victor.

61. Fassler, 73–74.

62. Robson, *Maurice*, 87, and, for the date of the sermon, 3; cf. Lecoy, *Chaire*, 425.

63. Beleth, *Summa* 72 (2:133–34).

to adopt monstrous shapes, some dressing themselves in the skins of farm animals, others putting on the heads of wild animals. . . . Others would dress up in women's tunics, shamelessly tricking out their soldierly muscles in feminine finery."⁶⁴

Even so, two early-fourteenth-century manuscripts, one French, the other Flemish, contain marginal illustrations of animal maskers that suggest the habit may have lingered longer in northern Europe. The disguise worn in the French illustration resembles a hollow tree trunk with a stag's head on top. The wearer's feet can be seen beneath the bottom of the costume, while his face peers through a hole about halfway up. The stag dances to a bagpipe.⁶⁵ The Flemish manuscript includes two pertinent illustrations. One shows the head and skin of a stag worn by a man bending forward so that his face appears in the animal's chest. The man's concealed hands hold a staff that doubles as the stag's front leg(s), and his legs serve as the animal's back legs. The stag appears to be dancing while a musician plays a pipe and tabor. To the right of the stag, a woman and two children run away in fright. The other illustration shows three dancers wearing animal heads (a stag, a hare, and either an ass or a boar) over normal clothes and two more dancers who are either women or men dressed as women. The musician plays a rebec. A tonsured cleric looms over the dancers, "wielding a birch as if to censure their pagan performance."⁶⁶ The cleric's cassock blows open to reveal the legs of a wild beast, exposing as hypocritical his censure of animal masking.⁶⁷

Michael Camille has rightly insisted that not all marginal illustrations of the period are "historical depictions" of contemporary social reality. But he singles out the second of these Flemish illustrations as an example of straightforward "visual documentation" of "masks used in seasonal rituals."⁶⁸ Twycross and Carpenter may be right, therefore, in suggesting that the performers were "true descendants" of the Kalends masqueraders.⁶⁹

64. Jacob of Voragine, *Legenda* 13 (86), *Golden*, 77–78; translation adapted from T&C, 39.

65. Robert de Boron, *Histoire de Graal*, BNF MS fonds français 95 fol. 273r; reproduced in T&C, 32.

66. Camille, *Mirror*, 241.

67. *Roman d'Alexandre*, illustrated by Jehan de Grise, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 264 fols. 70r and 21v; reproduced in color at <http://image.ox.ac.uk/list?collection=bodleian>. I am grateful to Markus Cruse for helping me to interpret these images.

68. Camille, *Mirror*, 239–41.

69. T&C, 33.

CHAPTER 2

The Holy City of Byzantium

Not all Kalends activities were subject to the disapproval of those in power. In a few cases, if the historical records can be trusted, those at the top of the prevailing civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies took part themselves. The Byzantine Empire provides us with two possible examples. The first concerns a young emperor who led his friends in public mockeries of the liturgy. The second involves an even younger patriarch who introduced scandalous songs and dances to the divine office. Faced with these reports, some scholars have erroneously suggested that the Feast of Fools began in Constantinople.¹

Tenth-century Byzantine historians tell a story from the reign of the emperor Michael III (842–867). The patriarch of Constantinople during the early part of Michael's reign was an austere monk named Ignatios. The emperor mocked the patriarch by pretending to appoint in his place an officer of the imperial guard nicknamed Gryllos.² Gryllos, who was something

1. Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:481); Tilliot, 6–7; Freund, *Dramatis*, 88. Chambers, 1:327–29, discounts the “attempt . . . to find an oriental origin for the Feast of Fools.”

2. Nicetas Paphlago, *Vita S. Ignatii*, in *PG* 105:487–574 (col. 527), calls him Theophilos; other historians call him Gryllos. The latter was a “joking name,” derived from *gryllus* = comic figure, caricature (Pliny the Elder, *Natural* 35.37.114 [9:344–45]; Binsfeld, “Grylloi”; L&S, s.v. γρύλλος). In the margins of medieval art, *gryllus* or *gryllus* denotes a grotesque face set on two legs or in the belly of a monster (Baltrušaitis, *Moyen*, 11–53; Camille, *Image*, 37–40).

of a jester and a mime, was ceremonially invested in patriarchal robes. The distinctive patriarchal stole, or omophorion, was draped around his shoulders. Twelve companions, including Michael himself, donned ecclesiastical vestments and sat on episcopal thrones to represent the patriarch's twelve metropolitan bishops. Together they staged a mock Eucharist, accompanying the patriarch's prayers and their own singing with the music of citharas. From a jeweled golden vessel, which had often been used in the consecrated celebration of the mass, they dispensed an unsavory mixture of vinegar and mustard. All this was done with laughter and foul language.

On the day of a solemn church festival, the group took to the streets. Gryllos, in clerical dress, rode a white ass. His metropolitans danced and sang around him like satyrs, effectively making Gryllos both a mock patriarch and a figure of Silenus. The latter was often represented riding an ass in the company of Dionysos and his satyrs. Accosting Ignatios in procession with a full retinue of clergy, the revelers launched into an obscene song, which they chanted to a sacred melody and accompanied with citharas, cymbals, and loud laughter. With tears in his eyes, Ignatios prayed that God would end the blasphemy and send the perpetrators to hell.³

On another occasion, we are told, Michael and Gryllos went to the Chrysotriklinos, a domed octagonal ceremonial hall in the heart of the imperial palace. Side by side in an apse, beneath a mosaic representing Christ enthroned in majesty, were two thrones. Michael sat on the emperor's throne. Gryllos, robed in patriarchal vestments, sat on the patriarch's throne. Michael sent a message inviting his mother, the empress Theodora, who was then under house arrest in the palace, to come and receive a blessing from the patriarch Ignatios. As a regent during Michael's childhood, Theodora had been a powerful supporter of Ignatios. Theodora hurried into the presence of the "patriarch." Failing to notice the substitution of Gryllos for Ignatios, she fell at his feet. The mock patriarch rose a little from his throne, turned his back on the empress, and farted.⁴

3. The primary source for this story is Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, *Vita Basilii* 21–23 = *Theophanes continuatus* 5.21–23, in *CSHB* 33:211–353 (243–47). For a German translation, see Breyer, *Bauernhof*, 64–67. Largely dependent on Constantine are Joseph Genesios, *Basileia* 4.49B, in *CSHB* 22 (102–3); Nicetas Paphlago, *Vita S. Ignatii* (see note 2); and Symeon Magister [= Symeon Logothete], *Annales* 18–21, in *PG* 109:663–822 (cols. 723–26) or *CSHB* 33:603–760 (661–64). Similarly dependent is the late-eleventh-century Scylitzes, *Synopsis*, ed. Thurn, 109–10; trans. Wortley, 64. The story is repeated, in English summary, in Gibbon, *Decline*, chap. 48 (8:255). For further discussion of the episode, see Ljubarskij, "Kaiser," 44–45; Ludwig, *Sonderformen*, 372–74. For the historical background of the period, see Jenkins, *Byzantium*, 153–97, and the pertinent entries in Kazhdan, *Oxford*.

4. Constantine VII, in *CSHB* 33:247; Symeon Magister, in *PG* 109:726 or *CSHB* 33:664; Scylitzes, *Synopsis*, ed. Thurn, 110; trans. Wortley, 64.

Parts of this narrative may be no more than the historical fiction of a later generation. But there is a measure of confirmation, from closer to the time, of Michael's misappropriation of sacred vestments, mockery of the Eucharist, and humiliation of the patriarch. In 869–70, two years after Michael's death, Ignatios presided over a council of Constantinople. Among the decrees issued by the council was an anathema directed against anyone, "be he emperor or prince," who remained impenitent after doing such things as were reported by many faithful witnesses "during the reign of the recent emperor." High-ranking laymen, it was charged, had twisted their hair around the crown of their heads to mimic clerical tonsure, dressed themselves in priestly vestments, elected bishops, appropriated episcopal insignia, chosen a patriarch, and provoked laughter by imitating and insulting divine mysteries and episcopal pronouncements.⁵ The accusation was clearly aimed at Michael and his friends.

Even so, there is more to this than at first meets the eye. Michael was born in 840. After his father's death in 842, Theodora served as regent. She is best known for restoring the use of icons in the Eastern Church after the prolonged Iconoclastic Controversy. To this end she appointed Ignatios, an extremist iconophile, as patriarch in 847. In 856, with the help of his maternal uncle Bardas, the sixteen-year-old Michael dethroned his mother, confining her to the palace until 858, when she was sent to a convent. In the same year, Ignatios was pressured into resignation, exiled, and replaced by a moderate scholar, Photios. After Michael's death in 867, Photios was in turn deposed, and Ignatios resumed his interrupted patriarchate, only to be replaced again by Photios at his own death in 877 or 878. The episodes of the mock patriarch must therefore have taken place between Michael's assumption of power in 856 and the resignation of Ignatios in 858. Michael was then between sixteen and eighteen years of age. Perhaps the mockery of Ignatios was no more than a form of mean-spirited youthful exuberance, encouraged by Bardas as a way of diminishing the stature of the troublesome Ignatios before forcing his resignation.⁶

Even this is not the whole story. As an adult, Michael proved to be a competent emperor and an active supporter of Christian missions. But in 865, influenced by his chamberlain Basil the Macedonian, Michael acquiesced in the murder of Bardas. The following year, Michael appointed Basil co-emperor.

5. *Conciles oecuméniques*, 2, pt. 1, 390–91; Mansi, 16:169.

6. Ivanov, *Holy*, 134–38, reads these episodes, together with another in which Michael accosts a woman on her way home from the bathhouse and insists on preparing supper for her, as a form of "'secular' holy foolery." Attractive as this reading may be, it seems to me that Michael's biography lacks the hidden sanctity characteristic of the Byzantine holy fool.

This was a serious mistake: Basil had Michael assassinated and succeeded him as emperor in 867. The council of Constantinople of 869–70, which anathematized Michael's misuse of sacred vestments, was convened by Basil I and presided over by the restored patriarch Ignatios. Biased in the extreme, it was annulled in 879 by a council of Constantinople under the leadership of Photios. The earlier council's decree suggests the intensity of Ignatios's resentment over a real humiliation, but to what degree the details are accurate is impossible to tell.

As for the tenth-century chronicles of Michael's reign, we can be confident that their accounts of imperial dissipation were at best grossly exaggerated and at worst fictitious. The most influential of these chronicles, the *Life of Basil*, was written in praise of Basil I by his grandson, the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Genesios's *History of the Emperors* was composed by order of Constantine. Niketas Paphlagon's *Life of Ignatios* was a vindication of the patriarch whom Michael deposed. Symeon Logothete's *Chronicles* were similarly biased.⁷ The vilifying accounts of Michael's life and character contained in these works are "now seen to be a tissue of slanders or half-truths, compiled without regard to historical fact and with the sole object of justifying to posterity Basil's brutal murder of a benefactor and consequent elevation to the supreme power."⁸

Moreover, the details of Constantine's account of Michael seem to have been drawn less from any verifiable history than from Plutarch's life of Antony and his now missing life of Nero. The fictitious Michael's vulgarity, reckless extravagance, drunkenness, impiety, love of chariot racing, and cruelty can all be traced to similar character traits in Plutarch's Antony or in what we know of Nero from other sources. Particularly relevant to the episode of the mock patriarch is Antony's "delight in undignified practical joking and revelry."⁹ Plutarch's Antony loved "mimes and jesters" (*mimoi kai gelōtopoioi*), precisely the terms used by Niketas Paphlagon to describe Gryllos.¹⁰ Entering Ephesus in 41 BCE, Antony was preceded by "women arrayed like Bacchanals, and men and boys like Satyrs and Pans." Antony himself was hailed as Dionysos. In these frivolous imitations of pagan rites, Plutarch's Antony likely served as the model for the mock Eucharist and Dionysiac pageantry of Constantine's Michael.¹¹ On another occasion Antony tricked his wife

7. For bibliographical details of these works, see notes 2 and 3.

8. Jenkins, "Constantine," 71.

9. *Ibid.*, 74.

10. Plutarch, *Antony* 9 (*Lives* 9:158–59); Niketas Paphlago, in *PG* 105:527; Jenkins, "Constantine," 73.

11. Plutarch, *Antony* 24 (*Lives* 9:186–89); Jenkins, "Constantine," 74.

into thinking him dead by disguising himself as a slave bearing a letter to that effect. Although Antony quickly revealed himself and kissed his distressed wife, the incident may have served as the literary model for the narrative of Michael's much coarser hoax on his mother.¹²

There is thus very little in the tenth-century historians' portraits of Michael III that can be confidently accepted as historical fact. The vehement condemnation issued by the council of Constantinople in 869–70 makes it likely that some ritual mockery of the patriarch Ignatios took place, but since neither the conciliar anathema nor the tenth-century chronicles specify a time of year, we cannot assume that the mockery was related to Kalends masquerades. One recent scholar has suggested that Michael's high jinks were part of a long-standing tradition of mimicry with its roots in classical New Year traditions and its future in the Feast of Fools,¹³ but this is a mistake. Michael and his friends may have appropriated for immediate political and ecclesiastical purposes traditions of mockery ordinarily associated with Kalends masquerades, but the figure of the mock patriarch is unrelated to the temporary popes and bishops of the Feast of Fools. Whereas Michael and his friends mocked the rites of the church from without, the Feast of Fools elected its festive dignitaries to preside over approved liturgies within the church.

Sometime around the middle of the twelfth century, the future patriarch Theodore Balsamon (ca. 1105–ca. 1195) wrote a lengthy commentary on the canons of the Council in Trullo (691). In one of its canons, as I have already noted, the council had prohibited public dances by women, cross-dressing, the use of comic, satyric, and tragic masks, and the invocation of Bacchus during the January Kalends and other festivals. This canon, Balsamon commented, “censures... things that are done by clerics at the feast of the Nativity of Christ and at the feast of the Epiphany [*festo Luminarium*], ... especially in the most holy Great Church [Hagia Sophia].”¹⁴

The Council in Trullo, of course, had said nothing of activities inside Hagia Sophia or any other church at Christian festivals. Balsamon was freely applying the council's edict to perceived abuses of his own day. Following the historian John Scylitzes (fl. 1080), Balsamon believed that these abuses had been introduced into the church by the patriarch Theophylactos (933–956).¹⁵ “It is to him,” Scylitzes had written, “that we owe the custom that

12. Plutarch, *Antony* 10 (*Lives* 9:162–63); Jenkins, “Constantine,” 75.

13. Ljubarskij, “Kaiser,” 44–48. Ljubarskij mistakenly grounds the tradition of seasonal mimicry in the late December Saturnalia rather than in the January Kalends.

14. Balsamon, *Canones ... in Trullo*, in *PG* 137:501–874 (cols. 727–28).

15. *PG* 137:727–28.

at public feasts God and the memory of the saints are blasphemed by the performance of the early morning offices with indecent howling, bursts of laughter and wild cries. . . . He gathered a band of disreputable men, set over them a fellow named Euthymios Kasnēs (whom he promoted Domestic of the Church) and taught them satanic dances, scandalous cries and songs gathered at crossroads and in brothels.”¹⁶

Steven Runciman describes Theophylactos, who had been appointed patriarch by his father, the emperor Romanus Lecapenus, at the age of only fourteen, as “a good-natured youth who could not learn to take his position seriously. . . . He made one brave attempt to reconcile pleasure with piety by brightening up divine service on the lines of a pantomime; but it met with disapproval, though some of the turns lasted to shock the righteous more than a century later.”¹⁷ Balsamon took a less charitable view. He understood Scylitzes to mean that something akin to the Kalends activities forbidden by the Council in Trullo at the end of the seventh century had been introduced into the divine office by Theophylactos in the middle of the tenth century. By the middle of the twelfth century, Balsamon reckoned, similarly inappropriate activities had become a staple of clerical misbehavior in Hagia Sophia at Christmas and Epiphany: “Disguising themselves for various roles [*pros diaphora metaskēmatiszontai prosōpeia*], certain clerics step into the center of the church, wearing swords and dressed as soldiers. They go forth disguised as monks or four-footed animals. The superintendents snap their fingers like charioteers, or paint their faces and mimic women, or do other shameful things in order to provoke the spectators to laughter. The rustics are moved to laughter by the pouring of wine into pitchers and are allowed to chant ‘Kyrie eleison’ in ludicrous iteration at every verse.”¹⁸

Balsamon’s commentary requires careful handling. It provides no evidence that seasonal clerical masquerades took place in Hagia Sophia in the tenth century under Theophylactos, let alone as early as the seventh-century Council of Trullo. Scylitzes testifies from his own experience only to a late-eleventh-century custom of disrupting “the early morning offices” at certain “public feasts” with howling, laughter, and disreputable songs and dances. He claims that the custom was introduced by Theophylactos, but—

16. Scylitzes, *Synopsis*, ed. Thurn, 243–44; trans. Wortley, 133; cf. Georgius Cedrenus (fl. 1100), *Historiarum Compendium*, 2 vols., CSHB 34–35, 2:333, who incorporates whole sections of Scylitzes’ text into his own. The *domestikos* was “in charge of the chants . . . and the singers. . . . On certain occasions he introduced the acclamations for the patriarch or celebrant” (Moran, *Singers*, 16).

17. Runciman, *Emperor*, 77.

18. PG 137:729–30; abbreviated translation adapted from Chambers, 1:328. Although *prosōpeia* often signifies “masks,” as Chambers renders it, it can also mean “characters” or “roles.”

as we have learned—the hostile testimony of Byzantine historians is not always trustworthy. Balsamon himself supplies firsthand testimony only to the invasion of Hagia Sophia by clerical Kalends masqueraders at Christmas and Epiphany in the middle of the twelfth century. Moreover, the twelfth-century clerics, who entered the church publicly and in full daylight with painted faces and in various disguises, were engaged in a very different kind of activity from that of the apparently undisguised eleventh-century clerics, whose questionable songs and dances were introduced only to the “early morning” offices sung at or before daybreak.

Early morning offices in Hagia Sophia may well have been disrupted or enlivened under Theophylactos (or at least by the time of Scylitzes), just as the Eucharist may well have been mocked and patriarchal processions interrupted under Michael III, but there is no evidence that the custom of clerical masqueraders invading Hagia Sophia at Christmas and Epiphany began before the time of Balsamon. As far as one can tell, the seasonal custom of costumed clerics provoking laughter in churches in Constantinople surfaced at about the same time that secular Kalends activities invaded the churches in Paris. The former disturbed Balsamon. The latter provoked Richard of St.-Victor.

The masquerades of Balsamon’s day were closer kin to the Feast of Fools than anything else we have come across in Constantinople. They took place inside the church. Clergy not only participated but also, unlike their counterparts in Richard of St.-Victor’s Paris, appear to have taken the lead. The “pouring of wine into pitchers,” if the Council of Trullo was correct, recalled Bacchus rather than the Eucharist. But another genuinely liturgical element did find a place in the day’s events: the “rustics” repeatedly chanted the Kyrie. Nevertheless, like the Kalends masquerades in Paris, the masquerades in Hagia Sophia were not the Feast of Fools. The Feast of Fools was embedded in the divine office of the church. The clerical activities of Balsamon’s day were not.

CHAPTER 3

Roman Games

A more reliable account of Kalends activities in high places reaches us from papal Rome in the early twelfth century. Sometime between 1140 and 1143, Benedict, a canon of Saint Peter's basilica in Rome, compiled his *Liber politicus*. This miscellaneous collection of materials contains an ordinal; a brief history of the papacy; and a regionary, cataloguing processional routes through the ancient city.¹ One of the appendices to the ordinal gives an account of several outdoor ceremonies in which either the pope or members of the papal Schola Cantorum took part.² These ceremonies were, in the order in which Benedict presents them, "the laudes of the Feast of the Horns" (*laudes Cornomanni[a]e*), a Greek sequence to be

1. Benedict, *Liber politicus*, in Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:139–77. The latter, 1:3, suggest that "the term *liber politicus* is equivalent to *liber polyptychus*," identifying the book as a miscellany rather than a political work. Brugnoli, "Archetipi," follows suit. For the nature of the regionary, see Spatz, "Church," 319–23.

2. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:171–74. The account of the outdoor ceremonies is reprinted in Fabre, "Polyptyque," 18–36, and Brugnoli, "Archetipi," 57–67. For a discussion of the contemporaneity of these ceremonies, see Harris, "Claiming," 58 n. 2, where I accept Brugnoli's argument (*contra* Fabre) that the events described are from Benedict's own time. The papal Schola Cantorum "was a body of singers charged with providing music for papal ceremonies, with training singers and with preparing young clerics to serve the Church of Rome in subordinate functions" (Dyer, "Rome," 615; cf. Dyer, "Schola").

chanted during refreshments after vespers on Easter Sunday;³ “the Roman games [*ludi*] that are common at the Kalends of January”; the first known record of a “Carnival game” (*ludus carnelevarii*); and “the laudes of the boys” (*laudes puerorum*). Although only one of these is identified as a Kalends game, others may have been influenced by the tradition of Kalends masquerades and house-to-house visits. Together they offer a fascinating glimpse into the kind of entertaining and even comic rites that were sanctioned by the church in papal Rome less than twenty years before the first references to the Feast of Fools appear in northern France.

The term “laudes,” which must not be confused with the early morning lauds of the canonical hours, signifies public acclamations sung or shouted in honor of royal or ecclesiastical dignitaries.⁴ The laudes of the Feast of Horns were something of a parody of conventional papal laudes.⁵ A cryptic reference to the same rite had previously appeared in John Hymonides’ prologue, composed in 876, to the anonymous *Coena Cypriani*:

Hac ludat papa Romanus in albis pascalibus,
quando venit coronatus scolae prior cornibus,
ut Silenus cum asello derisus cantantibus,
quo sacerdotalis lusus designet misterium.⁶

[The Roman pope amuses himself thus at the Albs of Easter,
when the master of the choir school comes, crowned with horns,
like Silenus with a little ass amid songs of mockery,
which priestly amusement denotes a mystery.]

In Benedict’s time, too, the *laudes Cornomanniae* took place on the Saturday of Albs, the first Saturday after Easter, when those baptized on Easter Saturday still wore their white baptismal garments (*albae*).⁷

3. A sequence, or prose, was “a piece of sacred chant of ample dimensions, in length as well as melodic range, set syllabically with a Latin text. The text consisted mostly of a series of couplets each having isosyllabic lines sung to the same melody; each couplet was different from the preceding couplet in melody and usually in length” (Crocker, “Sequence,” 91; cf. Smoldon, *Music*, 49–65). For a brief glossary of medieval musical terms, see Stevens, *Words*, 505–11; for more detail, see entries in *NGDMM*.

4. Kantorowicz, *Laudes*.

5. See *ibid.*, 125–46, for papal laudes, including a brief discussion (143) of the *laudes Cornomanniae*.

6. Mauro and Immonide, *Cena*, 184–87; Fontana, *Coena*, 66–67. John Hymonides is also known as John the Deacon or John, deacon of Rome.

7. Benedict’s account of the Cornomania is printed in Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:171–72; Fabre, “Polyptyque,” 18–24; Brugnoli, “Archetipi,” 57–59; Boiteux, “*Cornomania*,” 123. For summary and discussion of the text, see Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 1:107–8; Boiteux, “*Cornomania*.” For the ordinary office of the Saturday of Albs, see Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:155.

After lunch, when the archpriests of the eighteen diaconal parishes of Rome ordered the church bells rung, “all the people of their parishes hurried to church.” In each church, a sacristan (*mansionarius*) was dressed in an alb and surplice and “crowned with a horned garland of flowers.” He carried in his hand a *phinobulum*, described as a “stalk” (*caulus* = *caulis*) about as long as his arm, made of hollowed bronze and covered in small bells. The meaning of these insignia is unclear. Perhaps, Paul Fabre suggests, the horns recalled the choirmaster’s identity as Silenus in the days of John Hymonides, in which case the flowers and the phallic *phinobulum* may have represented the fertility of the earth (*caulis* can also, by analogy, mean “penis”). But Silenus, unlike Pan, was rarely horned. Or, Fabre adds, the horns may have been the twin points of a mock bishop’s miter,⁸ in which case the *phinobulum* could have represented his scepter or staff of office. Or, Martine Boiteux proposes, the hollow *phinobulum* was perhaps both a wind instrument, adorned with bells, and a precursor of the fool’s marotte,⁹ in which case the horned headgear may have been a precursor of the fool’s cap. But the fool’s cap was crowned with ass’s ears, not horns. It is hard to say.

From each parish, a procession of clergy and people made its way to the pope’s residence in the Lateran. Each of the archpriests wore a long ceremonial cloak known as a pluvial. When the pope joined the crowd outside, the laudes began. Each parish formed a circle, singing songs of acclamation to the pope in a mixture of Latin and Greek, while in their midst the sacristan “danced in a circle, ringing his *phinobulum* and bending back his horned head.” The verb used here (*saltare*) suggests a mimetic, leaping dance.

When the laudes and their accompanying dance were over, the archpriests took turns to mount an ass, facing its tail.¹⁰ A chamberlain balanced a basin, containing twenty denarii, on the head of the ass. The archpriest twisted backward three times, trying to grab some of the coins for himself. Vincenzo de Bartholomaeis imagines the result: “Naturally, the animal lowered its head, upsetting the basin and causing the rider to fall headlong, to the laughter of the crowd.”¹¹ Then all the archpriests laid garlands (*coronas*) at the feet of the pope. Three brought additional offerings. One offered a fox, which, being untied, ran away. Another offered a cockerel. A third offered a deer. In return, the pope gave each of the archpriests a bezant, a large gold or silver

8. Fabre, “Polyptyque,” 20 n. 4.

9. Boiteux, “*Cornomania*,” 113.

10. Bartholomaeis, *Origini*, 173; Boiteux, “*Cornomania*,” 114. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 1:108, assume that only one archpriest was subjected to this indignity.

11. Bartholomaeis, *Origini*, 173

coin. The three who had offered live gifts received an additional quarter- or half-bezant.

Each group then made its way back to its own parish, where it began a series of house-to-house visits. The sacristan was still in costume, “jesting and ringing his *phinobulum* as he had before.” An archpriest and two acolytes carried holy water, sweet wafers, and fronds of laurel. At each house the priest greeted the inhabitants, sprinkled them with water, placed laurel leaves in the hearth, and gave wafers to the children of the home. The sacristan sang macaronic verses; the head of the household gave him “a denarius or more.”

Although in Benedict’s time the Feast of the Horns took place on the first Saturday after Easter, it may originally have been part of the tradition of Kalends masquerades. Giorgio Brugnoli argues that the Cornomannia properly belonged not to Easter but to the New Year. Medieval Europe was never quite sure when the New Year began: the most common dates were 25 December (Nativity style), 1 January (Circumcision style), and 25 March (Annunciation style).¹² The date on which New Year’s Day was observed in Rome could change with the accession of a new pope, to ensure conformity with the prevailing convention of the pontiff’s home country. Brugnoli suggests that the Feast of the Horns moved to and fro between its original date at the end of December and a time as soon after 25 March as possible (given the fluctuating date of Easter). His argument depends on careful attention to the New Year style preferred, first, by the popes who ruled when John Hymonides composed his prologue to the *Coena* and Benedict compiled his *Liber politicus* (John VIII and Innocent II: Annunciation style); second, by the pope named most frequently in both the *laudes Cornomanniae* and the *laudes pueri* as their object of acclamation (Alexander II: Nativity style);¹³ and, third, by the pope identified in Benedict’s cryptic comment at the close of his account of the Feast of the Horns: “Thus it was right up to the time of Gregory VII” (Nativity style). Brugnoli believes this last remark to refer not to the demise of the Feast of Horns but to its final shift from Christmas to Albs at the death of Gregory VII in 1085, after which the papacy more consistently preferred the Annunciation style. Brugnoli concludes, “The Cornomannia of which Benedict speaks was nothing other than the ancient festival of

12. Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *Oxford*, 784–85.

13. In both Fabre, “Polyptique,” 26–30, and Brugnoli, “Archetipi,” 60–65, the *laudes puerorum* name Alexander II as the object of acclamation. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172–73, follow a variant manuscript reading, which substitutes Innocent II.

the Kalends of January from the time when the Nativity style prevailed in the curia.”¹⁴

Brugnoli’s argument is not conclusive, but there is much in its favor. Kalends activities in the heart of papal Rome had been around a long time. In 742 the missionary bishop Boniface had written from the Kingdom of the Franks to the new pope, Zacharias (741–752), complaining that “in certain years in Rome one can see, quite near to the Basilica of Saint Peter, at the beginning of the Kalends of January, people executing choral dances in the squares in pagan fashion, day and night, to the accompaniment of loud shouting [*acclamationes*] and sacrilegious songs.”¹⁵ Zacharias replied ambiguously that both he and his predecessor had forbidden the use of pagan “auguries, amulets, and incantations [*incantationes*]” during the Kalends of January.¹⁶ He made no comment on the activities mentioned by Boniface. Perhaps they were an earlier version of the *laudes Cornomanniae*.

Moreover, much about the Cornomannia of Benedict’s day recalls even earlier Kalends traditions: the rough music, the house-to-house visits, the exchange of gifts, and the placing of laurel leaves in domestic hearths were all long-standing Kalends customs. Perhaps, too, we may be forgiven for hazarding a final guess at the significance of the horns worn by the dancing sacristan. Might they be the horns of the persistent Kalends stag, now crowned with flowers? And might his leaping dance, in which he “bent back his horned head,” have suggested a rutting stag throwing back its head as it roars? We cannot tell.

The second outdoor ceremony mentioned by Benedict is simpler and briefer. It consists of the Greek words to a sequence that was sung by the Schola Cantorum after vespers on Easter Sunday, “in the presence of the pope while he drinks with all the curia in the portico near the baptismal fonts.”¹⁷ This ceremony is also mentioned in the main body of Benedict’s ordinal, and in the Roman ordinal of Cardinal Albinus, compiled between

14. Brugnoli, “Archetipi,” 54–55. If the two surviving accounts of the Feast of the Horns had been of a later date, one might have linked the feast with the tradition of the *risus paschalis* (Easter laughter), but 876 and even 1140 are almost certainly too early for such an association. The first reference to “*risus . . . paschalis gratiae*” (the laughter . . . of Easter grace) comes from a Good Friday hymn by Peter Abelard (1079–1142) (Abelard, *Hymnarius*, 2:106). But the first specific mention of the liturgical practice of inducing congregational laughter on Easter Sunday comes from a letter, dated 1518, by John Oecolampadius, who calls it “that unwholesome custom” (Oecolampadius, *Briefe*, 1:44–59). For studies of the *risus paschalis*, see Jacobelli, *Risus*; O’Connell, “Mockery.”

15. Boniface, *Epistolae* 49 (*Bonifacius Zachariae*), in *PL* 89:741–48 (col. 747); Boniface, *Letters* 50 (59–60); translation adapted from Backman, 57.

16. Zacharias, *Epistolae et decreta* 2 (*Zachariae papae ad Bonifacium archiepiscopum*), in *PL* 89:917–22 (col. 921); Boniface, *Letters* 51 (64–65).

17. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172; Fabre, “Polyptyque,” 24; Brugnoli, “Archetipi,” 59.

1188 and 1189.¹⁸ From these sources we learn that the pope served claret, then a pale wine made by mixing reds and whites, and that the singers kissed the pope's feet when they were done. There is nothing in the least irregular about the ceremony. On the contrary, it reminds us that drinking wine after divine office was customary and not, as some who write about the Feast of Fools imagine, a sign of drunken revels.¹⁹

The Kalends games follow in Benedict's account. These were New Year house-to-house visits by students from the Schola Cantorum. Benedict begins: "On the eve of the Kalends, late at night, the youths [*pueri*] get up and carry around a shield, and one of them is masked, with a club [*maza*] hanging from his neck. Hissing [*sibilando*] and sounding the drum [*timpanum*], they go around to the houses, and surround [*circumdant*] the shield: the drum sounds: the [one with the] mask [*larva*] hisses. This game over, they receive a reward from the master of the house according to what pleases him. Thus they do in each and every house. On that day, they eat all kinds of vegetables."²⁰

The precise nature of the students' Kalends masquerade is not clear, in part because of the ambiguity of some of Benedict's vocabulary. Various translations have been offered for *maza*, ranging from club (Italian, *mazza*; French, *massue*)²¹ to barley cake (Greek, *maza*)²² and drum (from the proximity of *timpanum*).²³ My own inclination is to understand the *maza* as a club and the masked youth as an early example of the festival "wild man," who traditionally carried such a weapon.²⁴ Such clubs (*massues*), stuffed with straw and animal hair to look like phalli, were still being used by New Year masqueraders in Clermont (France) in 1500.²⁵ The noise (*sibilando*) made by the boys may have been a threatening hiss rather than a tuneful whistle. Similarly, it is not clear whether the boys swung the shield around²⁶ or laid it on the floor and performed a circle dance around it to the beat of the drum.²⁷ I imagine

18. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:154 and 2:132. For the date of Albinus's ordinal, see *ibid.* 1:2. The ordinals provide more carefully transcribed versions of the Greek text.

19. As Caldwell, "Recordings," 489, points out, "refreshments after the service were written even into the *ordines romani* of the 8th and 9th centuries."

20. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172; Fabre, "Polyptyque," 24–25; Brugnoli, "Archetipi," 59–60; translation adapted from Tydemann, 632–33.

21. Fabre, "Polyptyque," 25 n. 2.

22. Boiteux, "*Cornomania*," 118–19. Cakes were sometimes offered to household gods in ancient Kalends rites (Johnston, "Lares," 344, 352).

23. Tydemann, 632.

24. Bernheimer, *Wild Men*; Husband, *Wild Man*; T&C, 48–50.

25. Bossuat, "Théâtre," 113–15; see also chapter 22.

26. Tydemann, 633.

27. Bartholomaeis, *Origini*, 176; Boiteux, "*Cornomania*," 119.

the latter. Afterward they received gifts, including vegetable dishes, from the master of the house.

The next morning's activities are easier to understand. Benedict continues: "Early in the morning, two of the youths get up; they are given olive branches and salt and they enter the houses. They greet the household, 'Joy and gladness be in this house.' They throw a handful of leaves and salt into the fire and say, 'So many children, so many piglets, so many lambs.' They wish for all good things. Before the sun rises, they eat either honeycomb or something else sweet, so that the whole year will go well with them, without disputes and without great labor."²⁸ The exchange of good wishes on the morning of the New Year was an ancient Kalends custom. So were the scattering of salt and leaves in the domestic fire and the auspicious consumption of sweet things.²⁹ Nevertheless, Benedict's account contains no suggestion of impropriety or fear that the choristers were engaging in residual pagan rites.

The fourth of Benedict's outdoor ceremonies is the Carnival game. Contrary to modern expectations of the genre, this first recorded Carnival appears to have been a pious pre-Lenten allegory. It began after lunch "on the Sunday before Lent." A group of *equites et pedites* rose from the table and drank together. These may have been "knights" and "foot soldiers,"³⁰ or they may have been civilian participants on horseback and on foot, perhaps dressed as soldiers.³¹ After those on foot laid aside their shields, they set off for the Testaccio Hill. Those on horseback were escorted by the prefect of the city to the pope's residence in the Lateran. Leaving his palace, the pope rode with the prefect and the cavalcade to the Testaccio Hill.

At this point Benedict begins his allegorical interpretation of events: "Just as there [at the Testaccio Hill] the city had its beginning, so there on that day [the Sunday before Lent] the pleasures of our body have their end. They perform the game before the pope, so that no contention arises among them. In killing a bear, the devil is slain, who is the tempter of our flesh. When bullocks are killed, the pride of our pleasures is slain. In the killing of a cock, the lechery of our loins is slain, so that we may live chastely and soberly in the midst of the spiritual battle and so be counted worthy to taste the body of the Lord at Easter."³²

28. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172; Fabre, "Polyptyque," 25; Brugnoli, "Archetipi," 59–60; translation adapted from Tydeman, 633.

29. Meslin, *Fête*, 39–43, 73–79; Johnston, "Lares," 352.

30. Tydeman, 639.

31. Boiteux, "Chasse," 45.

32. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172; Fabre, "Polyptyque," 25–26; Brugnoli, "Archetipi," 60; translation adapted from Tydeman, 639. Whatever may be true of the other outdoor ceremonies, the

The temptation to read Benedict's twelfth-century account in the retrospective light of more elaborate and less moralized Renaissance Carnival animal hunts on the Testaccio Hill, in which more than a dozen bulls and several pigs were chased and killed, is strong.³³ But to do so ignores the question of intervening change, and I am inclined to agree with Fabre that the games on the Testaccio Hill underwent "an almost complete transformation" between the time of Benedict and the early years of the Renaissance.³⁴ The credibility of Benedict's Carnival allegory is increased by his willingness to let the other ceremonies enter the record without any trace of allegorization; he is a reporter, not a moralizer.

Further support for Benedict's allegory comes from an account of the same Carnival tradition by Stephen of Bourbon (d. 1261). Stephen gives no details of the game itself, saying only that on the Sunday before Lent, men on horseback and on foot customarily "play in the presence of the pope" on the Testaccio Hill. He makes no mention of the killing of animals, but adds a longer version of the explanatory allegory, assigning its announcement to the participants themselves after the game. We have put to death, they say, "the lust of the world, . . . the devil, . . . the temptation of the flesh, . . . pride, envy, anger, discord, gluttony and lechery, sloth and sadness." We now live "soberly, piously, and justly, so that we may be counted worthy to receive the body of the Lord at Easter."³⁵ The language is similar but not identical to that of Benedict. Stephen may have done no more than adapt Benedict's account,³⁶ but he may also have relied on reports from contemporary visitors to Rome. In any case, moral allegory dominates both Benedict's and Stephen's accounts in a way that would have been entirely foreign to the Renaissance Carnival.

The last of Benedict's outdoor ceremonies again involves the students of the Schola Cantorum. In the middle of Lent, bearing lances decorated with flags and little bells, the boys gathered in front of the church to sing extended laudes to the pope. Afterward they went from house to house singing and receiving gifts of eggs.³⁷ Once again, there was nothing irregular about the ceremony.

ludus carnelevarii was almost certainly contemporary to Benedict. The first known occurrence of the word *carnelevarius* or any of its cognates comes from 965, the second from 1050, and its use becomes common only in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Moreover, none of the previous occurrences refers to any kind of "carnival game" (Aebischer, "Dénominations," 1–10).

33. For the Renaissance hunts, see Boiteux, "Chasse."

34. Fabre, "Polyptique," 26 n. 1.

35. Étienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes*, 423.

36. Boiteux, "Chasse," 34.

37. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:172; Fabre, "Polyptique," 26; Brugnoli, "Archetipi," 60.

With the exception of the choristers' Kalends games and possibly the Cornomannia, Benedict's outdoor ceremonies were not Kalends masquerades. Nor did any of them, despite Boiteux's confident assertion to the contrary,³⁸ announce the arrival of the Feast of Fools. But these two exceptions certainly narrowed the gap between the Kalends masquerades and the Feast of Fools. Drawing on the former's subaltern traditions of masking and mockery, while anticipating the latter's incorporation of clergy and choristers, they were some of the first activities with roots in the Kalends masquerades to be organized with the full approval of the church authorities.

One more step has to be taken before we can talk of real proximity to the Feast of Fools. Such moments of playfulness need to move indoors, becoming an integral part of the liturgy.

38. "La fête de la Cornomania... est une fête des fous" (Boiteux, "*Cornomania*," 121).

CHAPTER 4

Herod in Germany

In thirteenth-century Padua, during matins on the feast of Epiphany, clerical actors representing King Herod and his court invaded the cathedral. Herod climbed into the pulpit, hurled a wooden spear into the choir, and angrily read the ninth lesson. His followers set about beating the bishop, canons, choristers, and men and women standing in the nave with inflated bladders. Instructions for the Padua *Representation of Herod* are found in a thirteenth-century ordinal preserved in the cathedral library.¹ We can safely assume, therefore, that this was not an unlicensed intrusion into the liturgy but an annual embellishment approved by the cathedral chapter.

Some scholars have treated the *Representatio Herodis* as if it were an Italian version of the Feast of Fools.² While the Padua rite is certainly close to the Feast of Fools in spirit, its formal roots lie in a German tradition of Herod games and liturgical plays that stretches back at least to the eleventh century. A survey of this earlier tradition, culminating in a closer look at the Padua representation, will serve both to distinguish the Herod tradition from the

1. For a facsimile and complete transcription of the Padua *Liber Ordinarius*, see Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*; for excerpts from the ordinal relating to Herod and the surrounding liturgy, Young, 1:106–9, 2:99–100; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 174–80; for extended summaries, Bartholomaeis, *Origini*, 126–27, 181–83; for partial translations, Tydeman, 106, 108–9.

2. Martin, “Journeyman,” 162–63; Burke, *Desire*, 91–92.

Feast of Fools and to demonstrate that carefully planned moments of comic disorder can contribute to a profoundly devotional liturgical effect.

In this chapter I look at Herod games and plays from places that are now in eastern Belgium, eastern France, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany but were then all part of imperial Germany.³ Padua, now in northern Italy, was then also very much under German influence. I also consider criticism aimed at the tradition by Gerhoh of Reichersberg and Herrad of Landsberg.

As the master of the choir school at Augsburg cathedral between 1119 and 1124, Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093–1169) organized Herod games. The cathedral clergy, he later recalled with some embarrassment, would eat together in the refectory only “on rare feasts, especially when they used to represent Herod, the persecutor of Christ, the slaughter of the children, or other ‘theatrical’ games or spectacles [*ludis . . . aut spectaculis quasi theatralibus*].” “I have myself,” he confessed bitterly, “not only taken part in but even presided over such insanities in my role as master of the school.”⁴ The games likely took place at the feast of the Innocents (28 December).

Herod had already appeared, during the eleventh century, in short liturgical plays in the northern French cities of Nevers and Compiègne.⁵ But in neither case did he display what was to become his characteristic lack of self-control and exaggerated anger. Nor was the slaughter of the Innocents enacted. The Nevers and Compiègne plays were decorous throughout: the Augsburg games, if we are to trust Gerhoh’s embarrassed memory, were of a different kind.

Two eleventh-century liturgical plays from Freising, forty miles east of Augsburg, offer a more promising precedent. The first, an *Office of the Star*, was composed around 1070.⁶ *Officium Stellae* begins with the processional entry of Herod to his throne. After two brief scenes, in which an angel appears to

3. For a map showing the extent of the German Empire, 1125–1254, see Kitchen, *Cambridge*, 57.

4. Gerhoh, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, in *PL* 193:619–194:998 (194:890–91); translation adapted from Clopper, *Drama*, 46. *Theatralis*, in the rhetoric of the period, signified kinship with the obscene spectacles of the Roman *theatrum* (Clopper, *Drama*, 42–43). Classen, *Gerhoch*, 18, dates these events to 1119; Eynde, *Oeuvre*, 5 n. 5, prefers 1124.

5. Young, 2:50–58; Frank, *Medieval*, 35–36; and, for Nevers, Van Deusen, *Music*, 1:106–16. Reference to an even earlier dramatic representation of Herod can be found in a tenth-century commentary on Horace’s *Ars Poetica*: see Zechmeister, *Scholia*, ii–iii, 19; Pagani, “Teatro”; Drumbl, *Quem*, 327–28; Dronke, *Nine*, xxiii–xxvi; and, for the probable date and authorship of the commentary, Hardison and Golden, *Horace*, 86.

6. Young, 2:92–99 (text); Dronke, *Nine*, 24–51 (improved text, translation, and line numbers); Smoldon, *Music*, pl. 8 (photograph of manuscript). For the date of the play, see Dronke, *Nine*, 29; Drumbl, *Quem*, 336–37. Fragments of earlier German *Officia Stellae*, in which Herod’s behavior is still comparatively mild-mannered, survive from Metz, Lorsch, and the monasteries of Saint Emmeram (Regensburg) and Münsterschwarzach (Drumbl, *Quem*, 293–306).

the shepherds and the Magi follow a star, the action returns to Herod's court. A messenger reports the puzzling activity of the Magi and, at Herod's command, summons them to explain themselves to the king. Disturbed by the Magi's admission that the star is directing them to pay homage to a newborn king, Herod sends soldiers to fetch his scribes. The scribes find "in the books of the prophets" a promise of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, and the choir sings the antiphon "Bethlehem, non es minima" (Bethlehem, you are by no means the least).⁷ Herod, in his jealous fear of a rival king, hurls the book aside (*proiciat librum*). Then, in words freighted with comic irony, he demands that the Magi be brought back for further questioning: "Vassal, bring the foreign tyrants back—be quick about it!" (line 80). Herod is, of course, himself a foreign tyrant. Following the advice of his armiger, he disingenuously asks the Magi to locate the child and report back so that he too might "adore" the new king (90).

The Magi leave, meet the returning shepherds en route, present their gifts to the Christ Child, and, warned by an angel, head home without reporting to Herod. When a messenger tells Herod that he has been "mocked" by the Magi's escape, the king becomes enraged. "Leaping up" from his throne, he declares that he will slake his personal fury with indiscriminate slaughter: "I will put out my fire by general devastation" (*incendium meum ruina extinguam*) (119). The words, borrowed from Sallust's *War with Catiline*, align "Herod's fury with Catiline's frustrated ambition and vengeful desire."⁸ In a final burst of violence, Herod assents to his armiger's suggestion that he "vindicate" his royal "anger" by ordering many "boys" to be put to the sword in the hope that the particular "boy" sought by the Magi will be among those killed (120–23). Agitatedly "turning his sword to and fro," Herod orders the slaughter.

Then the mood of the play suddenly changes. A "procession of the king" ensues, during which Herod departs and the "boys" sing a joyous song, "Eia dicamus" (Let's sing "hurrah!"), welcoming the new king, who will "restore peace to the world." It is, as Peter Dronke remarks, "a brilliant piece of symbolic invention. . . . Just as Herod thinks he has killed all the little boys and stamped out the rival King, the mutiny breaks out in his own palace: it is Herod's own page-boys who, in his royal procession, proclaim the rival King, the true *rex Iudeorum*."⁹ As the choirboys of the cathedral, too, they hail "this yearly feast," when the king whose birth they celebrate authorizes "sung

7. An antiphon is "a short chant sung before and after a psalm or canticle" (Stevens, *Words*, 505).

8. Williams, *French*, 57. Sallust, *Bellum Catalinae* 31.9 (*Works*, 54–55): "incendium meum ruina restinguam."

9. Dronke, *Nine*, 28–29. The sudden reversal puzzled both Young, 2:98, and Smoldon, *Music*, 131.

poetry, festive holidays, choral dances” (*odas, festa, choreas*). The recessional hints at lively celebrations to follow. The boys close the liturgical office by singing the popular Christmas season sequence “*Laetabundus exultet fidelis chorus*” (Let the faithful choir exult in gladness).

The second Freising play, an *Office of Rachel*,¹⁰ overlaps somewhat with the first. Beginning with the visit of the shepherds to the manger, *Ordo Rachelis* moves quickly to the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt. The scene then switches to Herod’s court, where a messenger reports the escape of the Magi. Infuriated, Herod orders the slaughter of the Innocents. The massacre is represented by the armiger “killing the boys,” brutally telling each victim in turn, “Learn to die, boy.” The choir responds by singing “*Hostis Herodes impie*” (Impious Herod, enemy).¹¹ Rachel, the personification of grieving Hebrew mothers, weeps for her slaughtered children. The office closes with the singing of the *Te Deum*.

Gerhoh’s Herod games depended on the same biblical narrative as the earlier Freising plays. But Lawrence Clopper, in his careful study of the medieval meanings of *ludus*, *spectacula*, *theatrum*, and other words usually assumed to denote dramatic performance, suggests that Gerhoh’s *ludi* were not liturgical plays. Rather, he proposes, they were “inappropriate games and parodies that involve[d] not necessarily personation in a scripted text but the assumption of disguise for festive license.”¹² I believe Clopper is right to distinguish between scripted “plays” and unscripted “games” in this context, but I am not persuaded that the Herod games were parodic.

The Freising *Office of the Star* closed with slaughter commanded but not yet enacted. Perhaps a Herod game followed in the refectory. One can imagine Herod strutting his angry stuff, exaggerating the pagan king’s role as the “personification of vice” that medieval Christians knew him to be.¹³ Armed clerics might have engaged in swordplay and chased Innocents, while others put on demonized Kalends animal masks to play devils taking Herod to hell. Poetry would have been sung and songs danced, as the choirboys had promised. Noisy as it may have been, such a game would have exposed the ultimate foolishness and defeat of Herod’s violent opposition to Christ no less surely than the more restrained *Officium Stellae* that preceded it.

10. Young, 2:117–22; Drumbl, *Quem*, 341–47.

11. For the full text of the hymn, see Young, 2:447; Drumbl, *Quem*, 344.

12. Clopper, *Drama*, 47. For the medieval meanings of *theatrum* and related words, see also Marshall, “*Theatre*”; for an extended study of the idea of the theater in Latin Christian thought, see Dox, *Idea*.

13. Staines, “Out-Herod,” 209–10.

Perhaps the young Gerhoh organized similar games in Augsburg. Support for this hypothesis comes from a passage in Gerhoh's *Inquiry into the Antichrist*, written in 1162, by which time Gerhoh had been provost of the Augustinian monastery of Reichersberg (now just inside Austria, near Ried) for thirty years. During a lengthy polemic against "theatrical spectacles shown in the church of God," Gerhoh inveighed against the "devil masks" and the "Herod-like madness" adopted by those playing the part of the Antichrist.¹⁴ Scholars have regarded this as a reference to the Tegernsee *Play of Antichrist* (ca. 1160), associated with the Benedictine abbey of Tegernsee, some seventy-five miles southwest of Reichersberg.¹⁵ But as Clopper points out, there are no devils in the Tegernsee play.¹⁶ He suggests instead that Gerhoh had in mind unscripted Antichrist games, akin to the Herod games he had organized as a young man in Augsburg. In such games, a foolish, raging, and ultimately defeated Antichrist would take the place of Herod. The battles associated with the legend of Antichrist would allow even more swordplay than the slaughter of the Innocents. And Antichrist, like Herod, would be carried off to hell by masked devils. Antichrist games, like Herod games, would not be parodies of moral good, but joyous, raucous celebrations of the foolishness and ultimate impotence of evil.

Gerhoh complained as well, in his old age, of more conventional liturgical representations: "They show also by images [*imaginaliter*] the cradle of the infant Savior, the crying of the child, the motherly manner of the child-bearing Virgin, the flaming of the star like a heavenly body, the killing of the children, the motherly weeping of Rachel." Such representations, he wrote, were no better than "theatrical spectacles," in which "true men reduce themselves to women as if ashamed that they are men, clerics to soldiers, [and] men transfigure themselves in the masks of demons."¹⁷ As far as Gerhoh was concerned, scripted liturgical plays, unscripted biblical games, and Kalends masquerades were all equally deserving of condemnation.

The freedom of the Herod games may have influenced later liturgical Herod plays. A twelfth-century *Office of the Star* from Bilzen¹⁸ (now in eastern Belgium) follows much the same outline as the Freising play, but the scenes at Herod's court are expanded. Three messengers, rather than one, rush into Herod's presence in quick succession to report on the arrival of the Magi and

14. Gerhoh, *De investigatione* 1.5 (25–26); Young, 2:524–25; translation adapted from Tydeman, 113–14. For the date of composition, see Eynde, *Oeuvre*, 121–24, 131–39.

15. Young, 2:371–96; Wright, *Play*.

16. Clopper, *Drama*, 44–45.

17. Gerhoh, *De investigatione* 1.5 (27); Young, 2:525; translation from Tydeman, 114.

18. Young, 2:75–84.

the attendant prophecies of a newborn king. One, as if trying to stave off the inevitable challenge to Herod's rule, begins his report fawningly, "King, King, King! King,..." The royal court becomes "a scene of frenzied activity."¹⁹ When the Magi arrive, Herod interrogates them. "Swelling with anger and throwing swords around," he demands an explicit confession of their faith in the new king. When they comply, he orders them imprisoned. His scribes confirm the prophecy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. Herod "inspects the books and gives them back bitterly." He changes his mind, orders the Magi released, interrogates them again, and finally, at his armiger's suggestion, sends them to Bethlehem to find the child and report back. After they visit the manger, the armiger tells the hapless Herod that the Magi have left for home by another route. The Bilzen Herod is a comic portrait of royal pretension and real powerlessness: for all his frenzied activity and trappings of command, Herod fails utterly to alter the divinely initiated course of events.

The Bilzen play ends abruptly with the armiger's report of failure. A Strasbourg version ends with the line from Sallust.²⁰ A fragment from Einsiedeln (now in Switzerland) adds the command to slaughter the boys.²¹ But none of these scripts continues with a representation of the slaughter itself. The ending, as William Smoldon puts it, "seems to vanish."²² Perhaps the omission was deliberate, leaving the irate Herod and his soldiers to enact the slaughter later in the form of an unscripted game.

The Benediktbeuern *Christmas Play*, by contrast, includes a scripted slaughter, but it also includes devils, a boy bishop, an ass (twice), a ranting Archisynagogus (ruler of the synagogue), and an expanded role for Herod with more outbursts of anger and a gruesome death.²³ In this case there would have been no need for a subsequent Herod game. The manuscript in which the *Ludus de Nativitate* is found "dates from about 1230," but the play itself "may have been written as early as 1160."²⁴ The Benedictine abbey of Benediktbeuern is some forty miles south of Augsburg.

19. Staines, "Out-Herod," 213.

20. Young, 2:64–68; Wilmart, *Ancien*, 8–10. The Strasbourg play, preserved in an antiphonal dating from the second half of the twelfth century (Wilmart, *Ancien*, xii), was part of vespers on the octave of Epiphany. Walter, "Processions," 95, suggests that the illustrations in Herrad of Landsberg, *Hortus* (ed. Green et al.), 2:147–48, 155 (pls. 51–52, 54) or *Hortus* (ed. Caratzas), 96–101, 108–9 (pls. 27, 29bis), may reflect the "mise-en-scène" of the play. Williams, *French*, 57–58, 248 n. 29, discusses allusions to both Sallust and Virgil in the Strasbourg play.

21. Young, 2:447–48; Drumbl, *Quem*, 306, dates the Einsiedeln fragment to the eleventh or twelfth century.

22. Smoldon, *Music*, 212.

23. Young, 2:172–96; Bevington, 178–201.

24. Bevington, 178. The *Carmina Burana* manuscript, in which the Benediktbeuern plays are found, is now thought to have come from the South Tyrol (Austria) (Linke, "Germany," 216).

The play begins with a procession of prophets foretelling the birth of Christ, “the new king” who “will bring in a new age” (lines 50–51). Balaam, the fifth and last prophet, enters “sitting on an ass.” An angel, “unsheathing his sword,” bars the way. “The ass . . . steps back in fright,” and Balaam, who had intended to curse God’s people, instead sings the responsory “*Orietur stella ex Jacob*” (A star will arise out of Jacob) (76–78).²⁵ The presence of a live animal, as any theater director knows, threatens all kinds of unscripted action, especially when the animal is required to be frightened.²⁶

Archisynagogus and his Jews respond to the prophecies with “an excessive clamor.” Then, “shoving forward his comrade, agitating his head and his entire body and striking the ground with his foot, and imitating with his scepter the mannerisms of a Jew in all ways,” Archisynagogus mocks the prophecies, taking particular exception to those that promise a virgin birth. Less sensitive than we now claim to be, the role provides an opportunity for a clerical actor with a vicious talent for ethnic caricature. The boy bishop, a choirboy elected annually to exercise the office of bishop at the feast of the Holy Innocents, pronounces the Jews’ objections “empty” (95). Saint Augustine, in a lengthy debate, demolishes Archisynagogus’s arguments. Augustine sings “in a sober and discreet voice” (167). Archisynagogus answers “with immoderate and violent laughter” (126) or “bawls and shouts, agitating his body and head, and deriding the prophecies” (233).

Following the angelic annunciation to Mary, her visit to Elizabeth, and the birth of the Christ Child, the Magi appear. Summoned to Herod’s court, they are met by Herod “in a towering rage” (384). He boasts:

Nam Herodes ego sum	For I am Herod,
potens subjugare	Mighty enough to overwhelm
quicquid mundus continet	Whatsoever the world contains
caelum, terra, mare.	The heaven, the earth, the sea.

(389–92)

“Extremely angry,” Herod summons Archisynagogus, who arrives “with colossal pride, attended by his Jews.” The two blustering tyrants confront each

25. A responsory was “a chant, often of great complexity,” usually “sung after a lesson” during the divine office (Stevens, *Words*, 509).

26. For the opinion that a live ass was used in such plays, see chapter 10, note 61. A life-size, wheeled wooden image of Jesus on an ass, known as a *Palmesel*, was used in Palm Sunday processions in medieval Germany (Young 1:94–98, 2:532; Tydeman, 66–67, 79), but, despite the interesting speculation of Forsyth, “*L’Âne*,” 62, 64 n. 18, it is hard to imagine the speaking roles of Balaam and his ass being represented by such an inanimate object.

other. Herod accedes to Archisynagogus's suggestion that he send the Magi to search for the child. While the Magi continue their journey, an angel appears to the shepherds. A devil fails to persuade them that only "simple-minded people" (489) could fall for the angel's story. Singing the antiphon "Facta est cum angelo" (There was with the angel), the shepherds arrive at the manger and worship the child. The Magi follow but, warned by an angel, do not return to Herod.

Herod is "troubled": he "thinks he's been made a laughingstock" by the Magi (522–25). When Archisynagogus quotes the biblical prophecy of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, the enraged Herod promptly orders the slaughter of the Innocents. "The soldiers . . . slay the children," and the mothers grieve. "Afterward," the rubric instructs, "let Herod be gnawed to pieces by worms, and leaving his throne a dead man, let him be received by the devils with much rejoicing among them" (562).²⁷ Quite how Herod's death by worms was staged is not known, but it must have been at once a comic, sobering, and—in terms of moral justice—reassuring piece of stage business. Herod aspired to dominate by terror, but the play shows him to be a failure, unable to control even his own emotions, let alone the actions of others or his own fate. He dies a laughingstock, a plaything of the devils. The play ends with the Holy Family safely "going before the ass" into Egypt.

We can, I think, safely assume that in German Herod games, as in the Benediktbeuern *Christmas Play*, Herod was played as a braggart and an object of contempt.²⁸ Neither genre was a parody of Christian liturgy. On the contrary, both genres made fun of those who claimed the power to oppose Christ: Herod, Antichrist, and Archisynagogus. Both genres, too, would have afforded clerical participants the opportunity to indulge in overacting and swordplay, and both would have delivered the same message: only the unwise mock God. Herod, thinking himself invincible, was a loser.

Some critics, however, have suggested that the Herod of these games and plays functioned as "the Lord of Misrule"²⁹ or the "Fool-King . . . of the Feast

27. The play confuses Herod the Great (73–4 BCE), who was responsible for the slaughter of the Innocents, with his son Herod Antipas (21 BCE–39 CE), who "was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:23).

28. The same may be said of the late-twelfth-century French plays from the Fleury Playbook, *Ordo ad repraesentandum Herodem* and *Ad interfecionem puerorum* (Young, 2:84–92, 110–17; Bevington, 57–72). In this sequential pair of plays, the enraged Herod flings down the prophetic books, makes threatening gestures with his sword, tries to kill himself "as if demented," orders the slaughter of the Innocents, and finally dies. For commentary on the role of Herod in these plays, see Skey, "Iconography."

29. Dronke, *Nine*, 29.

of Fools.”³⁰ This is a mistake. The medieval Herod aimed obsessively at order. It was his lack of self-control, rather than any deliberate inversion of established order, that generated the chaos around him. The *dominus festi* of the Feast of Fools presided over a temporary reversal of established order, not to initiate disorder but precisely to celebrate the overthrow of disordered power. The Feast of Fools often invoked Mary’s lines from the Magnificat, “Deposuit potentes de sede et exultavit humiles” (He has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble).³¹ In these terms, Herod was among the mighty who are put down. The role of the *dominus festi* was sometimes played by a junior cleric. He was among the humble who are exalted. So was the boy bishop, played by a choirboy. Herod opposed Christ. The *dominus festi* and the boy bishop were, in this sense at least, both like Christ and exalted by Christ.

Gerhoh of Reichersburg was not the only leader of a German monastery to complain of disorderly seasonal games in sacred precincts. Herrad of Landsberg (1130–1195) spent most of her life in the Augustinian monastery of Hohenberg (now Mont Ste.-Odile, southeast of Strasbourg), serving as abbess from 1167 until her death in 1195. Unlike Gerhoh, Herrad drew a clear distinction between “reverent” liturgical representations and “irreverent” seasonal disguisings. The former, in her opinion, were orderly and devotional. The latter were disorderly, invading the church and collapsing the distance between clergy and laity.

Herrad was broadminded about the range of actions that liturgical representations might include. She approved of “religious performances” of “the star guiding the Magi to the newborn Christ, the rage of Herod and his deceitful cunning, the dispatch of the soldiers to slaughter the children, the lying-in of the Blessed Virgin, [and] the angel warning the Magi not to return [to Herod].” According to Herrad, these “acts of reverence” had become a part of the established liturgy “of Epiphany or its octave” by her day.³² But she objected strenuously to “acts of . . . irreligion and extravagance conducted with all the license of youth. The priests, having changed their clothes, go forth as a troop of warriors; there is no difference between a priest

30. Stumpf, *Kultspiele*, 382–83; Ashley, “Politics,” 155.

31. Luke 1:52.

32. Herrad, *Hortus* (ed. Green), 2:492 (fol. 315v); Young, 2:413; translation adapted from Pearson, “German,” 285–86. Herrad also composed or collected some delightfully lighthearted songs for the feasts of the Nativity and the Circumcision (Engelhardt, *Herrad*, 132–39), at least one of which suggests that her nuns may have sung the canon while engaging in a lively dance: “Leta, leta concio / Cinoel resonat in tripudio / Cinoel hoc in natalitio / Cinoel Cinoel Noel Noel” (May the joyful congregation, / dancing with happiness, cry out / on this day of his birth, “Noel, / Noel, Noel, Noel”); for a recording, see *Hortus*, track 6.

and a warrior. The house of God is thrown into disorder by the confusion of priests and laymen, by feasting, drinking, buffoonery, unbecoming jokes, vulgar games [*ludi plausibiles*], the clang of weapons, the gathering of loose women, [and] the ill-disciplined assault of all the vanities.”³³ Herrad may have had in mind both clerical Herod games, in which priests dressed “as a troop of warriors” and indulged in “the clang of weapons,” and secular masquerades, which threw “priests and laymen” together and attracted “loose women” to the church. Perhaps the two genres were becoming confused: clerical games, spreading from the refectory, may have met lay masquerades, entering from the street, in the nave of the church.

We can now return to thirteenth-century Padua, where a partially unscripted Herod was twice allowed to run riot during the liturgy of the Christmas season. Herod made his first appearance in Padua during mass on the feast of the Innocents. The ordinal sets out the special features of the divine office and mass for the feast, including specified antiphons, psalms, lessons, and prayers. In some years, it tells us, “when there is a little bishop [*episcopellus*],” he is required to preside over specified parts of the office.³⁴ When the little bishop, played by a choirboy, entered the bishop’s palace after first vespers, the canons sang the antiphon “*Sinite parvulos*” (Unless you become as little children). “Then,” the ordinal instructs, “the little bishop questions the other bishop about his good administration of the goods of the church and many other jests [*trufe*] are made there.” Wine was served, as it was at each of the monasteries visited by the little bishop between supper and second vespers the next day.³⁵ Social inversion and communal joy were both appropriate to a festive season celebrating the birth of the Son of God in a manger.³⁶

Inside the cathedral the *episcopellus* conducted himself in a consistently dignified fashion, which makes the events at mass all the more surprising. Mass began calmly enough with the introit (*officium*)³⁷ “*Ex ore infantum*” (Out of the mouth of infants). The epistle was equally suitable: “*Vidi supra*

33. Herrad, *Hortus* (ed. Green), 2:492 (fol. 315v); Young, 2:413; translation adapted from Pearson, “German,” 286; for *plausibilis* = vulgar, attracting popular applause, see TLL, s.v. *plausibilis*.

34. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:64; Young, 1:106; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 174.

35. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:65–68; Young, 1:106–9; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 175–78; Tydeman, 109.

36. Duffy, *Stripping*, 13–14, observes of English boy bishop ceremonies: “A perfectly good Christian justification could be offered for these popular observances, however close to the bone their elements of parody and misrule brought them. Christ’s utterances about children and the Kingdom of Heaven, Isaiah’s prophecy that a little child shall lead them, and the theme of inversion and the world turned upside-down found in texts like the ‘Magnificat’ could all be invoked in their defense.”

37. For this meaning of *officium*, see Harper, *Forms*, 308.

montem Syon" (I saw on Mount Zion) was drawn from Revelation 14:1–5, which tells of the 144,000 "who have not defiled themselves with women" and who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." This passage was frequently applied to the slaughtered Innocents. But the reader of the epistle and the action he initiated were unusual: "The person who says [the epistle]," we are told, "is dressed poorly and holds a wooden spear in his hand." Clothed in plain, ragged vestments rather than in royal robes, Herod was symbolically set apart from his martyred victims, who wore clean "robes . . . made white in the blood of the Lamb."³⁸ Angered by having to read an epistle glorifying his victims, Herod "throws [the spear] towards the people. And there are armed men who follow the spear and go round the church seeking the child with its mother, that is Christ with the Blessed Virgin Mary. And there is someone dressed like a woman who is sitting on an ass, holding a child in her arms, and someone, who represents Joseph, leads the ass fleeing through the church, signifying the flight of the Virgin with her child into Egypt as an angel of the Lord warned Joseph in a dream."³⁹

It was a moment of enacted terror in the middle of mass, but its purpose was not to terrify; rather, it represented inept terror defeated in its own purposes. Although the child and his mother, seated on a live ass, must have been visible to everyone else, Herod's soldiers failed to find them. Warned by an angel, the Holy Family successfully escaped into Egypt. The slaughter of the Innocents was not enacted; the epistle spoke instead of their glorification. For all his anger, Herod failed to find and kill the one child he really wanted dead.

Mass continued with the singing of "Laus tibi, Christe" (Praise to you, O Christ). After the reading of the gospel "Angelus Domini apparavit" (The angel of the Lord appeared), the *episcopellus* was led to the "steps before the altar of the Holy Cross," where he was seated to receive an offering from the people. At the close of the mass, he blessed the people and clergy. Herod's sudden, frightening, and ultimately ridiculous burst of anger in the middle of mass was surrounded and dwarfed by the rest of the service, which celebrated the good news that in Christ "the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."⁴⁰ While the raging Herod was rendered ineffectual, the little bishop and the infant Christ survived to bless the people of God.

38. Rev. 7:9, 14. In the Fleury *Ad interfectionem puerorum*, the Innocents wear "white stoles" (Bevington, 67).

39. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:66; Young, 1:107–8; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 176; translation from Tydeman, 108–9.

40. 1 Cor. 1:25.

Herod's foolishness was represented a second time during the long nocturnal office of matins on the feast of Epiphany. "When the eighth lesson is finished," the ordinal stipulates, "Herod with his chaplain comes out of the upper sacristy, and they are dressed in the poorest, skimpy chasubles. And he has a wooden spear in his hand, which with the greatest fury he hurls toward the choir and, with as great a fury, climbs up into the pulpit, and two scholars hold candles in front of him and with the same fury he begins the ninth lesson. And meanwhile his ministers, with great fury, go around the choir beating bishop, canons, and scholars with inflated bladders [*vesica inflata*] and also men and women standing in the church. And at some time or another they carry away Herod's spear which he hurled through the church. When the lesson is finished, Herod descends with his ministers and with the aforesaid fury again goes round the choir beating them as before."⁴¹

Again it was potentially a moment of terror, but this time it was rendered even more comic by the nature of the soldiers' weapons: inflated bladders. Not only did the action visibly emphasize the impotence of Herod's rage, but it also allowed the lay "men and women standing in the church" to enjoy the unusual sight of "bishop, canons, and scholars" being attacked with harmless but temporarily humbling bladders. This mild rite of inversion served, more importantly, as a comic representation of the ultimate ineptitude of evil.

Unlike previous Herod plays, the Padua *Representation of Herod* appears to have ended on a note of grace: "When the responsory [following the ninth lesson] is finished, a deacon dressed in a dalmatic goes up into the pulpit with Herod and his chaplain, and the chaplain carries a censer, with two scholars, with candles, in front. And meanwhile, the bishop begins the antiphon, 'In Bethlehem of Judea.' And afterwards the deacon says the gospel, namely "The genealogy of the Lord," and when it is finished the bishop begins the "Te Deum laudamus." And Herod carries the gospel book and the chaplain censers the bishop and canons with the censer, and they kiss the gospel book which Herod brings them."⁴²

In the Benediktbeuern *Christmas Play*, Herod was eaten by worms and carried off by devils. But in Padua he was subdued by the gospel, remaining in the church for the antiphon celebrating the birth of Christ in Bethlehem and standing in the pulpit alongside the deacon who read the gospel account of Christ's genealogy. Then, in an act of penitence, Herod carried the gospel

41. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:74–75; Young, 2:99; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 179; translation adapted from Tydeman, 106.

42. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:75; Young, 2:99–100; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 179; translation adapted from Tydeman, 106.

book to be kissed by the very bishop and canons whom he and his ministers had been attacking with bladders only minutes earlier. Not only was tyrannical evil made to look foolish, but it was also shown to be susceptible to grace and inclusion in the worship of God.

The play closed with a final act of theatrical mischief: a young “scholar,” positioned “above the altar of St Michael, sings the first verse of the hymn ‘Nuntium vobis’ [A message to you].” That done, “he shows a burning candle, representing the star, which he throws towards the choir.”⁴³ Tossing a lighted candle into the choir was a suitably playful ending to the night’s communal worship.

The Padua *Representation of Herod* was integrated more fully into the church’s liturgy than previous Herod plays. It rejoiced in the downfall of the proud and the exaltation of the humble. It celebrated merry grace. Though rooted in a different local tradition from the Feast of Fools, it thus more closely resembled the Feast of Fools than anything else we have yet encountered.

43. Cattin and Vildera, *Liber*, 2:75; Young, 2:100; Vecchi, *Uffici*, 179–180; translation adapted from Tydeman, 106. According to Durand, *Rationale* 6.108.11 (2:527), it was also customary to throw fire in church after the epistle at mass on the day of Pentecost: “Then fire is thrown from above [*ex alto ignis proicitur*], because the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in tongues of fire, and various kinds of flowers [are thrown] to mark the joy and the diversity of tongues and of virtues. Doves, too, are sent through the church to signify the sending of the Holy Spirit.”

CHAPTER 5

Tossing a Ball in a French Cathedral

As far as we know, John Beleth was the first author to mention the Feast of Fools by name. He was also the first to write about a liturgical ball game that was still popular in some French cathedrals nearly four hundred years later. Both notices are contained in his *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, composed between 1160 and 1164. Before we turn in chapter 6 to Beleth's announcement of the Feast of Fools, we can pause to enjoy the game.

In some churches during the Christmas season, Beleth wrote, "it is customary for archbishops and bishops to play with their subordinates in the cathedral close and even to indulge in a ball game." Such egalitarian December games were "in ancient times the custom among the pagans. . . . Although even large churches, such as that at Reims, retain this custom, yet it would seem more proper not to play."¹ William Durand described the same custom in his *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, written while he was bishop of Mende

1. Beleth, *Summa* 120 (2:223); translation adapted from Backman, 50–51. Mâle, *Gothic*, 180, finds an earlier reference to "the deacons playing ball in the cathedral on St. Stephen's day" in Honorius of Autun, *Gemmae animae*, in *PL* 172:541–738 (col. 646), but it is hard to see how Honorius's cryptic "In nocturnali officio de sancto Stephano palaestra imitatur, in qua pro corona certatur" can be understood to signify a ball game. Nonetheless, according to Mâle, Honorius "gives a symbolic meaning to the deacons' game. . . . It signifies the glorious contest (*palaestra*) of St. Stephen."

(1285–1295).² He added that the ball game was also observed at Easter and that it involved dance and song: “In some places on this day [Easter Sunday], in others on Christmas Day, prelates play with their clergy, either in the close [*in claustris*]³ or in the home of the bishop, even lowering themselves to a game with a ball, or to dances [*choreas*] and songs.” Like Beleth, Durand traced the games to the frequently invoked “December liberty” (*libertas decembrica*) of pagan times. He concluded, “It is laudable to abstain from such things.”⁴

A more positive early reference to the ball game is found in a document, described by a correspondent of Jean Lebeuf in 1727 as a “five-hundred-year-old manuscript,” from Vienne cathedral. The manuscript’s Easter Monday rubrics stipulate: “Before vespers, while the bells are being rung, the whole chapter should gather in the house of the archbishop; there meats are to be brought for them, and the archbishop’s servants are to put hippocras [*pigmentum*] on the table with the other things, and afterward wine. Afterward the archbishop should throw the ball.” A later hand, estimated by Lebeuf’s correspondent to be only “two hundred years old,” has added in the margin, “If the archbishop is absent, his deputy must provide the ball and throw it.” Accepting these dates, Lebeuf observes that the ball game “survived in Vienne for at least three centuries.”⁵

Nowhere is the ball game associated with the Feast of Fools: Beleth links it with the Christmas season in general, Durand with Christmas Day and Easter Sunday, and the Vienne document with Easter Monday.⁶ Nevertheless, a brief survey of the ball game will serve as our final preparatory step toward a detailed history of the Feast of Fools. Not only can the game seem as bizarre to the modern reader as many of the activities associated with the Feast of Fools, but also its history of scattered early disapproval, subsequent long popularity, and late suppression is a small—and therefore more accessible—mirror of the more disputed history of the Feast of Fools.

2. Durand was elected bishop of Mende in 1285 but only took up residence in 1291, holding the office until 1295. He identifies himself as “bishop of the Holy Church which is in Mende” (Durand, *Rationale*, Pr. 1 [1:3]; trans. Neale and Webb, [Durand, *Symbolism*], 2).

3. In Notre Dame and some other French cathedrals, *claustrum* or *cloître* (cloister), like the English “close,” designated the area adjoining the cathedral in which its clergy lived (Wright, *Music*, 27).

4. Durand, *Rationale* 6.86.9 (1:445). The phrase “*libertas decembrica*,” which both Beleth and Durand use, is adapted from Horace, *Satires* 2.7.4.

5. Leber, 20:319–20, reprinting an article by Jean Lebeuf originally published in *Mercure de France* (March 1727); Du Cange, s.v. *pelota* (6:253). For the use of *pigmentum* to designate hippocras, a cordial made of wine, sugar, and various spices, see Leber, 9:426.

6. Bourquelot, “Office,” 166, citing Beleth, wonders if the ball game followed the *conductus ad ludos* at the end of second vespers of the feast of the Circumcision in early-thirteenth-century Sens, but offers no further evidence.

The ball game in question was almost certainly a form of liturgical dance. We know that such a dance, called *pelota* or *jeu de la pelote* (ball game), was performed in the nave of Auxerre cathedral from at least 1396 until 1538.⁷ Early in the afternoon of Easter Sunday, the dean and as many as “a hundred” canons would gather at a paved stone labyrinth set into the floor at the west end of the nave.⁸ The newest member of the chapter carried a large leather ball. In 1412 the cathedral chapter ordered that the ball should be “smaller than usual, but too large to be grasped in one man’s hand, requiring two hands to stop it.”⁹ It was, perhaps, the size of a soccer ball. A manuscript account, written shortly after 1538, describes the dance: “The dean or his representative, who was dressed like all those present in an amice covering the head, used to receive the ball from a newly inducted canon. The dean began to sing antiphonally the appropriate Easter sequence, ‘Victimae paschali laudes’; then he took the ball with his left hand and danced the *tripudium* [dance] repeatedly in time to the music, while the others joined hands and danced the *chorea* [circle dance] around the labyrinth [*circa daedalum*]. While they danced, the dean would deliver the ball alternately to each and every one of the dancers, [who were] in the form of a garland [*serti in speciem*], and they would throw it back. There was sport, and the meter of the dance was set by the organ.”¹⁰

The dean appears to have danced within the labyrinth, making his way from the entrance to the center and back. The others danced in a circle, resembling a garland, around the outside of the labyrinth.¹¹ Perhaps the ball

7. The most complete account of the dance is found in Lebeuf, “Lettre” (reprinted in Leber, 9:391–401); for confirmation of Lebeuf’s authorship, see Lebeuf, *Lettres*, 1:420 n. 8; Leber, 20:319. Excerpts from key documents are printed in Du Cange, s.v. *pelota* (6:253). The discussion in Wright, *Maze*, 138–45, benefits from his use of Lebeuf, “Lettre”; additional documents published in Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:321–22; and archival sources confirming the letter’s accuracy. See also Fourrey, “Cathédrale”; Backman, 67–68; Doob, *Idea*, 123–27.

8. The first mention of the dance, in a 1396 ruling of the cathedral chapter, assigns it to Easter Monday, apparently following the earlier example of Vienne, but by 1471 at the latest it had moved to Easter Sunday, beginning “at an hour or two after midday” (Lebeuf, “Lettre,” 916–20; Leber, 9:395–98). Wright, *Maze*, 144, estimates the number of canons taking part at “a hundred.”

9. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:322, cites this regulation in its entirety; Du Cange, s.v. *pelota* (6:253), abbreviates; Lebeuf, “Lettre,” 916 (Leber, 9:395), summarizes; Wright, *Maze*, 321 n. 36, identifies its archival source.

10. Lebeuf, “Lettre,” 921–22 (Leber, 9:399), reproduced in Du Cange, s.v. *pelota* (6:253); translation adapted from Wright, *Maze*, 139, and Mehl, “Baseball,” 157.

11. Doob, *Idea*, 124, suggests that “either the dean or the canons may have traced the labyrinthine path, its turnings resembling the interlacings of a garland” (cf. Wright, *Maze*, 140). But McCullough, *Unending*, 79, sensibly comments, “The labyrinth would be extremely crowded with the chorus of clergy and the dean all maneuvering on the same narrow path. It makes more sense to have the dean dancing the pathway to the center while the rest of the clergy circle the perimeter.”

was thrown to and fro as the chant alternated between the dean and the other dancers. The Easter sequence, “Victimae paschali laudes,” was sung throughout the dance, inviting Christians to rejoice in Christ’s victory over death:

Victimae paschali laudes immolent christiani.	To the Paschal victim may Christians offer songs of praise.
Agnus redemit oves, Christus innocens patri reconciliavit peccatores.	The Lamb has redeemed the sheep, the innocent Christ has reconciled sinners to the Father.
Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando; dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus.	Death and life have clashed in a miraculous duel; the leader of life is dead yet reigns alive.
Dic nobis, Maria, quid vidisti in via? Sepulcrum Christi viventis et gloriam vidi resurgentis,	Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way? I saw the tomb of the living Christ and the glory of his rising,
Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes. Surrexit Christus spes mea praecedet suos in Galileam.	The angelic witnesses, the shroud and his clothes. Christ, my hope, has risen, he will go before his own into Galilee.
Credendum est magis soli Mariae veraci quam Judaeorum turbae fallaci.	More trust should be placed in truthful Mary than in the deceitful crowd of Jews.
Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere; tu nobis victor rex miserere.	We know that Christ has truly risen from the dead; victorious king, have mercy on us. ¹²

12. Wright, *Maze*, 143–44, prints the Latin text and music used in the cathedral of Auxerre, together with a translation; Young, 1:273, prints an identical Latin text, “current during the Middle Ages.” My translation is adapted from http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Victimae_Paschali_Laudes.

The manuscript account continues: “When the prose and dancing were finished, after the sung dance, the chorus hastened to a meal. There all the canons of the chapter, the chaplains and officers, as well as certain of the more noble citizens of the town sat on benches in a circle. To each of them were served sweets, fruit tarts, and game of all sorts: boar, venison, and rabbit; white and red wines were offered in moderation, each cup being filled no more than one or two times. Meanwhile, a homily appropriate to the festival was read from the bishop’s seat or the pulpit. Thereafter, following the ringing of the larger bells from the towers, they proceeded to vespers.”¹³

Erwin Mehl reckons everything but the song “heathen enough.” Penelope Doob judges the whole to be a “markedly Christian performance.”¹⁴ Doob is the more persuasive. “The general significance of the Auxerre *ludus*,” she concludes, “is clear from its date of performance and sung text.”¹⁵ On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate Christ’s resurrection. “Victimae paschali laudes” invites them to do so with joy. The Auxerre clergy would have known this chant by heart, singing it at matins and vespers on Easter Sunday and at vespers on the four ferial days following Easter, as well as several times during the performance of the dance itself.¹⁶

Like all medieval church labyrinths, the Auxerre labyrinth was unicursal, offering a single winding path to and from its center. Such labyrinths, giving Christian meaning to the classical myth of Theseus’s journey into the Cretan labyrinth to defeat the Minotaur,¹⁷ were understood to represent Christ’s redemptive death, harrowing of hell, and resurrection, as well as his guidance of the Christian soul through the twists and turns of life on earth.¹⁸ On Easter Sunday afternoon, according to Doob, the dean’s dance into the heart of the labyrinth represented Christ’s descent into and emergence from death and hell, described in the song’s third stanza as a “miraculous duel” between

The sixth stanza, because of its hostility to the Jews, was removed by the Council of Trent, which also changed “suos” (fifth stanza) to “vos” and added “Amen. Alleluia” at the end. For a recording of the modified version, see *Chant II*, track 3. Authorship of the sequence is generally attributed to Wipo of Burgundy (ca. 995–ca. 1048).

13. Lebeuf, “Lettre,” 922 (Leber, 9:399); translation adapted from Wright, *Maze*, 139–40.

14. Mehl, “Baseball,” 157; Doob, *Idea*, 124.

15. Doob, *Idea*, 125.

16. Wright, *Maze*, 144. Since its fourth and fifth stanzas take the form of a dialogue between Christ’s disciples and Mary Magdalene after she has seen the risen Christ near the empty tomb (John 20:10–18), “Victimae paschali” was frequently adapted for use in the Easter morning liturgical representation of the visit of the three Marys to the tomb (Young, 1:273–98; Wright, *Music*, 112–14).

17. For the classical versions of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, see Plutarch, *Theseus* 15–22 (*Lives*, 1:28–49); Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.122–82; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.14–33 (*Works*, 1:506–9). For summaries of the myth, see Doob, *Idea*, 11–13; Wright, *Maze*, 7–8. For the popularity of Christian allegorizations of classical literature in general and of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in particular, see Mâle, *Gothic*, 339–40.

18. Wright, *Maze*, 73–100.

“death and life.” The chorus’s dance around the outside of the labyrinth, recalling the dance of the blessed in heaven, was “an image of restored cosmic harmony.”¹⁹

The ball, tossed to and fro during the dance, represented—in Doob’s reading—one or both of the balls used by Theseus to defeat the Minotaur. In Christian versions of the myth, the ball of pitch, which Theseus thrust down the Minotaur’s gullet to stop the monster from biting, signified Christ’s humanity, while the ball of thread, which Theseus used to find his way out of the maze, signified Christ’s divinity.²⁰ Other scholars have preferred to find in the ball a reference to the joyful rising of the sun on Easter morning.²¹ Doob dismisses this reading as “folklore-inspired,”²² but the widespread folk belief that the rising sun danced on Easter morning was likely dependent on the much older biblical tradition that saw the rising sun as a symbol of Christ himself.²³

Only in the late fifteenth century did the Auxerre Easter dance encounter any significant resistance. In 1471 the newest canon, fresh from Paris, failed to produce the required ball on Easter Sunday. A “great altercation” ensued. Governors, magistrates, and citizens of Auxerre, who had gathered in the nave to watch the dance, looked on. The dean and chapter retired for private discussion. The recalcitrant canon protested that Durand had prohibited the ball game. The dean and chapter insisted. The canon submitted. The previous year’s ball was produced. In the presence of the lay audience still crowding the nave, the canon confessed that he had been informed of the pertinent statutes and would henceforth willingly obey them. He presented the ball to the dean as required, and the dance began. The customary meal in the chapter room followed.²⁴

Sixty years later, in 1531, another canon refused to take part. This time, instead of disrupting events on Easter Sunday, he took his case to a local court. Meeting in nearby St.-Bris-le-Vineux “because of an outbreak of plague,”²⁵ the court ruled in his favor: the chapter was ordered to substitute for the dance a sung performance, in honor of the Virgin, of the antiphon “Salve

19. Doob, *Idea*, 125; cf. Wright, *Maze*, 142. For the *chorea* as an image of cosmic harmony in both Platonic and Christian thought, see Backman, 14–21; Wright, *Maze*, 132–38; Morrison, “Dance.”

20. Doob, *Idea*, 126. For the role of the balls in Christian versions of the myth, see Pierre Bersuire, *Ovidius moralizatus* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS D.66), quoted in Haubrichs, “Error,” 135–36 (trans. Wright, *Maze*, 76–77); De Boer, *Ovide moralisé en prose*, 226–27.

21. Backman, 71–73; Kern, *Labyrinth*, 147; Chambers, 1:128–29.

22. Doob, *Idea*, 127; cf. Wright, *Maze*, 142.

23. Isa. 9:2, 60:1–3, Mal. 4:2, Luke 1:78–79, Eph. 5:14.

24. For the original documents, see Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:322. For summaries of the events, see Lebeuf, “Lettre,” 916–18 (Leber, 9:395–96); Wright, *Maze*, 141.

25. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:321.

regina" (Hail, Queen).²⁶ The chapter appealed to the Parlement of Paris, the kingdom's highest court of law. Hearing of the case, Francis I observed unofficially that "the ceremony was good and praiseworthy and shouldn't be changed or abolished without good reason, but if any abuses or deformities had crept in, these should be removed so that it might be maintained honestly."²⁷ Despite this informal royal endorsement, the parlement passed an act banning the game in 1538.²⁸

Cathedrals in Sens, Chartres, Reims, and Amiens also had pavement labyrinths in which it has been claimed—with varying degrees of credibility—that ball games were danced.²⁹ The evidence from Sens may be the strongest. In 1443 the Sens chapter reportedly decreed that "in keeping with tradition, the game on the labyrinth could be played at will during the divine office of Easter Sunday."³⁰ The game was later played in "the courtyard of the cloister," an outdoor square to the south of the building, where the clerics, including "the archbishop, if he be present," danced "a chorea" while singing "hymns of the resurrection of Christ and other Latin texts in praise of God." But in 1517, "because a large number of people of both sexes ran to join the chorea," the chapter abolished the dance, replacing it thereafter with a more orderly procession.³¹ Although no ball is mentioned in these documents, it is reasonable to suppose that the Sens "game" involved "the tossing of the *pelota*."³²

26. "Salve regina" is "one of the four large-scale Marian antiphons" (Ingram and Falconer, "Salve"); for Latin text and translation, see Harper, *Forms*, 274–275; for recordings, see *Chant II*, track 19; *Magnificat*, track 13.

27. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:322; translation from Wright, *Maze*, 141.

28. Lebeuf, "Lettre," 918–21 (Leber, 9:396–98); Du Cange, s.v. *pelota* (6:253). Fourrey, *Cathédrale*, 160–62, gives a helpful summary of events leading up to the suppression of the ball game.

29. Wright, *Maze*, 145–51, finds firm evidence of an Easter labyrinth dance in Sens and possible evidence of such a dance in Chartres. Beleth, *Summa* 120 (2:223), affirms that the ball game was played in Reims during the Christmas season, but he wrote before the present cathedral and its labyrinth were built. Lebeuf, "Lettre," 913–14 (Leber, 9:393), mistakenly assumes that Beleth was writing from Amiens rather than Paris, leading Grenier, 353, 385–86, to combine the early Christmas game and the Auxerre Easter game into a single version supposedly performed in the labyrinth in Amiens.

30. Krönig, "Osterfreude," 115, claims to be paraphrasing a document from Sens cathedral that he found in the Archives départementales de l'Yonne. Wright, *Maze*, 308 n. 57, remarks, "The wording of this notice and the nature of the document ring true, but I was not able to locate it during a search of the Archives départementales de l'Yonne in July 1996." There is also confusion about the date. Krönig gives the date of the chapter decree as "the Wednesday before Easter, 14 April 1443." Wright, *Maze*, 145, transcribes this as 1413. Neither can be correct: according to the Julian calendar then in use, the Wednesday before Easter fell on 19 April 1413 and on 17 April 1443; the closest years in which the Wednesday before Easter fell on 14 April were 1400 and 1462.

31. Villetard, "Danse," 113–14; translation adapted from Wright, *Maze*, 146; cf. Sahlin, *Étude*, 30–32.

32. Wright, *Maze*, 145

Scholars generally assume that Beleth's and Durand's Christmas ball game was an earlier and simpler version of the Auxerre Easter ball game.³³ Since the biblical passages that compare Christ to the rising sun have in mind primarily his incarnation rather than his resurrection, it may be that the Christmas game was the prototype, only later adapted for performance at Easter. The meaning of the Christmas game would have been found in the story of Christ's nativity, and the dancing would have been accompanied by the chanting of a Christmas sequence.

Even in Durand's day, though, neither the Christmas nor the Easter ball game was likely to have been danced on a paved labyrinth.³⁴ According to Durand, the ball game was played "either in the cathedral close or," as in Vienne, "in the home of the bishop."³⁵ The early dance may have been a simple circle dance, or, despite the absence of a paved labyrinth underfoot, it may have been a labyrinth dance. Dancers are quite capable of tracing the path of a labyrinth on unmarked ground. After his victory over the Minotaur, Theseus is said to have joined his companions in a dance, "consisting of certain rhythmic involutions and evolutions," in "imitation of the circling passages in the Labyrinth."³⁶ Such outdoor labyrinth dances on unmarked ground are still performed in the Mediterranean region.³⁷ If the Christmas game described by Beleth and Durand involved a labyrinth dance, it did not need a paved labyrinth for its execution. A group of clergy and a ball were enough.

33. When, in 1471, the dissenting Auxerre canon invoked Durand—who was largely dependent on Beleth—as his authority for refusing to play the cathedral ball game, he was making the same assumption. Oddly, Wright, *Maze*, 141, quotes the Auxerre canon, but later (336 n. 11) assumes that Beleth was describing a "game of tennis." Gillmeister, *Tennis*, 2, makes the same mistake.

34. The labyrinth in Chartres dates from "about 1215" (Wright, *Maze*, 44). "The maze at Sens may . . . predate the one at Chartres by some fifty years," but only if it was in place before the south tower of the cathedral imploded in 1286, destroying much of the southwest corner and possibly the floor at the west end. Otherwise, the maze was "inserted as part of the repaving of the church" (ibid., 308 n. 58). The Amiens labyrinth dates from 1288 (ibid., 60). The Reims labyrinth dates from about 1290 (ibid., 50). Of these, only the Chartres labyrinth survives; the present Amiens labyrinth is a late-nineteenth-century replica.

35. Durand, *Rationale* 6.86.9 (2:445).

36. Plutarch, *Thesius* 21 (*Lives* 1:44–45); Duchemin, "Thème."

37. In the village of Pupnat, on the island of Korčula (Croatia), in July 2003, my wife and I watched a performance of the village's traditional sword dance, shared an outdoor meal and wine with the dancers and their audience, and afterwards joined an impromptu dance in which the festive "king" of the village led a line of a hundred or so villagers, male and female, each holding hands with the dancer before and behind, in a series of movements that traced the twists and turns of a circular labyrinth on the sloping ground beneath our feet. For a description of an almost identical dance from southern France in 1838, see "Danse candiote"; Wright, *Maze*, 156–57. For a similar Basque "snail dance," see Hérèle, *Études*, 2:52–55; Kern, *Labyrinth*, 50.

A few observations pertinent to both the clerical ball game and the Feast of Fools will bring my survey of the ball game to a close. First, medieval notions of what was proper to corporate cathedral worship differed greatly from our own: until very recently, we were far more restrained. Even now, to my knowledge, no one has proposed tossing a soccer ball around a cathedral nave as an act of worship. Historians of the Feast of Fools go astray when they measure medieval reports against modern norms of propriety.³⁸ Second, assumptions of pagan origins, whether voiced by medieval clerics or modern historians, are frequently little more than subjective judgments. More careful scholarly inquiry or a little charitable reflection may suggest perfectly good Christian interpretations of liturgical games enjoyed by medieval Christians, even of those that at first seem very strange to the modern critic. Third, the pattern of early dismissal of the ball game as improper and therefore pagan, followed by its incorporation into the formal liturgy of the church and a long period (at least in Auxerre) of staunch support by the cathedral chapter, closing with suppression of the game in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, corresponds very closely to the pattern we will find in the history of the Feast of Fools. In both cases, as we shall see, suppression was due more to external historical factors than to any inherent impropriety in the festivities themselves.

38. Bourquelot, "Office," 90–91, made the same point in 1854.

CHAPTER 6

The Feast of the Subdeacons

Charles Haskins has famously written of “the Renaissance of the twelfth century.” The era, he writes “was in many respects an age of fresh and vigorous life. The epoch of the Crusades, of the rise of towns, and of the earliest bureaucratic states of the West, it saw the culmination of Romanesque art and the beginnings of Gothic; the emergence of the vernacular literatures; the revival of the Latin classics and of Latin poetry and Roman law; the recovery of Greek science, with its Arabic additions, and much of Greek philosophy; and the origin of the first European universities. The twelfth century left its signature on higher education, on the scholastic philosophy, on European systems of law, on architecture and sculpture, on the liturgical drama, on Latin and vernacular poetry.”¹

These signs of “fresh and vigorous life” flourished most luxuriantly in northern France. Paris, the capital city, enjoyed a booming economy, an expanding population, and a burst of ecclesiastical and liturgical innovation. “Not much more than a dot on the map even in 1100, by the end of the twelfth century it was the largest city in Christendom and a pre-eminent cultural and intellectual center.”² The abbey church of St.-Denis, begun

1. Haskins, *Renaissance*, viii. Benson, Constable, and Lanham, *Renaissance*, provides “a fresh survey of the terrain which Haskins charted” (xvi).

2. Jones, *Paris*, 32.

before 1140 about six miles north of Paris, is generally regarded as the first triumph of Gothic church architecture. The cathedral of Notre-Dame, in the heart of the city, was begun around 1160 to replace the older cathedral of Saint Stephen. The chapter's decision to grant licenses to teach theology and canon law in the vicinity of the new cathedral drew students and young clerics from all over Europe to what quickly became the continent's preeminent university. By the end of the century, too, the choir of Notre-Dame was renowned for its increasingly sophisticated repertoire of polyphonic chant.

During the same period, to name only those church buildings that play a part in the story of the Feast of Fools, work began on new cathedrals in Sens, Noyon, Senlis, Laon, Châlons-en-Champagne, and Chartres, the collegiate church of St.-Quentin, and the abbey of Pontigny. Several other cathedrals that play an important part in our story, such as those of Beauvais, Auxerre, and Troyes, were begun early in the thirteenth century. It was not in a context of social disorder and clerical decay but in one of economic prosperity, intellectual ferment, and architectural and liturgical innovation that the Feast of Fools arose.

The first surviving notice of the Feast of Fools places it firmly within the seasonal liturgy of the church. Writing in Paris sometime between 1160 and 1164, John Beleth observed, "The feast of the subdeacons, which we call 'of fools' [*quod vocamus stultorum*], by some is executed on the Circumcision, but by others on Epiphany or its octave." The *festum stultorum*, he explained, was one of "four *tripudia* [festivities]"³ honoring members of the clergy and the choir during the week following the Nativity: the feast of Saint Stephen (26 December) honored the deacons, the feast of Saint John the Apostle (27 December) honored the priests, the feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December) honored the choirboys, and the feast of the Circumcision (1 January)—or sometimes the feast of Epiphany (6 January) or the octave of Epiphany (13 January)—honored the subdeacons.⁴

Beleth remarked that the "office" (*ordo*) for the feast of the subdeacons, unlike those of the other three *tripudia*, remained "unspecified" (*incertus*). The uncertainty of the office was due to the subdeacons' own unsettled status. Not until 1207 was it finally determined by papal decree that subdeacons

3. "Festivities" is the simplest meaning of *tripudia* in this context (Stelten, *Dictionary*, 274). *OED*, *OLD*, Brainard, "Dance," and Airt, *Festoffizium*, 1:42–43, all properly include an element of dance in the word's range of meanings, but this may be misleading here. Thiers, *Traité* (1686), 438, unduly influenced subsequent exegesis of this passage when he translated Beleth's "quatuor tripudia" as "quatre danses."

4. Beleth, *Summa* 72 (2:133–34); translation adapted from Fassler, 74; for the date of composition, see Beleth, *Summa*, 1.30.

were the most junior of the major clerical orders rather than the most senior of the minor clerical orders.⁵ In the meantime, according to Beleth, it was not entirely clear on which day their feast should be held or what form it should take. The feast of the subdeacons, he wrote, “does not have a certain day and is celebrated with a mixed office [*officio celebretur confuso*].”⁶ By this he meant that elements of the subdeacons’ feast were still unspecified. Although the feast would always fall on one of the three days Beleth indicated, its precise date might vary from one city to another. An *officio confuso* was not chaotic but mixed: the subdeacons, for the time being, had to piece together the liturgy for their special day from a combination of other approved offices. Beleth gives no grounds for thinking that the early Feast of Fools was anything but an orderly festive liturgy.

Nor does the name by which the feast was known in Paris: *festum stultorum*. Christian biblical tradition acknowledges two kinds of fool. The first denies God’s existence and authority. Of such the psalmist wrote, “The fool [*stultus*] says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.”⁷ Such, too, are the fools of biblical wisdom literature, who “despise wisdom and instruction”⁸ and “whose number is infinite.”⁹

The second kind of biblical fool is chosen by God because of his or her lack of worldly status. Saint Paul, toward the end of a long passage favorably comparing “the foolishness of God” (*stultum Dei*) to “the wisdom of the world,” declared, “God chose what is foolish in the world [*quae stulta sunt mundi*] to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.”¹⁰ A little later he compared the “foolishness” of Christ’s apostles to the “wisdom” of those of his readers who thought too highly of themselves: “We are fools for the sake of Christ [*stulti propter Christum*] but you are ‘wise in Christ.’ We are weak, but you are ‘strong.’ You are held in ‘honor,’ but we in disrepute.”¹¹ The Feast of Fools honored the fool of lowly status.

5. Reynolds, “Subdiaconate”; Harper, *Forms*, 24, 316.

6. Beleth, *Summa* 72 (2:133–34).

7. Ps. 14:1 (Vulgate: Ps. 13:1).

8. Prov. 1:7.

9. Eccles. 1:15. Modern English translations substitute “what is lacking” for the Vulgate’s “stultorum.”

10. 1 Cor. 1:27–30.

11. 1 Cor. 4:10.

Ordinarily observed at the feast of the Circumcision, the Feast of Fools celebrated Christ's "foolish" willingness to humble himself by taking human flesh and so to suffer the physical pain of circumcision and crucifixion. During the feast, the choir often lingered over Mary's lines from the Magnificat, "He has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble." The subdeacons, as the church's junior clergy, were raised to higher rank for the duration of the feast, just as the choirboys were at the feast of the Innocents. The bishop of fools and the bishop of innocents were youthful leaders of church festivities, but they also represented Christ. Moreover, like Christ, they and their followers represented the "humble" exalted by God. Historians have tended to miss this point. The Feast of Fools took its name not from fools who rebel against God but from fools who, like Christ, are loved by God for their lowly status. We should not let the name mislead us into thinking that the Feast of Fools was an excuse for subversive buffoonery.

The same presumption of orderliness may be extended to the early Feast of Fools in Châlons-en-Champagne (formerly Châlons-sur-Marne), where a few more details of the liturgy have survived. An ordinal from Châlons, dating from 1151, lists additions to the divine office "on the feast of the octave of [the birth of] the Lord," that is, the feast of the Circumcision, when "the feast of the subdeacons is celebrated."¹² Several additions accord liturgical privileges to the subdeacons. At first vespers, according to the ordinal, two subdeacons "direct the choir." Two other subdeacons, in silk copes, chant the responsory "Stirps Iesse" (The stem of Jesse). At matins, four subdeacons chant the invitatory psalm. Subdeacons read the lessons. Two pairs of subdeacons chant the responsory. Another recites the *capitulum* (short scripture reading). At mass, two subdeacons in silk copes read the epistle from the *pulpitum*, the gallery on top of the rood screen.¹³ Pairs of subdeacons alternate the singing of the graduals following the lessons. Normal privileges of ecclesiastical rank are restored at the close of second vespers: the succentor begins the antiphon "O quanta est exultatio" (O how great is the rejoicing), the choir sings the Magnificat, two archdeacons cense the altar, and two deacons close the office by chanting the Benedicamus.¹⁴ The early feast of the

12. Prévot, "Festum," 234–35. The ordinal, dated 1151 by Ravaux, "Cathédrales," 42–43, survives in an eighteenth-century copy (Châlons-en-Champagne, Archives Départementales de la Marne MS H 211 fol. 57–69).

13. For the location of the *pulpitum*, from which "on Sundays and feast-days, the Epistle, Gradual, Alleluia, and Gospel of the Mass were sung" in some churches, see Harper, *Forms*, 37–38, 312.

14. "The verse 'Benedicamus Domino' and the response 'Deo Gratias'... were once a normal formula for bringing any religious office to a close" (Young, 1:67 n. 1).

subdeacons in Châlons, like the *festum stultorum* in Beleth's Paris, was firmly rooted in an orderly liturgy.

By about 1169 an outdoor procession and a joyous choral dance had been added to the subdeacons' feast in Châlons, which was known by then as the Feast of the Staff (*festum baculi*). The name was derived from the staff of office belonging to the precentor, or cantor. In Châlons, a second staff belonged to the "master of the staff" (*magister baculi*), the canon who took charge of the subdiaconal "fools" (*fatui*) and assumed some of the cantor's authority during the annual subdeacons' feast. A cathedral inventory of 1410 mentions "a staff [*baculus*] of painted wood, [topped] with an ivory apple, which is called the staff of the Feast of Fools."¹⁵

Details of the early Feast of the Staff in Châlons are scattered through a series of letters composed in his mid-twenties by Guy of Bazoches (1145–1203), at various points in his career a subdeacon, a canon, and the cantor of the cathedral of Châlons. Guy came from the noble family of Bazoches, which held the office of vidame in Châlons.¹⁶ As a child, he was entrusted to the care of his uncle Haimon of Bazoches, who served as bishop of Châlons from 1152 until his premature death in 1153. Guy was educated in the cathedral school but later spent time as a student in Paris. It was from Paris that he wrote his first letter mentioning the Feast of the Staff. Writing to a friend in Châlons, Guy recalled "the joy anticipated by the clergy and people of your city at the beginning of the year on the occasion of the *festum baculi*." He appended a poem he had written, which welcomed the New Year as a time of "divinely permitted gladness," when the whole church praises "the giver of joy," and celebrated the public acclaim accorded by clergy and people alike to the "bearer of the staff."¹⁷

But Guy's enthusiasm for the feast was to land him in trouble. In a later letter he wrote of the "bitter sorrow" in which he had been left, as it were in a shipwreck, by the "deceitful love of worldly [*secularis*] glory and wanton festive [*bacularis*] excess" into which he had been drawn by "the pressure of youthful rejoicing."¹⁸ The problem appears to have been fiscal irresponsibility

15. Hurault, *Cathédrale*, cited with no page reference in Prévot, "Festum," 216. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Hurault's book. The role of the *magister baculi* is described in two related ordinals from Châlons cathedral, dating from between 1251 and 1264, details of which are transcribed and discussed in Prévot, "Festum," 209–19, 229–34.

16. Benton, "Court," 572; for more on Guy's life, see Klein, "Editing," 27–28; Putter, "Knights," 258–62. The vidame was "the layman who enjoyed extensive rights in exchange for serving as the overseer and protector of the bishop and his domain" (Lagueux, "Glossing," 434.)

17. Adolfsson, *Liber* 5.38–40, vv. 1, 7 (18–19). For references to the *festum baculi* in Guy's letters, see also Prévot, "Festum," 219–21.

18. Adolfsson, *Liber* 18.11–13 (64).

rather than any more riotous form of excess. Given responsibility, as a young canon, for some aspect of the feast, he seems to have spent too lavishly, incurring “intolerable expenses” and running through “infinite sums of money.”¹⁹ His profligate spending drew intense criticism: in another letter, “to his friends and companions in Châlons,” he compared his detractors to “scorpions” and “biting dogs.” The feast, he complained, had turned out to be “a poison cup masked with honey.”²⁰

Under the circumstances, he had to leave the city. Louis Demaison suggests that Guy left Châlons early in 1171 at the age of twenty-five, spent his exile at a château in the Ardennes belonging to one of his uncles, and returned to his place in the cathedral chapter about eighteen months later.²¹ Officially, he seems to have been on study leave. In his charming “Poem on the Feast of the Staff,” written in a much happier mood and appended to yet another letter “to his brothers and companions in Châlons,” Guy insisted that he would again be at the feast were it not for his “studies.” The poem begins:

Adest dies	The day we long for,
optata, socii.	friends, is here.
Quidquid agant	Whatever others
et velint alii,	do or want,
nos choream	we dance the choral
ducamus gaudii.	dance with joy.
(<i>Refrain</i>) Pro baculo	Before the staff the
exsultet hodie	clergy and
clerus cum populo.	the people leap for
	joy today.

Six lighthearted stanzas follow, each ending with the same refrain. The final stanza apologizes for Guy’s absence:

Cantilenam	To his beloved
dilectis sociis	friends, Guy of
Guido mittit	Bazoches sends hence a
hanc de Basociis,	melody;
interesse	he’d be among you
promptus his gaudiis,	in this joy,

19. Ibid. 19.15 (69).

20. Ibid. 23.9–27 (89).

21. Demaison, *Vie*, 16–17, cited in Prévot, “Festum,” 221. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Demaison’s book.

nisi procul	were he not absent
esset in studiis.	studying.
(Refrain) Pro baculo	Before the staff the
exsultet hodie	clergy and
clerus cum populo. ²²	the people leap for
	joy today.

Guy's letters and poems allow us to draw at least three conclusions about the early Feast of the Staff in Châlons. First, the *festum baculi* appears to have been a comparatively recent innovation in Châlons. The 1151 ordinal makes no mention of a *magister baculi*, processions, or any other festivities outside the church. The Châlons Feast of the Staff, as far as we can tell, began sometime between 1151 and the time of Guy's letters and poems (ca. 1169–1172), at about the same time Beleth first mentioned the *festum stultorum* in Paris.

Second, the *festum baculi* was an occasion for widespread communal rejoicing, involving both clergy and laity. We know from later accounts that the *magister baculi* twice during the feast led the subdeacons in procession through the city streets.²³ At least one such procession seems to have taken place in Guy's day, providing the occasion for clergy and people to acclaim the bearer of the staff and, during a halt in the procession, to join hands and "leap for joy" in a sung dance (*chorea*) "before the staff."

Third, as long as expenses were kept within reasonable bounds, the Feast of the Staff seems to have encountered no opposition. Guy may have spent too freely, but there is no reason to believe that he was lavishing chapter funds on anything but an approved liturgical feast day.

Another possible strand of early evidence for the Feast of Fools is a group of late-twelfth-century poems that some scholars believe "can be understood as texts to be recited at the Feast of Fools."²⁴ The best known are by Walter of Châtillon (fl. 1170–1180). Karl Strecker, who edited eighteen "moral and satirical" poems attributed to Walter, linked four to "the feast of the staff." But the poet's allusions to the feast are ambiguous at best. In one he identifies "staff-bearers' feasts" (*feſta bacularia*) by name, only to deny the least desire to take part in them: "Festis bacularibus interesse minumus / volo."²⁵ In another he mentions *baculi* repeatedly, but the staffs in question belong to biblical figures.²⁶ He begins a third poem "A la feste sui venuz" (I have come to the

22. Raby, *Oxford*, 259–61; Adolfsson, *Liber* 22 (88).

23. Prévot, "Festum," 216, 218, 230, 233.

24. Schmidt, "Quotation," 46.

25. Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch* 4.3 (63).

26. Ibid., 12.1–18 (116–20). The staffs belong to Moses (Exod. 14:16, Num. 21:8), Jacob (Gen. 32:10), Elisha (2 Kings 4:29), and Judah (Gen. 38:18).

feast) before switching to Latin to excoriate the higher clergy. He exempts only the “staff bearer” (*baculifer*), whose generosity, he says, pleases God.²⁷ In a fourth poem, addressed to the people of Besançon (*Crisopolis*), Walter compares Christ to a golden rose. Because the “pope of fools” in Besançon later carried a golden rose,²⁸ Strecker suggests that the poem may have been linked to the city’s Feast of Fools.²⁹

Hans Spanke and Paul Gerhardt Schmidt, in separate essays, add more of Walter’s poems to those supposedly having their roots in the Feast of the Staff,³⁰ although both exclude the poem of the golden rose.³¹ Many of those they do link to the feast contain scathing and sometimes obscene attacks on the corruption of the higher clergy. This material strikes both scholars as suitable for recitation at the Feast of Fools. But it does so only because they have embraced the prevailing myth of a disorderly feast, in which “hierarchical order was broken down and abolished by masked antics, colourful pageants, boisterous dances, and theatrical performances.” They assume, too, that “it was the custom to attack the higher bearers of ecclesiastical office in mocking songs.”³² Neither Belet nor Guy of Bazoches (nor any other contemporary) bears witness to such a feast. Moreover, no external documentary evidence connects either Walter of Châtillon or his poems to the Feast of Fools. The two poems that mention the “*festa bacularia*” and a generous “*baculifer*” may attest to the Feast of the Staff in the late twelfth century, but I see no reason to think that Walter’s poems tell us anything about what actually happened at the feast.

More plausible is Bernhard Bischoff’s suggestion that four anonymous poems from a goliardic manuscript now in the Vatican Library may be traced to the feast of the Innocents in Chartres during the bishopric of William of Champagne (1165–1176). One poem celebrates the parts played by “Gauchelinus” and “Reginaudus” in the festivities. Gauchelinus’s duties resemble those of the *magister baculi* in Châlons: he serves as “judge” over the “beardless” youths, determining “what is proper in December.” Reginaudus is the boy bishop: he is called “our lord [*dominus*]” and commended as one

27. Ibid., 13.1–5 (123–24).

28. Gauthier, “Fête,” 198; Castan, “Forum,” 15; see also chapter 11.

29. Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch* 14 (127–32). Hood, “Golden,” argues the case at greater length.

30. Spanke, “Gedichten,” 212–17, with varying degrees of confidence, suggests Walter of Chatillon, *Lieder* 9, 26 (13–15, 44–45), and Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch* 1, 4–13 (1–17, 61–127). Schmidt, “Quotation,” 46–48, proposes Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch* 1, 4–6, 7a–8, 12–13.

31. Spanke, “Gedichten,” 217, insists the poem “has nothing to do with the Feast of Fools.”

32. Schmidt, “Quotation,” 44; cf. Spanke, “Gedichten,” 204–6.

of the best of the “young people.”³³ A second poem identifies its recipient as “a boy of good character,” living in Chartres (*Carnotensis*), whose duty is to “carry the staff.” The boy’s “uncle” serves as an exemplary model. Bischoff understands the youth to be Reginaudus, better known as Reginald of Bar or Renaud de Mouçon, nephew of William of Champagne, and later bishop of Chartres in his own right (1182–1217). The poem also briefly praises Gauchelinus, about whom Bischoff was unable to discover anything further.³⁴ Celebrating the election of the bishop’s nephew as boy bishop, the two poems offer no hint of avuncular disapproval.

Schmidt supposes that the poems “were recited . . . at the Feast of Fools.”³⁵ Like Guy of Bazoche’s “Poem on the Feast of the Staff,” however, the poems seem intended for private reading among friends rather than for public recitation. It is possible that they were read aloud at a festive dinner, but unlikely that they were declaimed inside the cathedral during the divine office. Two other poems from the Vatican manuscript are more devotional in character. Recalling the martyred Innocents and Rachel’s grief, they would not have been out of place in the liturgy of the feast of Innocents. Neither poem, however, identifies Chartres as its setting.³⁶ More important, none of these poems has anything to do with the Feast of Fools.

33. Bischoff, “Vagantenlieder,” 77–80.

34. *Ibid.*, 78, 83–85, 88.

35. Schmidt, “Quotation,” 49; cf. Bischoff, “Vagantenlieder,” 79.

36. Bischoff, “Vagantenlieder,” 86–87. The first direct documentation of a feast of Innocents in Chartres appears in 1313 (Clerval, *Ancienne*, 189).

CHAPTER 7

The Feast of the Ass

The story of the early Feast of Fools in Beauvais is a tangled one, confused rather than clarified by centuries of scholarly retelling. Amid the wealth of tantalizing details ascribed to the feast in twelfth-century Beauvais, its rootedness in the liturgy is easily overlooked. Captivated instead by rumors of impropriety, historians have fabricated lively narratives of clerical disorder. But the testimony on which these stories depend is second- or third-hand, surviving only in seventeenth-century accounts of earlier manuscripts now lost or destroyed.

Careful local history is nowhere more vital to the larger history of the Feast of Fools than in Beauvais. Dubious tales of the early Feast of Fools there have disproportionately shaped preconceptions about the feast elsewhere and at other times. Distortions in local history have become the stuff of grand narratives. It is thus crucial to separate what we know from what we think we know about the early Feast of Fools in Beauvais.

In 1635 Pierre Louvet published a brief description of the divine office and mass during the week after Christmas “in the time of M. Henri de France, bishop of Beauvais” from 1149 to 1162.¹ “On the day of the Circumcision,”

1. Louvet, *Histoire*, 2:299–302; for a partial translation of Louvet’s description, see Greene, “Song,” 538–39.

Louvet wrote, “the divine service was conducted with greater solemnity and with greater joy than on any other day of the year.” During matins, nineteen polyphonic proses were sung,² “among them one beginning with the words ‘Kalendas ianuarias solemne Christe facias.’” Set to a stately melody, “Kalendas ianuarias” sees the joys of the New Year as an anticipation of the eschatological marriage supper of the exalted Christ. It begins:

Kalendas ianuarias	O Christ, may you sanctify
sollempnes, Christe, facias	the Kalends of January
et nos ad tuas nuptias	and welcome us who are called
vocatos, rex, suscipias. ³	to your wedding feast, O King.

During mass, three more proses were sung, and several of the set pieces (the Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Epistle, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) were “chanted with paraphrase,” that is, with alternating lines of traditional text and interpolated gloss. Prayers (or, more accurately, *laudes*)⁴ were offered “not only for the pope and for the bishop in charge of the diocese, but also for the king, the queen, and for the Christian army.” Louvet named, as recipients of the *laudes*, Bishop Henry of France, Pope Alexander III (1159–1181), King Louis VII (1137–1180), and his queen, Adèle of Champagne, whom Louis married in 1160. Louvet’s source is therefore believed to be a manuscript, now lost, from the period between the royal wedding in 1160 and the close of Henry’s episcopacy in 1162.⁵

Thus far, Louvet’s account confirms what we know from Belet and Guy of Bazoches: in the third quarter of the twelfth century, in a few cities of northern France, the feast of the Circumcision was being celebrated with an increasingly elaborate liturgy. But in Beauvais a further liturgical innovation

2. Louvet, *Histoire*, 2:299, wrote, “Se chantoient dixneuf proses avec le ieu des orgues” (nineteen proses were sung to the playing of the organ), but, as Hughes, “Another,” 22, points out, Louvet must have misunderstood the phrase *cum organo* in the original manuscript. “Organum,” in the twelfth century, referred to polyphonic (or “organized”) song, not to the musical instrument we now call an organ (Wright, *Music*, 143–44; Reckow, “Organum”). Grenier, 363, repeated Louvet’s mistake. Strictly, a prose, or prosa, is “a text for a sequence,” but the two terms are often used synonymously (Crocker, “Prosa”).

3. Villetard, 122, 185–87. For a recording of the first part of the song, see *Messe*, track 5–1.

4. Kantorowicz, *Laudes*, 46 n. 116.

5. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:30–31.

was introduced. Before the beginning of first vespers on the eve of the feast, in front of the cathedral's west doors,⁶ the choir sang:

Lux hodie, lux laetitiae, me iudice tristis
 quisquis erit removendus erit sollempnibus istis.
 Sint hodie procul invidie, procul omnia mesta,
 laeta volunt quicumque colunt asinaria festa.

[Light today, the light of joy, I banish every sorrow;
 wherever found, be it expelled from our solemnities to-morrow.
 Away be strife and grief and care, from every anxious breast,
 and all be joy and glee in those who keep the Ass's feast.]⁷

An ass was then led into the church to the processional chanting of "Orientis partibus," now known as the song (or prose) of the ass.

Louvet failed to see the point of either the song or the ass. Misreading the song's vernacular chorus of "Hez, hez, sire asnes, hez," so that it became a Latin apostrophe to Silenus ("Silenus es" = "you are Silenus") rather than a French apostrophe to the ass ("sire asnes" = "Sir Ass"), he supposed the procession had something to do with Bacchus. He was wrong. The words of the song evoke the beauty, strength, and virtues of an ass as it journeys from the East, across the river Jordan, to Bethlehem:

Orientis partibus
 adventavit asinus,
 pulcher et fortissimus,
 sarcinis aptissimus.
 Hez hez sire asnes hez.

Out from the lands of Orient
 was the ass divinely sent.
 Strong and very fair was he,
 bearing burdens gallantly.
 Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh.

Hic in collibus Sichen
 iam nutritus sub Rub[en]
 transiit per Iordanem
 saliit in Bethlehem.
 Hez hez sire asnes hez.

In the hills of Sichem bred
 under Reuben nourishèd,
 Jordan stream he traversèd,
 into Bethlehem he sped.
 Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh.

6. The cathedral in question was not the Gothic cathedral begun, circa 1225, under Bishop Miles of Nanteuil, but the late-tenth-century cathedral, now known as the *basse oeuvre*, which preceded it (Bonnet-Laborderie and Rousset, *Cathédrale*, 23–42, 246–47; Murray, *Beauvais*, 4, pls. 3–5).

7. Louvet, *Histoire*, 2:300; translation from Hone, *Ancient*, 163. For a recording, see *Tempus*, track 11a.

Salto vincit hynnulos,
damnas et capreolos,
super dromedarios
velox madianeos.
Hez hez sire asnes hez.

Higher leaped than goats can bound,
doe and roebuck circled round
median dromedaries' speed
overcame, and took the lead.
Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh.

Dum trahit vehicula
multa cum sarcinula
illius mandibula
dura terit pabula.
Hez hez sire asnes hez.

While he drags long carriages
loaded down with baggages,
he, with jaws insatiate,
fodder hard doth masticate.
Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh.

Cum aristis ordeum
comedit [et carduum,
triticum a pale]a
segregat in area.
Hez hez sire asnes hez.

Chews the ears with barley corn,
thistle down with thistle corn.
On the threshing floor his feet
separate the chaff from wheat.
Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh.

Amen dicas, asine,
iam satur ex gramine,
amen amen itera,
aspernare vetera.
Hez va hez va hez va hez
biax [sire asnes] car allez
bele bouche car chantez.

Stuffed with grass, yet speak and say
Amen, ass, with every bray:
Amen, amen, say again:
ancient sins hold in disdain.
Heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh
fair sir ass, you trot all day;
fair your mouth, and loud your bray.⁸

"Orientis partibus" was chanted to a lively and highly memorable tune. But liveliness in church—even merriment—should not be confused with Bacchic revelry. Unlike Gryllos's burlesque ninth-century ride through the streets of Constantinople, the entry of the ass into Beauvais cathedral was part of the liturgy, recalling key moments in Christian history. Moreover, Beauvais was not the only church to welcome a live ass to this end. The Benedikt-beuern *Christmas Play* brought an ass into the church to reenact the story of Balaam. When Francis of Assisi erected a crib for the newborn Christ in Greccio in 1223, he added a live ox and ass to the scene.⁹ A live ass was also

8. Louvet, *Histoire*, 2:301; corrected text and translation from Greene, "Song," 535. For recordings, with added instrumentation, see *Medieval*, track 14; *Tempus*, tracks 11b, 16b.

9. Bonaventura, *Vita altera S. Francisci Confessoris* 10, in *Acta sanctorum*, October, 2:742–98 (770); Young, 2:27, 430; translation in Tydeman, 103.

to play an important part in the thirteenth-century Padua *Representation of Herod*, recalling the ass that carried the Holy Family to Egypt. Many Palm Sunday processions included a reenactment of Jesus riding an ass into Jerusalem. The Beauvais procession was unusual only in that it introduced an ass to the feast of the Circumcision.

A few later French scholars were more sympathetic than Louvet to the song of the ass. In 1697 Leonor Foy de Saint-Hilaire unscrambled Louvet's transcription of the refrain so that it celebrated "sire asnes" rather than Silenus.¹⁰ In 1853 Chérest defended the music: "The melody of the prose is singularly remarkable for its grace, and the refrain itself 'hez, sir asne, hez,' which has so often been portrayed as a barbarous cry, provides an ending for each verse as sweet as it is simple."¹¹ Other nineteenth-century scholars proposed allegorical readings, in which the ass represented the Jewish people bearing the true faith as far as Bethlehem, Christ bearing the burden of human sin to the cross, or the Gentiles coming to faith in Christ.¹² Certainly the song's language of bearing others' burdens, separating the chaff from the wheat, and overlooking ancient sins suggests some kind of allegorical connection between the ass and Christ.

Functionally, the processional song of the ass took the participants to "the reading of the tabula"—a list of assigned liturgical duties—with which vespers ordinarily began. The service then continued with "Deus in adiutorium" (O God, make speed to save me); "Veni creator" (O come, Creator); "Haec est clara dies" (This is the bright day), sung on the steps of the sanctuary; "Salve festa dies" (Hail festive day), sung in front of the altar; "two other proses"; and the paired antiphon "Ecce anuntio" (Behold, I bring a message of great joy) and psalm "Dixit dominus" (The Lord said). How far into the church the ass progressed is unclear. Perhaps it stopped in the nave, where it would not have been unduly out of place. The nave was "the people's portion" of the church, "open to all, day and night. Business was transacted there. Pilgrims often slept there, sometimes with their animals."¹³ Perhaps, exceptionally, the ass entered the choir. However far it progressed, we can be confident that the ass was seen not as a disorderly intrusion but as a lively act of processional worship.

In 1697, some sixty years after Louvet published his account, Foy de Saint-Hilaire, a canon in Beauvais, responded to a written inquiry from a

10. Leonor Foy de Saint-Hilaire to M. de Francastel, assistant librarian of the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, 18 December 1697, in Denis, *Lettres*, 311–313 (311).

11. Chérest, 26.

12. Clément, *Histoire*, 153–58; Desjardins, *Histoire*, 127–34.

13. McCullough, *Unending*, 60; cf. Hayes, *Body*, 53–69.

librarian in Paris concerning “the service of the ass.” After referring his correspondent to Louvet’s account and to a dependent entry in the 1678 first edition of Du Cange’s encyclopedic *Glossarium*, Foy de Saint-Hilaire added that he had confirmed the details of the prose of the ass in “a five-hundred-year-old manuscript.”¹⁴ Although Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s reference to Louvet might suggest that he was consulting the same manuscript as his predecessor, this was almost certainly not the case. David Hughes has argued that Foy de Saint-Hilaire had in front of him the manuscript now known as Egerton 2615.¹⁵ This manuscript, which includes a complete Beauvais office of the Circumcision as well as the Beauvais *Play of Daniel*, was prepared in Beauvais between 1227 and 1234, and “kept in the Beauvais cathedral library at least through the fifteenth century, and in the city of Beauvais through the seventeenth.”¹⁶ It is now in the British Library.¹⁷

Confusion over the identity of the “five-hundred-year-old manuscript” consulted by Foy de Saint-Hilaire has generated much subsequent confusion about what actually happened in Beauvais in the late twelfth century. The Benedictine editors of the 1733 second edition of Du Cange’s *Glossarium* ascribed matters indiscriminately to “MSS. huiusce festi” (manuscripts of this same feast), a “MS. codex 500 annorum” (a five-hundred-year-old manuscript volume), a “MS. codice Bellovac. ann. circiter 500” (a manuscript volume from Beauvais of about five hundred years of age), and “alibi” (elsewhere).¹⁸ None of the events ascribed to these sources by the 1733

14. Denis, *Lettres*, 311, and, for the inquiry on behalf of a “very curious man of letters” and subsequent acknowledgment of Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s response, 319–20.

15. Hughes, “Another,” 17 n. 11 (cf. Greene, “Song,” 537 n. 4; Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:22). Hughes’s argument depends primarily on the fact that Foy de Saint-Hilaire “cites material from a manuscript having a lacuna at just the same point” as Egerton 2615. The latter’s missing pages stretch from the rubric following the end of lauds to the Gloria at the beginning of mass (Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:141, 2:90–93). But Foy de Saint-Hilaire confuses matters by saying that the missing pages in his manuscript stretch from “the first rubric” of “the day of the Circumcision” to the pages “of Epiphany” (Denis, *Lettres*, 312). The context makes clear that he means the first rubric of the *day*, following lauds, rather than the first rubric of the *feast*, at the start of vespers the previous evening (Desjardins, *Histoire*, 123). Moreover, “Epiphany” is a mistake, either in Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s original letter or in Denis’s published edition, for “Epistle,” that is, the Epistle following the Gloria at mass. Despite this confusion, Hughes concludes that “the identification” between Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s manuscript and Egerton 2615 “is assured.” The case for Egerton 2615 is further strengthened by Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s observation (Denis, *Lettres*, 312–13) that the manuscript before him contains a play of Daniel. Egerton 2615 contains the well-known *Danielis ludus*, but Louvet mentions no such play in his source.

16. Hughes, “Another,” 17.

17. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:21–25, traces the travels of Egerton 2615 from Beauvais to Italy and finally, in 1883, to the British Museum.

18. Du Cange, s.vv. *festum asinorum* (3:461), *kalendae* (4:483). Greene, “Song,” 536 n. 3, suggests that Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s letter of response may have ended up in Paris in the hands of the editors of the 1733 edition of Du Cange (cf. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:22). Chambers, 1:287 n. 2, points out that

edition of Du Cange is found in Louvet. Most, but not all, can be found in Foy de Saint-Hilaire. Some we now know to belong to Egerton 2615. Others are from a manuscript apparently known to Foy de Saint-Hilaire's father but since destroyed. One item, a longer version of the prose of the ass, is from a now unidentifiable source.¹⁹

The confusion was further compounded by Pierre Grenier (d. 1789), whose unfinished but influential introduction to the history of Picardy was published posthumously in 1856. Grenier cited Louvet sporadically elsewhere in his book, but not when it came to the "feast of the ass." For that he largely relied on Du Cange, from whom he also derived his secondary knowledge of the material in Foy de Saint-Hilaire's letter. In so far as he consulted Egerton 2615 at all, he seems to have worked from an incomplete copy rather than from the original.²⁰ Failing to distinguish among these sources, Grenier merged into a single "twelfth-century" narrative items traceable to texts from very different periods: Louvet's early-seventeenth-century account of a lost manuscript thought to date from between 1160 and 1162; Foy de Saint-Hilaire's late-seventeenth-century reading of Egerton 2615, which itself dates from between 1227 and 1234; Foy de Saint-Hilaire's memories of his father's account of a destroyed manuscript, whose original date is unknown; Du Cange's early-eighteenth-century collection of materials on the "feast of the ass" (*festum asinorum*) and "Kalends" (*kalendae*) in Beauvais, whose sources—when not traceable to Louvet or Foy de Saint-Hilaire—remain unidentified; and Grenier's own incomplete late-eighteenth-century copy of Egerton 2615.²¹ Although Grenier correctly dated Louvet's source to around 1160, he incorrectly identified it with Du Cange's—and hence with

Du Cange's "five hundred years" should be counted back from 1733, not from the first edition of 1678, in which much of the Beauvais material did not appear. But the later editors were borrowing the phrase from Foy de Saint-Hilaire, who used it in 1697. The phrase, in any case, indicates a rough estimate, not a precise age.

19. Du Cange's version of the prose of the ass adds three stanzas (2–3, 5) not found elsewhere and one stanza (7) that is included in the Sens but not the Beauvais version: cf. Du Cange, s.v. *festum asinorum* (3:461); Villetard, 86–87, 130–31; Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:3, 104. Chambers, 2:279–81, prints the Du Cange version, describing its source as "a lost MS."

20. Bourquelot, "Office," 148, 171, consulted "an incomplete and modern copy" of Egerton 2615 found among Grenier's papers. Desjardins, *Histoire*, 124 n. 1, cited two eighteenth-century copies that he identified as Grenier and Bourquelot's sources. Chambers, 1:286 n. 1, wondered if the later copies were BNF Picardie 14 and 158, two of several MSS Picardie cited incompletely in Grenier's footnotes. Villetard, 232, decided on Picardie 158, which he called "a copy made at a time when one did not pay such close attention to matters of exactitude." Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:23, believes Picardie 158 to be a "limited" copy of Egerton 2615 made by Grenier himself.

21. Grenier, 362–64. For another case of Grenier jumbling secondary historical data, see chapter 5, note 29.

Foy de Saint-Hilaire's—"five-hundred-year-old ceremonial,"²² reinforcing the mistaken impression that every event in his own composite narrative belonged to the single early period of Louvet's lost source.

Unfortunately, Chambers trusted both Grenier and Du Cange. Unable to find a copy of Louvet's book, and assuming that Grenier had independently consulted Louvet's source, Chambers quoted Grenier's garbled account as if it were reliable. Moreover, he added details from Du Cange as if these were all derived from the same "codex 500 annorum."²³ Chambers seems not to have known of Foy de Saint-Hilaire's letter. From Chambers, the confusion passed into subsequent writings on the Feast of Fools.

Cautioned by this confusion, we can now look more carefully at what Foy de Saint-Hilaire actually wrote. He began by correcting several errors in Louvet's transcription of the prose of the ass. But he then made a mistake of his own, suggesting that the prose had been sung not at first vespers on the feast of the Circumcision but a week earlier at the feast of the Nativity. He was drawn to this conclusion by Louvet's mention of a brief chant sung in front of the altar after the reading of the tabula:

Salve festa dies toto venerabilis aevo
qua deus est ortus virginis ex utero.

[Hail festive day, blessed for all eternity,
when God sprang from the womb of the Virgin.]

Had Foy de Saint-Hilaire read a little further in Egerton 2615, he would have discovered that these same lines occupied an identical place in the thirteenth-century office of the Circumcision in Beauvais.²⁴ The Virgin Birth was a recurrent theme of medieval worship, by no means confined to the feast of the Nativity.

Foy de Saint-Hilaire then chided Louvet for omitting a savory detail from his account of the feast of the Innocents. Louvet, he wrote, had failed to notice "that it was written on the tabula *hac die incensabitur cum boudino et saucita* [on this day censuring was done with black pudding and sausage]." A "perfume so rare," Foy de Saint-Hilaire wryly observed, "deserves not to be

22. Grenier, 363. A ceremonial was "a book detailing the liturgical customs of collegiate and cathedral churches" (Harper, *Forms*, 292).

23. Chambers, 1:285–87.

24. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:5. Originally an Easter song excerpted from a longer poem by Fortunatus (ca. 540–ca. 600), "Salve festa dies" was adapted for use at many other feasts (Messenger, "Salve").

forgotten.”²⁵ Unfortunately, he failed to identify his source more carefully, reducing the editors of Du Cange to a noncommittal “elsewhere.”²⁶ Grenier was less cautious: he added the censuring rubric to his summary of mass at the feast of the Circumcision in 1160, claiming the ubiquitous “five-hundred-year-old ceremonial” as his source for the rubric, and acknowledging only Du Cange in his footnote.²⁷ By moving the incense of black pudding and sausage from the feast of the Innocents, where Foy de Saint-Hilaire had found (and rather enjoyed) it, to the feast of the Circumcision, Grenier added yet again to the impression that 1 January was a day of irreverent license.

Next, Foy de Saint-Hilaire quoted “the first rubric” of “the day of the Circumcision.” By this he meant the rubric following lauds, which was sung just before dawn. The rubric read, according to Foy de Saint-Hilaire, “The lord cantor and the canons stand before the closed doors of the church outside, each holding a flagon full of wine and a glass goblet. One of the canons begins ‘Kalendas ianuarias,’ then the doors are opened.”²⁸ In Wulf Arlt’s modern edition of the Egerton 2615 office of the Circumcision, the first part of the rubric is worded slightly differently: “Afterward all go before the closed doors of the church, and four [canons] stand outside each holding a flagon full of wine and a glass goblet.”²⁹ Significantly, Arlt’s edition limits to four the number of men holding a flagon of wine and a glass. If Hughes is right in affirming that Foy de Saint-Hilaire copied this rubric from Egerton 2615, and if Arlt’s later reading of Egerton 2615 is reliable, then Foy de Saint-Hilaire transcribed the rubric inaccurately, crucially omitting the limiting number “four.”³⁰

Gustave Desjardins believed that the wine and drinking vessels were simply carried into the church to be blessed for later use.³¹ Specifically, the four

25. Denis, *Lettres*, 311.

26. Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:483). Chambers, 1:286–87, cites both Grenier and Du Cange.

27. Grenier, 363.

28. Denis, *Lettres*, 311: “Dominus Cantor et Canonici ante januas Ecclesiae clausas stent foris tenantes singuli urnas vino plenas cum Cyfis [= scyphis] vitreis, quorum unus Canonicus incipiat Kalendas januarias tunc aperiantur januae.” Cf. Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:483).

29. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:90: “Postea omnes eant ante ianuas ecclesie clausas, et quatuor stent foris tenentes singuli urnas vino plenas cum cyfis vitreis.”

30. Augustin Le Cat, *Histoire des Evêques de Beauvais* (unpublished MS, written ca. 1697, quoted by Greene, “Orientis,” 484), offers a version of the rubric closer to Arlt’s version but still omitting “quatuor.” Le Cat is thought to have worked from Egerton 2615 (or a later copy). Bourquelot, “Office,” 171, who admits to working with “an incomplete and modern copy” of Egerton 2615, cites a similar version, but includes an ellipsis where Arlt finds “quatuor”; he also corrects the spelling of “Cyfis” to “scyphis.” Sandon, *Octave*, 70, is one of the few scholars to have followed Arlt in noticing that only “four people held jugs of wine.”

31. Desjardins, *Histoire*, 123.

men holding the vessels may have been subdeacons, whose office it was to prepare the bread and wine for the mass and to present them at the altar during the offertory. But Chambers called the episode a “drinking-bout.”³² His charge is unwarranted: the text makes no mention of drinking; the outdoor gathering took place at daybreak in midwinter, hardly the most likely time and place for a clerical “drinking-bout”; and if Arlt’s version is correct, there were only four glasses on hand, far too few for the entire chapter of Beauvais cathedral to drink itself silly.³³

Chambers’s charge has stuck nevertheless. Worse, Louvet’s account of the entry of the ass at the beginning of first vespers and Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s citation of the rubric concerning wine after lauds have been combined to create both a reentry of the ass at mass³⁴ and an earlier “drinking-bout” before first vespers. Validated and magnified in the retelling, the drunken prologue to vespers (or mass) is now assumed by some to be an essential feature of the liturgy of the Feast of Fools at all times and everywhere. Imaginatively conflated into a single series of events, the “drinking-bout,” the invocation of the “pagan” January Kalends, the procession into the church of an ass (“recalling Silenus”), and the lively communal singing (to anachronistic musical accompaniment) have combined to create a narrative of drunken clerics subverting the divine office with Bacchic disorder.³⁵ The sources do not warrant such a misreading.

Moreover, none of these feasts, according to Foy de Saint-Hilaire, was the true “feast of the Ass” (*feste de l’Asne*). Foy de Saint-Hilaire remembered being told by his father of a complete manuscript of “la messe . . . de l’asne,” which had been preserved in the collegiate church of Saint Stephen until the document was “cruelly burned” by an overscrupulous priest. Foy de Saint-Hilaire recalled the priest from his own childhood. According to his father’s

32. Chambers, 1:287.

33. Chambers, of course, did not have the benefit of Arlt’s modern edition: both Grenier and Du Cange, on whom Chambers relied, had repeated Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s version of the rubric. Moreover, Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:483), had cut the rubric loose from its mooring at the close of lauds, citing it immediately before the rubric that spoke of censing with sausage and black pudding and offering no liturgical context for either rubric.

34. Because of the missing pages, mass immediately follows lauds in Egerton 2615. Villetard, 232, traces the legend of the reentry of the ass at mass to the addition of a rubric, “*Conductus asini, cum adduciter*” (Conductus of the ass, while it is led), at this point in the late, imperfect copy of Egerton 2615 made by Grenier and used by Bourquelot (Grenier, 363; Bourquelot, “Office,” 172). Grenier may have thought the addition necessary because the prose of the ass was used, in an arrangement for three parts, as the conductus taking the two subdeacons to read the epistle at mass (Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:53–64, 146, 2:3–4, 104).

35. Freund, *Dramatis*, 88–89; *Feast*, tracks 1–4, 8–18. For a critical review of *Feast*, see Caldwell, “Recordings.”

memory of this destroyed manuscript, the full feast of the ass took place on the octave of Epiphany. A girl with a child in her arms rode an ass in procession from the cathedral to the church of Saint Stephen to represent the flight into Egypt. During the subsequent “solemn mass” inside the church, “the ass and its beautiful charge were placed in the sanctuary on the side where the gospel is read.” The Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, and other choral chants ended in “hin ham” (hee-haw). The celebrant, instead of ending the mass with “Ite, missa est,” brayed three times (“ter hinmannabit”). The people responded in like fashion (“hin han, hin han, hin han”).³⁶ Afterward, the ass was led back to the cathedral.

The presence of the ass at the altar and the braying of the priest and the congregation, derived solely from Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s unsubstantiated third-hand report of a destroyed and undatable manuscript, have also been folded into the popular narrative of disorderly Feast of Fools revels. Even if Foy de Saint-Hilaire’s report were substantially correct (and it may be), such a characterization would still be much exaggerated. Not only did the feast of the ass reportedly take place in a different church two weeks later than the feast of the Circumcision, but Foy de Saint-Hilaire, himself a cathedral canon, saw nothing untoward in it, observing simply that the *messe de l’asne* was “celebrated in honor of the *bourique* [ass] that carried the son of God and his mother into Egypt.”³⁷

It is unwise to trust too much in second- or third-hand accounts of missing manuscripts. It is also foolish to combine details of disparate sources from different periods into a single synchronous narrative. And it is even more foolish to generalize further, supposing such events to have taken place everywhere just because some of them may have taken place in Beauvais at some time.

Nevertheless, we need not entirely dismiss these later reports of the early Feast of Fools in Beauvais. Louvet’s description of the office of the Circumcision in Beauvais around 1160 is credible. The processional entry of the ass before first vespers is confirmed from surviving early-thirteenth-century manuscripts. Where Foy de Saint-Hilaire corrects Louvet’s transcript of the prose of the ass from his own reading of Egerton 2615, we can be thankful.

36. Le Cat (see note 30) believes that the sheaf of pages missing from Egerton 2615 “contained the procession [*conduite* = *conductus*] of the ass from the Cathedral Church to the Church of Saint Stephen.” Greene, “Orientis,” 484, quotes and accepts this suggestion. Both seem to have forgotten that the office of Egerton 2615 is for the feast of the Circumcision, while Foy de Saint-Hilaire insisted that the *feste de l’Asne* was celebrated in Saint Stephen’s on the octave of Epiphany. For more on the church of Saint Stephen, see Henwood-Reverdot, *Église*.

37. Denis, *Lettres*, 312.

But other details provided by Foy de Saint-Hilaire are less certain. Censing with black pudding and sausage at the feast of the Innocents is otherwise unreported. If in fact it was done in thirteenth-century Beauvais at the feast of the Innocents, there is no reason to believe that it was also done sixty years earlier (and four days later) at the twelfth-century feast of the Circumcision. Foy de Saint-Hilaire's careless transcription of the "wine" rubric following lauds during the thirteenth-century feast of the Circumcision has allowed scholarly imagination to run riot: the consequent images of drunken twelfth-century clerical revels are false. Finally, if we choose to trust Foy de Saint-Hilaire's story of his father's memory of a destroyed manuscript of the "feast of the ass" on the octave of Epiphany, we should remember that Foy de Saint-Hilaire made no attempt to date the manuscript. It was Grenier who blended all these details into a single narrative, assumed to have taken place around 1160, and it was Chambers who perpetuated Grenier's error.

In short, most of what we learn from Louvet about the liturgy of the feast of the Circumcision in Beauvais, duly corrected with regard to the text and propriety of the prose of the ass, may be cautiously placed alongside Beleth's brief notice and the letters and poems of Guy of Bazoches in a small collection of more or less trustworthy reports of the early Feast of Fools in northern France. Very little from Foy de Saint-Hilaire or Du Cange can be safely added to this collection. Despite all the imaginative reconstructions of generations of historians, all we really know of the mid-twelfth-century Feast of Fools in Beauvais is that it had at its heart an expanded, but still dignified, festive liturgy that, contrary to modern sensibilities, included a processional ass.

CHAPTER 8

The Complaints of Innocent III

The first official complaints about the Feast of Fools appear between 1198 and 1216. Although they can give the impression that the Feast of Fools was already widespread and disreputable, there are good reasons to be skeptical about this view. First, many of the complaints appear to be grounded in unsubstantiated rumor rather than in eyewitness accounts. Second, many consist only of one small item in a long list of complaints on a wide variety of topics. Gathered out of context, they seem weightier than they are. Third, there is no documented evidence of the Feast of Fools anywhere outside northern France before 1222. Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, all the complaints flow, directly or indirectly, from the same source, the Italian pope Innocent III (1198–1216).

Lothar of Segni was elected pope in January 1198.¹ Embracing an expansive view of papal authority, he quickly dispatched cardinal legates to attend to political, moral, and ecclesiastical matters throughout Europe. One legate, Peter of Capua, was sent to France, where he threatened the warring kings of England and France with papal interdict if they failed to conclude a peace treaty within two months. The French king, Philip Augustus (1180–1223), was given even less time to be reconciled with his Danish wife, whom he had

1. For biographies of Innocent III, see Moore, *Pope*; Sayers, *Innocent*.

rejected in favor of the daughter of a Bavarian duke. If marital propriety was not restored within a month, Peter of Capua warned, the whole of France would be placed under interdict: all public liturgical and sacramental activity in the kingdom would be suspended. The first threat had the desired effect; the second did not. After a delay, the national interdict was imposed. While in France, as part of Innocent's efforts to reform the behavior and to control the allegiance of the French clergy, Peter of Capua addressed the question of the Feast of Fools.²

In a letter to Eudes of Sully, bishop of Paris, the papal legate complained of reported abuses in the cathedral of Notre-Dame during the feast of the Circumcision. Though not an eyewitness himself, he had "learned" of such abuses "by the reliable report of many. . . . So many egregious and flagrant acts," he wrote, are committed "in that church," that the abode of the Virgin is "frequently defiled not only by foul language but even by the shedding of blood [*sanguinis effusione*]," and "this most holy day in which the Savior of the world chose to be circumcised. . . . has come to be called, and not without good reason, the Feast of Fools [*festum fatuorum*]."³

The charge of bloodshed in Notre-Dame is striking: it conjures images of murder or blasphemous sacrifice.⁴ But the accusation probably derived from nothing more than the story of a hypothetical accident. Peter the Chanter (d. 1197), an influential theologian and the cantor at Notre-Dame in Paris, had pondered in his *Summa de sacramentis* (ca. 1191/92–1197) whether actions done in jest (*per iocum*) warranted excommunication. He proposed an example: "So that [the question] might be properly addressed or resolved, suppose that at the Feast of Fools [*Vere dicetur vel reconcilietur, puta ad festum stultorum*] or of Saint Nicholas or the feast of the Innocents, blood were shed [*effederunt sanguinem*] during the performance of seasonal games [*miracula*] when one [of the players], intending to strike with the flat of his sword,

2. For Innocent's relations with France, see Foreville, *Pape*; for his program of clerical reform, see Fliche, "Advocate." For studies of the interdict during this period, see Clarke, *Interdict*; Krehbiel, *Interdict*.

3. Odo [Eudes of Sully], "Contra facientes festum fatuorum in ecclesia Parisiensi," in Guérard, *Cartulaire*, 1:72–75, incorporates both Peter of Capua's letter and Eudes's response; Wright, *Music*, 238–39, provides a photocopy of the original document and a translation of its most important parts. Maleczek, *Petrus*, 100–101, briefly discusses the correspondence within the broader context of Peter of Capua's career. This Peter of Capua should not be confused with his uncle, also called Peter of Capua, who wrote a theological *Summa* (Baldwin, *Masters*, 1:45).

4. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 462, understood Peter of Capua to mean "criminal actions, even to the point of bloodshed." According to Durand, *Rationale* 1.6.41 (1:80–81), trans. Neale and Webb (Durand, *Symbolism*, 109), "any violence or injurious shedding of human blood" in church required a formal rite of reconciliation before the church could again be used for the divine office.

struck instead with the blade.”⁵ Peter the Chanter was not claiming that such an accident had happened; he was merely supposing it in order to discuss a matter of church law.

Peter’s *Summa* was based on lectures given repeatedly over several years. Many students would have heard and perhaps later retold this anecdote without being careful to insist on its hypothetical nature. The story likely reached Peter of Capua from several of Peter the Chanter’s former students. Caught up in Innocent’s confrontation with Philip Augustus, Peter of Capua would have found such “reports” of laxity in Paris both credible and politically advantageous.

Before we dismiss the story entirely, though, it is worth asking why Peter the Chanter chose this particular example. Perhaps he had seen or heard something that suggested the possibility of such an accident. Paris itself is unlikely to have provided the occasion. Unlike some French cathedral cities, Paris allowed very little even in the way of simple liturgical plays. A brief *Visitatio Sepulchri* (Visit to the Tomb) was performed at matins on Easter Sunday as early as the tenth century, but after that no church drama in Paris is recorded before the late fifteenth century.⁶ Other than Peter of Capua’s unsubstantiated charge, I know of no contemporary references to church activities in Paris involving swordplay.

A second reference to liturgical plays, in Peter the Chanter’s *Verbum abbreviatum* (1191/92), may offer a clue. There Peter protested the election of immature clerics to positions of responsibility by invoking the much greater care taken in assigning actors to dramatic roles: “They give the role of blessed [Saint] Nicholas to a simple and gentle man, the role of Habakkuk [in Daniel plays] to an old man, and the role of [the Old Testament patriarch] Joseph to a discerning and eloquent man. Even in the Feast of Fools, in comedies, in tragedies, and in other dramatic and mimic representations,” he wrote, the actors chosen should correspond to their parts. Why should not the same care be accorded to those who are chosen for the real roles of “shepherds of the Church?”⁷

5. Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis*, London, British Library MS Harley 3596, fol. 143rb, cited in Baldwin, *Masters*, 1:132, 2:91 n. 109. For the date of Peter’s *Summa*, see *ibid.*, 2:245–46. For a brief biography, see Peter the Chanter, *Verbum*, vii–x. For the meaning of *miracula*, see Clopper, *Drama*, 69–78.

6. Wright, *Music*, 29–30, 112–14, 189–92, mentions only the tenth-century *Visitatio*, a 1491 decision of the cathedral chapter to continue the *Ordo Prophetarum* sung by the choirboys at the nocturnal mass on Christmas morning, and a 1509 decree prohibiting members of the choir from parading through the city in “masks or, in French, ‘false faces’” (*larvas gallice faulx visages*) on the feast of Saint Nicholas (6 December).

7. Peter the Chanter, *Verbum* 1.59 (406); cf. Baldwin, *Masters*, 2:144 n. 234. For discussions of the date of the *Verbum* and the relationship between its “long” and “short” versions, see Baldwin, *Masters*, 2:246–65; Monique Boutry, in Peter, *Verbum*, xii–xl.

Peter is no longer dealing in hypotheses but with actual events. Again, however, his remarks do not match any known dramatic activity in Paris. Several plays on the life of Saint Nicholas survive from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but none from the capital.⁸ A Daniel play in which the prophet Habakkuk plays a minor role was composed by Hilarius of Orléans (ca. 1130), but no evidence suggests that it was performed in Paris. Peter the Chanter probably had in mind the more recent Beauvais *Play of Daniel*, which also had a role for Habakkuk and was almost certainly composed by the last decade of the twelfth century.⁹ The only extant liturgical play known to have featured the patriarch Joseph is the Laon *Office of Joseph*, which dates from the same period.¹⁰ Both the *Play of Daniel* and the *Office of Joseph* were Feast of Fools plays.¹¹ Laon also had an *Office of the Star*, which was performed on the feast of the Innocents.¹² Beauvais and Laon are both within a hundred miles of Paris. If Peter attended the *Office of the Star*, he would have seen swords wielded by Herod and by the three soldiers who slaughtered the Innocents.¹³ Although no reports survive of accidental bloodshed during the Laon office, it is easy to see how Peter could have imagined such a mishap. Even if he had only heard of the Laon play from others, it could still have inspired his hypothetical example.

In the absence of any corroborative evidence of bloodshed in Notre-Dame at the feast of the Circumcision, therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that Peter of Capua's charge was based on secondhand reports of Peter the Chanter's classroom accounts of a hypothetical accident in a play performed in another cathedral at a different feast. Like many a tale about the Feast of Fools, the original anecdote not only grew in the retelling but was reassigned to the Feast of Fools to serve its bearer's purpose.

For his part, Eudes of Sully acted on the papal legate's complaint, but he did so in a way that ignored its specific charges. Eudes may have known Lothar of Segni a decade or so earlier when they were both students in Paris. He was to become a trusted ally of the new pope in his struggles with the

8. Young, 2:307–60.

9. The texts of both Daniel plays can be found in Young, 2:276–306; Bulst and Bulst-Thiele, *Hilarii*, 48–59, 99–113. For the date of Hilarius's play, see Dronke, *Nine*, 119; for the date of the *Danielis ludus*, see chapter 10, note 3. Habakkuk's role in the Daniel plays derives from Dan. 14:33–39 in the Septuagint and Vulgate versions of the Bible (otherwise Bel and Dragon 1:33–39 in the Apocryphal books).

10. Young, 2:266–76. For the date of the *Ordo Ioseph*, see chapter 9. There are reports of now lost Joseph plays from Amiens (Wright, *Dissemination*, 109–11) and Heresburg (now Stadtbergen), Germany (Young 2:485–86), but both are from a later period.

11. See chapter 10.

12. Young, 2:102–9.

13. Young, 2:105; Lagueux, "Glossing," 702.

French king.¹⁴ Discretion required that he respond favorably to Peter of Capua's letter. Later in 1198, therefore, Eudes issued a decree aimed at establishing a more settled liturgy for the feast of the Circumcision in Notre-Dame, restraining some of its more informal elements and adding prescribed chants and lessons of greater musical and textual complexity.

Specifically, Eudes insisted that the bells be rung "in the usual way" at first vespers. He forbade rhythmic poetry, impersonations (*personas*),¹⁵ and "strange lights."¹⁶ The *dominus festi*, who wore the cantor's cope and carried his staff (*baculus*) during the feast, was not to be led to the church or afterward to his house amid "procession and song." The *dominus festi* in Paris is sometimes assumed to have been a subdeacon elected by his peers to imitate and in some degree to mock the high office of the cantor. But the model of the *magister baculi* in Châlons suggests that the *dominus festi* in Paris was a figure of authority rather than inversion, a canon temporarily granted some of the cantor's prestige and charged with keeping the subdiaconal "fools" in order for the duration of their feast. Because the public processions (and perhaps, as in Châlons, an accompanying sung dance of clergy and people)¹⁷ were forbidden, the "lord of the feast" was to "put on his cope in the choir" rather than at home, and, "holding the staff of the cantor," immediately "begin the prose 'Laetemur gaudiis' [Let us rejoice with gladness] before vespers." Vespers itself was to be celebrated by the bishop or his designated representative "in the usual festal manner," with the addition "that the responsory and Benedicamus can be sung in two-voice, three-voice, or four-voice organum; generally the responsory will be sung by four subdeacons dressed in silk copes."¹⁸

At matins, two responsories were similarly "organized" for multiple voices, as were the gradual and Alleluia following the epistle at mass. Moreover, the epistle itself was "farsed." Readers unfamiliar with this term should not be

14. Tillmann, *Pope*, 3.

15. Guérard, *Cartulaire*, 74. Chambers, 1:277, translates *personas* as "masks," but, according to T&C, 337–38, *persona* "was the standard word for the theatrical stage mask" only "in classical times. . . . In medieval Latin it lost all theatrical nuances, and was generalised in very much the meaning it has in *person* today." The medieval Latin word for mask was not *persona* but *larva*. Neither word necessarily implies a dramatic context.

16. Fassler, 78.

17. In 1197 Eudes of Sully prohibited priests from taking part in *chorea* "in churches, in cemeteries, and in processions" (Mansi, 22:683). The prohibition appears to have had little lasting effect. "Hac in die salutari," a conductus composed in mid-thirteenth century Paris for the feast of the Circumcision, calls for "a circular dance" (see later in this chapter).

18. Although Eudes's introduction of multiple-voice "organum" to the office of the Circumcision is the "first extant record attesting" to the use of polyphony in Notre-Dame, it was "undoubtedly" not the first actual use (Wright, *Music*, 338).

misled: to *farse*, from the Latin *farcire* (to stuff), means to amplify the reading of scripture or to extend a sung liturgical phrase by the insertion of additional words, sometimes in the vernacular.¹⁹ There is nothing “farcical,” in the modern sense, about it.

“Laetemur gaudiis” again opened second vespers. Another popular Christmas season prose, “Laetabundus exultet fidelis chorus” (Let the faithful choir exult in gladness), was “sung in place of the hymn.” But the *Deposuit* was to be sung no more than five times. The pertinent line from the Magnificat, “*Deposuit potentes de sede et exultavit humiles*,” celebrates God’s overthrow of the powerful and exaltation of the lowly. The fact that the bishop allowed it to be sung five times suggests that he did not find its message personally threatening. Members of the church hierarchy understood the overthrow to apply not to themselves but to unbelieving or recalcitrant secular powers.

Then, “if the *baculus* shall have been taken,” a reference perhaps to the ceremonial passing of the staff to the next year’s *dominus festi*, the *Te Deum* was to be sung and the service concluded by the ordinary celebrant. Finally, Eudes stipulated that the canons and clerks, including the subdeacons, were to occupy the same stalls throughout the feast of the Circumcision as they did during the rest of the year.²⁰ Seating arrangements in the medieval cathedral choir were an important marker of rank, sometimes exchanged—as appears to have been the case in Paris before Eudes’s reform—during seasonal feasts honoring the lower clergy.

Eudes’s reform was an attempt to replace what Belet had called a “mixed office” with one that was both longer and more carefully prescribed, leaving less opportunity for unregulated clerical activity. How much advantage the subdeacons had previously taken of the uncertain status of their office is hard to tell. While Eudes may have felt the need to trim some youthful exuberance from the feast, the details of his reform do not reflect anything like the degree of disorder that Peter of Capua imagined. On the contrary, the bishop’s failure to mention either “foul language” or “the shedding of blood” strongly suggests that Peter of Capua’s charges were unwarranted.

Oddly, Innocent III’s best-known tirade against the Feast of Fools occurs not in reference to France but in a letter he wrote to the archbishop of Gniezno, Poland, in 1207, concerning the problem of married priests. Among

19. “Farse” is “virtually synonymous with trope... but as a rule the term ‘trope’ was used for interpolations into... chants, while ‘farsa’ was used for interpolations into... lessons” (Huglo and Planchart, “Farse”). For examples of farsed epistles in Sens and Beauvais, see Villettard, 111–13, 168–69; Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:105–9. “The purpose of ‘farsing’ an epistle is celebratory rather than didactic; it magnifies the importance of the reading” (Stevens, *Words*, 241).

20. Guérard, *Cartulaire*, 74–75; translation of the letter adapted from Wright, *Music*, 239.

the consequences of such laxity, he warns against “theatrical entertainments” (*ludi theatrales*) and “masked shows” (*monstra larvarum*) in churches and “scandalous stupidities” and “obscene revellings” of the lower clergy during the feasts “which follow directly after the Nativity.”²¹ It is hard for the modern reader to see the connection between clerical marriage and seasonal shows. It is also hard to tell whether Innocent believed that such entertainments were already desecrating Polish churches or merely feared that they would follow if the archbishop failed to eradicate clerical marriage. Finding no evidence of the Feast of Fools in Poland, Andrzej Dabrówka suggests that the question of theatrical entertainments may have arisen when students from the cathedral choir school in Gniezno were permitted to stage Latin plays in the city’s churches during Christmas week and members of the clergy joined in.²² The pope may have confused news of Polish school plays with his own notions of what was happening during Christmas week in northern France and, in the heat of the moment, blamed it all on married clergy.

Despite its confusion, Innocent’s letter was to cast a long shadow. In 1234 its attack on “theatrical entertainments” was excerpted in the *Decretals* of Pope Gregory IX, thereby becoming a permanent part of canon law.²³ In 1263 an explanatory gloss was added, clarifying papal support for seasonal representations of “the manger of the Lord, Herod, the Magi, and how Rachel wept for her children . . . when such things lead men rather to devotion than to licentiousness or sensual pleasure.”²⁴ Even so, for more than two hundred years, Innocent’s outburst against the consequences of tolerating married clergy was to provide critics with a readily available source of authoritative language for the condemnation of boy bishops and the Feast of Fools. We will meet it again.

Meanwhile, in France, others protested on the pope’s behalf. In 1210 Adam of Perseigne wrote to a colleague in Rouen: “What is there to say about this most abominable and execrable infamy, which takes place annually in many cathedral churches, when to the mocking of God and the ruin of all church discipline, a kind of theatrical representation and masked demonry [*teatralis representacio et larvalis demonizacio*] is practiced. It is properly called the Feast of Fools [*festivitas stultorum*], that is of madness, not because they

21. “Ut publice uxoratos . . .,” *PL* 215:1070–71; translation from Tydeman, 114. Cf. Young, 2:416; T&C, 40–41.

22. Dabrówka, “Medieval.”

23. *Decretales* 3.1.12 (col. 997). For a brief discussion of decretals in general and of Gregory IX’s decretal in particular, see Brundage, *Medieval*, 53–57.

24. *Decretales* 3.1.12 (col. 997); Young, 2:416–17; Clopper, *Drama*, 55–56; translation adapted from Tydeman, 114.

truly lose their minds, but because, as friends and familiars of demons, they diligently shun the wisdom of Christ.”²⁵ Adam was abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Perseigne, north of Le Mans. He served frequently as an envoy for Innocent III.²⁶ Whether he had seen such festivities himself or was reporting only what he had been told is unclear, but the lack of specific detail in his complaint and the similarity of his rhetoric to that of Innocent III suggest the latter. Like Peter of Capua, he was probably a mouthpiece rather than an eyewitness.

Robert of Courson, another papal legate dispatched to France by Innocent III, convened local church councils in Paris (1213) and Rouen (1214). As one item among many, each council issued a decree instructing secular clergy and monks to take no part in the *feſta follorum*, “where the [cantor’s] ſtaff is taken.”²⁷ The decrees prove little. A contemporary chronicler, William the Breton, complained that Robert and “many others under his authority . . . defamed the clergy before the people, ſaying shameful things and inventing things about their lives.”²⁸

We ſhould neither exaggerate nor generalize the opposition voiced by Innocent and his ſpokesmen. Thoſe who do ſo create the falſe impression that the Feaſt of Fools at the turn of the thirteenth century had already ſpread as far as Poland and was everywhere diſreputable. In fact, the firſt reliable evidence of the Feaſt of Fools outside northern France comes from England in 1222.²⁹ Innocent’s opposition was a comparatively ſmall matter even among the plethora of other ſmall matters of eccleſiaſtical diſcipline with which he concerned himſelf. His own comments on the Feaſt of Fools formed a very ſmall (and rather irrelevant) part of a long ſeries of letters to Polish clergy. Robert of Courſon’s councils pronounced on a wide range of matters, among which, in each caſe, the Feaſt of Fools warranted only one ſmall item. And as far as we know, neither Peter of Capua nor Adam of Perſeigne addreſſed the matter a ſecond time.

Local clerical views of the Feaſt of Fools in northern France at the turn of the century tended to be more poſitive, or at leaſt more accommodating. Peter the Chanter mentioned ſeaſonal plays, including thoſe of the Feaſt

25. Bouvet, *Correſpondance*, 289.

26. For details of the life of Adam of Perſeigne, ſee Bouvet, *Adam*, 7–29.

27. Mansi, 22:842, 920. Baldwin, *Masters*, 1:20, dates the two local councils to June 1213 and February–March 1214. For more on Robert of Courſon, ſee Dickſon and Dickſon, “Cardinal”; Baldwin, *Masters*, 1:19–25; Moore, *Pope*, 219–27. The decrees of the ecumenical Fourth Lateran Council (1215), over which Innocent himſelf preſided, do not mention of the Feaſt of Fools (Tanner, *Decrees*, 230–71).

28. Rigord and Guillaume le Breton, *Oeuvre*, 1:303–4; translation from Moore, *Pope*, 225–26.

29. See chapter 15.

of Fools, without disapproval. He also alluded to the Feast of Fools during a discussion of the excommunicable crime of striking a cleric: “If a priest were to come observing the Feast of Fools [*festum follorum*], and someone were to strike him with a bladder, just as many people are struck at that time, it is doubtful whether [such an act] would transgress this law.”³⁰ On another occasion he clarified the nature of the weapon: someone had used the opportunity to strike a cleric repeatedly “inside the church . . . with an inflated and swollen hen’s bladder [*vesicula galline inflata et turgida*].”³¹ Perhaps, before Eudes’s reform, Kalends masqueraders had been in the habit of invading the church armed with inflated bladders. A few decades later, of course, the Padua *Representation of Herod* would welcome the tradition of striking clergy with bladders into the liturgy itself. In any case, Peter the Chanter did not take it too seriously: striking a cleric with an inflated hen’s bladder, he decided, was less dangerous than throwing a packed and icy snowball at a cleric while playing together in the snow.³²

Leoninus (ca. 1135–1201), the first composer of church music to leave a significant body of work in his own name rather than anonymously, wrote a lengthy poetic letter, “To a Friend Who Will Come to the Feast of the Staff.” Toward the end of the poem, he compares his friend’s arrival to the joyous return of the feast:

Festa dies aliis baculus venit et novus annus.
 Qua venies veniet haec michi festa dies.
 Tunc ego dilecte cervici brachia nectam,
 pectore tunc caro pectora cara premam.
 Seria tunc dulcesque iocos archanaque mentis
 fas erit atque statum promere cuique suum.

[The staff comes, and the New Year—others revel:
 my revels come that day when you arrive.
 Then round the longed-for neck I’ll twine my arms,
 then shall I press dear breast against dear breast.

30. Peter the Chanter, *Summa*, 3 (2a):396.

31. Peter the Chanter, *Summa*, London, British Library MS Harley 3596, fol. 143rb, cited in Baldwin, “Image,” 647 n. 45; Baldwin, *Masters*, 2:91 n. 107.

32. Peter the Chanter, *Summa*, 3 (2a):395. Robert of Courson, *Summa* 4.1, BNF MS Latin 14254, fol. 30ra, rb, cited in Baldwin, “Image,” 647 n. 45, also complains of priests being struck with inflated bladders during the Feast of Fools (*in festo stultorum*). Baldwin, “Image,” 637 n. 6, gives the date of Robert’s *Summa* as 1208–1212/13. Robert of Courson was a student of Peter the Chanter (Dickson and Dickson, “Cardinal,” 64–65; Baldwin, *Masters*, 1:19).

Sweet jests, then, and the mind's more solemn secrets,
we'll have leave to disclose, and each his state].³³

Craig Wright reads both more and less into this passage than it warrants: "In his poem Leoninus mentions the coming of the New Year, the ceremonial passing of the staff to the newly elected Bishop of Fools (one of the subdeacons), and the pleasant jokes and serious mysteries that the feast will engender."³⁴ But Leoninus does not mention the passing of the staff. Nor does he refer to a bishop of fools or claim that the role was played by a subdeacon. Wright has borrowed these details from elsewhere in the generalized narrative of the Feast of Fools. Moreover, the "sweet jests... and the mind's more solemn secrets" were those shared by Leoninus and his friend, not by participants in the Feast of the Staff. Other than confirming its existence in Paris at the time, the poem tells us very little about the Feast of the Staff. As recent scholarship has discovered, it tells us more about "same-sex love" in twelfth-century Paris.³⁵

Other musicians composed works especially for the feast. Perotinus, successor in the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris "from at least 1207 until his death in 1238 or shortly thereafter,"³⁶ wrote a "beautiful conductus for three voices"³⁷ for the feast of the Circumcision. "Salvatoris hodie sanguinis praegustator" (Today the Savior's blood is tasted beforehand) celebrates the shedding of Christ's blood in his circumcision as a foretaste of his crucifixion.³⁸ An anonymous conductus in two voices, composed in Paris before the mid-thirteenth century,³⁹ is more immediately exuberant:

Hac in die salutari
monet plausu renovari

On this auspicious day
the New Year calls for renewal

33. BNF, MS Latin 14759, fol. 151. I am grateful to Katja Gvozdeva for taking time from her own research in the BNF to provide me with an electronic copy of this folio. For a critical edition of *Ad amicum venturum ad festum baculi*, see Holsinger and Townsend, "Ovidian Verse," 250–53. For an entirely persuasive homoerotic reading of the poem, with appended Latin text and translation, see Holsinger and Townsend, "Ovidian Homoerotics," 402–6, 414–21. I have quoted Holsinger and Townsend's translation (lines 101–6).

34. Wright, *Music*, 287; cf. Wright, "Leoninus," 26–27.

35. Holsinger and Townsend, "Ovidian Homoerotics," 393.

36. Wright, *Music*, 291. The successor was deputy to the cantor and, in practice, "musical director of the choir" (Wright, "Palm," 366 n. 21).

37. Baldwin, "Image," 646. "A conductus was a Latin metrical poem set to music in from one to four parts..., used for festive or processional purposes both within and without the church" (Ellinwood, "Conductus," 165). Often incorporating an original or secular melody, it derived its name from its original function of escorting, or conducting, participants from one place to another (Stevens, *Words*, 50–51, 56–63).

38. Anderson, *Notre-Dame*, 1:xxix, 54–60. For a recording, see *Tempus*, track 10.

39. Wright, *Music*, 32.

novus annus, ci[r]culari	with applause, and thus renewed,
ductu renovatus,	to be led in a circular dance.
movet annus suscitari	The year, reborn,
gaudium renatus:	inspires joy:
hoc in an-, hoc in an-	in this, in this
hoc in an-, hoc in, hoc in	in this,
hoc in anno.	in this year.
Vox sonora	May the sonorous voice
solvat ora	bring forth singing
sine mora,	without delay,
hoc in an-, hoc in an-	in this, in this
hoc in, hoc in, hoc in an-	in this
hoc in, hoc in, hoc in an-	in this
hoc in, hoc in, hoc in anno.	in this, in this, in this year. ⁴⁰

Bishops could be equally understanding of the feast. William of Auxerre (d. 1223) raised the question of why the *festum stultorum*, along with the related feasts of Stephen, John the Apostle, and the Innocents, were celebrated with such “levity.” For the answer he turned like many others to pagan precedents, but he did so without condemning current practices: “Before the coming of our Lord, they used to celebrate a feast called Parentalia; and on that day they used to place their hope in the belief that if good things happened to them on the [first] day [of the year], the whole year would continue in like fashion.” William was mistakenly applying the name of the Parentalia (13–21 February), which honored deceased family members, to the January Kalends, which was thought to set the tone for the whole year. He continued: “The church wanted to remove this feast, which is contrary to the faith. And, because she has not been able wholly to uproot it, she allows it, and celebrates that well-attended feast so that she might replace it with another; and, to that end, lessons are read at matins that discourage things against the faith. And, if on that day anyone does something away from the church that goes beyond the faith, at least it is not against the faith. And, to that end [the church] has completely changed *ludi* that are against the faith into *ludi* that are not against the faith. And, this she does permissively. In the same way, wanting the Jews

40. Anderson, *Notre-Dame*, 5:xxxvii, 82; translation adapted from Wright, *Music*, 33. For a recording, see *Tempus*, track 12, but beware of the accompanying translation, in which “circulari” is rendered as “circular movement [of the earth].”

to renounce idolatry, the Lord commanded them to sacrifice animals to himself that before they would sacrifice to idols.”⁴¹

Later in the century, William Durand of Mende cited Augustine’s condemnation of the “many superstitions” of the Kalends, but thought the activities of the “strong and young” subdeacons at the feast of the Circumcision pointed toward the physical perfection of humanity at the general resurrection. The eighth day on which Christ was circumcised was frequently seen as a type of the eighth and final age of the world, when “mortality would put on immortality” and all those raised to life, whether they died as children or as old people, would spend eternity like Christ in the “perfect strength” of a thirty-year-old adult.⁴² Durand repeated Belet’s remark about the “unspecified” and therefore “mixed” nature of the subdeacon’s feast,⁴³ but he did so as an outdated matter of classification.

The only written record of hostility to the Feast of Fools, therefore, during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries can be traced directly or indirectly to Innocent III. We should not be too easily persuaded by the testimony of a single hostile witness and a few subordinates. In any case, whatever minor disorders may have occurred were better addressed, as Eudes of Sully demonstrated, not by exaggerated complaint but by the preparation of a settled and expanded liturgy for the subdeacons’ feast, not by suppression but by the creation of an absorbing alternative. In the next two chapters we shall see how this was done even more effectively in Sens, Beauvais, and Laon.

41. *Summa Guilelmo Autissiodorensis de officiis ecclesiasticis*, BNF, MS Latin 14145, cited by Chérest, 44; Bourquelot, “Office,” 90 (abbreviated French translation); Villetard, 63 n. 1 (manuscript identification).

42. Durand, *Rationale* 6.15.16 (2:199). For the connection between the eighth day of Circumcision and the eighth age of the world, see Steinberg, *Sexuality*, 163–65. For the “perfect age” of the redeemed, see Mâle, *Image*, 374–75.

43. Durand, *Rationale* 7.42.15 (3:113).

CHAPTER 9

The Office of the Circumcision

Peter of Corbeil, archbishop of Sens between 1200 and his death in 1222, may have been the first to compile a fully prescribed office for the feast of the Circumcision.¹ He was previously a canon of Notre-Dame and a teacher of theology in Paris, where the young Lothar of Segni (later Innocent III) was one of his students.² He was also among those to whom Peter of Capua's complaint was addressed and a signatory to Eudes of Sully's decree. He was probably active in drafting the Paris reform. Two years later, Innocent appointed his former teacher to the prestigious archbishopric of Sens.³ Although the archbishop of Sens no longer carried the all-embracing title of "primate of Gaul," he still exercised authority over a diocese that included Chartres, Auxerre, Meaux, Paris, Orléans, Nevers,

1. For Peter of Corbeil's role in compiling the Sens office of the feast of Circumcision, see Chérest, 30–48; Villetard, 51–61; Hughes and Rosenfeld, "Pierre." Baldwin, "Image," 648, assumes that Peter drew up the office "when he became archbishop of Sens," or shortly after 1200, but a marginal note by Étienne Baluze (1630–1718), cited in both Chérest, 33–34, and Villetard, 52, dates the work to the papacy of Honorius III (1216–1227) and therefore to the period between Honorius's accession in 1216 and Peter of Corbeil's death in 1222. Whether the Sens office was in fact the first fully prescribed office for the feast depends on the completeness of the office of Circumcision in the now missing Beauvais manuscript of 1160/62 and on the date of composition of the Le Puy office, which survives only in a sixteenth-century manuscript.

2. Villetard, 54; Moore, *Pope*, 4, 9.

3. Powell, *Deeds*, 71; Luchaire, *Innocent*, 1:3–4.

and Troyes.⁴ Peter of Corbeil's reform in Sens no doubt benefited from the Parisian precedent but was more ambitious and almost certainly more influential.

Comparable Circumcision offices survive from Beauvais and Le Puy-en-Velay, while an office of the Epiphany survives from Laon, where the subdeacons were honored on 6 January. The Sens office, however, attracted more attention from nineteenth-century French scholars and was the first to be published in a fully annotated edition with text and music (1907).⁵ Its relative neglect in twentieth-century accounts of the Feast of Fools is thus particularly notable. I look briefly at the other three offices later in this chapter and more carefully at the liturgical plays to which the offices in Beauvais and Laon gave rise in chapter 10, but the Sens office of the Circumcision serves as my paradigm of a prescribed office for the subdeacons' feast.

The complete text and music for the Sens office is preserved in a bound manuscript known by early antiquarians as the *Missel des Fous* or the *Missel de l'Âne*.⁶ This title is misleading. Not only is the manuscript more than a missal, extending beyond mass to all the canonical hours of the feast, but Peter of Corbeil's text makes no mention of fools and only brief initial mention of an ass. The manuscript was written in the early part of the thirteenth century.⁷ Although it bears signs of long use, such as small tears and wear on its lower corners from fingers turning the pages, it is otherwise in excellent condition. The binding, added after the completion of the manuscript, is much older: a Roman sculpted ivory diptych, perhaps from the sixth century, depicting Bacchus and Diana as sun and moon, attached with gold leaf to a backing of oak boards.⁸ Éric Palazzo observes, "The magnificence of certain [medieval] bindings, decorated with plates of ivory and gold work, testifies . . . to the human desire to celebrate the liturgy with beautiful objects, in order to render glory to God."⁹ The age and beauty of the Sens diptych were what mattered; its pagan subject was largely coincidental.

On the verso of the first folio, a fifteenth-century hand has added two descriptive epigraphs. The first draws attention to the delight taken by the cantor in the "Feast of Fools," presumably because of its high musical caliber,

4. Wright, *Dissemination*, 118; Leviste, *Cathédrale*, 1.

5. For a bibliography of previous editions and studies of the Sens office, see Villetard, 28–37.

6. Chérest, 17.

7. Chérest, 15–17; Villetard, 14–16.

8. For a full description and life-size drawings of the diptych, see Millin, *Monuments*, 2:336–43, pls. 50–51; cf. Millin, *Voyage*, 1:60–69 (abbreviated translation in Millin, *Travels*, 23–25); Molinier, *Histoire*, 1:47–48; Villetard, 6, 12, pls. after xii.

9. Palazzo, *Liturgie*, 164–65.

and reminds participants that “all honor” at the feast “is due to the circumcised Christ”:

Festum stultorum de consuetudine morum
omnibus urbs Senonis festivitatis nobilis annis,
quo gaudet precentor: tamen omnis honor
sit Christo circumciso nunc semper et almo.¹⁰

[The Feast of Fools, by ancient custom
celebrated every year in Sens,
delights the cantor: but all honor's due
to Christ the circumcised, forever kind.]

The second, perhaps involving a pun on *tartarus* (Latin = Tartarus, infernal regions) and *tartre* (French = tartar, a by-product of wine fermentation), was judged untranslatable by Aubin-Louis Millin.¹¹ My best effort fails to capture the pun:

Tartara Bacchorum non pocula sunt fatuorum,
tartara vincentes sic fiunt ut sapientes.

[The cups of the fools are not hellish rites;
defeating the wine, the fools become wise.]¹²

The antiquarian title, the Roman binding, and the poetic epigraphs have proved unreliable guides to the manuscript, suggesting to the modern reader—despite the epigraphs' insistence to the contrary—an element of pagan revelry that is entirely absent from the office itself. Peter of Corbeil's own title for the office, placed in red letters at the head of the second folio, is a more reliable guide: *Circumcisio Domini* (Circumcision of the Lord). Stretching from first vespers on the eve of the feast, through compline, matins, lauds, prime, terce, mass, sext, and nones, to second vespers at the close of the feast, the Sens office of the Circumcision is a dignified and often beautiful score for corporate worship. Of the 152 component parts into which its modern editor, Henri Villetard, divides the office, ninety-five belong to the normal daily round of hours, fifty-one are borrowed from other liturgical contexts (mostly from elsewhere

10. Chérest, 17; Villetard, 12; for a French translation, see Millin, *Monuments*, 2:344; Villetard, 13.

11. Millin, *Monuments*, 2:344.

12. Chérest, 18; Villetard, 13.

in the Christmas season), and only six are “extra-liturgical” elements peculiar to the feast of the Circumcision.¹³ Even these extra-liturgical tropes enhance rather than disrupt the liturgy. At least three of them, if we can trust Louvet’s account of the Beauvais feast of the Circumcision of 1160/62, were already in use in Beauvais.

Two such tropes served as a prologue to first vespers. Sung outside the main doors of the cathedral, perhaps amid a crowd of lay worshippers,¹⁴ “Lux hodie, lux laetitiae” was a brief “invitation to joy.”¹⁵ Congregants were invited to banish ill will and gloom and to take part with delight in the “feast of the ass” (*asinaria festa*). This was followed by “Orientis partibus,” or the song of the ass, identified in the Sens manuscript as the “Conductus ad tabulam.” The Sens version added a fourth stanza recalling the visit of the three kings to Bethlehem, traditionally celebrated five days later on the feast of Epiphany:

Aurum de Arabia	Red gold from Arabia,
thus et myrram de Saba	frankincense and, from Sheba,
tulit in ecclesia	myrrh he brought and, through the door,
virtus asinaria	into the church he bravely bore.
Hez hez sire asnes hez.	Heigh, sir ass, oh heigh. ¹⁶

There is no evidence that a live ass accompanied the procession in Sens. This opening pair of songs was, in any case, the only mention in the Sens office of “the feast of the ass.”

Chérest, as we have already noted, found “the melody” of the song of the ass “singularly remarkable for its grace.” He observed, further, that it was the great variety of melodies and modes of delivery stipulated by the “artist” Peter of Corbeil that safeguarded so long an office as that of Sens against the dangers of “monotony.” The words alone have a certain similarity, he wrote, but the music provides “the charm of a continual variety.”¹⁷

The successive parts of first vespers illustrate this musical variety well.¹⁸ “After the elegant and almost worldly melody of the ‘Orientis partibus,’” the

13. Villetard, 41–44, 47.

14. Villetard, 49.

15. Clément, *Histoire*, 125; Villetard, 86, 129.

16. Villetard, 87, 130; trans. Greene, “Song,” 537. The French translation in Leber, 9:369, and Villetard, 50, renders the last two lines of this verse more carefully as “L’Église s’est enrichie, / Par la vertu d’ânerie.”

17. Chérest, 26–28. Bourquelot, “Office,” 166, also comments on the variety of the chants.

18. Villetard, 86–92, 129–37.

tabula was read. This was followed by a troped “Deus in adiutorium,” the conventional opening prayer of each of the canonical hours, set to a melody with “the direct appeal of plainchant.” Then came a farsed “Alleluia” with “an odd, uneven, skipping rhythm.” The four brief stanzas separating its opening “Alle-” from its closing “-luya” rejoiced that “the whole church resounds” with praise to “the son of Mary.” The music of the next piece, “Haec est clara dies,” reproduced “the movement and the solemnity” of the text and was sung, according to the rubric, by “four or five in falsetto, behind the altar” (*quatuor vel quinque in falso, retro altare*). Deciphered, this means that the chant was delivered in *fauxbourdon*, using three-part harmony: two or three tenors, a countertenor, and a descant. The last part was written as a bass line but was sung an octave higher by a soprano or falsetto. Moreover, the singers stood “in the apse, behind the altar,” possibly near a crib placed there for the Christmas season, thereby recalling the birth of Christ celebrated eight days earlier.¹⁹

The next piece, “Salve festa dies,” was sung by “two or three, in unison, before the altar” (*duo vel tres, in voce, ante altare*). Villetard speaks of the chant’s “superb melody.”²⁰ It was followed by “Laetetur gaudiis,” which Eudes of Sully had assigned to both first and second vespers in the Paris reform. At first vespers there, it had been sung by the *dominus festi*, newly dressed in the cantor’s cope and holding his staff. Perhaps the same was true in Sens, where the bearer of the staff was known as the *bacularius*. The words of the song acknowledged the sin of “our first parents” and rejoiced at the redemptive response of Christ “in the flesh.” “Laetetur gaudiis” flowed directly into “Christus manens,” sung according to the rubric as “versus cum organo,” a chant “organized” or arranged for several voices. In this instance, a countertenor part was added at a fifth above the tenor line. Occasionally the two parts stretched to an interval of a full octave or joined in unison on the same note.²¹ “Christus manens” closed with a reprise of the closing line of “Laetetur gaudiis.”

Resuming the ordinary pattern of vespers, five antiphons celebrating the Virgin Birth introduced and closed five psalms. Each psalm is followed in

19. Chérest, 28–29, describes the variety of music. Villetard, 77–79, explains the rubric, alludes to the crib (*praesepe*), and glosses “retro altare” as “in the apse, behind the altar.” The crib in the fourteenth-century Rouen *Officium pastorum* was placed “retro altare” (Young, 2:14, 19). For more on *fauxbourdon*, see Trumble, *Fauxbourdon*; Trowell, “Fauxbourdon.” For recorded versions of chants mentioned in this paragraph, albeit with added instrumentation, see *Messe*, tracks 1–2, 1–3, 1–5, 4–1, 4–2.

20. Villetard, 81.

21. Villetard, 79–81.

the text by the abbreviation, “Euouae.” Early critics, convinced of the deep-seated paganism of the Feast of Fools, interpreted this as a version of the encouraging cry of Jupiter to Bacchus, “Eu huie” (Courage, my son).²² It is, in fact, a common liturgical abbreviation for the last two words of the Gloria Patri, omitting the consonants of “seculorum amen” to leave only its vowels and thus announcing the singing of the Gloria Patri.²³

The *capitulum* came from Isaiah 9: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” This was followed by the popular medieval Christmas responsory “Descendit de caelis” (He descends from the heavens), its successive parts perhaps sung by individual or grouped clergy in ascending ecclesiastical rank.²⁴ Then came the “magnificent chant ‘Trinitas,’” praising the triune God in three-syllable rhyming lines. It was sung in unison, to a “sublime” melody, by “duo vel tres” (two or three) voices.²⁵ An antiphon then introduced the Magnificat. Perhaps, as in Paris, the subdeacons were tempted to dwell on God’s inclination to replace the “mighty” with the “humble.” First vespers closed with chanted prayer and an extensively troped Benedicamus.

The Sens office of the Circumcision continued in similar fashion through each of the canonical hours and mass. Mass and second vespers were the most elaborate, but others had their special features. Compline included a troped Lord’s Prayer, sung by two subdeacons, and a rare troped Creed, sung by two presbyters.²⁶ In each case, one chanted the traditional text and the other the commentary, alternating phrases throughout the piece. Matins closed with “Natus est,” the third of the six extra-liturgical tropes identified by Villettard.²⁷ Designated “*Conductus ad ludos*” (Procession to the games) by the rubric, this joyous announcement of the birth of Christ brought the clergy and choir in procession to the *bacularius*. Then, after the *bacularius* introduced the Te Deum, the procession made its way out of the cathedral. Matins was over, but it is fair to suppose that some unspecified *ludi* followed.²⁸

Lauds, prime, and terce stuck close to the forms stipulated by the breviary, but mass was expanded. After a troped Gloria, voices joined to sing “Lux optata claruit” (The longed-for light has shone). This was the “*Conductus*

22. Millin, *Monumens*, 2:343; Millin, *Voyage*, 1:69. Heers, *Fêtes*, 138, perpetuates this error.

23. Bourquelot, “Office,” 158–61; Clément, *Histoire*, 164–66; Dreves, “Geschichte,” 579; Harper, “Forms,” 196.

24. Clément, *Histoire*, 123.

25. *Ibid.*, 123, 131.

26. A troped Creed was also sung at prime in at least one version of the Beauvais office of the Circumcision (Hughes, “Another,” 21).

27. Villettard, 101–2, 152–53; for a recording of “Natus est,” see *Messe*, track 5–4.

28. Villettard, 50.

ad subdiaconum,” sung during the procession accompanying the assigned subdeacon to the *pulpitum* to read the epistle. The refrain was a merry one:

Hoc in hoc! Hoc in hoc!	In this, in this
Hoc in hoc sollempnio	in this festivity,
Concinat hec concio! ²⁹	this congregation celebrates in song!

While the repeated “hoc in hoc” may sound to some like a musical attempt to mimic the braying of an ass, Clément insisted that it was no more than a merry Christmas refrain “similar to a thousand others that do not shock us when we sing them in our childhood.”³⁰

The epistle itself, as had been the case under Eudes of Sully’s reform in Paris, was farsed. Brief phrases from Isaiah 9 alternated with explanatory “stuffing.” It began (customary introduction and biblical text in italics):

Lectio Ysaiae prophetae,
 In qua Christi lucida vaticanatur nativitas.
Haec dicit Dominus
 Pater, Filius, sanctus Spiritus, Deus unus:
Populus gentium qui ambulat in tenebris,
 Quem creasti, quem fraude subdola hostis expulit paradiso,
Vidit lucem magnam.
 Fulserunt et immania, nocte media, pastoribus lumina,
Habitantibus in regione umbrae mortis;
 Lux sempiterna et redemptio vere nostra
Orta est eis.
 O stupenda nativitas!³¹

[*A reading from the prophet Isaiah,*
 In which the birth of Christ is clearly prophesied.
Thus says the Lord
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God:
The people walking in darkness,
 Whom you created, whom he expelled from Paradise because of
 the crafty deception of the Enemy

29. Villetard, 110–11, 166–67. For recordings, with added instrumentation, see *Messe*, track 6–3; *Tempus*, track 16a. For an alternative translation, see Stevens, *Words*, 61.

30. Clément, *Histoire*, 144.

31. Villetard, 111–12.

Saw a great light.

Great lights shone at midnight on the shepherds

On those living in the land of the shadow of death

Everlasting *light* and truly our redemption

Has dawned.

O wondrous nativity!]

The gospel (Luke 2:21) recalled Jesus's circumcision. The troped Creed was sung by "two presbyters or deacons," the "Sanctus" by "two clerks," and the "Agnus Dei" by "two choirboys." Peter of Corbeil was careful to assign parts to all ranks of the cathedral choir, perhaps to ensure that no group was tempted to absent itself and to take part in disorderly Kalends activities elsewhere. The length of the office as a whole allowed little or no time for unscheduled activities. "With so much ritual to organize and so much music to rehearse and perform, celebrating clerics would have [had] neither time nor energy to get into serious trouble."³²

Sext and nones also stuck close to the breviary, just leaving time for second vespers and for the refreshments that followed. Observing a pattern similar to that of first vespers, but with different texts and music whenever possible, second vespers closed with the last three extra-liturgical tropes identified by Villetard.³³ The first, the "Conductus ad bacularium,"³⁴ accompanied the final procession to the *bacularius*. Beginning with the phrase "Novus annus hodie," the chant celebrated the New Year as an annual feast of new beginnings, when worshippers enjoyed the loosening of the bonds of mortal sin and the restoration of spiritual health. Its refrain was again an exuberant one:

Ha! Ha! He!
Qui vult vere psallere³⁵
trino psallat munere;

Ha! Ha! He!
He who wants to sing truly
should sing his part triply;

32. Hughes, "Another," 14.

33. Villetard, 121–23, 184–88.

34. Bourquelot, "Office," 133, and Clément, *Histoire*, 151, misread "bacularium" as "ludarium," repeating a mistake made earlier (111 and 138 respectively), when they assign the chanting of the Te Deum at the close of matins to the "ludarius." The meaning of "ludarius" is obscure: see Du Cange, s.v. *ludarius* (5:148). Villetard, 74–75, presents the case for "bacularium."

35. *Psallere*, in classical Latin, meant to play on or sing to a stringed instrument (*TLL*, s.v. *psallo*), but in medieval Christian liturgy it meant to sing without accompaniment. The use of musical instruments was extremely rare or nonexistent in medieval church music (Bowles, "Were"; Smoldon, *Music*, 245–49; Wright, *Music*, 33–34).

corde, ore, opere	with his heart and mouth and deeds
debet laborare,	he must do his work
ut sic Deum colere	so that he can worship
possit et placare. ³⁶	and please God.

“Novus annus hodie” was followed by the familiar “Kalendas ianuarías,” calling on Christ to sanctify the January Kalends. Identified here as “Conductus ad poculum” (Procession to the drinking-cup), it was sung as the *bacularius* was led from the cathedral to the refectory. Finally the manuscript provided a “Versus ad Prandium,” to be sung before a light meal (*prandium*) in the refectory itself. The words were borrowed from a longer hymn by the early Christian poet Prudentius (348–413), “Hymnus ante cibum” (Hymn before Food).³⁷ “Written in a style no less serious than the rest of the office,” these two pieces “served to sanctify the festivities of which the New Year was always the occasion and the excuse.”³⁸ The influence of the office, in other words, was expected to extend to the refreshments that followed, encouraging proper seasonal merriment within the limits of good clerical behavior.

Villetard insisted that there was nothing in the Sens office that would “shock even the most exacting taste.”³⁹ Peter of Corbeil had trimmed the subdeacons’ annual feast day of anything that might cause offense and embedded what remained in a carefully constructed and significantly enlarged seasonal liturgy that gave “all honor to the circumcised Christ,” while still allowing the subdeacons a degree of lighthearted prominence within the church but keeping them from trouble elsewhere. Even Innocent III would likely have approved his former teacher’s reform. For the next two hundred years, the Sens office of the Circumcision and similar offices in other cities provided the orderly sacred context in which the Feast of Fools took place.

Chérest made this point over 150 years ago. Writing in 1853, he regretted the failure of earlier historians to recognize the fundamentally religious character of the Feast of Fools: “Blinded by preconceived notions, most writers have considered only the feast’s burlesque side. They have taken care to exaggerate its abuses in order to have further reasons to stigmatize it. According to them, the feast was nothing more than an occasion for intolerable scandals.” And yet, he points out, for several centuries the Feast of Fools was

36. Villetard, 122, 185. For a recording of “Novus annus hodie,” adapted to the feast of Saint Nicholas, see *Legends*, track 11.

37. For the full text of Prudentius’s hymn, see *PL* 59:796–811.

38. Chérest, 23.

39. Villetard, 51.

not merely tolerated but actively supported by eminent cathedral chapters. Critics were not lacking, but there was powerful support for the feast within the church itself. “How,” he asks, “can such facts be reconciled with the commonly received view of the feast?” Since it would not be fitting, he writes with quiet irony, “to suggest that illustrious historians have made a grave error,” he will indicate only why he hesitates to join them and why he believes it worth embarking on some new research on the topic.⁴⁰ His first and most important evidence for the religious character of the Feast of Fools was the Sens office of the Circumcision.

The same point needs making again today. Summaries of the Feast of Fools rarely mention the Sens office of the Circumcision, but almost all quote the hostile letter issued by the theologians of the University of Paris in 1445.⁴¹ They do so despite the Sens office being far more representative of what took place in northern French cathedrals at the New Year between 1200 and 1400 (and beyond) than the kind of disorder reported by the Paris theologians. As Chérest remarked 150 years ago, it is time for some fresh ideas on the Feast of Fools.

Further evidence for Chérest’s affirmation of the religious character of the Feast of Fools comes from contemporary offices in Beauvais, Le Puy-en-Velay, and Laon. Prepared during the bishopric of Miles of Nanteuil (1217–1234), the Beauvais office of the Circumcision was, in Fassler’s view, “more restrained than its slightly older contemporary” in Sens.⁴² The Beauvais office replaced the phrase “asinaria festa” in the opening “Lux hodie” at first vespers with the innocuous “presentia festa” (the present feast), but retained the processional “Orientis partibus.” The latter was designated “Conductus quando asinus adducitur” (Conductus when the ass is led), suggesting that a live ass still made an appearance. The song of the ass was repeated without the ass, in an arrangement for three parts, as the conductus taking the two subdeacons to read the farsed epistle at mass,⁴³ but the “Conductus ad ludos” at the close of matins, as well as the “Conductus ad bacularium” and the “Versus ad prandium” at the close of second vespers, were all omitted.

“Kalendas ianuaris,” which was sung during matins in Louvet’s reading of the missing 1160/62 Beauvais manuscript and as the “Conductus ad poculum” at the close of second vespers in Sens, was moved to the close of

40. Chérest, 8.

41. Even, to my embarrassment, Harris, *Carnival*, 8–9, 140–42.

42. Fassler, 85. The Beauvais office, preserved in British Museum MS. Egerton 2615, fols. 1–68, has been edited, with full musical notation and commentary, by Arlt, *Festoffizium*. For the date of composition, see 1:29. For the bishopric of Miles of Nanteuil, see Murray, *Beauvais*, 34–38.

43. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:53–64, 146; 2:3–4, 104.

lauds in thirteenth-century Beauvais. According to the much misunderstood “wine” rubric, “Kalendas ianuarías” was introduced at that point by one of the four canons holding a flagon and a goblet.⁴⁴ The comparative restraint of the Beauvais office is further reason for setting aside Chambers’s notion of an early morning drinking bout.

The Beauvais office was longer than its Sens cousin. An elaborate stationary “procession before the crucifix” was added after first vespers. Leaving the choir, the clergy stopped before a large fixed cross, probably at the east end of the nave. There they chanted several pieces, including a troped Alleluia, a Magnificat, and a troped Benedicamus, before returning to the choir during the second responsory.⁴⁵ Matins was also expanded: each of the three Beauvais nocturns included a dozen or so pieces that had been omitted from the simpler structure of the Sens office.⁴⁶ Thus was every spare minute of the night hours, when the subdeacons might otherwise have been tempted to indulge in less dignified New Year celebrations, filled with sacred chant.

The pages describing prime, terce, and the beginning of mass are missing from the Beauvais manuscript, but they can be partially reconstructed from a seventeenth-century synopsis of a now missing variant of the Beauvais office, also dating from the time of Miles of Nanteuil.⁴⁷ This synopsis is even more restrained than the surviving manuscript, suggesting the possibility that further changes were either considered or carried out. “Orientis partibus” is missing, as are several of the more lively conducti. The rubric after lauds is omitted, and “Kalendas ianuarías” is returned to matins. “Kalendas ianuarías” was also sung at the close of second vespers, where a musically rich procession, twice alluding to the *baculus*, was replaced with a shorter, more direct exodus to the refectory.⁴⁸

44. Ibid., 2:90.

45. Ibid., 1:81–91, 2:15–23. For a recording of four chants sung during this procession, see *Manuscript*, disc 1, tracks 15–18. For the meaning of *procession ante crucifixum* and the location of the crucifix in contemporary Laon, see Fernie, “Fonction,” 258. For similar processions in Notre-Dame de Paris, see Wright, *Music*, 339–41.

46. Cf. Villetard, 142–53, and Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:39–81. Matins was composed of a number of nocturns, or sections, each consisting of psalms, readings, and responsories. At major feasts there were three such nocturns (Harper, *Forms*, 86–97).

47. Hughes, “Another,” 20–22.

48. Ibid., 19, 22–31. For the references to the *baculus*, see Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 2:156, 159. Hughes, “Another,” 19, speculates that “the liturgy of Egerton 2615” was celebrated elsewhere, “perhaps in the nearby church of St. Michel, now destroyed, or in the larger St. Étienne,” and that “the synoptist’s manuscript may have been intended for the basse oeuvre,” where it served as a “more restrained” office “for the bishop and his entourage.” I am not persuaded by Hughes’s argument, which largely depends on his view of Egerton 2615 as “an exuberant and partly parodistic manuscript.”

Le Puy-en-Velay, a major pilgrimage center in the Massif Central of southern France, also had an office of the Circumcision. Although it survives only in two sixteenth-century manuscripts, its contents are “contemporary” with those of “the other major festival books” from Sens, Beauvais, and Laon, “not only in terms of its songs, but also in terms of the essential character of the structure of the service itself.”⁴⁹ Even longer than its cousins from northern France, the Le Puy office lasted, according to a bequest made in 1327, “twenty-four hours, in which night and day without interruption are sung beautiful prayers, lessons, and proses.”⁵⁰

Unlike the Circumcision offices from Sens and Beauvais, the Le Puy office did not incorporate a subdiaconal Feast of Fools; instead it celebrated the cathedral’s claim to possess a relic of the foreskin of Christ.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the office had its lighter moments. One of the farsed “lessons” sung in the chapter hall “after second vespers and before the common meal” mentioned a “small gift” (*munusculus*) given to honor the holder of the *baculus*.⁵² It is not clear whether a temporary *magister baculi* or a ranking canon, such as the cantor or succentor, was intended. In either case, the recipient may have been responsible for the younger choristers. A related ordinal calls the Le Puy feast a “festum de clargastres” (feast of the young clerics or choirboys).⁵³

The reason becomes apparent at the close of second compline, when a rubric instructs, “The choirboys dance” (*Clericuli tripudiant*). Two *clericuli* sing the final Benedicamus, after which an elaborate stational procession “to the chapel of the holy crucifix” forms up. Again, “the choirboys dance.” Finally,

49. Arlt, “Office,” 328. Arlt reports (341 n. 5) that he is preparing for publication an annotated edition of the text and music of the Le Puy office, to be called *Lo Bozolari: Ein Klerikerfest des Mittelalters aus Le Puy*. Meanwhile, the text of the office is available in Chevalier, *Prosolarium*. For a recording of parts of the office, made in close collaboration with Arlt, see *Manuscrit*, disc 2.

50. Payrard, “*Prosolaire*,” 147; Chevalier, *Prosolarium*, 1–2; translation from Arlt, “Office,” 325.

51. Chevalier, *Prosolarium*, 2–3; Arlt, “Office,” 330.

52. Chevalier, *Prosolarium*, 46; Arlt, “Office,” 338.

53. Arlt, “Office,” 340. Du Cange, 2:354, gives the meaning of *clargaster* as “clericus” (cleric), but the passage he cites more narrowly defines *clargaster* as a cleric “who has not yet attained his twentieth year.” According to Seck, “Lateinische,” the Latin suffix *-aster* serves as either a diminutive or a pejorative (cf. Nyrop, *Grammaire*, 3:99–100). In the case of *clargaster*, Seck (398) takes the suffix as a pejorative, defining *clargaster* as “bad cleric.” Arlt, “Office,” 340, also believes the term “was used with negative connotations.” But I understand *clargaster* in this context as a diminutive (= *clericulus*) and *festum de clargastres* as a name derived from the dance of the *clericuli* (young clerics or choirboys) with which the feast ended. *DMF* s.v. *clergeaut*, gives the meaning of the gallicized form of the word as “petit clerc, jeune clerc.” Payrard, “*Prosolaire*,” 151, quotes an anonymous “sixteenth-century” source that claimed, “with some malice,” that “choirboys, *clergeastres*, subchoristers, choristers, poor canons, and others overindulged [*ne soulaient faillir*]” at a “light meal” (*collation*) on the morning of the feast in Le Puy. Even here, despite the charge of overindulgence, there is no reason why *clergeastres* cannot be a diminutive: growing boys do eat more than the rest of us.

as the procession leaves the last of the stational chapels, the succentor begins “Hoc in anno” in a raised voice (*alta voce*) while “the choirboys dance vigorously.” “Hoc in hoc, hoc in hoc, hoc in hoc, in anno,” which we have met before in a slightly different form, is the merry refrain to the conductus “Hac in die salutari,” whose words call for the company “to be led in a circular dance.”⁵⁴ The dance of the *clericuli* seems to have encountered no resistance in Le Puy: the late date of the manuscripts and other supporting evidence suggest that the cathedral’s office of the Circumcision, with its closing dance, was still in use in the early sixteenth century, if not beyond.⁵⁵

Laon’s subdeacons’ feast took place at Epiphany. Details of the feast survive in a single manuscript collection “of all the special, elaborate liturgy that the cathedral chapter might celebrate over the course of the year.”⁵⁶ Unlike the offices of the Circumcision from Sens, Beauvais, and Le Puy, the Laon manuscript does not restrict itself to one feast, and is therefore more selective in the material it provides for each feast, tending to include only the “special music and liturgy”⁵⁷—as well as three liturgical plays—and to omit the more familiar chants. The manuscript itself has been variously dated from the last quarter of the twelfth century to the early thirteenth century.⁵⁸ If Peter the Chanter’s remark about “the role of Joseph,”⁵⁹ in his *Verbum abbreviatum* (1191/92), refers to the Laon *Office of Joseph*, then the play must date at least from the late twelfth century, but the manuscript in which the play has survived may be later. If, however, the Laon manuscript were also to date to the late twelfth century, it would be older than its cousins from Sens and Beauvais.

The Laon office of the Epiphany, according to Robert Lagueux, “gives the impression that it [was] a dignified, reformed version of a more raucous celebration that may have been celebrated in the past.”⁶⁰ But this assumption relies more on the inherited scholarly narrative of the early Feast of Fools

54. Chevalier, *Prosolarium*, 51–57; Arlt, “Office,” 339–40.

55. Chevalier, *Prosolarium*, 4–5; Arlt, “Office,” 329. The choirboys of Seville, known as *los seises*, still dance annually before the altar of the cathedral during the feasts of the Immaculate Conception, Corpus Christi, and Carnival (González Barrionuevo, *Seises*).

56. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 232. The manuscript is Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 263. As part of his careful study of the Christmas season in medieval Laon, Lagueux describes the contents of the manuscript (227–35); transcribes the text and music for the liturgies of the feasts of Saint John the Evangelist, Holy Innocents, and Epiphany (494–628); and transcribes and translates the texts of the three liturgical plays performed between Christmas Eve and Epiphany (690–711).

57. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 228.

58. For the early date, see Hughes, “Music,” 137; Lagueux, “Glossing,” 227–28. For the later date, see Young, 2:266. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:220, remains judiciously undecided.

59. See chapter 8.

60. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 334 n. 1.

than it does on any evidence of prior rowdiness in Laon. The manuscript itself bears witness to a sustained and dignified act of communal worship, during which only minor privileges were accorded to the subdeacons. At prime on the eve of Epiphany—the first service of the feast in Laon—“all the subdeacons” processed through “the nave of the church” (*in medio ecclesie*) to their place in the choir.⁶¹ Lagueux plausibly suggests that the subdeacons were seated for the duration of the feast in positions of greater esteem than they usually enjoyed.⁶² The opening rubric of first vespers instructs, “At vespers, let four subdeacons be the singers [*cantores*],” assigning to the selected subdeacons the privileged role of intoning the chants, usually reserved to the cantor or his deputy, the succentor.⁶³

The subdeacons are mentioned on one other occasion, at the close of second compline (and thus at the end of the entire feast). It is here that Lagueux finds hints of rowdiness. “All the subdeacons chant in the middle of the choir” the strophic song “*Nos respectu gratiae*” (We, regarding grace). The last verse invites the assembly to sing “with jubilation,” or “with dance”:

Lucis tanto radio	Let this assembly
hec perfusa contio	filled with such beams of light
ex amore nimio	out of such great love
psallat cum tripudio	sing with jubilation. ⁶⁴

Moments later, the final rubric of the feast invites the assembly to “sing all the *Benedicamus* [songs] we know.”⁶⁵ Lagueux comments, “The conclusion of the Laon subdeacons’ feast was thus characterized by one final bout of revelry, with dancing, and as much singing as was possible.”⁶⁶ Lagueux also notes that candles usually lit and left burning in the cathedral from first to second vespers at major feasts were not put in place for Epiphany, because then, according to a thirteenth-century Laon ordinal, “the subdeacons celebrate their feast.”⁶⁷ He wonders whether the subdeacons routinely stole the candles or whether “such a quantity of open flames was considered dangerous”

61. For the customary use of *in medio ecclesie* to designate the nave, see Fernie, “Fonction,” 259.

62. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 337, 512.

63. *Ibid.*, 337–38, 512. To “intone” a chant is to sing its opening phrase, establishing the melody for the choir.

64. *Ibid.*, 338, 627, 688.

65. *Ibid.*, 338, 628, 689.

66. *Ibid.*, 339.

67. Chevalier, *Ordinaires* (Laon), 243; trans. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 339. For the date of the ordinal, see Lagueux, “Glossing,” 222.

during the “endless compline” of “songs and dance” that followed second vespers.⁶⁸

But even troped and polyphonic versions of the *Benedicamus* were dignified chants, not drinking songs.⁶⁹ And if compline ended with a dance, it was probably no less appropriate (and no less joyous) than the choirboys’ dance in Le Puy. Moreover, even if Lagueux were right about the close of the feast, everything else in the Laon office of the Epiphany testifies to a form of worship that was even more restrained than those of the Circumcision in Sens, Beauvais, and Le Puy. The Laon office supports rather than undermines what we have already learned about the devotional nature of the carefully crafted liturgies that were at the heart of the early Feasts of Fools.

68. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 339.

69. For fine recordings of two *Benedicamus* songs from Le Puy, see *Manuscrit*, disc 2, tracks 13, 24; for an attempt to turn a *Benedicamus* into a drinking song, see *Messe*, track 5–2.

CHAPTER 10

The Plays of Daniel and Joseph

The Beauvais and Laon subdeacons' offices differed from those in Sens and Le Puy in one significant respect. Each added a lively play to the liturgy of the feast: a *Play of Daniel* in Beauvais and an *Office of Joseph* in Laon.

The Beauvais *Play of Daniel*, now the best known and most frequently revived of medieval liturgical plays, is preserved in the same manuscript as the Beauvais office of the Circumcision.¹ Both were inscribed in the same hand and had the same musical notator,² but the play was probably composed earlier and copied into the surviving manuscript from a now lost original.³

1. Ogden contains a facsimile of Egerton MS. 2615, fols. 95–108; a transcription of the music and text by A. Marcel J. Zijlstra; Zijlstra's translation, revised by Timothy Graham; and several critical essays. Wulstan, *Play* (2007), describing Zijlstra's transcription as "misguided" (xix), offers both a new edition of his own transcription of the text and music and a new translation. Earlier editions of the play include Young, 2:290–301; Greenberg, *Play*; Bevington, 137–54; Collins, *Medieval*, 397–458; Wulstan, *Play* (1976); Dronke, *Nine*, 110–46. For nineteenth-century editions, see Taylor, "Prophetic," 25. For a brief history of modern revivals of the play, see Collins, "Play."

2. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, 1:26; Fassler, 66 n. 5.

3. For the various attempts to date *Danielis ludus*, see Emmerson, "Divine," 45, 59 n. 45. Estimates range from "about 1140" (Young, 2:290 n. 4; Dronke, *Nine*, 119) to "ca. 1230" (Stevens, *Words*, 312). My own estimate is that the play dates from sometime between 1160/62, when Louvet's lost manuscript apparently made no mention of it, and 1190/92, when Peter the Chanter may have referred to it in his *Verbum adbreuiatum*. If, as Young, 2:303, Wulstan, *Play* (2007), x–xi, and others suggest, Ralph (Raoul) of Beauvais had a significant hand in shaping the play, these dates can be narrowed

The play's opening song (lines 1–4)⁴ clearly declares its intention to honor Christ and, less clearly, its origin:

Ad honorem tui, Christe,	In your honor, O Christ,
Danielis ludus iste	this play of Daniel
in Belvaco est inventus	was compiled in Beauvais
et invenit hunc iuventus.	and the young men compiled it.

Those responsible for the play may not have been as young as most translations suggest. *Iuventus* denotes young men in “the prime of life (between the ages of 20 and 45).”⁵ Karl Young believed that it signified here “the students of the cathedral school,”⁶ but it no doubt also included the subdeacons, on whose feast day the play was performed. While some students may have been subdeacons, not all subdeacons were students: some subdeacons were “paid to serve in the choir,” while others were “important and highly placed canons, . . . as numerous charters from the twelfth century attest.”⁷

How the “young men” prepared the play is unclear. Some scholars argue that *Danielis ludis* was a reworking of an earlier play on the same topic by Hilarius of Orléans,⁸ or that both were independent reworkings of a now lost Daniel play,⁹ in which case “inventus” would retain its primary meaning of “found” or “discovered.”¹⁰ Others believe that the Beauvais *Daniel* was an original work,¹¹ in which case “inventus” would bear its secondary meaning of “devised.” In either case, it is probable that “one exceptionally eloquent and imaginative writer was the controlling intelligence behind the Beauvais

further. According to Hunt, “Studies,” 12, Ralph “was at the height of his fame in the late sixties and seventies.” By 1182–1185 he “was an old man.”

4. Line numbers conform to the Young and Bevington editions.

5. Simpson, *Cassell's*, s.v. *iuventus*; Dronke, *Nine*, 111, remarks that *iuventus* “in the twelfth century tended to begin at 21 and not end before 50.” Daniel is described later in the play, at an age when he has already served as “ruler of all Babylon” under Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:48), as being “in the glory of his young manhood” (*in iuventis gloria*) (line 128).

6. Young, 2:290; cf. Tydeman, 132; Ogden, “Staging,” 17.

7. Fassler, 76.

8. Young, 2:303–4; Wright, *Dissemination*, 106; Dronke, *Nine*, 119; Ogden, “Staging,” 18–19. For the contrary argument that Hilarius reworked *Danielis ludus*, see Meyer, *Fragmenta*, 56–57; Drumb, *Quem*, 341; Bulst and Bulst-Thiele, *Hilarii*, 9–15. For the text of Hilarius's *Historia de Daniel Representanda*, for which no music has survived, see Young, 2:276–86; Bulst and Bulst-Thiele, *Hilarii*, 48–59.

9. Wulstan, *Play* (2007), ix–xi.

10. *OLD*, s.v. *inuenio*; Wulstan, *Play* (2007), vii. Cf. *Danielis ludus*, lines 110–11: “Seek out Daniel, / And when you have found him, bring him here [*et inventum adducit*].”

11. Fassler, 86–87.

text.”¹² Some have suggested that Ralph (or Raoul) of Beauvais (Radulfus Belvacensis), grammar master at the cathedral school in the middle of the twelfth century, was the writer in question.¹³

With its references to “the solemn feast of the Nativity” (270, 276) and its closing angelic announcement of the birth of Christ (389–92), the *Play of Daniel* was clearly intended for performance during the Christmas season. Earlier scholars assigned it to various ritual moments in the Christmas octave,¹⁴ but Fassler has argued persuasively for its link to the Feast of Fools.¹⁵ Her argument, in summary, “is that *Danielis ludus* is a Feast of Fools play; that the staging, the text and music, the particular choice of Old Testament characters, and the narrative, all serve to illustrate the themes of misrule prominent in other aspects of Feast of Fools celebrations. But, although *Daniel* is a *ludus*, that is, a sporting or jocular entertainment, it is not ultimately irreverent. Instead this is a play written by ecclesiastical reformers, as was the Circumcision Office that accompanies it in manuscript. It permits folly and discord, but within an orthodox context, and its goals are to suppress certain aspects of well-established popular traditions by bringing them into the church and containing them within larger liturgical and exegetical traditions.”¹⁶

Although Fassler’s identification of the *Play of Daniel* with the Feast of Fools is persuasive, her portrayal of the Feast of Fools should be approached with considerable caution. Much of what she assumes about the characteristic “misrule” of “Feast of Fools celebrations” is based uncritically on “the wealth of archival materials” made available by Tilliot in 1741 and the “invaluable synthesis” later provided by Chambers.¹⁷ Fassler quotes the list of abuses from the central paragraph of the letter circulated by the Paris theologians in 1445.¹⁸ She also deduces, from Richard of St.-Victor’s complaint,

12. Dronke, *Nine*, 110; cf. Smoldon, *Music*, 227; Wulstan, *Play* (1976), ii, 1.

13. Young, 2:303, followed by Wright, *Dissemination*, 106–7, and Frank, *Medieval*, 56, suggests that “Raoul of Beauvais” adapted Hilarius’s play. Wulstan, *Play* (2007), x–xi, suggests that “Ralph of Beauvais” adapted another, now lost work. For what little is known of Radulfus Belvacensis, see Hunt, “Studies,” 11–16; Wright, *Dissemination*, 97.

14. Harris, “Rough,” 89 n. 56, gives a brief account of scholarly efforts to locate the play at particular moments in the Christmas season. In addition, Foy de Sainte-Hilaire, in Denis, *Lettres*, 312, believed the play “was represented on Christmas Eve before the Te Deum”; Smoldon, *Music*, 224–25, thought the feast of the Circumcision more “likely.”

15. Fassler, 97–98, ties the play firmly to the feast of the Circumcision without insisting on a specific time in the office. Avalle, *Teatro*, 135, and “Secundum,” 21, previously suggested a link with the Feast of Fools. Writing after the publication of Fassler’s essay, all the contributors to Ogden accept that *Danielis ludus* was a Feast of Fools play. So does Petersen, “*Danielis*,” 297.

16. Fassler, 66–67.

17. Fassler, 72 n. 23.

18. Fassler, 80 n. 58.

Eudes of Sully's decree, and Chambers's reports of "traditions in other cathedral towns," that the early Feast of Fools in Paris involved a "riotous procession" and a "drinking bout" and that "the entire ecclesiastical establishment was, for one day, turned inside out."¹⁹

As for the Feast of Fools in Beauvais, Fassler pays too little attention to Louvet's account of the office of the Circumcision in the now lost 1160/62 manuscript, dismissing the manuscript as an "unofficial ordo or mock processional."²⁰ She relies instead on Chambers's account of the early Feast of Fools in Beauvais, which—as we have seen—was dependent on Grenier's gross misreading of the evidence. Despite characterizing the Beauvais office of the Circumcision as "more restrained" than the Sens office,²¹ Fassler describes the immediate context of the Beauvais play as "a special occasion: the gathering of cathedral canons and townspeople to witness the annual storming of their cathedral during the Feast of Fools."²²

Nevertheless, with only a small modification, it is possible to rescue this part of Fassler's argument. Rather than supposing that the *Play of Daniel* was part of an ongoing effort to reform the Feast of Fools in Beauvais, we can imagine that the play, like the liturgical feast itself, was designed as a rival attraction to competing Kalends games. Indeed, the play was able to go one step further than the office of the Circumcision alone. By devoting the ample resources of the church to the staging of the *Play of Daniel*, the "young men" of Beauvais cathedral were simultaneously able to outperform the secular New Year games and, in the dramatic narrative, condemn them as pagan. With this modification, Fassler's argument stands.

Moreover, the play owes much that is positive to the Feast of Fools. The Feast of Fools, like Herod plays and boy bishop ceremonies, may be considered a meditation on a line from the Magnificat: "He has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble." The *Play of Daniel* sustains and deepens this meditation. The proud and mighty are represented by the pagan rulers Nebuchadnezzar, Balthasar (Belshazzar), and Darius, and, at a lower rank, by their conniving courtiers. The humble are represented by Daniel and by the Christ whom Daniel prefigures and whose conception first prompted Mary to sing the Magnificat. If the play had aimed only at containing popular traditions in an approved dramatic narrative, it would

19. Fassler, 78–79.

20. Fassler, 82.

21. Fassler, 85.

22. Fassler, 67–68.

have been little more than a defensive measure. But the message of the play lies at the positive heart of the Christian gospel. It is thus eminently suited to the great Christmas season of rejoicing.

Like the office for the feast of the Circumcision that surrounds and dwarfs it, the *Play of Daniel* is built around a series of elaborate sung processions. The opening processional prose served both to summarize the dramatic action about to unfold and to usher King Balthasar and his “princes” into view in the cathedral. Arriving at his throne (perhaps the *cathedra* usually occupied by the bishop),²³ Balthasar ordered his satraps to produce for his own secular use the sacred vessels that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had removed from the temple in Jerusalem.²⁴ Nebuchadnezzar and Balthasar, like Herod, were dramatic types of the pagan ruler convinced of his own invincibility in defiance of the Christian God.

Most scholars assume that vessels from the cathedral’s own treasury were used as stage properties at this point.²⁵ Fassler sees a link between the stolen vessels of the plot and those set aside for use during mass but periodically borrowed for use in unlicensed festivities.²⁶ In late-thirteenth-century Paris, students misappropriated church vestments and other ornaments for use in festive processions through the city streets on the feast of Saint Nicholas (6 December).²⁷ Perhaps something similar had been happening in Beauvais. If the doomed Balthasar was “dressed in opulent vestments borrowed from the sacristy”²⁸ and drank with his princes from vessels usually reserved for the consecrated wine of the mass, it may have been to warn against such misuse. The subdeacons were responsible for the sacred vessels and vestments of the cathedral. Their feast day would have been an appropriate occasion to dramatize the consequences of removing sacred objects from the house of God for unlicensed festivities.

The second processional prose, “Iubilemus regi nostri” (Let us sing praise to our king), was sung by the satraps as they brought the stolen drinking vessels to the king. Its melody echoed in its opening and closing phrases the

23. Taylor, “Prophetic,” 37; Ogden, “Staging,” 22; Emmerson, “Divine,” 51.

24. 2 Kings 24:13, Dan. 5:2.

25. Collins, *Production*, 253; Fassler, 88; Emmerson, “Divine,” 51–52.

26. Fassler, 88. Emmerson, “Divine,” 45–46, sees a reference to the appropriation and sale of plate from Beauvais cathedral by Philip I of France (1060–1108). The fate of Belshazzar was commonly invoked as a warning against the misuse of sacred vestments and vessels (Durand, *Rationale* 1.3.48 [1:51]; trans. Neale and Webb, [Durand, *Symbolism*], 70).

27. Denifle, *Chartularium*, 1:532; see also chapter 24.

28. Fassler, 88.

familiar melody of the song of the ass.²⁹ Its words evoked songs, clapping, and instrumental music:

Resonet jocunda turba sollemnibus odis,
Citharizent, plaudent manus, mille sonent modis.

[Let the joyful throng resound with festive songs,
Let them play the harp, clap hands, and make a glad sound in a
thousand ways.]

(42–43)

Fassler plausibly supposes “a delighted audience of clerics and, perhaps, townspeople as well.”³⁰ Such an audience may have played its part in representing the “joyful throng,” applauding the entry of the satraps, clapping along to the familiar melody of the processional chant, and otherwise making “a glad sound.” In Hilarius’s *Daniel* play, the opening prose begins, “Resonet unanimes cum plausu populari” (Let all together resound with the applause of the people).³¹ Alternatively, the references to clapping may have been “no more than poetic colouring,”³² intended to establish a narrative mood but not to invite actual clapping. As a boy in the Church of England, I heard the cathedral choir sing, “O clap your hands together, all ye people.”³³ Had anybody in the congregation dared to clap, it would have been considered most improper.

The same ambiguity surrounds the question of musical accompaniment. “Let them play the harp,” in the satraps’ prose, is the first of several references to musical instruments in the *ludus*. When, later, King Darius enters with his princes, the rubric announcing his arrival (215) mentions “harpists” (*citharistae*). The processional chant that follows (216–45) twice mentions “dance” (*tripudium*) and closes with a reference to “tambourines” or “drums” (*tympana*), “harpists plucking their strings” (*citharistae tangant cordas*), and the sound of “polyphonic music” (*musicorum organa*). Young claims that “the singing of such lines was unquestionably accompanied by the melody and clangour of musical instruments.”³⁴ But Craig Wright insists that musical

29. Fassler, 88–90.

30. Fassler, 86, 88.

31. Bulst and Bulst-Thiele, *Hilarii*, 48; Young, 2:276. Dronke, *Nine*, 144, explains why he variously translates *plaudere* as “dance,” “clap,” and “leap.”

32. Smoldon, *Music*, 254.

33. Ps. 47:1.

34. Young, 2:302; cf. Dronke, *Nine*, 113.

instruments were never used in the liturgy of the period. The occasional textual mention of musical instruments in sacred songs was, he believes, nothing more than “poetic metaphor.”³⁵ (When the cathedral choir of my boyhood sang, “Praise him in the cymbals and dances, praise him upon the strings and pipe,”³⁶ only the organ accompanied the chorister’s voices.) Processional “harpists” may have been required by the Beauvais rubric as part of the visual, rather than the musical, representation of the Babylonian court. The textual invocation of musical instruments may have been “verbal poetry, and, like all other liturgical drama, the *Daniel* may well have been sung entirely *a capella*.”³⁷

Fassler strikes an intriguing middle ground. Knowing that sacred chant of the period was sung unaccompanied, she argues that musical instruments were used in the *Play of Daniel* precisely because they were “so out-of-place in church, so pagan.”³⁸ Musical accompaniment was employed, in other words, for its startling dramatic effect: it noisily reinforced the pagan identities of Balthasar and Darius. Her argument is cogent and may be correct.³⁹ We should bear in mind, however, that amid all the complaints about masks, swords, bladders, live asses, and cross-dressing inside churches during the Christmas season, we have not yet come across a single reference to the use of musical instruments.⁴⁰ Fassler’s argument is not conclusive.

Nevertheless, her response to the question of “poetic metaphor” in the matter of musical instruments may be usefully extended to the larger question of how *Danielis ludus* was staged. One can imagine a performance in which all the references to musical instruments, dance, clapping, stolen vessels, banquets, and female roles were confined to the text. Such a performance would have recalled the abuses of Kalends festivities without reenacting them. Moreover, it would arguably have placed the devotional element of

35. Wright, *Music*, 34. “There was no organ in Notre Dame [de Paris] prior to the fourteenth century,” and no other instruments “were countenanced within the walls of Notre Dame” before “the beginning of the sixteenth century” (143, 231).

36. Ps. 150:4.

37. Ogden, *Staging*, 191, 232 n. 22; cf. Smoldon, *Music*, 255.

38. Fassler, 96.

39. Two fine recordings of the *Play of Daniel* with very different approaches to the question of instrumental accompaniment are *Ludus* (Schola Hungarica) and *Ludus* (Harp Consort). The first uses only occasional, restrained percussion; the second uses vielles, shawms, drone pipes, lute, gittern (cithara), harp, psaltery, organ, bells, and percussion. The first comes wonderfully close to meditative, unaccompanied plainchant; the second exploits the intense emotional and theological drama of the play. The first makes no concession to the Feast of Fools; the second, acknowledging the influence of Fassler’s article, incorporates the song of the ass after Darius’s “O hez!” Which of the two recordings is closer to the original twelfth-century performance is a matter for ongoing scholarly discussion.

40. We will meet one for the first time in fourteenth-century Nîmes (see chapter 13).

the play at less risk. But one can also imagine a performance in which much that would otherwise have been “out of place” in church was allowed in the *Play of Daniel* precisely because it so effectively characterized the Babylonian court as “pagan.” Moreover, as the German Herod games, the Benedikt-beuern *Christmas Play*, and the Padua *Representation of Herod* have shown, a little controlled disorder can sometimes enhance rather than diminish devotional effect. Although its characters are more well rounded and its dramatic and musical technique more sophisticated than those of the other *ludi*, it seems to me that the *Play of Daniel* was inspired, at least in part, by the same creative impulse to employ ludic means for devotional ends.

When Balthasar’s returning satraps sang “Laughing Babylon applauds” (56), therefore, they may have been referring both to the historical court and to the present audience.⁴¹ The delivery of this line to a melody reminiscent of the song of the ass, accompanied by stringed instruments, drums, and hand-clapping, would have drawn the subdiaconal performers and their laughing and applauding audience firmly into the represented world of pagan Babylon. If, as Fassler believes, “the Babylonians in *Daniel* were meant to be recognized as subdeacons”—or as I prefer, Kalends revelers—“in disguise,”⁴² then the audience’s laughter and applause implicitly called into question the propriety of the same audience’s previous laughter and applause for seasonal excesses outside the church.

Once the royal banquet was under way, writing mysteriously appeared on the wall. The terrified king’s knees knocked wildly.⁴³ His wise men were unable to decipher the words. The queen arrived in another sumptuous procession (75–98), designated “*Conductus reginae*” (*Conductus of the queen*). A male subdeacon would have played the role of the queen. It was normal for male clerics to play female roles in liturgical plays, the best-known example being that of the three Marys in the Easter *Visitatio Sepulchri*.⁴⁴ Clerics representing the Marys acted soberly and made only modest adjustments to their clerical vestments, such as covering the head with a hood or an amice, to suggest feminine dress.⁴⁵ But there is reason to suspect that the subdeacon playing the role of the queen in the *Play of Daniel* may have gone further. The words of the *conductus* drew attention to the queen’s “golden apparel” (84–86), proclaimed her/him a “man-like

41. Dronke, *Nine*, 123, translates “Babylon leaps laughing,” excluding the audience and restricting the action to the performers.

42. Fassler, 89.

43. Fassler, 96; Dan. 5:6.

44. Young, 1:239–410; Hardison, *Christian*, 178–252; Bevington, 27–29.

45. Collins, *Production*, 285–87; Ogden, *Staging*, 127–28.

woman" (*virago*) (93),⁴⁶ and invoked "joyful applause" (95) and the music of "strings and voices" (97–98). Men dressed in women's clothes had for centuries been a commonplace of Kalends masquerades. Like the "pagan" use of musical accompaniment, cross-dressing may have been allowed during the queen's conductus precisely to contain such behavior and to place it in a narrative context that identified it as "pagan."⁴⁷ Perhaps, if this was the case, the cleric playing the queen did so in a deliberately comic style. Or perhaps he stopped short of impropriety, evoking femininity just enough to make the audience hold its collective breath but not enough to cause laughter or offense.

To a simple, lilting melody, the queen urged the king to send for Daniel. The king agreed. The princes, finding Daniel, addressed him partly in Latin, partly in French, suggesting not only that Daniel was a foreigner but also that he belonged to the world of the audience in the cathedral.⁴⁸ The words and music that accompanied Daniel's processional entry were "of more serious character,"⁴⁹ as befitted the arrival of "the true servant of God" (121). While the princes exalted his "virtue, life, and character" (131), Daniel added his own refrain, in a characteristic mix of Latin and French: "Pauper et exulans envois al roi par vos" (As a poor man and an exile, I go with you to the king) (127, 133, 139). Daniel's humility compared favorably with the pomp of the earlier processions and introduced him as a type of Christ. The play was carefully endorsing the promise of the Magnificat: while Balthasar would be put down, Daniel (and Christ) would be exalted.

Arriving at the royal court, Daniel interpreted the mysterious writing as an expression of God's displeasure at the misuse of sacred vessels and as an announcement of the imminent end of Balthasar's reign. Unlike Herod, who raged when challenged, Balthasar heeded the divine rebuke, commanding that Daniel be dressed in royal robes and ordering the satraps to remove the offending vessels.

The queen's recession provided a second opportunity for the subdiaconal actor to play a cross-dressed role. The words of the conductus lauded

46. Simpson, *Cassell's*, s.v. *virago*: "a man-like woman, female warrior, heroine." Translators of *Danielis ludus* usually conceal the gender ambiguity of the Latin *virago* by choosing "heroine" (Zijlstra, "Play," 119) or even "royal lady" (Wulstan, *Play* [1976], 6). Andrew Lawrence-King, in *Ludus* (Harp Consort), 29, comes closer with "mighty woman." Wulstan, *Play* (2007), 6, amends his earlier translation to "mighty lady."

47. Fassler, 91.

48. Dronke, *Nine*, 112, understands the "vernacular snatches" as a bridge between the "high, Latinate world of the court" and the "everyday, colloquial world outside it," to which Daniel, in his humility, belongs.

49. Fassler, 95.

the queen as an example of the perfect wife of Proverbs 31:10–31. Such praise was narratively justified by the queen's wise advice to the king, but it heightened the potential for comic effect to have a subdeacon dressed as a woman extravagantly praised as the model of an ideal wife, especially when it came to the line "She is valued like a strong man" (*Precium est eius si quam fortis*) (183).⁵⁰ By contrast, the words of the satraps' recessional, as they returned the misappropriated vessels to their rightful place, praised Daniel's youthful wisdom and virtue.

The second half of the play began with the arrival of the Persian king Darius. Two of his princes ran ahead to "drive out Balthasar as if killing him" (246), fulfilling the prophecy of the writing on the wall. Darius's bellicose conductus twice invoked the presence of "tripudia," a term which may here retain its older connotation of noisy ritual dances in which priests struck shields with spears or staves in honor of the war god Mars.⁵¹ Once Darius was enthroned, two of his followers suggested that he summon Daniel. Daniel's second conductus again stressed his identity as a prophet and type of Christ by addressing the assembled Christian congregation (now firmly in the actual world of Beauvais cathedral rather than in the virtual world of pagan Babylon), "Rejoicing together, let us celebrate this feast of the Nativity" (270).

Jealous of Daniel's success, the royal counselors conspired to trap him by reminding the king of a law forbidding the worship of any god but Darius himself. Darius ended his brief affirmation of the decree by exclaiming, "O hez!" (311). Fassler finds, in this exclamation and in some of the surrounding melodic phrases, traces of the melody and refrain ("Hez hez sire asnes hez") of the prose of the ass. "The king brays," she remarks. "The Babylonians in their wickedness have become donkeys and fools."⁵² Dronke disagrees: "In Old French the exclamation *hez!* is used to urge animals forward. . . . There is no instance where it represents the sound made by an animal."⁵³ Nor is it likely that the destroyed manuscript of the *messe de l'asne* in Beauvais's church of Saint Stephen, with its brayed responses, was of sufficient antiquity to provide a precedent for braying in the *Play of Daniel*.

The action of the play continued with Daniel's arrest and confinement in the lions' den. The lions may have been played by men in terrifying masks,

50. Translation by Andrew Lawrence-King in *Ludus* (Harp Consort), 34.

51. *OED*, *OLD*, s.v. *tripudium*.

52. Fassler, 92. Smoldon, *Music*, 225, also detects an "ass's bray" in this phrase.

53. Dronke, *Nine*, 145; cf. Avalle, "Secundum," 21; Wulstan, *Play* (2007), xiv. Bevington, 150, and Zijlstra, "Play," 124, both translate "O hez!" as "Hear ye!"

simultaneously appropriating for sacred purposes an otherwise forbidden Kalends tradition and evoking the verse from the messianic psalm: "Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me."⁵⁴ Daniel's lament (342–49, 352–57), too, recalled the passion of Christ. An angel, armed with a sword, kept the demonic lions at bay (351). Far away in Judah, another angel appeared to Habakkuk, announcing that the prophet was commanded by the divine "ruler of all" (361) to take food to Daniel. "Seizing him by the hair of his head" (365), the angel carried Habakkuk to Daniel in Babylon. In the morning, the penitent Darius rejoiced over Daniel's miraculous survival (which looked forward to Christ's resurrection),⁵⁵ ordered the counselors to be thrown to the lions, and commanded that "the God of Daniel who reigns forever shall be worshipped by all" (383–84). Like Balthasar, Darius distanced himself from the model of a raging and impenitent Herod but failed to change the course of history. Daniel announced the coming of a "holy" king who would bring an end to "pagan temples" (*phana* = *fana*) and all opposing "rule." In immediate fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, an angel "suddenly exclaim[ed]":

I bring you a message from high heaven:
 Christ is born, Ruler of the world,
 In Bethlehem of Judea, as the prophet foretold.
 (389–92)

With this proclamation of the good news of the Nativity, performers and audience were once again firmly back in Beauvais during the Christmas season. Together they sang the *Tu Deum*, bringing the *ludus* to a close.

The Play of Daniel's "deliberate mixture of the sacred and the secular, the serious and the comic,"⁵⁶ skillfully accommodated and tamed the traditional license of popular Kalends festivities by incorporating them into the liturgical Feast of Fools. Appropriating the message of the Magnificat, the play dramatized the overthrow of the mighty and the exaltation of the humble. It staged the fall of blasphemous Balthasar, allowed penitent Darius to retain a power already relativized by the announcement of the coming "holy . . . ruler of the world," and raised humble Daniel to prominence. Above all, it celebrated the birth of Christ as the archetypal just and humble ruler. And if Fassler is correct, it did all this in a style that allowed

54. Ps. 22:13.

55. Petersen, "*Danielis*," 307.

56. Fassler, 99.

the subdeacons to indulge in “pagan” processions, loud music, and cross-dressing.

Lagueux has made a similar case for the Laon *Office of Joseph*.⁵⁷ The text of the *Ordo Ioseph* follows those of two other liturgical plays, *Ordo Prophetarum* and *Ordo Stellae*, in the manuscript that contains the offices for Christmas, Epiphany, and other special occasions in Laon. Lagueux has argued convincingly that the three plays belonged to the liturgy of the Christmas season, the *Office of the Prophets* being staged on Christmas Eve, the *Office of the Star* on the feast of Innocents, and the *Office of Joseph* on the feast of Epiphany.⁵⁸ Although the manuscript includes music for the canonical hours, it records only the words of the three plays.⁵⁹

The first two plays make some allowance for comedy. The *Office of the Prophets* ends with the episode of Balaam and his ass. Balaam delivers his prophecy, an angel with a sword appears, Balaam “beats the ass, and when it fails to move,” speaks to it “angrily.” Then “a boy beneath the ass” (*puer sub Asina*) speaks the surprising response of the ass.⁶⁰ Probably a boy was concealed beneath the caparisons of a live ass.⁶¹ It is hard to imagine, despite both Young’s and Lagueux’s insistence to the contrary, that the comic potential of the episode was suppressed.⁶² There is no reason why a talking ass cannot be

57. The *Ordo Ioseph* may be found in Young, 2:266–76; Lagueux, “Glossing,” 704–11.

58. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 258, 274, 372–75. For more on the Feast of Innocents in Laon, see *ibid.*, 274–96, 503–10, 551–68, 656–71, 713–17.

59. Lagueux (*ibid.*, 444) argues that “the MS does not provide music for the dramas because it allows for *different* music to be used depending on the specific needs and desires of the community at the time of the performance.”

60. The Laon *Ordo Prophetarum* may be found in Young, 2:145–50; Lagueux, “Glossing,” 692–98. For an alternative translation of the Balaam episode, see Tydeman, 100.

61. Hidé, “Notices,” 114, assumes that “a choirboy, slipping under the caparisons of the animal,” spoke the lines. Martinet, “Fêtes,” 92, agrees. Saint-Denis, *Laon*, 167, supposes that “a small child hidden in the beast’s burden lent his voice to the quadruped.” A similar rubric (“Quidam sub asina dicat”) occurs during the Balaam episode in the fourteenth-century Rouen prophet play *Ordo Procesionorum Asinorum* (Young, 2:159). Young, 2:167, glosses this as “the person concealed under the animal cries out in protest,” while Bérenger-Feraud, *Superstitions*, 4:31, supposes that “a cleric, slipping under the belly of the ass, speaks for her.” But Peter Meredith, in Tydeman, 101, translates the rubric as “Someone inside the ass shall say,” and Campbell, “Liturgical,” 579, refers to “an actor impersonating a donkey.” Ogden, *Staging*, refers to “the player inside the animal costume” at Rouen (74), but wonders if the speaker might have been “tied ‘underneath’ a live donkey” at Laon (135). Meredith, Campbell, and Ogden may have been influenced by the stage direction in the sixteenth-century Chester play of *Moses and the Law: Balaack and Balaam*, which reads, “Et hic oportet aliquis transformiari in speciem asinae; et quando Balaham percutit, dicat asinia” (And here someone ought to be transformed into the guise of an ass; and when Balaam strikes, the ass shall say) (Lumiansky and Mills, *Chester*, 1:88; Mills, *Chester*, 91; for an alternative translation, see Meredith and Tailby, *Staging*, 120–21). But even in Chester, it is possible to imagine the use of a live ass (Coldewey, “Secrets,” 216–21; Billington, “*Cheval*,” 14, 21).

62. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 263; Young, 2:152. Chambers, 2:57, sees the episode “as an attempt to turn the established presence of the ass in the church to purposes of edification, rather than of

both a miraculous sign and a cause of merriment.⁶³ In the *Office of the Star*, it is Herod's rage that again introduces the potential for comedy.⁶⁴ But it was the *Office of Joseph* that was the designated "Feast of Fools play," specifically "composed for performance on Epiphany, . . . the feast of the subdeacons at Laon."⁶⁵ The text is incomplete, breaking off before Joseph's brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's sons, but enough survives for us to see its very strong conceptual resemblance to the *Play of Daniel*.

Like the Beauvais play, *Ordo Ioseph* was built around a series of lavish processions. In the absence of musical notation, these are not marked as clearly in the text as they are in the Daniel play, but Lagueux has pinpointed several moments that require such processions.⁶⁶ The first, representing the long journey from Canaan to Egypt, occurs after Joseph has been sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelite merchants (67). A shorter procession, within Egypt, takes place when Joseph leaves the playing area after being sold to the pharaoh Potiphar (90). Another, akin to the conductus of Balthasar's queen in the *Danielis ludus*, accompanies the departure of the pharaoh's wife after her attempted seduction of Joseph (137). Further processions ensue when characters are released from or returned to jail, first the baker and cupbearer (143, 157), and then Joseph (157). A second long journey from Canaan happens when Joseph brothers "go to Egypt, and coming before Joseph say . . ." (185). A final, interrupted journey in the other direction takes place when the brothers leave Egypt with full sacks of grain, only to be pursued by Joseph's servants, who find "stolen" silver in the sacks and so lead the brothers back to Egypt (204, 214).

Like *Danielis ludus*, *Ordo Ioseph* may also have employed as stage properties sacred vessels and vestments for which the subdeacons were responsible. When the baker and cupbearer are brought from jail to the pharaoh, the former servant arrives "with bread wafers and a basket" (*cum nebulis et cophino*), the latter "with a vine and bunches of grapes" (143). Lagueux points out that *nebula* designates not just any bread but specifically "the bread of the eucharist," and argues accordingly that "the cup held by the *pincerna* [cupbearer] was a chalice and that the *pistoris* [baker] held a paten or ciborium."⁶⁷

ribaldry," but his assumption that the ass had previously been an occasion for "ribaldry" is almost certainly mistaken.

63. Lagueux, "Sermons," 201–2, 214–16, argues that the Balaam episode was a complex piece of performed seasonal exegesis: the miracle of the talking ass was understood as evidence to unbelieving Jews that even a Virgin Birth was within the power of God; Balaam's prophecy of a rising star (Num. 24:17) linked Balaam allegorically with the Magi, who actually saw such a star (Matt. 2:2).

64. Young, 2:103–9; Lagueux, "Glossing," 699–703.

65. Lagueux, "Glossing," 372.

66. *Ibid.*, 393–96.

67. *Ibid.*, 385, citing in support Du Cange, s.v. *nebula* (4:582–83).

Presumably the “stolen” silver found in the sacks of Joseph’s departing brothers also came from the cathedral treasury. Lagueux suggests, too, that the “splendid garment” worn by Joseph (67) to represent his “coat of many colors” was “most likely the sumptuous cope of the cantor.”⁶⁸ Perhaps Joseph received the cope from Jacob at the beginning of the play. The rubric specifies that Joseph also accepted from his father at this point a shepherd’s “staff” (*baculus*) (30), which may have been represented in performance by the cantor’s silver-plated *baculus*.⁶⁹

The *Office of Joseph* also included an opportunity for cross-dressing. The comic potential of the female role was arguably greater in Laon than in Beauvais. Whereas in *Danielis ludus* Balthasar’s queen was an ideal wife, in *Ordo Ioseph* Potiphar’s wife was a persistent seductress. The series of rubrics for the scene begins, “Again [*iterum*] Potiphar’s wife, desiring Joseph, calls him in private” (125). As Lagueux points out, “*iterum*” suggests that this was not her first attempt to seduce Joseph.⁷⁰ Possibly she had been silently pantomiming seduction in the northern transept (Egypt) while the previous scene between Jacob and his sons played out in the southern transept (Canaan). Then, as the attention shifted back to Egypt, she tried again. Joseph resisted, but she caught his cloak as he fled. She took the cloak to Potiphar and, in lines that “a cleric in drag”⁷¹ must surely have been tempted to deliver in an exaggeratedly comic style, complained:

Me lascivus	The wanton wanted
in conclavi	to overwhelm me
voluit opprimere!	in the chamber.

(132–34)

Nevertheless, despite its comic moments,⁷² *Ordo Ioseph* was devotional in its intent. Adapting a term from Susan Boynton, Lagueux argues that the play was “a sophisticated masterpiece of performative gloss.”⁷³ In her careful reading of the late-twelfth-century Fleury *Slaughter of the Innocents*, Boynton argues that the Fleury play “functions as a form of performative exegesis

68. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 378, 435–36. Cf. Gen. 37:3.

69. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 432–34.

70. *Ibid.*, 383–84, 428–29.

71. *Ibid.*, 428.

72. Martinet, “Fêtes,” 93, and Lagueux, “Glossing,” 380–81, also find comedy in the economic shrewdness of the Ishmaelite merchants, who buy Joseph for a low price in Canaan and sell him for a high price in Egypt.

73. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 374.

through the medium of dramatic impersonation,” embodying in its action multiple historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings of the biblical narrative more commonly articulated in sermons and commentaries.⁷⁴ Lagueux makes a similar case for the *Office of Joseph*. In summary he writes: “Several of the characters are polysemic symbols, creating a web of exegetical connections. Joseph, for example, is not only the O[ld] T[estament] patriarch, but [is] also connected with Christ, Daniel, the Innocents, and the Laon subdeacons themselves. He is, furthermore, portrayed as the ideal ruler and the ideal cleric.”⁷⁵ The journeys of the children of Israel into Egypt and Jacob’s grief over Joseph’s bloodied robe are just two examples of the way in which the story of Joseph was understood to look forward to the birth and passion narratives of Christ. *Ordo Ioseph* was concerned with the redemptive character of sacred history no less than with its comic moments.

Like the *Play of Daniel*, the *Office of Joseph* mixed “the sacred and the secular, the serious and the comic,”⁷⁶ accommodating and taming the traditional license of popular New Year festivities within an approved liturgical setting. The two plays show how elements of such festivities, rather than being harshly condemned, could be invited into the church, contained in an orderly narrative, and put to profound devotional use in memorable works of liturgical art. Together with the Sens and Beauvais offices of the Circumcision, they display the Feast of Fools at its most creative.

74. Boynton, “Performative,” 44. The *Interfectio puerorum* may be found in Young, 2:110–13; Bevington, 67–72; Boynton, “Performative,” 62–64. For earlier readings of the play’s multiple and simultaneous temporal mimesis, see Marshall, “Aesthetic,” 40–43; Harris, *Theater*, 53–57. For a sensitive reading of the play in its liturgical context, see Guiette, “Réflexions.”

75. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 374–75.

76. Fassler, 99.

CHAPTER 11

Chapter Support

In 1853 Chérest remarked that his fellow historians tended “to exaggerate the abuses” of the Feast of Fools. If the Feast of Fools was nothing more than “an occasion for intolerable scandals,” he asked, why had “eminent cathedral chapters” not only tolerated the feast but also given it such prolonged financial and moral support?¹

Chérest’s question has largely gone unanswered. This evasion is partly due to continued scholarly prejudice, but it is also due to the fragmented nature of the history of the Feast of Fools between 1234 and 1400. By 1234 the offices of the Circumcision in Sens, Beauvais, and (probably) Le Puy, as well as the office of the Epiphany in Laon, were all in place. In 1400 Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, launched his first attack on the Feast of Fools. Gerson’s lead was followed by the ecumenical Council of Basel in 1435, by the Pragmatic Sanction of Charles VII of France in 1438, and by the letter from the Paris faculty of theology in 1445. With the rise of official opposition, documentation of the Feast of Fools increased.

In the meantime, the history of the feast may be compared to a neglected jigsaw puzzle: many pieces are missing, and those that remain come from widely scattered parts of the whole. On the one hand, there is ample evidence

1. Chérest, 8.

of proliferation: many more cities can be added to the list of those holding a Feast of Fools. On the other hand, no single city offers the extensive local evidence provided by Sens, Beauvais, and Laon before 1234. What evidence we do have suggests that attitudes toward the Feast of Fools were far from uniform: the feast could be generously supported in one cathedral even as it was peremptorily banned in another. It could be observed with dignity in one city even as it slipped toward disorder in another. Nevertheless, the evidence of local chapter support for an orderly Feast of Fools, forming an integral part of the seasonal liturgy, is far greater during this period than is the evidence of either disorder or opposition. When opposition did arise, it came largely from outside ecclesiastical sources rather than from the canons of the local cathedral or collegiate church.

It is striking, too, that chapter support for the Feast of Fools continued even amid the widespread social instability that characterized much of France during what Barbara Tuchman has called “the calamitous fourteenth century.”² The reasons for this designation are manifold. When the last of Philip IV’s sons, Charles IV, died in 1328 without a male heir, the French throne was claimed by both Philip of Valois, who ruled France as Philip VI (1328–1350), and Edward III of England. By 1337 France and England were at war. (The conflict, now known as the Hundred Years’ War, would rage intermittently until 1453.) In August 1346 the French suffered a calamitous defeat at the Battle of Crécy. The bubonic plague, or Black Death, reached France in January 1348. The second half of the fourteenth century in France was marred by war, plague, famine, religious fanaticism, and a perverse mix of economic disarray and conspicuous consumption. During periods of truce, entrepreneurial knights and demobilized soldiers formed their own mercenary companies to continue pillage for personal gain. Peasants occasionally rebelled and were brutally suppressed by armed knights. An obsession with the gruesome physical details of death manifested itself in high art and popular religion. The church slipped into the Western Schism (1378–1417), during which rival popes, based in Avignon and Rome, bitterly excommunicated each other. Charles VI inherited the French throne in 1380 at the age of eleven. By 1392 he was showing the first signs of an insanity that would periodically afflict him until his death in 1422. By contrast, the Feast of Fools remained, in most cities, a remarkably orderly phenomenon.

The fragmented nature of the surviving evidence means that a chronological history of the Feast of Fools during this period would be severely

2. Tuchman, *Distant*, uses this phrase for her subtitle.

disjointed. I have therefore arranged the material in part three topically. This chapter looks at churches where the Feast of Fools remained an orderly liturgical celebration, duly supported by the local chapter. In chapter 12 I consider churches where a similar liturgical order has since been overlaid by unwarranted rumors of disorder. Chapter 13 examines churches where local chapters, often with considerable resistance, faced efforts by external authorities to suppress their feast. Chapter 14 looks at the early evidence of companies of young laymen mounting seasonal festivities of their own. Finally, chapter 15 surveys the limited evidence for the Feast of Fools outside France.

Sens is, perhaps, the best example of sustained chapter support for the Feast of Fools. It is true that in 1245, yet another papal legate, Eudes of Tusculum, wrote to the Sens chapter calling attention to the “ancient frivolities” that marred the feasts of Saint John, the Innocents, and the Circumcision, and requiring that the feasts be celebrated with the proper ecclesiastical ceremonies. Specifically, he condemned clergy who exchanged their vestments for other modes of dress, wore floral wreaths, or otherwise conducted themselves in a dissolute fashion.³ Papal legates, as we have seen, were not always reliable witnesses to local details of the Feast of Fools. But even if Eudes’s complaints were correct, it is worth noting—as both Chérest and Villetard point out—that he was objecting not to Peter of Corbeil’s reformed office but to lingering traces of older practices.⁴ Disguise, floral wreaths, and “dissolution” were characteristic of popular Kalends traditions; and, according to Villetard, it was partly to help his people resist “the temptation to take part in the street festivities occasioned by the January Kalends” that Peter of Corbeil had compiled his office in the first place.⁵ It is not unreasonable to read Eudes’s letter as a call to the members of the Sens chapter to remain faithful to Peter’s reform. Later generations of clergy in Sens certainly did so. In 1444 the canons cited the “statute” of “a certain legate”—meaning Eudes’s letter—in support of their continued celebration of the office of the Circumcision “just as it is set out in the book of the office itself, devoutly and with reverence.”⁶

In the meantime, the chapter accounts bear witness to ongoing support for the feast. Although the records for most of the thirteenth century are missing,

3. For the full text of the letter, see Chérest, 46–47; Villetard, 64–65.

4. Chérest, 47–48; Villetard, 64–65, 69–70.

5. Villetard, 63.

6. Chérest, 66.

the accounts from the following century yield a mass of pertinent entries.⁷ In 1345 wine was provided for “the vicars of the church on the day of the Circumcision of the Lord.” In 1349 wine costing twice as much was provided for both the vicars and the clerks “on the day of the Feast of Fools.” A similar entry appears almost annually between 1352 and the end of the century. In 1387 “two *setiers* [about fifteen liters] of white wine and one *setier* of red wine” were specified.⁸ Three *setiers* of wine divided among, say, sixty-five vicars, clerks, choirboys, and guests would have been enough for about two glasses of wine apiece. In 1376 payment was made “for a large gift” to the “cantor of fools” (*precentor stultorum*) on the “first day of January.” Chérest suggests that the distinctive title of cantor—rather than bishop or pope—of fools bears witness to the continued musical character of the office in Sens.⁹

Generous financial support was also provided. In 1375 a share of the annual income generated by woods owned by the cathedral chapter was set aside “for the Feast of Fools.” The following year an additional sum of seventy-five sols tournois, equivalent to the annual stipend of either the choir director or the master of the cathedral school, was voted by the chapter for expenses incurred in connection with the Feast of Fools. Similar subventions were still being made at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹⁰ The extent of this support suggests to Chérest that the responsibilities of the cantor of fools were not confined to the feast of the Circumcision but continued in some measure throughout the year.¹¹

Chérest argues, too, that the chapter’s consistent support of the Feast of Fools, as well as the complete absence of any expressions of concern or measures of constraint, give us good reason to believe that the feast operated within its prescribed bounds. If the Feast of Fools had been “a sacrilegious masquerade,” he asks, why would the Sens chapter have encouraged it for so long? In his opinion, the chapter’s support is proof that fourteenth-century Sens “celebrated the day of the Circumcision with a solemn and extraordinary worship service.” Critics who believe otherwise, he adds, have made the mistake of confusing distinct epochs, reading back into the fourteenth-century Feast of Fools the reported abuses of a later period.¹² Villetard agrees.

7. Chérest, 49–54; Villetard, 65–67. Similar entries in the accounts, beginning in 1337, testify to chapter support for the “archbishop of the boys” (*archiepiscopus puerorum*) at the feast of the Innocents.

8. The *setier* was a locally variable measure of liquids or grains. As a measure of liquids, it was equivalent in Paris to 7.45 liters (Doursther, 495).

9. Chérest, 56; cf. Villetard, 66–67.

10. Chérest, 60–61.

11. Chérest, 54–55.

12. Chérest, 52–53, 55.

“At the beginning of the fifteenth century,” he concludes, “the Feast of Fools [in Sens] still conserved its ancient splendor.” Peter of Corbeil’s “solemn” and “extraordinary” office was still in use.¹³

A similarly positive approach was taken by the cathedral chapter in Châlons-en-Champagne. By the third quarter of the thirteenth century, the city’s *festum baculi*, which Guy of Bazoches had so enjoyed a hundred years earlier, had become an elaborate office of the Circumcision. Directions for the office survive in two ordinals, dated between 1251 and 1264, which provide detailed outlines of worship practices in Châlons throughout the liturgical year, including the Christmas season.¹⁴

Formal preparations for the feast of the staff began while mass was being sung on 31 December. The *magister baculi* drew up “the tabula for his feast, on which he wrote the names of the subdeacons at the cathedral, the deacons and subdeacons at two affiliated churches, and all the clerks whom he had chosen for official roles. During nones, the *magister* gathered “his brothers,” as well as the clerks and choirboys, in the chapter room to elect their “bishop.” The *episcopus* in Châlons was a boy bishop rather than an adult bishop of fools. When the election was over, the *magister* intoned the Te Deum. Joining him in the familiar hymn, the company led the newly elected boy bishop to the altar, where one of the subdiaconal “fools” (*fatui*)¹⁵ recited the verse “A Domino factum est istud, et est mirabile in oculis nostris” (This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes), and another recited the prayer “Pretende Domine famulo tuo” (Protect, O Lord, your servant). Then two or three fools led the boy bishop to the real bishop’s palace.

When the bells rang for first vespers, the *magister* and the remaining fools also went in procession to the episcopal palace, bearing three crosses, two large candles, censers, and holy water. As they returned to the cathedral with the boy bishop, they sang the popular Christmas responsory “Descendit de caelis” (He descends from the heavens), stopping before a crucifix to sing the verse “Tamquam sponsus” (Like a bridegroom) and entering the choir to the refrain “Et exivit per auream portam” (And he came forth through a golden gate) in thanksgiving for the Virgin Birth. Standing on a footstool (*scabellum*), wearing an episcopal miter, and carrying an episcopal staff, the boy bishop began vespers. The use of a footstool to boost his height confirms

13. Villetard, 67–68.

14. For the date of the ordinals, see Prévot, “Festum,” 209. For a transcription (from which I quote) and précis of one ordinal’s instructions for 31 December and 1 January, see *ibid.*, 216–19, 229–34.

15. One ordinal refers to them as “subdiaconi,” the other as “fatui” (*ibid.*, 210).

that one of the younger choirboys was elected to the office. The assigned chants strongly suggest that the boy bishop was understood to signify the Christ Child.¹⁶

Those clerics designated by the *magister* led the service. Four subdeacons or “fools,” two on the left and two on the right, directed the choir, taking turns to intone the psalms and their antiphons. The tones were not prescribed but left to the discretion of the subdiaconal choir directors.¹⁷ Four other subdeacons, chosen by the choir and vested in silk copes, chanted the responsory “*Stirps Iesse*” (The stem of Jesse). The *magister* and “his choral associate” intoned the antiphon “*Tecum principium*” (You shall have sovereignty) and the hymn “*A solis ortus*” (From the rising of the sun). The boy bishop recited the *capitulum* and intoned the antiphon “*Qui de terra est*” (Whoever is of the earth). Together with two of the more important “fools,” who had also been selected by the choir, the boy bishop “censed [the altar]”—as two archdeacons and the real bishop, when he was present, normally did at vespers—before returning to his footstool. Two “fools” censed the boy bishop and afterward the choristers. Then they gave the thuribles back to the altar boys, who censed throughout the choir. Four subdeacons chanted the closing *Benedicamus*, and the boy bishop pronounced “his benediction.”

There is nothing here to suggest parody. The worship was led, for the most part, by subdeacons and a choirboy rather than by senior clergy, but it remained a dignified worship service. All the named musical pieces were standard components of the Christmas season liturgy. Most had been used in the Sens and Beauvais offices of the Circumcision. Many linked the boy bishop to the Christ Child. The censing may have been a little exuberant, but it was modeled on normal liturgical practice, and its commendable intent was to purify all those taking part.

The same spirit of joyous worship prevailed throughout the feast. At compline, two subdeacons intoned the antiphon and hymn and sang the Kyrie “as they pleased,” meaning that they were free to choose among its many different settings. Otherwise the boy bishop chanted the whole of compline. He also began matins, again standing on his footstool. Musical leadership at matins was handled much as it had been at first vespers. Most of the lessons were read by subdeacons, but the gospel was read by the cleric—customarily

16. A 1337 ordinal from Wells cathedral states explicitly that its boy bishop “signif[ies] the Christ Child, the true and eternal high priest” (see chapter 15).

17. A tone is “a melodic formula” used in the chanting of psalms, lessons, and collects (Harper, *Forms*, 317).

a deacon—given the same responsibility at mass. The ninth lesson was read by the boy bishop, flanked by crucifixes, candles, thuribles, and torches.

Prime followed much the same pattern as compline with one exception: after the chanting of the *capitulum*, the *magister baculi* was required “to listen to [a recital of] his faults” (*audire marrancias suas*) and to make amends according to the judgment of the fools. This may have involved some good-humored ribbing of the *magister*. After prime, the company processed to the bishop’s palace, presumably for refreshments.

Before terce, the boy bishop was again led to the cathedral to the chanting of the responsory “Descendit de caelis.” If it was a Sunday, the procession passed through the cloisters. At terce, the chants again alternated between the two sides of the choir. The boy bishop delivered the closing prayer. But he played no part in the mass, which was conducted conventionally by the hebdomadary (the priest assigned to this and to other ceremonial duties for the week), a deacon, and a subdeacon. Sext and nones followed the pattern of terce. Second vespers resembled first vespers. Toward the end of second vespers, however, the hebdomadary and the succentor entered the choir, resuming their ceremonial roles by intoning an antiphon and the Magnificat. The feast of the staff was over for another year.

The office of the Circumcision in Le Puy-en-Velay remained in use for over four hundred years. Although the contents of the office itself “date to a great degree from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,” one of the two surviving manuscripts dates from 1552 and the other, perhaps, from some thirty years earlier. Both manuscripts can be shown from “datable owners’ entries, . . . entries preceding and following the primary contents, later redactions, and not least of all general traces of handling and wear” to have been in use “at least up to the seventeenth century.” Arlt therefore claims with some confidence that “the tradition was alive and well throughout this period.”¹⁸ Perhaps the Le Puy office survived intact the slow suppression of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because it was untainted by association with the Feast of Fools.

By contrast, we know very little about the later history of the Feast of Fools in Beauvais. Chambers admits, “There are only the faintest traces of the [Beauvais] feast outside the actual twelfth- and thirteenth-century service books.”¹⁹ Grenier cites two such traces but assigns them no date: a model account form, which includes the entry “on the day of the Circumcision if

18. Arlt, “Office,” 328–29.

19. Chambers, 1:301.

the Feast of Fools is done”; and an item regarding the distribution of candles to the subdeacons and other lower clergy at first vespers on the feast of the Circumcision. The candles were to be placed before the crucifix, as part of a liturgy “as solemn” as those honoring “the priests, the deacons, and the Innocents.”²⁰ What few traces there are, then, suggest dignified worship.

Sadly, too, we know nothing about how long the Beauvais *Play of Daniel* continued in use. Evidence from elsewhere in France, though, suggests that liturgical plays continued to be performed in connection with the Feast of Fools. A fourteenth-century prophet play from Rouen, *Ordo Procesionorum Asinorum*, included an episode of Balaam and his talking ass and, as yet another example of the confusion of pagan might, an angry King Nebuchadnezzar. Spectacularly, when Nebuchadnezzar ordered the three young men to be thrown in the fiery furnace, “a furnace of linen and tow in the middle of the nave of the church” was “set alight.” Young believes that the play was performed on the feast of the Circumcision. The text specifies that it began immediately after terce and was followed by mass.²¹

According to Edmond Martène, a prophet play was performed in Tours during both matins and second vespers of the “feast of the New Year.”²² Although Chambers assumes that it “doubtless” included “Balaam on his ass,”²³ there is no mention of either in Martène’s account. As part of a dignified office for the feast, similar to those we have already met in Sens and elsewhere, a procession of “costumed prophets” was led singing into the choir. There each in turn, after being announced by two choirboys in the *pulpitum*, chanted his or her prophecy. Martène’s source was an “old ritual” (*antiquum rituale*), which Chambers plausibly assigns to “the fourteenth century.”²⁴

The ritual adds a few other distinctive details. The boy bishop (*episcopus puerorum*) delivers a blessing after the procession preceding mass. During the afternoon, the clergy “must dance in the cloisters in surplices until the church is opened and all its light kindled.” The Deposuit is sung three times at second vespers. After second compline, as the “new cantor [of fools]” (*cantor novus*) is led home to the singing of “*Verbum caro factum est*” (The Word

20. Grenier, 362.

21. Young, 2:154–71; Tydeman, 100–101. For the means by which such a furnace might have been constructed and set alight, see Butterworth, *Theatre*, 52–53.

22. Martène, *De antiquis*, 3:116–17; Young, 2:153.

23. Chambers, 1:309.

24. Ibid. “A ritual contains the liturgical texts not included in the missal and breviary necessary for the administration of sacraments and blessings by a priest” (Krochalis and Matter, “Manuscripts,” 415).

became flesh), he strikes the walls en route with his *baculus*.²⁵ The world into which Christ came in the flesh is a reassuringly solid world.

Another positive note comes from Amiens. An ordinal from the city's cathedral, dated by Marcel Rigollot to 1291, requires that "if what is called the Feast of Fools is done by the subdeacons, and if it should fall on a Sunday, it should be done by them in silk copes, according to the instructions contained in the feast books [*in libris festorum*]." ²⁶ William of Macon, bishop of Amiens (1278–1308), seems to have been particularly fond of the feast. At his death in 1308 he reportedly "left to the Amiens chapter his own episcopal vestments to adorn the bishop of fools."²⁷

In Besançon, by the mid-thirteenth century, four different churches were celebrating the feast of the Innocents with high-ranking leaders of fools. The cathedral of Saint Stephen chose a pope of fools, the cathedral of Saint John an archbishop of fools, the collegiate church of Saint Mary Magdalene a bishop of fools, and the collegiate church of Saint Paul a cardinal of fools.²⁸ Besançon is situated in the Franche-Comté (Free County of Burgundy), which then enjoyed considerable autonomy as a culturally French county within the political boundaries of the German Empire.

A manuscript ritual (*rituel*) dating from between 1215 and 1253 gives details of "the annual exaltation of the pope of fools by the lower clergy of the cathedral church of Saint Stephen."²⁹ On the feast of Saint John, the "pope" (*papa*) was carried in candlelight procession by "a third of the servants of the church, singing 'In circuitu [Round about].'" The pope, who was dressed in "a specially prepared amice and alb, a red dalmatic or cope, with gloves, a miter, and sandals," led the singing at first vespers. Canons carried a thurible and candlestick in procession before him at matins, mass, and second vespers. At the close of second vespers, the pope delivered a prayer from the bishop's throne.

25. Martène, *De antiquis*, 3:117–18. Martène also mentions (117) the recitation of a *miraculum* in the cloisters after prime ("Post recitatur miraculum in clauistro"), which Chambers, 1:309, seems to have mistaken for the performance of a miracle play. But the *miraculum* was, as Martène notes, a martyrology, a liturgical document read (or chanted) every evening after prime, announcing the next day's feast and listing the saints who died on that day. For the nature of a martyrology, see Krochalis and Matter, "Manuscripts," 408. I am grateful to Bill McCarthy for helping me to understand this use of *miraculum*.

26. Rigollot, 19.

27. Martone, *Piété*, 49 n. 2. Chambers, 1:302, mistakenly gives the date of William's death and bequest as 1303.

28. For a history of Besançon, including its churches, see Fohlen, *Histoire*.

29. Castan, *Forum*, 7–8, 14–15; cf. Gauthier, "Fête," 198–200; Dahhaoui, "Pape," 157–58; Rittaud-Hutinet, *Trétaux*, 18–19 (illus.). For the date of the ritual, see Castan, *Forum*, 14 n. 1; Dahhaoui, "Pape," 145–46, 148.

The feast of the Innocents began with a shared *collatio* (light meal or refreshments). Everyone living on the hill on which the cathedral stood was obliged to bring the “pope” gifts of “bread and wine.” The next day, dressed in the same papal apparel as he had worn at vespers and carrying “a golden rose” (*rosa aurea*), the “pope” rode “with his cardinals” on a circuit of churches and monasteries in the vicinity of the city. At each stop the pope gave his blessing and received gifts of bread or wine. If the *archiepiscopus* of Saint John’s, the *episcopus* of Saint Mary Magdalene’s, or the *cardinalis* of Saint Paul’s met the pope on his rounds, they were required to bow before him and receive his blessing.

The golden rose carried by the pope of fools was a symbol of papal benevolence. For a millennium or more, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, the real pope has sometimes conferred a golden rose as a token of reverence or affection.³⁰ In thirteenth-century Besançon, the rose had a particular local resonance. In a poem addressed to the city, Walter of Châtillon had commemorated the presentation of a golden rose to Louis VII of France by Pope Alexander III in 1163. The poem, “Ecce nectar roseum,” ended by comparing the rose to Christ, its gold signifying his wisdom, its red his blood, and its fragrance his healing power.³¹ Carried in cavalcade by Saint Stephen’s pope of fools, the golden rose not only marked the papal status of its bearer but also pointed to the grace and passion of Christ.

In the chapter room, before second vespers, the gathered company invoked “the grace of the Holy Spirit” and chose the next pope “by election or by mutual agreement.” After consecration by his predecessor, the new pope was carried into the choir, where he was asked a series of questions:

Are you willing to become pope?

I am willing [*Volo*].

Will you rule and defend the holy Roman church and its daughters?

I will.

Will you be of good character, prudent and chaste?

I will.

Are you willing to be confirmed?

30. Fabre and Duchesne, *Liber*, 2:150; Durand, *Rationale* 6.53.8–11 (2:293–96); Rock, “Golden.”

31. For a text, translation, and exposition of “Ecce nectar roseum,” see Hood, “Golden.” Hood (*ibid.*, 207–8, 216), following Strecker’s lead in Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch*, 127, suggests that the poem was written for “the Feast of Fools” and “intended originally for performance . . . at the cathedral of Saint Stephen on Holy Innocents’ Day.” Given the absence of any evidence for a “pope of fools” in Besançon—or anywhere else—before the thirteenth century, this is unlikely.

I am willing.

And I confirm you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Nothing suggests that the vows were intended to be taken lightly.

Although the ritual also notes that the feast of the Circumcision was “called the *festum stultorum*,” it does not indicate any special celebrations on that day. On the octave of the Innocents, the pope of fools led the singing of the canonical hours.³² During mass on the feast of the Epiphany, a procession of three “kings,” wearing “golden crowns,” made its way through the church.³³

A fifteenth-century manuscript copy of a mid-thirteenth-century ritual from the cathedral of Saint John gives directions for an almost identical set of ceremonies, the only significant difference being that the clergy there honored an “archbishop of innocents” (*archiepiscopus innocentium*) or “fools” rather than a “pope.” There, too, the feast of the Circumcision was known as the *festum stultorum*.³⁴ Similar rites were presumably observed for the bishop of fools at Saint Mary Magdalene’s and for the cardinal of fools at Saint Paul’s.

Rivalry over the feast of the Innocents sometimes caused tension between the two cathedrals. In 1387 Pope Clement VII dispatched a legate, Cardinal Thomas of Naples, to Besançon. Clement was then one of two rival claimants to the papacy.³⁵ In August 1387 Thomas issued a set of statutes, consisting of forty articles, one of which dealt with the feast of the Innocents. To remove the opportunities for division and scandal that arose on this feast, he ordered, it should be “done one year in one church, and the following year in the other.” The ruling also applied to the cavalcade through the town.³⁶ The advice seems sensible enough.

Despite periodic misgivings, the chapter of Chartres cathedral also supported its Christmas and New Year feasts. We have noted traces of the feast of Innocents in Chartres during the bishopric of William of Champagne (1165–1176). When irregularities crept in, the chapter moved to protect its liturgy. In 1297 the chapter ordered that “during the octaves of the Nativity and subsequent feasts, customary eccentricities should cease, which is to say, chants should not be changed, vestments should not be varied, and the office

32. Castan, *Forum*, 15.

33. Castan, “Origines,” 294 n. 1; cf. Young, “Procession,” 76.

34. Castan, *Forum*, 15–16.

35. The other was Urban VI. For histories of the Western Schism, see Smith, *Great*; Delaruelle, Labande, and Ourliac, *Église*.

36. Gauthier, “Fête,” 186, 200.

should be celebrated solemnly.”³⁷ In 1300 the chapter put it more positively: “The Feast of Fools should remain in full and be celebrated devoutly.” The following year the feast was again permitted, with the single stipulation that it not interfere with a scheduled obit mass. An early-fourteenth-century directory of worship (*directoire*) notes laconically that at vespers on 1 January, “the feast of the subdeacons is done without a [specified] *ordo*, which everyone thinks better [*quid quisque melius*].” This may mean only that the subdeacons were free, as in Châlons, to choose among several different settings of the texts.³⁸

In 1313, however, the chapter distinguished between the feast of the Innocents and the Feast of Fools, permitting the first but demanding that “all the Feasts of Fools disappear henceforth.” The ban did not hold. In 1366 the chapter complained that “certain canons . . . give themselves up inside the church to certain games [*jeux*] that are called the Feast of Fools, on the occasion of which they [also] stage comedies [*comédies*] and wear masks or women’s clothes or other unseemly costumes. They renew the same disorders on the day after Easter.”³⁹ It is unlikely that all these activities took place “inside the church.” If contemporary testimony from elsewhere in northern France is any guide, the canons were playing liturgical “games” inside the cathedral at the feast of the Circumcision and staging outdoor plays, for which they wore “masks” and various “costumes,” on New Year’s Day and Easter Monday.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the chapter was still of two minds. In 1479 it vehemently “did away with, abolished, and completely suppressed” the cathedral’s Feast of Fools. Six years later, in 1485, it devoted sixty sols tournois to the expenses of the feast. On 1 January 1501 the chapter authorized both the Feast of Fools and a *comédie*. In 1506 and 1507 it allowed the majority of the chapter to enjoy themselves outside while six elderly choristers (*anciens heuriers matinières*) and twelve canons remained in the choir to conduct the divine office.⁴⁰ By then, as we shall see, the liturgical Feast of Fools was almost everywhere in retreat. Chartres was less consistent in its support of the feast than other churches considered in this chapter. Even so, its feast endured.

37. Lépiniois and Merlet, *Cartulaire*, 2:239; Clerval, *Ancienne*, 188.

38. Clerval, *Ancienne*, 188–89.

39. *Ibid.*, 189–90.

40. *Ibid.*, 190–92. Souchet, *Histoire*, 3:458 (cf. Rigollot, 19–20, 157–58), offers a brief but undocumented account of the activities of a “pope of fools” (*papifol*) and his “cardinals” in Chartres cathedral in 1505.

CHAPTER 12

Rumors of Disorder

Despite the evidence of sustained chapter support, rumors of disorder in the Feast of Fools abound. In this chapter I show how some of these rumors were started and how poorly they stand up to close examination.

The first such rumor arises from a reference to the Feast of Fools in the *Roman de Renart*, a collection of fables by various authors about Renart the fox and his friends. In the twelfth “branch” of the collection, written by Richard of Lison between 1190 and 1200,¹ Tibert the cat steals a priest’s horse and books. Mistaking the priest’s distress for drunkenness, a passerby scornfully advises him to continue his indulgence in drink and games at “the Feast of Fools” (*la feste as fox*) the next day in Bayeux.² Chambers believed these lines testified to the early existence of the Feast of Fools in Bayeux.³

Subsequent scholars of the *Roman de Renart* have gone further, suggesting that the fable’s repeated mockery of the clergy, parody of parish vespers (including an elaborately farsed Benedicamus), prolonged ringing of the church

1. Richard of Lison names himself as the author of the fable: Martin, *Roman*, 2:42 (branch 12, line 1476); Roques, *Roman*, 4:113 (numbered differently, branch 11, line 12922). For the date of composition, see Dufournet, “Remarques,” 432.

2. Martin, *Roman*, 2:14 (468–72); Roques, *Roman*, 4:83 (11936–40).

3. Chambers, 1:289.

bells, inversion of roles, and dressing of animals in priestly vestments (“like the ass” in the Feast of the Ass)⁴ are “the echo of a ‘Feast of Fools’ in which Richard of Lison had himself taken part, perhaps even in the cathedral of Bayeux.”⁵ But this interpretation of the fable depends on a gross misreading—passed unexamined from one scholar to another—of secondhand accounts of the Sens office of the Circumcision, from which the Sens office emerges as an extended burlesque of the liturgy.⁶ Because such things happened in Sens, the argument goes, they could also have happened in Bayeux. But the Sens office of the Circumcision was, of course, no such thing. Nor have I found any evidence elsewhere of late-twelfth-century clerical parodies of the liturgy during Christmas week.

There is an even greater problem with the notion that the fable bears witness to a historical Feast of Fools: the story, by its own account, takes place “in May.”⁷ Scholars, noting this oddity, have tried to find a precedent for a Feast of Fools in May. Tilliot, they point out, described an early-thirteenth-century clerical outing in Evreux, each 1 May, to gather foliage for decorating the images of saints in the cathedral. According to Tilliot, this late spring ceremony “took the place of the Feast of Fools” in Evreux.⁸ Perhaps it did. Perhaps something similar happened in Bayeux on 1 May, accompanied by tipping and games, as the fable suggests. Perhaps this is what Richard of Lison had in mind. But only by remote analogy can a May Day ceremony be called the Feast of Fools. This single passing remark in the fictional *Roman de Renart* cannot plausibly be made to support claims of a Feast of Fools in late-twelfth-century Bayeux.

What little we do know of the Feast of Fools in Bayeux comes from a thirteenth-century ordinal, which includes details of the liturgy for “the three days after the Nativity of the Lord and the feast day of the staff [*sollemnitatis Baculi*].”⁹ The Bayeux ordinal stipulates that the feasts of Saint Stephen, Saint John, and the Innocents are to be celebrated “as solemnly as possible.”¹⁰ The activities of the boy bishop (*puer episcopus*) on the feast of the Innocents are described at some length, but there is no mention of subdiaconal activity

4. Dufournet, “Remarques,” 443.

5. Flinn, *Roman*, 81.

6. Ibid., 82–91; Dufournet, “Remarques,” 442.

7. Martin, *Roman*, 2:1 (7); Roques, *Roman*, 4:69 (11479).

8. Tilliot, 29. Flinn, *Roman*, 83, and Walter, “Renart,” 7, cite Tilliot in support of a May Feast of Fools; Dufournet, “Remarques,” 442, cites Flinn.

9. Chevalier, *Ordinaire* (Bayeux), 3; cf. Boynton, “Work,” 72. For the date of the ordinal (between 1228 and 1270), see Chevalier, *Ordinaire* (Bayeux), xiv.

10. Chevalier, *Ordinaire* (Bayeux), 65.

on the feast of Circumcision, which the ordinal only once calls the feast of the staff.¹¹

The boy bishop, wearing all the episcopal insignia “with the exception of the ring,” sat in the dean’s stall. The other choirboys, dressed in silk, occupied the “high stalls” throughout the feast and “showed reverence to their bishop.” There was also a boy cantor and a boy chaplain. Toward the close of matins, according to the ordinal, “the bishop censes and is censed by the boy chaplain [*per puerum capellandum*].” At the close of terce, he gave the solemn benediction. In both cases the boy bishop was acting just as “the great bishop” (*episcopus magnum*) did when leading worship. Similarly, the boy cantor (*cantor puerorum*) exercised his office at mass in respectful imitation of the true cantor. At second vespers “Deposuit potentes” was sung repeatedly, extending through an orderly procession into the nave (*ad medium ecclesiae*). There, if a new boy bishop was to take office, he was given the pastoral staff by his predecessor. Chanting of the Deposuit continued as the procession returned to the choir stalls. The new boy bishop, if there was one, presided over compline.¹²

“The Bayeux ordinal,” Boynton observes, “makes it clear that the feast of the Innocents is a day of highly controlled liturgical play.”¹³ The boy bishop and his companions were not engaging in a parody of the liturgy. Rather, they were practicing, with the full approval of their clerical elders, for their own future roles as priests, cantors, chaplains, and bishops. The feast of the Innocents, here as elsewhere, was a part of the boys’ education, not a subversion of church order.

As for “the feast of the staff,” nothing out of the ordinary took place on 1 January. The ordinal briefly mentions the *baculus* at second vespers: “if in fact the staff is carried,” the clergy are to form “a crowd around the candelabrum.” There they are to sing the responsory “Videte miraculum” (Behold the miracle) and a well-known hymn, either “*Laetabundus exultet*” or “*A solis ortus*.” The ordinal adds, “And thus [it is done] in all the feasts in which the staff is carried.”¹⁴ The staff in question may have been the same one carried by the boy bishop.

Something similar took place in the collegiate church of St.-Omer. Unfortunately, the thirteenth-century manuscript containing details of the church’s liturgy was already in very poor condition when Louis Deschamps

11. *Ibid.*, 75.

12. *Ibid.*, 69–72.

13. Boynton, “Work,” 73.

14. Chevalier, *Ordinaire* (Bayeux), 75–76.

de Pas transcribed and published it in 1887.¹⁵ The folios containing instructions for Christmas Day are missing; those for the feasts of the Innocents and the Circumcision contain many lacunae. The manuscript is in two parts: the first, a temporal, containing material relevant to the seasons of the church year, dates from before 1264; the second, a sanctoral, containing material relevant to saints' days, dates from sometime between 1264 and 1297.¹⁶

Enough of the office of the Circumcision survives in the temporal, however, for Deschamps to conclude that the thirteenth-century Feast of Fools in St.-Omer was conducted "in a seemly enough manner" and that "it was only much later" that "license and disorder" prompted its suppression.¹⁷ Oscar Bled agrees: if the document had survived in its entirety, "there is no doubt that it would have rivaled in celebrity the famous rituals of Sens and Beauvais."¹⁸ Chambers takes a different view: "A 'bishop' and a 'dean' of Fools took part in the services. The latter was censured in a burlesque fashion, and the whole office was recited at the pitch of the voice, and even with howls."¹⁹ Chambers reaches this conclusion by ignoring several pages of careful instructions about the seasonal psalms, antiphons, and responsories to be sung during the feast and focusing instead on a few small details. These he exaggerates or misinterprets.

The *episcopus* in St.-Omer, as Deschamps makes clear, was not a bishop of fools but a boy bishop (*episcopus puerorum*).²⁰ The "dean of fools" (*decanum fatuorum*) is mentioned only once, as the object of a censuring done "in reverse order."²¹ Since the first half of the sentence in question is missing, its meaning remains obscure: perhaps a group of clerics, including the "dean," was censured in reverse order of rank. But there is no need to interpret this censuring, any more than that at first vespers in Châlons, as "burlesque." Nor is there any other indication that the dean of fools engaged in disorderly behavior. As with the *magister baculi* in Châlons, his role may have been to keep order.

As for the high-pitched "howls," this seems to be an erroneous gloss on the opening rubric of the office of the Circumcision: "The Kalends of January, when the circumcision of the Lord was done, is a duplex [i.e., major] feast with nine lessons, in which the vicars and other clerics crowding the choir,

15. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 145–205; Bled, "Fête," 57–58.

16. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 99–102, 106.

17. *Ibid.*, 106–7.

18. Bled, "Fête," 57.

19. Chambers, 1:289. He also claims (1:305) that the Feast of Fools in St.-Omer "existed in the twelfth century," but I can find no supporting evidence.

20. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 106, 150.

21. *Ibid.*, 147: "... domino decano fatuorum ferunt incensum sed prepostere ut dictum est."

together with their [boy] bishop, occupy themselves in singing and observing the office just as has been described above for the feast of the Holy Innocents—with the exception, however, that everything from that day becomes what is designated for the office of the Feast of Fools—as far as possible and even *ullulando*.²² Deschamps, like Chambers, understands *ullulando* to mean “howling,”²³ but there is a far more plausible interpretation. Matthew 2:18, with its reference to Rachel weeping and mourning for her children, was sung “by a deacon or, if it pleases, by a choirboy” at mass on the feast of the Innocents. In the Vulgate translation, this verse reads, “Vox in rama audita est ploratus et *ululatus* multus Rachel plorans filios suos et noluit consolari quia non sunt” (emphasis added). Moreover, the antiphon “Vox in rama” (A voice was heard in Rama), which sets this text to music, was sung both after mass on the feast of the Innocents and at second vespers on the feast of the Circumcision. Several other references to the slaughter of the Innocents appear in the St.-Omer office of the Circumcision, including the antiphon “Herodes iratus” (Angry Herod). It seems to me highly unlikely that the opening rubric intended to license senseless howling throughout the office. Rather, I believe, it was reminding the participants to imitate Rachel’s mourning during certain chants, just as they had on the feast of the Innocents.

In Autun, in 1230, the cathedral chapter refused, apparently not for the first time, to underwrite expenses incurred by the holder of the *baculus anni novi* (New Year staff): “We renew [our previous ruling] that anyone who takes the New Year staff from another will as punishment receive nothing from the chapter’s funds. If, however, against this [ruling], anyone should dare to come [for funds], he will be shunned by all until he returns to his senses.”²⁴ This was not necessarily, as Chambers assumed, an outright ban on the passing of the staff from one holder to another,²⁵ but may have been meant to discourage potential future “masters of the staff” by refusing financial support. A similar measure had previously failed to have the desired effect.

No further verifiable reports of the Feast of Fools in Autun appear until 1411, when the chapter stipulated that an ass was not to be led in procession on the feast of the Circumcision, “as has been customary,” and that “songs” (*cantilena*) were not to be sung around the ass.²⁶ Denis Grivot plausibly suggests that the Autun procession of the ass had begun in the thirteenth

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 106; Chambers, 1:289.

24. Charmasse, *Cartulaire*, 1:144; Gagnare, *Histoire*, 631.

25. Chambers, 1:289; cf. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 469.

26. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 628.

century.²⁷ Du Cange includes an undated and unattributed description of the Autun procession, observing that the festivity there was celebrated “with no less solemnity or ceremonial propriety” than it was in Beauvais: “The ass was dressed in gold cloth. Four of the principal canons were privileged to carry the corners of the cloth. Others were required to be present in their proper vestments, just as on Christmas Day. Thus, at last, in a densely packed throng, they used to lead the ass in a solemn rite. The more they were seen to be laughing, the more piously was the ceremony observed.”²⁸ It is good to be reminded that laughter was considered conducive to piety. But a disapproving eighteenth-century archivist in Autun, Philibert Gagnare, conflated this account with material from later prohibitions in Autun and with reports of prophet plays elsewhere²⁹ to construct a narrative of riotous procession, with a “king of fools” riding the ass and playing the part of Balaam while all the clergy were “disguised in grotesque costumes.” Du Cange’s account does not warrant this expansion.

Laon has also been charged with staging a rowdy Feast of Fools. Lagueux, whose primary focus is on the liturgy and its plays in Laon at the beginning of the thirteenth century, assumes that the effects of liturgical reform had worn off by the “fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.” By then, he remarks, “the character of the feasts had regressed . . .; no longer an ecclesiastically sanctioned expression of mirth, unrestrained revelry—and ecclesiastical disapproval—seems once more to have been the norm.”³⁰ But Lagueux derives this impression from the work of previous scholars, who—just as Chérest charged—were confusing epochs, importing the reported abuses of a later period to the late-thirteenth-century Feast of Fools.

Specifically, Lagueux depends not on his own meticulous research in the earlier archives but on a lecture by C. Hidé published in Laon in 1863. “Around the year 1280,” Hidé told his audience, “the chaplains, vicars, and choristers used to gather in the choir of the cathedral on the eve of Epiphany, after prime, to elect a patriarch of fools. Those who abstained from the election paid a fine. The chapter provided the patriarch and his retinue with bread and wine, [and] eight livres parisis, often more and sometimes less, for the feast. It also furnished the cross, the miter, and a full assortment of masks

27. Grivot, *Histoire*, 21.

28. Du Cange, s.v. *festum asinorum* (3:461).

29. Although Balaam and his ass are represented in twelfth-century stone capitals in Autun cathedral (Grivot, *Sculpture*, 58–59) and, in a much better state of preservation, in the basilica of Saint Andoche in nearby Saulieu (Forsyth, “Âne”), I know of no evidence of a prophet play in either place.

30. Lagueux, “Glossing,” 335 n. 5.

and disguises. The joyful band, rigged out in grotesque costumes, in priestly vestments that had been torn or turned inside out, began the feast with a procession through the town with flaming torches; then it returned to the cathedral, where the choir was illuminated with bright lights. For two days, the divine office was abandoned and the church belonged to the fools, by right and by fact. They invaded the stalls, chanted antiphons of the other world, danced, gambled, drank, and ate. It was an assault of grimaces, cries, and extravagant follies. The patriarch gave his blessing to the congregation and pronounced comical indulgences for the benefit of the crowd. After this the mob, preceded by its high dignitary, abandoned the church and spilled into the city. The tumult was at its highest pitch. While some stationed themselves in the squares, uttering jeers, others organized themselves into a cavalcade that went in search of means to pay for their revels. The feast ended with the procession of the Rabardiaux; no detail of this burlesque ceremony has come down to us.”³¹

Hidé’s description of the Feast of Fools in late-thirteenth-century Laon is deeply suspect. He is vague about his sources, referring only to “the chapter accounts” (*les registres du chapitre*).³² In fact most of his description is taken verbatim and unacknowledged from an earlier history of Laon by Maximilien Melleville. Melleville gives no dates, cites no sources, and includes details, which Hidé judiciously omits, about clerical cross-dressing, obscene farces in the cathedral, and a final “comic and derisory” staging of a *mystère* (religious play) in the cathedral.³³ Melleville’s account is consistent with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century descriptions, often unduly critical, of the Feast of Fools elsewhere, but not with any documented reports from late-thirteenth- or early-fourteenth-century Laon. Even Grenier’s sifting of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chapter accounts from Laon, while documenting efforts to restrain the Feast of Fools, offers nothing to warrant Melleville’s imaginative reconstruction.³⁴

Moreover, Hidé seems to have derived the few credible details in his lecture not from consulting the chapter accounts himself but from the work of Marcel Rigollot. In a study of commemorative coins issued in connection with the feasts of the Innocents and Fools, Rigollot wrote, “The chapter accounts [*registres du chapitre*] of the church in Laon mention the feast of the Innocents in 1284 and 1397: one can see that the choirboys used to make a

31. Hidé, “Notice,” 115–16. Chambers, 1:303, also relies on Hidé.

32. Hidé, “Notice,” 115.

33. Melleville, *Histoire*, 1:189–90.

34. Grenier, 370–72.

cavalcade in the town.”³⁵ Hidé borrowed the early date and his claim of an authoritative source from Rigollot, but he grossly distorted the cavalcade. Touring churches and monasteries on horseback was, as we have seen, a conventional and perfectly respectable practice of the boy bishop in many cathedral cities, not to be confused with the riotous cavalcade described by Melleville. Hidé also found in Rigollot the name of the “patriarch of fools” elected in Laon in 1307: Pierre Caput.³⁶ But, like so many historians of the Feast of Fools before and after him, Hidé was not content with small, but accurate, details. He preferred to combine unverified reports from different feast days and epochs into a single narrative of gross disorder, which he then ascribed in its entirety to the earliest available date.

Setting Hidé’s misleading lecture aside, we are left with no verifiable record either of rowdiness or of attempts to restrain the Feast of Fools in Laon until the mid-fifteenth century, by which time the feast was also in trouble elsewhere. It is true that we do not have the same evidence of continuous chapter support as we do in Sens. But unless we are to suppose that the Feast of Fools disappeared in Laon between 1307 and 1454, when the bishop upheld the feast against the dean,³⁷ it is reasonable to believe that the feast quietly enjoyed chapter support all along. This being the case, Chérest’s conclusion concerning the respectability of the feast in Sens applies to Laon as well: for two hundred years or so, it operated peaceably within approved boundaries. Unfortunately, we do not know for how long the *Office of Joseph* or either of its companion plays continued to be performed as part of the seasonal liturgy in Laon. We do know that the established office (*servitium*) of Epiphany was still in use as late as 1521,³⁸ but the *Ordo Ioseph* may have been set aside before then.

Not all rumors of disorder are necessarily the product of later scholarship. An early snippet of complaint, overlooked by Chambers, can be found in William of Perault’s *Summa de vitiis*, written before 1236. Often known by his Latin name Peraldus, William of Perault (ca. 1200–1271) was a Dominican preacher from the order’s convent in Lyon. After 1261 he served as its prior.³⁹ Writing in the *Summa* of the folly (*stultitia*) of pride, he observed that the vice could express itself in clothing that was either too ornate or too scanty. As a perverse example of both extremes, he imagined someone

35. Rigollot, 21.

36. Rigollot, 22 n. 1; Hidé, “Notice,” 115 n. 2; Grenier, 370.

37. Grenier, 370–71; Rigollot, 22–23; Hidé, “Notice,” 117.

38. Rigollot, 24; Hidé, “Notice,” 120.

39. For Perault’s life and works, see Dondaine, “Guillaume”; for the extensive influence of the *Summa*, see Wenzel, “Peraldus.”

“wholly naked” riding “a finely caparisoned horse.” Such a person, he continued, “is like a certain cleric who, at the Feast of Fools, dressed his horse in scarlet and himself was dressed in a single mat made of rushes.”⁴⁰ Sandra Billington interprets this as a processional inversion of rank, the cleric wearing something akin to a cheap saddle pad made of matted rushes while his horse was dressed, like a cardinal, in scarlet.⁴¹

Whether Perault had himself seen such a foolish cleric, merely heard rumors of his eccentric actions, or freely invented him as a lively homiletic illustration is uncertain. In any case, it is significant that the ill-clad cleric, whether real or imagined, was outdoors rather than inside a church. What was permitted outside the church, even to clerics, differed greatly from what was allowed inside church buildings, especially during times of formal worship.

Failure to mark this distinction between sacred and domestic or secular space is responsible for Chambers’s misrepresentation of the Feast of Fools in Viviers, a small cathedral city in the southeastern department of Ardèche. A manuscript ritual, dated 1365 by Du Cange, sets out how the feast was observed.⁴² Both the nature of the source and other incidental details make it clear that the feast enjoyed full chapter support.

Proceedings began on 17 December with the election by the lower clergy of an “abbot of fools” (*abbas stultorum*), also known as an “abbot of the clergy” (*abbé du clergé*). Following the election and a chanting of the *Te Deum*, the companions of the newly elected abbot carried him on their shoulders to the house (*domus*) where the rest of the chapter had gathered. Wine, fruit, and festive decorations had been prepared. On the abbot’s arrival, everyone stood, “even the bishop himself if he was present.” Chambers conceals the domestic setting and likely exaggerates the quantity of wine when he says only that the abbot was “borne to a place of honour at a drinking-bout.”⁴³

After refreshments, the clergy divided into two parts, the higher clergy on one side and the lower clergy on the other. Alternating phrases, the two groups sang repeatedly and at top volume a brief song of indeterminate meaning in Latin and Greek. While one side chanted, the other “shouted, hissed, howled, cackled, jeered, and gesticulated.” The goal, presumably,

40. Peraldus, *Summa* 6.3.12.657–60 (258): “Ipsi sunt similes ciudam clerico qui in festo stultorum induit equum suum scarleto et ipse indutus erat matta una.”

41. Billington, *Social*, 5.

42. The ritual is generously cited in Lancelot, “Recueil,” 255–56 (reprinted in Leber, 9:361–63), and Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:481–82), from whose accounts I have quoted. Cf. Bérenger-Feraud, *Superstitions*, 4:11–15.

43. Chambers, 1:315.

was to disrupt the opposition and so to be the last side chanting. When the singing game was over, the porter announced in Occitan, “On the part of monsignor the abbot and his counselors, I let you know that all men should follow him, wherever he wishes to go, on pain of having their breeches slit [*sus la pena de talhar lo braye*].” Then, according to the Latin ritual, “the abbot and the others rush out of the house” (*tunc Abbas alique domum exeunt impetum facientes*). Chambers paraphrases this as “the whole crew rushed violently out of the church.”⁴⁴ To render *domus* as “church” is a gross mistranslation, creating the false impression that the drinking and the rowdy song contest took place in the cathedral rather than in a private house.

The crowd of clergy followed the “abbot” through the city, bestowing greetings on everyone they passed. During this friendly “visitation,” which was repeated every evening until Christmas Eve, the “abbot” was required “always to wear his [official] garb, whether it be a cloak, or a tabard, or a cape with a fur collar [*cappa una cum capputio de variis folrato*].” Du Cange remarks that the purpose of this visible identification was so that “if anything unbecoming should be done by the group, [the abbot] might intervene and reprove.” The role of the “abbot of fools” in Viviers, as in other cities, was to maintain order.

On the feast of Stephen, the “fool bishop” (*episcopus stultus*) appeared. This office, distinct from that of the “abbot of fools,” was filled by another young clerk. Although he had been elected at the end of the previous feast of the Innocents, it was only during the three feast days of Saint Stephen, Saint John, and the Innocents that he finally “enjoyed the rights of his dignity.”⁴⁵ In the sacristy, before matins, mass, and vespers on each of these days, the “bishop” was dressed in a silk cape and adorned with a miter and silk gloves. Preceded by a candlestick and accompanied by his “chaplain,” who was also dressed in a silk cape but carried “a small pillow or cushion on his head in place of a hat or biretta,” the “fool bishop” walked “meekly” (*cum mansuetudine*) to the real bishop’s marble throne in the choir. Seated there, he presided over the designated services.

At the close of worship each day, after the chaplain had said in a loud voice, “Silete, silete, silentium habete” (Be silent, be silent, observe silence), and the choir had responded, “Deo gratias,” the fool bishop gave the benediction.

44. Ibid.

45. Lancelot, “Recueil,” 255 (Leber, 9:362).

Then the chaplain pronounced a mock indulgence in Occitan. On the first day he said:

De part Mossenhor l'Évesque,
Que Dieus vos donne grand mal al bescle,
Aves una plena banasta de pardos
E dos des de raycha de sot lo mento.

[On behalf of my lord the bishop,
may God give you a great pain in your liver,
with a full basket of pardons
and two fingers of skin rash under your chin.]

On the second and third days he said:

Mossenhor ques ayssi presenz,
Vos dona XX banastas de mal de dens,
E à vos autras donas a tressi
Dona una coa de Rossi.

[My lord, who is here present,
gives you twenty baskets of toothache,
and he assigns you other women
to braid the tail of a workhorse.]⁴⁶

The mention of women suggests that the comic indulgences were directed toward a lay audience, gathered in the cathedral to enjoy the entertaining conclusion to the day's worship.

The fool bishop was a popular figure in Viviers. At the close of the feast of the Innocents, a new *episcopus stultus* was chosen. Preceded by the ringing of bells, he was carried to the real bishop's palace. Whether or not the bishop was in residence, the palace doors were opened wide. The fool bishop stood at a window of the great hall and blessed the whole town.⁴⁷

46. Lancelot, "Recueil," 256 (Leber, 9:362–63); Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:482); Bérenger-Feraud, *Superstitions*, 4:15 (with French translation and a variation of the second indulgence); Pilot de Thorey, *Usages*, 181–82.

47. Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:482).

Further evidence of strong chapter support for these events comes from an episcopal court case in 1406. Guillaume Raynoard had been elected “abbot of the clergy” but did not wish to fulfill the duties of the office. In particular, he refused to bear the cost of refreshments at the gathering following his election. The matter was referred to the arbitration of three canons, who decided, on 31 May, that Raynoard should instead provide a meal on the feast of Saint Bartholomew (24 August).⁴⁸

Exceptionally, the Feast of Fools in late-fourteenth-century Troyes⁴⁹ damaged church property. Most years, after his election by the cathedral chapter, the “archbishop of fools” (*archevêque des foux*) carried a reliquary to the high altar while bells were rung and the *Te Deum* was chanted.⁵⁰ But on 10 January 1372, the cathedral chapter forbade the vicars to celebrate the Feast of Fools without the chapter’s permission.⁵¹ Perhaps there had been trouble earlier in the month. Nevertheless, while visiting the city the following Christmas, the duke of Burgundy gave a franc “to the bishop of fools of [the church] of Saint Stephen of Troyes.”⁵² Whatever trouble there may have been appears to have been resolved.

In 1380, however, the chapter accounts record payment “for a new iron stem for one of the large leather candlesticks that Marie la Folle broke at the Feast of Fools [*que Marie la Folle brisa a la feste aux Foolz*].” Two years later, in 1382, the chapter paid to repair and regild “the good cross which was broken on the day of the Feast of Fools.”⁵³ Whether these items were broken during festivities in the cathedral or had been borrowed for more rowdy secular parades outdoors is not clear. The mention of Marie la Folle (Mary the Fool) strongly suggests the latter. The best-known Mère Folle (Fool Mother) was a cross-dressed man who led a company of several hundred lay fools through the streets of Dijon during Carnival in the sixteenth and seventeenth

48. Lancelot, “Recueil,” 255 n. 1 (Leber, 9:361 n. 1); Bérenger-Feraud, *Superstitions*, 4:13–14.

49. Boutiot, *Histoire*, 1:494, claims that “the Feast of Fools” in Troyes dated back “at least to the twelfth century” and that “a count of Champagne, perhaps Henry the Liberal [1152–81], was obliged to pay five sols to the archbishop of fools” of the collegiate church of Saint Stephen. Courtalon-Delaistre, *Topographie*, 2:128, mentions the obligation but does not speculate as to the count’s identity. Neither historian offers documentation. Boutiot documents two payments from the royal accounts, in 1513 and 1595, to Troyes’s “archbishop of fools” (*archevêque des Saulx*).

50. Courtalon-Delaistre, *Topographie*, 2:127.

51. Boutiot, *Histoire*, 2:264, citing Michel Sémillard, “Mémoires historiques sur la ville de Troyes” (unpublished MS in 7 vols.), 3:17. Royer, “Journal,” 423, identifies Sémillard’s MS as Bibliothèque de Troyes MS 2317.

52. Prost, *Inventaires*, 1:89–90 n. 5. Given the prevailing confusion over when the New Year begins in French records of the period, it is possible that the chapter decree was issued on 10 January 1373, two and half weeks after the duke’s gift.

53. Gadan, *Comptes*, xiv, 23, 31.

centuries.⁵⁴ In any case, the Troyes chapter appears to have paid for the breakages in 1380 and 1382 without taking any punitive action. Despite the earlier caution, as far as we can tell, permission to celebrate the Feast of Fools was not withdrawn.

The record of breakages in Troyes provides a different kind of evidence for chapter support of the Feast of Fools. There the cathedral chapter seems to have supported its feast even in the face of mild disorder and occasional damage. Once again, however, we should not generalize from the exceptional: verifiable cases of disorder during this period are rare. Where there was pressure on local chapters to curtail the Feast of Fools, it tended to come from external authority rather than from local misbehavior. In chapter 13 we look at cases of cathedral chapters that faced such pressure. Some appear to have conceded, while others negotiated a compromise. At least one fiercely defended its feast.

54. See chapter 25.

CHAPTER 13

A Spirited Defense

In 1246 the chapter of Nevers cathedral received a series of directions from Eudes of Tusculum, the same papal legate who in the previous year had complained to the Sens chapter. Predictably, one ruling had to do with the Feast of Fools: “Because we have become aware that on the Feast of Fools, which is [celebrated on the feast] of the Innocents and the New Year, they do many shameful things in your church, we strictly insist, under penalty of excommunication, that they not presume to hold such mocking feasts [*festa irrisoria*] in the future, strongly enjoining that solemn divine service be held just as on other days; in this way you should take care to act with all decency and devotion on these feasts.”¹ The bishop of Nevers, Robert Cornu, was himself a papal appointee to the see. It is not clear what part if any he played in framing these directions.² As for Eudes, like other papal legates before him, he seems to have been attacking activities of which he had heard but which he had not himself witnessed: “we have become aware,” he wrote, not “we have seen.” It is possible that in this instance the

1. Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, 4:1070; Mansi, 23:731.

2. Martene and Durand, *Thesaurus*, 4:1070, do not name the author of the document. Crosnier, *Monographie*, 298, is confident that it came from Eudes of Tusculum; in *Congrégations*, 76, he adds that Robert Cornu “seems not to have taken any direct part” in the preparation of the document. But Van Deusen, “Institutional,” 57, writes that “the reform” was “prescribed by Bishop Robert Cornu.”

chapter conceded and abandoned its feast. I know of no subsequent references to the Feast of Fools in Nevers.

In Romans-sur-Isère, in 1274, a dispute between Archbishop Guy of Vienne, the canons of the collegiate church of Saint Barnard in Romans, and the lay community of Romans was settled by the publication of a joint decree. Because of “the many evils, dangers, and scandals” that had arisen from the custom, the clergy of Romans were no longer to be allowed to elect an “abbot.” Any cleric playing the part would be banned from the choir; any layman doing so would be expelled from the town until recalled by his master.³ J.-J.-A. Pilot de Thorey assumes, probably correctly, that the office in question was an abbot of fools. Drawing on evidence from the “ancient statutes” of the town, he also affirms that there were two such offices and that the election of a “bishop of fools,” probably a boy bishop, continued unabated. One of the boy bishop’s duties at the feast of the Innocents was to intone the verse from the Magnificat “‘Deposuit potentes de sede,’ so that the words would be in accord with the thing [done].”⁴ Until at least 1472, the “bishop” also carried a “pilgrim’s staff” (*bourdon*) on the feast of the Circumcision.⁵

Vienne, too, had both a boy bishop and an abbot of fools. The boy bishop, as in Romans, seems to have encountered no opposition. On 15 December, the eve of the feast day of Saint Ado—a former archbishop of Vienne—the youngest clerks chose one of their number to serve as “bishop of the innocents” (*évêque des innocents*). Dressed in cape and miter and seated on the archiepiscopal throne, he presided over the entire festive liturgy with the exception of mass. Lower and higher clergy exchanged their ranked choir stalls for the duration of the feast. The higher clergy also carried the candlesticks, books, and breviary, tasks usually assigned to the younger clerks. After dinner the next day, the young bishop was led in a general procession, in which the higher clergy escorted the lower clergy through the city. In the final position of honor, accompanied by two young clerks in cape and miter, one swinging a censer and the other carrying a prayer book, came the bishop of innocents. A similar procession took place on the eve of the feast of the Innocents, after which the festive liturgy repeated the same pattern as before. Moreover, according to an “ancient ceremonial,” the archbishop was obliged to give three florins, a measure of wine, and two years’ supply of firewood to the boy bishop, who also received a load of wood from each of the canons.⁶

3. Du Cange, s.v. *abbas esclaffardorum* (1:14); Pilot, *Usages*, 1:182 n. 1.

4. Pilot, *Usages*, 1:176–77.

5. *Ibid.*, 1:7–8.

6. Artigny, *Nouveaux*, 4:302–3 (reprinted in Leber, 9:257–58).

The “abbot of fools,” by contrast, ran into opposition in 1385, when the Avignon pope, Clement VII, ordered reform in Vienne. The cathedral chapter responded by calling for an end to “the abuses which are customarily committed by the abbot, commonly called [the abbot] of fools or of companions [*stultorum seu sociorum*].”⁷ The chapter prescribed a new method for the abbot’s annual election. The priests and clerks, rather than the lower clergy alone, were to elect the abbot. He would continue to enjoy his “right of jurisdiction,” which included maintaining order and resolving disputes among his “companions,” as long as he was recognized as apt and capable. Any complaints about his lack of fitness were to be made to the dean or to the judge of the chapter, who was responsible for administering prompt justice.⁸

Moreover, the chapter insisted, no one was to be carried “on a grill” (*in Rost*) during the feasts of Stephen, John, the Innocents, or Epiphany. Nor should anyone, whether clerk or layperson, “recite disgraceful or defamatory rhymes” or “demand a pledge or otherwise seize anything.” Antoine d’Artigny, an eighteenth-century canon of Vienne cathedral, believed that these activities had been part of a single game: “A man was taken by force, placed on a grill set aside for this ridiculous purpose, and carried thus through the streets, while [the crowd] sang obscene and satirical couplets. No one, not even ecclesiastics, was spared. If the person seized refused to serve as the plaything of the populace, he was insulted, beaten, and forced to pay a sum of money or to provide a guarantor [of payment] in order to redeem himself from this vexation. License was taken so far that day that no one scrupled to enter homes and to take at will whatever could be found.”¹⁰

This game was not part of the clerical Feast of Fools. Organized by young laymen, it took place in the streets, not in the cathedral. Some of the younger clerks, perhaps with the permission of their abbot of fools, may have joined in voluntarily; other members of the clergy were apparently seized as reluctant victims. The roots of such games lay, at least in part, in the ancient Kalends tradition of masqueraders demanding a downward flow of New Year’s gifts.¹¹ By the late fourteenth century, the practice had been adopted and adapted by

7. Pilot, *Usages*, 1:178 n. 1.

8. *Ibid.*, 1:177–78.

9. *Ibid.*, 1:178 n. 2.

10. Artigny, *Nouveaux*, 4:303 (Leber, 9:258–59).

11. Pilot, *Usages*, 1:178, describes the ludic thefts and payments in Vienne as “New Year’s gifts” (*étrennes*). The Kalends tradition of *strenae* flowing upwards also seems to have been enjoying a revival at the close of the fourteenth century. Buettner, “Past,” 600, writes of the expanding evidence of *étrennes* in the French royal courts “from the 1380s onwards.”

lay “youth groups” (*compagnies de jeunesse*).¹² We will return to the activities of these lay societies briefly in the next chapter and at greater length in part five. For now it is worth recalling that the elaborate and time-consuming offices of the Circumcision in Sens, Beauvais, Châlons, and elsewhere had been designed, in part, as orderly rival attractions to lay seasonal revels. In attempting to suppress the local game, the Vienne chapter was not abandoning its festive liturgy. It was trying to regain ecclesiastical control of the city’s post-Christmas festivities.

The chapter made clear that its reform did not affect customary liturgical practices. The lower clergy, wearing amices, were still permitted to take over the higher stalls and to preside solemnly over the seasonal divine office, “as has been the practice until now, conserving at all times the decency and modesty that is proper in the house of God.” The younger clerks were allowed to elect a bishop of innocents. These privileges, according to Artigny, remained in force until 1670.¹³

The most spirited defense of Christmas week festivities by a cathedral chapter in the late fourteenth century took place in Nîmes. The story begins twenty miles away in Arles, in June 1365. In that month, in the city’s cathedral of St.-Trophime, the German emperor Charles IV was crowned king of Arles as part of an attempt to strengthen his claims over the disputed territory of Provence. According to Jean-Pierre Papon, an eighteenth-century historian of Provence, the cathedral chapter decided to include elements of its Feast of Fools, whose annual expenses it underwrote, in the ceremonies surrounding the coronation. “The emperor was so scandalized, by what he was shown in the church of St.-Trophime, no doubt on the day of his coronation, that he was obliged to make it stop.”¹⁴

Rather than hazard a guess as to the particular activities that so offended the emperor, Papon concocted a generalized account of “the indecent spectacle of the Feast of Fools,” relying on Tilliot and the 1445 letter from the Paris theologians. He then assumed similar “scandalous” behavior in Arles.¹⁵ But this makes no sense. The Arles chapter would not have greeted the emperor with anything that was self-evidently scandalous. A much better explanation had already been offered by Gilles Vivien in 1395. Vivien was lieutenant to the seneschal of Beaucaire and Nîmes, William of Neillac.

12. Beam, *Laughing*, 22–23.

13. Artigny, *Nouveaux*, 4:304 (Leber, 9:259).

14. Papon, *Histoire*, 3:213.

15. *Ibid.*, 3:212. For a somewhat more cautious account of the Feast of Fools in Arles, see E.F., “Curiosités,” 49–51, 54–55.

The seneschal, in turn, represented the periodically insane Charles VI of France, whose uncle Louis II, duke of Anjou and king of Naples, was by then in precarious control of Provence.¹⁶ Attempting to abolish Christmas week festivities in Nîmes, Vivien cited the precedent of the emperor's visit to Arles: "People of both sexes, both male and female, were celebrating his happy arrival by dancing and leaping [*coreantes seu trepidiantes (= tripudiantes)*] in the [cathedral] church of that city. Becoming annoyed by this, the emperor did not allow them to do this in the church, but instead immediately ejected them."¹⁷ A circle dance in the nave of the cathedral is a much more likely explanation of the misunderstanding between emperor and populace than the full-scale, out-of-season, exaggeratedly rowdy Feast of Fools that Papon supposes. Such a dance may well have been considered dignified and even sacred by the people of Arles but strange and inappropriate by the visiting German emperor.

Dancing in the nave of the cathedral was one of the factors prompting the dispute in Nîmes thirty years later. Another was the death, on 16 September 1394, of Clement VII, who was succeeded in the Avignon branch of the papacy by Benedict XIII. This extension of the schism was the occasion of public prayers throughout France for the reunion of the church. Vivien, in his role as lieutenant to the absent seneschal, decided that the time was right to abolish (or at least to suspend) certain Christmas festivities in Nîmes. On 25 December 1394 he issued an order declaring that it was inappropriate, in such unhappy times, for "clergy and laity, both male and female," to indulge in "dances and other licentious activities [*tripudia et alie lacivie*] in certain churches of Nîmes," where "godly worship" and prayers for the unity of the church ought instead to be offered. A public proclamation in Occitan was made the same day: no person, of whatever estate, was to engage in "dances [*dansas*] inside places set aside in Nîmes by God for prayer" until such time as the schism was over.¹⁸

Vivien's ordinance was met with lively irritation by the people of Nîmes, especially by the cathedral canons. The canons quickly made private inquiries as to whether Vivien had acted with the approval of other civic

16. For the role of the seneschal, see Rogozinski, "Counsellors."

17. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr135 (103). Ménard provides the Latin (and occasionally Occitan) text of key documents from the cathedral archives in a separately paginated appendix (*Preuves*, 3:125–142) and a substantial French paraphrase and commentary on these and other pertinent archival documents in the body of his book (3:93–105). When citing the original documents from the *Preuves* (*Pr*), I have placed their page reference first, followed in parentheses by the page reference for Ménard's paraphrase. The 1873–1875 (reprint 1989) edition of Ménard does not include the *Preuves*.

18. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr125–26 (94–95). Germain, *Histoire*, 1:428–30, provides a French translation of parts of the ordinance, together with the Occitan text of the public proclamation.

authorities. The royal judge (*juge royal ordinaire*) declared that he had not authorized the ordinance and expressed his disapproval. Three consuls replied that they had received no prior knowledge of the decree and that they had heard its proclamation “with true displeasure.” The royal counsel to the seneschal stated that his opinion had not been sought when the document was drawn up and that he had heard of it only from public report. The royal *viguier*, whose duty it was to see that local administration ran smoothly and that the seneschal’s orders were carried out,¹⁹ also said that he had not been consulted, adding that if he had been in the house of the lieutenant when the order for the proclamation was given to the *sousviguier* (subviguier), he would have protested.²⁰

On 3 January 1395 two of the consuls delivered a formal appeal, “on behalf of ourselves, our wives, our children, and all other laypersons living in the city of Nîmes,” to an official in the curia of the absent bishop of Nîmes. The appeal was ultimately directed “to our lord the king and to his worthy law court of the Parlement of Paris.” The consuls complained not only about the content of Vivien’s ordinance but also about the circumstances in which it was made public. The *sousviguier*, they protested, had delivered his proclamation on “the feast day of the Nativity of the Son of God,” within the “sacred space” of the cathedral. Inside the building, a great crowd of people had gathered “for the celebration of a certain honest dance, to the honor and reverence of the Nativity.” Either Vivien had made a last-minute decision or he had timed his announcement to maximize its disruptive impact.

The dance, according to the consuls, was a long-established tradition. As far back as people could remember, the whole Christian populace of the city had been in the habit of gathering in the cathedral “to the glory of the Son of God and his holy Nativity” and there “celebrating the feast with resounding musical instruments” (*festivando instrumentis musicalibus resonantibus*) and “a special kind of joyous dance” (*talis tripudiosa leticia*). “The citizens and inhabitants of Nîmes and their wives” took part, “together with the good and honest canons, and their new bishop [*cum ... eorum episcopo novello*] and his clerical companions.” The “new bishop” was the newly elected boy bishop. The participation of husbands “and their wives” bore witness to the propriety of the dance. The reference to “resounding musical instruments” suggests the unusual incorporation of a secular musical tradition into the seasonal liturgy of the church. Besides, the consuls added, the dance was not

19. Strayer, “Viscounts,” 245.

20. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:95–96.

restricted to the Christmas season: it was also performed in the cathedral at weddings and on Ascension Day.

The consuls challenged Vivien's justification of the ban in terms of the schism, which, as they pointed out, had been going on for fifteen years without interrupting traditional festivities. Indeed, no previous representative of a seneschal or of any other civil or ecclesiastical authority had ever prohibited the dance. In any case, they maintained, Vivien did not have the authority to issue such a ban, since it concerned the church and its canons, over whom the seneschal had no jurisdiction. The *viguier* and the *juge royal* were responsible for maintaining order in Nîmes, and they had no complaint. Nothing in the dance was sacrilegious, contrary to good order, or in any way a threat to public safety. Everything was done "to the honor, praise, and glory of God."²¹

On 4 January, on behalf of the whole cathedral chapter, a delegated canon delivered a similar appeal to Vivien himself. The chapter's document placed the dance in the context of the cathedral's seasonal liturgy. As was the case in all other churches, the feast of the Nativity recalled "the shepherd's crib and the infancy of the Savior," the feast of Saint Stephen was a time of joy for the deacons, the feast of Saint John belonged to the priests, and the feast of the Holy Innocents was celebrated especially by the young men and adolescents. During these feasts, "the canons of the church were accustomed to having musical instruments, both for the divine office and in honor of the festivity and of the new bishop," who was chosen each year by the young clerks. After vespers on Christmas Day and on the three following days, "in the lower part [i.e., nave] of the church," the clergy joined "with their relatives, and other noble and distinguished persons, upright and honest men and women of this city, and whoever else may wish to take part," in an expression of appropriate seasonal joy. The dance had been a part of these festivities as long as anyone could recall.²²

Far from being disreputable, as the chapter pointed out, the cathedral's Christmas festivities had been honored by the presence of such dignitaries as John II of France (1350–1364), the royal dukes of Anjou, Berry, and Burgundy and their families, several cardinals from the papal court, and previous seneschals. When the king had visited, the feast had been celebrated in the bishop's palace, perhaps because the paving stones in the cathedral were too wet from recent heavy rains. But when the dukes had visited, they and several members of their families had joined "the canons to dance [*tripudiare*] joyfully and publicly in the church." Léon Ménard, the distinguished

21. Ibid., 3:Pr127–29 (96).

22. Ibid., 3:Pr131 (97–98).

eighteenth-century historian of Nîmes, confirms and dates these royal visits: John, duke of Berry, was in Nîmes on 29 December 1360; John II attended the city's Christmas festivities in 1362; Louis, duke of Anjou, and his wife, did so in 1373; and Philip, duke of Burgundy often traveled with his brothers and was presumably part of the company on one or both of their Christmas visits to Nîmes.²³ The canons also reminded Vivien that seneschals, "with their wives and families, [and] with the canons," had "danced eagerly and publicly in the church." None of these dignitaries had ever attempted to prohibit the dance. What higher approval of its probity, the canons asked, could one desire?²⁴

In any case, the canons alleged, Vivien's motive in issuing the order was not piety and good order but personal vengeance. The chapter had previously refused the lieutenant's request to have a slain friend interred in the church of the Augustine friars. By long-standing custom, which the chapter could not in good conscience overrule, those who had not chosen their burial site were buried "near the mother church [i.e., cathedral] of Nîmes." Moreover, the lieutenant had believed false reports that the canons would not admit him to the divine office on the grounds that he had been excommunicated for delegating responsibilities in his absence to one Jean Fressac, who had after due process truly been excommunicated by Clement VII.²⁵

According to the canons, the manner in which Vivien's order had been proclaimed further betrayed his impiety and hostility. After vespers on the feast of the Nativity, a day when "the dread, loud voice of justice" should properly remain silent, the herald had faced the doors of the cathedral, in a "sacred place, where the crucifix stands during the procession for the absolution of the dead." There, "with a most terrible blast of his trumpet" [*cum tuba terribiliter clangendo*], he had so loudly delivered his proclamation that it had "scandalized" the great crowd of faithful Christians gathered in the nave to honor God with their dance.²⁶

On 15 January, Vivien replied to the chapter's appeal. Acknowledging the special features of the cathedral liturgy on the four feast days spanning 25–28 December, he reassured the canons that he had no desire to prohibit representations of "the crib, the wise men, Herod, or anything else that leads people to godly remorse." The wording of Vivien's concession was taken directly

23. Ibid., 3:99–100, and, for further details of each visit, 2:220 (duke of Berry), 2:248 (John II), 2:317 (duke of Anjou).

24. Ibid., 3:Pr132 (99).

25. Ibid., 3:Pr132 (100).

26. Ibid., 3:Pr131–32 (102).

from the official gloss on Innocent III's letter to the archbishop of Gniezno.²⁷ Although the chapter's appeal mentioned the seasonal remembrance of "the shepherd's crib and the infancy of the Savior," no evidence survives of a Herod play in Nîmes. Vivien's concession appears to have been formulaic rather than indicative of particular local traditions.

Vivien went on to insist that he had forbidden people "to dance" (*coreare*) only on account of its "bodily lewdness," and even then only for the duration of the schism. The church, he maintained, should be a place of peaceful worship, not the clamor that accompanies a dance involving both men and women. Reverence should be shown to the sacramental body of Christ, which is kept in the church, and to the entombed bodies of the dead, which should not be trampled by dancing feet. To reinforce his argument, Vivien recalled the German emperor's expulsion of dancers from the cathedral in Arles.

In Nîmes, he pointed out, the cathedral was not the only place where a dance could be performed. As far as Vivien was concerned, the canons were free "to dance [*trepidiare & coreare*], if they wished, in their cloisters, or in the house of the bishop next to the church," as they had in the past. Vivien maintained his authority to issue a ban on dancing in the church, but he claimed that he had ordered the ban to be proclaimed only in the public streets. If it had in fact been delivered "in a sacred space"—which he found hard to believe—he offered to pay an appropriate penalty. On the matter of the appeal as a whole, however, he pronounced it "vain, useless, frivolous, and inane, . . . erroneous in both matter and form." He would not be forwarding it to a higher court.²⁸

The canons did not give up. On 26 January they sent a revised appeal to the lieutenant. This document had been prepared two weeks earlier by Jacques Arnaud, both a canon of Nîmes and a chaplain to the Avignon pope, and endorsed by the entire chapter. While Arnaud's version repeated most of the initial appeal word for word, it addressed at greater length some of the specific arguments in Vivien's reply.²⁹ The revised appeal insisted that the dance violated neither the sanctity of Christ's consecrated body nor the repose of the entombed dead. The nave had been chosen as the site of the

27. The pertinent portion of the 1263 gloss reads, "Non tamen hoc prohibetur representare presepe Domini, Herodem, Magos et qualiter Rachel plorat filios suos, . . . cum talia potius inducant homines ad compunctionem" (*Decretales* 3.1.12 [col. 997]; Young, 2:416–17). Vivien's concession reads, "Dicens quod talia non prohibentur, scilicet presepe, magos, Herodem, nec alia que inducunt gentes ad compunctionem" (Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr134).

28. Ménard, *Histoire*, Pr134–36 (102–4).

29. Germain, *Histoire*, 1:431–45, provides a French translation of most of the revised appeal.

dance precisely to avoid any suspicion of impropriety. In the lower part of the church, away from the choir and the lateral chapels of the apse, there were “no altars, no Eucharistic sacrament, no holy relics, and no monuments to the bodies of the deceased.” If the dance was sometimes performed in the bishop’s palace, it was only because heavy rains had made the floor of the nave too slippery.³⁰

The manner of the lieutenant’s public proclamation continued to rankle the chapter, as is evident from this excerpt from a much longer, breathless sentence: “. . . you ordered to be published by the voice of a herald, on Christmas Day, when the horrible voice of a herald should not be heard, with a trumpet, after vespers, through the town, openly and publicly, in a religiously privileged place, a place consecrated and blessed, in great injustice to the church, chapter, and canons, there where it was neither customary, nor was it permitted, nor is not now permitted to make even the smallest proclamation, yes indeed, a herald armed with a trumpet, who faced the open doors of the church, so that his horrid voice might enter the church more freely and immediately, disturbing the souls of all the canons and all those present, filling and scandalizing them with shame, injury, confusion, and disgust . . .”³¹

In the revised appeal, the canons also repudiated at greater length Vivien’s “frivolous” claim that the schism required the suspension of the dance. During the same schism, they pointed out, dances in church had been thought entirely proper both when the king of France was restored to health (that is, to sanity) and when his son was born. All the more reason, then, to dance for the birth of the Son of God, the redeemer of the human race. The Bible provided ample precedent for the propriety of dance and musical instruments in worship. Not only did the Jews use such means in temple worship, but “David celebrated the feast of the ark of the covenant, with all the people of Israel, with all kinds of musical instruments and dances.”³² Since the ark prefigured Christ, it was all the more incumbent on Christians to rejoice in like fashion over the coming of Christ himself. During the sixteen years of the schism, the cathedral canons and the people of Nîmes had faithfully “chanted processions, masses, and other divine offices” for the health of the king and for the end of the schism, but the schism did not give the lieutenant the right to order the clergy and the people of Nîmes to abandon the dance with which each year they celebrated the birth of the Savior.³³

30. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr137–38 (98); Germain, *Histoire*, 1:432–33.

31. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr138 (102); Germain, *Histoire*, 1:433–34.

32. Cf. 2 Sam. 6:12–23, 1 Chron. 15:25–29.

33. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:Pr139–40 (101); Germain, *Histoire*, 1:439–42.

Unfortunately, we do not know how the story ended. Alexandre Germain, a nineteenth-century historian of the church in Nîmes, could find no further evidence there of “the fête des fous” but still believed it “probable that the canons would have gained their cause.”³⁴ Perhaps he was right: the weight of civic and ecclesiastical support for the dance may have prevented its demise. Perhaps he was not. Sustained, national attacks on the Feast of Fools were to begin in 1400, seventeen years before the schism ended. Under the circumstances, the dance in Nîmes may never have recovered from Vivien’s ban.

It is important to note, however, that the exchanges between Vivien, the consuls, and the canons nowhere used the name Feast of Fools. Nor did they assign a feast day to the subdeacons or mention the feast of the Circumcision. As far as I can tell, the name of the Feast of Fools was introduced into the discussion of Christmas festivities in Nîmes by Ménard in 1748.³⁵ This can be misleading. The dispute was over a dance, which even the lieutenant agreed could legitimately be done elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the chapter’s spirited defense of its dance can serve as a reminder that by the last decade of the fourteenth century, two very different views of Christmas week festivities in French cathedrals were in play. The canons’ view was the older one, representing nearly two hundred years of sustained chapter support for the liturgical Feast of Fools and its kindred celebrations. Vivien’s view was the newer one, anticipating the centralized attacks on the Feast of Fools that were to unfold in the first half of the fifteenth century. It is the newer view that has shaped most subsequent scholarship. The older view, argued in the heat of battle by the canons and consuls of Nîmes, should be given no less scholarly attention.

34. Germain, *Histoire*, 1:445.

35. Ménard, *Histoire*, 3:93.

CHAPTER 14

Youth Groups, Coal Dust, and Cow Dung

Another factor that has confused historians of the Feast of Fools is the appearance in the seasonal records of lay activities having little to do with the liturgical Feast of Fools except, perhaps, to serve as a rival attraction. Although some young clerics might take part, these activities were beyond the immediate jurisdiction of the church. Most involved young, unmarried laymen. We have already met the street game with a grill in Vienne in 1385. The damage to church property in Troyes in 1380 and 1382 was probably due to similar lay festivities there.¹

An earlier example comes from Paris. A sermon preached in 1273 contains the observation that “young men are accustomed at the Feast of Fools to blacken their faces [*denigrare facies suas*] with coal dust [*de faecibus caldeciarum*];² whence they do not blush red [*non erubescunt*] to blacken their faces, but they turn red [*erubescunt*] from washing them.”³ Despite the mention of the Feast

1. See chapters 12 (Troyes) and 13 (Vienne).

2. John Dillon (personal communication, 27 March 2008) suggests that *caldeciaris* may be “an otherwise unrecorded term for someone who sells or transports coals by the *chalдре* (Old French = “mesure de charbon”), in which case the *faex* in question would be the coal dust at the bottom of the containers.”

3. Lecoy, *Chaire*, 425 n. 2. Lecoy is cited by Chambers, 1:291 n. 2, as the authority for his claim that “abuses” of the Feast of Fools were “condemned in more than one contemporary collection of sermons.” But Lecoy’s history of preaching in thirteenth-century France barely mentions the Feast of Fools. Although he refers in passing to the feast of “the Circumcision, with its procession of profane

of Fools, this homiletic wordplay on “faces” and “feces” and on “blacken” and “reden” was almost certainly aimed at lay revelers. I know of no case of a group of young clerics disguising themselves in this manner.⁴

Nor were the young men in question likely to have been students at the University of Paris, who held their own street festivities on the feast of Saint Nicholas rather than at the New Year. During these festivities the students imitated episcopal pomp and church ceremonial, for which they sometimes borrowed props from the churches. On 5 December 1275 the faculty of arts ruled that “on the feast of blessed Nicholas,” no master was to permit the use of “church ornaments [*paramenta*] or dances [*corea*] in the street by day or by night with or without torches.”⁵ The ruling was aimed not at Saint Nicholas Day festivities as such but at associated abuses.

Student festivities gained in strength over the next hundred years. By 1367 it had become a “well-known and peaceful custom for masters and scholars . . . , on the night of the winter feast of Nicholas each year, for their own amusement, to appoint certain bishops from among themselves, and for the same masters and scholars [to lead the bishops] with torches and lights or other [illuminations] through our town of Paris dressed in episcopal vestments.”⁶ Some (or all) of the student bishops may have been dressed in episcopal costumes designed for the occasion rather than in genuine ceremonial vestments.

The university’s defense of the custom, written in late December 1367, was prompted by an armed attack earlier that month on one of the parading student groups by the soldiers of the night watch. Several of the students had been wounded. The “bishop” was believed to have been killed by the guard and his body thrown into the Seine. An inquiry into the brawl by the Parlement of Paris blamed the watch, finding that its members had attacked the group because of a long-standing grudge against the former rector of the university, Peter of Zippa, in whose house the group had gathered.⁷ The riot, in other words, was exceptional, neither the habitual behavior nor the fault of the students.

merriment, which the preachers did not fail to reprove” (368), Lecoy cites only two examples (425): Maurice of Sully’s late-twelfth-century complaint against rural New Year gifts (see chapter 1) and this Parisian sermon of 1273.

4. In seventeenth-century Besançon, during Epiphany plays, one of the kings and his page blackened their faces (see chapter 20). No such liturgical play is known in thirteenth-century Paris. In any case, the Parisian preacher’s complaint about unregulated “young men” could hardly apply to such a rite.

5. Denifle, *Chartularium*, 1:532.

6. *Ibid.*, 3:166.

7. *Ibid.*, 3:166–75; Chambers, 1:363–64.

The records of the case make no mention of blackened faces. The “young men” castigated by the preacher in 1273, therefore, were almost certainly neither clerics nor those studying to be clerics. Perhaps they were late Kalends masqueraders, whose predecessors had been blackening their faces since the time of Peter Chrysologos.⁸ Or perhaps they were early members of a bourgeois *compagnie de jeunesse*: it was at about this time that Kalends masqueraders began to morph into organized youth groups. The preacher associated the young laymen with the Feast of Fools not because they were part of the clerical feast but because they were in the habit of staging their masquerades on the same day (or night) as the feast.

By the end of the fourteenth century, *compagnies de jeunesse* begin to appear more frequently in the civic records of northern France. They were common in villages as well as in towns. Although such groups operated at various times of the year, they frequently included the twelve days of Christmas on their calendar, and often elected a new “king” or “abbot” during their mid-winter gatherings.⁹ Because they were at their most popular between about 1450 and 1560, I consider them in greater detail later. For now, I want only to note two examples of youth groups, from Lille and Amiens, that were active during the Christmas season before the end of the fourteenth century.

In Lille, such activities first appear indistinctly in the background of an already established tradition of clerical festivities. The earliest surviving evidence of the latter comes from the chapter accounts of the collegiate church of Saint Peter, which record a payment of thirty-two sols, on “the Saturday after Christmas” 1301, for a gift of wine “to the bishop of fools” (*au veske des fols*).¹⁰ A smaller sum of six sols, ten deniers, was set aside in 1306 “for wine presented to the bishop of innocents.”¹¹ There were thus two seasonal “bishops” in Lille at the time: a boy bishop, attached to the feast of the Innocents, and an adult bishop of fools, attached to the Feast of Fools, which was observed at Epiphany in Lille.¹²

Two decades later an attempt was made to suppress the Feast of Fools. A miscellany of chapter statutes enacted in 1323 included the brief ruling, “We decree that the Feast of Fools be abolished under threat of punishment.” Another statute demanded that “on the day of blessed Stephen and [the day of] Saint John the Evangelist, all canons, chaplains, and clerks should come

8. *SPCCS*, 968–69; *SPCCS*, 3:265–66; see also chapter 1.

9. Davis, *Society*, 104.

10. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:6 n. 3. In 1301, the Saturday after Christmas fell on 30 December.

11. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:218 n. 1.

12. *Ibid.*, 2:217.

to the church just as on other days.”¹³ Rival attractions outside the church, perhaps organized by emerging youth groups, were apparently proving too strong. The set of statutes was reaffirmed in its entirety in 1328.¹⁴

The ban did not last. A document from 1366 reports that it was “customary” in Lille for “the clerks of the church of Saint Peter” to take part in a “game and amusement in which they appoint a bishop called the bishop of fools [*l’evesque des folz*] between Christmas and Candlemas, and the amusement lasts a certain time, and at the end of that game they are accustomed to eat and drink together.” Whether the game extended intermittently over the five weeks between Christmas and Candlemas (2 February) or was played only once during that period is not clear. In any case, it was followed by a meal and, in at least one instance, by a fight with a group of laymen. Earlier in the year, “around the [feast] day of [the Conversion of] Saint Paul” (25 January), after the completion of their game the clerks had shared an evening meal in the “house that is called ‘of the clerks.’” A group of pewterers came to see them, and the scene ended in a “scuffle” (*bagarre*).¹⁵

Despite these setbacks, the two “bishops” continued to receive sponsorship. In 1376–77 the hospital of St.-Sauveur in Lille paid six gros “for the New Year’s gift of the bishop of fools [*le helloire dou vesque des sos*].”¹⁶ Payment to the bishop of innocents was again mentioned in the chapter accounts in 1384 and 1385.¹⁷ Over Christmas 1392–93, the duke of Burgundy gave thirty-two sols to “the bishop of innocents” for the celebration of “his feast at Christmas” and forty sols to “the bishop of fools of the church of Saint Peter” for celebrating “his feast on the day of the Three Kings” (Epiphany).¹⁸

By the late fourteenth century, Lille’s burgeoning *compagnies de jeunesse* began to move into the foreground. In 1382 a municipal ordinance forbade the city’s youth groups “to play any *gieu de personnages* [play with spoken roles] whatsoever, to organize encounters of one group against another, or to plant May trees in the streets.”¹⁹ The youth companies may also have organized New Year masquerades. On 30 December 1396 the civic authorities ordered that no one was to go out at night “disguised in any manner of clothing, their face covered with mud [*boiet*] or cow dung [*bouseret*], or in any

13. Hautcoeur, *Cartulaire*, 2:630–31; cf. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:215; Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:11.

14. Hautcoeur, *Cartulaire*, 2:651; Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:215.

15. Vaultier, *Folklore*, 88; cf. Prost, *Inventaires*, 1:89 n. 5.

16. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:6 n. 4; DMF s.v. *helloire*.

17. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:217, 223.

18. Van Hende, “Plommés,” 39–40; Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:217.

19. Knight, “Processional,” 103; Knight, *Mystères*, 1:35–36.

state that might prevent them from being recognized.”²⁰ The ban on disguises was renewed on 31 December 1398, this time specifying that a person’s face should not be “covered with a mask [*coquet*], or any other thing, or cow dung.”²¹ Whether this was aimed at New Year masqueraders in general or at lay youth groups in particular is unclear. Possibly by then it was the latter. As a marker of the generic distinction between the clerical Feast of Fools and the seasonal activities of lay youth groups, it should be noted that the civic authorities, not the cathedral chapter, regulated the *compagnies de jeunesse*.

Evidence of another form of seasonal youth activity comes from Amiens. A letter written close to Christmas 1387 reports that “a young man called Jehan had been named and elected prince of a game called the game of the fools [*le jeu des sos*], which is customarily played each year in our town of Amiens by the young bourgeois of this town.... Several young bourgeois of our town and the said Jehan had jousted [*jousté*] and carried out their amusements honorably, even though the mayors and aldermen of our said town had contrarily forbidden them.” As a result, the mayor wanted to put them in prison, and a sergeant came to arrest them.²² Whether the threat was carried out remains unknown.

The youth groups of Lille and Amiens first appeared in the written record when they ran afoul of the civic authorities toward the end of the fourteenth century. Their fortunes improved markedly in the following century, when both achieved considerable respectability, financed rather than punished by the civic authorities. We will meet them again at the height of their fame in part five.

20. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:34; DMF s.vv. *bouer*, *bouseret*.

21. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:34 n. 2; DMF s.v. *coquet*.

22. Vaultier, *Folklore*, 90–91. For courtly jousts in fifteenth-century Amiens, see Ledieu, “Vielles,” 18–21.

CHAPTER 15

Outside France

There is very little evidence of the Feast of Fools outside France. Most comes from England, where French influence was especially strong. After the Norman conquest in 1066, nearly all the secular landowners, bishops, and heads of monasteries in England were Norman. The first Plantagenet king of England, Henry II (1154–1189), was also the duke of Normandy, the count of Anjou, and the duke of Aquitaine. As such, he ruled over western France from Normandy to the Pyrenees. English claims to this territory were variously renounced and enforced over the succeeding centuries, but were only finally abandoned in 1453 after the Hundred Years' War. In the meantime, the higher echelons of English society, both lay and ecclesiastic, remained heavily influenced by French culture. Under the circumstances, "it would be surprising. . . if the Feast of Fools had not found its way across the channel."¹

Even so, the evidence from England is scant compared to that from France. Moreover, it is apparent that the Feast of Fools in England differed in several respects from its French counterpart. Only in Lincoln and Beverley was the English feast held on the day of the Circumcision, and perhaps only in Beverley were the subdeacons privileged in connection with the feast. More

1. Chambers, 1:321.

frequently, the English Feast of Fools appears to have been a kind of supplement to the choirboys' feast of the Innocents. Sometimes, if a few fourteenth-century complaints from the dioceses of Exeter and Wells can be trusted, the feast of the Innocents displayed the kind of disorder we usually associate with the Feast of Fools, but this was the exception rather than the rule.

Although some English cathedrals had a prescribed *officium puerorum*, setting out the liturgical role of the boy bishop and his companions, there was nothing in the English midwinter liturgy to match the scale or creativity of the Sens office of the Circumcision or the Beauvais *Play of Daniel*. Nor, as far as we can tell, was there much chapter support for the Feast of Fools in England. Lacking both an absorbing liturgical framework and the moderating influence that chapter support necessarily entails, the English Feast of Fools may, at least in late-fourteenth-century Lincoln and Beverley, have drifted toward the kind of disorder that scholars have tended to presume everywhere. Even in these two cases, however, the relevant episcopal complaints yield little specific detail and leave some doubt as to their reliability. Perhaps because it never developed into an elaborate liturgy for the feast of the Circumcision, the English Feast of Fools came to an end much sooner than its French kin.

Records of the English Feast of Fools may be grouped into three clusters. The first stretches from 1222 to 1245 and is the most geographically diverse, encompassing evidence from Salisbury, Lincoln, and London. The second, from 1331 to 1360, is confined to the southwest dioceses of Wells and Exeter. The third, in 1390–91, belongs to the northeasterly cities of Lincoln and Beverley. If nothing else, this clustering of disparate evidence reminds us that festive activities reported at one time and place did not necessarily occur at another. In the case of Wells and Exeter, it may also suggest an outburst of contagious criticism rather than a spread of festive activity.

The first surviving record of the Feast of Fools in England comes from Salisbury, where a cathedral inventory of 1222 mentions both “a gold ring” for use in the “Feast of the Boys” (*Festum Puerorum*) and two “staffs” (*baculi*) for use in the “Feast of Fools” (*Festum Folorum*).² Intermittent references to the boy bishop in Salisbury continue through about 1440, when the original manuscript edition of the Sarum *Processional* is believed to have included details of his dignified participation in the divine office at the feasts of Saint John, the Innocents, and Saint Thomas of Canterbury (29 December).³

2. Jones, *Vetus*, 2:128, 135.

3. Wordsworth, *Ceremonies*, xx, notes that “several pages” of the 1440 manuscript “have been torn away and lost,” including those pertaining to “the services for the Chorister Bishop.” He

Despite the continuity of the boy bishop, there is no further record of the Feast of Fools in Salisbury.

Similarly, an inventory of 1245 from Saint Paul's cathedral in London records a "fools' staff" (*baculus stultorum*) made of "ivory [*ebore*] and without a crook [*cambuca*],⁴ with a pommel of ivory beneath, inlaid with ivory and horn"; a "miter for the innocents' bishop, of little value"; "another new white miter, studded with orphrey, [but otherwise] unadorned, which John Belemeyns gave for the innocents' bishop";⁵ and twenty-eight "boys' copes and mantles," described as "weak and worn" (*debiles et contritae*) "for the feast of Innocents and Fools."⁶ The need for a "new" bishop's miter and the dilapidated condition of the boys' vestments were probably due to long use.

The boy bishop ceremonies had been in place at least since the time of Dean Ralph of Diceto (ca. 1180–1200), whose statutes required the newest resident canon of Saint Paul's to entertain the boy bishop and his companions: "The new residentiary ought after supper on Holy Innocents' Day to take his boy with dance, round dance [*chorea*], and torches to the almonry," where the choirboys lived, "and there to offer drink and spices to each one by torchlight and to make livery of wine and ale and spices and candles. . . . And he will hold a second dinner on the octave of Innocents' [Day], feeding the [boy] bishop along with the boys and their retinue and giving [them] gifts at their leaving."⁷ Just as one youth played the part of the bishop, so another played the dean, and yet others played the various canons.⁸ All joined in the torch-lit processional dance and shared the refreshments.

therefore copies these services (52–57) from the 1508 and 1555 printed editions of the *Processional*. For a partial translation, see Tydeman, 108. For other references to the boy bishop in Salisbury, see Wordsworth, *Ceremonies*, 58–59; Chambers, 1:352–353; Leach, "Schoolboy's," 133–34, 136.

4. Abigail Ann Young, in Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 322–23, translates *ebore* as "of ebony," but *ebore* derives from *ebur* (ivory) not from (*h*)*ebenus* (ebony). For the meaning of *cambuca* (= *cambuta*) as the curved head or crook of the bishop's staff, see Rock, *Church*, 2:157–58. Translations provided in all REED volumes cited in this chapter are by Abigail Ann Young.

5. Chambers, 1:354, relying on a note in Simpson, "Two Inventories," 473 ("John de Belemains held the prebendal stall of Chiswick in 1225"), assumes that Belemeyns donated the miter "about 1225." But Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 352, points out that Belemeyns is mentioned as a canon of Saint Paul's on several occasions between around 1216 and 1252, "with possible mentions as late as 1254." Since he was still alive when the inventory was drawn up, he could have made the donation at any time between 1216 and 1245. A later Saint Paul's inventory (1295) records the same "white miter with embroidered flowers, of the gift of John of Belemeyns, for the use of the boy bishop" (Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 18, 325); cf. Dugdale, *Monastici*, 3:313; Simpson, *Registrum*, 92 n. 56.

6. Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 15, 322–23 (translation adapted); Simpson, "Two Inventories," 446, 448–49, 472–74, 480.

7. Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 14, 322; Simpson, *Registrum*, 129.

8. An order by Dean Geoffrey of Feringes in 1263 makes these mimetic relationships clear (Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 17–18, 325). Stokes, *Somerset*, 248–50, 837–39, includes several references from Wells cathedral, 1461–1478, to "every other [boy acting as] his canon."

Intermittent references to a boy bishop at Saint Paul's cathedral, where he was required to preach an annual sermon,⁹ and at least thirty-seven London parish churches continue until 1556. By that late date, the boy bishop's role seems to have involved little more than leading house-to-house visits in quest of money.¹⁰ As in Salisbury, there is no further record of the Feast of Fools in London after its brief mention in the thirteenth-century inventories.

The first episcopal complaint against the Feast of Fools in England comes from Lincoln, where it was linked to the feast of the Circumcision rather than to the choirboys' feast of the Innocents.¹¹ In 1236 the bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, wrote to his dean and chapter, reminding them that the house of God was a house of prayer and that Christ's circumcision was both the first bitter taste of his passion and "a sign of the spiritual circumcision" of the Christian's heart, by which all "carnal lusts and sensual desires are cut off."¹² Accordingly, he ordered that they "no longer permit the Feast of Fools to take place in the church of Lincoln on the day of the worshipful solemnity of the Lord's Circumcision, since it is full of emptiness and filthy with lusts, hateful to God and lovable by demons."¹³ Grosseteste's rhetoric is short on detail. It conveys his distaste but tells us nothing of what he thought might actually be happening during the Feast of Fools in Lincoln.

The same may be said of the ban on the Feast of Fools included in Grosseteste's Diocesan Statutes (ca. 1239), where he added weight to his decree by invoking "the special authority of a papal rescript."¹⁴ Chambers plausibly takes this as a reference to Innocent's III's letter to the archbishop of Gniezno, included in the recently published *Decretals* (1234) of Pope Gregory IX.¹⁵ Grosseteste's generic description of the Feast of Fools and his dependence on Innocent III's letter may imply that his objections were preemptive,

9. In 1330 the almoner of Saint Paul's referred in his will to "the quires of sermons for the feast of the Holy Innocents that the boy bishops usually read in my time" (Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 19, 326). For the text of a boy bishop's sermon from 1489–1491, see Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 234–47; Nichols, "Two Sermons," 1–13. For the serious religious intent of the three extant boy bishop sermons, see DeMolen, "Pueri," 22–26. In 1512 Dean John Colet's plans for Saint Paul's School contained the proviso that its pupils "shall every Chylidremasse [Innocents'] day come to paulis Church and here the Chylde Bishoppis sermon, and after be at the hye masse, and eche of them offre a 1d [penny] to the Childe Bishopp; and with them the Maisters and surveyours of the scole" (Lupton, *Life*, 175).

10. Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, xxv–xxvii, 133, 135–36, 247–48; Lupton, *Life*, 175. For other records of boy bishops in London, see the many pages so designated in the index of Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, 452.

11. For Lincoln's boy bishop, see Stokes, *Lincoln*, 104, 155, 432, 647, 680–81. Louth also had a "childe bischope" between at least 1500 and 1523 (Stokes, *Lincoln*, 231–35, 433). I am grateful to James Stokes for allowing me to see proofs of *Lincoln* while it was still in press.

12. Cf. Matt. 21:13, Deut. 30:6, Rom. 2:29.

13. Stokes, *Lincoln*, 103, 645–46; Grosseteste, *Epistolae*, 118–19 (letter 32).

14. Stokes, *Lincoln*, 7–8, 617; Grosseteste, *Epistolae*, 161, 166 (letter 52bis).

15. Chambers, 1:322 n. 2; cf. Wickham, "Robert," 82.

made in response to the possibilities raised by the papal document rather than to any actual practice of the Feast of Fools in Lincoln. A later reference to the Feast of Fools in Lincoln, in 1390, is too far ahead in time to shed any light on what may (or may not) have been happening there in 1236/38.

A second cluster of references to the Feast of Fools, all negative, begins in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. In 1331 the dean and chapter of Wells cathedral complained that “from Christmas to the octave of [Holy] Innocents’ [Day] some clerics, subdeacons, deacons, [and] even priests, vicars of this church, put on theatrical entertainments in the church of Wells and, introducing masked shows, presume to exercise their scandalous stupidities, contrary to clerical decency and the prohibition of the holy canons, hindering the divine office in many ways. We, forbidding [this] to take place hereafter in the church of Wells under canonical penalty, wish that the divine office be celebrated on the feast of the Holy Innocents, just as on similar feasts of saints, quietly and peacefully without any confusion or playfulness [and] with due devotion.”¹⁶ The statute again displays a suspicious dependence on generic authority: key phrases are taken almost verbatim from the excerpt from Innocent’s letter published in the *Decretals*.¹⁷ By 1338, when the succeeding dean and chapter reaffirmed the ban, they had discovered the full text of Innocent’s letter, adding to their own statute phrases used in the letter but not copied into the *Decretals*. The clerical actors, they wrote, “hinder the divine office by the obscene ravings of their gestures, [and] make the honour of the clergy grow cheap in the sight of the people whom they ought rather to charm at that time with preaching.”¹⁸

The Wells chapter may have been responding to specific activities known to take place each year in their cathedral. But if this is the case, the formulaic use of phrases taken verbatim from Innocent’s letter means that we cannot rely on the Wells statutes to tell us exactly what those activities were. The language of ecclesiastical condemnation, especially when it borrows from an older condemnation believed to be authoritative but itself having only an ill-defined object, should not be mistaken for a precise record of present offenses.

16. Stokes, *Somerset*, 236, 830 (translation adapted).

17. Cf. *Decretales* 3.1.12 (col. 997) (“ludi fiunt in ecclesis theatrales, ... introducuntur in eis monstra larvarum, ... insaniae suae ludibria exercere praesumunt”) and Stokes, *Somerset*, 236 (“ludos faciunt theatrales, ... monstra larvarum introducentes in ea insanie suae ludibria exercere praesumunt”).

18. Stokes, *Somerset*, 239, 832. Cf. *PL* 215:1071/Young, 2:416 (“per gesticulationum suarum debacchationes obscenas, in conspectu populi, decus faciunt clericale vilesce, quem potius illo tempore verbi Dei deberet praedicatione mulcere”), and Stokes, *Somerset*, 239 (“per gesticulationem debacchationes obscenas diuinum officium impediunt in conspectu populi decus faciant clericale vilesce quem potius illo tempore deberent praedicatione mulcere”).

At much the same time, a similar campaign against seasonal abuses was launched by the bishop of Exeter, John Grandisson. On 16 December 1333 he wrote to two of the senior canons of his cathedral, "We have learned . . . from the account of trustworthy persons that some vicars and other ministers of the church [of Exeter], having put on masks [*laruati*], do not . . . fear to practise in a manner worthy of condemnation dissolute behavior, laughter, jeering, and other excesses irreverently as an offence to God and a marked impediment to divine worship and a scandal to our . . . church during the solemnities of the church service and especially in this famous feast of the Holy Innocents: thus, through their mimings' obscene ravings, they cheapen the honour of clerics in the sight of the people." He commanded the canons to read his letter to the assembled chapter "without delay" and to "forbid each and every one of them . . . to do the aforesaid things."¹⁹

Like many English bishops of the period, Grandisson did not live in his cathedral city. Indeed, "in more than forty years [he] apparently never stayed there for one of the great feasts, although he may have occasionally come in for the cathedral services from one of the country houses where he usually resided."²⁰ As he admits, he was not an eyewitness to the reported misbehavior: he had been told about it by "trustworthy persons." His informants do not appear to have provided much in the way of specific details. Like the Wells chapter, Grandisson borrowed the language of condemnation from Innocent III, making vague reference to masks, otherwise unknown in the annals of early English liturgical practices, and quoting the same extended complaint about obscene gesticulations that was to reappear in the 1338 Wells statute.²¹ Perhaps it was Grandisson who introduced the Wells chapter to the full text of Innocent's letter.

Commendably, though, Grandisson did more than just complain. In 1337 he compiled an ordinal, outlining all the special liturgy that the cathedral chapter might be expected to celebrate over the course of the year. The "office of the boys" began at vespers on the eve of the feast of the Innocents and continued through vespers on the feast day itself. "Signifying the Christ Child, the true and eternal high priest,"²² the boy bishop led most of both vespers services, as well as parts of compline, matins, and lauds. At first vespers, he also censured "the choir at the great cross." At both vespers, a

19. Wasson, *Devon*, 6–7, 319.

20. Edwards, *English*, 104–5.

21. "Officij diuini impedimentum notabile . . . per gesticulacionum suarum huiusmodi debacaciones obscenas in conspectu populi vilescere faciunt decus clericale" (Wasson, *Devon*, 6–7).

22. The Sarum *Processional* used the same phrase a century or more later (Wordsworth, *Ceremonies*, 52; Chambers, 2:282; Tydeman, 108).

cambucarius (staff bearer) temporarily borrowed the *baculus* to lead an antiphon of his own.²³ While nowhere near as impressive as Peter of Corbeil's office of the Circumcision in Sens, the Exeter *officium puerorum* had a similar goal. It was, to adapt John Wasson's comment, "a straightforward religious service promulgated by Bishop Grandisson to prevent the horseplay [believed to be] common elsewhere."²⁴

In subsequent years, Grandisson seems to have had particular trouble imposing his office on the choirboys of the collegiate church of Saint Mary in Ottery, eleven miles east of Exeter. Since Grandisson had himself raised the parish church of Ottery to collegiate status,²⁵ this must have rankled. On 9 December 1339 he wrote to the warden of the church, complaining about the irregular attendance of the church's choirboys, who were inclined to "run about [the town] even at the time of divine office." In particular, he continued, "we have learned that the choirboys, not content on the feast of the Innocents last past with their dissolute behavior and insolences within the parish of the church, wandered to various places outside the parish on many days following the feast, leaving the church unserved for their part in the meantime."²⁶ The boys were probably engaged in a fund-raising ride around the surrounding district, similar to but longer than those we have seen in France.²⁷

On 10 December 1360 Grandisson wrote again to the warden and chapter in Ottery: "It has come to our notice... that in past years... on the very holy feasts of the Lord's birth, and of Saints Stephen [and] John..., and of the Holy Innocents, ... some ministers of our aforesaid church, together with the boys, ... have rashly presumed... to engage in tasteless and harmful diversions unbecoming clerical uprightness... not only at matins and vespers and the other hours, ... but what is more horrible, during the solemnities of the masses, disfiguring in many ways vestments and other furnishings of the church to no small extent... by the spattering of filthy mud: not only are the people... drawn away from due devotion by their jeering gestures and derisory laughter but [they] are dissolved into disorderly laughter and illicit mirth; and divine worship is mocked and the office is basely hindered."

23. Dalton, *Ordinale*, 1:74–76; Reynolds, *Ordinale*, fol. 30–30b.

24. Wasson, *Devon*, lxii–lxiii.

25. Horsfield, "John," 255–67.

26. Wasson, *Devon*, 8–9, 320–21 (translation adapted).

27. Dahhaoui, "Voyages," describes a boy bishop's *quête* in the diocese of York that lasted from 4 to 27 January 1397. Documentation for this *quête* is in the form of a privately owned accounts roll, published by Rimbault, *Festival*, 31–34, and, with its abbreviations expanded, by Chambers, 2:287–89. Since the whereabouts of the roll is now unknown, it is not included in Johnston and Rogerson, *York*.

Grandisson unequivocally forbade all such activities. A written response from the chapter, dated 30 December 1360, reported full obedience.²⁸

Identical letters were sent to the dean and chapter of Exeter cathedral, to the chapter of the collegiate church of the Holy Cross at Crediton, and to the warden of the chapter of the collegiate church of Saint Thomas the Martyr at Glasney (near Penryn, Cornwall). Together with Saint Mary of Ottery, these were the four most important churches in the diocese.²⁹ The reply from the Glasney chapter survives. Like that from Saint Mary of Ottery, it promises future compliance without acknowledging any past offense.³⁰ Since it is unlikely that all four churches were guilty of identical abuses, the multiplication of letters suggests a broad condemnatory brush. Given the specificity of the charges, however, it is probably safe to assume that the choirboys and younger clerics of at least one of the churches were having fun with mud during the three days after Christmas and that, far from being offended, the members of the congregation were hugely entertained.

A third and final cluster of references to the Feast of Fools comes from Lincoln and Beverley in 1390–91. William Courtney, archbishop of Canterbury, conducted a visitation of Lincoln cathedral in 1390. Among other disorders, he found that “vicars and clerics . . . on Circumcision day, dressed in laic clothing, are hindering the divine office . . . by their uproar, tricks, chattering, and games, which they commonly and appropriately name ‘the Feasts of Fools’ [*festa stultorum*].” The archbishop forbade all such practices, including “public drinkings [*publicas potaciones*] or other insolent activities . . . in the church.”³¹ This is the last record of the Feast of Fools in Lincoln.³²

In 1391 Thomas Arundel, archbishop of York, provided the chapter of Beverley minster, less than fifty miles north of Lincoln, with a set of statutes “for the better government” of the church.³³ Among these, he insisted that the “long-standing, customary, [and] truly depraving behavior of the king of

28. Wasson, *Devon*, 12–14, 325–27.

29. Horsfield, “John,” 48–49.

30. Joyce and Newlyn, *Cornwall*, 503–5, 587–89, 601 n.

31. Stokes, *Lincoln*, 108, 650; Wordsworth, *Statutes*, 2:247–48. If the archbishop’s charge is justified and the drinking was not only public but also excessive, this would be the first credible reference to intemperate drinking in church during the Feast of Fools.

32. In 1437 Canon John Marshall complained to the bishop of Lincoln that he had been deceived into bearing the expenses of “pascendo ly ffolcfeste in ultimo Natali” (catering the folk feast on the last day of Christmas, i.e., Epiphany) (Wordsworth, *Statutes*, 2:388). This was probably a lay festivity (Billington, *Social*, 4; T&C, 43), occurring outside “the Lincolnshire part of the diocese” and having “no connection with the Feast of Fools” (James Stokes, personal communication, 27 April 2009).

33. Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 6, pt. 3:1308–12, prints the original statutes; Leach, *Memorials*, 2:265–79, prints the royal confirmation of the statutes, including their approved text, noting the separate dates

fools [*corruptela regis stultorum*] inside and outside the church... [should be] abolished and uprooted.” At the same time, however, he upheld the custom of serving a special meal to the deacons on the feast of Saint Stephen, the vicars on the feast of Saint John, “the thurifers and choristers” on the feast of the Innocents, and “the subdeacons and clerks of the second form” on the feast of the Circumcision.³⁴ He also upheld “the ancient custom of the church in Beverley called *les Fulles* [the Fools], and of the two candles kept burning in the refectory from Christmas Eve to the Purification [Candlemas].”³⁵ The Fulles may have been lay festivities, celebrated between Christmas and Candlemas, rather than a clerical Feast of Fools.³⁶ Arundel’s statutes provide no details of either the *rex stultorum* or the Fulles.

Boy bishops continued in England at least until Henry VIII’s Royal Proclamation of 22 July 1541, which prohibited certain practices associated with saints’ days, including those in which “chyldern be strangely dect and appareled to counturfett prystes / bisshops / And women / And so be... led with songes and Daunces from howse to howse blessing the people and gethering of money. And boys do synge Masse and preche in the pulpytt.”³⁷ In some places, despite the ban, the custom lasted a little longer. In Hereford cathedral, in 1543–44, payment was made “for wine for the little bishop being present at mass during the first half of one year.”³⁸ And in London, “in the late dayes of quene Marye,” the house-to-house visits of the boy bishop enjoyed a brief reprieve between 1554 and 1556.³⁹ But there are no records of the Feast of Fools in England after 1391.

There are even fewer records of the Feast of Fools on the continent outside France. Indeed, if we were to insist on identifying the Feast of Fools by name or as a set of activities clearly distinct from those associated with a boy bishop, we would have to conclude either that the Feast of Fools did not exist outside France and England or, if it did, that it has left no known records. There are, however, a few cases from imperial Germany in which

of the statutes (28 July 1391) and their confirmation (4 June 1398). Billington, *Social*, 3, mistakenly dates the statutes themselves to 1398.

34. Leach, *Memorials*, 2:273–74; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 6, pt. 3:1310. For “clerks of the second form,” see Edwards, *English*, 303–7: “These were the clerks who sat in the second row of choir stalls below the vicars choral and cantarists, but above the choristers” (303).

35. Leach, *Memorials*, 2:274; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 6, pt. 3:1310.

36. Billington, *Social*, 3, wonders if carvings of fools in Beverley minster provide visual evidence of the Fulles. She mentions a stone carving from around 1330 and others on wooden misericords from 1520. For drawings of the latter, see Wildridge, *Misereres*, pls. xxii, xxviii, lviii, lxi–lxii, and, for their date, 12.

37. Klausner, *Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, 539.

38. *Ibid.*, 119, 226, 536.

39. Erler, *Ecclesiastical*, xxvi, 133, 135.

boy bishop festivities appear to have spilled over into activities reminiscent of the Feast of Fools.

In 1249 Pope Innocent IV wrote to the bishop of Regensburg. He explained that he had received from the abbot of Prüfening Abbey, on the outskirts of the city, a complaint about the behavior of “the young clerks and scholars of the city of Regensburg” during the feast of the Nativity: “Every year, while playing at appointing a bishop for themselves, they indulge in masked shows [*monstra larvarum*] and other mostly shameful games. Approaching the monastery each year with games of this kind [and] weapons in their hands, they break the doors and treat the monks and the servants of the monastery shamefully. Then they drive the horses and cattle from their stalls. [These] excesses . . . are sometimes not accomplished without bloodshed [*sine sanguinis effusione*]. . . . If these things are true [*haec si vera sunt*],” the pope concluded, the bishop should prevent them from happening in the future.⁴⁰

The pope’s conditional “if” shows rare caution. Moreover, the use of phrases that had already appeared in Innocent III’s letter to the archbishop of Gniezno (“*monstra larvarum*”) and in his legate Peter of Capua’s letter to Eudes of Sully (“*sanguinis effusione*”) raises the possibility that the abbot was engaged in a generic complaint. But the specificity of his charges of violent behavior at the monastery (“they break the doors and . . . drive the horses and cattle from their stalls”) gives the abbot’s complaint a certain credibility. As to what seasonal “games” lay behind the complaint, the observation that the masqueraders were carrying weapons implies something more than a boy bishop on the rampage or the ill-tempered overflow of a liturgical Feast of Fools. It sounds very much like a Herod game gone wrong. Perhaps after eating, drinking, and brandishing their swords in the refectory, the young clerks were in the habit of advancing on the abbey. Like Augsburg, Freising, and other places where Herod *ludi* had taken place, Regensburg is in Bavaria.

The tradition of marauding clerks may have survived for another hundred years in Regensburg. In 1357 a member of the boy bishop’s retinue was attacked. On the day of the Innocents, we are told, “a citizen of Regensburg killed . . . a canon of the cathedral church, while he was riding with his bishop, namely [the bishop] of the boys.” Perhaps the citizen was acting in self-defense against armed clergy representing Herod’s soldiers. In any case, relations between clergy and townspeople deteriorated into “great discord and litigation.” Parents forbade their sons to have anything to do with the youths of the choir school. Because of this, the chronicler reports, “that game

40. *Monumenta Priflingensia* 40, in *MB* 13:1–296 (214–15); for a partial citation and German paraphrase, see Specht, *Geschichte*, 227–228.

ceased, which is colloquially called the bishopric of the boys [*episcopatum puerorum*].”⁴¹

Something more like the French Feast of Fools may have taken place during boy bishop festivities in fourteenth-century Moosburg, forty miles south of Regensburg. In 1360 John of Perchausen, dean of Moosburg, compiled a gradual, or service book, which included a number of *cantiones* (songs) for Christmas week. By his own account, these were included in the gradual lest worldly songs become more prevalent during the ceremonies of the “school-boy bishop” (*scolarium episcopus*), distracting the priest at the altar, confusing the choir, and provoking the people to “laughter and wantonness.”⁴² Five of the songs had been written by Perchausen himself before he became dean.⁴³ While most were joyous devotional celebrations of the birth of Christ, one hints at more lively festivities:

Gregis pastor Tityrus,
asinorum dominus,
noster est episcopus.
(Refrain) Eja, eja, eja,
vocat nos ad gaudia
Tityri cibaria.

Tityrus, the shepherd of the flock
the lord of asses,
is our bishop.
Oho, oho, oho,
The good food of Tityrus
Summons us to joy.

Ad honorem Tityri
festum colant baculi
satrapae et asini.

In honor of Tityrus
satraps and asses
celebrate the feast of the staff.

Applaudamus Tityro
cum melodis organo,
cum chordis et tympano.

Let us applaud Tityrus
with organ melodies,
with harp and timbrel.

Veneremur Tityrum,
qui nos propter baculum
invitat ad epulum.⁴⁴

Let us revere Tityrus,
who, by his staff,
invites us to the banquet.

Tityrus is the name of the shepherd in Virgil’s first Eclogue,⁴⁵ but none of the other imagery of the song is drawn from Virgil’s poem. The language of

41. Arnpeck, *Chronica Baioariorum* 5.53, in *Sämtliche*, 1–443 (321).

42. Dreves, *Analecta*, 20:22–23; *Moosburger*, xiv–xv, fol. 230v.

43. *Moosburger*, xv.

44. Dreves, *Analecta*, 20:110–11, 254; *Moosburger*, fol. 233r. For a recording, see *Provence*, track 13.

45. Virgil, *Works* 1.2–9.

asses, feasting, music, and “the feast of the staff” belongs to the Feast of Fools, or in this case to a boy bishop ceremony. The song may have been sung processionally as the boy bishop was led to the cathedral. Perhaps the procession was accompanied by the music of portative organ, strings, and percussion. Perhaps the bishop and one or more of his companions rode asses.

According to the church reformer Jan Hus (1373–1415), an ass was ridden during boy bishop ceremonies in Bohemia (then part of the German Empire, but now part of the Czech Republic). In his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, written in 1412,⁴⁶ Hus recalled his own boyhood involvement in boy bishop masquerades: “What an obvious outrage they commit in the church, putting on masks. I, too, in my youth, was once to my sorrow a masquerader! Who could depict all that took place in Prague? Having dubbed a monstrously dressed cleric a bishop, they set him upon an ass with his face turned toward the tail and lead him into the church to mass. And they carry a plate of broth before him, and a jug or bowl of beer; and he eats in the church. And I saw how [the bishop] incenses the altars and [how the ass], raising one leg, pronounced in a loud voice: Bú! And the clerics brought before [the bishop] large torches in place of candles. And he rides from altar to altar, incensing as he goes. Then I saw how the clerics turned their fur-lined vestments inside out and danced in the church. And people look and laugh, supposing that all of this is sacred or right, since they have it in their rubric, it is in their statutes. Nice statutes indeed: outrage and infamy! . . . While I was young in years and in reason I also subscribed to this foolish rubric. But when the Lord gave me understanding of the Scriptures I erased this rubric, the statutes of delusion, from my weak intellect. Archbishop John, of holy memory, prohibited this dissolute game on pain of excommunication.”⁴⁷

F. M. Bartoš has argued that the archbishop of Prague, John of Jenštejn (1378–1396), had banned such festivities in 1386, and that Hus remembered them from his time before that as a schoolboy chorister in Prachatice, about a hundred miles southwest of Prague. Hus had arrived there in 1385, around the age of thirteen.⁴⁸ But Hus claims that the festivities “took place in Prague [*na Praze*],” where he moved in 1390 to begin studies at the university. Perhaps the archbishop's ban, like so many others of its kind, was not immediately effective.

46. Spinka, *John*, 195.

47. Hus, *Výklad na páteř*, in *Opera*, 1:330–92 (342); Hus, *Mistra*, 1:288–358 (301–2); trans. adapted from Jakobson, *Selected*, 6, pt. 2:667. For a Latin translation of this passage, see Hus, *Documenta*, 722.

48. Bartoš, “Studentských,” 25; cf. Spinka, *John*, 23–25.

By the time he penned his memory of youthful masquerades, Hus had been excommunicated and gone into voluntary exile from Prague. He was to be burned three years later, condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance. Like many subsequent reformers, he may have been unduly prejudiced against the seasonal traditions of a church in need of reform. Even so, I see no reason to doubt that something of the kind that he describes took place in Prague.

Oddly enough, one of Hus's harshest critics at his trial at the Council of Constance was Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris.⁴⁹ Since 1400, when he wrote his own first attack on the Feast of Fools, Gerson had been at the forefront of efforts to suppress the Feast of Fools in France. Those efforts, eventually successful, are the subject of part four.

49. Spinka, *John*, 233, 241.

CHAPTER 16

Jean Gerson and the Auxerre Affair

Jean Gerson was appointed dean of the collegiate church of Saint Donatian in Bruges in 1394. He was thirty-one years old. A year later he was appointed chancellor of the University of Paris. With some difficulty, he held both positions until 1411, when the chapter in Bruges removed him from office because of his many prolonged absences. He remained chancellor of the university until his death in 1429.¹

These were not good years to be in France. Throughout the first half of the fifteenth century, “the forces set in motion during the fourteenth century played themselves out, some of them in exaggerated form like human failings in old age.”² Only with the end of the Hundred Years’ War in 1453 did the retreat of “plague, war and famine” begin to “stimulate a recovery of France’s population” and, finally, “an economic boom that lasted from the 1460s until the 1520s.”³ Nor was it a good time for the University of Paris. Once a magnet for the best scholars in Europe, by the beginning of the fifteenth century it had become one of more than a dozen universities competing for influence in France alone.⁴ Moreover, because of its physical proximity to

1. McGuire, *Jean*, 1, 64, 68, 199, 295; Vansteenbergh, “Gerson.”

2. Tuchman, *Distant*, 582.

3. Knecht, *Rise*, 3, 6.

4. Jones, *Paris*, 94.

the crown, the university was tainted by the bitter (and sometimes bloody) struggles for power during Charles VI's periods of insanity. Since the French crown supported the Avignon pope, the university also suffered from the political repercussions of the schism. Students from the many countries loyal to the Roman pope stayed away.

Even so, the faculty of theology in Paris "could still create tremors in Latin Christendom and needed only a charismatic figure such as Gerson to press its case."⁵ Gerson wrote and preached prolifically, having as his primary goal the moral and spiritual reformation of Christian society. While much of his work is wise and balanced—remarkably so, given the climate of the times—he was also prone, like many polemicists, to hostility and exaggeration. Historians would do well to bear this in mind when evaluating Gerson's attitude to the Feast of Fools.

Gerson was perhaps the first powerful voice in the long and often negative "reform of popular culture" which Peter Burke has called "the triumph of Lent."⁶ Like the later reformers, both Catholic and Protestant, Gerson found traces of ancient paganism, temptation to sin, and wasteful excess in various forms of play and popular recreation. Like the later reformers, too, he protested against the intrusion of what he understood to be profane playfulness into sacred space. The Feast of Fools was an obvious target. Remarkably, in all his attacks on the Feast of Fools, Gerson did not once claim that he had personally witnessed the abuses against which he railed. Like many critics of popular culture, he seems to have relied on secondhand reports. Although Burke dates "the first phase" of the reform of popular culture to between 1500 and 1650, it is not unreasonable to see Gerson's campaign against the Feast of Fools as the opening sortie in what would become a long, strident, and sometimes bloody culture war.

On 1 April 1400 Gerson wrote from Bruges to Pierre d'Ailly, his predecessor as chancellor of the University of Paris and, since 1397, bishop of Cambrai, about eighty miles southwest of Bruges.⁷ Gerson's letter begins with a complaint about "the general disaster of the church... in this our time of tempest" and the "raging corruption of sins" that "has filled the entire body of Christianity." Amid such a storm, "those who steer the ship of the church, namely its prelates, ... are perversely difficult to correct and

5. Hobbins, *Authorship*, 4.

6. Burke, *Popular*, 207–22.

7. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 2:23–28; Gerson, *Early*, 168. For studies of d'Ailly, see Salembier, *Cardinal*; Guenée, *Between*, 102–258.

the number of fools is infinite [*stultorum infinitus est numerus*].”⁸ Of the many “vices” prevalent in the church, Gerson chooses “this one example” by way of illustration: “In major churches and in cathedrals false remnants from sacrilegious rites of pagans and idolaters almost everywhere are carried out. Neither the place of prayer nor the presence of the holy Body of Christ, nor the celebration of the divine office, keep churchmen from acting in the most vile dissoluteness and performing such acts about which it is a horror either to write or even to think. But if one of the prelates of these churches tried to stop such practices, he would immediately be ridiculed, hissed at, and attacked. ‘Behold,’ they say, ‘a third Cato has fallen from the heavens.’⁹ How much wiser and more useful to the church were your predecessors who not only tolerated these practices but also flattered those who performed them.’ Thus the negligence of former prelates in providing authority for vile and heinous crime is to be condemned.”¹⁰

Gerson’s biographer Brian McGuire takes these remarks as a reference to the Feast of Fools.¹¹ Even so, it is hard to tell what “practices” lurk beneath Gerson’s rhetoric. He may have been indulging only in generalized hyperbole, but it is possible that he had heard rumors from Cambrai.¹² Surviving chapter accounts from Cambrai, dated between 1439 and 1601, frequently record support for a bishop of innocents and an abbot of fools. Had the earlier accounts survived, perhaps they, too, would have recorded these roles.¹³ Although Gerson takes pains to insist that he is not criticizing d’Ailly, with whom he enjoyed a close friendship,¹⁴ he may have been encouraging the new bishop to spare no pains in rooting out these practices in Cambrai.

8. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 2:23; Gerson, *Early*, 168.

9. Cf. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 9:680: “the censorious Catos of our age.” Cato “Censorius” (234–149 BCE) and his great-grandson Cato Uticensis (95–46 BCE) were known for their conservative opposition to contemporary culture. See Plutarch, *Marcus Cato* (*Lives* 2:301–385); Plutarch, *Cato the Younger* (*Lives* 8:235–411); *OCD*, 214–16; Gerson, *Early*, 417 n. 76.

10. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 2:24–25; Gerson, *Early*, 169–70; cf. McGuire, *Jean*, 100, 113–15.

11. McGuire, *Jean*, 114; Gerson, *Early*, 417 n. 75; cf. Chambers, 1:292 n. 2 (dependent on an earlier edition of Gerson’s works, Chambers dates the letter to 1 January 1400).

12. Between April 1395 and March 1397, d’Ailly had also been, in quick succession, bishop of Le Puy-en-Velay and of Noyon. Since d’Ailly did not set foot in either city (Salember, *Cardinal*, 114–17; Guenée, *Between*, 180–83), it is unlikely that Gerson had in mind the choirboys’ dance in Le Puy (see chapter 9) or “the game of the kings” in Noyon (see chapter 17).

13. Fouret, “Cambrai,” 485–94. Fleury, *Origines*, 43, cites the ruling of a synod, held at Cambrai “between 1300 and 1310,” which prohibited the involvement of clergy with “comic spectacles, entertainers, and dances [*ludibriorum spectaculis, jocularibus et choreis*], and with such things in churches or in cemeteries.” Fouret, “Cambrai,” 494, implies that this is a reference to the “Feast of Fools or of Innocents,” but it sounds to me more like a generic condemnation of clerical participation in secular amusements and the intrusion of such activities into sacred space.

14. Guenée, *Between*, 151–53.

Gerson goes on to propose that bishops “ought to restrain such people from sacrilege not in a gentle way, . . . but through the hands even of lay princes.”¹⁵ The call to involve secular powers in the suppression of the Feast of Fools was a new development. Previously all efforts to control the Feast of Fools had rested with the clergy themselves, whether at the level of the pope or, more often, at the level of the bishop or the local chapter. Gerson changed the rules. Soon the king of France would be drawn into the battle.

In 1402 Gerson wrote “A Complaint against the Corruption of Youth,” in which he condemns “the filthy corruption of boys and adolescents by shameful and nude pictures offered for sale at the very temples and sacred places.” He sees similar dangers in the home, where “Christian boys are initiated” into sexual impropriety “by ungodly mothers or impure maids, to the silly laughter of lost fathers.” Moreover, boys can be led astray by activities involving “most obscene songs and gestures and garments, even sometimes in churches and on most holy days and in most holy places.” McGuire understands this as another reference to the Feast of Fools.¹⁶ Finally, Gerson alludes to “many other detestable acts, about which it is most shameful to think or even to write, for these things exceed Sodom and Gomorrah.”¹⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Gerson seems to have had a “great interest in the sexual behavior of boys.”¹⁸

Gerson first attacked the Feast of Fools by name in “Against the Feast of Fools,” written in August 1402.¹⁹ This short piece begins with a sweeping condemnation of “the great, detestable abuses done in the kingdom of France, in diverse churches and abbeys of monks and nuns, during what they call the Feast of Fools [*feste des folz*], where abominable disorders and insolences are done. . . . Such insolences could not be done by cooks in their kitchens without shame or reproach as are done in holy church, this place of prayer, in the presence of the holy sacrament of the altar, while chanting the divine office, with all the Christian people, and even some Jews, watching.”²⁰

15. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 2:25; Gerson, *Early*, 170.

16. McGuire, *Jean*, 154.

17. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 10:28; translation adapted from Brown, *Pastor*, 241.

18. McGuire, *Jean*, 174, and, for a balanced assessment of this interest, see 172–177.

19. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 7:409–11 (original French text), 10:29 (date); Chambers, 1:292 n. 2 (excerpt from Latin translation); Swain, *Fools*, 207 n. 53 (partial translation of Latin). Before *Oeuvres*, Gerson's French writings were published only in Latin translation (McGuire, *Jean*, 180, 329). Chambers, 1:292 n. 2, includes Latin excerpts from four of Gerson's works; Swain, *Fools*, 71, 207, cites and translates three of these as if they were from a single work.

20. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 7:409.

The rest of the piece consists of six “conclusions.”²¹ In one Gerson insists that the “prelates” of the church must use every means in their power to eradicate the Feast of Fools, “whether by preaching and exhortation, by judgment and excommunication, by imprisonment, or by calling on the secular arm of the law.” In another he affirms that if prelates will not act, or if the abuses prove too deeply rooted, then “the king principally and other Christian princes can reasonably, holily, and justly provide a remedy, by edict and general prohibition, and by the arrest of rebels and disobedients.” In yet another conclusion, he denounces the claim that “long usage” or the apparently harmless designation of “games” (*jeux*) renders the *festes des folz* acceptable. It is in this context that he makes a rare reference to a particular case, rejecting the claim made by “someone at Auxerre” that the Feast of Fools “is as much approved as the feast of the [Immaculate] Conception of Our Lady.”²²

The Auxerre case is worth looking at in some detail, both for its own sake and for the evidence it affords of Gerson’s influence.²³ It all began quietly enough. On 20 December 1395 the Auxerre chapter upheld a decree, which it had first issued in May 1394, requiring that the office of the Feast of Fools be done “decently.” If a “fraudulent” or “mock” sermon were preached (*si fiat fraus*), “malicious words [*mala verba*] should not be included nor should ill be spoken of any outsider,” and it should take place only after mass. Clerks were not to threaten townspeople: a fine was to be imposed on anyone who “takes cloaks” or any other personal property and requires payment for their return.²⁴ Like the demand for pledges forbidden by the Vienne chapter in 1385, this was probably a matter of young clerks joining in a game organized by the youth of the town. René Fourrey considers the chapter’s deliberations to have been “marked by wisdom.”²⁵

The following year, on 25 December 1396, the chapter decided to forgo the Feast of Fools, owing to “the great sadness of our king of France and other royals” at the recent slaughter of an army of crusaders by Turkish forces at the battle of Nicopolis (now Nikopol, Bulgaria).²⁶ In 1397 “a certain tax,” to be paid at the reception following the feast, was authorized. At a chapter

21. In the Latin version, “Quinque conclusiones super ludo stultorum” (Gerson, *Opera*, 3:309–10), the fifth and sixth conclusions are combined.

22. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 7:410.

23. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:232–34, publishes the pertinent Latin entries from the Auxerre chapter records between 1395 and 1411; Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:484), provides excerpts; Chambers, 1:309–11, and Fourrey, “Cathédrale,” 156–58, summarize.

24. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:232.

25. Fourrey, “Cathédrale,” 156.

26. For the battle of Nicopolis, see Tuchman, *Distant*, 538–63.

meeting on 27 December 1398, the dean, Pierre de Chissy,²⁷ spoke strongly against the annual gift of wine “for the Feast of Fools.” After Chissy had left the meeting, the remaining canons decided unanimously in favor of the gift, for which they set aside “two écus.” The “tax” to be paid at the reception was again imposed in 1400.²⁸

So far nothing suggests that the Auxerre chapter was lax in its oversight of the Feast of Fools. It is often hard to tease out the precise meaning of chapter records, but we can sense, I think, both a commendable concern to preserve the dignity of the office of the Circumcision, including the sermon delivered by the bishop of fools, and an understandable desire to curtail the involvement of clerks in rowdy secular games. There may also have been a struggle over expenses. Not only was a “tax” introduced to meet the costs of the festive reception, but the dean’s objection to the annual gift of wine may have been prompted not by any misbehavior of “thirsty revellers,”²⁹ but by its cost.

By 18 December 1400, however, less than nine months after Gerson had first attacked the Feast of Fools in his letter to Pierre d’Ailly, the mood in Auxerre had changed. The chapter ordered “all those who take part in the Feast of Fools . . . not to ring their chapter bell after lunch except on the first day of the election of their new bishop. In their sermons of fools [*in suis sermonibus fatuis*],” they are not to indulge in any reproach or blame. Neither are they to “take cloaks from anyone,” demanding payment for their safe return, nor to strike “men and women in the town,” nor to engage in any mockery (*derisionem*) that might bring discredit to the church.³⁰

Despite these constraints, the Feast of Fools that year still caused problems. Some months later it was reported that “several canons, assembled in the chapter room on the day of the Feast of Fools, had created and named officers who had dispatched certain letters, which obliged the bishop [of Auxerre, Michel de Creney,] to bring an action against these canons in the secular court.” The accused canons had appealed to the church court in Sens.³¹ In the meantime, on 12 January 1401, Creney persuaded the chapter to forbid “those of the Feast of Fools” to form their own festive “chapter,” to appoint “proctors” (*procuratores*), or to shout “la fête aux fous” after the singing of the hours in the church.³² Reading between the lines,

27. For more on Chissy, see Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:421–22.

28. *Ibid.*, 4:232.

29. Chambers, 1:310.

30. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:232.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:30. The document is dated 9 June 1401.

32. *Ibid.*, 4:232; Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:484).

we may surmise that the office of the Circumcision, while still being done “decently” inside the cathedral, was losing its battle with rival attractions outside. The younger clerks were perhaps completing the liturgy as required but immediately afterward pouring into the streets, as an organized festive “chapter,” to take part in secular revels. The content of the offending “letters” remains a mystery.

Creney had been appointed bishop of Auxerre in 1390, but for several years afterward had remained in Paris, where he was a canon of the Sainte-Chapelle and confessor to Charles VI. Well known to Pierre d’Ailly, Creney was one of two bishops assigned to receive d’Ailly’s oath of loyalty as the new bishop of Cambrai in 1397.³³ Although he had been active in Auxerre’s affairs for some time beforehand, it was not until 4 June 1401 that Creney took up his official residence in Auxerre.³⁴ Five days later an agreement between the bishop and his chapter was formalized. One of its twenty-two articles stipulated that the dispute over the Feast of Fools should be regarded as “null and void, without prejudice to the parties” concerned.³⁵

But on 2 December 1401 matters flared up again. The abbot of the nearby Cistercian abbey of Pontigny preached a sermon before the chapter in Auxerre advocating “the abolition of the Feast of Fools,” which, he insisted, “was not a feast. At no time had it been established by God, nor had it been approved nor would it be approved by the church.”³⁶ The next day, the dean, Pierre de Chissy, informed the chapter that the abbot’s views were shared by the University of Paris. Moreover, it was the intention of the university to proclaim these views “publicly throughout the churches of France, wherever such a feast was customary[,] . . . and to abolish the same feast, even, if necessary, by calling on the secular arm.” It would therefore be “better and more honorable,” Chissy concluded, for the chapter to reform itself voluntarily than to be compelled to do so by a higher and more rigorous authority. After much discussion, the chapter agreed to abolish the Feast of Fools. The feast of the subdeacons (*festum subdiaconorum*) would still be held, but “no sermon [of fools] was to be made inside the church during the feast, . . . especially while the divine office was being said, and [the preacher] was not to wear his ecclesiastical vestments.” Outside the church, however, the clergy might, if they wished, “dance . . . and . . . promenade” (*chorizare . . . et . . . spatiare*) in the

33. Salembier, *Cardinal*, 117; Guenée, *Between*, 183.

34. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:23.

35. *Ibid.*, 2:30.

36. *Ibid.*, 4:232. Fourrey, “Cathédrale,” 157, calls the sermon “a violent criticism of the Feast of Fools.”

spacious Place St.-Étienne.³⁷ These restrictions sound more like a tactical retreat than an outright abolition.

In August 1402, in response to these developments in Auxerre, Gerson composed his treatise "Against the Feast of Fools." Someone in Auxerre had apparently challenged the abbot of Pontigny's claim that the Feast of Fools was not an approved feast, asserting that it was as much approved as the feast of the Immaculate Conception. This remark was bound to infuriate Gerson, who was both fiercely opposed to the Feast of Fools and fiercely protective of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.³⁸ The identity of the canon who made this counterclaim has not come down to us. Lebeuf suggested that it was "one of those who were most obstinate for the preservation of the Feast of Fools."³⁹

Nor do we know who told Gerson about this remark. Lebeuf believed it was Gerson's close friend Nicolas de Clamanges. Clamanges had been a classmate of Gerson's at the University of Paris, where they had both studied under Pierre d'Ailly. The three "remained close friends and maintained correspondence throughout their careers."⁴⁰ According to Lebeuf, Clamanges was a member of the Auxerre chapter,⁴¹ but a recent biographer places him as a canon in Langres, about a hundred miles west of Auxerre, between 1398 and 1403.⁴² Certainly, at some point, Clamanges became aware of events in Auxerre. In his treatise "On Not Instituting New Feasts," composed in 1413, he wrote approvingly of Creney's efforts to suppress "the detestable insolences, which he used to see done on feast days" in Auxerre.⁴³

Creney himself may have been Gerson's contact in Auxerre. Like d'Ailly, Gerson, and Clamanges, Creney had been a student and master at the Col-

37. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:232–33.

38. Both the doctrine and the feast of the Immaculate Conception were matters of dispute in France at the time. For Gerson's use of "some of the most rabid language of his career" in defense of the doctrine in 1389, see McGuire, *Jean*, 40–47.

39. Jean Lebeuf, "Remarques sur... la fête des fous," in Leber, 9:379–90 (384). For Lebeuf's authorship, see Lebeuf, *Lettres*, 1:420 n. 8.

40. Bellitto, *Nicolas*, 11; cf. Guenée, *Between*, 138, 150–53.

41. Lebeuf (Leber, 9:385) claims that Clamanges was "admitted to the chapter at Auxerre, by virtue of his being a canon of Bayeux." But Clamanges did not become a canon and, later, archdeacon of Bayeux until sometime after 1403 (Bellitto, *Nicolas*, 24; Lydus, "Vita Nicolai de Clemangis," in Nicolas de Clamanges, *Opera*, 1:b3–c2 [c]).

42. Bellitto, *Nicolas*, 18–24.

43. Nicolas de Clamanges, "De novis celebritatibus non instituendis," in *Opera*, 1:143–60 (151). For an abridged French translation, see Glorieux, "Moeurs," 16–29 (24); date of composition (16). Clamanges does not mention the Feast of Fools by name, but this is consistent with his stylistic preference for rhetorical flourish over concrete detail.

lege of Navarre, one of the wealthiest and most prestigious colleges of the University of Paris. Living in Paris for four years after Gerson succeeded d'Ailly as chancellor of the university, he would have known both men well. In any case, whoever was keeping Gerson informed of events in Auxerre, it is clear both that Gerson's hostility to the Feast of Fools helped to shape discussion in the Auxerre chapter after December 1400 and that events in Auxerre influenced Gerson's subsequent writings on the topic.

Despite the decision reached by the Auxerre chapter in December 1401, neither the Feast of Fools in Auxerre nor Gerson's attacks on the feast in general quickly faded away. In 1403 the Auxerre chapter paid "twenty sols for the Feast of Fools."⁴⁴ Perhaps the regulations of December 1401 were already being disregarded, "on the plea that they were intended to apply only to the year in which they were made."⁴⁵ Or perhaps the twenty sols were intended to cover expenses associated with the dance and other approved activities in the square outside the church.⁴⁶

In February 1404 Gerson preached a sermon "On the Life of Clerics."⁴⁷ "One of Gerson's strongest attacks on clerical abuses,"⁴⁸ it includes the observation that "all blasphemy that attributes to God or to his holiness anything unworthy or foul, whether by word or deed or sign, is so much more execrable when done in a church." In this context, he adds, "Whatever blasphemy is done in the form of games [*ludi*] must be earnestly put right by those who hold high office" in the church. If superiors fail to act, responsibility for "the corrupting sacrilege" will rest on their heads.⁴⁹ In another sermon from this period, "On the Circumcision of the Lord," he condemns the New Year games played by pagans in classical times, but draws no explicit connection to the Feast of Fools.⁵⁰

By 1405 Gerson had enrolled the king of France in the battle against the Feast of Fools. Toward the end of a long sermon, "For the Reform of the Kingdom," delivered in French before Charles VI, Gerson commended the king and his lords for their good work on behalf of religion. Among many good acts, he said, the king "has recently dispatched letters, which I have seen, against the cursed and idolatrous abominations that are committed in French churches

44. Fourrey, "Cathédrale," 157 n. 5.

45. Chambers, 1:311.

46. Fourrey, "Cathédrale," 157.

47. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 5:447–58.

48. McGuire, *Jean*, 183.

49. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 5:454.

50. *Ibid.*, 5:459–71 (460).

under cover of the Feast of Fools; they are fools and pernicious fools; they are not to be suffered; they must be done away with [*besoing est de l'exécution*]."⁵¹

In Auxerre, in 1406, Creney reportedly renewed his attack on "the jurisdiction of the chapter." Lebeuf assumes this had something to do with "the obstinacy of certain canons" in favor of the Feast of Fools, but he gives no further details.⁵² On 12 December 1407 the chapter acted decisively against the feast. The language of the decree may not be elegant, but it is doggedly insistent: "Because, in the Feast of Fools, which used to be done by some of this church on the first day of January, many shameful and disgraceful acts were committed, from which many scandals were occurring, therefore it has been decreed by the chapter, with no one dissenting except master Jean Piqueron and priests [*domini*] Jean Bonat and Jean Berthome, that in the future no Feast of Fools should be done and in the future such shameful acts should not happen. Masters Jean Piqueron, Bonat, and Berthome said that they were in agreement with the accord previously reached with the bishop, but that they did not wish the feast to be permanently abolished, and master Jean Piqueron⁵³ declared that it was the feast of the subdeacons of this church, and that [the decree] was being protested so that he and his fellow subdeacons of this church, both present and future, should not be deprived for the future. Because some were doubtful whether this decree about not doing the feast applied only for this year or permanently, therefore it was repeated by consent of all the *domini* of the chapter, except the three named, that it be decreed, established, and concluded that the decree about not doing the Feast of Fools be permanently and inviolably preserved and upheld."⁵⁴

Gerson continued his attacks. In his "Instructions for Visitations," composed between 1407 and 1408, he devoted a paragraph to the Feast of Fools. "Let it be known," he wrote, "how that most impious and insane rite which reigns throughout all of France can be plucked out or at least regulated: [I refer], of course, to what ecclesiastics do either on the day of the Innocents or on the day of the Circumcision or on the Epiphany of the Lord, or during Carnival [*in carnisprivio*], throughout the churches [of France], where a

51. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 7, pt. 2:1137–85 (1183); cf. Chambers, 1:292 n. 2; Swain, *Fools*, 207 n. 53.

52. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:31.

53. According to Lebeuf (Leber, 9:385), Piqueron was himself a subdeacon. In 1414 he was appointed the bishop's penitentiary (*pénitencier*) (Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:470), authorized on behalf of the bishop to hear confession and pronounce absolution in extraordinary cases. As such, he sometimes presided over chapter meetings in the absence of other dignitaries. He died in 1418.

54. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:233.

detestable mockery is made of the service of the Lord and of the sacraments, where many things are impudently and execrably done which should be done only in taverns or brothels, or among Saracens and Jews; those who have seen [these things] know [what I mean]. If ecclesiastical censure does not suffice, let the help of the king's power be sought through a [royal] edict vigorously enforced."⁵⁵

The addition of Carnival to the list of dates on which the Feast of Fools took place is significant. We have already noted a tendency to confuse the revels of Kalends masqueraders or lay youth groups with the clerical Feast of Fools, especially if younger clergy were taking part in both. Gerson confused matters further by extending the reach of the Feast of Fools to include not only the earlier feast of the Innocents but also the later festivities of Carnival. By grouping as much misbehavior as possible under a single head, he enlarged his target and made it easier to condemn the Feast of Fools.

In April 1408, at a diocesan synod of Reims, Gerson delivered a sermon, "On the Office of the Pastor." Toward the end, he included a paragraph complaining of improprieties in church, some of which were "cloak[ed] under the name of fools [*fatuorum*], against which we have written elsewhere."⁵⁶ Gerson's opposition to the Feast of Fools was by then so well known that he needed only to recall his prior written polemic against it. To the best of my knowledge, this was his last public attack on the feast.

The bishop of Auxerre, Michel de Creney, died in Paris in 1409.⁵⁷ The next bishop would not arrive in Auxerre until May 1412.⁵⁸ In the meantime, Pierre de Chissy's ability to preside over chapter meetings was hampered by deafness; in December 1410 he relinquished the responsibility to another canon (and a close friend of Nicolas de Clamanges), Renaud de Fontaines.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, on 2 January 1411 the elderly Chissy complained that, despite all the previous chapter decisions against the Feast of Fools, "several canons of inferior rank [*canonici tortrarii*], chaplains, and

55. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 6:108–14 (112); cf. Chambers, 1:292 n. 2; Swain, *Fools*, 207 n. 53.

56. Gerson, *Oeuvres*, 5:123–44 (140), and, for the date and place of delivery, 10:29; cf. McGuire, *Jean*, 183–84.

57. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:34.

58. Jean de Thoisy was elected bishop of Auxerre in 1410 but was transferred to the see of Tournai before he could take up residence. Philippe des Essarts was elected later in the same year but did not arrive in Auxerre until 19 May 1412. For biographies of both bishops, see Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:35–47.

59. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 2:37, 422. Lydus, "Vita," in Nicolas de Clamanges, *Opera*, 1:b4, reports that Fontaines was a graduate of the College of Navarre and a lifelong friend of Clamanges; Arbois de Jubainville, *Inventaire*, 1:243, adds that by 1421 he was "confessor to the king of France."

choir clerks” had again held the feast over the New Year. “They transformed themselves by means of various shameful garments, and in the church of Auxerre, during vespers, mass, and matins, did many shameful things while the divine office was being celebrated, and afterward, in a loud voice, said several injurious things to the dean, and the whole service and church was disturbed.” The offended dean demanded that charges be brought immediately “against these delinquents.” A committee of three canons was appointed to investigate the matter. On 18 December 1411 the chapter reaffirmed its “permanent” prohibition of 1407. Jean Piqueron and five other canons protested.⁶⁰

This is the last mention of the Feast of Fools in the extant chapter records from Auxerre. Traces of the practice lingered, however. In the sixteenth century, an abbot of fools was elected in Auxerre every 18 July under a great elm that cast its shade outside the main doors of the cathedral. Benches, rugs, and a writing table being set in place, the chapter elected the *abbas stultorum* “by a plurality of voices.” Typically, the abbot’s role was not to provoke disorder but to enforce good order: he was charged with reforming minor offences, such as the arrival of a canon in the choir wearing the wrong habit.⁶¹ Moving his election to July circumvented decrees against the midwinter Feast of Fools and increased the likelihood of good weather for the outdoor ceremony.

The sixteenth-century *abbas stultorum* provided entertainment not only for the clergy but also for the townspeople of Auxerre. A local poet, Roger de Collerye (ca. 1470–ca. 1536), composed a “proclamation for the abbot of the church of Auxerre and his fellows [*suppostz*].” Suitable for delivery the day before the election, it greets the women and men of the town as “fools” (*sottes et sotz*). Beginning at the wealthy end of the social scale, it invites “users who have gold that jingles” to attend. Merchants are advised to shut their shops. Judges and police chiefs should bring their “nice little wives” (*sadinettes*), who can leave all baby food at home and feed their infants “from their two little breasts” (*de ses deux mamelletes*). “Young lasses and pretty wenches” need not bring their own bottles of wine. “Merchants, bourgeois, shoemakers, cobblers, cheats, flute players, pipers, . . . minstrels, scroungers, pimps, errand boys, . . . rogues, slovens, . . . [and] wine growers” will all be there. Come one, come all,

60. Lebeuf, *Mémoires*, 4:233.

61. Leber, 9:358–59.

Car par l'Abbé, sans troubler voz cerveaux.
Et ses suppostz, orrez demain merveilles.⁶²

[For from the abbot, without troubling your brains,
And his fellows, you'll hear marvels tomorrow.]

Perhaps, after the election—whose outcome would have been known in advance—the assembled crowd was treated to a *sottie* (fools' play), written by Collerye and acted by the abbot and his fools, which wittily made fun of local foibles.

62. Roger de Collerye, *Oeuvres*, 275–76; cf. Leber, 9:373–78.

CHAPTER 17

Trouble in St.-Omer and Noyon

Although Auxerre was the only cathedral chapter named by Gerson, his campaign almost certainly prompted others to take action against the Feast of Fools. In this chapter I look at Senlis, St.-Omer, and Noyon, three towns where concerted efforts to suppress the Feast of Fools began during Gerson's lifetime, nearly two decades or more before the ecumenical Council of Basel issued its authoritative ruling against the Feast of Fools in 1435. In each case, despite both national and local opposition, traces of the feast lingered into the sixteenth century. As with Auxerre, I avoid later fragmentation of the narrative by following each town's story to its close now. At the end of the chapter I also look at two church councils—the diocesan synod of Langres (1404) and the provincial council of Tours (1431)—whose opposition to the Feast of Fools anticipated that of the Council of Basel.

In 1403 the cathedral chapter in Senlis discussed the future of its “pope [*papa*] of fools.” Five canons were in favor of continuing the custom inside the church but felt that the pope should wear “decent, secular clothes” and that there should be no elevation (*elevatio*) or accompanying dance (*dansio*). The majority insisted that the pope not enter the church, but allowed that “chaplains and other [clergy] can do whatever they want outside.”¹

1. Dreves, “Geschichte,” 584. Grenier, 365, dates the discussion to 1413; Rigollot, 26, follows suit.

Abolition of the feast in Senlis appears to have been no more straightforward than in Auxerre. On 30 December 1421 the Senlis chapter granted a bushel of wheat (*un minot de bled*) for the Feast of Fools.² In 1523 the canons were back indoors, exchanging choir stalls and habits during “the feast of the priests” (*la fête des prêtres*), the resulting “motley” provoking “laughter and jesting” in those taking part.³

Senlis’s collegiate church of St.-Rieul also held a Feast of Fools. In 1501 the chapter of the collegiate church permitted the customary “games in the cemetery” and the presence of a “prelate of fools, . . . probably a bishop,” on the day of the Circumcision.⁴ In 1537 the chapter gave eight sols to cover the expenses of the “little bishop” on the day of the Innocents, “as was the custom.”⁵

The collegiate church of St.-Omer, as we have already seen, supported a dignified office of the Circumcision in the late thirteenth century. Both a boy bishop and a “dean of fools” took part. By the start of the fifteenth century, the number of “bishops” had grown, companies of young laymen were organizing their own street entertainments, and both ecclesiastical and municipal authorities had begun efforts to limit the festivities.

The chapter accounts record apparently untroubled payments to a “bishop of fools” (*évêque des sos*) in 1399 and 1407. The funds came from the revenue from endowed chapels.⁶ In November 1407, however, the church’s provost, Pierre Trouseau, reportedly forbade unspecified “abuses” associated with the Feast of Fools.⁷ Du Cange quotes, but does not date, a chapter statute from St.-Omer: “Because in times past many defects and several scandals, disorders, and evils have happened on account of the bishop of fools and his companions, we determine and ordain that in future at the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, vicars and other assembled members of the choir and their bishop should conduct themselves decently, singing and officiating

2. Grenier, 365. A *minot* was a locally variable measure of grain, equivalent in Paris to 1.07 bushels (Doursther, 282).

3. Rigollot, 25–26.

4. Grenier, 365.

5. Rigollot, 26–27.

6. Legrand, “Réjouissances,” 190.

7. Quenson, *Notre-Dame*, 90–91; Bled, “Fête,” 61–62. Both cite Charles-François Deneuille, *Annales de la ville de Saint-Omer*, 3:65, as their source. Deneuille adds, “At the time of the divine office, the lower clergy [*habitués*] used to run masked in the choir and throw the books on the ground and commit several other extravagances.” Bled dismisses Deneuille’s account as exaggerated, insisting that if any such “drolleries” did take place, they were “extra-liturgical,” occurring well apart from the divine office. For more on Deneuille’s unpublished MS, left incomplete at his death in 1731, see Bled, *Évêques*, 20 n. 1.

as it is fully laid down in the church's ordinal."⁸ Perhaps the statute belongs to Troussseau's reform. Rather than abolish the Feast of Fools, it was intended to safeguard the dignity of the office of the Circumcision.

Charles-François Deneuville claims that the reform went further, effectively abolishing the office of the bishop of fools: after the provost's intervention, "no one dared to take the name of bishop, of abbot, or of any other ecclesiastical dignitary of fools."⁹ This may have been true in the short term. In 1410 the chapter accounts record support for "the bishop of the deacons" (*episcopus dyacanonorum*) on the day of Saint Stephen, for "the bishop of the priests" (*episcopus presbiterorum*) on the day of Saint John, and for "the bishop of the innocents" (*episcopus innocentium*), but make no mention of a bishop of fools.¹⁰

Outdoor *mystères* (mystery plays) were also becoming part of the seasonal festivities in St.-Omer. The tradition of staging such plays in St.-Omer appears to have begun in 1403,¹¹ but it is not until 25 December 1416 that we find one identified with the Christmas season. On that date a *jeu de personnage* was performed in St.-Omer by a group of "several lawyers [*ceux de la loy*] and other notables from the town of Théroutanne." The town of St.-Omer paid for "six pitchers [*kennes*] of wine" for the visiting actors.¹² A year later, on the feast of Saint Nicholas, a "mistère de Monsieur St-Nicolas" was performed by the scholars of the church school before a large and distinguished audience in the Vieux Marché.¹³

For a while there seems to have been some confusion of the clerical feast and the secular celebrations. In 1417 the town paid twenty sols to "the bishop of innocents" and forty sols to "the bishop of fools... for help in doing his feast, as has been the custom." In 1418 the aldermen (*échevins*) issued a prohibition against anyone "going around in masks, except on the day of the

8. Du Cange, s.v. *episcopus fatuorum* (3:278).

9. Quenson, *Notre-Dame*, 91; Bled, "Fête," 62.

10. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 104 n. 1.

11. Legrand, "Réjouissances," 198.

12. *Ibid.*, 199–200. A *kenne* or *kanne* was a locally variable measure of wine equivalent in Lille, where it was also called a *pot*, to 2.092 liters (Doursther, 182, 438).

13. Legrand, "Réjouissances," 169–71, provides the archival reference to the performance of the *mistère de St-Nicolas*. Since summer *mystères* were staged on the Vieux Marché in 1413 and 1417–18 (*ibid.*, 199), Legrand plausibly assumes that midwinter plays were also performed there. But he offers no documentary support for his assumption that the St.-Omer *mistère de St-Nicolas* was a revival of Jehan Bodel's *Jeu de Saint Nicolas* (ca. 1200). In a subsequent chain of unexamined references, Demont, "Sainte," 28 n. 1, repeats Legrand's assumption that the play was Bodel's; Foulon, "Représentation," 66 n. 48, quotes Demont; Axton, *European*, 132, cites Foulon. But Carol Symes (personal communication, 22 August 2008) agrees that "the link made by Legrand is naïve and tenuous." For the text of Bodel's play, see Bodel, *Jeu*; trans. Axton and Stevens, *Medieval*, 71–135; for the date of composition, see Foulon, "Représentation," 56–57; for a discussion of the play in its original social context, see Symes, *Common*, 27–68.

Innocents or on New Year's Day, for the entertainments [*ébastemens*] of the bishops of innocents and of fools." In 1421 it was specified that neither "the bishop of fools nor any other minister of the church" should be "attacked," and that no one should "take by force" the bishop's "standard or his other accoutrements." The bishop, for his part, should not provoke or insult anyone. Nor should he enter churches, "escorted by his turbulent cortège, . . . during the celebration of the divine office." In 1431 the ban on masks was relaxed a little, allowing them to be worn on "the night and the day of the Innocents, of the New Year, and of [the feast of] the Three Kings."¹⁴

Despite these setbacks, the chapter continued to support its seasonal "bishops." In 1431 the succentor, Seraphin Cotinet, was elected "bishop of fools for the year." On 5 December he reminded the dean and chapter that it was customary to share a joyful meal together on the feast of Saint Nicholas. The chapter decided that its members were free to attend the meal or to abstain, but agreed that those who did attend should provide some material help, such as a pitcher of wine. The chapter contributed twenty-four sols from its own funds.¹⁵ In 1433 the chapter discussed whether to support "a choirboy who had become a holder of a benefice, if he were made a bishop of innocents or a bishop of fools, or said his first mass," and if he wished to celebrate the honor by hosting a meal. It was decided to give him "six bottles of wine and a *demi-rasière* [nearly two bushels] of wheat" if he held the meal in the cathedral precincts, but to provide no institutional support if he held it elsewhere. In 1490 the chapter reaffirmed its "usual" commitment to help with the expenses of "the bishop of innocents and [the bishop] of fools."¹⁶ About this time, too, the bishop of innocents and his followers received fourteen sols for chanting in a local abbey at the feast of the Innocents.¹⁷

According to Albert Legrand, the clerical Feast of Fools in St.-Omer was finally suppressed in 1516 by order of François de Melun, bishop of Arras and provost of the collegiate church of St.-Omer. The amateur actors of the city's chambers of rhetoric promptly asked that the forty sols given each year by the town to the bishop of fools be converted into a prize for the best morality play. Their request was granted "for this time only."¹⁸

14. Legrand, "Réjouissances," 191.

15. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 134; Legrand, "Réjouissances," 189–90.

16. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 103–4. A *rasière* was a locally variable measure of grain equivalent in St.-Omer to 3,522 bushels (Doursther, 463).

17. Mélicocq, "Cérémonies," 93.

18. Legrand, "Réjouissances," 191–92. Deschamps, "Cérémonies," 107 n. 1, dates the suppression to 1515. François de Melun was bishop of Arras from 1509/10 to 1512/16, after which he became bishop of Thérouanne. Some sources claim he occupied both sees simultaneously (Brockwell, "Painting," 61). Melun died in 1521.

Traces of the bishop of innocents survived in St.-Omer until at least the middle of the eighteenth century, when an eyewitness reports that the music of mass and vespers of the feast of the Innocents was sung and directed entirely by children. The writer found the experience “edifying.”¹⁹ Another account reports that every 27 December until the French Revolution there was an annual procession through the town of children “dressed in various religious costumes.” In the church, the choirboys solemnly took the place of the adult members of the choir, while the latter crouched and sang falsetto.²⁰

Noyon celebrated its Feast of Fools at Epiphany. In 1366 the “watchmen of the belfry” were paid by the city’s silversmiths to guard their doors on “the day of the kings, while the people of the church of Noyon took part in the game of the kings [*le gieu des roys*].”²¹ The game required the election of a “king,” who, with his “companions,” played some undefined role in the cathedral choir before taking off into the town. Perhaps the players represented Herod and his soldiers. Their goal seems to have been the seizure of valuables for subsequent ransom.

Noyon’s clergy also elected a bishop of innocents. In 1416, when the canon chosen for the role proved unwilling, a “coadjutor” was named to take his place.²² An inventory of the cathedral treasury in 1419 mentions “a small silver crozier with a black staff” and “small red sandals,” both “for the bishop of innocents.”²³ In the same year the chapter supported the bishop of innocents but banned the *gieu des roys*.²⁴ In 1420 a canon was punished for having tried to initiate the Feast of Fools inside the church at compline on the feast of Epiphany. He had retrieved the king’s scepter (*baculus*) from the high altar, where it had lain wrapped in a silk cope since the feast of the Innocents.²⁵

In 1430 there were two bishops of innocents, one elected in the cathedral, the other in the church of St.-Martin. The former complained to the cathedral chapter.²⁶ Prestige and provisions were at stake. In Noyon, as in many other cities, the bishop of innocents enjoyed a processional lunchtime cavalcade. In 1497 the “bishop” provided the dean with a proposed menu: the dean was expected to serve the bishop and his *cortège* white bread, wine

19. Bled, “Fête,” 64–67, citing a letter in his possession, written after October 1751.

20. Quenson, *Notre-Dame*, 91.

21. Mazière, “Noyon,” 93.

22. Mélicocq, *Cité*, 161.

23. *Ibid.*, 161–62.

24. *Ibid.*, 161; Mazière, “Noyon,” 93.

25. Mélicocq, *Cité*, 276; Mazière, “Noyon,” 93.

26. Mélicocq, *Cité*, 161; for the parish church of the abbey of St.-Martin, see Mazière, “Noyon,” 77.

in three kinds (red, claret, and white), sugared almonds, fruits, wafers, and other dainties.²⁷

In the same year, restrictions were placed on both the bishop and the king: the bishop's cavalcade had to be over before nones, so as not to delay the chanting of the office; no disreputable or shameless songs were to be sung at the close of the feast of the Innocents; and "if the vicars and their king take part in the customary cavalcade, no dances [*chorea et tripudia*]" were to take place "in front of the great door" of the cathedral, "at least not in the usual shameless fashion."²⁸ Two years later the ruling was reaffirmed with additional restrictions: the cavalcade itself was no longer to assemble in front of the great door, and the king and his companions were to appear in the choir in "long and decent clothes" rather than in costumes "of different colors."²⁹ In 1506 the chapter again insisted that the king not enter the choir wearing "royal" dress. If he wanted to take part in the office, he should wear church vestments. In 1521 the rule was relaxed, and the king was allowed to wear his crown "according to the ancient custom."³⁰

Meanwhile, a youth confraternity, the Confrérie de la Jeunesse, was getting into the action. In January 1483 the town paid sixteen sols tournois "to the prince of youth [*prince de jeunesse*] and his companions who had put on some amusements [*joieusetez*] for the feast of the Peace of Arras." The treaty in question, concluded in December 1482, brought the Burgundian counties of Artois and Franche-Comté under control of the French crown. In February 1492 three members of the confraternity staged a public burlesque of the church's sacraments, for which offense the cathedral chapter ordered them imprisoned.³¹ In both 1500 and 1501, twelve members of the confraternity traveled to Laon to perform a play at the town's annual theater festival, known as the *fête des bourgeois* or *fête des braies* (festival of the breeches).³²

27. Mélicocq, *Cité*, 162.

28. Rigollot, 28–29.

29. Mazière, "Noyon," 93–94. The chapter had already ruled, in 1466, that everyone who entered the choir on "the days of the Innocents" should wear long ecclesiastical dress (91–92). This was in keeping with the decree of the Council of Basel that "those who recite the canonical hours shall enter the church wearing an ankle-length gown and a clean surplice reaching below the middle of the shin-bone or a cloak" (Tanner, *Decrees*, 489).

30. Rigollot, 29.

31. Mazière, "Noyon," 109–10. Since the Peace of Arras was signed in December 1482, we can be sure that its celebration in Noyon took place in January 1483, rather than, as Mazière has it, on "10 janvier 1482." I have also changed his "14 février 1491" to 1492.

32. Matton, "Royauté," 11:125; Mazière, "Noyon," 109–10. For more on Laon's *fête des bourgeois*, see chapter 23.

Back in Noyon, in 1527 permission was granted for a single year's election of the bishop of innocents on condition that the associated "episcopal ceremonies" not be observed. In 1566 the chapter ruled that the choirboys were not to present the bishop of innocents with his miter and crozier; that the bishop could officiate only at matins and vespers, but must not give the episcopal benediction; and that he could sit in the higher stalls near the treasurer, wearing a surplice and amice.³³ In 1622 the dean of Noyon, Jacques le Vasseur, defended the feast of the Innocents on the grounds of its antiquity and its representation of the slaughter of the Innocents. Referring both to the martyred Innocents and to the choirboys of Noyon, he wrote, "They play and this same game pleases the church" (*Ludunt et placet iste ludus ecclesiae*). As for those who demanded the abolition of the game, he added, "You are respectable in your outer clothing, philosophers by your beards and your cloaks, but in every other respect, you are sheep."³⁴

According to Rigollot, the church "masquerade" was finally suppressed in 1721 because of the "high cost of provisions" (*la cherté des vivres*).³⁵ If this is correct, the *gieu des roys*—perhaps linking Herod, the Innocents, and the three kings—had endured long beyond its original prohibition in 1419.

It would take more than Gerson's campaign and a few local chapter rulings to suppress the Feast of Fools. Attempts to do so at a higher level began with the rulings of diocesan and provincial councils. The former were called by a bishop, the latter by an archbishop.

In 1404 the diocesan synod of Langres prohibited clerical participation in a long list of recreational activities it deemed inappropriate. These included dice, cards, tennis (*stophum, dictum à la paulme*), wrestling, stone throwing, leaping dances, choral dances—whether with shields or with musical instruments—bowls, running races for prizes of money or for wine, darts, sword-play, quintain, tournaments, jousting, "charivari, in which they use masks in the shape of devils," and "those disgraceful games that are customarily done in certain churches at the Feast of Fools, which they observe during the feast days of the Nativity of the Lord."³⁶ Nicolas de Clamanges was a canon of Langres, where he was in residence between 1398 and 1403. Perhaps he had a hand in shaping this decree.

33. Mazière, "Noyon," 92; Grenier, 358.

34. Grenier, 358–59.

35. Rigollot, 29.

36. Bouchel, *Decretorum* 6.19.1 (1025–26); Gillmeister, *Tennis*, 29, 310 n. 86; Prynn, *Histriomastix*, 599–600 (with translation).

In 1431 the provincial council of Tours met in Nantes. Of a possible twelve delegates, only the archbishop of Tours and the bishops of Nantes, Léon, St.-Brieuc, and St.-Malo attended.³⁷ In the fourteenth century, Tours had elected a boy bishop and a “cantor of fools,”³⁸ but I know of no other churches in the province that did so. Nevertheless, the council felt obliged to legislate on the matter. It issued thirty-nine “canons,” of which the majority were reaffirmations of existing legislation and twenty were exact transcriptions of canons issued by the previous provincial council, held at Angers in 1366. Only ten contained new material.³⁹ Two of these addressed the question “of forbidden games” (*de ludis prohibitis*). The first condemned clerical misbehavior during the spring festivals of Easter and the beginning of May. The second concerned Christmas week.

“In some churches of the province of Tours,” the council observed, “on the feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, Saint Stephen, John, and the Innocents, some make and appoint, from the novices or [choir]boys, a pope, some a bishop, others a duke [*dux*], others a count [*comes*], [and] others a prince [*princeps*].” Such a spectacle encouraged neglect of parish churches on feast days, gatherings of crowds, disruption of divine office, suspension of devotion, provocation of laughter, and shameful banquets. “In common speech, such things are called the Feast of Fools” and are “believed by many to be descended from the remains of the Kalends of January.” The council insisted that on the feast of the Innocents, divine worship should be celebrated “by the same church officers who are accustomed to say the office on other feast days,” and that “processions [*pompae*] and abuses” involving “boys, ministers, and other servants of church” should be “abolished and rejected.”⁴⁰

The rulings of the synod of Langres and the council of Tours had only regional impact. The decree of the Council of Basel, to which we turn in the next chapter, had a much wider reach.

37. Avril, *Conciles*, 58, 421, 424.

38. Martène, *De antiquis*, 3:117–18.

39. Avril, *Conciles*, 422–23.

40. *Ibid.*, 428–29; Chambers, 1:293 n. 2.

CHAPTER 18

Troyes, Sens, and the Council of Basel

The Council of Basel was, at least in name, an ecumenical council. The Roman Catholic Church accords it equal status with such better-known councils as those of Nicea, Chalcedon, Constantinople, Trent, and Vatican I and II. But the Council of Basel was also a fragmented council. When it opened in 1431, Pope Eugenius IV stayed away. In 1437 those delegates loyal to the pope moved to Ferrara—where they were joined by the pope—and subsequently to Florence and Rome, finishing their business in 1445. Their decisions are recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. The remaining delegates stayed in Basel until 1449. Their decisions are not recognized.¹

The council was primarily concerned with questions of papal supremacy, heresy, and union with the Eastern churches (some of which sent delegates after the council moved to Italy), but it also turned its attention to other matters, including the expulsion of popular culture from sacred space. On 9 June 1435, while still united in Basel, the council issued a series of decrees dealing with appropriate behavior in church. The last of the series was called “On Not Performing Spectacles in Churches.” Given its importance in the subsequent suppression of the Feast of Fools, the decree

1. For the history of the Council of Basel, see Delaruelle, Labande, and Ourliac, *Église*, 227–92; for the decrees of the Basel-Ferrara-Florence-Rome council, see Tanner, *Decrees*, 453–591.

is worth quoting in full: "In some churches, during certain celebrations of the year, there are carried on various scandalous practices. Some people with miter, crozier and pontifical vestments give blessings after the manner of bishops. Others are robed like kings and dukes; in some regions this is called the Feast of Fools, or Innocents, or of children. Some put on masked and theatrical comedies [*larvales et theatrales iocos*], others organize dances for men and women, attracting people to amusement and buffoonery. Others prepare meals and banquets there. The holy synod detests these abuses. It forbids ordinaries as well as deans and rectors of churches, under pain of being deprived of all ecclesiastical revenues for three months, to allow these and similar frivolities, or even markets and fairs, in churches, which ought to be houses of prayer, or even in cemeteries. They are to punish transgressors by ecclesiastical censures and other remedies of the law. The holy synod decrees that all customs, statutes and privileges which do not accord with these decrees, unless they add greater penalties, are null."²

Despite its broad scope, the decree implicitly recognizes limits to its own constraints. Théophile Boutiot rightly notes that the council's prohibition "applies only to the place of the feast and not to the feast itself."³ Many cathedral chapters were quick to note this distinction, expelling questionable activities from church buildings but allowing them to continue in the square outside. Chérest argues, too, that the council did not call into question the established liturgical offices of the feasts of the Innocents and Circumcision. While reproving "the abuses, the dances and the games in the church, the profane masquerades, the tumult and the disorder advancing to the altar," the decree did not intend to prevent "the children or the vicars" from "celebrating a special feast, reclaiming on that day some independence and some privileges."⁴ This case proved harder for local chapters to make, but several made the attempt, endeavoring to safeguard the feast's liturgical office while taking aim at invasive revelry.

The authority of the Council of Basel was not immediately acknowledged in France. On 1 May 1438 Charles VII convened in Bourges an assembly of some thirty archbishops, bishops, and other French clergy to advise him on the merits of the council's decisions. On the whole, the assembly approved the council's decrees but recommended that some be modified to protect the independence of the French church and to affirm the king, rather than the pope, as its sovereign. On 7 July the king issued the Pragmatic Sanction of

2. Tanner, *Decrees*, 492, gives both the Latin original and an English translation.

3. Boutiot, *Histoire*, 3:20.

4. Chérest, 69–70.

Bourges, declaring the assembly's modified version of the council's decrees to be binding in France. By doing so, the king asserted his authority over the decisions of popes and councils.⁵ The council's decrees of 9 June 1435, including "De spectaculis in ecclesia non faciendis," were accepted without change.⁶ Thus, the ongoing campaign against the Feast of Fools was bolstered by the weight of royal and conciliar authority.

Once again, however, compliance did not come easily. Events in Troyes, where the Feast of Fools was celebrated in the cathedral church of Saint Peter and in the collegiate churches of Saint Stephen and Saint Urban,⁷ serve as a good illustration. I have already noted two cases of damage to cathedral property, possibly by lay youth groups, in connection with the Feast of Fools in Troyes in 1380 and 1382.

In 1436 the cathedral chapter gave its vicars and choirboys permission to celebrate the Feast of Fools "without mockery and with reverence." In 1437 the chapter ruled that a vicar who left the chapter, having once treated the others to a meal (*bien venue*) in the role of archbishop of fools, if he returned, was not obligated to accept a second election to the expenses of the office.⁸ In 1439, after the publication of the Pragmatic Sanction, the choirboys were allowed to celebrate the feast of the Innocents "without mockery," but the vicars were forbidden to observe the Feast of Fools "in the church." More positively, in 1443 permission was given to "the companions of the church, both small and large," to celebrate "this good and joyful feast outside the church." The customary stipends would be paid, the archbishop of fools would be dressed in a "beautiful long robe," a "rochet" (a linen vestment, akin to a surplice, usually worn by a bishop or an abbot), and a "beautiful furred bonnet." Feasting, however, should take place in the house of one of the canons and not in a public tavern. Nevertheless, a canon was afterward fined twenty sous "for the foolish actions and extravagant gestures" which he had allowed himself during the *fête des fous*.⁹

Matters became more confrontational the following Christmas. Two letters written early in 1445 bear hostile testimony to the events of the season. The first, dated 23 January, was sent by the bishop of Troyes, Jean Leguise

5. For the text of the Pragmatic Sanction, see *Ordonnances*, 13:267–91; for an abridged translation and commentary, see Ehler and Morrall, *Church*, 112–21; for discussion of its historical context, see Valois, *Histoire*; Delaruelle, *Église*, 315–77.

6. *Ordonnances*, 13:287; Delaruelle, *Église*, 356.

7. The cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul and the basilica of Saint Urban are still in use, but only the Rue du Cloître St.-Étienne marks the former site of the church of Saint Stephen.

8. Arbois de Jubainville, *Inventaire*, 1:244; Clouzot, "Folle," 70; Boutiot, *Histoire*, 3:19–20.

9. Boutiot, *Histoire*, 3:20; Courtalon-Delaistre, *Topographie*, 2:127.

(1426–1450), to the archbishop of Sens, Louis de Melun.¹⁰ Wishing to abide by the Pragmatic Sanction, Leguise had “well in advance” (*ja pieça*) required the clergy of Saint Peter’s and Saint Stephen’s to “stop making bishops and archbishops in their churches at the Feast of Fools.” His order was not well received. “This year,” he writes, “under cover of the Feast of Fools, some clerics of this town have committed several great acts of mockery, derision, and foolishness against the honor and reverence of God and in great contempt and abusive censure of the clergy and of the whole ecclesiastical state. And they have observed the feast with greater excess than has been customary in times past,” not just “for a day or two, but for four whole days.”

Specifically, he complained that the clergy of Saint Stephen’s had elected an archbishop of fools. He mentioned two further incidents. On the Sunday before Christmas some of the “fools” had put on a *jeu de personnages* in the largest and most public place in town. The entertainment, which they called “the play of the consecration of their archbishop,” ended by “mocking...the holy mystery of pontifical consecration.” Whether, in fact, the rite was intended as a mockery is uncertain. The lower clergy may have thought they were reclaiming an old privilege of consecrating their own “archbishop,” while the bishop may have been inclined to find any such imitation presumptuous and inherently derisive. Later, during the feast of the Circumcision, the archbishop of fools appeared in the cathedral robed in episcopal vestments. He presided over the divine office and gave the closing benediction. Afterward, preceded by a cross-bearer, he walked through the town, blessing the people. Leguise saw this as a great insult to “the archiepiscopal dignity.”¹¹

When told that they were acting badly, the vicars claimed that similar things were done in Sens and that the archbishop of Sens himself had authorized their feast. Despite being told that this was untrue, the vicars persisted in their belief. In his letter Leguise acknowledged that the two churches of Saint Peter and Saint Stephen were subject to the archbishop rather than to himself, and he asked Melun to “attend to the excesses and abuses, so that all evils and scandals which might henceforth arise on the occasion of the feast should cease in every respect.”¹² As we shall see, there may have been

10. For the full text of the letter, see Foucher, “Lettre,” 95–97; for “the principal passages,” see Rigollot, 153–54; Dreves, “Geschichte,” 585 n. 3. Though dated only 23 January, the letter “clearly refers to the events of 1444–5” (Chambers 1:297 n. 1).

11. Foucher, “Lettre,” 96.

12. *Ibid.*, 96–97. For the authority of the archbishop of Sens, rather than the bishop of Troyes, over the churches of Saint Peter and Saint Stephen, see Wright, *Dissemination*, 122.

some justification for the vicars' conviction that such activities were allowed in Sens.

Leguise also petitioned the king. Charles VII responded with a long letter, dated 17 April 1445, to the civil authorities in Troyes.¹³ Reminding them of the condemnation of the Feast of Fools by the Council of Basel and by his own Pragmatic Sanction, Charles expanded the catalog of forbidden acts. The Council of Basel, he wrote, "expressly forbade to people and ministers of the church a certain derisory and scandalous feast, which is called the Feast of Fools, which is customarily observed in several cathedrals and other collegiate churches around the feasts and octave of Christmas." Emboldened by this feast, some members of the clergy were in the habit of performing, "even during the divine office, several great insolences, derisions, mockeries, public spectacles, [and] bodily disguises, using indecent clothing, not belonging to their state and profession, such as the clothing and vestments of fools, of men of arms, . . . of women, and masks [*faux visages*]." All such abuses, "and any others that are customary at the feast," have been forbidden by the Council of Basel and by "our Pragmatic Sanction."

Turning his attention to events in Troyes, Charles recognized that for some years the clergy of the town had complied with these decrees, giving up their usual seasonal excesses. But hearing rumors that the Pragmatic Sanction had been revoked, they revived the Feast of Fools "during the feasts of the Innocents and of the Circumcision just past." (The rumors were partly true: in defense of papal authority, the papal legate to France, Pietro dal Monte, bishop of Brescia, had been working hard, but without success, to persuade Charles to revoke the Pragmatic Sanction.)¹⁴ Under cover of these rumors, the king continued, the clergy in Troyes indulged in "a greater excess of mockeries, spectacles, disguises, farces, verses, and other such follies, than they had ever misdone in human memory."

Moreover, "on the following Sunday," a group of clergy from the cathedral and from the collegiate churches of Saint Stephen and Saint Urban donned various disguises and, heralded by trumpet blasts, gathered "most of the people of the town" in the main square. There, on a high scaffold stage, they performed a *jeu de personnages*, in which the three main characters, Hypocrisy (Hypocrisie), Dissimulation (Faintise), and False-Seeming (Faux-Semblant), were understood to represent the bishop and the two canons most

13. For the text of the letter, see Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, 1:1804–7; for substantial excerpts, see Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:483–84).

14. Zanelli, "Pietro," 7:365–73.

actively opposed to the feast.¹⁵ For all his professed concern for the honor of God, it was perhaps his own offended dignity that prompted Leguise to complain to the archbishop of Sens and to the king.

Leguise also appears to have asked for help from friends on the faculty of theology in Paris. Charles continues, “All these things having come to the knowledge of the faculty of theology of our University of Paris,” the members of the faculty, “after mature deliberation, . . . have compiled a certain notable letter,” which they intend “to send to the prelates and chapters of our kingdom, execrating and condemning the damnable feast as superstitious and pagan,” having its origins in the feasts of “pagans and unbelieving idolaters, as Saint Augustine well expressed.” The faculty, the king reports, have sent a copy of this letter to “our counselor,” the bishop of Troyes.¹⁶ Leguise may have forwarded the letter to Charles. At the very least, he drew the king’s attention to its contents. Gerson’s successors at the university were now continuing and expanding his campaign against the Feast of Fools with the full backing of the king. In the process, the hostile rhetoric had been raised a notch or two: the Feast of Fools was now declared to be rooted in paganism and idolatry. We will return to the theologians’ letter in the next chapter.

Charles concluded his own letter with the observation that “no benefit or profit can come to anyone from the Feast of Fools, but only evil and an opportunity for sin.” He therefore commanded the civil authorities in Troyes to heed and to enforce the letter from the faculty of theology, to allow no unlicensed public plays, and to examine all plays beforehand, permitting their performance only if they contained nothing “against the faith [or] good morals.”

Four days later, on 21 April 1445, the cathedral chapter resolved “to remove [*effacier*] from the ordinal everything having to do with the Feast of Fools in which there might be found any mockery of the divine office. The ordinal was brought to the chapter room and was corrected [*royé* = *rayé*] and censured.”¹⁷ But in 1446, and again in 1468, the chapter of Saint Urban’s gave financial support to the feast.¹⁸ Although the feast itself may eventually have disappeared, certain financial obligations traditionally attached to it remained. Even the royal treasury, as late as 1595, was still making a payment of five sols to the “archbishop of fools” of Saint Stephen’s church. According

15. Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, 1:1806; Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 35.

16. Charles does not name Leguise at this point, but it is clear that “notredist conseiller” (Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, 1:1806) is identical with “nostre amé et feal conseiller l’evesque de Troyes” (1:1804), to whom the letter is addressed.

17. Arbois de Jubainville, *Inventaire*, 1:244; Boutiot, *Histoire*, 3:22–23.

18. Boutiot, *Histoire*, 3:22.

to Boutiot, these royal payments continued until 1789, when the Revolution put a stop to them.¹⁹

Events in Sens were less confrontational. Between 1400 and 1420 the chapter continued to provide material support for the archbishop of innocents (*arcevesque des enfans*), the cantor of fools (*précentre des fols*), and the Feast of Fools (*fête aux fols*), albeit at a lower level than in the previous century. After 1420 the chapter accounts mention such payments only rarely. Chérest puts the reduction of support down to a loss of chapter revenue rather than to any attempt at suppression. He also suggests that the reduction was partially responsible for the growing disorders of the feast in Sens and elsewhere. Combined with the gradual exodus of festive activities from church property required by the Council of Basel, the loss of chapter support meant a corresponding loss of church control over communal celebrations. In many cities, effective control passed to lay festive societies willing to put time and money into street festivities.²⁰

In Sens, the chapter tried to retain control over the liturgical office while implicitly yielding control over activities outside the church. In early December 1444 the chapter met to discuss the future of its annual office of the Circumcision (*servitium dominicae circumcisionis*). Mentioning neither the Council of Basel nor the Pragmatic Sanction, the chapter's unanimous decree instead cited in its own support "this statute produced by a certain legate," meaning the letter sent to Sens by the papal legate Eudes of Tusculum in 1245. "In the future," the chapter declared, "the office should be done just as it is set out in the book of the office itself, devoutly and with reverence." Peter of Corbeil's office, preserved in its bound thirteenth-century manuscript, was still the measure of the proper liturgical observance of the feast of the Circumcision in Sens. But irregularities had apparently crept in. The decree continued: the office should be done "without any mockery, confusion, or baseness, just as other offices are done at other feasts, in [ecclesiastical] vestments, [as] ordained by the said statute, and no others, with melodious voice, without dissonance, and all who are obliged to be present should take part in the office in this way, and should do their duty without running or confusion, especially in the church."²¹

Even so, some leeway was allowed for actions not imagined by Peter of Corbeil. At vespers, no more than "three small pails [*situlae*] of water" should be thrown over the cantor of fools. Moreover, on the day after Christmas,

19. Ibid., 1:494, 3:23.

20. Chérest, 60–63.

21. Chérest, 65–67; Villetard, 69–70.

people should not be led about “without trousers covering their private parts” (*sine brachis verenda tegentibus*). Nor should they be taken into the church. Instead they should be taken “to the well in the cloisters, not at the time of the office but at some other time, and there doused harmlessly with only one small pail of water.” By contrast, “outside the church,” the “fools” were permitted to “do other ceremonies,” as long as no damage or injury ensued.²²

It was presumably this decree that some of the clergy in Troyes claimed as authority for their own festivities during late December 1444 and early January 1445. Nothing in the Sens decree, however, can be plausibly construed as licensing the kind of anti-episcopal *jeu de personnages* that drove Jean Leguise, in a frenzy of letter writing, to seek the backing of Louis de Melun, the faculty of theology in Paris, and Charles VII. Nevertheless, faced with the faculty’s letter and its royal endorsement, Louis de Melun issued a statute, in November 1445, strictly forbidding the Feast of Fools. Since the statute’s account of the feast is taken almost verbatim from the faculty’s letter, it should not be thought of as a description of events in Sens. Melun did, however, add one local detail to the catalog of faults stitched together by the Paris theologians, adapting one of their outraged clauses to read “impudently leading unclothed men with their private parts uncovered about the town and its theaters in shabby traps and carts.”²³ Finally, he ordered all offensive material erased from the church’s books of worship. Fortunately, as Chérest points out, this order was ignored, and Peter of Corbeil’s office of the Circumcision survived intact.²⁴

In 1485 the provincial council of Sens reaffirmed the pertinent decree of the Council of Basel but made allowance for Christmas week customs that were conducted “with decency and peace.”²⁵ In 1486 occasional payments for the feast of the Innocents and “the feast of the first day of the year” (*la feste du premier jour de l’an*) began to reappear in the Sens chapter accounts. The change of name may have been a way of bypassing Melun’s ban on the Feast of Fools. Between 1501 and 1509, to prevent choirboys from wandering through the public market in search of funds, the chapter paid the choir-master a small sum toward the expenses of the feast of the Innocents. There was no longer any mention of an archbishop of innocents.²⁶

22. Chérest, 66–67; Dreves, “Geschichte,” 584–85.

23. For the full text of Melun’s statute, see *Gallia*, 12:Instrumenta, cols. 95–97; for excerpts, see Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:484); Chérest, 67–68.

24. Chérest, 68.

25. Mansi, 32:414.

26. Chérest, 68–72.

On Friday, 5 December 1511, the chapter renewed its ban on the Feast of Fools: "The feast that is called 'of fools,' which is customarily observed on the day of the Circumcision of the Lord, is to be omitted entirely this year." The elected "cantor of fools" was to make no "displays," on penalty of excommunication and the loss of his benefices. The rest of the fools were not to indulge in any "excesses [*insolentia*], by day or by night." Specifically, they were not to put on *jeux de personnages* on the day of the Circumcision, nor were they to shave the cantor's beard on an outdoor stage.²⁷

On "the last Wednesday of December" (31 December), the chapter made clear that its ban on the Feast of Fools did not in any way affect the office of the Circumcision. Permission was given to the "vicars and lower clergy of the church to celebrate . . . the divine office on the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, just as . . . it has been . . . sung in this church from of old."²⁸ Chapter records confirm that similar permission was granted in 1514, 1516, and 1517, with the acknowledgment that the office of the Circumcision was "commonly called the *festum fatuorum*." In 1520 permission was again given, with the proviso that the feast be done "reverently and decently," and that "the candles [*lucerna*] of the cantor of fools" not be brought into the church.²⁹

In 1521 both the Feast of Fools and the office of the Circumcision were suspended "because of the imminent danger to the kingdom of France." War had broken out between Francis I of France and the emperor Charles V of Germany and Spain.³⁰ The lower clergy were specifically forbidden to elect a cantor of fools on the feast of Saint John or to shave him "on the last day of the year" on a stage erected before the doors of the cathedral or anywhere else in Sens. The ban was renewed on 22 December 1522 but relaxed on 30 December. The vicars could celebrate the feast of the Circumcision "as of old," but were to do so "decently and devoutly, without lanterns, without a cantor [of fools], without carrying the staff of the lord cantor," and without the ritual shaving. In 1524 even "the feast of the Circumcision instituted by the deceased [Peter of] Corbeil, commonly called the Feast of Fools," was suspended "for this year, on account of "certain disturbances [*moventibus*]," a reference perhaps to the ongoing war rather than to local misbehavior. Permission was given in 1535 for "the office of the fools" to

27. Chérest, 72–73. Chambers, 1:299 n. 2, explains, "The shaven face was characteristic of the mediaeval fool, minstrel, or actor."

28. Chérest, 73.

29. Chérest, 75–76.

30. Knecht, *Rise*, 93–94.

be observed “without scandal,” and, in 1539, “without the carrying of great, thick candles by the vicars.” In January 1543, presumably after the event, it was forbidden “to enter the choir with hiccups or, at the feast of the Innocents, masked or hooded.”

On 23 December 1547, recognizing that “it was difficult to prevent scandal” at the feasts of the Innocents and Saint John (when the cantor of Fools was elected and, thus, when the Feast of Fools began), both feasts were suppressed. This time, perhaps because of the barrage of criticism directed at such feasts by Protestant Reformers and to the tensions of the Wars of Religion, the suppression—at least of the Feast of Fools—seems to have held.³¹

Some, however, think it lasted longer. Although he offers no documentation, Dreves asserts that the Feast of Fools in Sens continued to swing “between prohibition and permission” until 1614.³² J. B. Salques, too, tells an entertaining story about the last time Sens held a procession of the twelve apostles and the Virgin as part of the “festum asinorum” in 1634. Without identifying his source, Salques reports that the Virgin was seized by a sudden “pressing need.” Dismounting from the ass, she was concealed behind a well by the apostles. Her discomfort was greeted by so many amused whoops from the onlookers that afterward she could barely be persuaded by Saints Peter and Paul to remount. Bringing the festivities into further disrepute, Saint John drank too much at the subsequent meal. Returning home, he struck his wife. The poor woman ran into the street, demanding of passersby if Saint John had ever struck his wife after supping with the Virgin.³³

A version of the liturgical feast of the Innocents was still being celebrated in Sens in the mid-nineteenth century. An eyewitness speaks of the joy of the children at being allowed to preside over the divine office during the feast. “Just as the children of a regiment play at colonel and at battle, the children of the choir play at archbishop and the mass. One of them dresses as an archbishop. To make up for his presumption, they call him the ass [*l'âne*]. . . . Another becomes the cantor. . . . The last two ‘archbishops’ are in the little seminary at the moment, learning how to become archbishops in a more serious fashion, if they can.”³⁴

31. Chérest, 76–79; Villetard, 72.

32. Dreves, “Geschichte,” 586.

33. Salques, in Leber, 9:238 n. 1.

34. Chérest, 81–82, quoting information given him by the abbé Carlier, then a canon of Sens cathedral and president of the Société Archéologique de Sens.

CHAPTER 19

Rereading the Letter from Paris

Historians have treated the 1445 letter from the Paris theologians as if it were an objective, timeless description of the Feast of Fools. It is not. Those who issued the letter were heirs to an extended campaign against the Feast of Fools, begun in 1400 by the former chancellor of their university, Jean Gerson, and subsequently backed by the Council of Basel and the Pragmatic Sanction. More immediately, in January 1445, the Paris theologians had been petitioned by Jean Leguise, bishop of Troyes, for support in his efforts to suppress the Feast of Fools and its perceived assaults on “archiepiscopal dignity” in Troyes. This local context is not evident in the letter itself, which engages in sweeping condemnations of the Feast of Fools everywhere while mentioning nowhere in particular. While Leguise was hoping to use the faculty’s long-standing hostility against the Feast of Fools to his local advantage, the theologians were using the conflict in Troyes as an opportunity to sustain their own more generalized attack. Both, it could be argued, were early (and pugnacious) advocates of the reform of popular culture. It is time to subject the letter to a more critical examination.

The theologians begin their letter by ascribing pagan origins to the Feast of Fools. Their argument here proceeds in three stages. First, they fulminate against the “diabolical” and “idolatrous” character of classical Roman festivals in general. Second, they invoke the authoritative condemnation of such festivals by the New Testament writers and early church fathers, calling

Saints Paul and Augustine as witnesses. Third, they identify the Kalends of January in particular as the source of the Feast of Fools. Equating participation in the Kalends with idolatrous worship of the Roman god Janus, they claim that Christian priests and clerks who should be joyously celebrating the season of the Nativity are surrendering to pagan “uncleanness” (*immunditia*): “Imitating the most foul Janus, they mock and pollute the worship of God, mixing the frivolities of Janus with the divine office.” Still not satisfied, they insist that the Feast of Fools exceeds its pagan antecedents in sacrilegious impropriety. Even “fanatical [Roman] priests did not permit such frivolities in their temples and in the presence of their idols.” Such “wanton allurements . . . were not done in [sacred] temples, but by profane people in groves, fields, or the theaters of country houses.”¹

The first two stages of this argument, condemning the festivals of pagan Rome, would have been accepted without question by most late medieval Christians. The trouble lies in the third stage. The liturgical Feast of Fools owed nothing to classical Roman worship of Janus. Neither urban temples nor rural groves exercised any influence on Peter of Corbeil’s office of the Circumcision. Kalends masquerades almost certainly fed into popular medieval seasonal festivities, but the masquerades began, as far as we can tell, only after the Roman Empire had become officially Christian. Moreover, the heirs of the Kalends masquerades were not the clerical Feasts of Fools but the seasonal activities of *compagnies de jeunesse* and other festive societies. The several offices of the Circumcision, the liturgical plays composed for the feast, and the dignified rites of inversion celebrating the exaltation of the humble had been designed, at least in part, to draw both clergy and laity away from disorderly secular games. In the Council of Basel’s resolve to expel playfulness from the churches, this salutary purpose of the ancient offices had been largely forgotten.

The fifteenth-century Paris theologians were not thinking of Peter of Corbeil’s dignified office. They had heard rumors of more outrageous goings-on. Gathering these rumors into a single paragraph, the theologians produced what has become, in translation, the best-known short description of the Feast of Fools.² Their testimony should be challenged phrase by phrase.

“Priests and clerks,” they say, “may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office.” I have found no firm evidence of such behavior during the Feast of Fools before 1445. Balsamon alluded to clerical Kalends masqueraders entering Hagia Sophia during the feasts of Christmas

1. PL 207:1170–71.

2. PL 207:1171; translation from Chambers, 1:294.

and Epiphany in the middle of the twelfth century. In 1162 Gerhoh of Reichersberg complained of “devil masks” being used in Antichrist games; perhaps they also appeared in Herod games. The lions in the Beauvais *Play of Daniel* may also have worn masks, not to disrupt the divine office but to dramatize God’s deliverance of Daniel. Of these few possible uses of masks by late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century clerics, only the *Play of Daniel* was associated with the Feast of Fools.

In his letter to the archbishop of Gniezno, written in 1207, Innocent III inveighed against “masked shows” (*monstra larvarum*) in churches during the Christmas season. Three years later his complaint was repeated with reference to the Feast of Fools by Adam of Perseigne. After Innocent’s complaint had been included in the *Decretals* of Gregory IX in 1234, it was further recycled by the bishop of Regensburg in 1249, by the dean and chapter of Wells in 1331, by the bishop of Exeter in 1335, and by Gilles Vivien in Nîmes in 1395. Only in Regensburg is there any likelihood that masks were actually used. If so, they were worn in an attack on the property of a nearby abbey by “young clerks and scholars” of the city, rather than in any disruption of the divine office in the abbey or the cathedral.

Closer to the time of the theologian’s letter, the chapter of Chartres cathedral complained in 1366 that “certain canons . . . give themselves up inside the church to certain games that are called the Feast of Fools, on the occasion of which they [also] stage comedies and wear masks or women’s clothes or other unseemly costumes.”³ The division in the sentence, marked by the comma, is significant. If contemporary testimony from elsewhere in northern France is any guide, the canons were playing liturgical “games” inside the cathedral, and staging comedies, for which they wore “masks” and various “costumes,” outdoors. It is unlikely that the “comedies” took place “inside the church,” let alone at the hours of office.

Lay New Year revelers in Lille were ordered in 1398 not to wear masks in the streets. Regulations banning and then permitting such masks were passed in St.-Omer in 1418 and 1431. In 1421 the “bishop of fools” in St.-Omer was forbidden to enter churches, “escorted by his turbulent cortège, . . . during the celebration of the divine office.” Perhaps some of his followers wore masks. The Synod of Langres, in 1404, prohibited clerical participation in secular “charivari, in which they use masks in the shape of devils.” Only John Hus has left an unequivocal report of masks inside a church. In 1412 he recalled young scholars “putting on masks . . . in church” during the boy bishop festivities of his youth.

3. Clerval, *Ancienne*, 189–90.

In 1435 the Council of Basel declared that “masked games” could be found in churches during the feasts of Innocents and Fools. The council’s accusation was probably dependent on the *Decretals* of Gregory IX and recent scattered reports of lay (and possibly clerical) masqueraders. The Parisian theologians, in turn, drew on the authority of the Council of Basel. In truth, if some clerics were “wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office,” they were few and far between and have left little trace in the records.

The same may be said of the theologians’ claim that “priests and clerks . . . dance in the choir dressed as women, panders, and minstrels.” Kallends masqueraders were certainly in the habit of disguising themselves in women’s clothes. According to Balsamon, clerics who took part in such masquerades in twelfth-century Constantinople sometimes “paint[ed] their faces and mimic[ked] women.” The young clerks who played the wives of Balthasar and Potiphar in the Beauvais *Play of Daniel* and the Laon *Office of Joseph* may have worn women’s clothing, but this is by no means certain. The chapter in Chartres complained in 1366 of canons wearing women’s clothes in *comédies*, but the plays were likely staged outdoors. In 1411 the elderly dean of Auxerre, Pierre de Chissy, grumbled that some of the lower clergy had worn “shameful garments” and done “many shameful things” over the New Year, even “while the divine office was being celebrated” in the cathedral. Chissy’s testimony is inconclusive. He did not specify the nature of the “shameful garments.” Taking deep personal offense at remarks made by the “fools,” he may have exaggerated their crimes. Nevertheless, it is possible that some of the clerical fools in Auxerre dressed as women, panders, or minstrels. If they did so in Auxerre, they may have done so elsewhere. But this is speculative. I know of no solid evidence to justify the theologians’ charge of scandalous clerical disguise in French churches during the Christmas season, let alone during the liturgical Feast of Fools.

As for dancing, it is true that choral dances took place in several cathedrals, but most took place in the nave. Only the choirboys of Le Puy appear to have begun their dance in the choir. Of the dance that accompanied the “pope of fools” in Senlis, we know only that it was banned in 1403. There is no certainty that it took place inside the church. In any case, as far as we know, none of the participants in these dances were disguised, let alone as women, panders, or minstrels. The annual Christmas dance in the nave of Nîmes cathedral may have prompted the Council of Basel’s charge that some people “organize dances for men and women, attracting people to amusement and buffoonery.” But the consuls and canons of Nîmes mounted a vigorous defense against all charges of impropriety.

“Wanton songs” were certainly sung by lay masqueraders. Such songs may occasionally have trespassed around the edges of the liturgical Feast of

Fools. But nothing in the established offices of the feasts of Circumcision or Epiphany warrants such a label. Nor do I know of any account of the Feast of the Fools in which intruders “eat black puddings at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying mass,” “play dice there,” or “cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes.” Perhaps, like Foy de Saint-Hilaire 250 years later, the theologians had heard that “censing was done with black pudding and sausage” at the feast of the Innocents in twelfth-century Beauvais. As for the notion that members of the clergy “run and leap through the church, without a blush at their own shame,” this seems to be a generalized inference from the preceding charges rather than a specific fact derived from the records or personal observation.

“Finally,” the theologians complain, members of the clergy “drive about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts, and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gestures and verses scurrilous and unchaste.” In December 1444, the Sens chapter had ruled that people should not be led about the town on the day after Christmas “without trousers covering their private parts.” The chapter made no mention of carts. In November 1445, the archbishop of Sens went further, complaining of people “impudently leading unclothed men with their private parts uncovered about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts.” But his expansion of the chapter’s ruling followed by several months the publication of the theologians’ letter in March 1445. He was probably drawing on the authoritative language of the theologians’ letter to strengthen his own statute.

Like many public figures who engage in calumny, the theologians close their summary description of the Feast of Fools with a claim of integrity: “And likewise many other abominations, which are shameful to remember and which the mind recoils from reciting, have been done this year in many places, as we have learned by credible report.” In a single sentence, the theologians claim restraint (we could tell you many worse things), contemporaneity (all of which happened this year), concern over the widespread nature of the offenses (in many places), and credibility (according to our faithful sources). Significantly, though, they do not claim to be eyewitnesses: they rely on reports.

The theologians then attempt to rebut some of the weaker arguments in defense of the Feast of Fools.⁴ One such argument advocates the medieval equivalent of letting off steam: “Do not wineskins and barrels burst if their

4. *PL* 207:1171–73.

bungs are not loosened once in a while? Even so, we are old wineskins and worn barrels; the wine of wisdom fermenting within us, which we hold in tightly all year in the service of God, might flow out uselessly, if we did not discharge it ourselves now and then with games and foolishness.”⁵ While granting the propriety of occasional recreation, the theologians insist that the Feast of Fools is far from innocent and that such an argument is “against divine law, against natural order, against our inborn sense of shame, [and] against the holy places of the church.” Another argument invokes the tolerance of “our predecessors” for such festivities. The theologians declare this argument “diabolical” and counter it with a list of church authorities, extending from Saint Paul to “general councils” that have condemned such “abominations.” The theologians conveniently ignore more cogent arguments in favor of the feast, embedded not just in the Magnificat but in the entire liturgy of Christmas week.

Determined to uproot the Feast of Fools, the theologians close their letter by calling on all the prelates and chapters of France to act without delay to “remove this sacrilege from our midst.” They offer Moses as an example of the proper zeal in such circumstances: usually “the meekest of men,” he responded to the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai by ordering the slaughter of “three thousand idolaters.”⁶ The “evil crimes” of those involved in the Feast of Fools, the theologians insist, “are certainly not far from idolatry, if rightly considered.” The perpetrators of this “pestilential rite” should be severely punished, “with the assistance of the holy Inquisition and the help of the secular arm.”⁷ Fortunately, this chilling call for inquisitorial persecution went unheeded.

The theologians then append a number of “conclusions” to their letter,⁸ practical steps required of local prelates to hasten the “total destruction or abolition of the . . . damnable and pagan Feast of Fools.” These conclusions paint a more accurate picture of the Feast of Fools than the letter itself does. Turning to practical instruction, the theologians are forced to tone down their wild rhetoric and engage with the real behavior of offending clerics. Urging prelates to suppress the clerical use of masks, cross-dressing, and wanton songs during the divine office is a waste of ink if such things are not in fact happening. Better to focus on known offenses. In the dissonance between the exaggerated attacks of the letter and the more measured instructions of the

5. Translation from Davis, *Society*, 299 n. 21.

6. Num. 12:3, Exod. 32:28.

7. *PL* 207:1173.

8. *PL* 207:1173–76.

conclusions lies the evidence that, at some level, the theologians knew their now famous summary description of the Feast of Fools to be false.

The conclusions take aim at the election of bishops, archbishops, and popes of fools, at the misappropriation by such figures of the insignia of episcopal and papal authority, and at their usurpation of the priestly privilege of presiding over the divine office and blessing the people of God. The theologians' negative judgment may be questioned, but at least they are now basing their judgments on activities for which there is ample evidence. It is less certain that members of the clergy celebrated the divine office without wearing clerical vestments, led dances (*chorea*) in church during divine service, or allowed people to eat or drink around the altar while mass was being celebrated. But if these are fabrications, they are mild compared to the outrageous offenses evoked in the body of the letter.

Moreover, activities earlier supposed to have taken place inside the church have now been discreetly moved outdoors. Outside the church, the theologians insist, priests should not dress as laymen or fools, adopt masked or painted faces, or put on women's clothes. The theologians know that such behavior appears more shocking in the context of a cathedral liturgy than it does in a street masquerade. To provoke their readers' indignation, they earlier claimed that members of the clergy were wearing masks and dressing as women during worship. For practical purposes, they now urge local prelates to put a stop to priests' taking part in outdoor masquerades. The former is likely a fabrication, the latter a punishable fact.

The theologians also demand that priests not be allowed to take part in theatrical plays or other games involving impersonation. This, they say, is especially important if such events occur in a public place or in the presence of a large crowd. They probably had in mind the anti-episcopal *jeu de personnages* staged by clergy in the main square of Troyes in January 1445. Laymen, too, if they take part in such plays, should not dress as monks or other ecclesiastical figures in order to mock them.

The theologians' letter is not a reliable account of the Feast of Fools at all times and everywhere. It is not even an accurate description of the Feast of Fools in the cathedrals of northern France around 1445. Rather, it is a historically conditioned, highly prejudiced attack on the Feast of Fools, taking advantage of Leguise's particular troubles in Troyes to further a general campaign against the Feast of Fools. It repeatedly confuses sacred and secular space, claiming that activities known to have taken place outdoors also happened inside churches during the hours of office. Maybe they did, but the supporting evidence is sparse at best. For the most part, the letter is based on secondhand reports, willful exaggerations, and outright fabrications. Historians should treat it accordingly.

CHAPTER 20

A Durable Feast

The cumulative impact of Gerson's attacks, the Council of Basel, the Pragmatic Sanction, and the letter from the faculty of theology in Paris failed to halt the Feast of Fools with equal effect everywhere. Some chapters capitulated quickly: the Feast of Fools was expelled from Auxerre's cathedral in 1411, reappearing in the sixteenth century as a communal outdoor summer festivity. In Troyes, the cathedral church of Saint Peter removed all offensive material from its ordinal in April 1445, but the collegiate church of Saint Urban was still supporting the feast in 1468. Other chapters managed to extend their feast for a century or more. In the collegiate church of St.-Omer, the Feast of Fools may have lasted until 1516, and in Senlis cathedral until at least 1523. In Sens, the venerable office of the Circumcision was still being celebrated in 1539 and perhaps as late as 1614.

In the meantime, church councils at various levels continued to restrict the Feast of Fools.¹ One of the first to act on the theologians' letter was the provincial council of Rouen. As part of a long series of decrees issued on 15 December 1445, the council forbade "games that are commonly called 'of fools' to be done in churches or cemeteries, with masked faces or in any other shameful manner."² In 1485 the provincial council of Sens confirmed a

1. Thiers, *Traité*, 445–49; Chambers 1:300 n. 1.

2. Mansi, 32:28.

set of decisions first made in 1460. One of these prohibited the profanation of churches “with dances and theatrical games that are mocking and extravagant,” but permitted “anything done according to the customs of the church, in veneration of God and of the saints, at the Nativity and the Resurrection,” if done “with decency and peace.” With this qualification, the council reaffirmed the decree of the Council of Basel against the excesses of “the Feast of Fools or Innocents.”³ One senses in both cases a wish to distinguish the benign from the malignant.

Most subsequent council rulings were couched in general terms. Their language, largely drawn from prior documents, provides little or no information on local practices. The decree of the national council of Sens, meeting in Paris in 1528, is unusually specific: “We prohibit actors and mimes from entering a church, to the striking of drums, harps, or other musical instruments. . . . Moreover, we prohibit henceforth the Feast of Fools or Innocents; neither is a deanery of dishes to be set up [*neque erigatur decanatus patellae*].”⁴ Perhaps the “deanery of dishes” had to do with feasting.

Evidence from the churches themselves varies. Rather than try to document, in piecemeal fashion, all the cities from which even minimal records survive of a clerical Feast of Fools after 1445, I restrict myself in this chapter to five from which the published evidence is more extensive: Châlons-en-Champagne, Besançon, Beaune, Autun, and Reims.

Châlons, one of the first cathedrals to hold a Feast of Fools, was also one of the last. Records from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries bear witness to a dignified office of the Circumcision led by the church’s subdeacons, joyous outdoor processions, and a boy “bishop of fools.” By 1570, according to a chapter register quoted at length by Abel Hugo,⁵ the Feast of Fools had moved to the feast of Saint Stephen, and the canon in charge of the subdiaconal “fools,” previously known as the *magister baculi*, was called the “master of the fools” (*maîtrise des fous*).

Around two in the afternoon, a procession made its way to the master’s house, where it was joined by “the bishop of fools, mounted on an ass.” The bishop wore a cope, miter, pectoral cross, and gloves, and held a crozier. The ass was “decked out with a beautiful cloth and other magnificent trappings.” Then, “to the sound of all kinds of musical instruments and of bells,” the procession escorted the bishop to a platform (*théâtre*) in front of the great door of the cathedral. Dismounting, the bishop ascended the platform and sat

3. Ibid., 32:413–14.

4. Ibid., 32:1189–90.

5. Hugo, *France*, 2:226; see also Rigollot, 211–13.

down at table to eat and drink with his court. The register notes that “it was ordinarily the most qualified canons who made up the house of fools.”

During a second meal in the same place, later in the afternoon, “the chaplains, choristers, and lower clergy divided into three groups.” The first stayed near the platform “to serve as sentinels.” The second entered the church, where they sang “confused and nonsensical words, and made horrible grimaces and contortions.” The third “ran around the cloisters and the streets.” After the meal, all went inside the cathedral to conduct a hurried vespers. Then, as two choristers and the choirmaster kept time, the gathered choir sang a motet “to the honor, glory, and praise of Saint Stephen” and in loud and joyous celebration of “our feast.”

Afterward, amid a large crowd, they set off on a noisy cavalcade through the cathedral close and city streets, accompanied by “oboes, flutes, harps, flageolets, basses, drums, fifes, and other instruments,” and preceded by a group of children “carrying torches, censers, and lanterns.” Arriving at the marketplace, “they played tennis” (*jouaient à la paume*) and danced. Finally, some of the crowd “followed the canons” back to the cathedral close, while others gathered in front of the church, beating cauldrons and pots, made of copper and cast iron, with various utensils, howling, and “making a terrible charivari.” While this was going on, “all the bells were rung, and the clergy dressed in a grotesque and foolish manner.”

It is hard to know how seriously to take this account. Hugo claims to have found the register in the cathedral archives. His French translation may have distorted the Latin original. If both his source and his translation are reliable, the Feast of Fools in Châlons had undergone a considerable transformation over the centuries. Though still joyous, it had become a more rowdy and predominantly outdoor communal celebration. Hugo’s account thus serves as a warning against imposing late reports of the Feast of Fools onto early data. In this case, we know from detailed early accounts that the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Feast of Fools in Châlons was very different from its sixteenth-century counterpart. According to Hugo, the Feast of Fools in Châlons was finally suppressed in 1583.

Besançon’s combined feast of Innocents and Fools was also one of the earliest and most enduring. By the mid-thirteenth century, the city’s two cathedrals and two collegiate churches were between them electing a pope, archbishop, bishop, and cardinal of fools for the feast of the Innocents. In 1387 a papal legate ruled that the two cathedrals should take turns, celebrating the feast and its accompanying cavalcade in alternate years.⁶

6. See chapter 11. The ruling was reaffirmed by another papal appointee in 1471 (Gautier, “Fête,” 207).

The collegiate church of Saint Mary Magdalene also elected a “king” for the feast of Epiphany. Some days beforehand, according to “an ancient ordinal” belonging to the church,⁷ the canons elected one of their number “king, because he had to take the place of the King of kings.” On the day of the feast, he was seated “on a kind of throne” at the most prestigious point in the choir and given a palm as his scepter. From there he presided over the liturgy, beginning with first vespers. During mass, three canons, dressed respectively in white, red, and black dalmatics, processed from the sacristy and along one side of the “lower church” in imitation of the three Magi. Each wore a crown and carried a palm. Accompanied by pages bearing gifts, they followed a star, represented by “a kind of candelabrum” holding several lighted candles. Jean-Baptiste Bullet, who published a summary of the ordinal’s instructions in 1762, added that in some churches one of the Magi and his page “had their face and hands blackened.” This was still being done in a “procession of the three kings” held in the cathedral of Saint Stephen in 1629.⁸ The procession in Saint Mary Magdalene’s arrived in the choir just as the recitation of the gospel reached the moment when the biblical Magi entered the stable to worship the infant Christ. Continuing to the altar, the three costumed Magi prostrated themselves and presented their gifts to the king. Afterward they returned to the sacristy along the other side of the nave. As the feast of Epiphany drew to a close, the king treated his fellow canons to “a magnificent *collation*,” during which he was treated as “the king of the company.”⁹

The fifteenth century brought pressure on Besançon’s seasonal festivities. In November 1425 the cathedral chapter required all canons, chaplains, and other beneficed clergy present in the city to take part in the cavalcade of the “Feast of Fools” (*festum stultorum*). Fines imposed on unexcused absentees helped pay for a meal enjoyed by those who did join in.¹⁰ Perhaps the growing reluctance of some clergy to participate was due to the “prejudice of the University of Paris,”¹¹ but there was also a rival attraction. From about 1365 through 1469, the city sponsored a secular Festival of the Emperor. Originally held on 1 January, this was moved by at least 1435 to 6 January. The festival involved the election, cavalcade, and supper of an honorary *empereur*.¹²

7. Bullet, “Festin,” 40.

8. Young, “Procession,” 81.

9. Bullet, “Festin,” 40–41. For similar “processions of the three kings” at both cathedrals, see Castan, “Origines”; Young, “Procession.”

10. Gauthier, “Fête,” 191, 201–2.

11. *Ibid.*, 193.

12. Castan, “Origines,” 292–96, 302–10.

On 11 January 1462 the archbishop of Besançon, Quentin Ménard, sided with canons from Saint Mary Magdalene's who had protested the "scandals and excessive expenses" of the Feast of Fools. He abolished the church's feast and cavalcade, but affirmed its Epiphany play on the grounds that it moved "clergy and people to devotion."¹³ On another occasion Ménard forbade his clergy to take part in street masquerades: "There are some who, in dances and other abominations, play the parts of fools, ribalds, wantons, giants [*gamagagorum*], devils, [and] prostitutes. Adopting the corresponding clothes and masks and the most horrible, fetid, and filthy speaking parts," they show themselves to the populace, rejoicing in the praise they receive for playing their roles well. Such "detestable" activity," he concluded, is incompatible "with the decorous and decent life of a clergyman."¹⁴

The cathedral cavalcade survived Ménard's reforms. For a while it was customary for the abbot of the monastery of Saint Vincent to present the visiting pope of fools with a tournament lance. One of the mounted followers of the pope would then charge the closed abbey doors, shattering the lance on contact, to general applause. In 1490 the abbot offered the pope a tree trunk. To the embarrassment of the pope's party and the amusement of other onlookers, neither the pope nor his knights were able to lift the giant weapon.¹⁵ In 1521 the cavalcade was followed by a mystery play based on the life of Saint Stephen.¹⁶

The cavalcade ran into trouble on 28 December 1539. In that year the monks of Besançon's Hospital of the Holy Spirit defied the long-standing monopoly of the cathedrals and elected their own "pope, cardinal, and bishop" of fools. Escorting their three dignitaries through the town in an oxcart, the hospital's monks and domestic servants met the cathedral's more orderly cavalcade at a bridge over the river Doubs. Swearing "By the death of God, we will pass," the monks demanded that the cathedral clergy stand aside. The clergy refused. The monks hurled threats and insults and finally charged their rivals. Fisticuffs ensued. To avoid further scandal and possible fatalities, the clergy withdrew. Two days later the cathedral chapter sent a formal complaint to the rector of the hospital. The rector apologized profusely, claiming to have given his monks permission only to "enjoy

13. Gauthier, "Fête," 203–5.

14. Ibid., 206–7; for a French translation, see Rittaud-Hutinet, *Trétaux*, 17. I have translated *gamagagorum* as "giants," following John Dillon's suggestion (personal communication, 7 May 2009) that *gamagagorum* is a Latin "form of Gogmagog." Cf. Layamon, *Brut*, 48–53 (lines 905–65), who spells it "Geomagog."

15. Gauthier, "Fête," 190.

16. Ibid., 191.

themselves in the city without displeasing anyone.” He promised to punish those involved and to ensure that no such elections took place in the future. Recriminations flew back and forth. The chapter brought a lawsuit against the hospital. On 22 December 1540 a delegation of four monks appeared before the cathedral chapter to apologize on behalf of their brethren. They formally recognized the sole right of the cathedral chapter to elect “a pope or a bishop” at the feast of the Innocents. Only then did the cathedral chapter withdraw its suit and pronounce its forgiveness.¹⁷

In his history of Besançon, published in 1750, F. I. Dunod de Charnage greatly exaggerated this isolated incident, implying that it was a regular occurrence involving cavalcades from all four churches: “When the cavalcades of the different churches met, they shouted abuse at one another [*elles se chantoient poiïlle*], and sometimes came to blows. . . . The Feast of Fools was finally suppressed, with the consent of all the city’s churches, in 1518, on the occasion of a bloody battle on one of the bridges between two of the cavalcades.”¹⁸ Dunod’s falsehood, repeated almost verbatim by Rigollot and Chambers,¹⁹ passed into the generalized mythology of the Feast of Fools.

In fact, far from suppressing the feast of the Innocents’ cavalcade, the cathedral chapter temporarily expanded it. On 31 December 1557, in the interests of avoiding “scandals” generated by rivalry among the city’s churches, the chapter agreed to include in the cavalcade not only a pope from Saint Stephen’s, an archbishop from Saint John’s, a cardinal from Saint Paul’s, and a bishop from Saint Mary Magdalene’s, but also an abbot from the monastery of Saint Vincent.²⁰ In 1585, bowing to the reforming pressure of the times, the chapter abolished “all customary ceremonies of the Innocents,” whether in the cathedrals or in the city, with the telling exception of “all ceremonies, offices, and festivities in both churches ordinarily conducted by the reverend lords and other officers of the same churches.” Once again this was an attempt to restrict extraneous abuses without surrendering the liturgical office itself. The chapter issued a similar decree in 1587. According to Jules Gauthier, the last vestiges of the Feast of Fools at Saint Mary Magdalene’s were not suppressed until 1718.²¹

The collegiate church of Notre-Dame in Beaune also had an Epiphany play, involving the annual election of a canon to play the role of Herod. The

17. Ibid., 192–93, 206–14.

18. Dunod, *Histoire*, 228–29.

19. Rigollot, 47–49; Chambers, 1:312.

20. Gauthier, “Fête,” 194. Between 1544 and 1566, Besançon’s youth elected an “abbot of fools,” whose masquerade and meal, on the Sunday following Epiphany, was supported by public funds.

21. Gauthier, “Fête,” 195, 214–16.

earliest records, dating to 1432, make it clear that canons were chosen “in rotation according to the principle of seniority.”²² The elected canon was expected to provide a festive meal and to play the part of King Herod in the play (*misterium*) of the Three Kings. Under some circumstances he was allowed, on payment of a fine, to be replaced by a substitute. No text of the play has survived.

The annual election continued, apparently without opposition, through the first decade of the sixteenth century. In 1468 the chapter reiterated that even the dean had to take his turn as Herod. In 1473 and 1479 elected canons paid to be released from their responsibilities. The names of the chosen canons are known for most of the years between 1481 and 1510.²³ But after the election in early December 1512, “the chapter received orders from the bishop of Autun to suppress the Feast of Fools on Innocents’ Day as well as the playing of King Herod at Epiphany.” The chapter delayed its response until its absent dean had returned, but on 5 January 1513 agreed “not to play the accustomed role or office [*personagium nec officium*] of King Herod on the next day.” In December 1513, on its own accord, the chapter canceled its Feast of Fools, bishop of innocents, and King Herod “because of war.”²⁴ The Swiss had invaded Burgundy.²⁵

On 24 December 1515 a second episcopal order to suppress the *festum folorum* and the *personagium* of Herod was delivered to Beaune. This time the chapter resisted, insisting that it was not acting in defiance of the Pragmatic Sanction, because it intended to have the bishop of innocents perform his office “without miter or *baculus* and without scandalous behavior in the church.” Likewise, at Epiphany, Herod would play his part without “mockeries and cries in the choir.” In 1517 the chapter protested that “in celebrating the vigil and feast of Epiphany as well as the *misterium et representacione* of the Three Magi,” it intended no disrespect to the bishop. On the contrary, these things were done “in honor of God and for the devotion of the people.”²⁶ At the same time, the chapter offered a compromise: if the bishop would revoke his order, the chapter would drop its appeal in the civil courts of Lyon and the Parlement of Dijon. The bishop refused.

On 29 December 1518 the chapter decided that the *misterium* of the kings would be performed in the church at Epiphany “in the accustomed

22. Ashley, “Politics,” 155.

23. *Ibid.*, 160 nn. 20–21.

24. *Ibid.*, 161.

25. Knecht, *Rise*, 65.

26. Ashley, “Politics,” 161–62.

manner.” A cavalcade of the bishop of innocents was also authorized. In 1519 the threat of plague caused the cancellation of the Herod play, the meal, and the feast of the Innocents. On 5 December 1520 a bishop of innocents was chosen, with authorization to use chapter funds and to stage the cavalcade “honestly and seriously, for the glory of God and the Innocents.” Two days later a canon called Claude Margueron was chosen for the role of King Herod. The feast of the Epiphany was celebrated “magnificently.” In 1521 the feast of the Innocents and the *misterium* of the kings were again canceled because of the plague. In 1522 the chapter decided to perform its play “with solemnity.” The elected canon being absent, Margueron offered to reprise the role of Herod. Individual canons paid twenty sols apiece toward the cost of the banquet, while the chapter provided bread and wine. The records mention the elaborate staging of the *misterium*, the cavalcade, and unspecified “maskings and other disguises.”²⁷

Although the annual elections of the bishop of innocents and King Herod continued, the play was not performed for another sixteen years. In the meantime, those chosen for the office of Herod were responsible only for the festive meal. In 1537 the dean of Beaune, Louis Martin, was selected. In 1538 he was chosen again in his distinct status as a canon.²⁸ In that year the chapter again authorized the canons and choirboys to play the *misterium* in the church according to ancient custom, “but without insolence.” The cost of production, rather than any organized opposition, seems to have been the cause of its temporary demise. The records show that Pierre Landroul, a canon last elected to the office of King Herod in 1523, when the long interruption of the play’s run had begun, personally underwrote the cost of the play in 1538. After a lapse of sixteen years, “the *misterium* was staged to the very great happiness of all the people and there was a great crowd of people in the church.”²⁹ Sadly, this may have been the last performance of the Herod play in Beaune. Canons were elected to the role for another nine years, but there is no further mention of the *misterium*. “The year 1547 appears to be the last in which a King Herod was chosen.”³⁰

The Feast of Fools in Autun included at different periods both a good-humored procession of the ass and a Herod play. The former, which may have begun as early as the thirteenth century, was suppressed by the cathedral

27. Ibid., 162–63.

28. Ibid., 157.

29. Ibid., 163.

30. Ibid., 164. Beaune’s feast of the Innocents survived until at least 1553 (Cyrot, “Manuscrit,” 70, 72–73).

chapter in 1411.³¹ The following year, the chapter extended its ban to include the entire Feast of Fools.³²

Seventy years later, however, on 24 December 1484, “at the request of the fools [*stultorum*],” the chapter gave permission to hold “the Feast of Fools [*festum folorum*] this year.” The existence of an organized group of “fools” suggests that some elements of the feast had survived, although the procession of the ass does not seem to have been among them. On 31 December the chapter clarified its permission: the Feast of Fools should be conducted “with solemnity” as “described in the book of the feast.” In the interests of even “greater solemnity,” it was agreed that every canon or chorister who was present for the whole office would be paid a supplementary allowance. It is clear that the chapter had in mind a dignified revival of the liturgical Feast of Fools. Afterward, however, there was the possibility of fun: anyone who failed to attend “matins and other hours” would be “doused in the fountain” (*comburetur in fonte*).³³

In January 1498 the revival ran into trouble. After matins on the day of the Circumcision, “some men in masks and others in irregular dress” performed a variety of dances (*choreas, tripudia & saltus*) inside the cathedral. Clerics and their domestic servants who had not been present at matins were seized from their homes and carried to the fountain in the cathedral square, where they faced the choice of being dunked or buying their freedom. The kidnappers appear to have been a mix of lay masqueraders and disguised clerics. The following day a strongly worded chapter ruling, condemning both the disturbance of the liturgy and the violence done to members of the clergy, banned all manner of dances and the imposition of ransom payments (*vadiationes*). The ruling specifically warned “chaplains, canons, and other clerics, and even their servants” not to join in the extortion of ransom money.³⁴

On 6 November 1499, at their dean’s insistence and under the pressure of letters from the king, the Autun chapter took even more decisive action against the Feast of Fools. Invoking the Council of Basel’s ban on “masks and theatrical plays and dances” in churches, the chapter decreed that in future there should be no “King Herod, bishop of innocents, or Feast of Fools” in Autun cathedral. Autun’s Herod play, for which no script survives, was perhaps modeled on that in nearby Beaune. A “dean of innocents” survived

31. See chapter 12.

32. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 628; Grivot, *Histoire*, 22.

33. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 628. Chambers, 1:312, translates the penalty literally (“burning at the well”) but Gagnare, 466, takes it figuratively (“seroient plongés dans la fontaine”); Grivot, *Histoire*, 22, follows Gagnare.

34. Gagnare, *Histoire*, 467, 629.

the ban, leading worship on the feasts of Saint Stephen, Saint John, the Innocents, and the Circumcision. Mass on the day of the Innocents was still known as “the mass of the fools.” Old habits soon resurfaced. In 1514 the chapter elected a priest to play the role of Herod. It did so again in 1515. In 1518 the choirboys asked permission to elect a bishop of innocents. The chaplains wanted to choose a dean of innocents and to reintroduce the Herod play. The chapter forwarded the requests to the officers of the king in Dijon, but was turned down.

In 1535 the chapter renewed its ban on the “bishop and dean of innocents or boys, which by some is called the Feast of Fools.” Though not mentioning the Herod play by name, the ban again included “masks and theatrical plays and dances.” It also condemned the familiar practice, now known as *gaigizons* (pledges), of extorting money from people under the threat of dunking those who refused to pay.³⁵ This time the ban on activities inside the cathedral appears to have stuck.

Outdoor festivities continued. On 3 January 1566, prompted by recent “scandals,” the chapter ordered “all canons and chaplains not to run around and make trouble all night [*discourir et ribler la nuit*], take part in masquerades [*faire masques*], [and] sound tambourines about the town and in their houses, at late hours, not even on the days of Carnival.”³⁶ The date of the decree suggests a response to New Year masquerades. The mention of Carnival testifies to the chapter’s awareness of an ongoing rapprochement of the Christmas and Carnival masking seasons. In the same year, a priest in Autun was punished for “running about the town in a mask” on Ash Wednesday.³⁷

Christmas week festivities at Reims cathedral also ran into trouble when they found themselves linked to Carnival. Louis Paris provides a summary description of the usual form of the feasts of Innocents and Fools in Reims in the fifteenth century. The choirboys chose by lot an “archbishop,” whose first task was to secure the chapter’s permission to observe the feast. The boys then selected other officers from their own ranks and, as their “host” (*maître d’hôtel*), “one of the richest and most well-disposed of the canons. . . . From the eve of the feast to the end of the feast day itself, the archbishop of innocents was absolute master of the choir and clergy. Canons and chaplains could appear only in the uniform of the innocents or at least deprived of their canonical habit. Those who wanted to share in the pleasures of the feast had to contribute to the expenses. After a copious meal, the feast ended with

35. Ibid., 467–69, 630. *Gaigizons* appears to be derived from *gager* (to pledge, to pay).

36. Abord, *Histoire*, 1:267–68.

37. Ibid., 1:268.

a noisy cavalcade which lasted all night, and was sometimes the occasion of troubles and accidents. The chapter records of Notre-Dame teach us that frequent disorders were committed which had to be curbed.”³⁸

Tilliot dates the first suggestion of disorder in Reims to 1479. In that year, he writes, “the [arch]bishop of fools, the choirmaster, and the choirboys” were given permission to hold their feast. The chapter agreed to bear the expenses, as long as the ceremonies were conducted “without any farces, without the noise of instruments, and without a cavalcade.” Invoking the Pragmatic Sanction, the cathedral’s archdeacon also insisted that the children not bear the episcopal miter, cross, or other ornaments.³⁹

A major disturbance occurred in 1490.⁴⁰ According to Paris, the feast of Innocents took place that year without a cavalcade. The trouble started the next day when, on a scaffold in front of the church, “the deacons, subdeacons, and choirboys staged . . . a farce or *sottie* for the entertainment of the people.” As part of the show, the clerical actors made fun of the newfangled “hoods [*chaperons*] . . . that some bourgeois women of Reims were wearing, saying that the women had attempted to ape [*singer*] the fashion of the ladies of Paris. . . . Two characters in women’s clothes, each holding a book,” read verses mocking the fashionable vanity of the women of Reims. Here, at last, we have a documented case of clerks cross-dressing, but they did so to act female parts in an outdoor play and not, as the Paris theologians had imagined of earlier clerical “fools,” to “dance in the choir.”

It was not the cross-dressing but the content of the play that outraged the husbands of the offended women. Coming to their defense, the city’s law clerks (*messieurs de la Bazoche*) made plans to retaliate by staging a *sottie* at the close of Carnival that would satirize the clergy of Reims. The archbishop promptly banned all performance and publication of farces. The prior (*commandeur*) of the city’s convent of the Hospitallers of Saint John, in whose courtyard the law clerks were accustomed to perform, pointed out that his

38. Paris, *Théâtre*, 29; Rigollot, 50, provides a similar summary. Anquetil, *Histoire*, which Rigollot cites with no page reference, may be their common source. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Anquetil’s work.

39. Tilliot, 16–17. Clerical involvement in farces and other stage plays appears to have been a recurrent problem in Reims. As early as 1373, the chapter had forbidden the loan of church ornaments for use, at any time of the year, in “comedies and theatrical plays, even if the plays were holy” (Paris, *Théâtre*, 16).

40. Paris, *Théâtre*, 29–31; Paris, *Remensiana*, 31–37. Paris relies in part on the *Mémoires* of Jean Foulquart, of which only various hand-copied extracts survive, the original MS having been lost in the eighteenth century (Runnalls, *Mystères*, 265–71). Bartholomé, “Mémoires,” published some of these extracts, but not those referring to the disturbances of 1490. For Bartholomé’s authorship, see Runnalls, *Mystères*, 266 n. 3.

order was not subject to an archiepiscopal ban.⁴¹ On the first Sunday in Lent, popularly known as the *dimanche des brandons* (Sunday of the Torches), the law clerks performed “their farces and comedies in the courtyard of the Temple,” as the hospitallers’ property in Reims—inherited from the Templars—was still known. Emboldened by their mockery of the clergy, the actors set off for the cathedral. At around six in the evening, armed, and accompanied by as many as 120 followers, they poured into the cloisters, looking for canons whom they might mock and provoke to a quarrel. The next day the crowd returned, “leading a man disguised as a fat, unraveled [*deschevetrée*] woman,⁴² and shouting, ‘Why don’t today’s priests pay land taxes [*tailles*]?’” Soon afterward, in a series of chapter meetings, those involved in the disorders were excommunicated.

This late Carnival rampage can hardly be blamed on the Feast of Fools; but the clerical *sottie* that provoked it might arguably be blamed on the long and vehement campaign against the Feast of Fools during the first half of the fifteenth century. In many cities this campaign succeeded in curtailing the clerical Feast of Fools and expelling its more theatrical elements from the churches. An unintended result was to strengthen the seasonal street festivities that the clerical Feast of Fools had originally been designed to counteract. No longer distracted by an all-consuming liturgical obligation, clerics were free to take part in secular farces or, as in Reims, to stage their own. One can make the case that, like many misguided efforts at cultural reform, the theologians’ attacks on the Feast of Fools backfired.

41. For the Reims *commanderie* of the Hospitallers of Saint John, later known as the Knights of Malta, see Mannier, *Ordre*, 271–94.

42. *Déchevêtrer* ordinarily means “to unhalter” an animal, but can also be synonymous with *débrouiller* and *démêler* = “to unravel” (Robert, *Dictionnaire*, s.v. *déchevêtrer*).

CHAPTER 21

Festive Societies

The suppression of the clerical Feast of Fools cleared the way, according to Chambers, for “a second tradition of Feasts of Fools, in which the *fous* [were] no longer vicars but *bourgeois*, and the *dominicus festi* [was] a popular ‘king’ or ‘prince’ rather than a clerical ‘bishop.’”¹ We have already seen evidence of this “second tradition” in the late-fourteenth-century youth groups of Vienne, Troyes, Lille, and Amiens, in the anticlerical *sottie* staged by the law clerks of Reims in 1490, and in the *jeux* played by the young men of Noyon at Laon’s *feste des bourgeois* in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Even as the clerical Feast of Fools was struggling to survive, lay festive societies multiplied, dominating much of urban festive life in northern France between about 1450 and 1560. Louis Petit de Julleville, too, believed that the *bourgeois* fools were “the former celebrants of the Feast of Fools, thrown out of the church by shocked councils and reassembled in the public square. . . . The [lay] confraternity of fools,” he concluded, was “the Feast of Fools secularized.”²

But several facts argue against so simple a view of continuity between the clerical Feast of Fools and the entertainments of lay festive societies. First, as we saw in part one, groups of lay maskers had been active at the New Year

1. Chambers, 1:373.

2. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 144.

long before the start of the clerical Feast of Fools in the mid-twelfth century and a full millennium before its suppression. At what point the last Kalends masqueraders were incorporated into organized festive societies of young men is unclear, but such youth groups were active at the very least by 1380. This was a good twenty years before Gerson launched his initial attack on the Feast of Fools in 1400 and more than half a century before the Council of Basel officially expelled the Feast of Fools from the churches in 1435. The actual expulsion, which proceeded at varying paces in different cities, may have accelerated the growth of lay festive societies, but it did not initiate it.

Natalie Zemon Davis has argued for an even earlier beginning for the festive societies, proposing that they “existed in some form in French cities from the thirteenth century on.”³ If we allow for considerable blurring between late Kalends masqueraders and early festive societies, this may be true. But I am not convinced by her assertion that identifiable festive societies were in place as early as 1220. For supporting evidence, she points only to Lille’s King of the Small Thorn (Roi de l’Épinette),⁴ named after a fragment of the Crown of Thorns kept in an ornate reliquary in the town’s Dominican convent. Also known as Sir Joy (Sire Joie), the “king” was the leader of a company of seventy well-to-do bourgeois who, between at least 1328 and 1487, organized a series of jousts each year during Carnival and Lent.⁵ The evidence for the society’s early origin is a set of memorial books believed to date back to 1220.⁶ By the early fourteenth century, the company aspired to imitate the dignity and pomp of the nobility without “getting mixed up with the theater or with comedy.”⁷ In this regard it was unlike most other festive societies, for which staging plays was an activity second only to feasting. Moreover, since its activities were focused on the beginning of Lent rather than on the Christmas season, its existence touches only tangentially on the question of whether festive societies were historically “contemporaneous with the cathedral fête.”⁸

My own impression is that Belet’s first mention of the *festum stultorum* around 1160 predates the earliest unequivocal record of a lay festive society

3. Davis, *Society*, 102.

4. *Ibid.*, 299 n. 20.

5. Clément-Hémery, *Histoire*, 23–47; Derode, *Histoire*, 1:383–404; Outreman, *Histoire*, 391. Davis, *Society*, 299 n. 20, cites Van Gennep, *Manuel*, 1:923, and Sadron, “Associations,” 227, both of which depend on Clément-Hémery.

6. Clément-Hémery, *Histoire*, 26–27.

7. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 242. Derode, *Histoire*, 1:386, suggests that the company performed a *mystère* on the Saturday before Carnival.

8. Davis, *Society*, 102.

engaged in Christmas season theatricals by about two hundred years.⁹ But the Kalends masquerades had been around for a further eight hundred years. Davis is therefore right in assuming that in many cities one or another of these lay activities would frequently have been a rival attraction to, rather than a later secular adaptation of, the liturgical feast.

A second objection to the hypothesis of continuity between clerical and lay feasts at the New Year lies in the marked difference between the activities of the lay societies and those of the clerical “fools.” Both groups, it is true, frequently met to eat and drink, but the primary focus of the clerical fools for nearly two hundred years was on participation in the liturgy of the church. Choirboys and clerks may have imitated their superiors, but they did so largely in the context of sacred worship, in celebration of the birth of the Christ Child as a paradigm of God’s commitment to “put down the mighty from their seat and raise up the humble,” and in hopeful preparation for their own later roles as cantors, bishops, cardinals, and (maybe) popes. Members of lay festive societies, on the whole, remained outside the churches when geared up for foolery and were generally careful not to interfere with the divine office. While the farces and other entertainments staged by lay societies sometimes mocked corrupt or decadent clergy, they also mocked unfaithful wives, deluded husbands, quack doctors, incompetent civic officials, and foolish kings. By the mid-fifteenth century, some clerics, too, were staging *sotties* and other farces, but this was more by way of imitation of the lay societies than as an extension of the liturgical Feast of Fools.¹⁰

Davis adds two other significant measures of difference. First, “the imagery of the lay organizations was usually monastic rather than episcopal as in the Feast of Fools.” Sometimes it was royal. If the lay festive societies had been little more than secularized versions of the clerical feast, one would expect their leaders to have been called bishops rather than abbots, kings, or princes. Second, “the lay societies had mock jurisdiction over marriages and domestic affairs, for which there is no precedent in the Feast of Fools.”¹¹ Charivaris, those raucous (and sometimes violent) mockeries of neighbors who transgressed the social norms of marriage, were commonly organized by lay youth groups. This is hardly surprising: eligible bachelors had the most to

9. Rossiaud, “Fraternités,” 101: “In the southeast of France, the first reports of urban [youth] abbeys date from the end of the fourteenth or from the beginning of the fifteenth century, only becoming frequent after 1450.” These dates seem to me to apply to festive societies in general throughout France.

10. Paris, *Théâtre*, 29, quotes contemporary records to the effect that the clerical farce in Reims in 1490 was done “in imitation of the law clerks” (*à l’instar de Messieurs de la Bazoche*).

11. Davis, *Society*, 102.

lose when a widower or outsider married one of the available young women of the town.

Even more significant, perhaps, are the distinct connotations of “fool” in clerical and secular feasts. I argued in chapter 6 that the lower clergy based their identity as seasonal fools on Saint Paul’s argument that God favors the “foolish” precisely because of their lack of worldly status. Traces of this idea survived in the court fool, whose outsider status freed him to comment on the moral folly of those around him. When the bourgeois members of festive societies identified themselves as fools, they were laying temporary claim to a similar kind of freedom. But they did so in order to satirize those of their fellow citizens who, having surrendered to vice or passion, had denied the authority of God or reason and so become worldly “fools” who “despise wisdom and instruction.” Unlike liturgical fools, who rejoiced in the divine inversion of the Deposuit, secular fools enforced the status quo of bourgeois morality by aggressively mocking fools who broke the rules.

Finally, to the best of my knowledge, the activities of lay festive societies were never referred to in contemporary records as a Feast of Fools. This name appears to have been reserved for the clerical feast. Chambers was therefore misappropriating the term when he spoke of the lay festive societies as constituting “a second tradition of Feasts of Fools.” So was Victor Hugo, in the opening chapters of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, when he described the rowdy theatricals and underworld parades of lay Parisians on “6 January 1482” as a “combined celebration . . . of the day of the kings and the Feast of Fools.” They were nothing of the sort. They were not even an accurate portrayal of lay festivities. Despite the carefully applied veneer of historicity, the fictional revels were almost wholly a figment of Hugo’s imagination.¹²

Much confusion has been wrought by the failure to observe this distinction between the clerical Feast of Fools and the amusements of lay “fools.” Not only has it led to a fundamental muddling of categories, but it has also allowed some historians to assume that early clerical Feasts of Fools engaged in the same tumultuous activities as Hugo’s Parisians. Adolphe Fabre, for

12. On the second page of his novel, Hugo appears to claim that the late-fifteenth-century chronicler Jean de Troyes (also known as Jean de Royes) identified these events as a Feast of Fools: “Le 6 janvier, ce qui mettait en émotion tout le populaire de Paris, comme dit Jean de Troyes, c’était le double solennité, réunie depuis un temps immémorial, du jour des rois et de la fête des fous.” In fact, Troyes makes no mention of the day of the kings or the Feast of Fools. He records (*Histoire*, 278) only the performance, on 4 January 1482 (1483), of “a very beautiful morality play, *sottie*, and farce, which many people of the town went to see” in the private residence of the cardinal, Charles I of Bourbon. It was the idea of a popular audience, not the fifteenth-century name of the feast, that Hugo borrowed from Jean de Troyes. Moreover, the entertainment in the cardinal’s *hôtel* would have borne very little resemblance to the disorderly public events imagined by Hugo.

example, in the midst of a long, error-strewn attack on the Feast of Fools, blithely assumes that the “farsed” epistles and chants of thirteenth-century offices of the Circumcision belonged to the same genre as the farces staged by fifteenth-century festive societies.¹³ More famously, the theologian Harvey Cox enthusiastically described the Feast of Fools as an occasion when “even ordinarily pious priests and serious townsfolk donned bawdy masks, sang outrageous ditties, and generally kept the whole world awake with revelry and satire. Minor clerics painted their faces, strutted about in the robes of their superiors, and mocked the stately rituals of church and court.”¹⁴ Widely read, Hugo and Cox have done much to shape popular misconceptions of the Feast of Fools.

The development of festive societies was in fact part of a broader explosion of amateur dramatic activity, beginning in the late fourteenth century and reaching its heyday between 1450 and 1560. “The conclusion of the Hundred Years’ War, the subsiding of the plague, and an invigorated monarchy all contributed to a cultural flowering after 1450, a phenomenon that lasted over a century until the onset of the Wars of Religion.”¹⁵ The luxuriant growth of secular theater was one element of this flowering. “Historical” plays, based on biblical history (for example, *Le Mystère de la Passion*), profane history (*La Destruction de Troye*), or saints’ lives (*La Vie de Saint Martin*), were staged with considerable commercial success by companies of as many as several hundred amateur actors brought together under civic sponsorship. Their performance often stretched over several days and, in some cases, weeks.¹⁶

Most established festive societies performed shorter, “fictional” plays, such as moralities, farces, and *sotties*. Morality plays were set in a world ruled by God or, at least, by reason: allegorical characters faced clear choices between good and evil, leading to meaningful and possibly eternal consequences. Farces were set in a world ruled by folly: characters deceived one another in pursuit of their own worldly ends, usually sexual or financial, and whatever temporary resolution brought the play to a close was a matter not of justice but of relative success or failure.¹⁷ *Sotties* were a subgroup of farce in which the actors dressed in parti-colored—usually green and yellow—fools’ costumes. They carried marottes and wore hoods topped with ass’s

13. Fabre, *Clercs*, 221–25. Hidé, “Notice,” 115–16, makes similar misguided assumptions about the Feast of Fools in Laon “around the year 1280.”

14. Cox, *Feast*, 3.

15. Beam, *Laughing*, 18.

16. Petit de Julleville, *Mystères*; Frank, *Medieval*, 125–210; Tydeman, 281–328. For the division of late medieval drama into “historical” and “fictional genres,” see Knight, *Aspects*, 17–38, 91.

17. For the distinction between morality and farce, see Knight, *Aspects*, 41–67.

ears, accoutrements now indelibly associated with the uniform of a secular fool. Rather than illustrate malign human foolishness in the manner of a farce, *sotties* were “peopled with wise or benign fools, clowns, and acrobats,” whose function was “to reveal, ridicule, and censure the folly around them.”¹⁸ Like many of the festive societies that performed such plays, the fools in a *sottie* were often led by a “prince, mother, captain, or general” of fools.¹⁹

Festive societies whose mission included the performance of these shorter, mostly comic plays went by a variety of generic names. Youth groups, made up of young unmarried men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-six,²⁰ described themselves as “compagnies de jeunesse,” or, if they modeled their organizational structure on monastic rather than secular institutions, “ab-bayes de jeunesse.” Others were drawn from groups of young men with a shared profession. Professional organizations of law clerks attached to the Parlement of Paris and to similar courts elsewhere in France were known as *basoches*. Many *basochiens* devoted themselves in their spare time to farces and *sotties*.²¹

Other groups were open to both adult and young men of various professions. Petit de Julleville coined the term “sociétés joyeuses,” aptly translated by Sara Beam as “festive societies,” to describe these broader male fellowships.²² Among the best known are the Infanterie Dijonnaise, usually identified by the name of its leader, the Mère Folle, of Dijon; the Connards or Cornards (Long-Eared Fools) of Rouen; and the Mauvaises Braies (Bad Breeches) of Laon. Incorporating youth groups into these bourgeois *sociétés joyeuses* generally meant the socialization of the young men into more orderly festivities.²³ Following Beam’s example, I have used the term “festive societies” both as a translation of Petit de Julleville’s “sociétés joyeuses” and as a general designation for any lay social group of the period that was organized around feasting and farces.

A number of other male fellowships described themselves as confraternities. Some of these had a genuinely religious purpose; others were modeled

18. Ibid., 80. For more on farces in general, see Beam, *Laughing*, and on *sotties* in particular, Arden, *Fools*.

19. Frank, *Medieval*, 244.

20. Rossiaud, “Fraternités,” 68–69.

21. Fabre, *Clercs*; Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 89–191; Harvey, *Theatre*; Bouhaïk-Gironès, *Clercs*; Tydeman, 332–34. Harvey, *Theatre*, 24–27, argues that the Paris Basoche also gave rise to the Enfants-sans-Souci (Carefree Kids), whose members devoted themselves exclusively to the performance of *sotties*. Bouhaïk-Gironès, *Clercs*, 131–35, contends that the Enfants-sans-Souci are nothing more than the product of a “literary myth.”

22. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 192–261; Beam, *Laughing*, 22 n. 31.

23. Rossiaud, “Fraternités,” 71–72, 83–89.

on the structure of religious confraternities but were devoted to foolery. Yet others, often calling themselves “puy,” organized literary or theatrical competitions. In the Low Countries, such competitive societies were generally known as “chambers of rhetoric” (*rederijkerskamers*). Although festive societies might meet and perform at various times of year, they tended to be most active during the calendar festivals of Christmas, the New Year, Carnival, May Day, Corpus Christi, and local patronal saints’ days.

A complete study of such festive societies would require a lengthy book of its own. Moreover, since their activities do not in fact constitute “a second tradition of Feasts of Fools,” such a study would be superfluous to this book. Nevertheless, to ignore the festive societies altogether would leave unanswered a number of important questions about their varied relationships with the clerical Feast of Fools. In some cities, the two kept their distance. In others, they joined forces. In some, one thrived in the absence of the other. In others, the two coexisted amicably. Young clerics staged farces and *sotties* in one town, laymen in another, and both groups independently in yet another. In part five I look at representative examples of these various relationships. I begin, in chapter 22, by considering four cities where lay and clerical festivities overlapped during Christmas week. In each of the subsequent three chapters, I look more closely at a single example from later in the year of the relationship (or supposed relationship) between the clerical Feast of Fools and a major civic festival or lay festive society. At the close of chapter 25, I also show how the *Infanterie Dijonnaise*’s claim of direct descent from a privileged clerical Feast of Fools in Dijon’s *Sainte-Chapelle* radically distorted subsequent scholarly histories of the Feast of Fools in general.

CHAPTER 22

Innocents and Fools

Toul's clerical feast of the Innocents happily combined indoor liturgies with outdoor cavalcades, plays, and masked parades. According to the statutes of the city's cathedral of Saint Stephen, collected in 1497, choirboys and subdeacons took part in a single feast.¹ "All the boys and the subdeacons celebrating the holiday [*subdiaconi feriat*], who are reckoned in the number of the innocents," elected one of the boys as "bishop." Wearing an episcopal miter and vestments and holding a bishop's crozier, the "bishop of innocents" presided over divine office from first to second vespers of the feast of the Innocents. He also rode in two cavalcades. The first, on the morning of the feast, took him to two monasteries, in each of which he intoned an antiphon and offered an episcopal prayer. The second, after vespers, was more informal: he was accompanied through the city by "mimes and trumpets" (*cum mimis et tubis*). A supper followed, after which the canon in charge asked the boy bishop and his retinue to excuse any shortcomings in the preparations. He then gave "a chaplet [*pileus*]"² of

1. Du Cange, s.v. *kalendae* (4:483); Rigollot, 41–46. In Avallon, too, the feast of the Innocents and the subdiaconal Feast of Fools coincided (Chérest, 9, 55–56).

2. Rigollot, 42, first translates *pileus* as "bouquet," deriving it from *pila* (ball), but later (158) appears to favor "chaplet." Chambers, 1:348, prefers "cap" (*pilleus* = the close-fitting cap worn at Roman feasts).

rosemary or other arrangement of flowers” to the boy bishop, who in turn presented it to the canon who would pay for the next year’s festivities. If the designated canon neglected his responsibilities, the subdeacons and choirboys were allowed to hang a black cope on a rake (*in raustro*) in the middle of the choir and censure it “for as long as they please.”

On the afternoon following the feast, the innocents went through the city “with their faces covered and in various costumes.” If the weather was dry, they performed farces. Sometimes they added “moralities or representations of miracles.” A week later, on the octave of the feast, in full episcopal regalia, the boy bishop and his retinue went to the church of Ste.-Geneviève, where they chanted an anthem and a collect in honor of the saint. Afterward, they repaired to the “parish house . . . or elsewhere.” The master and brothers of the hospital (*domus Dei*), which was attached to the church, treated the boy bishop and his companions to “a cake, apples, and nuts.” Finally, the company chose disciplinary officers, whose role was to collect fines from its members for faults in the chanting of the divine office.

Toul’s feast of the Innocents was still very much a liturgical feast. The cavalcade, too, was an old tradition. But the presence in the evening cavalcade of mimes and trumpets, the wearing of masks and costumes by the innocents on the following day, and the performance of farces by the subdeacons and choirboys all show the influence of the secular tradition.

A court case from Tournai, now in Belgium, bears witness to a more turbulent relationship between town and clergy at the feast of the Innocents after the cathedral summarily withdrew its outdoor festive entertainment. The case was brought jointly against the municipal authorities of Tournai by the dean and chapter of the cathedral of Notre-Dame and the *curé* of the church of Saint Mary Magdalene. It was heard by the Parlement of Paris, whose detailed summary of the opposing arguments survives.³

In 1489, according to counsel for the clergy, some “children of the bourgeois of this and other towns, at the time of the Innocents,”⁴ captured vicars, dragged them off to “public taverns,” and demanded that they elect one of their number a bishop of fools (*évesque des sotz*). Counsel for the defense responded that the vicars of Tournai had elected a bishop and performed plays (*jeux*) “for the past two hundred years, as do all the bishoprics in Picardy and likewise in Paris.” The election, he continued, usually took place on a scaffold stage in front of the west doors of the cathedral and was followed by “seven or eight days” of *jeux*. Finally, there was a communal “roast” (*convici*),

3. Bourquelot, “Arrêt.”

4. In the language of the time, “children” designated both boys and young unmarried men.

at which “canons and others of the town” were “spoken about,” no doubt satirically. The chapter and the town supplied bread and wine. Presumably, the chapter had recently banned this custom and the young men of the city tried to reinstate it by force. In the aftermath, the chapter secured letters from Charles VIII requiring the local court to hold an inquiry into the alleged disorders. If the chapter’s complaints were upheld, the court was to forbid the vicars to elect “any bishop,” and the “young men and others of the town” were not to compel or demand his election. The court did so.

For a while, things went smoothly. Perhaps the young men were content with the activities of their own festive societies.⁵ But in 1497 rumors surfaced that “the children and their allies” in Tournai were again planning to enforce the election of a bishop of fools and to “play farces” in the town. The royal letters were brought out and the ban reiterated. In 1498 the dam burst. On the eve of the feast of the Innocents, between nine and ten at night, according to counsel for the clergy, a group of “twenty or thirty” young men and others from the town, including municipal officials and police officers, gathered in a tavern. From there, some went to the house of the *official*, a priest delegated by the bishop to adjudicate church court cases on his behalf. Failing to convince the *official*’s chaplain that an important visitor required his master’s presence, the men led the barely dressed chaplain “through snow and ice” to the tavern, where they told him he had to play the bishop of fools. He refused. Leaving him under guard, they set out in search of another candidate. Finding a cleric “saying his hours in a cemetery,” they took him to the tavern, but he too refused to serve as bishop of fools. Frustrated, the mob went to the houses of other vicars, “broke doors, and carried and dragged as many as seven or eight” more “completely naked” (*tout nus*) vicars to the tavern.

The chapter demanded action from the municipal authorities, who said only that they would “take the matter under consideration, stood up, and went away laughing.” The next day, the young men and their allies captured three more clerics. Having forced the prisoners to elect one of their number bishop of fools, the group carried the reluctant bishop through the streets that night with torches and trumpets. Arriving at a fountain, they “baptized” him by throwing three buckets of water on his head. The chapter’s protest was again met with official laughter and the amused response that it was “the custom of the town.”

5. On 1 January 1494 Tournai’s “prince d’amours” led a company to Douai to take part in an annual theater festival known as *la fête des ânes* (Preux, “Nouvel,” 8. For Preux’s authorship of this piece, see Lasteyrie, *Bibliographie*, 2:392). For Douai’s *fête des ânes*, see note 28.

For three days, the young men led the bishop about in a surplice and played defamatory farces, causing “great scandal.” The cathedral bell ringer was told by the chapter to sound the bells “against the delinquents,” but he too was captured and paraded through the town. Since it was customary for other churches not to ring their bells unless the cathedral bells had first sounded, the chapter ordered the *curé* of Saint Mary Magdalene to keep his bells silent. For some reason, this did the trick. Once the revelers had elected as bishop of fools a visiting clerk from Cambrai, who was unafraid of the Tournai chapter, they released the cathedral bell ringer and the captured vicars. “That done, the bells rang everywhere.” In the meantime, however, the *curé* of Saint Mary Magdalene had begun vespers without ringing the church bells. One of the town’s provosts, together with police officers and a large crowd, interrupted the service and demanded that the bells be properly rung and that the service be restarted. On the feast of Epiphany, the same group managed to arrest the *curé*, but finally released him to the episcopal *official*.

In March the chapter sued before the Parlement of Paris. The summary of the case is dated 18 November 1499. Since “the time of the Innocents” was fast approaching, the chapter asked that the accused each be fined the large sum of a thousand livres parisis and be held in prison until the fine had been paid in full, that the election of such “bishops” in the future be strictly forbidden, and that the provost and other municipal authorities be required to enforce this ban and the good behavior of their subjects on pain of losing their office.

Counsel for the defense, after affirming the antiquity of the customs in question, insisted that the “vicars and other young people” had kept the feast of the Innocents “without any rudeness or scandal.” Nothing was done inside the church. Nor was there any disturbance of divine service. The games were intended “for the comfort of the people, which is permitted not just in Tournai, but throughout the kingdom, even in Paris.” The clerk who was elected bishop did not complain, but gave his consent, and had “never thought to have received so great an honor.” Perhaps the trouble arose when the bishop distributed hoods with ears—the traditional headgear of secular fools—to a few people who did not want them. There was no truth, however, in the report that violence had been done to the *curé* of Saint Mary Magdalene. As for requiring that he interrupt vespers and begin again after the ringing of the church bells, the provost and his men were only insisting on established practice.

Having heard these initial arguments, the parlement adjourned the case. In the end, it appears to have been settled out of court. “One of the documents

preserved is endorsed with a note of a *concordat* between the chapter and the town, by which the feast was abolished in 1500.”⁶

In Amiens, the liturgical feast of the Circumcision and the secular feast of the prince of fools (*fête du prince des sots*) coexisted amicably. We have already come across a positive reference to the subdeacons’ Feast of Fools in 1291 and the equally positive bequest by the bishop of Amiens, in 1308, of his own vestments for use by the bishop of fools. We have also found mention of the young bourgeois of Amiens electing a prince of “the game of fools” in 1387. The evidence for these feasts multiplies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their mutual tolerance may be due to the fact that the two feasts were independently organized and financed. Whereas the young men of Tournai required the participation of clerical personnel to complete their festivities, those in Amiens did not.

Hyacinthe Dusevel provides a general description of the *fête du prince des sots* “in the fifteenth century.”⁷ Early on 1 January, a crowd gathered outside the Maison des Marmousets, at “the crossroads of St.-Denis,” now the Place René Goblet. The façade of the house was probably decorated with carved “marmousets,” grotesque humanoid forms that sometimes appeared on medieval houses and cathedrals.⁸ Heralded by loud blasts on horns or clay trumpets, the doors swung open and a crowd of young men rushed out. Each was dressed in a dirty, tattered costume consisting of a green and yellow doublet and long-eared hood topped with bells. Behind them came a large cart, bearing a dozen fools playing drums, trumpets, viols, and other instruments. Last came six figures of fun (*drôles*) mounted backward on caparisoned donkeys (or, in another account, wicker hobbyhorses), whose tails they gripped in lieu of reins.⁹ Held high and unfurled in their midst was an enormous green standard, charged with fools’ marottes and yellow crescents and decorated with an emblematic bust of the prince of fools. An inscription warned the

6. Chambers, 1:308.

7. Dusevel, *Notice*, 5–11; Vaultier, *Folklore*, 91.

8. Camille, *Image*, 136–37; Camille, “Signs,” 15. A sixteenth-century Maison des Marmousets survives in Ploërmel (Brittany).

9. In *Notice*, 6, Dusevel refers to “six drôles montés à rebours sur des ânes caparaçonnés et dont ils tenaient les queues en guise de bride.” In *Histoire*, 1:514, he mentions that the fools (*suppots*) accompanying the *prince des sots* rode “mannequins d’osier, en guise de chevaux, dont ils tenaient la queue au lieu de bride.” Perhaps these were two different groups of riders, both mounted backward. Or perhaps Dusevel was mistakenly confusing the *drôles* in Amiens with the “cavalry” that accompanied the *prince des sots* in Ham, some forty miles east of Amiens. The Ham cavalry rode wicker hobbyhorses, but there is no indication that they faced backward. Ham’s fools were primarily associated with Carnival (Dusevel and Scribe, *Description*, 1:228–29). The members of a festive “abbey” from Le Quesnoy also rode “chevaux d’osier” (Outreman, *Histoire*, 395).

“bourgeois of Amiens” that “on this feast day” they would “serve as objects of ridicule [*jouets*] for the fools.”

While the onlookers shouted and stamped their feet, the fools on the cart launched their satirical attacks. They ridiculed the grocer who sold “false wax” (that is, not beeswax), tasteless cinnamon, and worm-eaten cheese. They showed the quack doctor phials of urine and begged him, by examining these samples, to diagnose their maladies. They exposed social climbers and cuckolds. Meanwhile, the fools in the street took up a collection: people gave to avoid becoming targets. The day ended with a communal meal in the covered market, followed by the performance of a *sottie amoureuse* (romantic fools’ play).

Further details of the secular fools and their feast can be derived from dated entries in the municipal records. In 1404, in honor of the mayor’s attendance at the communal feast, the town paid for two *kanes* of wine.¹⁰ In 1427 the town paid for four *kanes*.¹¹ In 1422 the fools, whose collections must have been profitable, loaned fifty gold écus to the town to help pay the expenses of armed men sent against English forces northwest of Amiens.¹² In 1427, “at the request of the prince of fools and by order of the mayor,” tilers were paid to repair “two large holes” in the roof of the market “where the prince held his dinner and feast last New Year’s Day.”¹³

In March 1447 the mayor and aldermen (*échevins*) were asked to help with the costs of a jousting tournament planned for later in the year. Specifically, they were asked to pay for the building of the lists, the removal and spreading of dung (*épandage de fumier*) after the event, and a supper for the participants. They declined, citing the poor state of the town’s finances. Moreover, they said, “the responsibility for dung spreading lay with the prince of fools and not with them.”¹⁴ In June the aldermen reversed their decision and agreed to share the expenses. Two of the jousters had important connections to the duke of Burgundy. The tournament was held in July.¹⁵

The feast of the prince of fools was not held every year. There seems to have been a lapse for some years before 1450, due perhaps to renewed fighting as the Hundred Years’ War neared its end. In that year, the last English

10. Ledieu, “Vielles,” 4. According to Ledieu, a *kane* was a locally variable measure of wine equivalent in Amiens to four liters.

11. Dusevel, *Notice*, 9 n. 2.

12. *Ibid.*, 13 n. 1.

13. *Ibid.*, 9 n. 1.

14. *Ibid.*, 14, understands “espandre le fien” to signify the spreading of straw before the joust rather than the removal of dung after the event.

15. Ledieu, “Vielles,” 19.

forces were driven out of Normandy. In November, by way of celebration, the board of aldermen in Amiens decided that it would be “good and proper to hold this year the feast of the prince of fools, as it used to be done in times past on New Year’s Day.”¹⁶

The fools’ activities were not confined to the New Year. They also staged occasional charivaris, during which they beat pans, cooking pots, cauldrons, and copper basins. A document issued by the municipal authorities in May 1455 licensed the prince of fools to impose a fine, known as a *barboire*, on anyone entering into a second marriage. The threat of a rowdy charivari outside the newlyweds’ house encouraged quick payment. In a nice mix of sacred and profane, the fools’ collection of *barboires* helped to pay for the city’s celebration of the feast of Saint Firmin on Ascension Day. Some of the money was spent on decorating the processional reliquary of the saint, who had been martyred in Amiens in 303 CE. The fools dressed for the occasion in dignified silk or taffeta robes and coronets of flowers and carried the reliquary while chanting pious canticles. The rest of the money was used later in the day so that the prince of fools and his companions could drink to the health of the girls “whom they made leap or dance in honor of the blessed body of Saint Firmin.”¹⁷

Published references to the prince of fools are rare after 1455. The house to which the fools had finally retreated with their prince after the festivities of New Year’s Day was still known as the Maison du Prince des Sots in 1518.¹⁸ A painting given to the town’s Confraternity of Notre-Dame de Puy in 1526 portrayed a joust. Among those watching was the prince of fools in his green and yellow costume.¹⁹ Both the house and the painting may have borne witness to past customs rather than to the prince’s continued activity.

The cathedral’s pope of fools lasted longer than the secular prince of fools. Identified as a “bishop of fools” in 1308, he had been elevated to “pope of fools” (*papa stultorum*) by the time he reappeared in the records on 3 December 1438. Three priests who had themselves served as pope of fools informed the chapter of a bequest made by a recently deceased priest and former pope. In his will he had left a quantity of lead, worth about sixty sols parisis when sold: the proceeds were to help pay for the cathedral’s Feast of Fools. In light of this gift, the three asked permission to join with other surviving former

16. Dusevel, *Notice*, 11 n. 1; Ledieu, “Vielles,” 4 n. 4.

17. Dusevel, *Notice*, 12–14.

18. *Ibid.*, 10 n. 1.

19. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

popes to invite all those holding benefices in Amiens to a shared meal at the feast of the Circumcision, there to elect a new pope, and so to celebrate the feast as they had done in previous years. Permission was granted.²⁰

On 19 April 1496 the town authorities paid for two *kane*s of wine to be “given to the pope of fools [*pappe des sos*] for the *pasques natives*.” Dusevel assumes that the recipient was the lay prince of fools rather than the clerical pope of fools.²¹ But since the annual election of the cathedral’s pope of fools was held at Easter (*pâques*), it seems more likely that the wine was provided by the town for communal (*natives*) festivities accompanying his public election. In December 1520 the chapter gave permission for the office of the Circumcision to be sung in the choir, but insisted that there be no “excesses or mockeries” and that no bells be carried in the church or anywhere else. Moreover, if the vicars wanted a festive meal, they would have to bear the expenses themselves.²² In December 1533 the chapter authorized the feast of the Innocents to be held “as it used to be done in past times,” contributing sixty sous toward the costs.²³

In January 1538 the chapter helped pay for the food served by “the pope and cardinal of fools of this city” In April the customary election of a new pope at Easter was forbidden “for the present year.” In August the canons repented of their severity and permitted the election of a pope, on condition that all borrowed pontifical insignia be properly returned afterward. A gold ring, a silver tiara, and an official seal were duly lent.²⁴ In 1540 the chapter paid fifty livres tournois toward the amusements of the pope and his cardinals on the next Sunday of “brioris” (*dominicâ proximâ brioris*).²⁵

20. Dreves, “Geschichte,” 583; Rigollot, 14–15.

21. Dusevel, *Notice*, 11 n. 2.

22. Rigollot, 15.

23. *Ibid.*, 13. For the earlier feast of the Innocents in Amiens, see Ledieu, “Vielles,” 16–17.

24. Rigollot, 16–17.

25. The meaning of *brioris* is unclear. Rigollot, 17–18, offers two suggestions. Might it translate the French *bures* or *brandons* and so designate “the first Sunday of Lent,” sometimes known as the *dimanche des brandons* (Sunday of the Torches)? Or could it refer to “the tradition of *barres*, which would be surrendered (*rendu*) the following Sunday”? Leber, in a footnote to Rigollot, favors the former. Grenier, 362, translates *brioris* with *barres*, but offers no further explanation. Perhaps both Grenier and Rigollot were thinking of the *jeu de barres*, a game between two teams of young men involving the taking of prisoners (*Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 6th ed. [1832–1835], s.v. *barres*). Durieux, *Théâtre*, 148, reports that on 13 October 1442, the city of Cambrai paid its prince of fools, known as the Prince of the Palace, for organizing an “entertainment and *jeu de barres* and a play.” Chambers, 1:302 n. 5, implausibly wonders if “dominicâ brioris” might be a local version of the mid-January *fête des Braies* (Feast of the Breeches) in Laon. Grenier dates the relevant accounts entries from Amiens to 9 July (permission granted) and 26 July (payment authorized). If these dates are correct, they cause problems both for Chambers and for the first of Rigollot’s hypotheses, since the next *dimanche des braies* (January) or *dimanche des brandons* (Lent) was likely too far ahead to be dealt with in July.

In 1548 the chapter forbade the election of a pope “from this time forward.”²⁶ The ban appears to have held. In 1626 new canons were still obliged to provide a meal for the chapter on the eve of the feast of the Innocents. And in 1837 Rigollot reported that the choirboys still wore copes and occupied the higher places in the choir during divine office on the day of the Innocents.²⁷ But I know of no further references from Amiens to the pope of fools.

Amiens provides an example of the prolonged coexistence of a clerical Feast of Fools and a well-organized lay festive society of fools. Although they shared the same festal day, each had its own independent identity, with separate sources of authority and funding. Despite the potential for hostility, the two appear to have enjoyed a remarkably amicable relationship.²⁸

In Clermont (now half of Clermont-Ferrand, capital of the region of the Auvergne), the cathedral chapter abolished its Feast of Fools on 5 December 1450.²⁹ Given the timing of the decision, on the eve of the feast of Saint Nicholas, it is probable that the choirboys’ feast of the Innocents was also included. Unlike its counterpart in Amiens, the chapter in Clermont may have felt overwhelmed by the city’s long (and possibly ancient) tradition of youth group masquerades. “At the end of the year,” Jean Savaron complained, young people run through the streets “masked and disguised as fools in honor of the Nativity of the Son of God. Carrying clubs [*masses*] stuffed with straw and animal hair [*bourre*] to look like a phallus [*braiette*], they strike at men and at women whom they obviously idolize.”³⁰ Savaron was president and lieutenant general of the seneschal’s court of the Auvergne and the author of *A Treatise against Masks* (1609).

Such masquerades had been popular in Clermont long before Savaron’s time. Shortly before Christmas 1500, Charles II of Bourbon, in his role as bishop of Clermont, had forbidden all “masks and disguises.” A delegation

26. Grenier, 414; Rigollot, 17–18.

27. Rigollot, 19.

28. Douai provides another example of a town where both clergy and laity organized festivities at the New Year without apparent tension. The collegiate church of St.-Amé had a bishop of fools (*evesque des asnes*) and a bishop of innocents (*evesque des innocens*). The collegiate church of St.-Pierre had a pope of fools (*pape des sots*). The town organized a large-scale annual theater festival, known as the *fête des ânes*. No asses were involved. In Douai’s festive lexicon, *ânes* was synonymous with “fools,” since secular fools wore hoods topped with ass’s ears. The clerical fools occasionally staged plays in the theater festival. Clerical and lay feasts coexisted between about 1390 and 1560 (Guilleray, “Fête”; Brassart, “Fêtes”; Preux, “Nouvel”). Béthune probably modeled its own smaller New Year *fête des ânes* on that in Douai (Mélécocq, “Cérémonies,” 93; Mélécocq, “De l’art,” 159–60).

29. Bossuat, “Théâtre,” 113, 115.

30. Savaron, *Traitté*, cited in Bossuat, “Théâtre,” 115. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Savaron’s book.

of three citizens, one of them a woman, protested to the city consuls, explaining that the inhabitants of Clermont had long enjoyed the “good custom of entertaining themselves joyously at the feast of Christmas [*Nohe*] with masks and other disguises.” The bishop, they said, had promised to respect the citizens’ privileges, not to abolish them. On 26 December the sympathetic consuls advised the delegation to approach the official in charge of the bishop’s temporal affairs. Perhaps, if they gave the proper assurances, they might be allowed to enjoy their entertainments “without disturbing the divine office and without carrying sticks and clubs [*massues*] or anything else with which they might cause damage.”³¹

A few years later, on 27 December 1509, an order of the Parlement of Clermont forbade people, on pain of imprisonment, “to play the *jeu de Mommon* [mumming game], in masks and otherwise disguised.” It seems to have had little effect. Savaron complained of the “merrymakers and libertines” of his own day: “They mask at the feasts of Christmas, in broad daylight, publicly, during the divine office, in front of the cathedral church which bears on its façade the image of the Virgin holding her son, without respect for the bishops buried in the cathedral. The masked bands, in fools’ costumes and with the sounding of all sorts of instruments, leap, spin, [and] pirouette with lewd and lascivious movements and shameful words.” He complains of masks representing “bears, wolves, dogs, bulls, stags, monsters, and, worse still, satyrs and demons.” The “supreme abomination,” he adds, is that “one sees men dress themselves as women and women dress themselves as men.”³²

The masked dancers of Savaron’s description bear a remarkable resemblance to traditional Kalends masqueraders. Although the Clermont dancers wore contemporary “fools’ costumes,” they also wore stag masks and engaged in cross-dressing, two of the most distinctive markers of the old Kalends masquerades. Clermont had been one of the oldest and largest cities in Roman Gaul, and, according to Savaron, such masquerades were known at so late a date only in the Auvergne. He may have been testifying to masked dances with a very long pedigree.

By the sixteenth century, the young men of the town had added Carnival to their festive calendar. On 26 February 1517 the city consuls expressed their indignation over a “farce” performed in the public places (*carrefours*) of the town during the recent Carnival. The actors, mounted on asses, “spoke ill of the magistrates, councilors, auditors, tax collectors, and other inhabitants,

31. Bossuat, “Théâtre,” 113–14.

32. Savaron, *Traitté*, cited in Bossuat, “Théâtre,” 116.

especially widows and married women of the town.”³³ Later, the young men established a more formal festive society, devoted to feasting, farces, charivaris, and the imitation of noble pastimes. In 1573, while religious civil war swept France in the wake of the brutal Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacres of the previous summer, Clermont’s festive society elected its own officers, a Prince of High Folly (Prince de Haute Folie), a Prince of Good Times (Prince du Bon Temps), and a King of the Moon (Roi de la Lune). Together they “organized cavalcades through the streets and committed a thousand follies.”³⁴

This society was still active in the winter of 1665–66, when the abbé Fléchier spent several months in Clermont. Shortly before 4 February 1666, while preparations were under way for the town’s Carnival, Fléchier and those with him “were very much astonished early in the morning to hear all the drums in the province beating; their confused noise, reverberating in the narrow streets of the city, made a frightful racket, which was varied only by the sound of several flutes. Behind them came a troop of young men, whose liveries, of yellow and green mixed, appeared very remarkable.” Identified by their costumes as fools, the young men were called on by the visitors from Paris to explain their noisy parade. One replied: “‘You must know that we are officers of the Prince of Haute-Folie, and we are going to demand the customary tribute from a stranger who is carrying off the fairest nymph in his realm. We have our rights.’ Hardly had these words been uttered when all the drummers came into the courtyard and made such a noise that one could not hear oneself in the house.”

After the parade had left, an old “gentleman of quality of the city, . . . who was formerly an enthusiastic participant in these formalities,” reminisced about the magnificence of such follies in his own youth. “As the city is divided into three quarters,” he explained, “we used to elect three princes, who were the masters of the public revels, and whose business it was to keep the young people entertained.” These were “the Prince of Haute-Folie, another of Bon-Temps, and the last the Prince of the Moon.” The three companies “used to get up the most amusing and brilliant pleasure parties in the world. There were ceremonies and speeches and dinners and horse-races, which afforded fine sights. When one of these kings was in love and wished to give

33. Bossuat, “Théâtre,” 114.

34. Bossuat (*ibid.*, 114) dates these events to 1572, but his archival source appears to have retained the old habit of beginning the New Year at Easter. France enjoyed a temporary respite from its civil wars of religion between August 1570 and August 1572. Since Bossuat reports that the young people’s entertainments took place “en pleine guerre civile,” Carnival 1573 is the more likely date.

his mistress some entertainment, he assembled his courtiers and sent challenges to his neighboring princes. Then he set forth with a fine company of horsemen to maintain his contention that there were no ladies in the other States more beautiful and charming than his. They sent each other the most ingenious challenges based upon these innocent contentions and got up miniature tournaments.”

But such glories were past, he said. There were no longer three princes, but only one. Even so, “you can hardly find a good King of Haute-Folie. All that remains of these old sports is a right to levy a tax upon certain occasions. When a stranger marries a young lady of the city, the prince taxes him a certain number of . . . pistoles [gold coins] to pay for the nymph whom he is carrying away. When a widower marries a spinster, or a widow a bachelor, they are taxed according to their circumstances for having carried off the nymph or gentleman, as the case may be, who should rightly belong to another.” If the tax was not paid on time, “the custom was for the officers of the prince to enter the debtor’s house with their mad pranks, take down the hangings, move the furniture about, and even throw everything out of the window. But it was all done in such good humor that it was rather amusing than rough.” Collected “taxes” went toward a banquet for all the courtiers of the prince and “to furnish funds for the upkeep of the city.”³⁵

The New Year masqueraders in Clermont were related to the cathedral’s Feast of Fools only by a common date. They danced outside the cathedral, perhaps even during the divine office, but not inside it. They may have been part of a much older tradition of Kalends masquerades. The newer festive society of young men shared with the Feast of Fools only the language of folly. Dressed in the green and yellow of secular fools, they conducted charivari and collected “taxes.” In the early seventeenth century, they also aspired to imitate the dignity and pomp of a past age of noble chivalry. Their roots lay not in the clerical Feast of Fools but in the older tradition of New Year masquerades, in the desire of unmarried young men to punish outsiders who reduce the pool of available young women, and in the inclination of many bourgeois festive societies to stage their own versions of “noble” feasts and pastimes.

35. Fléchier, *Mémoires*, 283–87; Fléchier, *Clermont*, 274–78. Shortly after these events, on 4 February 1666, Fléchier’s party left Clermont for Paris. Preparations for Carnival were already taking place (*Mémoires*, 288–89; *Clermont*, 279–81).

CHAPTER 23

King of the Breeches

If lay festive societies had in fact grown out of the church's Feast of Fools, as Chambers and Petit de Julleville supposed, we might expect to see the clearest evidence of such influence in those lay festivities that most closely followed the clerical feast in the calendar. After 1 January itself, the next date on which major secular festivals were held was the twentieth day after Christmas. The most prestigious *vingtième* gatherings took place in Laon and Cambrai. Although the cathedral in Cambrai had both a bishop of innocents and an abbot of fools, the surviving records of their counterparts in Laon are more complete.¹ In this chapter, therefore, I concentrate on Laon.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the people of Laon elected three midwinter dignitaries. The choirboys chose a bishop of innocents. The vicars and chaplains elected a "patriarch of fools," who was honored at the feast of the Epiphany. The bourgeois chose, from one of the well-established families of the town, a festive King of the Breeches (*roi des braies*) to rule over a three-day festival of theater beginning on 12 January.² The breeches in

1. For Cambrai's clerical and secular midwinter festivities, see Durieux, *Théâtre*, 10–41, 141–85; also Fourret, "Cambrai," but beware of the erroneously transcribed "parquet" for "marquet" (485; cf. Durieux, *Théâtre*, 141).

2. Thillois, "Fête," provides the first scholarly notice of the feast. Matton, "Royauté"; Fleury, *Origines*, 185–211; and Fleury, "Royauté" extend the discussion and add extracts from the municipal accounts.

question, images of which survive on lead tokens issued by the seasonal king, were short trousers, laced across the front and reaching about halfway down the wearer's thigh.³ The theater festival was variously known as the *fête du roi des braies*, the *fête des bourgeois*, or simply the *vingtième*. The first record of the festival comes from 1411 and the last from 1541. Since "it was already too well organized" in 1411 to be "a recent creation" and "too lively" in 1541 to be on its last legs, it was almost certainly celebrated both before and after these dates.⁴

In January 1411, according to the town's financial records, eight *pots* (about sixteen liters) of wine were given "to the King of the Bad Breeches [*roy des mauvaises braies*] . . . on the day of his feast." Auguste Matton assumes that the king's nickname derived from the dirt on the men's breeches after three days of drinking. Édouard Fleury disagrees.⁵ Fleury may well be right: the Feast of the Breeches generated no recorded complaints of disorder, and sixteen liters of wine shared over three days by all whom the king was obliged to entertain was not excessive. In 1440, when the feast next appears in the accounts, a similar quantity of wine was provided for a visiting festive society, My Lord of the Bad Heads (*M[auv]aises Testes*) and his fellows from St.-Quentin. A smaller amount went to the Cardinal of the Joyous Ones and his companions from Reims.⁶

The feasts of Fools and Innocents reappear in the chapter records, after a gap of about sixty years, in 1454. Four livres parisis were set aside for the feast of the Innocents.⁷ Permission was also given to the "patriarch [of fools] and his consorts to put on their plays and their cavalcade according to custom." The dean opposed this decision, but on 5 January 1455 the bishop of Amiens encouraged the chapter to override its dean. A majority of the chapter voted to celebrate the feast "in the accustomed manner, outside the church, with plays and a cavalcade."⁸ Clerical plays are again mentioned in 1463, when the chapter provided support for the patriarch on condition that the divine office be sung "decently, as it had been for the past three years," and that the texts of plays be submitted for prior examination. In 1473 the patriarch's plays and cavalcade were omitted from the New Year festivities "because of the

3. Fleury, *Origines*, unpaginated illustration following 192; Fleury, "Royauté," 238. The *patriarche des fous* issued similar tokens, usually displaying an episcopal miter (Fleury, *Origines*, unpaginated illustration following 188).

4. Fleury, *Origines*, 190; Fleury, "Royauté," 234.

5. Matton, "Royauté," 9:248; Fleury, *Origines*, 187–88; Fleury, "Royauté," 232–33.

6. Fleury, *Origines*, 263; Matton, "Royauté," 11:123.

7. Rigollot, 21.

8. Grenier, 370–71; Hidé, "Notices," 117–18. In a welcome change, Grenier, 370–72, provides precise references to his sources.

war,” a reference to the escalating conflict between Louis XI of France and Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Other chapter records from the period, while occasionally requiring that there be no “scandal” or that vicars and chaplains attend divine office in the proper ecclesiastical vestments, testify to ongoing support for both the bishop of innocents and the patriarch of fools.⁹

The plays staged by the patriarch of fools and his company probably reflect, here as elsewhere, the influence of lay festive societies. The *fête du roi des braies* was up and running by 1411, forty-three years before the first mention of outdoor clerical plays in Laon. Although records are scant in the early years, we know that festive societies from other towns were attending the festival by at least 1440. It would have been extraordinary had they not brought plays with them. When the records resume in 1483, this practice becomes explicit. In that year, the Companions of St.-Omer were paid two gold écus for performing “several *jeux de personnages* and . . . several other pious pieces [*pyeulsetez*]” during the “bourgeois festival of the twentieth day.”¹⁰ The St.-Quentin players returned in 1484. In 1489, wine was provided both for “the election of the King of the Breeches” and for a company of actors from Soissons. The following year a company of twenty-four clerical and lay “companions” arrived from St.-Quentin and another of “twelve persons” came from Soissons “to play several moralities, farces, and other amusements over the course of the three-day “feste du XXe.”¹¹

The festival was growing. In 1494, no fewer than six companies of players arrived. A “prince of youth” led the troupe from St.-Quentin, which brought “fully thirty horses.” The group from Soissons was led by a festive “abbot.” Others came from the smaller towns and villages of Chauny, Crepy, Crécy-sur-Serre, and Bruyères-et-Montbérault. All the companies were provided with wine “to maintain love and fellowship with these towns.”¹² The entertainers from Chauny were especially renowned, receiving favorable mention forty years later in Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: Gargantua and his tutor Ponocrates “went to see the jongleurs [*basteleurs*], conjurers [*trejectaires*], and sellers of quack remedies, and noted their antics, their tricks, their somersaults, and their smooth words, attending especially to those from Chauny in Picardy, for they are great babblers by nature, and fine reciters of stories on the subject of green monkeys.”¹³ A grimacing green monkey

9. Rigollot, 21–23.

10. Lecocq, *Histoire*, 40, 49, compares *pieusetez* to *mystères*.

11. Fleury, *Origines*, 197, 263–64; Matton, “Royauté,” 11:123.

12. Fleury, *Origines*, 264.

13. Rabelais, *Gargantua* 1.24 (93). I have substituted “jongleur” for the more restrictive “juggler” in this translation. A *bateleur* was, among other things, a tumbler, storyteller, and actor of *sotties*.

appeared on the banner of Chauny's Confraternity of Trumpet-Jongleurs. On the first Monday of each October in Chauny, the confraternity staged its own festival of "hurdy-gurdy players, bagpipers, trumpeters, animal trainers (with performing bears, dogs, and monkeys), rope dancers, sword swallows, and jugglers."¹⁴ Fleury believes it was this group that traveled to Laon under the name of the Companion Adventurers of Chauny.¹⁵

Musicians are first mentioned in connection with the *fête des braies* in 1496, when payment was made to "minstrels and trumpeters" who came with the troupe from St.-Quentin. The next year "buglers" were added to the list. In 1498 the custom of paying "the minstrels of the festival" was said to have existed "from the earliest times."¹⁶

Meanwhile the cathedral chapter was beginning to impose restrictions on its innocents and fools. In January 1487 the patriarch's play was performed in front of the church of St.-Martin-au-Parvis, situated to the north of the open space (*parvis*) in front of the cathedral. In 1490 the bishop of innocents was permitted to celebrate his feast, but "only in a long habit." The patriarch's *jeux* and cavalcade were prohibited "for known" (but otherwise unrecorded) "reasons." The patriarch was still permitted a festive meal, but was threatened with imprisonment if he invited anyone who intended "to trouble good order." In 1501 a chaplain was fined for not attending the election of the new patriarch.¹⁷

No such restrictions were placed by the civil authorities on the *fête des braies*, which continued to expand in the first four decades of the sixteenth century. In 1502 the abbey of St.-Martin (not to be confused with the church of St.-Martin-au-Parvis) was mentioned for the first time in the festival records as the site of the "dinner" shared by the "royalty of the breeches" and its guests.¹⁸ The abbey sits amid spacious grounds at the western end of the old walled city. Fleury believes that the dinner was held there because the plays were performed under cover of a "temporary wooden market" (*halle volante de bois*) erected in the abbey grounds.¹⁹ Wealthy patrons supplied food

14. Fleury, "Trompettes-Jongleurs," 23. Fleury, "Singes" and "Trompettes-Jongleurs," together provide the most complete account to date of the Trompettes-Jongleurs of Chauny. These two articles were also published as a single booklet: *Trompettes-jongleurs et singes de Chauny* (St.-Quentin: Librairie du Vermandois, 1874). Lecocq, *Histoire*, 155–61, and Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 238–39, both depend on Fleury.

15. Fleury, "Royauté," 240; Fleury, *Origines*, 198.

16. Fleury, *Origines*, 265–66; Matton, "Royauté," 11:124–25.

17. Grenier, 371.

18. Fleury, *Origines*, 267; Matton, "Royauté," 11:126.

19. Fleury, *Origines*, 201–3; Fleury, "Royauté," 244–45. A similar structure was built to house the passion play performed in the "Champ-Saint-Martin" at the feast of Pentecost in 1460.

for the dinner. In 1510 the abbot of St.-Nicolas-aux-Bois brought “two large pieces of venison.” In 1511 the count of Vendôme and St.-Pol presented “a large wild boar.”²⁰

In 1509 payment was made to one Jehan Clocquant “for having served on the *bareuil* during the *chevauchée* of the King of the Breeches.”²¹ *Chevauchée* can signify either an orderly cavalcade or a raucous charivari. It is not clear which is in view here. The *bareuil* or *tombereau* was the processional cart in which the “king” rode. Fleury, believing that the *chevauchée* imitated a royal entry, in which the King of the Breeches was escorted by musicians and by troupes of visiting players on horseback, all flying their standards, imagines that the *bareuil* was akin to the wheeled monstrosities that carried the host in Corpus Christi processions.²² Matton implies that it was the kind of cart ordinarily used to carry manure (*fumier*).²³ It depends, I suppose, on the nature of the *chevauchée*.

Multiple companies staged plays each year, among them, in 1517, a company of clergymen (*gens d'église*) from Soissons who went by the collective name of Rhetoric. Occasionally the festival was suspended because of events elsewhere. In January 1525 the French army was bogged down in Italy in the protracted and eventually disastrous siege of Pavia.²⁴ Under the circumstances, the bourgeois of Laon felt it best not to hold their feast. The Junior Lawyers (*practiciens*) from Soissons, who had prepared a play, were reimbursed for expenses already incurred.²⁵

Meanwhile, the cathedral chapter seems gradually to have lost interest in its patriarch of fools. On 7 January 1519 a chaplain was sentenced to eight days in prison. Stationed above the portal of the church on the eve of Epiphany, he had thrown fire on the patriarch and his consorts below. Whether this was an act of hostility or a planned special effect is unclear. In 1521 the chapter declared that the funds “ordinarily” given to the patriarch of fools and the bishop of innocents should “henceforth” go toward the salary of the cathedral organist. Moreover, the divine office at the feast of Epiphany should be celebrated in the cathedral by the city’s parish priests (*curés*), according to established usage, “decently” and without “ridiculous

20. Fleury, *Origines*, 196, 268–69; Matton, “Royauté,” 11:127.

21. Fleury, *Origines*, 267; Matton, “Royauté,” 11:126.

22. Fleury, *Origines*, 193–96; Fleury, “Royauté,” 239–41. Such a procession, escorting the city’s Prince of Pleasure, entered Valenciennes in May 1548, at the start of the prince’s annual festival there (Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:69–71; Knight, *Aspects*, 137).

23. Matton, “Royauté,” 11:126 n. 1.

24. Knecht, *Rise*, 117–20.

25. Fleury, *Origines*, 199–200, 269–71; Matton, “Royauté,” 11:127–28; Fleury, “Royauté,” 243.

mannerisms.” The cathedral’s vicars and choirboys were to take part “at the *curés*’ expense.” In 1523 and 1525 the chapter not only refused to reinstate its financial support of the patriarch but also declined to impose fines on those who failed to attend his election. It also banned the practice of carrying burning torches in the choir.²⁶

In 1527 the patriarch of fools asked to celebrate his feast “in the old way” or to be excused from being present at the election of his successor. Perhaps he felt that the feast had been so diminished as to be no longer worth observing. The matter was referred to the “former patriarchs.” Their decision is not recorded, but it may have been favorable, for in December 1531 the patriarch briefly recovered his right to celebrate the Feast of Fools, to play *jeux* and comedies, and to receive fines from those who missed his election.²⁷

The *fête des braies* continued unabated for a few more years. Clerics, real or caricatured, traveled with some of the visiting companies. In 1529 a priest led the Companion Adventurers from Chauny. In the same year, for the first time, a group came from the village of Pinon. A monkey-bishop, mitered, enthroned, and holding a crozier, appears on a fifteenth-century seal from Pinon. Fleury wonders if the same image was displayed on the company’s banner.²⁸ In 1530 the Children of Foul Mouths from Vailly were led by an “ad hoc cleric” (*clerc adoc*).

Throughout the 1530s, the account books record generous payments for wine, “trumpets,” and the familiar companies of players. “Four bands of players” came in 1537, five in 1540, and five again in 1541. They were by then described as “players of farces.” Eighty *pots* of wine were consumed in 1538, a hundred in 1541.²⁹ But after 1541 there is no further record of the festival. Fleury speculates that as tastes changed, the Festival of the Breeches gradually lost favor with its municipal sponsors and its public. Relevant documents, however, may be missing.³⁰ There is no record of the festival being suppressed in the manner of the Feast of Fools, but it is hard to imagine a theater festival on this scale surviving the general crackdown on amateur dramatics in the 1560s. Even so, for all the consumption of wine and the invocations of folly in the names of many festive societies, there is no recorded complaint of disorder or impropriety during the entire 131-year history of the festival.

26. Grenier, 371–72.

27. *Ibid.*, 372.

28. Matton, “Royauté,” 11: 128–30; Fleury, “Royauté,” 239–40, 270; Fleury, *Origines*, unpaginated illustration following 194.

29. Fleury, *Origines*, 270–72; Matton, “Royauté,” 11:128–30.

30. Fleury, “Royauté,” 249; Fleury, *Origines*, 190, 208; Matton, “Royauté,” 9:249–50.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the clerical Feast of Fools lasted a little longer, albeit under considerable restraint by the chapter. In 1541 or 1549—Grenier is not sure—the patriarch of fools was commanded not to pretend “to say mass merrily” (*dire la messe à liesse*). In 1546 the chapter banished “all indecent ceremonies” from the cathedral, even replacing the outdoor *mystère* with a sermon to be preached by the bishop of innocents. This, too, was soon cut.³¹ In January 1560 the chapter tried again to manage its Feast of Fools. Perhaps for the last time, it authorized the election of a patriarch of fools and set aside funds for his banquet, insisting that nothing be done “contrary to religion, the king, or the state.”³²

By the eighteenth century, all that remained of Laon’s Feast of Fools was a ceremony known as *primes folles* (foolish prime), which was held in the cathedral late on the eve of Epiphany. Lay worshippers were allowed to occupy the high stalls in the brightly lit choir. Everybody present wore a crown of green leaves. The service itself was chanted solemnly.³³ In spirit it sounds like a much smaller version of the dignified and joyous thirteenth-century office of the Epiphany.

Neither chapter nor civic records in Laon suggest any organizational links between the clerical Feast of Fools and the lay festival of the *vingtième*. Despite their proximity in the calendar and a shared interest in plays, there appears to have been no overlap between the two. Each was subject to its own authority and benefited from its own funding source. The lay festival neither imitated nor interrupted the cathedral’s seasonal liturgy, and though individual clerics may have enjoyed (or even acted in) the *fête des braies*, the chapter made no attempt to regulate or restrain it. The history of festivities in Laon provides no reason to believe that lay festive societies there or elsewhere were an outgrowth of the clerical Feast of Fools.

31. Hidé, “Notices,” 124.

32. Grenier, 372.

33. Hidé, “Notices,” 121.

CHAPTER 24

Our Lady of the Trellis

Lille's major civic festival, which took place in early summer, brought youth groups, festive societies, and the bishop of fools from the collegiate church of Saint Peter together in a single celebration. Chapter and town jointly funded the participation of the bishop of fools. This unusual alliance was due not to any continuity between the Feast of Fools and the city's summer festival, but to a shared church and civic interest in the latter.

The civic festival had its origins in an annual procession, founded in 1270 by Countess Margaret of Flanders, in honor of a statue of the Virgin Mary located in Saint Peter's church. The image, known as Notre Dame de la Treille (Our Lady of the Trellis) after the iron trellis that protected it, was believed to have been responsible for a series of miracles in 1254. Since the first of these had reportedly happened on the Sunday after Trinity, in late May or early June, the Virgin's devotees established an annual novena beginning on that day. It was the countess's idea to open the novena with a procession through the town.¹ Over the course of the fourteenth century, the "great procession" expanded from its religious origins, adding military orders, trade guilds, and

1. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:31–32; Derode, *Histoire*, 4:89–90. For the text of Margaret's authorizing document, see Hautcoeur, *Cartulaire*, 1:432–34. The Sunday after Trinity is two weeks after the movable feast of Pentecost.

plays to the pilgrims and clergy escorting the statue.² The plays are first mentioned in an ordinance of April 1382, forbidding youth groups “to play any *gieu de personages* whatsoever, . . . except at the next procession of Lille.”³ By the 1430s, the aldermen had introduced prizes for the best plays presented on the day of the procession.

In the meantime, with only occasional reluctance, Saint Peter’s church supported its midwinter bishops of innocents and fools. Brief notices from the fourteenth century make it clear that Saint Peter’s observed its Feast of Fools at Epiphany and that, since at least 1365, it had involved a “game” of some kind.⁴ By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the bishop of fools was beginning to fill a variety of civic roles as well. Some of these involved theatrical entertainment. On the octave of Epiphany 1405, the priest serving as bishop of fools (*evesque des fols*) for that year completed “the solemn feast of his bishopric” (*la solennité de son évesquiet*) at the church. He then proceeded to the market hall, where he thanked the aldermen for providing him with wine in the nearby town of Tournai. Léon Lefebvre assumes that the bishop had taken a group of clerical players from Lille to perform in Tournai.⁵ In 1408, in the midst of the Western Schism, the bishop of fools was given a gold crown for his part in “services of prayer for the unity of the church.”⁶ In 1430 the chapter paid him “for certain expenses [*pro certis misiis*] incurred” in connection with the “joyous” entry into the city of Philip the Good of Burgundy, and his new bride.⁷ Alan Knight assumes that the bishop organized “entertainments” for the royal entry.⁸

2. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 1:364–66; Mélicocq, “Procession,” 370–73; Knight, “Guild,” 187–88.

3. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:36. Bans on performing plays “on wagons or in any other manner” were also passed in 1398, 1405, and 1428, but Knight (38–45) argues that these were intended to maintain public order at other times of the year rather than to strip the procession of its new dramatic entertainments. Lille’s aldermen were not against plays as such. In 1386 they had brought members of a festive society from Douai to Lille to perform *jeux* before the visiting king. In 1402 and 1417 they allowed confraternities to perform “representations of saints’ lives or other subjects” in connection with the procession. In 1418, 1422, and 1425 they supported festive companies from Lille that performed in Douai and Ypres.

4. See chapter 14.

5. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:6–7.

6. Montlinot, *Histoire*, 341, quoting Lille’s *comptes de la rèdime* (financial records). Montlinot understands “in sollemnitate unionis ecclesiae” to refer to a celebration of “the union of the church of Saint Peter,” prompting Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:216 n. 1, to exclaim, “We simply do not know what the union of the church of Saint Peter might have been.” Noting also that the *comptes de la rèdime* for 1408 “no longer exist,” Hautcoeur concludes that Montlinot’s citation is “highly suspect.” But if, as seems more likely, “in sollemnitate unionis ecclesiae” refers to prayers for the end of the Western Schism, the loss of financial records alone is no reason to suspect the evidence.

7. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:216. For *misa* = expense, see Niermeyer and Van de Kieft, *Mediae*, s.v. *misa*.

8. Knight, “Bishop,” 158.

In 1431 the bishop was involved for the first time in the processional play competition. According to church records, the “bishop of fools and his fellows” received a subsidy that year “for giving prizes at the Lille procession” (*pro jocalibus dandis in processione Insulensi*).⁹ The church’s ownership of the statue of Our Lady of the Trellis, as well as the interest in popular theater shown by his predecessors, were no doubt factors in securing this role. In 1440 the bishop of fools again made the awards, as he did in 1446, 1447, 1448, and most years between 1450 and 1526.¹⁰

In some years the bishop received especially generous subsidies. In 1446 Nicolas Beselaire, “priest and bishop of fools,” was given twenty-four livres, enabling him to award prizes not only to Lille’s own festive societies but also to visiting groups from other towns.¹¹ In the same year, he received an additional six livres toward the cost of taking “the companion clerks from the church of Saint Peter” to perform “certain *histoires* and other *jeux de personnages*” at a procession in Ypres.¹² Particularly fine gold prizes were also awarded in 1448 and 1453. On both occasions Philip the Good and his family were present for the procession.¹³ No doubt such financial investments had economic as well as devotional motives. Lavish public festivities attracted visitors.

Each year, some weeks before the procession, the bishop of fools issued a proclamation calling for entries in the dramatic competition. One such proclamation, dated 10 May 1463, survives.¹⁴ It begins: “To the honor of God and of the most glorious Virgin Mary, his most blessed mother, and likewise for the adornment and embellishment of the procession of this good town of Lille, we, the Prelate of Fools[,] . . . intend to award, with God’s help, the prizes listed below to groups formed in one neighborhood with no outsiders, who come on the day of the procession on large or small wagons, wains, or portable scaffolds [*cars, carettes, esclans ou escaffaulx portatifs*] to present histories from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, saints’ lives or passions approved by our mother Holy Church, or Roman histories from ancient chronicles, each containing at least three hundred lines and at most as you will. In the morning as the procession passes, the plays are to be mimed in the

9. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:216–17; translation from Knight, “Bishop,” 158.

10. Mélicocq, “Procession,” 377–79; Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:7–13; Knight, *Mystères*, 1:49–50.

11. Mélicocq, “Procession,” 377.

12. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:7.

13. Mélicocq, “Procession,” 377–78; Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:218–19.

14. Flammermont, *Album*, 163 (reproduction of the original proclamation); Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:9 (reproduction and transcription); Knight, *Mystères*, 1:52–54 (transcription); Knight, “Bishop,” 159–61 (partial translation).

squares designated by us or our deputies, and in the afternoon to be played before us, wherever we wish and in good and true rhetoric.”¹⁵

The proclamation went on to require that each group competing for a prize enter both a history play and a farce. The script of the history play had to be submitted in advance. Farces were apparently not subject to this requirement. The risk of heterodox theology was perhaps thought to be greater than that of irresponsible satire. Played in dumb show along the route of the procession on Sunday morning, the *histoires* were performed again during the afternoon, with full speaking parts, in the city’s spacious main square. After supper, the acting companies entertained the crowd with farces. By the end of the fifteenth century, competing groups had grown so numerous that the dramatic performances continued for three days after the procession.¹⁶

In the meantime, the bishop of fools continued to observe his own feast during the week of Epiphany. In 1467 Philip the Good gave two gold francs “to the bishop of fools, . . . according to custom, to help him sustain his folly, observe his feast, and dine . . . on the fourteenth of January.”¹⁷ As we shall see again in Dijon, Duke Philip the Good was a faithful supporter of the clerical Feast of Fools. His death in June 1467 may have put Lille’s bishop of fools in a precarious position, entailing as it did a loss of both financial sponsorship and political protection. In 1469 the chapter of Saint Peter’s suppressed its “prelate of fools,” complaining that he and his companions “did many offensive things, bringing the chapter into disrepute, from the eve of the Epiphany to its octave.” One cause of offense may have been “the game [*lusus*] that they call Deposuit,” which the chapter singled out for abolition.¹⁸ Details of the game have not survived. Perhaps the lower clergy were observing the role reversals of the Magnificat with too much enthusiasm.

In the absence of a bishop of fools, the aldermen took over full responsibility for the play competition in 1470, cutting costs by reducing the number of prizes from five to four, and delegating responsibility for vetting scripts to four friars. In 1471 prizes (and probably the competition itself) were suspended “because of the prevailing war” between France and Burgundy. In the three following years, prizes were awarded by the “prince” of the Puy Notre-Dame and by two neighborhood festive societies. In 1475, however, Johannes

15. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:52–53; translation adapted from Knight, “Bishop,” 159. All seventy-two surviving texts of Lille’s processional mystery plays have been edited by Knight, *Mystères*.

16. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:56; Knight, “Processional,” 101.

17. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:51.

18. Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:221 n. 3; translation adapted from Knight, “Bishop,” 157.

de Biens “and his companion vicars of Saint Peter’s” were again in charge of the competition. The chapter had relented and restored its bishop of fools.¹⁹ Perhaps “the valuable service that he performed in organising and judging the dramatic presentations” was “one reason for his quick restoration.”²⁰

Even so, the bishop’s role in the summer festival was no longer secure. In 1476 the presiding bishop of fools was from Saint Stephen’s church. In 1479 the prizes were awarded by a youth abbey; in 1481 by a priest who was also a clockmaker and the author of a series of mystery plays; and in 1485 by the “bishop of fools,” but with the notation that he was being funded “this year, by special favor.” A “priest and chaplain of Saint Peter’s” again held the office in 1490. But in both 1491 and 1492 the town’s subsidy was given not to the bishop of fools as such but to the “society of the house of clergy.”²¹

In the sixteenth century, the bishop’s winter festivities also ran into trouble with the town authorities. On 31 December 1519 the magistrate issued an order forbidding the people of Lille “to make or to help to make a bishop of fools, to accompany him in any way, or to play the Deposuit of the bishop.”²² The game of the Deposuit had apparently been adapted for performance in the streets. But these restrictions did not immediately affect the bishop’s role in the summer play competition. In 1522 clergy from Saint Peter’s awarded prizes “to those who, at the procession, performed plays, moralities, and folly.”²³ In 1526, too, the “vicars and companions of the prelate of fools of Saint Peter” were reimbursed for prizes given “to those who, adorning the procession, played several beautiful and honorable Roman history plays.”²⁴

This was the last time members of the clergy awarded the prizes. In December 1526 the civic ban on New Year activities of “the bishop or prelate of fools” was renewed.²⁵ In 1527 the municipal records complained that “the vicars of Saint Peter’s and other priests had defiantly played the Deposuit of the prelate or bishop of fools in front of the Beau Regard,” an elegant row of houses in the center of the town.²⁶ The aldermen responded by assuming full responsibility for funding and organizing the summer play competition.²⁷ In

19. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:56–58; Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:11.

20. Knight, “Bishop,” 161.

21. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:10–12; Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:222.

22. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:12.

23. Van Hende, “Plommés,” 41 n. 3.

24. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:12 n. 1. Knight, “Roman,” 24, compares the “histoires rommaines” to saints’ plays, since both genres were “intended to provide their audiences with exemplars of virtue and good behaviour.”

25. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:12.

26. Delay, “Compagnies,” 508–9.

27. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:61–62; Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:12–13.

1531 the chapter of Saint Peter's unreservedly abolished its bishop of fools. Because of "scandals and mockeries customarily done under the pretext of foolishness by the prebendaries and residents of our church, from the vigil to the octave of Epiphany," the chapter's ordinance states, "we decree that henceforth no one may be named, raised, or created prelate of fools, nor may the game called *Deposuit* be played, practiced, or done at that vigil or at any other time."²⁸ This time, the ban appears to have held.

The feast of the Innocents remained a problem. The young men of the town were taking advantage of the occasion to engage in their own street festivities. In 1528 the town's magistrate prohibited the outdoor election and cavalcade of Saint Peter's bishop of innocents. The chapter continued its boy bishop ceremonies inside the church.²⁹ In 1551, in the hope of giving the youth groups something else to do, the town paid for two plays to be performed on wagons in front of the market hall on the day of the Innocents. On 26 December 1552 the *échevins* issued a decree intended "to prevent insolent and shameful acts that might be done tomorrow on the day of the Innocents by young people, children, and others who might be found in the streets of this town in unknown clothes, imitating the Innocents." An exception was made for "young children" acting "respectably." Despite the safeguards, the situation deteriorated. On 26 December 1556 the aldermen insisted that those in the streets should not carry rapiers, daggers, or sticks, nor "fling *terchoeul* [a mixture of coarse flour and bran left after the last sifting of the wheat], ashes, or other *ordures* [waste products], nor sing lewd songs, nor hit people with *verghes* [rods]." In this form, the ban was renewed annually through 1560. The bishop of innocents was last mentioned in the chapter records in 1592.³⁰

In the meantime, economic pressures and the disruptions of the Wars of Religion ended the summer play competition. Prizes were last awarded in 1565.³¹ But the procession of Our Lady of the Trellis survived, growing to lavish proportions in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before finally succumbing to the Revolution.³² By the first half of the eighteenth century, a secular fool was involved. Dressed in typical fool's costume and carrying a marotte, the "fool of the town" (*fou de la Ville*) led the procession, throwing water at spectators and attacking them with his marotte. He paid

28. Du Cange, s.v. *Deposuit* (3:70); Hautcoeur, *Histoire*, 2:222 n. 4.

29. Van Hende, "Plommés," 45–46.

30. Lefebvre, *Histoire*, 1:14–16.

31. Knight, *Mystères*, 1:67.

32. Derode, *Histoire*, 4:92–111.

his own expenses. Artigny remembered the fool being played by a banker, one of whose sons was a canon of Saint Peter's.³³

Lille's great procession, with its accompanying mystery plays and farces, drew financial support from both the collegiate church of Saint Peter and the town. Moreover, it incorporated the church's bishop of fools into the celebrations in an administrative role. The procession was not, however, an outgrowth of the clerical Feast of Fools. The two festivities took place at different times of the year. One was an outdoor civic festival; the other was embedded in the liturgy of the church. The role of the bishop of fools in the procession was a consequence not of lay imitation of the clerical feast but of the church's ownership of the image of Our Lady of the Trellis. This was not a pattern followed elsewhere. "It was only in Lille . . . that the Bishop of Fools assumed such responsibilities."³⁴

33. Artigny, *Nouveaux*, 4:311 (Leber, 9:265–66).

34. Knight, "Bishop," 158.

CHAPTER 25

Mother Fool

No festive society has been more frequently linked to the Feast of Fools than the Infanterie Dijonnaise, whose name (Dijon Infantry) playfully identifies the society's members as both "children" and "foot soldiers." Nor, as we shall see, has any supposed link done more to distort the history of the Feast of Fools as a whole. More commonly known by the name of its elected leader, the Mère Folle (Mother Fool), Dijon's celebrated *société joyeuse* is widely but erroneously believed to have developed from a clerical Feast of Fools that took place annually in the city's Sainte-Chapelle.

The earliest surviving record of this feast (and indeed of any Feast of Fools in Dijon) comes from 1 January 1366, when "the chaplains of the chapel of the duke of Burgundy in Dijon [the Sainte-Chapelle] celebrated *la feste des fols*," and Duke Philip the Bold gave them "six gold deniers" for the occasion. Again, on 1 January 1372, the duke gave "the chaplains, clerks, and choirboys of his chapel in Dijon ten gold francs to help them celebrate their *feste des fols*."¹ Details are lacking, but the day of the feast and the clerical

1. Prost, *Inventaires*, 1:89–90. Valcke, "Société," 35, assumes that "a group of fools" was active in the Sainte-Chapelle "without doubt as early as the thirteenth century," but offers as evidence only the example of "several other French churches."

identity of the participants suggest an orderly celebration of the feast of the Circumcision.

So do subsequent records. The clergy of the Sainte-Chapelle enjoyed a privileged position: in spiritual matters they were under the direct authority of the pope, while in temporal matters they were subject only to the duke of Burgundy. In the wake of the Council of Basel, the *haut-bâtonnier* (senior staff bearer) of the chapel's Feast of Fools appealed to the current duke, Philip the Good, to protect its feast. Philip responded with a good-humored *mandement* (authorization) in verse, dated 27 December 1454, in which he confirmed

Que cette Fête célébrée
 Soit à jamais un jour l'année,
 Le premier du mois de Janvier,
 Et que joyeux Fous sans dangier,
 De l'habit de notre Chapelle,
 Fassent la Fête bonne et belle,
 Sans outrage ou dérision.²

[That this celebrated Feast
 Should forever be observed on one day a year,
 On the first of the month of January,
 And that joyous Fools without risk,
 In the habit of our Chapel,
 Should keep the Feast in a good and seemly way,
 Without outrage or mockery.]

The document was sealed with a green seal, from which hung ribbons of red, green, and gold silk, colors later adopted by the Infanterie Dijonnaise instead of the green and yellow of traditional fools' costumes.³

The authorization confirms that the clerical feast took place each year on the feast of the Circumcision, that the participating "fools" wore the clerical dress (*habit*) of the chapel's clergy, and that all was to be done "in a good and seemly manner, without outrage or mockery." This last phrase is standard cautionary language of the time and no indication of misbehavior. On the contrary, Philip's strong endorsement is itself presumptive evidence of a dignified office of the Circumcision. The office may have included

2. For the full text of Philip's *mandement*, see Tilliot, 100–103; Valcke, "Société," 39–40.

3. Tilliot, 103, 110; Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 195, 203.

some elements of role reversal befitting the season, but the *mandement* does not say so.

Further steps to safeguard the chapel's feast were taken after Louis XI seized Burgundy in 1477. The treaty of Dijon guaranteed to the city all "rights, exemptions, freedoms, prerogatives, [and] customs" previously authorized in writing by Philip the Good.⁴ In 1482 Guy Baroet, "proto-notary and bursar of the [chapel's] fools," met with the bishop of Langres and the military governor in their role as royal representatives. Baroet produced the 1454 authorization signed by Philip the Good. The two officials, in a verse document of their own dated "the day of the Innocents 1482," confirmed Philip's permission on behalf of the king. They allowed

Que tous les Foux de la profession
De l'Église, et qui auront l'habit
De la Chapelle, pourront sans contredit
Au premier jour qui sera de l'année
Faire la Fête, et porter la livrée
Du Bâtonnier qui fera son édit.⁵

[That all the Fools in the profession
Of the Church, who have the habit
Of the Chapel, will be able without objection
On the first day of the year
To observe the Feast, and wear the livery
Of the Staff Bearer who makes his proclamation.]

Permission to observe the Feast of Fools was granted only to those covered by Philip's original authorization: "Ceux qui seront de ladite Chapelle / Et non autres" (Those who are of the said Chapel / And no others). Juliette Valcke assumes that this stipulation excluded rival clerical fools from the church of Saint Stephen.⁶ Petit de Julleville imagines that "some profane fools, vanguard of the Mère Folle, were trying to slip in among the privileged fools of the ducal chapel."⁷ But the clause need reflect no more than the understandable

4. Plancher, *Histoire*, 4:ccclxvii (*preuves* 270); Chevrier, "Débuts," 95.

5. For the full text of the *confirmation*, see Tilliot, 104–7; Valcke, "Société," 41–44.

6. Valcke, "Société," 43 n. 25. Tilliot, 21–22, provides two references to an outdoor Feast of Fools at Saint Stephen's: shaving the "cantor of fools" (*préchantre des foux*) on a stage in front of the church in 1494; and parading through the streets with "fifes, drums, and other instruments," while carrying lanterns ahead of the "cantor," in 1621.

7. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 198–99.

wish of the king's representatives to preserve the status quo established by Philip the Good. The treaty of Dijon obliged them to do no more.

The royal document allowed the chapel fools "to wear the livery of the staff bearer [*bâtonnier*]." Reading backward from the later customs of the *Infanterie*, Valcke understands this to mean that the chapel fools donned the traditional motley costume and eared hood of a secular fool.⁸ A far more likely interpretation is that the *bâtonnier* was heir to the *bacularius* of earlier Feasts of Fools, deriving his name not from a fool's marotte but from a clerical staff of office. Like his predecessors, he would have worn ecclesiastical vestments, perhaps special silk copes. The royal document is best read as authorizing his supporting "fools" to wear a similar ecclesiastical "livery."

One piece of evidence, however, has been widely accepted as proof that the *bâtonnier* and his clerical fools in the Sainte-Chapelle dressed and acted like secular fools. Among the dozen drawings published by Tilliot, documenting costumes, banners, seals, carvings, and other surviving material culture of the *Infanterie Dijonnaise*, there is one that depicts "the *bâton* of this company."⁹ Petit de Julleville describes the intricately carved design that tops the *bâton*: "A fool, visible to his waist, rises from a nest made of vine branches, holding a cup in his right hand and a bottle in his left. Among the branches, fools' heads play and grimace. Each fool wears a scalloped collar and a hood with two large ears. One of the fools arches his head backward, presenting a wide open mouth to the neck of the bottle."¹⁰

Most of the objects depicted in this series of twelve drawings belong to the period of the *Infanterie*'s well-documented existence after 1574. The *bâton*, however, carries a small plaque on which the date "1482" is inscribed. Although Tilliot himself drew no conclusion from this date, later scholars assumed that it recorded the year of the *bâton*'s construction. They therefore took it for granted that the *bâton* belonged to the *bâtonnier* of the chapel's Feast of Fools and that its carved fools represented "the fools in the ducal chapel."¹¹ This is highly improbable. Liturgical fools did not wear hoods with ears; secular fools, including those of the *Infanterie Dijonnaise*, did. The *bâton* almost certainly belonged, as Tilliot clearly states, to the festive society of the *Mère Folle*. The inscribed date, I suspect, does not record the year in which the *bâton* was made. Rather it memorializes the year in which the representatives of Louis XI confirmed the chapel fools' privileges. By the

8. Valcke, "Société," 36.

9. Tilliot, pl. 4.

10. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 197.

11. Chambers, 1:384; cf. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 196–97; Valcke, "Société," 36.

seventeenth century, as we shall see, it was in the society's interests to claim descent from the clerical fools of the Sainte-Chapelle. In the face of contemporary royal displeasure, the Infanterie Dijonnaise hoped to find shelter under the earlier royal license of 1482.

Even more problematic is a document found shortly before 1855 behind the wainscot of the great room in Dijon's Dominican convent. Valcke describes the document as "a parchment from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, attached to a small board and bearing the inscription 'CHORUS' in illustrated Gothic letters on a green, red, and gold background, decorated with flowers and fruits. Two heads adorn the C, the first representing a grimacing fool and the second a crowned old man, perhaps Father Good Times [*le père Bon Temps*]." ¹² Similar boards were hung in churches to indicate which side of the choir should begin the office. From the coloring of the background and the depiction of the fools' heads, Valcke deduces that this particular board belonged to the Infanterie Dijonnaise, which used to hold its meetings nearby. ¹³ "Perhaps," she concludes, "it represented a reminiscence of the Feast of Fools when they used to give themselves to parodies of the liturgy." ¹⁴ But there is no evidence that either the chapel fools or the Mère Folle engaged in parodies of the liturgy. The board may just as well have belonged to the Dominicans, in whose convent it was found, and involved a playful visual reference to their sixteenth-century neighbors, the Mère Folle.

In fact, only tenuous documentary evidence survives of the Feast of Fools in the Sainte-Chapelle after 1482. Between 1494 and 1516, the chapel archives contain occasional references to a "boite de la feste aux fols" (box of the Feast of Fools), to which newly appointed canons were required to contribute. Perhaps the funds helped to cover the cost of food and drink at the feast. ¹⁵ In any case, it is a further sixty years before the Infanterie makes its first appearance in the city records.

12. Valcke, "Société," 73; cf. Valcke, "Théâtre," 66 n. 1. Lépine, *Fastes*, fasc. 3, 42, provides a color print of the parchment; he also proposes (52), in keeping with his anachronistic reconstruction of events in 1482, that both the parchment and the *bâton* were then presented to the Mère Folle by the military governor. Załuska, *Manuscrits*, 275–76, dates the parchment to the early sixteenth century and cites Rossignol, *Fête*, for the story of its discovery. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Rossignol's work.

13. According to Tilliot, 108, the company met "in the room of the *jeu de Paume de la Poissonnerie* [tennis court of the Fish Market]." Valcke, "Société," 73, places this building at what is now 82 Rue des Godrans.

14. Valcke, "Société," 73.

15. Yann Dahhaoui (personal communication, May 1 and 24, 2010), citing vol. 2 of Garnier and Gauthier, *Inventaire*. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Garnier and Gauthier's book.

Performance activities of Dijon's secular youth groups, by contrast, were expanding. A sketch from around 1438 provides us with visual evidence of one such group. The group's leader, the "king of love" (*roi d'amour*), "has left us an astonishing drawing of his Carnival retinue, parading as roosters in the midst of other masked personages and male animals, as he blows on the rose that he holds in his fist."¹⁶ At the center of the sketch is a "giant mannequin with a blackened face." Past the giant marches the "king of love" himself, wearing a bird mask and crowned with a rooster's crest. The king clutches a rose, whose petals scatter as he blows on them. He is preceded by a stag with visible genitalia, and followed by two swordsmen, one with a feathered helmet, the other with a rooster's crest. Jacques Rossiaud understands the masquerade to represent "love . . . as a hunt," with the rose recalling, as it did in the popular *Roman de la Rose*, the female object of desire.¹⁷ The Carnival venue and showy character of the masquerade make the "king of love" and his followers more likely precursors of the *Infanterie Dijonnaise* than the clerical Feast of Fools on 1 January.

Plays staged by Dijon's law clerks were another likely ancestor of the *Mère Folle*. In 1497 law clerks from the city's *basoche* staged a play about King Xerxes and Queen Esther. In 1509 another generation of clerks acted the story of Susanna and the elders. Both plays drew on biblical material but probably appealed to young clerks because of the opportunity they afforded to satirize old men lusting after young women.¹⁸ *Basoche* performances disappear from the records in Dijon after 1560.¹⁹ The early satires of the *Mère Folle* replaced them. According to Valcke, "the majority of [the society's] members came from the town's legal establishment."²⁰ Moreover, *L'Asnerie* (1576), the first play known to have been staged by the *Mère Folle*, "presents a structure and a vocabulary that emanates directly from the law courts and betrays the influence of the *Basoche*."²¹

The name of the *Mère Folle* was borrowed from lay youth groups and festive societies elsewhere. Troyes had a *Marie la Folle* as early as 1380. In the early sixteenth century, some professional performers were given the name *Mère Sotte* (Mother Fool) in recognition of their contributions to the comic theater. The actor and playwright Pierre Gringoire began to use this title

16. Rossiaud, "Prostitution," 309; Rossiaud, "Fraternités," 91, reproduces the drawing.

17. Rossiaud, "Fraternités," 90–93.

18. Rossiaud, "Prostitution," 325 n. 89. On the early history of the Parlement of Dijon, which was established in 1480, see Chevrier, "Débuts."

19. Beam, *Laughing*, 120.

20. Valcke, "Société," 63.

21. *Ibid.*, 221; Valcke, "Satire," 150.

after 1509.²² Langres, to whose diocese Dijon belonged, had a Mère Folle “et ses sots” (and her fools) from sometime in the fifteenth century until around 1550.²³ Châlon-sur-Saône had a Mère Folle as late as 1626.²⁴

Nevertheless, the Feast of Fools makes one final appearance in the supposed prehistory of Dijon’s Mère Folle. On 19 January 1552 the regional Parlement of Dijon issued an *arrêt* (judgment) intended to prevent “scandals and mockeries . . . in cathedral churches, collegiate churches and others under the jurisdiction of the court . . . on the day of the feast of the Innocents and other days.” Specifically, the ruling forbade clergy to engage in “any insolences and tumults in the churches, to leave the churches empty, and to parade through towns with dances and costumes that are inappropriate for their ecclesiastical state.”²⁵ Although the text refers by name only to the feast of the Innocents, its heading (perhaps added by a later editor) identifies the ruling as one “that abolished [or abolishes] the Feast of Fools” (*qui abolit la Fête des Foux*).

Had the Feast of Fools in Dijon’s Sainte-Chapelle still been active in 1552, it would have been subject to this decree: the chapel’s clergy could not have claimed exemption from the ruling of a royal parlement. Historians who look for the roots of the Infanterie Dijonnaise in the chapel’s Feast of Fools therefore suppose that the 1552 ruling drove the clerical fools from the Sainte-Chapelle into the streets, where they formed the nucleus of a lay festive society, led by the Mère Folle, which was fully active by the 1570s. But the request for the parliamentary ruling came from the dean and chapter of the cathedral of St.-Vincent in Châlon-sur-Saône, some forty miles south of Dijon. The ruling was directed specifically against the Feast of the Innocents in Châlon and only generally toward similar “abuses” elsewhere. It makes no mention of Dijon’s Sainte-Chapelle. The document, in short, offers no evidence that the chapel’s Feast of Fools was still active in the mid-sixteenth century, let alone that it was a target of the decree. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it is likely that the chapel’s feast came to an end soon after its final mention in the archives in 1516. A gap of nearly sixty years thus exists between the last documented evidence of the Feast of Fools in the Sainte-Chapelle and the first evidence of the Infanterie in the 1570s.

As festive societies go, the Infanterie Dijonnaise was a late starter. In 1574 the company took part in festivities celebrating the return of Henry III from

22. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 160–67; Bouhaïk-Gironès, *Clercs*, 133, 202–3.

23. Sadron, “Associations,” 226.

24. Tilliot, 179–80. For more on the iconography of Dame Folly in northern Europe during the sixteenth century, see Pinson, *Fools*, 91–108.

25. For the full text of the *arrêt du Parlement*, see Tilliot, 74–76.

Poland.²⁶ In 1576 it staged *L'Asnerie*, a play that chastised a local official for beating his wife.²⁷ On 6 February 1579 the Parlement of Dijon affirmed a judicial decision made by the Mère Folle. Such rulings by the society's leader were binding on its members and could be appealed only to the parlement.²⁸ A week later the society organized a lavish parade through the city, including "seventy or eighty horses, . . . a triumphal chariot bearing the nine Muses, Apollo, and the god Mars, with the music of viols, lute, and organs," and players praising the house of Lorraine in several languages.²⁹

The subsequent history of the Mère Folle, until it disappears from the records in 1660, is well documented.³⁰ Like many all-male societies before and since, the Mère Folle met to eat and drink, to elect officers, and to admit new members. Some of its members, recruited partly for the political protection they could afford, were high-ranking members of the nobility. Henry of Bourbon, prince of Condé, inducted in 1626, is perhaps the best example.³¹ Several times a year the company took to the streets to participate in the entries of royal or other noble visitors, to entertain the crowds at Carnival or on the first of May, to stage *sotties* or other plays, or to engage in noisy charivari. Its formal parades were both lavish and orderly, incorporating as many as two hundred men on foot, in red, green, and yellow uniforms, carrying marottes. Other men rode finely caparisoned horses, and yet others, including the cross-dressed Mère Folle himself, were seated on ornately decorated and painted floats (*chariots*). Some floats supported small stages on which actors and musicians performed. The company's flags and banners—all in red, green, and yellow—depicted yet more fools, two of whom bared their buttocks to the winds, and the familiar motto, "Stultorum infinitus est numerus."³²

The purpose of the *sotties* and the charivari was "to correct the bad manners of society"³³ by satire, ridicule, and exposure. Despite its public claims of foolishness, the Mère Folle was generally a force for social conservatism. The society's *Comédie des mécontents* (1583), for example, satirized—among

26. Valcke, "Société," 88.

27. For the date of the play, see Valcke, "Société," 218–20; Farr, *Hands*, 218 n. 93. For the text of the play, see Valcke, "Société," 327–82; Durandea, *Théâtre*, vol. 3. For discussion, see Valcke, "Satire," 150–53.

28. Tilliot, 109.

29. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 201.

30. For the history of the Mère Folle during this period, see Tilliot, 79–183; Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 201–32; Valcke, "Société," 63–99.

31. For the acts of reception of various members, including Henry of Bourbon, see Tilliot, 117–31.

32. Tilliot, 108–12, pls. 5–7; Valcke, "Société," 74–79.

33. Philibert de La Mare, quoted in Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 205.

others—servant girls who wore ornaments and cosmetics above their station, a practice recently forbidden by local law.³⁴ But the society's later plays also denounced abuses by those in power. In the *Reveil de Bon Temps*, written for performance during Carnival 1623, the society's fools took aim at "national disorders and even the misconduct of the royal court. Incessant wars, government corruption, depravity, cowardice, theft, female extravagance, gluttony, laziness, and adultery" were all targets of the play's satire.³⁵

The Mère Folle ran into serious trouble in 1630. On the evening of 27 February, riots against the prospect of higher taxes broke out in Dijon. Armed protesters marched on the city center. The next morning, the mob pillaged the houses of two government officials, looting wine and setting fire to the furnishings. Among the objects burned was a portrait of Louis XIII. Shortly afterward the king stripped Dijon of some of its electoral privileges. Although no evidence survives of the Mère Folle's involvement in the uprising, the society's persistent satire may have been thought conducive to rebellion.³⁶ On 21 June the king issued an edict in which he declared, "We abrogate, revoke, and abolish the company of l'Infanterie and Mère Folle."³⁷ The following year Louis reinstated Dijon's privileges. Henry of Bourbon, as the newly appointed governor of Burgundy, then restored the right of the Mère Folle to engage in "respectable and public merrymaking," but he insisted that Mère Folle should henceforth "ask permission to do so from the governor or lieutenant of the king, or, in their absence, from the mayor [*vicomte-mayeur*] of the town."³⁸

The Mère Folle survived for another thirty years, taking part in noble entries and occasionally performing "inoffensive pieces designed to flatter the elites."³⁹ Its last outing honored the return to Dijon of Isabelle, princess of Condé, in 1660. After that, it ceased to exist.⁴⁰ It may be no coincidence that in 1661 the young Louis XIV announced, to the astonishment of his ministers, that he would assume all responsibility for ruling the kingdom himself. Louis's ideal of absolute monarchy brooked no dissent.

34. For Valcke's introduction to and edited text of *La comédie des mécontents*, see Valcke, "Société," 237–44, 403–31.

35. Valcke, "Société," 280, and, for an introduction to and edited text of *Le reveil de Bon Temps*, 280–87, 556–74. For the first published edition of the play, see Tilliot, 153–73.

36. Valcke, "Société," 90–95; Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 218–19; Breen, "Addressing," 352.

37. For the full text of Louis's edict, see Tilliot, 181–83.

38. Ordinance of 10 May 1631, quoted by Durandea, *Aimé*, 224 n. 1; cf. Valcke, "Société," 95.

39. Valcke, "Société," 95.

40. For the last years of the Mère Folle, see Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 222–30; Valcke, "Société," 95–99.

It is safe to conclude that the Infanterie Dijonnaise had no historical connection with the Feast of Fools in Dijon's Sainte-Chapelle. The two groups were entirely different in kind. There is no reason to believe that the clerical Feast of Fools was anything but a dignified expression of the seasonal liturgy. Nor is there any reason to believe that the Infanterie was ever anything but a festive society, devoted to social gatherings, magnificent parades, *sotties*, and charivaris. The idea that the festive society was heir to the liturgical feast was probably first advanced by high-ranking members of the Infanterie wanting to claim for their own society, at a time of political uncertainty, the ducal and royal authority once accorded to the chapel's Feast of Fools.⁴¹ In truth, the company's ancestry was almost certainly bourgeois, traceable to local youth groups and *basoches*, and to the example of festive societies elsewhere.

Nevertheless, claims that the Infanterie Dijonnaise had its origins in the Sainte-Chapelle's Feast of Fools have had a far-reaching effect. At first, the confusion was restricted to local historians who accepted the society's own account of its approved chapel heritage. Philibert de La Mare (d. 1687) was perhaps the first to do so. "The Feast of Fools [Festum Fatuorum]," he wrote, "was what we now call *la Mere-folie*."⁴² Others followed suit. Tilliot claimed that the Mère Folle "existed under Duke Philip the Good, before 1454, as one can see from the confirmation granted it in that same year by the prince."⁴³ Frédéric Lépine concocted a fictitious (and perversely violent) account of the Mère Folle's public antics on the day of the later royal confirmation in 1482.⁴⁴

In time the confusion spread beyond Dijon. Historians of repute from Paris and London accepted the local narrative. Petit de Julleville, despite noting marked differences between the Feast of Fools and the Mère Folle, endorsed Tilliot's verdict that Philip the Good had licensed the Mère Folle in 1454: "All historians trace the foundation of the Mère Folle to this famous charter. It can hardly be doubted, in fact, that the Mère Folle was heir to the Feast of Fools of the ducal chapel; but it curiously differed from its predecessor in its lay character and its complex organization."⁴⁵ Chambers, too, embraced the established narrative. The Infanterie Dijonnaise, he wrote,

41. This claim was implicitly repeated in "Adieux des Dijonnais à Bon Temps," a short prose piece written for the Infanterie Dijonnaise about 1644, a few years before its final demise. There a vine grower remembers Bon Temps's "pretty wife . . . , Meire Fôlie, who lived in the time of the dukes [*qui vivó dó le tan dé Du*]" ; see Valcke, "Société," 45 n. 28, 317, 678, and, for Valcke's introduction to and edited text of "Adieux," 315–19, 675–81.

42. Tilliot, 80, 97–99.

43. Tilliot, 79–80, 100.

44. Lépine, *Fastes*, fasc. 3.

45. Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 196.

“seems directly traceable to the fall of an ecclesiastical Feast of Fools. Such a feast was held... in the ducal, afterwards royal, chapel, and was abolished by the Parlement of Dijon in 1552. Before this date nothing is heard of l’Infanterie. A quarter of a century later it is in full swing.... The Dijon example is but a late one of a development which had long taken place in many parts of northern France and Flanders.”⁴⁶ But as we have seen repeatedly, there is no evidence of such development elsewhere. On the contrary, far from following the precedent of earlier models in other French cities, it was “the Dijon example” that had itself been shaping scholarly narratives of other clerical feasts and festive societies.

Even current scholars have raised few objections to the prevailing narrative of the Mère Folle’s chapel heritage.⁴⁷ Valcke is the most thorough recent historian of the Infanterie Dijonnaise. In her critical edition of the society’s dramatic texts and in subsequent articles, she takes a more nuanced approach than her predecessors, supplementing but not discarding the notion of clerical influence. She properly expands the list of possible influences on the Infanterie to include “rural youth abbeys” and *basoches*,⁴⁸ but still allows that the clergy of the Sainte-Chapelle’s Feast of Fools were “probable ancestors of the fools of the Infanterie.”⁴⁹ Although the clerical fools “were engaged in activities that differed profoundly from those of the Mère Folle,” she writes, “they undoubtedly exercised a certain influence on the latter in the sense that they established, in Dijon, a satirical tradition imprinted with the theme of folly.”⁵⁰ Valcke’s argument, like those of scholars before her, depends on a generalized but false image of the Feast of Fools. Summarizing the clerical Feast of Fools in Dijon’s Sainte-Chapelle with a paraphrase of the central paragraph from the 1445 letter of the Paris theologians, she adds, “After these burlesque ceremonies, the canons organized parades and marched through the streets of Dijon, dressed in a livery of fools.”⁵¹

46. Chambers, 1:373–74. Chambers believed that “the character of [the Infanterie’s] dignitaries and... badges point[s] clearly to a derivation from the chapel feast.” But Petit de Julleville, *Comédiens*, 203, more plausibly suggests that the society’s ranks of officers and their regalia had a secular model. They were, he writes, “a complete parody of a real royal court [*une royauté sérieuse*].”

47. In his otherwise careful study of “artisans and their world in Dijon, 1550–1650,” Farr, *Hands*, 214, writes, “In the fifteenth century mère-folle [*sic*] may still have been part of Ste. Chapelle’s ‘feast of fools,’ its participants canons and chaplains. Sometime during the sixteenth century, however, it became laicized, banished from the sanctuary to the street, perhaps because Dijon’s clerical elite perceived sacrilegious abuses in it.”

48. Valcke, “Société,” 46–59.

49. Valcke, “Théâtre,” 66.

50. Valcke, “Satire,” 148; cf. Valcke, “Société,” 34–35, 45–46.

51. Valcke, “Société,” 35–36.

The confusion emanating from Dijon was not confined for long to histories of the city's own clerical and lay fools. It quickly spread to general studies of the Feast of Fools and of festive societies elsewhere. Indeed, the fictitious genealogy of the Infanterie Dijonnaise has done more than any other piece of local history (with the possible exception of concocted stories of a drunken "feast of the ass" in Beauvais) to distort the narrative of the Feast of Fools as a whole. This final and most widespread layer of confusion is due to the extraordinary influence of Tilliot's *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de la fête des foux* (1741), which has played so dominant a part in shaping subsequent scholarly narratives of the Feast of Fools.

Tilliot was a native of Dijon and an avid collector of documentary and material relics of the Infanterie Dijonnaise. It was his interest in the city's festive society and its supposed origins in the Sainte-Chapelle's Feast of Fools that prompted him to gather data about the Feast of Fools in general and to identify his book not as a work of local history but as a collection of materials for a comprehensive "history of the Feast of Fools." The first half of Tilliot's book contains a miscellany of data about the Feast of Fools in general. The second half provides a valuable collection of documents about the history of the Mère Folle in particular. The second half is far more reliable than the first.

Tilliot's juxtaposition of the Mère Folle and the Feast of Fools is misleading. Not only was he wrong in supposing that the Mère Folle grew out of the Feast of Fools in the Sainte-Chapelle, but this error also led him to conform his understanding of the Feast of Fools in general to what he already knew about the Mère Folle in particular. Rather than attend to the dignified offices of the Circumcision in Sens and Beauvais or to the sustained support of many cathedral chapters for their Feasts of Fools during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (and beyond), Tilliot collected rumors of disorder and paper trails of suppression. In Tilliot's vision, the Feast of Fools became a link between the Roman Saturnalia and the Carnival revels of the Mère Folle.⁵²

Being wrong did not limit Tilliot's influence. Ordinarily careful scholars, from Petit de Julleville and Chambers to Fassler, have—as we have seen—accepted Tilliot's framework and passed it on in influential works of their own. A pattern has thus been established of taking the activities of late secular festive societies as reliable guides to the liturgical offices of early clerics at the feasts of the Circumcision and Epiphany. The character of the Feast of Fools has been misunderstood accordingly. But over 150 years

52. Tilliot, 2–5.

ago, before any of these now more famous scholars endorsed Tilliot, Aimé Chérest called for “new research” into “the Feast of Fools.” His call, based on his own familiarity with the Sens office of the Circumcision, has until now gone largely unheeded.

With this book I have tried to address Chérest’s call. I have separated the Feast of Fools from the many other festivities with which it has too often been confused. I have distinguished the fools who scorn God from the fools who are chosen by God because of their lack of worldly status. I have paid careful attention to changes over time. I have treated official hostility to the feast with considerable caution. As a result, I have read the documentary history of the Feast of Fools with a growing conviction that its dominant motif is not one of disorderly clerical revels but one of orderly seasonal liturgy. I have concluded that the Sens office of the Circumcision is a better guide than the *Mère Folle* (or any other secular festivity) to the Feast of Fools. And at the heart of the Feast of Fools, I have found not a secular fool in a cap with ass’s ears but a subdeacon or a choirboy temporarily raised to a position of honor. His elevation celebrated the twofold conviction that God sent the Christ Child to “put down the mighty from their seat and exalt the humble” and that the Christian’s calling is to be a “fool for the sake of Christ.”⁵³

53. It may be worth noting that I began my work on the Feast of Fools some years ago with the assumption that the story told by Tilliot, Petit de Julleville, and Chambers was essentially correct. This book therefore represents a considerable change in my own thinking.

Epilogue

Orange Peel in Antibes

One of the last reports of a clerical Feast of Fools pertains to the Franciscan monastery in Antibes, in the south of France. Chambers summarizes thus: “It was on Innocent’s day in the church of the Franciscans. The choir and office were left to the lay-brothers, the *quêteurs* [mendicant friars], cooks and gardeners. These put on the vestments inside out, held the books upside down, and wore spectacles with rounds of orange peel instead of glasses. They blew the ashes from the censers upon each other’s faces and heads, and instead of the proper liturgy chanted confused gibberish.”¹ This cautionary tale of monastic disorder serves as a final illustration of why I have learned to distrust the established narrative of the Feast of Fools.

The original report, on which Chambers depends, is found in *Complaint to Gassendi* (1645) by Michel Neuré, a scholar who went by several other names as well. Born Laurent Mesme in Loudun in 1594, he was the son of a poor *gargotier* (keeper of a cheap eating house). After studying with success in Poitiers, he changed his name to Michel Neuré—in an effort to hide his obscure origins—and entered the Carthusian monastery in Bordeaux. There he devoted himself to the study of mathematics. After thirty years he left the

1. Chambers, 1:317–318.

order and settled in Paris, where he allied himself with the Cartesian philosopher and mathematician Pierre Gassendi and the astronomer Jean-Baptiste Morin. He called himself variously Michel Neuré, Mathurin de Neuré, and “le sieur de Laroche.” He died in Paris around 1677.²

Neuré wrote *Complaint to Gassendi* shortly after he left the monastery. Addressed to his new mentor, the sixty-page booklet consists primarily of a scathing attack on Corpus Christi festivities in Aix (now Aix-en-Provence). After coming across a copy of the booklet in 1738, Antoine de La Roque wrote: “Although the author might be basically correct, I believe he has exaggerated matters. He paints them for us with terrifying colors. Even his style and his manner of writing Latin, in which everything is made of iron and strongly resembles that of Tertullian, renders his images even darker.”³ A French translation of parts of Neuré’s work appeared in 1757. So exaggerated was the original that the translator considered it a “satire.”⁴ Constant Leber remarked that Neuré’s “indignation was not free of bitterness and even of sarcasm.” He went on to note that Pierre-Joseph de Haitze had explicitly refuted “some of Neuré’s declamations.”⁵

Toward the end of his booklet, Neuré added brief but similarly vehement complaints about festive practices during December in the south of France. Specifically, he railed against chanting the Magnificat to the tune of an “impertinent” song, foolery in the Franciscan church in Antibes at the feast of the Innocents, and public celebrations during the feasts of Saint Eloi (1 December) and Saint Lazarus (17 December) in Marseilles. It is his complaint about the Franciscans that concerns us here.

“At the home of the Franciscans in Antibes,” he wrote, “these rites are conducted thus (and never did blind paganism display such madness in its foolish superstitions and errors). All the contemplative priests [*Therapeutae sacerdotes*] and even the superiors [*Archimandrita*] withdraw from the choir. Their places are taken by the worthless drudges of the monastery, some of whom would otherwise be filling begging bowls, others working in the kitchen, others taking care of the garden. They invite lay brothers to join them. When, on both sides, the seats ordinarily occupied by the initiates and priests are full, they announce that they will observe the office in a manner appropriate to the feast. Then they simulate a mystical and foolish frenzy

2. Lerozey, *Loudun*, 427.

3. La Roque, “Lettre,” 1972 (Tilliot, 37–38). Tilliot, 35–46, reprints the bulk of La Roque’s letter.

4. “Plaintes a Gassendi . . . traduit librement du Latin,” in Leber, *Collection*, 10:83–104 (83, 85).

5. Leber, *Collection*, 10:83 n. 3; Leber, 10:101 n. 1, quotes pertinent extracts from Haitze, *Esprit*. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Haitze’s book.

that is truly excessive and raving. They dress in priestly vestments, preferring those that are torn if they can find them, as suited to their perversion, and wearing them inside out. They hold the books upside down and pretend to read them through spectacles, perched on their noses, from which they have removed the glass, replacing it with orange peel. This makes them so deformed and gives them so ugly an appearance that no one who had not seen it would believe such foulness. This is especially true after the buffoons blow ashes out of the censers and glowing ashes out of the incense containers. Throwing ashes blindly in mockery, they scatter them on each other's stupid faces. Once they have prepared themselves in this way, they sing neither hymns nor psalms nor the normal liturgy. Instead they mutter confused and inarticulate words, and utter completely insane cries 'like a caterwauling band,' so that one would think a herd of escaped cattle more capable of saying the divine office of the day. For it would be better and truly more holy to put beasts and cattle in the temple to praise God in their own way than to bring in men of this sort, who, thinking they offer praise by ridiculing God, become more senseless than the most senseless beasts of burden and exceed the foolishness of brutes with such detestable insanity."⁶

Neuré's account is lurid. Perhaps something like this happened in Antibes. But if it did, it was late and exceptional. Moreover, Neuré is a biased witness in the extreme. Even Tilliot, who was not usually so cautious, published La Roque's warning against the exaggerated nature of Neuré's report. Chambers knew this, but he published his summary of the feast of Innocents and Fools in the Franciscan church in Antibes without any suggestion that the reader should treat the material with caution.

Whether from Thiers, Tilliot, or Chambers, Neuré's report has passed into the mainstream of scholarly accounts of the Feast of Fools as if it were both trustworthy and typical.⁷ Moreover, parts of Neuré's report have been taken out of context and added to reports of the Feast of Fools elsewhere. When, for example, Hidé asserted that "around the year 1280, the chaplains,

6. Neuré, *Querela*, 54, quoted in La Roque, "Lettre," 1973–75 (Tilliot, 39–41). For a French translation, see Thiers, *Traité*, 449–50 (Tilliot, 33–34), and for an English translation from the French, Walsh, *Curiosities*, 439–40. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Neuré's booklet. The phrase "like a caterwauling band" (*hōsper surbēnaiōn khoros*), which La Roque includes but Tilliot omits, is a modified Greek quotation from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 15.697 (7:238–41), who in turn quotes Clearchus of Soli, *On Education*: "There remains the caterwauling band, each member of which sings in mockery whatever he pleases, paying no attention to the president and teacher of the band; but even more disorderly by far than they is the spectator in the audience" (Wehrli, *Schule*, 3:13). I am grateful to John Dillon for identifying this quotation.

7. See, for example, Walsh, *Curiosities*, 439; Gilhus, *Laughing*, 81; Cochis, "Bishop," 100; and, to my embarrassment, Harris, *Carnival*, 140.

vicars, and choristers” of Laon used to parade through the city on the eve of Epiphany “in grotesque costumes, in priestly vestments that had been torn or turned inside out,”⁸ he was borrowing the costume details not from the records in Laon but from Neuré’s account of the feast of the Innocents in Antibes. So was Barbara Tuchman when she wrote that the bishop of fools was everywhere “dressed . . . in vestments turned inside out.”⁹

Like the central paragraph of the 1445 letter from the Paris theologians and the antics of the cross-dressed Mère Folle in Dijon, Neuré’s report has proved too juicy to ignore. None of these, however, bears reliable witness to the Feast of Fools. My aim in this book has been to separate the reliable from the misleading and to gather the former into a history of the Feast of Fools that, without minimizing its potential for abuse, does justice to its liturgical innovation, its devotional nature, its good humor, and even its beauty.

8. Hidé, “Notice,” 116.

9. Tuchman, *Distant*, 32. John Hus also alluded to clerics who “turned their fur-lined vestments inside out” during boy bishop ceremonies, but Neuré’s account is much better known in translation and almost certainly the source of subsequent references to vestments that were “torn or turned inside out” at the Feast of Fools.



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