

Looking a medieval gift horse in the mouth. The role of the giving of gift objects in the definition and maintenance of the power networks of Philip the Bold¹

CAROL M. CHATTAWAY

A horse's age is commonly gauged by the state of its teeth. An old proverb, according to St. Jerome common even in the fifth century, warns against looking a gift horse in the mouth². That is, one should not question the quality or implications of a gift. I propose in this article, however, to ignore the proverb and explore what lay behind the extensive giving of gift objects by Philip, nick-named the Bold, Duke of Burgundy from 1363 to his death in 1404³. To do this, I shall focus in particular on the insignia of the Order of the Golden Tree⁴, which Philip gave as New Year presents in 1403⁵.

In this context, I have taken 'gift' to mean something freely given, or given without any precisely defined return (whether of cash, goods or service) being specified in advance, and which does not appear to be part of a contract or of a household or family responsibility⁶. Gifts were, however, traditionally reciprocal, and while reciprocity in kind (that is, by means of an item of broadly comparable value) might be expected from a peer, it could not be from someone of a lesser rank. Gift-giving was thus used both as an act of power in itself, and to create obligations of service and dependency among recipients⁷. The arrangements for such reciprocity might, however, be secret, informal or unspecific, and a gift, particularly of a manufactured object, the only evidence of it to survive. Analysing Philip's gifts of objects therefore offers a possible means of identifying otherwise invisible networks of his clients.

1 This is an extended version of a paper given at the European social science history conference in Amsterdam, in March 1998, in a session entitled 'Powerbrokers, informal relations, collective identities', which explored aspects of the economical and political roles of networks in the Burgundian Netherlands in the later Middle Ages. I have taken network to mean people bound together, formally or informally, by some form of reciprocal obligation, either to each other or to a common patron. Almost everyone at this period belonged to a number of these networks, each with its own collective identity, which provided contexts for their beliefs and actions.

2 'Noli... ut vulgare proverhium eat, equi dentés inspicere donati' from Jerome's commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, quoted in *The Oxford library of words and phrases*, II, *Proverbs* (London, 1989) 91.

3 The first Duke of Burgundy from the French royal house of Valois.

4 The ducal accounts term it 'l'ordre de monseigneur', Dijon, Departmental Archives of the Côte d'Or (hereafter ADCO) B1538 f. 161 r. Later historians named it to reflect its design. See J. Richard, 'La Toison d'Or comparée aux autres ordres cheveralesques du Moyen Age', in: C. van der Bergen-Pantens, ed., *L'ordre de la Toison d'Or* (Brussels, 1996) 20.

5 New year gifts at this period in France were exchanged on January 1.

6 Such as a gown for the year for functionaries like the Chancellor, clothes for special occasions, such as weddings and funerals, for members of the household; or clothes, furnishings and plate for wife and children.

7 See M. Mauss, *The gift* (London, 1993) 65.

Guenée dubbed the late fourteenth century *le temps des alliances*', pointing to the effect on politics and administration in France of visible, recognised networks. These might be based on kinship, marriage and godparenting, where the obligations were well understood, but not necessarily written down; on confraternities and chivalric orders, where obligations were generally spelt out; and on formal contracts of alliance, where specific obligations were entered into on oath⁸. Such networks linked kings, princes and nobles with each other, and with the leaders of civil and military administration, both centrally and locally, in the exercise of power in the state. (See Plate 1.)

In the last twenty years, in highly urbanised areas such as Flanders, where the towns played an important role, both politically and economically, attention has turned to different, but no less interesting, networks linking the Court and the towns, and to networks within towns. The former have been explored as examples of developing relationships between governors and governed; of imposing control over newly acquired areas; and as a symptom of the genesis of the modern state in the Low Countries, with the substitution of such direct relationships for those with intermediary authorities: the latter as a means of developing and maintaining social and political cohesion within a town⁹.

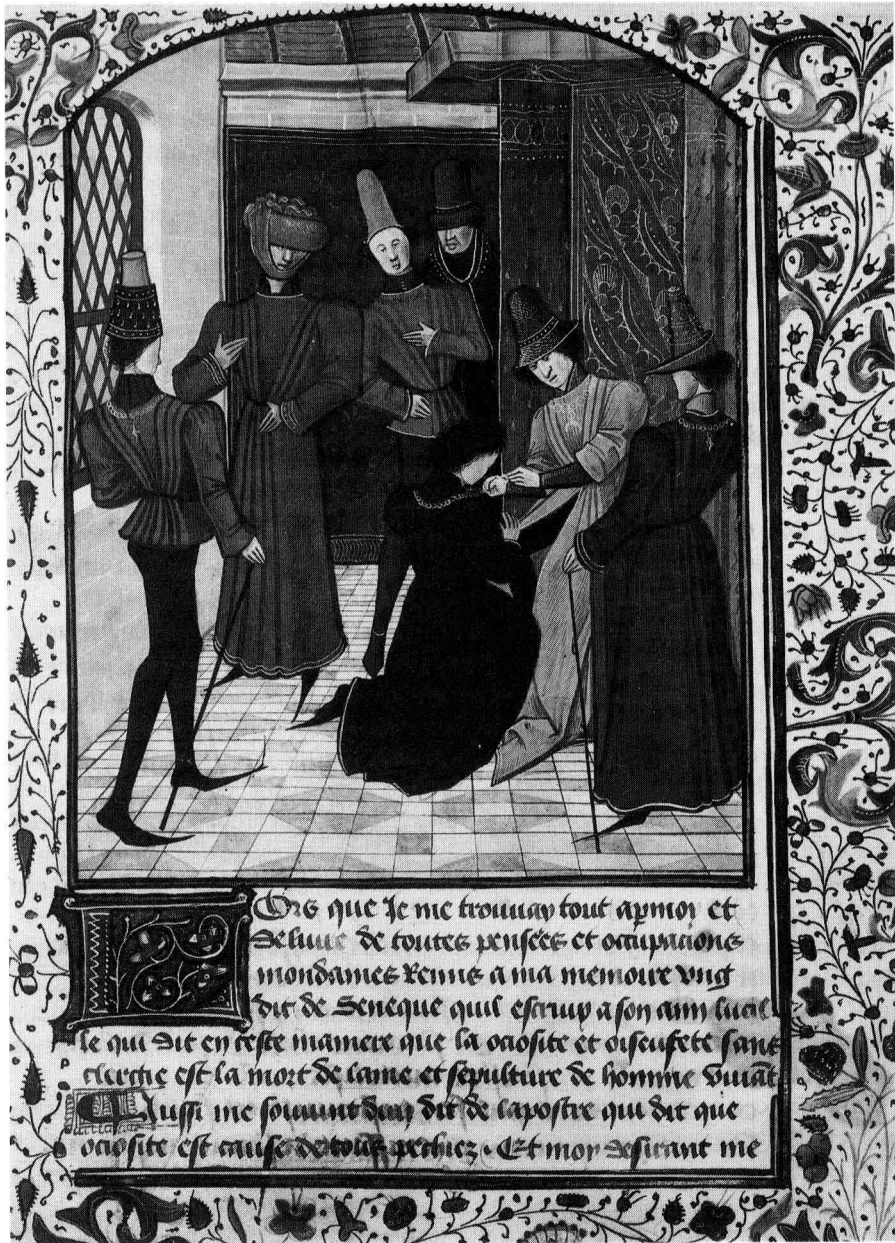
These networks are usually less formal, with no written contracts; are less specific about the obligations involved; and are, initially, all but invisible. Their nature and extent can, however, be made visible just because they are based on reciprocal obligations, where services are performed for, or rewarded by, a gift of some kind, which is recorded¹⁰. Often the recipients, and sometimes the services rendered or expected, are also recorded, though the latter may be only in broad terms.

Exploring Philip's gift of the insignia of the Order of the Golden Tree offers an opportunity to marry these two approaches. Although termed an Order, it had none of the conventional trappings of the recognised, Court-based networks which affected the exercise of power, and consequently has not been studied from this perspective. Since it was given to a carefully selected group of influential people, at the same time, it might be assumed that a network with a common obligation was being developed. The ducal accounts give no indication of what that obligation might have been. The gift of the insignia not only renders visible a hitherto unrecognised power network, but offers an opportunity to discover the nature and purpose of the obligation it was designed to secure. Gift objects, like the insignia, and ornaments, jewellery,

8 B. Guenée, *Un meutre, une société* (Paris, 1992) 111.

9 M. Boone, 'Dons et pots-de-vin, aspects de la sociabilité urbaine au bas moyen âge. Le cas Gantois pendant la période bourguignonne', *Revue du Nord*, LXX (1988) 231-247; A. Derville, 'Pots-de-vin, cadeaux, racket, patronage', *Revue du Nord*, LVI (1974) 341-364.

10 Some gifts of coin, plate or consumables were designed to gain general protection for the town and its interests and, if given on a regular basis, served almost as a retainer. Others were offered voluntarily as a specific payment to gain the influence of an intermediary or to conclude a particular business deal, or even extorted by force. See A. Derville, 'Les pots-de-vin dans le dernier tiers du XVe siècle (d'après les comptes le Lille et de Saint-Omer)', in: W. P. Blockmans, ed., *Le privilège générale! les privilèges régionaux de Marie de Bourgogne pour les Pays-Bas en 1477* (Kortrijk, 1985) 449-469.



1 Presentation of the Insignia of the Order of the Golden Fleece, from *Recueil de Traitées de la Noblesse*, Brussels, Royal Library Ms. 10977-10979, f. 33.

lengths of precious textiles, furnishings and tapestries have been studied in this period, but not in the context of political networking. This article seeks to remedy that omission.

The reasons for this neglect lie, I suspect, in the nature of the objects themselves, and in the contexts in which their giving has been perceived by historians. As artefacts, they have been studied in the context of the development of artistic styles or techniques, or of commercial and trading practices¹¹. Their giving has been viewed as an aspect of the 'largesse' or generosity which was an important and widely recognised aspect of good lordship in the Middle Ages; or as a mark of apparently thoughtless extravagance; or as a general means of impressing recipients with the giver's wealth, and therefore power¹².

Since the objects were often given to family, household, and courtiers, they have been seen primarily as an alternative or addition to the provision of food, clothing, lodging and other provisions in kind which formed the mainstay of such people's support — wages and pensions at Court being meagre, partial and intermittent in this period¹³.

Again, since the objects were often given on conventional occasions, such as baptisms, weddings, and New Year, they have been seen as a conventional part of social intercourse and of traditional ceremonial¹⁴. (See Plate 2.)

In fact, a closer inspection of both the objects and the contexts in which they were given permits not only the identification of networks of recipients and some definition of their size, relative importance and period of existence, but enables some idea to be formed of the purposes for which they were set up or maintained.

No example of the insignia of the Order of the Golden Tree survives, but the accounts detail it as a brooch or clasp with an eagle and a lion, enamelled in white, between which rose a gold tree. Below was a sapphire crescent, and around it curled a scroll on which was spelt out the motto 'in loyalty' in letters of rouge cler enamel. It was finished off with red and blue enamel leaves¹⁵. Let us see what an examination can tell us.

The *nature* of the gift object can indicate something about the purpose of the giving. Badges, similar to brooches in form, were associated with loyalty and affiliation, and some contemporary princes, like Richard II of England, gave them, usually with a personal device, to retainers to reinforce such bonds¹⁶. Philip, however, had never followed this practice.

The intrinsic value, rarity or popularity of the *materials* of which the gift was made might indicate the value placed on the recipient's service. Since rouge cler was the most expensive and up-to-date form of enamelling at this period, the Order must

11 See, for instance R. Lightbown, *Goldsmiths' work in medieval France* (London, 1978).

12 See, for instance H. David, *Philippe le Hardi, duc de Bourgogne, protecteur des arts* (Dijon, 1937), and by the same author, *Philippe le Hardi... le train somptuaire d'un grand Valois* (Dijon, 1947).

13 H. Kruse, *Hof, Amt und Gagen* (Bonn, 1996) explores the change to a predominantly money-based remuneration system at the Burgundian court in the mid fifteenth century.

14 See J. Heers, *Fêtes, jeux et joutes dans les sociétés d'occident à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1982).

15 ADCO B1538f. 161r.

16 R. Lightbown, *Medieval European jewellery* (London, 1992) 196.



2 Fromondin de Bordeaux offering a present to Béatrice de Cologne and Guérin de Metz at their wedding feast, from *Histoire de Charles Martel*, Brussels, Royal Library Ms. 8, f. 326.

have been designed to obtain or reward significant service. Materials could also indicate purpose — sapphires were believed to protect against harm, and to promote loyalty¹⁷. Colours, too, could be indicative — blue being commonly associated with loyalty, perhaps because it was the colour of sapphire¹⁸.

Specific decorations on gifts, like inscriptions, coats-of arms, other personal devices and mottoes, might indicate the giver, the recipient, the occasion or the purpose of the gift¹⁹. Philip had never used the design of the Order as a whole before, nor does it ever appear to have been used again. It was not a traditional family devise, nor one closely associated with his territories, and the motto 'in loyalty' had been used before by Philip only once, on the collars of his dogs, and therefore gives only a very general, vague clue as to the possible purpose of the gift²⁰. This uniqueness, and iconographic complexity in comparison to the devices of his contemporaries, suggests that it was intended to convey a more specific message.

In an age which delighted in visual and literary allegory, more *general decoration*, like that of the Order, could have many, often conflicting connotations, and its use in a particular instance needs therefore to be checked against other examples of its use by the giver, and against the context²¹.

The purpose of gifts with such general decoration can be deciphered sometimes also by what is known, or can be deduced, about the giver's general attitudes and beliefs, and about his particular concerns at or around the occasion of gift-giving²².

As to the *occasions* of gift-giving, the elaborate and formal ceremonial of Court life could be used for more than the obvious display of power and bolstering of the privileges of rank²³. At a time when rulership was still a very personal affair; when government still lay more in the hands of members of the household and their clients, rather than with a professional, independent civil service; when a small group of nobles controlled most of the country side, but owed increasingly complex, and sometimes contradictory allegiances for scattered lands to different princes, particularly

17 L. Pannier, *Les lapidaires français du Moyen Age* (Geneva, 1973) 85, from a translation of Marbodius, of which the Duke had a copy.

18 J. Cooper, *An illustrated encyclopaedia of traditional symbols* (London, 1978) 40.

19 For example, in 1388 Philip gave his nephew, Charles VI of France, cloth of gold embroidered with the King's devices for that year. B. Prost, *Inventaires et mobiliers et extraits des comptes des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de Valois* (Paris, 1902) II, item 2501.

20 David, *Le train somptuaire*, 151 note 4.

21 Philip had used eagles positively, in a secular context, as supporters, for his motto on furnishings, and lions were a heraldic device of Flanders, part of his territory, but in neither case were they white, which at the time was a royal colour. Prost, *Inventaires*, II, 3394. They had been used negatively, however, during the entry of Charles VI's Queen to Paris, when they attacked Charles' symbol of a white hart. F. Autrand, *Charles VI* (Paris, 1986) 235.

22 During the Anglo-French peace negotiations in 1393, Philip chose to give as diplomatic sweeteners to the Duke of Lancaster, the chief English negotiator, not tapestries with conventional hunting or religious themes, but ones with an apparently political message, portraying the history of Clovis, used to justify Valois against English claims to France; ADCO 1500, f. 137v, and Pharaoh and the Nation of Moses, recording a people's escape from a non-legitimate ruler.

23 This is clear in surviving descriptions of ceremonial at the court of Philip's grandson, Philip the Good. One such, in *Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche*, Beaune, J. d'Arbaumont, éd. (Paris, 1883) IV, 1-94, indicates that the practice derived from much earlier.

in border or disputed territories; and when towns in the county of Flanders, one of the most urbanised areas in Europe, were a force with which the Duke had to reckon, especially where their interests conflicted with those of the French crown, on which he relied heavily for funds, ceremonies played an important role in bringing the Duke and his most influential subjects together publicly to reinforce bonds of loyalty and maintain control. The giving of an object, particularly if appropriately decorated, served as a reminder to the giver, the recipient, and to a wider public, of the occasion and of the bonds. Since the objects given were intended to be worn or displayed, the reminder was a public one.

Baptisms are a case in point. The spiritual kinship between godparent and child was seen as a way of extending family relationships and, in theory, almost as good a means of cementing loyalties as the political marriages which were common among the nobility. By the fourteenth century, influential godparents from a higher social rank were sought as life patrons by any with aspirations for their children's careers. These aspirations could be used by the Duke and his family to extend their networks of those who owed them service and loyalty in a conventional, and therefore unobtrusive way. The Duke's present of a silver, silver gilt, or gold cup and ewer, which the recipient would naturally display on the buffet in the room where meals were taken, served as a concrete reminder to the family and its guests both of the relationship with the prince and of its potential future benefits²⁴.

Wedding gifts of plate or jewellery from the Duke (or exacted by later Dukes from the towns for their staff or clients of powerful courtiers) served a similar function²⁵.

For those princes who gave badges to reinforce loyalty, New Year was the traditional occasion to present them. Philip had used New Year to reinforce ties with some of his household by a variety of gift objects — a practice which he might have decided to focus to secure more specific loyalty for a particular purpose.

Just because gift-giving on occasions like baptisms and New Year was conventional, an analysis can reveal something about the nature of the relationship. Those at Court might expect to receive gifts at New Year on a fairly regular basis. Fluctuations in the gifts received can therefore indicate the state of the Duke's relationship with them in a given year.

Conventionally, too, the *value* of the gifts reflected the rank and position of the recipient²⁶. When analysis suggests a departure from this norm, we can assume that there was something special about the relationship between the giver and the recipient.

It is unlikely that such variations from the hierarchical norm were accidental. The relationships of the different ranks and the privileges associated with each one were widely and clearly understood, and scrupulously observed. The insignia of the Order of the Golden Tree were carefully graded, both in value and in nature. Of the 60

24 A silver gilt goblet and 2 dozen cups were given in 1387 to the son of Jehan Blondel, a squire, who was councillor and chamberlain by 1398. Prost, *Inventaires*, II, 1646.

25 W. Paravicini, 'Invitations au mariage. Pratique sociale, abus de pouvoir, intérêt de l'état à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne au XVe siècle', in: *Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres. Comptes rendus 1995* (Paris, 1995)687-711.

26 See work in progress at the University of Kiel by Jan Hirschbiegel on New Year gifts.

recipients of the Order, to seven of the most important such as relatives like the Duke of Brittany, Philip's two eldest sons, and a nephew, together with the influential Grand Master of the King's Household, went large gold brooches enhanced with different selections of jewels, varying in value from 600 to 337,5 francs according to rank. Six identical jewelled brooches at 150 francs went to senior nobles, like the Marshal of Burgundy, Jean de Vergy, Jehan de Croy, and Guillaume de la Tremouille, some of whom served as chamberlains, as did his close confidant, Régnier Pot; sixteen identical brooches without jewels at 50 francs to more junior nobles, or ones less close to him, like Anthoine de Craon, Jehan de Chalon, and younger members of the de la Tremouille family; and finally to twenty-four squires, like Raillart de Chauffour, Guillaume Blondel and yet others of the de la Tremouille family, unadorned clasps at 30 francs²⁷.

The opportunity to analyse gift objects in this way is one of the main reasons for focussing on the reign of Philip the Bold. We have what appear to be complete and fairly detailed accounts of his household expenditure, including that on gifts, as well as wages, pensions and expenses, for all but one of his forty years' rule. This makes it possible to examine the period over which someone received gifts, and any fluctuations in their nature and value, in relation to their service to the Duke and any other emoluments they received from him. It also makes it feasible to answer questions about whether the relationships formed or reinforced in this way were deliberately planned; about whether those so favoured could be said to form networks, rather than a haphazard mass of individual relationships; and about whether any networks were temporary or permanent, in response to the needs of a particular moment or part of a considered, long-term plan.

I would argue that Philip's gift-giving was deliberate. He was certainly a prodigious gift-giver, even by the standards of his contemporaries. In the 1390s, his expenditure on New Year gifts alone accounted for some 15% of his demesne revenues²⁸. This might seem the action of a profligate, but Philip is now recognised as having been an astute politician, and financial manager²⁹. He planned his expenditure carefully to meet priority needs in the light of expected revenue, staying as far as possible within the limits of his demesne revenues, supplemented by occasional taxes only for unexpected and exceptional expenditure, and then only when he could not cover the costs by extracting gifts of money from the French crown. It is unlikely that such a man would spend wantonly or wastefully on gifts.

It might be argued that his gift-giving, while not wanton, was motivated simply by a desire to obey the conventions of his age. The evidence of his accounts, however, suggests something more than a passive response to convention. The normally regular level of expenditure on New Year gifts, for instance, fell sharply in 1369 to permit him to spend some 7500 francs on diplomatically essential wedding gifts on the

27 ADCO B1532 f. 254r-266r.

28 R. Vaughan, *Philip the Bold. The formation of the Burgundian state* (London, 1962) 228 estimates the demesne revenues as about 183,000 francs; and David, *Le train somptuaire*, 58, New Year gift costs as 20-25,000 francs in this period.

29 See Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, and A. van Nieuwenhuysen, *Les finances du duc de Bourgogne, Philippe le Hardi* (Brussels, 1984).

occasion of his marriage to the richest heiress in Western Europe, thus securing the promise of substantial future revenues without exceeding his current income or attempting to extract additional income from reluctant burghers³⁰. This would suggest that staying within his income counted for more than maintaining the level of largesse at New Year which had come to be expected of him as Duke of Burgundy, and that he shifted the focus of his gift-giving according to his policy priorities.

Nor does it appear that Philip responded passively to the behaviour of others. Although gift-giving was often reciprocal, particularly at New Year, there appears to be no evidence that he gave gifts only to those who had offered a gift to him; or that he always gave a gift to someone who had given to him. Even reciprocal gifts to family members reflected the degree of influence they could be expected to exert on his behalf, rather than their rank³¹.

Even presenting a gift personally to the Duke, or asking him for a favour involving a gift object, does not seem to have guaranteed the receipt of a gift object. It would be surprising, for instance, if members of the household had not routinely asked him to favour them by standing godfather to their child, or attending their wedding, but the number of occasions on which he did so was smaller than the number of births and marriages in the household. There is also evidence of the Duke drawing a distinction between those to whom he gave money on the occasion of a marriage or birth, and those to whom he gave an object — the latter implying a closer relationship and more personal input by the Duke³². He does, therefore, seem to have exercised some deliberate choice in his gift-giving.

Nor did the same people receive gifts on all occasions. Normal practice today would be for a group meriting wedding or baptismal gifts to be similar to that meriting New Year gifts, or at least for there to be a common core. Apart from a very small core of close family, however, this does not seem to have been the case with the Duke. Even allowing for the different circumstances, this suggests that he deliberately gave a gift to selected people on selected occasions.

But what justification is there for concluding that these recipients formed part of deliberately constructed networks, rather than series of individual, unrelated obligations created on selected occasions? Is there evidence of connection between recipients, rather than simply between the Duke and the recipient, or of the recipients acting together as a group?

Within groups, there are examples of recipients of baptismal gifts being related to each other in some way, or of being clients of others in the royal family or in their households. This might suggest that the Duke was tapping into existing networks or reinforcing them.

30 Prost I lists the wedding gifts in *Inventaires et mobiliers et extraits des comptes des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de Valois* (Paris, 1902) I, items 972-1017. There are virtually no New Year gifts.

31 For example, Prost, *Inventaires*, II, 1052.

32 For example, in the accounts for 1399-1400, the babies of a frequently mentioned squire and a personal secretary received plate, and the Duke's name, while that of a rarely mentioned squire received cash from the Duke as godfather—ADCOB1519 f. 187v, 193v, 194v. This seems to correspond with later practice within the towns, see Boone, 'Dons et pots-de-vin ... bourguignonne'.

The continuity of the godparenting relationship, in the sense that die Duke appears not only to have given a present at baptism, but to have contributed to educating his godchildren, and to finding places for them either in his own household or those of his blood and spiritual kin, could suggest some long-term network of clientage.

It is difficult to be sure that gifts secured the desired behaviour by a group of recipients, if that behaviour is general in form, and over a long period, unless the group consistently exhibited more loyal behaviour than others of comparable rank and function who were not so favoured, and might be regarded as a control group. Some gift networks seem, however, to have been designed to secure support for shorter term and more specific Ducal policy. Both the existence of such a network and its behaviour as a group is easier to trace where the Duke gave recipients gifts with identical decoration, on the same occasion.

The gift of the Order of the Golden Tree was the only time in the nearly forty years of Philip's rule that he had given the same device on gifts to a large group of people on the same occasion³³. The fact that others of similar rank and function received either a different New Year gift, or none at all on this occasion, immediately set the recipients of the Order apart as specially selected. The striking nature of the design also set them apart visually.

Despite this visibility, and the fact that the gifts were termed an Order, I would argue that it can nevertheless be categorised as an informal network. There is no evidence of any regulations, ceremonies or livery, of the kind associated with formal princely Orders of Chivalry, such as the Order of the Garter. This may be because Philip died the following year, but his successors made no effort to formalise or retain it.

With no written sources to indicate the objectives of the Order, we have to rely on interpreting its decoration, in the context of events at the time, to identify Philip's purpose in giving it, before trying to establish whether he succeeded in this with the group of recipients.

There have been several interpretations of the Order, none of which I feel can be substantiated. As we have seen, it seems to have been more than a general token of largesse or reinforcement of household loyalty. Nor is it likely to have been a chivalric conceit, designed to match that of the Order of the Rose, which Christine de Pisan recorded her then patron, Philip's rival, the Duke of Orleans, as having established in January 1402 to protect the honour of ladies. Neither the iconography nor the occasion of Philip's Order would support such an interpretation, except perhaps the reference to loyalty, which Christine had portrayed as the most important aspect of courtly love³⁴. Philip might be argued, in any case, to have expressed his support for the conceits of chivalry and courtly love in his establishment some three years earlier, in a charter promulgated on St. Valentine's Day 1400, of the *Cour Amoureuse*³⁵. Unlike

33 This is apart from the badges, ensigns, or 'email' with his arms which Lightbown, *Medieval European jewellery*, 198, notes that Philip gave to his heralds in 1375.

34 See E. McLeod, *The Order of the Rose. The life and ideas of Christine de Pizan* (London, 1976) 75-76, for this Order.

35 See *La Cour Amoureuse dite de Charles VI*, C. Bozzolo, H. Loya, ed. (Paris, 1982) I, Introduction, 2-4.

these, the recipients of the Golden Tree included no women, clerics, merchants or local officials.

Some historians have interpreted the Order of the Golden Tree as crusade-related, seeing it as an attempt to avenge the humiliating defeat at Nicopolis in 1396 of the crusade nominally led by Philip's eldest son; as part of a continuing crusading policy pursued by the Valois Burgundian Dukes to establish themselves as a major European power, or as an expression of the traditional crusade ideal pursued by the Burgundians since the days of Charlemagne³⁶. It is unlikely that the Order was purely retrospective. There were some honorary Orders for those returning from service on crusade, but the membership of Philip's Order does not bear out this interpretation³⁷.

Although some recipients had been involved in crusades, many had not. Iconographically, the only potential link with crusade in the devise is the crescent, which had other meanings in the period, and was not as strongly linked with Islam as today³⁸. Nor does the Order bear any resemblance to the crusading order which Philip de Mézières, the King's tutor, proposed to the Duke³⁹. Crusading orders were also traditionally inaugurated on the feast day of a military saint, like St. George, rather than on New Year's day. In 1403, Philip had only just finished meeting the costs of the 1396 crusade, and there is no evidence that he was either honouring those who served on it, or planning another attempt.

What then might have been the purpose of Philip's Order? As we have seen, he had not used the whole devise before, but elements of it had featured on his garments and household decoration⁴⁰: It is dangerous to interpret individual elements of a devise in isolation, as the meaning is affected by their interrelationship, but some pointers can be gleaned by looking at these earlier uses. Individual elements can be tied in to contemporary visual symbols or literary allegories related to his nephew, the French king, Charles VI; to concepts of family solidarity, dynastic continuity and loyalty; and to occasions of marriage celebrations in Philip's or the Royal family⁴¹.

36 David, *Le train somptuaire*, 151; M. Pastoureau, 'La Toison d'Or, sa légende, ses symboles, son influence sur l'histoire littéraire', in: Van den Bergen-Pantens, *L'Ordre de la Toison d'Or*, 101; H. Müller, *Kreuzzugspläne und Kreuzzugspolitik des Herzogs Philipp des Guten von Burgund* (Schriftenreihe des Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie, Band 51 ; Göttingen, 1993) 13; and M. Kintzinger, 'Sigismond, roi de Hongrie, et la croisade', in: *Nicopolis, 1396-1996* (Annales de Bourgogne, Tome 68, fasc. 3; Dijon, 1996)31.

37 See D'Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown. The monarchical orders of knighthood in later medieval Europe 1325-1520* (Suffolk, 1987).

38 The Ottoman symbol of the crescent did not become the symbol of Islam until after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The crescent was a symbol of the Virgin Mary in this period, see J. Speake, *The Dent dictionary of symbols in Christian art*, 33, but there was no crusading Order with this devise until René of Anjou's in 1448.

39 See 'Epistre Lamentable', in: J. Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed., *Chroniques de Froissart*, XVI, 444-523.

40 Philip had used crescents on his garments in 1389 at the jousts held by Charles VI to mark the entry to Paris of his Queen, and the marriage of his brother, and in 1390 on Charles' visit to Burgundy and the marriage of Philip's daughter Bonne. Trees also featured on Philip's and his son's parade clothes at the 1389 jousts. Prost, *Inventaires*, II, 3435,3506, and 3190,3441.

41 A tree was used by de Mézières, Charles VI's tutor, as an allegory for Charles in both *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, and *Letter to Richard II*, G. W. Coopland, ed. (Liverpool, 1975) 80-82. C. Beaune argues in *The birth of an ideology* (Oxford, 1991) 297-298, that it was a popular symbol for the kingdom of France,

If we look at events in late 1402, when the Duke must have ordered the insignia for them all to be ready, we find that in the autumn, and again at the turn of the year, his nephew, Charles VI had lapsed into madness, causing public concern and rumour about attempts by the King's younger, and ambitious brother, the Duke of Orleans, to murder or replace the King, harm the Queen, and wrest control of the King's eldest son and heir, the Dauphin, and of the government and finances of the country, from the King's uncles⁴². Of these uncles, Philip was undoubtedly the most powerful and influential, with a reputation as a sober and concerned protector of French interests.

To conserve his power and especially his access to the French crown revenues on which he depended, Philip needed to preserve his influence over the King and government. It would not be surprising if, knowing the fragility of the arrangements made to secure his majority on the governing Council, Philip chose this time to reassure the Queen, as guardian of the Dauphin during the King's illness and therefore an important ally; the King himself, when lucid; and the Dauphin, of his continuing loyalty and that of a selected group, to the French crown, by distributing gifts whose decorations referred to it and to the King.

The year before, Philip had even had to call up a sizeable armed force from his territories and, ostensibly to protect the city, rushed it to Paris to confront Orleans, who was threatening it with a large mercenary force⁴³. The Queen and the King's other uncles had made strenuous attempts to effect a reconciliation between the two, and it could be that the Order represented a show of potential Burgundian strength, designed to retain the upper hand peacefully, without further recourse to armed force. This would have had the added advantage of securing popular support for him in Paris.

It is also significant that Philip was in the process of arranging contracts of marriage between the Dauphin and two of his siblings with three of the Duke's grandchildren. This would have had the effect of prolonging and reinforcing the close contacts and influence of the Burgundian dynasty with the French crown, securing continued French financial support in return for the support of the Duke's subjects for France and French interests. In 1402-1403, deteriorating relations between France and England highlighted again the latent danger for France of the close alignment of the commercial interests of Philip's Flemish subjects and of England.

It was all too easy for different forces to play on the confusion caused by the King's illness to get decisions, particularly about marriages and guardianship arrangements, reversed. The gift of an Order with symbols relating to Charles VI, Burgundy, and marriages might well have been intended to remind the king of the benefits of the proposed Burgundian alliances and of the need to honour the contracts made. The wealthy Jean de Montagu, a close friend and confidant of the King, who had recently

and was used in a political context reinforcing the contemporary French view of France as the centre of the earth, and as a second Holy Land, both of which were associated in legend with the Tree of Life. The tree also featured in a book dedicated to Charles VI, which Philip acquired from its author, Honoré Bonet in 1390, called the Tree of Battles, where the tree symbolises suffering and discord in France.

42 See Autrand, *Charles VI*, 394, and Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, 91.

43 See Autrand, *Charles VI*, 390.

been appointed Grand Master of the King's Household, one of the most influential positions at the French Court, was one of the recipients of the Order. Although he was a godchild of Philip's father, and therefore spiritual kin to the Duke, he had fled to Avignon in 1392 to escape arrest when Philip and the King's other uncles took back control of the government of France⁴⁴. This suggests that Philip might have included this former opponent in the Order to enlist the most influential help available to secure these marriages.

The fact that Philip's great-nephew, the young Duke John V of Brittany, was also a recipient of the Order, along with some senior members of his household, reinforces the interpretation of it as intended to maintain the integrity of French territory and loyalty to the French crown. Brittany, like Burgundy, was a large and strategically important fief of France. Duke John's father, who had died in 1399, leaving John to succeed as a minor, had been allied to England, in order to try to secure Breton independence, and John's widowed mother had married the new king of England, Henry IV, in 1402, and was planning to take the young Duke to England. This endangered the delicate diplomatic balance which Philip had helped to achieve by the negotiation of a lengthy truce with Charles VI's son-in-law, Richard II of England, whom Henry had just deposed. Philip had travelled to Brittany in October 1402 to negotiate a treaty of alliance against everyone except France, and to assume guardianship of the young Duke. In December, he had brought him to Paris, and then to Burgundy to maintain French control and to counter the influence of the young Duke's mother. In a further attempt to bring Brittany back into the French royal fold, John was married to a daughter of Charles VI⁴⁵.

To what extent was the gift of the Order successful in ensuring that the recipients remained loyal towards these objectives? Judging from what is known of their behaviour, it would appear that it was, at least until Philip's death. This significantly changed the picture. Whether or not Philip's heir, John the Fearless, as a recipient of the Order, wanted to pursue his father's objectives, he was not in a position to do so. He lacked his father's closeness to the throne; his influence as a guardian whom the King admired and trusted; his tactical ability and experience; his reputation for protecting French interests; and his access to French revenues. With all this, he could not counter Orleans' bids for power by peaceful means and resorted to murder. This placed the recipients of the Order in a difficult position, forcing them to choose between loyalty to French interests and to Burgundy.

This choice was most difficult for the 20 or so outside Philip's household. Despite the Burgundian marriages being achieved, and arguably staying neutral after the murder by, for instance, acting in the King's interests to negotiate a peace between the Orleanist and Burgundian factions, Jean de Montagu seems to have excited John's enmity. This was not only as one of the alleged worst abusers of power during the King's illnesses,

44 See L. Merlet, 'Biographie de Jean de Montagu, grand maître de France (1350-1409)', in: *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* (1852) 261.

45 See G. A. Knowlson, *Jean V, duc de Bretagne et l'Angleterre* (Cambridge, 1964) for the period 1402-1403 and after Philip's death.

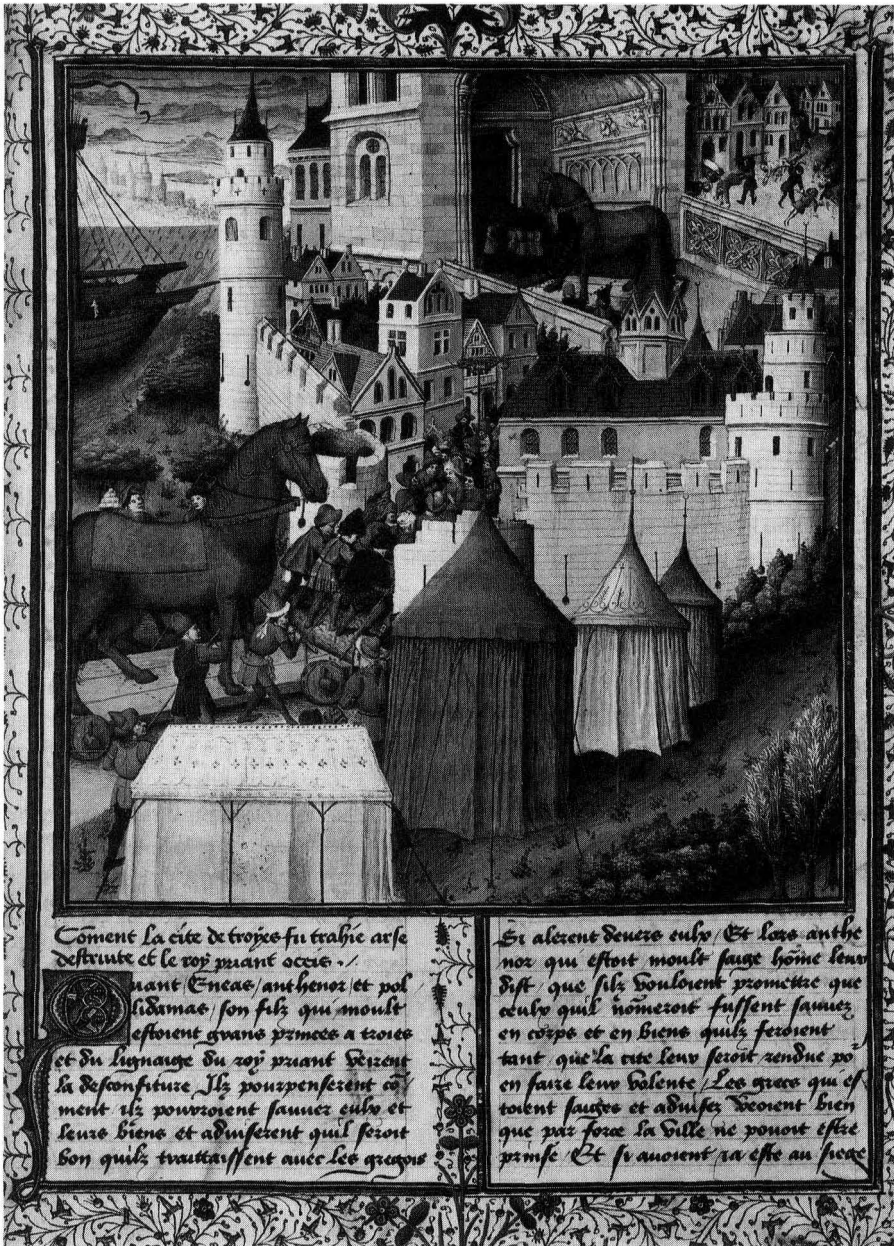
and therefore the focus of John's reforming counter-attack and propaganda against the Orleanists, but as the possible initiator of the removal of the King and the legal government from Paris in 1408, before John could seize control⁴⁶. He was executed when John regained control of the king in 1409. The Duke of Brittany supported the French Queen, but the loss of Philip's influence seems to have led to him becoming drawn into the Orleanist camp, through the marriage of his sister to the son of one of its main supporters.

In conclusion, the example of the Order suggests that networks created by object-giving to promote general support and loyalty for the giver and his family were not sufficient to secure support for more specific policy objectives, and needed to be supplemented by a more focussed and clearly visible network. It also suggests that such focussed networks were necessarily shorter-term, since they were relevant only for so long as the policy was current, and needed to be reinforced by other means if the original circumstances changed significantly.

As a postscript, I would add that some medieval recipients of gift horses, taking perhaps the well-known lesson of the Trojan horse to heart, also ignored the proverb referred to in the title of the article. (See Plate 3.) Pierre de la Trémouille, one of Philip's chamberlains, having been given a plain insignia of the Order of the Golden Tree, worth 50 francs, not only looked in the horse's mouth, but complained that it was not up to expectations. At the end of the section of the household account for that year dealing with gold and silver acquisitions by the Duke, in very small script, squeezed in at the bottom of the folio, it is recorded that one worth 225 francs had been substituted, putting Pierre on a par with senior ranking nobles and even above the Marshal of Burgundy⁴⁷. Pierre must have indicated that his rank, family connections and past services to the Duke entitled him to greater public recognition, if his support for the policies represented by the Order was to be secured.

46 See Guenée, *Un meurtre, une société*, 209.

47 ADCO B1532f.271r.



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3 The gift of the Trojan Horse, from *La fleur des histoires*, Brussels, Royal Library Ms. 9231, f. 116.

Het politiek bestel van de Republiek: een anomalie in het vroegmodern Europa?

G. DE BRUIN

Vanaf de tijdgenoten tot de dag van vandaag is het uitzonderlijk karakter van het politiek bestel in de Republiek in alle toonaarden beklemtoond¹. Het buitenissige zou primair schuilen in de combinatie van twee factoren. Enerzijds zou de Republiek een opmerkelijk gedecentraliseerde staatsopbouw hebben gekend, met de onwankelbare machtspositie van stemhebbende adelscolleges en stadsbesturen als grondslag. Deze versplintering zou in schril contrast staan tot de centralisatie die in Europa gaande was. En anderzijds zou de Republiek een eigenaardig representatief en veelhoofdig staatsgezag hebben gekend, met de omhooggevalen Statencolleges als vertegenwoordigende lichamen én als soevereine regeringen. Deze regeerwijze zou haaks staan op het absolutisme dat in Europa hoogtij vierde. De combinatie van de twee trekken in een staat die lange tijd een centrale plaats in het Europees machtsevenwicht innam en als middelpunt van de wereldhandel fungeerde zou de Republiek een uniek aanzicht geven.

Vanaf de tijdgenoten tot de jaren 1980 heeft het politiek bestel in de Republiek doorgaans een negatieve pers gehad. Voor de zeventiende-eeuwen vormden de absolute monarchie en de centralisatiepolitiek het referentiekader. Buitenlandse waarnemers beschouwden het politiek bestel in de Republiek meestal met ongelovige en verachtelijke blik. Zo'n eigenaardig gedrocht zou vroeg of laat aan tweedracht en factiestrijd ten onder moeten gaan. Inheemse beschouwers hadden ook de grootste moeite met het centrifugale en veelkoppige bestel, dat elk moment uit elkaar leek te kunnen spatten en een symbool van eendracht ontbeerde. De lappendeken van geografische en maatschappelijke eenheden met hun rechten en belangen vormde echter sinds de Opstand zo'n onaantastbaar gegeven dat de bestaande constellatie gelaten moest worden aanvaard. De vernuftige pogingen het politiek bestel te idealiseren met behulp van de klassieke harmonieleer en te legitimeren met behulp van een gefingeerd verleden konden de wijdverbreide gevoelens van onbehagen niet wegnemen. De lokroep van de 'Ware Vrijheid' vond na 1650 weinig weerklank; de lofzangen op ongebreidelde verbrokkeling en republikeinse vrijheid klonken ijl en schril.

Voor de achttiende-eeuwen vormden de voortgaande staatsversterking en centralisatiepolitiek het referentiekader. Het versteende staatsbestel van de Republiek viel steeds meer uit de toon. Uit- en inheemse waarnemers bekeken het bestel vooral na 1740 met meewarige blik; de snelle financiële, economische, militaire en politieke neergang van de Republiek droegen daartoe sterk bij. Dit negatief oordeel werd tegelijk

¹ Dit is de gewijzigde versie van een voordracht die op 24 oktober 1997 op het KNHG-congres gewijd aan de 'Geschiedschrijving over de Nederlandse Republiek' te Amsterdam is gehouden.