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Brigitte Buettner

# Metal Labor, Material Conversions: Goldsmiths in the *Life of St. Denis* and in Parisian Life, ca. 1300

A seated man raises a hammer to strike a metal cup placed on an anvil: these are the basic bodily gestures and material signifiers that identify metalworkers in medieval visual representation (Fig. 1). The present essay examines the labor performed by goldsmiths and the use of gold in a selection of Gothic miniatures, specifically those found in a lavishly illustrated *Life of St. Denis* created around 1300 for the French king Philip IV the Fair.<sup>1</sup> As a composite portrait of a group of professionals and a type of material, my discussion asks how manuscript painters reflected—and reflected on—the creations of colleagues who, like them, were among the few artisans who handled substances of exceptional social prestige: silver and, above all, gold. To what extent did the painters' and smiths' enterprises coincide physically and coexist conceptually in the conversion of gold into two-dimensional images and three-dimensional objects? And how did those material transpositions echo with the conversion of currencies controlled by the money changers who were the chief purveyors of the noble metals? Finally, can such secular transmutations be associated with a central concern of the *Life of St. Denis*, namely the recasting of Parisians from pagans into Christians?

## Picturing Goldsmiths

A high point of Gothic book production, the *Life of St. Denis* was the fruit of a collaborative effort between the royal abbey of Saint-Denis and a Parisian workshop.<sup>2</sup> In word and image, the sumptuous book chronicles salient episodes of the saint's missionary activity in third-century Paris. Along with his companions Rusticus and Eleutherius, Denis (Lat. Dionysius) was a cephalophoric saint, meaning one who carries his severed head to a final resting place of his choosing. In this case, the

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<sup>1</sup> For additional examples, see Marian Campbell, "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones," in *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, ed. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 107–66; John Cherry, *Goldsmiths* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 24–29; and Peter Cornelius Claussen, "Goldschmiede des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 32 (1978): 46–86.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript has elicited numerous studies, the most detailed of which is Charlotte Lacaze, *The "Vie de St. Denis" Manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 2090–92)* (New York: Garland, 1979).



**Fig. 1:** A money changer, goldsmith, and a man on horseback with a falcon and his servant. Life of St. Denis. Paris, ca. 1318. Paris, BnF, Ms. fr. 2091, fol. 99r (detail). Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

self-translation brought the martyrial body from Montmartre to the location of the future sanctuary that preserves his memory to this day.<sup>3</sup> Commissioned by Philip IV (d. 1314), the book was presented sometime between October 1318 and the fall of the following year by the abbot of Saint-Denis, Gilles de Pontoise, to the king's son and successor Philip V (d. 1322).<sup>4</sup> So integral to the overall experience of this state-of-the-art manuscript is its superb pictorial cycle that a *titulus*, inserted below the opening presentation scene, expressly encourages readers to turn into viewers: "And after the writing, take note of the care of the painter."<sup>5</sup> Brief as the note may be, it is a remarkable acknowledgment of the authority of the image and, as such, consistent with the efflorescence of things visual in Gothic Europe.

<sup>3</sup> In the Carolingian era, this Dionysius was (con)fused with two other personages carrying the same name, one a disciple of St. Paul mentioned in the Gospels, the other an influential Neoplatonic Greek philosopher. The textual tradition is summarized by Lacaze, *Vie de St. Denis*, 4–20.

<sup>4</sup> Lacaze, *Vie de St. Denis*, 57–81, convincingly argues that the manuscript was not finished by 1317, the year indicated in the colophon.

<sup>5</sup> "Et post scripturam pictoris percipe curam," and, in the French translation on the facing page, "Et aprez toute l'escripture aparçoit du paintre la cure." Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2090, fols. 4v and 5r.

The once single codex is now divided into three volumes (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Mss. fr. 2090–2092), each measuring about 24 x 15 cm.<sup>6</sup> The visual program consists of seventy-seven full-page miniatures headed by a caption. Of the thirty pictures centered on the saint's preaching activity and martyrdom in Paris, eight accommodate a hardworking goldsmith. The general organization is always the same, as in Ms. fr. 2091, folio 99r (Fig. 2): a hagiographic main narrative unfolds in the upper register while contemporary secular activities crowd the lower half. Elaborate architectural borders, which mimic the Gothic architectural language of compound piers, crocketed pinnacles, arches, and galleries, unite the discontinuous spaces and discrete temporalities. In addition to bright vermilion, lapis lazuli blue, light blue, pale pink, and mauve, substantial amounts of scintillating gold animate the pages of the *Life of St. Denis*. The highly burnished, vibrantly reflective metallic color is the only one, however, which functions at once denotatively and connotatively. In the first case, it invokes golden and gilded objects; in the second, it identifies things of value to the images' internal logic. Importantly, gold also acts as a unifying optical device. On this folio, it ties the borders and ivy scrolls to the diamond grid that enlivens the salmon-colored background, then converges on the scaly conical roofs that simultaneously separate and stitch together the two spheres—past and present, religious and secular—into a symbiotic whole.

The manuscript's emphasis on human labor has elicited numerous comments. Understandably, explanations for its unprecedented promotion of mundane pursuits have varied. For some scholars, the lower scenes perform a visual celebration of Paris's prosperity and reputation under the Capetian dynasty; for others, the inclusion of a few paupers insinuates a realistic note, even a social critique (however unlikely in an official commission). Others yet have commented on the dialectical bond that interlaces urban ordinariness with hagiographic extraordinariness.<sup>7</sup> At a minimum, everyone agrees that the images underscore how the city flourishes under the tutelage of a saint whose blood is etched into its history and, by extension, under the religious authority of the institution that represents him physically, legally, and symbolically.

In Ms. fr. 2091, folio 99r, St. Denis is seen preaching to a closely packed group of city dwellers: "Through the blessings of faith, heavenly life is offered," reads his

<sup>6</sup> The three volumes are available in digital format on Gallica: Ms. fr. 2090, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447296x>; Ms. fr. 2091, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452762k>; Ms. fr. 2092, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84478804>.

<sup>7</sup> Respectively, Lacaze, *Vie de St. Denis*, 126–38; Virginia Wylie Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris: A Record of Early Fourteenth-Century Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Camille Serchuk, "Paris and the Rhetoric of Town Praise in the *Vie de St. Denis* Manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. fr. 2090–2)," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 57 (1999): 35–47; and Wolfgang Brückle, *Civitas Terrena: Staatsrepräsentation und politischer Aristotelismus in der französischen Kunst, 1270–1380* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2005), 90–123.



**Fig. 2:** St. Denis preaches to the Parisians. Life of St. Denis. Paris, ca. 1318. Paris, BNF, Ms. fr. 2091, fol. 99r. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

scroll. Headed by one Lisbius, who proclaims, “Already now I believe in Christ, already now I give myself to his teachings,” those seated in the front rows have received the new Gospel while those clustered in the back continue to debate and puzzle.<sup>8</sup> The toppling of pagan idols was the conventional visual shortcut to convey the idea that effective preaching ends in conversion.<sup>9</sup> No less than their kinetic precariousness, the sculptures’ golden complexion serves as an allegory for a doomed belief system. Compared to these deities’ crassly materialistic identity, the Christian god reverberates aureate brightness as a salvific luminosity, one that surfaces (literally) in the proselytizing speaker’s ornately Gothic platform, the triumphantly upright cruciform staff, and the close-set ranks of gilded haloes.

Whether *in bono* or *in malo*, gold is abundantly present. Though consonant with a royal commission, the visual opulence it imparts to the *Life of St. Denis* must also have conveyed notions of spiritual plenty and material wealth. The lower scenes across the entire cycle are noticeably less glittery. But even if a loss of gloss signals descent into the here and now, that same sparseness helps to position our gaze on the things that matter: the heap of coins a money changer is handing over to a client (the empty scroll serving as a signifier of the transaction) and the chalice displayed in the adjoining booth. In line with the representational trope with which I started, this goldsmith is busy at work on a second cup. Surprisingly, the anvil, humble piece of equipment if there ever was, is painted in silver, and so too is the hammer’s oversized head. One wonders if the metallic pigment, rarely used in the *Life of St. Denis*, was meant to ennoble the goldsmith’s tools while maintaining a semantic distinction with the finished products.<sup>10</sup> Both professions appear on the left, and are balanced, on the opposite side, by a more varied cast of characters. The right-most compartment shelters a customer who is shopping for a knife while more dangle from near-invisible pegs. With blades painted in silver and handles in gold, they join the two gilded purses to complete the wares the female mercer has on offer. Her trade specialized in selling rather than in making; it was in the ascendant in our period thanks to a more robust consumer culture and increased demand for manufactured goods. As is the case here, the manuscript’s rhythm-conscious illuminators liked to extend commercial transactions—exchanging, selling, purchasing—into purely physical actions. Hence the young falconer who is holding his beaky bird aloft in such a way that it reproduces the smith’s determined arm motion; hence, too, the porter, weighted down by a heavy sack, who prolongs the mounted man’s charge and left-to-right movement. Add to this continuous narrative the gesticulating watchman and the singing students in the boat to come away with a

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<sup>8</sup> “Per fidei merita prebetur celica vita” and “Iam Christum credo, iam disciplinis suis me do.” Slightly modified from Lacaze, *Vie de St. Denis*, 288.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115–28.

<sup>10</sup> I thank the anonymous reader for this and other helpful suggestions.

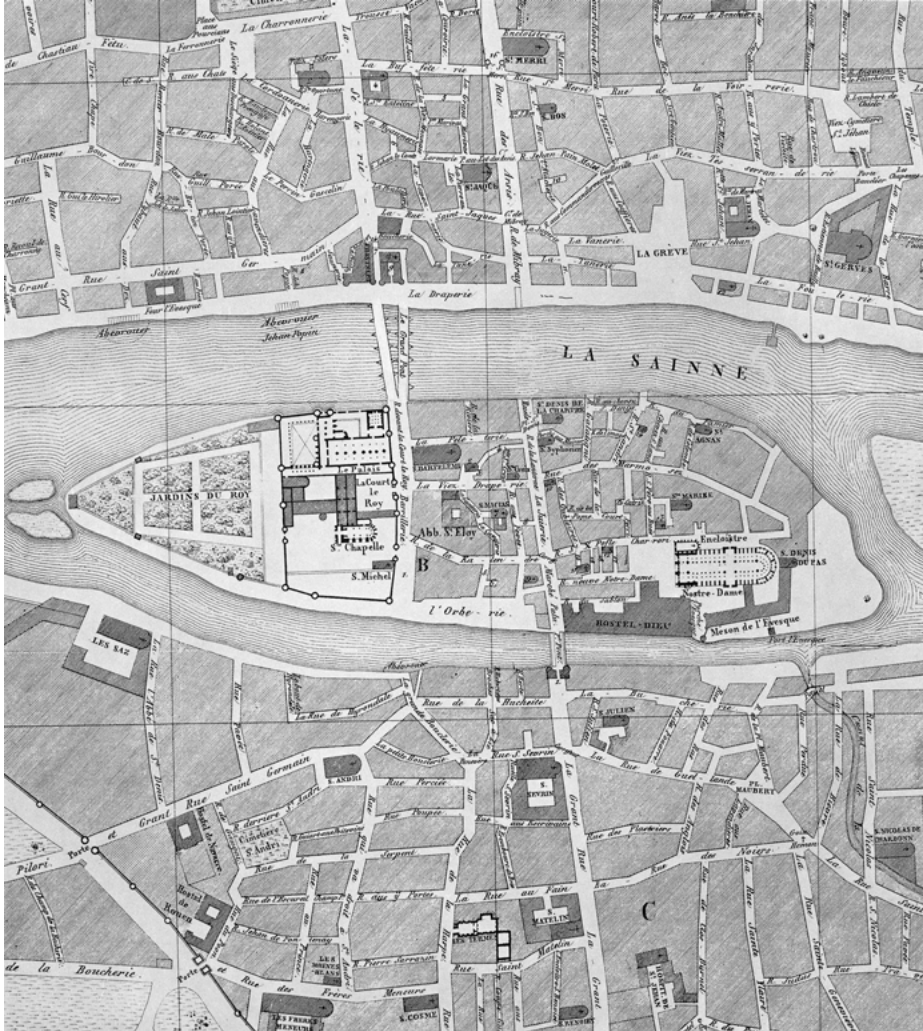
feeling of restlessness—the energy produced by a city as densely packed with people and things as are the carefully framed images that memorialize it.

Separated from and yet complementing the social ranks featured in the main narrative—ecclesiastics, nobles, soldiers, and well-to-do burghers—the bridge scenes run the gamut of what we would call the middle class, the lower class, and the frankly disenfranchised. Among various professionals, tradespeople, merchants, peddlers, students, and travelers, one recognizes a doctor, a bird dealer, a cutler, a mason, a ragpicker, a shepherd, a spinner of wool, a bear tamer, and more. Some poor and some disabled folk as well as a leper complete a social panorama that encompasses the sedentary, the permanently mobile, and the impaired; that embraces the old no less than the young, women and men. Many citizens travel on foot, but others do so on horseback and in fancy coaches. And they walk, talk, haul, ride, sit, swim, sing, perform, sleep, fish, fight, haggle, sell, and buy. An incessant flow of goods further bolsters the impression of a thriving urban economy—portable organs, bird cages, dogs, falcons, a bear, pet monkeys, fruit, bread (already a Parisian specialty), pastries, wheat, lumber, coal, building stones, and lots of wine, all destined for the visual pleasure of the king and his entourage.

The encyclopedic stamina with which the *Life of St. Denis* surveys people, things, and actions was a strategic move, and so was its topographical realism. The lower scenes always take us to the heart of *Parisius*, the central island bookended by the cathedral of Notre-Dame and the sprawling episcopal precinct on the east side and the royal palace with the Sainte-Chapelle and the stately great hall (modernized by Philip IV) on the west (Fig. 3). Before the erection of new bridges later in the fourteenth century, one would access the Île-de-la-Cité via the Grand Pont from the Right Bank (on the miniatures' left) and via the Petit Pont from the Left Bank. For all their persuasiveness, the pictures misleadingly suggest that the two bridges were aligned when, in reality, people, animals, and all manner of conveyances had to zigzag through the congested streets to cross from one side to the other. Most dramatically, they hide the fact that in 1280 and again in December 1296, the Grand Pont was taken down by floods, its strength compromised by the weight of houses, booths, forges, and perhaps even goldsmiths' nonstop pounding and hammering. Instead of showing the timber bridge that would be finished two years later—set a little to the east and at a slight diagonal—the makers of the manuscript opted for a condensed stone structure resting on four arches. In fact, there were sixteen arches, thirteen of which were equipped with a mill and one of which was used for navigation.<sup>11</sup> In this ideal and timeless staging of the city, it is surely not accidental that

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<sup>11</sup> Miron Mislin, "Zur Baugeschichte des Grand-Pont im Mittelalter," *Alte und Moderne Kunst* 25, no. 171 (1980): 16–20, at 17–18.



**Fig. 3:** Map of central Paris, ca. 1300. Republished with permission of Princeton University Press, from Virginia Wylie Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris: A Record of Early Fourteenth-Century Life* (1974), fig. 33; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

the bridges are carefully paved nor that a paver is among the island-crossing Parisians. Moved by the noisome miasmas that infected the palace area, King Philip took particular pride in having initiated that improvement to the urban fabric. Regardless, an official gift from the royal abbey would not want to reveal, underneath the soothing palette of light-absorbing colors and the dazzling brilliance of light-



reflecting gold, the grim reality: stench, dirt, and debris accumulating in the hectic core of what was then the largest city in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

## Goldsmiths in Gothic Paris

In this expansive “mirror of the city,” no one is more predictably present than the money changer and the goldsmith.<sup>13</sup> Included eleven and eight times respectively, the high-status occupations added luster to city and book alike. A second example, Ms. fr. 2901, folio 111r (Fig. 4), confirms both the standardization of the compositional scheme (down to the fallen golden idols) and the systematic variation of individual elements. Note how the goldsmith’s hammer is here slender and gilded whereas it appears as a heavy, pitch-black tool in other images. Such granular attention to things and gestures effectively highlights the embodied nature of work. Additionally, it might be interpreted as a kind of meta-commentary, a way for illuminators to implicate their own expert handling of different brushes, pigments, glues, and binders—a reflection, in sum, on the *techne* that sustains any act of material conversion.

The knife seller on the Petit Pont to the right introduces a different type of work. Rather than selling goods, this woman trades material riches for spiritual assets as she offers a coin to one of the manuscript’s best-known figures: a beggar, his unsteady body half-covered under a red hooded cape and a baby poignantly slung on his back. As opposed to the shiny metals handled by the changers, the goldsmiths, and the more upscale mercer on folio 99r, this coin’s surface is white. In its bareness, it accords with the shopkeeper’s stool, her wares, the alms bowl, the man’s braies, and the heavy sacks on the other side of the portal—a fair inventory of the ordinary. After all, people like this tradeswoman, let alone the beggar, would never finger gold species and rarely set their eyes on gilded objects.

As handlers of expensive, socially prestigious, and symbolically auratic substances, goldsmiths and money changers operated directly under the vigilant eyes of royal officials. To cut down on malpractice and keep fraud in check, a royal ordinance of 1141 had mandated that changers ply their trade on the Grand Pont in the stretch between the navigation arch and the Right Bank.<sup>14</sup> On the island side, the

<sup>12</sup> On the ideological disjunction between text and image in this manuscript, see Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 129–32.

<sup>13</sup> Lacaze, *Vie de St. Denis*, 129, speaks of *speculum urbis* to echo Vincent of Beauvais’s encyclopedia *Speculum maius* (The Great Mirror).

<sup>14</sup> Mislin, “Zur Baugeschichte,” 19, table 1, and 20. For a comprehensive social portrait of Paris in our period, see Raymond Cazelles, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris: De la fin du règne de Philippe Auguste à la mort de Charles V, 1223–1380* (Paris: Hachette, 1972).



Fig. 4: St. Denis continues his preaching activity. Life of St. Denis. Paris, ca. 1318. Paris, BnF, Ms. fr. 2091, fol. 111r. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Grand Pont abutted the northeast corner of the Palais de la Cité. The articulated palace housed, besides the king's official residence and various administrative offices, the royal mint, which regulated the price of metals and employed goldsmiths as engravers of coins and seals. Fortified gates on both banks provided ready-made surveillance, a function the *Life of St. Denis* pointedly translates into a lexicon of fortified towers, spiky portcullises, and alert watchmen observing the comings and goings of their fellow citizens from windows and crenellations. Pulsating at the center of Paris, the safe-like Grand Pont was prime real estate. It offered easy access to water, an imperative for activities needing fire; better yet, it guaranteed a constant flow of customers. That the services and goods provided by the goldsmiths and changers were vital to the city's economic well-being is confirmed by the decision to equip the wooden replacement bridge right away with new houses, booths, and workshops where those professions could continue to exert their activities.

Even if the Grand Pont would be renamed Pont au Change (or Pont aux Changeurs) in the fifteenth century, goldsmiths were, in fact, more numerous in our period than the changers. Though caution is in order with tax rolls, which are easily skewed by under- and overreporting, they represented about sixty percent of the individuals counted for the Grand Pont in the late thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Descriptive sources corroborate that result. Written around 1323, Jean de Jandun's *Tractatus de laudibus Parisius* celebrates *Parisius* as an earthly *Paradisus*. Often described as a textual counterpart to the *Life of St. Denis*'s visual encomium, it too identifies *artifices manuales* as essential cogs in a well-oiled urban machinery. Summing up the activity of metalsmiths with the same combination of products, tools, and actions as coeval visual representations, the *Tractatus* notes that those artisans "are excellent fashioners (*figuratores optimi*) of metal vases, chiefly of gold and silver, pewter and copper," that they are "found on the Grand Pont," and that "their hammers on the anvils resound in a harmonious cadence."<sup>16</sup>

Unlike the diminutive gabled structures pictured in the *Life of St. Denis*, a mix of booths called *fenestrae* (windows), usually equipped with crawl spaces for storage, and multistoried houses transformed the Grand Pont into a crowded, corridor-like space.<sup>17</sup> When houses proper, the upper floor(s) were reserved for the living quarters while street-level workspaces doubled as retail shops. Passersby were at

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<sup>15</sup> Such trade clusters were standard in medieval cities. For a comparable Italian example, see Glyn Davies, "The Organisation of the Goldsmiths' Trade in Trecento Siena: Families, Workshops, *Compagnie* and Artistic Identity," in *Orfèvrerie gothique en Europe: Production et réception*, ed. Élisabeth Antoine-König and Michele Tomasi (Rome: Viella, 2016), 13–27.

<sup>16</sup> Translation in Egbert, *On the Bridges*, 28; original in Le Roux de Lincy and L. M. Tisserand, *Paris et ses historiens au XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), 54.

<sup>17</sup> Egbert, *On the Bridges*, 22; Mislin, "Zur Baugeschichte," 17–18 and ill. 7–8. See also the older but still informative study by Paul Lacroix and Ferdinand Seré, *Histoire de l'Orfèvrerie-Joaillerie* (Paris: Librairie de Seré, 1850), 42.

leisure to sample wares displayed on the lowered shutters and through the front openings. The obligation to work in broad daylight had another purpose than stimulating the visual appetite of the Gothic *flâneur*: curbing dishonest professional behavior and, at the same time, encouraging ocular competition. By decree, goldsmiths had to occupy the west side of the Grand Pont so that their fire-prone, smoke-emitting, and polluting forges faced downstream. Their workshops, being private, were much simpler than the one described in the early twelfth century by Theophilus. His famous treatise *De diversis artibus* (*On Diverse Arts*) envisions a spacious monastic atelier divided into different sections, one for each metal.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, John of Garland's *Dictionary* pictures our Parisian goldsmiths as sitting "in front of their furnaces and little tables" to forge "chalices of gold and silver" by spreading "with their delicate little hammers . . . thin sheets of gold and silver over forged iron." Since goldsmiths and jewelers were not yet separate professions, the text goes on to explain that the same artisans also create brooches, necklaces, pins, and buttons, and set rings with "pearls and jasper, sapphires and emeralds."<sup>19</sup> John of Garland, who was English but lived in Paris in the first decades of the thirteenth century, found a way to enliven an otherwise dry Latin and Old French wordlist with references to nearly fifty trades.<sup>20</sup> The resulting typology is sufficiently fine-grained to distinguish the goldsmiths (*aurifabri*) from the artisans (*cipharii*) who merely sheet wooden cups with gold leaf or add metallic feet and rims to make them more durable and attractive.

A parallel, slightly earlier description adds further detail. Alexander Neckam (d. 1217) was, like John of Garland, an English expatriate in Paris. A multitalented master of the grammatical arts, philosophy, natural sciences, and theology, he is believed to have dispensed his learning on the Petit Pont after having put in some years as a student in a school located on the same bridge, which was always more intellectually inclined than the neighboring "manual bridge." In the *De nominibus utensilium* (*On the names of utensils*), composed around 1175–85, Neckam observes that a smith's workshop must be outfitted with "a forge pierced at the top so that

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<sup>18</sup> Theophilus, *De diversis artibus/The Various Arts*, ed. and trans. C. R. Dodwell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 64–66.

<sup>19</sup> John of Garland, *The Dictionarius of John de Garlande*, trans. Barbara Blatt Rubin (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1981), 38–39.

<sup>20</sup> See Martha Carlin, "Shops and Shopping in the Early Thirteenth Century: Three Texts," in *Money, Markets, and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H.A. Munro*, ed. Larin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl, and Martin M. Elbl (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 491–537; and Lisa H. Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), for a contextual reading of Latin word-books.



Fig. 5: Seal of the Parisian confraternity of goldsmiths. Photo: INTERFOTO / Alamy Stock Photo.

the smoke may evaporate by a sure road.”<sup>21</sup> In terms of equipment, Neckam recommends an anvil of “unassailable hardness,” and two whetstones, one to assay the metals, the other to sharpen iron tools.<sup>22</sup> Then come the hammers, bellows, tongs, sharp chisels (to carve gemstones), toothed saws, files, and a supply of twisted gold and silver wires for soldering new pieces and repairing broken ones. A pouch to collect precious filings and a hare’s foot “to smooth and polish and wipe clean the surface of gold and silver” complete the list.<sup>23</sup> It bears noting that Neckam ends with an observation of an epistemic nature. Implicitly recognizing the competitive environment of the rapidly expanding Gothic city, he warns against wily merchants who pass the cheap for the expensive and recommends strengthening manual know-how with material expertise. Thus armed, one is able to distinguish between genuine gold and its look-alikes, including copper and brass.

From a tax roll redacted in 1300, we learn that goldsmithing was among the most commonplace professions. The 251 taxed practitioners of that craft formed a significantly larger group than those belonging to more useful occupations, such as

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Lightbown, *Secular Goldsmiths’ Work*, 4. The same text usefully comments on other documents and surviving evidence. On goldsmiths’ work practices more generally, see Johann Michael Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa* (Munich: Beck, 1982), 37–58; and Elisabeth Vavra, “Ich Goldtschmid mach köstliche ding’: Organisation, Arbeitsbedingungen, Produkte,” *Das Mittelalter* 21, no. 1 (2016): 273–94.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Lightbown, *Secular Goldsmiths’ Work*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

the building trades, the garment industry, and the food purveyors. Only weavers (360), fur makers (338), and cobblers (267) surpassed the number of goldsmiths then operating in Paris.<sup>24</sup> The statutes of all these professions are included in Étienne Boileau's wonderfully informative *Livre des métiers*. Boileau was the *prévôt des marchands*, a powerful administrative position that combined some of the roles of a modern mayor with those of a secretary of commerce. He compiled the "Book of Trades" in the 1260s at the behest of King Louis IX (d. 1270), and this work proved of such fundamental importance that it remained the basis for trade regulations down to the modern era.<sup>25</sup> It enshrined goldsmithing as an independent creative endeavor, separating its practitioners from those who use the noble metals as accessories, on the one hand, and those who work with base metals, on the other.<sup>26</sup> The same text tells us that the apprenticeship for goldsmithing was, at ten years, among the longest of the 101 registered trades, and that only one apprentice could be hired from outside the family. No limit was placed on assistants related to either the goldsmith or his wife, a provision amended in 1355 when the total number of assistants was restricted to three. Like other high-status professions, goldsmiths were exempted from the obligation of contributing to the city watch (*guet*) and from paying sales taxes. More unusual was the permission to work after sunset on ecclesiastic and royal commissions. Moreover, the rule of reserving Sundays and feast days (*jours d'apostele*) for rest and religious activities was, if not lifted, made less stringent. One goldsmith at a time was granted permission to operate on those days, undoubtedly to take advantage of the increased church-bound traffic. To compensate for this loosening of the boundaries between worldly and spiritual economies, the proceeds were to be collected in the money box of the goldsmiths' confraternity. And that little treasure was to be spent at Easter on meals for the poor and the sick living in the Hôtel Dieu, the vast hospital complex situated next to Notre-Dame within a stone's throw from the Grand Pont.

The Parisian goldsmiths' confraternity was one of the earliest such charitable organizations. Though the *Livre des métiers* omits mention of it, we know that its patron saint was Eloi (Eligius) (d. 660). Many other cities would make Eligius their patron, honoring a saint who had been a skilled metalworker before being appointed by King

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24 Gustave Fagniez, *Études sur l'industrie et la classe industrielle à Paris au XIIIème et XIVème siècle* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1877), 6–19 (also 251–70, for a detailed description of goldsmiths' work practices based on Theophilus's account).

25 Étienne Boileau, *Le Livre des métiers*, ed. René de Lespinasse and François Bonnardot (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1879), 32–34. For a layered contextual analysis, see Elizabeth Sears, "Craft Ethics and the Critical Eye in Medieval Paris," *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 221–38.

26 As observed by Lacroix and Seré, *Histoire de l'Orfèvrerie-Joallerie*, 40.

Dagobert to the post of Master of the Mint, royal counselor, and bishop of Noyon-Tournai. One of the few canonized artists,<sup>27</sup> Eligius appears in the hagiographic record as someone who spent his life collecting relics, founding monasteries, ransoming slaves, and converting pagans in Flanders and barbarians in Frisia. Amazingly, he still found time to run a large workshop that manufactured tombs, thrones, jewelry, and other status-creating objects for the Merovingian elite. On the Parisian goldsmiths' seal, officially adopted in the fifteenth century, a mitered St. Eloi stands in a gabled structure flanked by two schematically rendered Gothic reliquary shrines (Fig. 5). Of note is the fact that he clutches a muscular hammer with no less pride than a crosier, the attributes of his two professional identities.<sup>28</sup>

For a less formulaic version, we can turn to the *Images de la vie du Christ et des saints* (Fig. 6). Alison Stones has ascribed this superb Flemish devotional picture-book to the patronage of a laywoman, Marie of Rethel (d. 1315), hence the alternate title of *Livre de Madame Marie*.<sup>29</sup> In juxtaposing Eloi with a kneeling youth, hands raised in praise, the image draws on the saint's dossier of miracles. For legend holds that the saintly bishop shod the mutilated leg stump of the young man's horse, which is why he became the patron saint of horses, farriers, and blacksmiths too. The strange form that sprouts from the equine forehead is a trindle. Typically cast from copper or tin (here rendered in ochre, suggesting the former), this was a mold used for the production of coiled candles. Wrapped around a sick body or diseased limb, such candles were burned at shrines in the belief, derived from ancient sympathetic magic, that the illness would likewise melt away. Executed not long after the *Life of St. Denis*, Madame Marie's book is notable for its intensely saturated blues and reds, the preferred Gothic palette. Gold leaf is sparse, but its function remains the same, namely to throw the most precious objects into sharp optical relief. Bridging the iconic and the indexical, it extends from the border to the saint's halo, the trimmings on his miter and stole, and his crosier's foliated top. Gilding the head of the hammer and having it overlap with the staff are visual devices to upgrade a simple tool into a saintly attribute. As a consequence, they communicate a certain commensurability between the work of spiritual regeneration and the work of material conversion.

<sup>27</sup> Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury in the late tenth century, is the patron saint of goldsmiths in England.

<sup>28</sup> For a complete survey of the iconography of St. Eloi and ritual practices at his shrines, see Jean-Christophe Masmonteil, *Iconographie et culte de saint Éloi dans l'Occident médiéval* (Orléans: Rencontre avec le Patrimoine Religieux, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. nouv. acq. fr. 16251, fol. 88r. Digitized at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b72000827>. See Alison Stones, *Le Livre d'images de Madame Marie* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).



**Fig. 6:** A young man thanks St. Eloi. *Images de la vie du Christ et des saints (Livre de Madame Marie)*. Northern France, ca. 1300. Paris, BnF, Ms. nouv. acq. fr. 16251, fol. 88r. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



## Metal in the City

But what was the material relationship between the gold leaf of the illuminator and the weightier leaf used by the smith? To answer this question, we must dig deeper into the matter of gold itself. A primary objective of all medieval guild regulations was quality control, a task entrusted to two or three sworn wardens (*preud'omes*) in the case of the Parisian goldsmiths' trade.<sup>30</sup> Those experienced artisans verified that no one adulterated gold and silver with cheaper metals beyond the authorized standards for alloys (gold, too soft to hold its shape, has to be alloyed). Silver had to be at least equivalent to a sterling (92.5% pure) whereas the benchmark for gold was the "touch of Paris," equal to 19.2 karats. Since that standard was even adopted outside of France, Boileau's contention that this gold was the "best in the world" seems more than an expression of Gallic chauvinism.<sup>31</sup> Goldsmiths who tampered with the quality of materials or committed infractions to what we would call labor laws were fined; those guilty of repeated frauds could expect the destruction of the stock in their possession and banishment from the guild.

While silver was abundantly present in Europe, domestic sources for gold were minimal. Until the industrial exploitation of deposits discovered in eastern Europe from the 1320s onward, placer gold panned from rivers augmented by meager quantities of mined gold represented the extent of local resources. What, then, went into a goldsmith's crucible on the Grand Pont? What was the origin of the bits and pieces of precious metal that were forged and cast? Recycling certainly provided a significant share of the metals (and gems) required to craft new cups, jewels, crowns, reliquaries, and other high-status objects. Together with dismembered objects, coins constituted another reliable supply of gold; they could be either bought from money changers or received from patrons.<sup>32</sup> A great variety of currencies was the norm on a Parisian changer's table around 1300.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the occasional Roman, Gallo-Roman, and early medieval archaeological species, one could find a plethora of new coins, French deniers, Florentine florins, Venetian ducats, Byzantine solidi and hyperpera, south Italian taris, Castilian anfusi, and the especially plentiful dinars

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<sup>30</sup> Boileau, *Livre des métiers*, 34 (11.11).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 (11.2–3).

<sup>32</sup> Irma Passeri, "Gold Coins and Gold Leaf in Early Italian Paintings," in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250–1750*, ed. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 97–115. On the procurement of gold across the Middle Ages with additional bibliography, see Nancy K. Turner, "Surface Effect and Substance: Precious Metals in Illuminated Manuscripts," in this volume.

<sup>33</sup> For much of what follows, I rely on Peter Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 163–86.

brought back from the Islamic world by returning crusaders and long-distance merchants. One common feature of this decidedly transnational mix was the provenance of the raw material: the bulk of the differently minted gold had originated in West Africa. Before the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese gained a foothold along the so-called Gold Coast and developed maritime trade colonialism, huge trans-Saharan caravans transported coveted rarities from the historic empires of Ghana and Mali northward. In exchange for gold and ivory, as well as slaves taken from the heart of Africa as human commodities, they received silver, copper, horses, and manufactured goods.<sup>34</sup> Whether in dust, nuggets, or bars, substantial amounts of gold of a high level of purity (at a standard of 20.5 karats) made it to the Maghreb, where the initial rough minting took place. From there, the shiny, prestige-laden coins trickled across the Mediterranean to be adapted for local usage. A handful of Italian cities, led by Florence and Genoa, accumulated enough surplus by the mid-thirteenth century to issue the first European golden coinage.

In France, after several short-lived attempts, Philip the Fair managed to produce as many as six different gold coins. The intended recipient of the *Life of St. Denis* had them stamped with a distinctly royalist iconography borrowed from official seals. As can be seen on the obverse of the stately *denier d'or à la masse* issued in 1296 (the same year that the Grand Pont collapsed), an enthroned, crowned, and scepter-holding king dominates the composition (Fig. 7). Enlarging on the political message, the reverse fuses a large cross with heraldic fleur-de-lis to stress the realm's Christian credentials.<sup>35</sup> Such high-end coins were not intended for daily use. When not accumulating in the royal coffers as a handy cash reserve, they were earmarked for diplomatic transactions and religious donations, presumably in the hopes of commensurate political rewards and spiritual paybacks. Though impossible to quantify, a sizable number of gold coins must also have found their way into the goldsmiths' furnaces to be transfigured into enticing artistic creations.

Gold minting exacerbated the chronic shortage of gold. Contrary to the carefully curated picture of a well-ordered polity as advertised by the *Life of St. Denis*, Philip's reign was chaotic, rattled by ongoing expansionist wars and short-term fiscal policies enacted to shore up the realm's precarious finances. In 1306, for example,

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<sup>34</sup> Most relevant for the present discussion are Sarah M. Guérin, "Gold, Ivory, and Copper: Materials and Arts of Trans-Saharan Trade," in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa*, ed. Kathleen Bickford Berzok (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 174–201; and Thomas Walker, "The Italian Gold Revolution of 1252: Shifting Currents in the Pan-Mediterranean Flow of Gold," in *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. J. F. Richards (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), 29–52.

<sup>35</sup> Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, ed., *L'Art au temps des rois maudits: Philippe le Bel et ses fils, 1285–1328* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1998), 348–65; Yves Coativy, "Les Monnaies de Philippe le Bel et leurs avatars," in *Monnaie, fiscalité et finances au temps de Philippe le Bel*, ed. Philippe Contamine, Jean Kerhervé, and Albert Rigaudière (Paris: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2007), 141–56.



Fig. 7: *Denier d'or à la masse* issued by Philip IV the Fair in 1296, 7 gr. Paris, BnF, Cabinet des Médailles, Monnaie Royale Beistegui 247. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

social unrest caused by severe inflation culminated in urban riots. One answer was the expulsion from Paris of all Jews, scapegoated, as usual, for empty coffers and accused of profiteering from the repeated debasement of the currencies in addition to other assorted public ills. (The Lombards, that is, Italian merchants and bankers, would experience the same fate a few years later.)<sup>36</sup> Philip's most notorious act remains the brutal suppression of the Knights Templar and the ensuing all-out assault on the order's overflowing coffers. In an effort to limit the dispersal of the two fine metals, the royal administration resorted to other, less draconian measures. Homes were searched for old gold and silver coins, and although the despoiled owners were promised compensation in new money, that value hardly equaled what was taken from them. Add to this the interdiction to import foreign currencies and stricter control over nonmonetary uses, and you have a recipe for a measurable decline in available gold. That scarcity appears to have forced goldsmiths to reduce both the net volume of their output and the size of their products.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> A complete account of Philippe IV's erratic monetary policies is found in Edgard Boutaric, *La France sous Philippe le Bel: Étude sur les institutions politiques et administratives du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Plon, 1861), 306–27. For anxieties regarding the fluctuating value of gold and gilded objects in early modern France, see Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 189–208.

<sup>37</sup> Lacroix and Seré, *Histoire de l'Orfèvrerie-Joaillerie*, 45–46.

Few contemporaries were aware of the African origin of their gold. Medieval sources speak of Arabian gold instead, praising it for its pleasing reddish hue and warning against imitations made of regular gold alloyed with red copper.<sup>38</sup> Without giving a specific geographic indication, Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1270/71) is one of many authors who maintains that the redder the gold, the better it is. The observation appears in the *Liber de natura rerum* (Book on the nature of things), a work the Brabantine author started to redact in the 1230s when he was completing his theological training at the Dominican *studium* in Paris. It is a concise encyclopedia (a genre much in vogue in the thirteenth century) that introduces readers to an extensive archive of things-of-nature: humans and animals, plants and planets, minerals and metals (gold, electrum, silver, bronze/copper, tin, lead, and iron).<sup>39</sup> Gold is described as durable, malleable, ductile, untarnishable, and weighing twice as much as any other metal (we call this density). The text credits these outstanding qualities to the equal distribution of the four elements because that causes the primary qualities—hot and cold, dry and moist—to be uniformly balanced. It goes on to acknowledge that mined gold is rare and that the retrieval of river gold is a labor-intensive process, involving purification through intense washing. Leftover gold dust (*aurum molitum*) and dross (*palea*) should be used for gilding (*opus aureolum*). Finally, readers of the *Liber de natura rerum* learned that gold could lessen skin rashes, prevent wounds from festering into tumors, fortify the heart, and cure leprosy (that is, the symptoms thereof). Baffling as such references to therapeutic uses may seem, they were key to the medieval understanding of minerals and metals as active substances, not inert inorganic stuff.

Thomas of Cantimpré's target audience was the rank-and-file preachers of his order, but his intellectually user-friendly compendium quickly gained him a broader readership. Several of the 150-odd surviving copies of the *Liber de natura rerum* received illustrations, including a medium-sized volume presently housed in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, which shows quite a bit of wear and tear (Ms. Hamilton 114). While the patron remains unknown, the colophon gives a date of 1295 and mentions a Brabantine artist.<sup>40</sup> Two smiths appear in the *bas-de-page* of folio 164 (Fig. 8).<sup>41</sup> On the left, a metalsmith greets his customers from behind a legless table.

<sup>38</sup> Theophilus, *Various Arts*, 96–98. According to this author, genuine Arabian gold is recycled from ancient vases. It counts as one of the four varieties of gold he retains, the others being gold from the biblical land of Havilah, Spanish gold, and “sand” or placer gold.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, ed. Helmut Boese (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 375–78. As of yet, there is no modern translation of this text.

<sup>40</sup> Helmut Boese, *Die lateinischen Handschriften der Sammlung Hamilton zu Berlin* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 64–65. I thank Alison Stones for discussing this manuscript with me.

<sup>41</sup> In an initial of another early illustrated copy of the same work, a man is shown pointing toward vessels of different shapes and colors, including one in gold and one in silver. See Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 320, fol. 176r, digitized at: <https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/sommaire/sommaire.php?reproductionId=11606>.



**Fig. 8:** A metalsmith and goldsmith selling wares. Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, Bk. 15, “De metallis.” Flemish, 1295. Berlin, SB, Ms. Hamilton 140, fol. 164r (detail). Photo: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

The tiered silver vessels (now oxidized) have been enlarged for the benefit of the viewer and perhaps as a way to maintain fair optical competition with other metallic artifacts. Those comprise two monumental grey-bluish bells (in tin?), a stout vessel of a coppery tint posed on a tripod (of which only a fragment is visible in this reproduction), and the outsized matte black iron horseshoes. The artist let two of them drift across the parchment while he attached the other two, like the bells, to the framing *baguette*, thereby playfully alternating between a representational and ornamental modality. As a result of this scrupulous material mimesis, the visual catalog of metals’ looks and uses produces encyclopedic knowledge in its own right. Equally innovative was the decision to depict the smith as a relaxed shop owner rather than a toiling laborer, an iconographic reframing that speaks to the nascent uncoupling of manufacture and retail.

We find all these aspects reiterated in the posh world of the goldsmith to the right. Foreshadowing Petrus Christus’s famous 1449 panel painting of an aristocratic couple visiting a goldsmith’s shop (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975.1.110), this mini-shopkeeper welcomes a similarly smartly dressed man and woman. In both compositions, the woman’s outstretched hand demonstrates that she is taking the lead. Here she selects from among a profusion of desirable wares laid out on the ornate table. We recognize three golden cups, two of which are lidded; three rings; a large silver drinking vessel; and an even larger spoon made of the same material. Some of these objects are captured from above and some from the side. By contrast, the serried rows of gold coins, stored in a separate compartment, beckon the customers—and

solicit the beholder's eye—from a single point of view. It might be observed that these multiple perspectives not only improve visual legibility but mimic the changing ways in which we perceive metallic pigments. For those tend to look dull when viewed head-on but come into their shimmering selves when our hands manipulate an illuminated book, allowing the surfaces to refract light at ever new angles. One could say that this, too, is an experience of conversion, albeit of a perceptual nature.

The fact that money is here depicted in a goldsmith's shop indicates that the changers' monopolistic claim over the handling of coins was not observed in practice. Indeed, contrary to the vision of industrious harmony championed by the *Life of St. Denis*, the boundaries between trades profiting from precious metals were porous and relations chronically strained. In 1303, for example, ongoing quarrels came to a head, prompting a royal ruling that debarred goldsmiths, always eager to nibble on the lucrative currency trade, from using a *tapetum* (the rug or heavy cloth that we see on the changers' tables in the *Life of St. Denis*).<sup>42</sup> If goldsmiths encroached on the changers' territory, they, in turn, felt the pressure of competition from the mercers who needed gilded and silver trimmings to accessorize paternosters, hats, purses, girdles, buttons, and other accoutrements proper to a fashionable Gothic lifestyle. Another dispute recorded in the fourteenth century led the goldsmiths to make a case for a whole range of objects needing to be classified as their work and taxed accordingly. Did they not *shape* the gold and silver parts that the mercers merely applied?<sup>43</sup>

## Transformational Aesthetics

“Pass through the hammer and forge” is the literal wording the goldsmiths used to define and defend their profession.<sup>44</sup> Only goldbeaters approximated such a form-altering, corporeal engagement with metallic substances. In Boileau's *Livre des métiers*, the beaters are recorded as among the smallest guilds, one divided into those who make metallic threads and those who manufacture gold and silver foil. Both were expected to do “good and loyal work,” and they lobbied for some of the same privileges granted to their more prominent and powerful smithing colleagues, such as release from watch duties and exemption from sales taxes.<sup>45</sup> Their products, they argued, were essential to adorn the things that catered to elite buyers.

The goldbeaters' primary clientele were other artisans. Illuminators would buy the quasi-transparent and yet assertively material leaves obtained from flattened-out coins, glue them to the parchment, and burnish and tool them to create backgrounds

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<sup>42</sup> Lacroix and Seré, *Histoire de l'Orfèvrerie-Joaillerie*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Fagniez, *Études sur l'industrie*, 383 (article 2).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Boileau, *Livre des métiers*, 65–66.

of a jewel-like reflective force.<sup>46</sup> On folio 111r of Ms. fr. 2901 (see Fig. 4), the bridge's arches are filled with gold leaf tooled with a diamond grid containing impressed dots, as is clearly seen in a photograph taken at an oblique angle (Fig. 9). One also catches a glimpse of a different use of gold in the upper right. The foliate swirls, executed in raised mordant gilding, join other decorative patterns and objects to imbue such a deluxe manuscript as the *Life of St. Denis* with an extra degree of luminous physical presence.<sup>47</sup>

Another miniature, showing St. Denis tied to a cross (Ms. fr. 2902, fol. 30r), puts this scrollwork to great effect. Appearing behind both the hagiographic narrative above and the quotidian scenes below, it enacts gold's signifying potential from the indexical (gold as gold) to the iconic (gold representing gilded objects) (Fig. 10). Phrased like an *imitatio Christi*, the affecting scene draws our attention to the grotesquely distorted torturers sporting hooked noses and a paganizing winged head-gear. These attributes belonged to the conventional arsenal of anti-Semitic imagery, although the specific historical context would perforce have intensified their accusatory charge.<sup>48</sup> The chained companions of the superbly rendered St. Denis already acknowledge the salvific hand of God that announces their acceptance into the kingdom of heaven. Below, and at the other end of the emotional spectrum, a man is napping in a boat tethered to the rightmost arch, seemingly unaware of the drama unfolding above his head. Considering that the team of illuminators established visual connections between the upper and lower zones throughout the pictorial cycle, this man's shut eyes—his emphatic unseeing-ness—may well have been intended as a metaphor for spiritual blindness.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the golden cup with matching ewer has migrated from the stall of the goldsmith (who is left with a silver dish) into a wine crier's hands. Criers were familiar faces in medieval towns, whether their task was to broadcast news or publish the daily prices of wine served in local taverns. In the image, the gleaming chalice and cruet that the upward-looking figure is holding are headed for a liturgical use. They are ready to collect, if not the martyr's blood, then the sublimated byproduct of his suffering: gold scrollwork.

<sup>46</sup> Although focused on later materials, see the informative discussion of gold leaf supply by Susie Nash, "Pour couleurs et autres choses prise de lui . . .": The Supply, Acquisition, Cost and Employment of Painters' Materials at the Burgundian Court, c. 1375–1419," in *Trade in Artists' Materials: Markets and Commerce in Europe to 1700*, ed. Jo Kirby, Susie Nash, and Joanna Cannon (London: Archetype, 2010), 97–182, at 133–37.

<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to Nancy Turner for having pointed out that the background motifs are in mordant gilding rather than painted metallic ink. See her description in "Surface Effect and Substance," in this volume.

<sup>48</sup> On the anti-Semitic implications of such imagery, see Ruth Mellinkoff, "Demonic Winged Head-gear," *Viator* 16 (1985): 367–81 (at 369 for the *Life of St. Denis*).

<sup>49</sup> A theme developed by Cornelia Logemann, "Heilsräume – Lebensräume: Vom Martyrium des heiligen Dyonisius und einem paradisischen Paris (Paris, BN, Ms. fr. 2090–92, Ms. lat. 13836)," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 30 (2003): 53–91, at 62–63.



**Fig. 9:** A money changer, goldsmith, and two youths in a boat. Life of St. Denis. Paris, ca. 1318. Paris, BnF, Ms. fr. 2091, fol. 111r (detail). Photo: author, with the permission of the BnF.





**Fig. 10:** Crucifixion of St. Denis. Life of St. Denis. Paris, ca. 1318. Paris, BnF, Ms. fr. 2092, fol. 30r. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Gold, in other words, weaves together otherworldly treasures and worldly riches, spiritual transcendence and embodied facticity. While other colors play an aesthetically unifying role, gold alone mediates between contemporary Paris and its founding moments by blending transitive meanings with self-referential materiality. Echoing this representational multivalence based on a series of formal transpositions, the crier's vessels were themselves products of a long chain of *operationes*—dust recast into coins, coins into sheets, sheets into objects, and, at long last, objects into pictures. In her study of the *Life of St. Denis*, Elizabeth Brown observes that “the changer converts one currency to another and the goldsmith fashions raw metal into a beautiful and precious object.”<sup>50</sup> Rightly insisting on the labor of conversion, she further comments on the parallelism between St. Denis's persuasive rhetorical skills in “refining” pagans into Christians and the artisans' production of things of value. Medieval hagiographic literature sometimes explicitly linked spiritual conversion to the bending of matter. Rooted in several biblical passages, such as Proverbs 17:3 (“As silver is tried by fire, and gold in the furnace: so the Lord trieth the hearts”), the comparison implies that the flesh must suffer—must “pass through the hammer and forge”—for the soul to be cleansed. A German poem composed around 1080, for example, allegorizes the trials deployed by the divine *artifex* to perfect (the very imperfect) Archbishop Anno of Cologne (d. 1075) in terms of an artisan whose skilled interventions create a fine brooch.<sup>51</sup> In like fashion, the *Life of St. Denis* told the king that goldsmiths (and changers) are key to perfecting his city and vital to burnishing his rule. Sadly, their creations have all but vanished, sacrificed to the perpetual demand for gold. We are left with shimmering ghosts of their labor in the work of those whose task it was to perfect books by illuminating them.

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “Paris and Paradise: The View from Saint-Denis,” in *The Four Modes of Seeing: Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness*, ed. Evelyn Staudinger Lane, Elizabeth Carson Pastan, and Ellen M. Shortell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 419–61, at 439.

<sup>51</sup> Opitz's Anno: *The Middle High German “Annolied” in the 1639 Edition of Martin Opitz*, ed. R. Graeme Dunphy (Glasgow: Scottish Papers in Germanic Studies, 2003), 136–37.