

“Diu küneginne rîche streit dâ ritterlîche.”

Chess as an Impetus for Female Agency

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Abstract

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(Under the direction of Dr. Kathryn Starkey)

This work examines the development of the two main chess allegories in German literature from the twelfth to the fourteenth century focusing on the issue of gender. Chess was a common allegory for political negotiation on the one hand, and courtly love on the other. In the political chess allegory, women are typically absent. In the courtly love chess allegory, women have a central role but it is usually a passive one. I will show that these two allegories did not develop separately, but intersected at some points, granting power to the female sex. A space for female agency is created when poets draw on both allegories, and chess can actually lead the ladies away from their passive role in the love allegory by means of the political allegory. This will be demonstrated in scenes from Wolfram’s *Parzival* and Gottfried’s *Tristan*, and in one illumination found in the Manesse Codex.

To my mother, for her truly endless support and motivation.

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Introduction

“The king is a fighting piece,” instructed Wilhelm Steinitz, the Austrian world chess champion and father of modern chess, in the 19th century.¹ But already seven centuries earlier, around 1200, Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Antikonie in *Parzival* presages his advice. “Ez waere küneec noch roch / daz warf si gein den vîenden doch” (whether king or rook, she flung them towards the enemies), to defend herself and Gawan from the knights closing in on them.² Gawan makes inappropriate albeit welcome advances to Antikonie (“er ruorte irz hüffelîn” [he touched her hip]³), who just welcomed him to Schanpfanzun. A knight comes in, misinterprets the situation of mutual interest as rape and calls to weapons. Gawan and Antikonie flee to the nearest tower but find themselves lacking weapons, until “dô vant diu maget reine / ein schâchezabelgesteine / unt ein bret, wol erleit, wît” (the pure maiden found a set of chess pieces and a big, well-constructed chess board), which they use for their defense.⁴ Multiple things seem curious here. Why did Wolfram pick a chess board, and not a sword or another weapon? Furthermore, why is Antikonie fighting, instead of letting Gawan defend her?⁵ And why

¹The New York Times, “Chess”, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/11/arts/chess-369892.html>, Accessed April 15 2009.

²Wolfram, Wolfgang Spiewok, and Karl Lachmann, *Parzival*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 408, 28f.

³Wolfram 407,3. All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

⁴Ibid., 408, 19ff.

⁵Ibid., 405,22.

⁵Ibid., 405, 22.

is Gawan not shocked by the knightly behavior of the lady, but instead cannot stop looking at “ir munt, ir ougen unde ir nasen” (her mouth, her eyes and her nose) and appreciating her beauty even while she is fighting?⁶ Antikonie appears here in a comedic, but entirely positive light when she eschews the passive role of a damsel in distress for the more active role of warrior.

Key to this scene and its interpretation is the chessboard’s central role. Chess was a very popular game in the Middle Ages but more significantly, it was a common allegory for war and political negotiation on the one hand, and courtly love on the other. Chess appears in several songs either as a metaphor for love, or political negotiation. In the political chess allegory, women are typically absent or relegated to a passive role. In the courtly love chess allegory, women have a central role but it is typically a passive one. This thesis argues that the notions of these two chess allegories are combined in *Parzival*, and in a similar scene in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*. In *Parzival*, Antikonie functions as the linchpin that joins the two implications of chess together. She is both the courtly object of Gawan’s desire, and a warrior engaged in battle. Her status as a lady is crucial for her role in combining the realm of courtly love with a political realm, although it places her in the unusual position for a courtly lady of taking an active role in battle. She demonstrates much more agency than the ladies in minnesong, for example. In *Tristan*, too, gender plays an important role in the combination of the allegories. This development is facilitated by the special properties of the chess game as a sphere with different rules and regulations. Whereas both chess allegories relegate women to a passive role, a space for female agency is created when poets draw on both allegories. By

⁶Wolfram, 409, 25.

means of the political allegory, chess can actually lead the ladies away from their passive role in the love allegory.

The literature on the game of chess itself is extensive. H.J.R. Murray's *A history of chess* traces the origins and expansion of chess by means of the development of the individual moves and the transformation of the names of the chess pieces. An account that is more focused on the actual transmission of the game of chess – how it was passed on across international borders– is provided by R.G. Eales (*Chess, the History of a Game*) and by David Shenk (*The Immortal Game: A History of Chess Or how 32 Carved Pieces on a Board Illuminated our Understanding of War, Art, Science and the Human Brain*). Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* and the response to it, Roger Caillois' *Man, Play and Games*, discuss game theory and the importance of games in human culture. Jenny Adams's *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* examines the representation of chess in French and English literature of the late Middle Ages and argues that the game served as a vehicle for political and economic ideology. Little scholarly work has been done on chess in German literature of the Middle Ages. One contribution is chapter five of Peter Wapnewski's *Waz ist minne?*, which concentrates on the renowned quarrel between Walther von der Vogelweide and Reinmar von Hagenau (the so-called *Reinmarfehde*) and interprets the chess queen as a mirror for all noble women, here specifically for Reinmar's lady. My contribution draws primarily on Marilyn Yalom's *The Birth of the Chess Queen*, which traces the origin and development of the chess queen from the Arabs to the seventeenth century. Her book is important because she discusses the interplay between the queens on the chessboard and living queens throughout Europe. Furthermore, she reexamines the game and its

development through the lens of gender, for instance, why the game needed a queen and how that changed it. While Yalom follows the piece's history, she does not enlarge upon its allegorical status. My thesis will outline the development in German literature of the two main chess allegories from the twelfth to the fourteenth century and will focus on the issue of gender. Additionally, I will show that these two allegories did not develop separately, but intersected at some points, granting power to the female sex. This will be demonstrated in the scene from *Parzival* described above, a scene from Gottfried's *Tristan*, and one illumination found in the Manesse Codex.⁷

To return to one of the questions asked above, namely why Wolfram wrote about a chessboard and chess pieces in *Parzival*, one thing is already clear: Chess must have been known in courtly circles around 1200. But how was it introduced both into the Western world as well as into literature, how well was it known and what kind of impact did it have? The oldest Arabic chess books can be traced back to the year 850, but chess had already existed centuries before that. After 750, chess was widespread in the Muslim world, and by the ninth century, it had pervaded the Arab lands. Finally, "at some unknown date before AD 1000 chess was introduced into western Europe [...]" through contacts with the Muslim world, for instance through trade.⁸ By the twelfth century, chess had spread through medieval clergy as well the upper classes. The confinement to the nobility can be explained by the long duration of a slow game of chess, which the working classes simply would not have had time for. Murray defines "[t]he three main features of the life of the noble in the 10th to 12th century [as] his isolation, his absence of

⁷Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. Germ. Cpg 848.

⁸R.G. Eales, *Chess, the History of a Game*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1985), 39.

regular occupation, and the grey monotony of his existence.”⁹ Chess was an ideal game for the nobility as it not only created a diversion and helped to pass the time, but the nicest boards and pieces were also status symbols. The spread of chess was a cross-cultural phenomenon: “around 1200, the game was played with roughly the same rules from the Indus to the Atlantic and from the Sahara to Iceland”.¹⁰ In Europe, its popularity was furthered when chess was included in the education of noble youths. Playing chess eventually became one of the seven knightly skills (along with riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking and verse composition).¹¹ The earliest literary evidence of the game’s transmission is in the *Einsiedeln verses* or *Versus de scachis* around 1000, a Latin poem housed in the Einsiedeln Abbey which describes the chessboard and the movements of the pieces.¹² Another early source is the Latin epic *Ruodlieb* from the beginning of the eleventh century, which tells the story of a delegate playing chess so well that a king wants to play against him and learn from him.¹³

Because of the cultural differences between the Eastern and the Western world, there were some major shifts between the Arab version of chess and European chess. Most importantly, the chess queen came to life. Previously, her piece was called *fīrz*, the counselor of the king. The change probably occurred in Germany, and may reflect the

⁹H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 438.

¹⁰Eales, 48.

¹¹David Shenk, *The Immortal Game :A History of Chess Or how 32 Carved Pieces on a Board Illuminated our Understanding of War, Art, Science, and the Human Brain*, 1st ed., (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 50.

¹²For information on the dating and the origin of the Einsiedeln verses, see Helena M. Gamer, “The Earliest Evidence of Chess in Western Literature: The Einsiedeln Verses”, *Speculum*, 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1954), 734-750.

¹³Harry Golombek, *Chess: A History*, (New York: Putnam, 1976), 68.

historical context in which two powerful queens played prominent political and cultural roles: Otto I's wife Adelaide of Burgundy, and Otto II's wife Theophano, a Byzantine princess.¹⁴ Adelaide was influential not only culturally, promoting the arts and literature, but also politically, trying to gain power over her son Otto II after her husband's death. When he married Theophano, the new queen soon exiled her powerful mother-in-law. She also hired artists from Constantinople to work at her court and "introduced many refined practices such as taking baths and wearing silks."¹⁵ The fact that her husband was criticized for following her advice rather than that of his council bears testimony to her influence and power. She was apparently the better counselor. It is possible that the chess piece's reconception as a queen reflects the recognition of these women's power. Although the *firz* became the queen, the figure's moves did not change: she could move to an adjacent diagonal square, forwards and backwards. After the pawn, she was the weakest piece on the board, so the birth of the queen did not translate into a new set of rules or moves. This change from counselor to queen was noted for the first time in the afore-mentioned *Einsiedeln verses*, and can be seen already in chess sets from southern Italy between 1080 and 1100, in which the queen appears enclosed in a canopy with attendants.

But the *firz* was not the only piece that changed. When the Arab empire expanded and started colonizing Spain, the piece *al Fil* (elephant) was altered. The Spaniards were not familiar with elephants and thus tried to adapt the word to denote something they knew. The tusks of the chess piece were interpreted as a bishop's miter, thus turning the

¹⁴Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History*, 1st ed., (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 19.

¹⁵Ibid., 21.

elephant into the similar word *alfil*, the bishop.¹⁶ The historical bishop did not only have clerical, but also secular power. As Yalom explains, “[d]uring the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, bishops yielded enormous power as administrators of church moneys, properties, and even armies of their own.”¹⁷ His inclusion among the pieces of the chess board underlines the bishop’s political importance in medieval society. Smaller alterations to the board were the addition of two colors instead of one, and the partition of the board into vertical and diagonal lines so that the moves could be followed more easily.

Finally, a whole new kind of literature developed around chess, the chess allegories. The “prevalence of symbolism in Medieval thought” explains the urge to find a deeper meaning for chess, be it for the pieces and movements or for the players.¹⁸ This lead to the development of two different allegorical representations of chess: as courtly love and as an enactment of political structure. The notion that chess could function in the same way as political negotiation goes back as far as the ninth century, when the Iberian poet Muhammad ibn Ammar, who was reputedly unbeatable at chess, played against King Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile, who was planning on invading the Islamic Kingdom of Seville¹⁹. The story tells us that, if the king won, he was to be awarded the precious chess board and pieces, but if the poet won, he could choose his own reward. As was bound to happen, ibn Ammar won and wished for the king to leave Seville. The

¹⁶Golombek, 50.

¹⁷Yalom, 18.

¹⁸Eales, 63.

¹⁹This is described by the Moroccan historian Abdelwahid al-Marrakushi in *Kitab al-mujib fi talkhis akhbar ahl al-Maghrib* from 1224.

importance of this anecdote is that “[t]hey played a chess game [...] in lieu of clashing in a real war [...]”, or, if the anecdote is merely a fiction, that people believed in the possibility of playing chess instead of engaging in warfare.²⁰ Apparently, winning the war on the chess board could replace a real war. The chess board could not only stand in for political negotiation, but it also reflected the structure of medieval society and could be used to teach people about the estates. One of the most popular examples of this use of chess as an allegory of society was Jacobus de Cessolis’ *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium sive super ludo scacchorum* (referred to as *liber* or *schachzabelbuch* below), written around 1280.

This treatise is crucial to understanding the importance of chess as a political allegory. Jacobus was a Dominican monk in Lombardy, Italy. He lived from around 1250 to 1322, during which time period the Lombardy constituted the center of Italian chess playing. The popularity of chess must have prompted Jacobus to employ chess in his sermons at a time when most of the clergy were against all kinds of games and regarded them as the devil’s distractions. Apparently, “Cessolis knew very well that a sermon, if it is to attain its purpose, must entertain, as well as edify, in order to hold men’s attention.”²¹ In those didactical sermons, he tried to explain the changing social order to his audience. Additionally, he portrays every piece, or, respectively, every class, as important, so that people are content with their position instead of striving for a higher rank. The *schachzabelbuch* is extant in over one hundred manuscripts, which led

²⁰Shenk, 49.

²¹C. K. Wilkinson, "A Thirteenth-Century Morality.", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 2, (1943), 50.

C.K. Wilkinson to believe that “[t]here must, originally, have been thousands of them.”²²

Whether his estimation is accurate or not, there can be no doubt that the *liber* was immensely popular. It was translated into eight languages, including English (William Caxton, *The game and playe of the chesse*) and German (most prominently, Konrad von Ammenhausen’s *Schachzabelbuch*).

But Jacobus was not the first to use chess as an allegory of society. One of his possible sources is *Quedam moralitas de scaccario* (1260), which was ascribed to Pope Innocence III, but was most likely written by John of Wales, a highly educated Franciscan friar, familiar with contemporary philosophers and theologians.²³ Overall, John portrays the king and the knights in a favorable light with many virtues, whereas the queen and the bishops have more vices than virtues. In particular they are prone to corruption and mendacity. Chess is depicted as the game of the devil, who is one of the players. Society is endangered by the pawns’ ability to move around relatively freely, which can confound the class distribution. As Adams remarks, chess here “demonstrates mankind’s tendency towards social *disorder*”, which is quite contrary to the view put forth by Jacobus de Cessolis.²⁴

Not only is the theme of Jacobus’s *liber* derivative, but also his didactical use of *exempla*, which J.M. Mehl defines as follows:

²²Wilkinson, 47.

²³Golombek, 67.

²⁴Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*, The Middle Ages Series, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 44.

“L'exemplum est une historiette dont on truffe un sermon pour faire passer auprès d'un auditoire une leçon morale, une vérité religieuse, en l'amusant et en proposant à sa mémoire un conte qu'elle a plus de chances de retenir qu'une démonstration abstraite.”²⁵

(The *exemplum* is an anecdote with which a sermon is peppered to pass down a moral doctrine or a religious verity to an audience by amusing them and by providing their memory with a story which is more likely to be remembered than an abstract demonstration.)

Introduced by Aristotle as a form of proof, *exempla* were an established part of the *ars praedicandi* (art of preaching) in the Middle Ages.²⁶ They strove to target the emotions of the audience rather than their reason, and this emotional response was supposed to be an effective means of teaching moral behavior. Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dictate memorabilia* from around 30 AD already contains most of the examples and anecdotes that we find in the *liber*. Jacobus refers to his source often since, presumably because “[i]l faut encore qu'elle [= la leçon] présente des garanties de authenticité.” (it is also necessary that the lesson shows guarantees of authenticity.)²⁷ Valerius Maximus wrote didactically, trying to further morality by means of stories of virtues and vices, much like the Dominican monk did. Jacobus' other sources include John of Wales, as discussed above, Vincent of Beauvais, John of Salisbury, and the bible.

For Jacobus, all estates contribute to the order of the world. He “offered a vision of a secular order organized around contractual agreements rather than one organized

²⁵J. M. Mehl, "L'Exemplum Chez Jacques De Cessoles.", *Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire Et De Philologie*, 84, (1978), 231.

²⁶For a recent definition of *exempla*, see Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women : A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 5ff.

²⁷Mehl, 239.

around a centralized authority and sustained by kinship ties [...].”²⁸ Hence, every class is described in the same way in his *schachzabelbuch*: He starts with an image of how a person from a particular estate should look; then he goes on to say which virtues the person needs; and finally, he illustrates these virtues with an accumulation of *exempla*. He starts with the king, who should be “senftmüetig”, “warhaft”, “guet”, “gerecht”, and “chäwisch” (benevolent, veracious, ethical, righteous and chaste), none of which is a surprising virtue for a king.²⁹ The role of the woman – the queen being the only woman represented in the game – is centered on her reproductive function. Hence, it is especially important that she knows how to “irew chind [...] tzyehen an tügenten vnd an syten vnd an chawschait” (educate her children in virtues, manners and chastity), the same qualities that she herself needs to embody.³⁰

The bishop, representing the judicial power, stands right next to the king, who is the legislative power. He is portrayed as a “richter mit ainem offen püech” (a judge with an open book), and he should “dem chünig trewlich raten” (loyally counsel the king).³¹ There are five virtues to which the bishop should adhere, just like the king, queen and later the rook, who is “des chünigs vicary oder verweser” (the proconsul or legate of the king).³² The knight, however, needs not only five but seven virtues that include “weyshait” (wisdom) and being “ein hitziger schermer vnd pehalter” (an avid protector

²⁸Jenny Adams, "Longene to the Playe': Caxton, Chess, and the Boundaries of Political Order.", *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 21, (2005): 150.

²⁹Jacobus and Gerard F. Schmidt, *Das Schachzabelbuch in Mittelhochdeutscher Prosa- Übersetzung*, Texte Des Späten Mittelalters, Heft 13, (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1961), 31-35.

³⁰Ibid., 40.

³¹Ibid., 43.

³²Ibid., 57.

and sustainer) of the law.³³ This indicates the complexity of knighthood, which itself was composed of multiple levels. The aforementioned pieces form the back line of the chess board, while the pawns populate the front line.

Jacobus' distribution of the different pawns is a novelty. He distinguishes eight different realms of commoners, which all have different desirable virtues. Thus, "[h]e embeds the virtues, via their assignment to specific socially relevant activities, into contexts relevant to daily life", moving away from the concentration on the nobility.³⁴ The novel interconnectedness between the different ranks is emphasized by assigning each field of work a distinct space on the board, complete with an explanation thereof. The seventh pawn, for example, is positioned in front and on the left side of the king, because he helps the knight with protecting people by keeping watch when the knight is asleep. The figure below illustrates Jacobus' classification in detail:

Gamblers, couriers	City guards	Tavern- keeper	Physician	Merchant	Notary	Smith	Building and farm laborer
Rook = delegate	Knight	Bishop = judge	Queen	King	Bishop = judge	Knight	Rook = delegate

³³Ibid., 49/58.

³⁴Pamela Kalning, "Virtues and Exempla in John of Wales and Jacobus De Cessolis." *Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages, 1200-1500*, edited by Eric Kuchle, István Bejczy and Cary J. Nederman, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 156.

Almost everyone in medieval society would fit into one of these categories – except for women. The queen can be read as an example for all courtly ladies, but the female commoners are left out of the scheme, even though they participated in at least some of the activities mentioned, like the wives of tavern keepers, who usually helped run the tavern, or the wives and daughters of farm laborers, who helped with agriculture, amongst other things.³⁵ Whereas gender is very clear and distinct for the nobility, the boundaries of male and female work spaces for the lower classes are rather blurred.

Jacobus creates a system of interdependence. In the last part of the *liber*, he remarks that “die gemainen sind als ain chran der edeln” (the commoners are like an extension of the nobility).³⁶ On the one hand, they work for and protect the higher classes, but on the other hand, they also need the nobility to stand behind them to counsel and instruct them, so it is a reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, he describes how the pawns can gain “die wirdichait [...] das der chünigin von genaden verlihen ist” (the importance which is conferred upon the queen by the grace of God), so they can actually advance to something higher, not socially, but in terms of their ethics and morals.³⁷ Jacobus also grants the queen more power: Instead of being one of the weaker pieces and only being allowed to move “to any adjacent diagonal square”³⁸, her first move could be a privilege leap, a move in which she could advance forward by three fields. Afterward,

³⁵Sometimes, women even dominated a domain, as is the case with brewsters, female ale brewers in England. Remarkably, when brewing became more prestigious, men took over and women were relegated to the low skilled and low paid areas of the trade, as Judith Bennett argues in *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England. Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300 – 1600*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁶Jacobus, 113.

³⁷Ibid., 126.

³⁸H.J.R. Murray, *A Short History of Chess*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 15.

she should not move too much, “wann die frawn nicht vil vmblawffen schüllen” (because the ladies should not walk about too much).³⁹ However, this move is not an invention of Jacobus, but rather developed between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

³⁹Jacobus, 120.

The lady on the decline: First objectified, then ignored.

In the earliest poems employing chess, it is either used as a political allegory or a love allegory, but the two allegorical forms do not overlap. The chess queen, when she appears at all, is not portrayed as a powerful figure. The Manesse Codex contains six poems that make use of chess terminology. The first two, by Reinmar der Alte and Walther von der Vogelweide, refer to each other and are generally considered to be part of the so-called *Reinmarfehde*, but Walther also wrote two other poems that include chess terms. The other two poets are Reinmar von Zweter and Ulrich von Gutenberg. The poems in question can be dated between 1150 and 1250, the first date being the birth of the oldest poet, Reinmar der Alte, the last date being the death of the youngest poet, Reinmar von Zweter.

Reinmar der Alte's poem *Ich wirbe umbe allez daz ein man* is one of the poems attributed to the *Fehde* between Reinmar and Walther. It is a praise to his lady, who cannot be adored enough. He serves her willingly but hopes for a reward from her, which leads him to hypothesize about stealing a kiss from her. At first sight, the poem only contains one specific reference to chess, "dâ ist *iu* mat!" (there you are checkmated!) in the last line of the first stanza.⁴⁰ But this stanza contains several other chess related words as well: the lady he is referring to is on a field ("stat") and never moved away ("getrat")

⁴⁰Ingrid Kasten and Margherita Kuhn, eds., *Deutsche Lyrik Des frühen Und Hohen Mittelalters*, Bibliothek Des Mittelalters, 1 Aufl., 129, (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1995), 308.

from female virtue.⁴¹ In the poem, Reinmar explains his longing and love for a lady, who embodies all worldly pleasures to him, and who cannot be compared to other ladies as she is above all of them. Here, he expands the convention of praising one lady above the rest by degrading all other women in light of her perfection. In the next four stanzas, which will not be the focal point here, he explains his longing further and goes as far as to say that, if possible, he would steal a kiss from his lady – and to “return” it, if she complains about the theft (“daz ich ab ir wol redenden munde ein küssen mac versteln [...] dâ nim eht ichz und tragez hin wider”).⁴²

Reinmar’s references to the game of chess, and his emphasis on the singularity of his lady equate her with the queen on a chess board. His praise of her “wîplîchen tugenden” (female virtues) suggests that the chess queen already embodied the same virtues in the twelfth century that the *schachzabelbuch* later granted her, namely that she is “rain vnd käwsch” (pure and chaste), and “mit syten altpärîch vnd volkomen” (honorable and perfect).⁴³ These qualities are accompanied by her beauty, since she is “ein schönew frauw in vergoltem gewant” (a beautiful lady in a gilded dress).⁴⁴ Although Reinmar does not develop the metaphor extensively, his references to the game of chess elevate his lady to the status of the chess queen, a figure identified in the *liber* as the paragon of womanly virtue.

⁴¹Kasten, 308.

⁴²Ibid., 308f.

⁴³Jacobus, 37.

⁴⁴Ibid., 43.

However, Reinmar's "dâ ist *iu* mat!" (there you are checkmated!) is cryptic.⁴⁵ It raises three questions: Who is checkmating, who is checkmated, and how? Technically, all the pieces on the board (or rather the player who moves them) can checkmate, but only one piece, the king, can be checkmated. It seems like the poet could be one player, who is checkmated by the other player, his lady: he is submissive to her and longs to serve her. Nevertheless, the "iu" cannot refer to the narrator himself, but implies that somebody else is addressed. It could refer to the audience, who is checkmated by the lady's perfection. That is, she renders her onlooker powerless because her beauty surpasses that of all other ladies. A second possibility is that the adored lady is merely a piece on the board and not one of the players. Reinmar would then be the player who uses her to checkmate the other player. And who could be a better opponent than Walther? Because Reinmar's lady is the most beautiful, he is able to use her to render Walther powerless. As Peter Wapnewski argues, Walther and Reinmar might both have had the same arbitress, so Reinmar may be asserting here that he is the one who praises her best.⁴⁶ On account of the preexisting feud between the two competing poets, to which I return below, this seems to be the most likely interpretation.⁴⁷

Reinmar's example demonstrates the difficulties of the role of women in male-authored poetry. For the quintessence of courtly love, "the worship of an ideal, incarnated

⁴⁵Kasten, 308.

⁴⁶Peter Wapnewski, *Waz Ist Minne: Studien zur Mittelhochdeutschen Lyrik*, (München: Beck, 1975), 91.

⁴⁷Yet, it equates Walther with the king, a position that Reinmar surely would not have liked to grant him. The chess metaphor is rather vague and cannot be applied in all its complexity.

in or transposed to a woman”, female passivity is inevitable.⁴⁸ The depicted also has neither individual connotations, nor any other eye-catching attributes; she stays a blank canvas which the poet can paint according to his desires. If the lady showed any passion, "her passion would transform her into an ordinary woman, a mortal and faulty and desiring creature, like everyone else. [The] vagueness regarding the beloved lady - her namelessness, her abstract qualities, her continual absence - are all necessary to make her credible as the goal of the lover's service and the judge of his worth."⁴⁹ The *vrouwe* is an object of admiration, but she does not herself exhibit agency. Reinmar merely uses her to get at Walther. Throughout minnesong, the women stay objects to emphasize the role of men: “By constructing women as the objects – not so much of love as of poetry, the poets construct themselves as better (more masculine) men”, men who can control and moderate themselves.⁵⁰ But Reinmar clearly cannot do so, as he steals a kiss from his beloved. If she did object to that, he would simply return the kiss, and abuse her another time.

Before Walther’s response will be discussed, we will depart from the path of well-known minnesingers with a short excurses to Ulrich von Gutenberg, whose poem is similar in theme to Reinmar’s. His oeuvre probably dates around 1190. His biography is unknown, but in 1220, he was “als tot beklagt” by Heinrich von dem Türlin.⁵¹ In the Manesse codex, he is represented by one *liet* and one *leich*. What defines the latter is “die

⁴⁸Joan M. Ferrante, *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*, edited by George Economou, Frederick Goldin, (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), 5.

⁴⁹Ferrante, 54.

⁵⁰Sara S. Poor, "Gender Studies and Medieval Women in German", *College Literature* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 123.

⁵¹Wolfgang Stammer, Karl Langosch, and Kurt Ruh, eds., *Die Deutsche Literatur Des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 2. völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978), Bd. 9, 1267.

längere Abfolge formverschiedener Strophen sowie deren metr[ische] Untergliederung” and, predominantly, “sprachliche Elaboriertheit”.⁵² The poem in question can be further classified as a *minneleich*, since its topic is “Minneklage und Frauenpreis”.⁵³ The part that contains the chess terminology reads thus:

diu guote dô hat mir benomen
mînen sin der ich bin undertan
sie ruoret mich an
mînen alten ban
den muoz ich aber niuwen
ich hupf ir uf der verte nach
mich leit ir süezer ougen schâch

(The beloved one, who robbed me of my senses; I am her servant. She takes me at my old promise, which I have to renew. I follow her at once; her lovely eyes lead me into checkmate.)⁵⁴

Evidently, these lines are characterized by the ideal of *hohe minne*: the poet completely submits to the lady. Now, it seems like not only the lady is on the chessboard, but also the poet, who jumps after her (“ich hupf ir uf der verte nach”), and who is checkmated by her.⁵⁵ As Marilyn Yalom states, being checkmate is an equivalent for the knight “to suffer, to submit, to become as if dead under the stunning effects of his lady”, just like the poet feels here.⁵⁶ However, it is not the lady or queen as a person who stuns him, but only “ir süeze[...] ougen” (her lovely eyes), a rather conventional attribute. What she does with those eyes, we do not find out. If she looked invitingly or lovingly at her suitor, she

⁵²Robert Auty, *Lexikon Des Mittelalters*, (München; Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1977; 1999), Bd 5, 1850.

⁵³Ibid., 1850.

⁵⁴Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, *Minnesinger. Deutsche Liederdichter Des Zwölften, Dreizehnten Und Vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1838; 1861), 1,115.

⁵⁵Ibid., 115.

⁵⁶Yalom, 125.

would be less passive than Reinmar's lady. Nevertheless, it is not her gaze that checkmates the poet, but rather his gaze at her. Thus, he disables himself, again rendering the beloved to a passive object.

Returning to the two major poets, Walther perhaps felt prompted to strike back after Reinmar's poem and composed *Ein man verbiutet âne pfliht*. In the Manesse codex the scribe has inscribed the song with the title *in dem done: Ich wirbe umbe allez daz ein man*, thus establishing the connection between this song and Reinmar's earlier work. The existence of a feud between the two has been ardently debated and has produced as many supporters as detractors. It has been deduced that Reinmar was Walther's teacher at some point, but then Walther's style changed, especially with respect to his representation of *hohe minne* and *niedere minne*. The two poets might also have been rivals for a minstrel position at the Viennese court, vying for the favor of the audience. The feud has been described "als ein[...] beständige[r] Wettstreit im Minnelob".⁵⁷ This description emphasizes exactly how the older poet insults the younger one: by abating his ability to praise. Presumably to get even, Walther uses a clever strategy. In the second stanza (which only contains one gaming reference, "spil" [game]), he lets the beloved lady speak for herself and rebuke Reinmar, a much harsher rejection than he could have suffered through Walther.⁵⁸ Instead of neglecting *mâze* (moderation) and stealing a kiss, he should rather "werbe ez mit vuoge und ander spil" (strive for it [the kiss] condignly

⁵⁷Burghart Wachinger, *Sängerkrieg; Untersuchungen Zur Spruchdichtung des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Münchener Texte Und Untersuchungen Zur Deutschen Literatur Des Mittelalters, Bd. 42, (München: Beck, 1973), 105.

⁵⁸Kasten, 466.

and using a different game).⁵⁹ This “other game” could well be a reference to chess which would mirror Reinmar’s allegorical use of the game and be consistent with the terminology and imagery in the rest of Walther’s poem. If so, another role of chess would be alluded to here, namely chess as a catalyst for physically bringing lovers together. The lady would surely prefer playing chess to the theft of her kiss, since it would not jeopardize her reputation. Walther places his words in the mouth of Reinmar’s lady, and thus manipulates her to his own ends. He treats her just like a player would treat a chess queen at that time: He uses her to advance in the game.

Returning to the first stanza, more chess terms can be found. “Ein man verbiutet âne pfliht / ein spil”(a man overbids a game on his own initiative) is Walther’s first criticism of Reinmar: Without anybody prompting him to do so, Reinmar made a strong claim about his lady which nobody would trump.⁶⁰ Walther does not define here what kind of game is being overbid, chess, or the “game” of minnesong itself. He continues to criticize Reinmar’s hyperbole in comparing his lady to an Easter day and exclaims: “[B]ezzer waere miner frowen senfter gruoꝝ / dâ ist mates buoz.”⁶¹ Ingrid Kasten translates this line as: “Besser wäre der freundliche Gruß meiner Dame” (the friendly greeting of my lady would be better).⁶² But this does not make sense, it sets up an analogy between two different levels of narrative: on the one hand, the comparison of the lady to an Easter day, and on the other, the lady’s greeting. Wapnewski solves this

⁵⁹Kasten, 466.

⁶⁰Ibid., 464.

⁶¹Ibid., 466.

⁶²Ibid., 467.

problem by explaining that the lady is the dative object, thus changing the sentence to “[B]esser wäre für die *frouwe* ein zarter Gruß” (a tender greeting would be better for the lady).⁶³ This is more meaningful: A tender greeting towards the woman would be preferred to an overstrained comparison. In Walther’s opinion, Reinmar’s overreaching praise is overkill; subtle glorification however is the goal of minnesong. Walther remains modest and thus frees himself from Reinmar’s checkmate with “mates buoz”, the counterattack.⁶⁴ His *mâze* (moderation) also deters him from checkmating Reinmar with his criticism. Interestingly, the poet says what would be better for the lady, but the lady speaks for herself in the second stanza. After the first stanza, everything has been said, so all that is left to the lady is to reaffirm the poet’s assertions.

While in the first two poems discussed, chess terminology is used to compare the lady to the chess queen and to thereby demonstrate her singular status, Walther employs a different chess metaphor, which pertains to the game as a whole. All of these poems show that chess terminology (checking and countering) could also be applied to courtly love relationships. These poems presage the development of chess as a full-fledged allegory of courtly love. In these examples, chess is mainly the common denominator which visibly – and audibly – connects Reinmar’s and Walther’s poems. The listener or reader could realize that Walther refers back to Reinmar, even without the subtitle which can only be found in the Manesse codex.

Another poem of Walther, which is linked to the above mentioned poems, is *Mir tuot einer slahte wille*. It is written from a woman’s perspective and outlines her

⁶³Wapnewski, 89.

⁶⁴Kasten, 466.

problematic role in a courtly love relationship. The genre *Frauenlied*, of which this poem fulfils all criteria, is a byproduct of a patriarchal society. It has a female voice rather than female authorship, simple language, “the utterance is perceived as in some way contrastive to male voice song”, and the subject is love.⁶⁵ The aspired relationship is not one of *hêhe minne*, but rather an *amor mixtus*, where the woman is more susceptible towards bodily pleasures than in traditional minnesong. *Hêhe minne*, however, was part of the notion of courtly love, as found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature. The main feature is the poet’s preoccupation with a lady, who is “the wife of another man, and yet this relationship is celebrated as the source of a higher morality, notwithstanding the prevailing religious and social sanctions of monogamy.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, the lover longs for physical closeness to the lady, which should ideally never happen in *hêhe minne* (also called *amor purus*)⁶⁷. This striving without fulfillment itself elevates and purifies the lover, but the role of which the lady is consigned is a passive one. And in this song the knight wants much more. What he really strives for is never explicitly stated, but only expressed in contractions and referred to as “it” or “that”, for example in “dem enmac ich niht versagen mê / dez er mich gebeten hat” (I do not want to deny him any longer that which he asked of me)⁶⁸ What he asked her for is certainly some form of physical contact, be it a kiss or sexual intercourse, which is never openly admitted. Further instances are the contractions “des”, “ichz” (four times) and “swes”, all of which

⁶⁵ Anne L. Klinck, "Lyric Voice and the Feminine in some Ancient and Mediaeval Frauenlieder." *Florilegium: Papers on Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 13, (1994), 14.

⁶⁶ Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love.", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 73, no. 287 (Jan. - Mar., 1960): 40.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁸ Kasten, 458.

refer to the same act.⁶⁹ The ideals of courtly love were so ingrained in aristocratic society, that all listeners would have known what the lady is talking about. While the poet is showing his best behavior to woo her and while she wants to reward him and give in to him, her “wîbes êre” (womanly honor) impedes her from doing so.⁷⁰ Though spoken in a female voice, a male threat causes her sorrow; it is not part of her own agency and does not represent her active longing for him. When she says: “[O]uwê, des vorhte ich vil ze sere / daz ich muoz volgen swes er wil” (Woe is me, I fear it very much, that I must comply with whatever he wants),⁷¹ it becomes apparent that she feels compelled or forced to submit to the poet. This is an example not of *hêhe minne*, but of “*amor mixtus*”, “[a] compromise between *amor purus* and sexual gratification [...]”.⁷² But although this song is composed in a woman’s voice, the female speaker does not express agency of her own, but only succumbs to a man’s desire.

In the last of the five stanzas, Walther surprisingly uses the exact same rhymes that Reinmar used in connection with the chess queen: “stat” (field), getrat” (moved), and “mat” (checkmate).⁷³ But instead of saying that she never left the field of perfection, he refers to the knight who has a field in the lady’s heart that no one else ever moved to. Everybody else lost the game (“si hânt das spil verlorn”⁷⁴), showing the knight as the most powerful and winning piece. The chessboard is allegorically located within her

⁶⁹Kasten, 458.

⁷⁰Ibid., 458.

⁷¹Ibid., 458.

⁷²Moller, 40.

⁷³Kasten, 460.

⁷⁴Ibid., 460.

heart; the knight on the field occupies a space therein (sô hân ich im vil nâhen / eine stat in mime herzen geben” [so I gave him a space in my heart, very close]).⁷⁵ We can see the love allegory develop here: the knight has outperformed all others and won the game as well as the lady’s heart. Allegorizing love was common in the Middle Ages. The tradition of allegory existed in the ancient world already, but “the later [= the Medieval romantic] allegory with its free, and often ingenious, plot, and its luxuriant poetry, is a genuinely new creation [, which] owes to antiquity not so much its procedure as the preservation of that atmosphere in which allegory was a natural method.”⁷⁶ As will be demonstrated on the basis of a manuscript illumination later, allegory can be textual or pictorial. Allegory can be defined as follows:

“[E]in Text oder ein sprachl[iches] Zeichen [kann] über seinen wörtl[ichen] Sinn hinaus weitere Bedeutungen enthalten [...]. In der Darstellungsweise reicht die Skala von der eindeutigen Auslegung, die Punkt für Punkt vorgeht, in einem Extrem bis zur mehrdeutigen, in welcher der Autor nur mit sprechenden Namen oder Details auf eine weitere Sinnebene verweist, auf der anderen Seite. Die Sinnbezüge orientieren sich an Konventionen [...].”⁷⁷

For the Middle Ages, some of these conventions are fights or spaces (for instance, the *minnegrotte* in Tristan), and, of course, chess.

While in Reinmar’s poem the lady is a personification of the chess queen, chess itself is an allegory for courtly love here. The knight on the chessboard plays well and thus puts the others out of action; just as the lady’s demanding lover performs *minne* well

⁷⁵Kasten, 460.

⁷⁶C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; 1936), 84.

⁷⁷Auty, Bd 1, 423.

and thus eliminates all other men from her desires. The interpretation is not completely unambiguous, since the knight technically can only checkmate the king and not the other knights. As a metaphor for a courtly love relationship, the notion of checkmating and the role of the king in chess make sense. If the lady submits to the knight physically, then the king loses her troth, all the other players lose the possibility to woo her, and even the queen herself loses, in this case her honor. If both lovers share physical intimacy in the patriarchal context of minnesong, then only the knight stands to gain something positive from the liaison. It is irrelevant what the lady really wants or does not want; she is unable to move either way. If she does not give in to her wooer, he might leave her. If she does give in, she could lose her honor. She is trapped by the rules she has internalized, and is forced into playing a passive role as she is unable to do anything.

Walther indicates that, in fact, courtly love was just another part of a male dominated society. As illustrated, Reinmar portrayed the chess queen as the most powerful piece who can checkmate everybody else (even though this does not comply with the formal rules of the game), unlike Walther, who ascribes this role to the knight – another correction of the rivaling poet. We have to agree with Walther twofold: the knight was more powerful than the queen on the chessboard and (at least in this poem) also dominated over the lady in the context of courtly love, playing an active role. Overall, even though Walther mentions the different estates in medieval society, no political angle is involved yet. Chess serves as a pure allegory for courtly love. The song depicts the emotional world of a fictional lady, which has little relevance for medieval politics.

Walther's other chess poem, called the *Unmutston*, could not be more different from the two mentioned above, as it does not belong to minnesong, but to *Sangspruchdichtung*. This genre is defined by "pregnante Einstrophigkeit, diverse lehrhafte Inhalte" and by the writer being "gesellschaftlich inferior".⁷⁸ As will become apparent, as soon as politics and power are introduced, not only female agency, but also women in general, are lacking. Firstly, Walther demonstrates the importance of having "guot" (property), and criticizes the measures many desperate people take to acquire it.⁷⁹ The third to sixth stanzas are directed towards Leopold VI, Duke of Austria, whose court was well known amongst minnesingers. On the one hand, Walther praises him as energetic ("er mac, er hat, er tuot" [he can, he has, he acts])⁸⁰ and "milte" (generous).⁸¹ On the other hand, he commands Leopold to "lâ stân!" (let it go!) and not send him away from court.⁸²

To understand the remaining stanza, which contains chess terminology, some historical background is required. As Manfred Günter Scholz explains, "[m]it der Anspielung auf das Schachspiel wird eine Situation evoziert, in der Ottos Herrschaft durch den Gegenkönig Friedrich betont war."⁸³ The Otto in question is Otto IV of Brunswick, representative of the House of Welf and son of Henry the Lion. After being crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1209, his rival king Frederick Roger from the Staufens

⁷⁸Auty, Bd 7, 2144.

⁷⁹Kasten, 496.

⁸⁰Ibid., 500.

⁸¹Ibid., 502.

⁸²Ibid., 500.

⁸³Manfred Günter Scholz, *Walther Von Der Vogelweide*, Sammlung Metzler, Bd. 316, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Buchhandlung, 1999), 81.

dynasty gained influence. In 1212, Otto found himself deserted by his former supporters and faced Frederick's arriving army. This is the situation depicted by Walther. The stanza focuses on the pair of opposites "wirt" (lord or host) and "gast" (stranger or guest), the general idea being that one has property whereas the other one is dependent on him.⁸⁴

Even though Walther prefers the role of the host, he himself is only a guest. He equates this condition with being checkmate ("gast und schâch kumt selten âne haz" [being a guest and being checkmated are always hateful]).⁸⁵ So why does chess appear here as analogous to being a guest, dependent upon a lord? In the next line, the poet requests: "Hêrre, bûezet mir des gastes, daz iu got des schâches bûeze."⁸⁶ (Lord, free me of being a guest, so that God might free you of being checkmated) This is a pun, as *schâches buoz* is the counterattack to free somebody from being checked. Here the poet has used the related verb *bûezen* (to free from something, to improve something). The "deal" between the two is unusual; Otto is supposed to free Walther of his financial dependence, and in return, God will help to free him politically. Apparently, Walther has a direct connection to God; he disposes of God's grace with the "Selbstbewusstsein eines Künstlers".⁸⁷ Still, there is no obvious relationship between being a guest and being checkmate. Chess seems to be chosen in this poem as an analogy because of its political dimension. As Colleen Schafroth puts it, "the game's greatest appeal was that it was

⁸⁴Kasten, 498.

⁸⁵Ibid., 498.

⁸⁶Ibid., 498.

⁸⁷Scholz, 81.

almost instantly recognized as a microcosm of society.”⁸⁸ The king (or Emperor) Otto IV is checked by Frederick’s arriving army, but he is not checkmated yet and could still free himself. The comparison with chess is less fully developed than the allegory of courtly love. Mainly, this poem demonstrates another use of chess as a political allegory, and underlines the notion that “die entscheidende Innovation Walthers [...] ist, dass er das Thema Politik in die Lyrik einführt.”⁸⁹ His poetry is political in as far as it is related to contemporary people, events, and the state of society. Just like Reinmar’s poem was a foretaste to the courtly love allegory, this poem presages the use of chess as a political allegory, a motif that was developed most notably by Jacobus de Cessolis. There is no female voice or representation at all. The queen is not part of this allegorical representation.

Reinmar von Zweter is another important representative of *Sangspruchdichtung*. He composed mainly in the *Frau-Ehren-Ton*, modeled after his teacher Walther von der Vogelweide’s compositions. The poem that contains chess was very likely composed between 1237 and 1241, when Reinmar v. Z. stayed at Wenzel’s court, since he mentions that he chose “Bêheim” (Bohemia) because of its good lord.⁹⁰ The then king, Wenzel I, was not only a minnesinger himself and portrayed in the Manesse codex, but also a connoisseur and patron of music. In the poem, Reinmar v. Z. explains his origins; he was born at the Rhine, grew up in Austria, and then went to Bohemia. His poem informs us that only one thing makes his stay at the court problematic, namely the fact “daz [in]

⁸⁸Colleen Schaforth, *The Art of Chess*, (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2002), 53.

⁸⁹Scholz, 41.

⁹⁰Stammler, Bd 7, 1199.

nieman werde / ez ensî ob erz al eine tuot” (that nobody appreciates him except for him [= the king] alone).⁹¹

Reinmar v. Z. draws on the language of chess and explains his situation as follows: “ich hân den künec al eine noch / unt weder ritter noch daz roch / mich stiuret niht sîn alte noch sîn vende.” (I only have the king left and neither knight nor castle, neither his bishop nor his pawn support me).⁹² Similar to Walther, Reinmar v. Z. seems to have a great deal of self-confidence. He was not gladly chosen by Wenzel I to stay at his court, but he actively picked Wenzel and Bohemia. This is a typical characteristic of *Sangspruchdichtung*, “das betonte Selbstbewußtsein der Sangspruchdichter erscheint als übergreifendes Charakteristikum ihrer Texte und steht im Kontrast zu dem permanenten Ringen um materielle und gesellschaftl[iche] Anerkennung.”⁹³ Being the poet laureate, Reinmar contributes to Wenzel’s prestige and can thus look to his support, but for Wenzel’s entourage, Reinmar’s presence does not count as much.

The selection of the pieces that Reinmar v. Z. presents us with is unusual in two ways: First of all, he mentions every piece but the female one, the queen. Thus, he avoids all boundary points with the courtly love allegory and stays within the political realm. Nevertheless, it also shows again that the queen was not yet the most powerful piece on the board, since he would certainly have not neglected her otherwise. Secondly, the poet includes all other pieces, down to the pawn. Socially, the three closest people to the king are the bishop, the rook and the knight. In his *schachzabelbuch*, Jacobus de Cessolis

⁹¹Kasten, 170.

⁹²Ibid., 170.

⁹³Auty, Bd 7, 2144.

defines the role of the bishop to “dem chünig trewlich raten” (to advise the king loyally), he stands right next to the king and thus is close to him.⁹⁴ On the chess board, the knight stands next to the bishop. As mentioned above, he should “rechter gesetz sein ein hitziger schermer vnd pehalter” (be an avid protector and sustainer of the law), another important assistant to the king.⁹⁵ The rook functions as “des chünigs vicary oder verweser” (the king’s steward or vicar), yet another important office.⁹⁶ So if these important figures do not estimate Reinmar highly enough, his frustration is understandable, especially if they treat him disparagingly in public, in an age where representation was important because it “ermöglicht[e] die sinnlich erfahrbare Darstellung von sozialem Rang”.⁹⁷ The pawn’s approval, however, is hardly needed, as he has no space at court, where poetry is performed. By including the lowest social class, Reinmar stresses on the one hand how much he feels rejected, virtually everybody except the king does not estimate him highly enough. On the other hand, he denounces the state of the court: nobody follows Wenzel’s example in appreciating Reinmar. Like Jacobus, Reinmar von Zweter is not concerned about the opponent or the second half of the chessboard. Chess seemed to be popular enough around 1234 for educated people to understand the mere reference to chess pieces, and to associate chess with political events.

To sum up, we see a divide between the chess poems with *minne* as their subject (exemplified by Reinmar der Alte, Ulrich von Gutenberg, and by the first two of Walther

⁹⁴Jacobus, 43.

⁹⁵Ibid., 58.

⁹⁶Ibid., 59.

⁹⁷Horst Wenzel and Hedda Ragotzky, eds., *Höfische Repräsentation: Das Zeremoniell Und Zeichen*, (Tübingen : Niemeyer, 1990), 176.

von der Vogelweide's poems), and poems with a political interest (shown by Walther and Reinmar von Zweter). This body of material suggests a chronological timeline and development of the chess allegory. Von Gutenberg's *minneleich* was likely composed before 1200, since the height of *leichs* was between 1150 and 1190. Reinmar's exchange with Walther von der Vogelweide must have happened before Reinmar's death in 1210. Then, there is a break in the *minne* poetry and love allegory, and Walther starts the political allegory with his *Unmutston* in 1212, which Reinmar von Zweter takes up in 1237. In the courtly love poems, chess serves to underline the lady's lack of agency on and off the chess board. The political poems serve the same purpose, since the lady is completely eliminated and kept away from the political sphere. Even if the lady is given a voice, she has nothing to say except repeat what other people told her.

The lady on the rise: Dynamic fighter, lover and winner.

The chronological development of the chess allegory in the poems above from a love allegory to a political allegory is disturbed by two Middle High German epics, Wolfram of Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Gottfried of Strassburg's *Tristan*, both from around 1210. I argue that these epics depict the intersection of these two allegories and in doing so, create a space for female agency. When both the love allegory and the political allegory are invoked together in these poems, the passive lady of courtly love is thrust into the political realm and able to act. The illumination of Otto of Brandenburg from the Manesse Codex will finally offer a pictorial synthesis.

As the introductory example suggested, Antikonie does not fit in with the passive ladies of minnesong. To recapitulate the situation, Gawan arrives in Schanpfanzun on his way to a fight with Kingrimursel. He is sent to and received by the sister of king Vergulaht, Antikonie. Conveniently, the attendants leave the room, so that Gawan can give in to his desire and fondle the lady. As "er greif ir undern mantel dar"⁹⁸ (he touched her under her coat), a knight enters and springs to arms, accusing Gawan of rape. Gawan and Antikonie do not have any weapons nearby and try to flee to a place that is better suited for their defense. They run into a tower, but the only thing to be found that resembles a means of defense is "ein schachzâbelgesteine / unt ein bret, wol erleit, wît."

⁹⁸Wolfram, 407, 2.

(a set of chess pieces and a broad, well-constructed board)⁹⁹ The lady gives Gawan the board, but she throws the pieces at the assailants with such force that those she hits sink to the floor (“Swen dâ erreichte ir wurfes swanc / der strûchte âne sînen danc.”¹⁰⁰).

The chessboard has two functions here: it serves as a weapon and it also unites Gawan and Antikonie in a single purpose, defending their love from attack. The combination of motifs in this scene may explain why Wolfram gave Antikonie chess pieces to fight with, and not a sword or some other weapon. The chess allegories of love and political negotiation were pervasive, and Wolfram’s use of the chessboard draws on them both simultaneously. The unusual use of the chessboard also has a comic effect. Wolfram tells us: on Gawan’s board, “was schâchzabels vil gespilt: der [= der schilt] wart im sêr zerhouwen”(a lot of chess was played, his shield was badly hewn).¹⁰¹ He fights for his life, but the battle is humorously portrayed as just a game of chess. Furthermore, Antikonie is compared to “diu koufwîb ze Tolenstein / an der vasnaht” (the chandlers of Dollenstein on Shrovetide) and their jolly celebrations, even though she is fighting hard to help Gawan. Chess creates comic relief in a serious situation, which other, ordinary, weapons would not have done.

Wolfram stresses the mutual agency of the two defenders. Unlike the passive women of minnesong who are being looked at and whose kisses are sought, Antikonie offers her embrace to Gawan right when he enters and kisses him “ungastlîch”

⁹⁹Wolfram, 408, 20f.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 409, 3f.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 408, 25ff.

(intimately).¹⁰² When Gawan decides to test the waters by touching her, “von der liebe alsölhe nôt gewan / beidiu maget und ouch der man” (both the maiden and the man felt such desire from their love) that they would have gone much further, since “des willen si bêde warn bereit” (they were both willing).¹⁰³ The double mention of “both” emphasizes that the lady and Gawan were on the same page, their desire is mutual. Furthermore, even after the episode is over, Antikonie complains only that “het [Gawan] mir genozzen mêt, mîn vröude waer gein sorgen hêt” (if Gawan had enjoyed me more, my joy would be free from sorrows).¹⁰⁴ She really wanted to consummate their love, and it is her joy that she cares about, not only his. It almost seems like she chose the pieces that she is throwing deliberately: first and foremost, “ez waere künec oder roch” (be it the king or the rook). The king represents her brother Vergulaht, whom she publicly reprimands for attacking Gawan. Then, there is the rook, which could represent the knight who caught the two in the act, or later Liddamus, a vassal of the king who argues for a strict punishment of Gawan. In throwing the pieces, she symbolically opposes those men, pushing her social boundaries.

Gawan enjoys watching her fighting and appreciates her more and more for her active role in their battle. The narrator comments on this as follows: “diu küneginne rîche streit dâ ritterlîche” (the noble queen fought as befits a knight).¹⁰⁵ The lady as knight – a very unusual picture, but not for Gawan, who looks at the lady even more lovingly and

¹⁰²Wolfram, 405, 21.

¹⁰³Ibid., 407, 5ff.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 431, 23f.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 409, 5ff.

desiring than before. Also, none of the other members of the court seem to find her behavior strange either. She must be very strong, since she is able to throw the pieces which are “grôz und swaere” with such force that the attackers fall.¹⁰⁶ Apparently, she possesses many of the virtues that, according to Jacobus de Cessolis, are essential for a knight, for instance, she is “sterkch” and “trew” (strong and loyal).¹⁰⁷ Her seemingly unwomanly behavior is tolerated for two reasons. Firstly, because it is just part of a game, as Wolfram illustrates when he states that chess was played (referring to the attackers who are hitting Gawan’s shield). According to Huizinga, play is defined as “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being not serious, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly [...]. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules.” Within the game of chess to which the battle is compared, the lady is able to be a strong player and a winner, just like Antikonie in this episode. The battle is depicted as not serious, disarmed by its comparison to chess. It is only a game, and Antikonie’s gender transgression is therefore harmless. A different situation which nevertheless functions by the same principle is described by Helen Solterer, who claims that

“[b]y mixing customary elements of representation with some of the more outlandish, the Tournoiement [= Pierre Gencin’s thirteenth century narrative *Li Tournoiement as dame*] can narrate the functions of women knights, rendering them viable without promoting them actively.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Wolfram, 409, 1.

¹⁰⁷Jacobus, 49.

¹⁰⁸Helen Solterer, “Figures of Female Militancy in Medieval France.”, *Signs* 16, no. 3 (Spring, 1991): 525.

By substituting traditional weapons for chess, Antikonie's fighting is acceptable without representing a general call to arms for women.¹⁰⁹ Thus, chess enables her to take an active, accepted position within society.

Secondly, Antikonie's positive representation here as a warrior may be explained by recent work on courtly beauty. According to James A. Schultz, male and female beauty was constituted differently in the Middle Ages than today. In *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness and the History of Sexuality*, he argues that there was an ideal of "courtly beauty", which manifested itself in the features, clothes and behavior of the respective person, but not in gender markers like breasts.¹¹⁰ It was less differentiated in the sense that female beauty was not different from male beauty, the standard of beauty remained the same. Schultz asserts that for Wolfram, "red lips and radiance are the quintessence of courtly beauty", be it in a man or in a woman.¹¹¹ The same observation can be made about Otto of Brandenburg's illumination in the Manesse Codex, which will be discussed in detail below. Here, the poet and the lady have the same pronounced red lips, while the musicians do not. Both poet and lady display courtly beauty without differentiation. According to Schultz, what a man or woman would fall in love with is this courtliness, for instance in looks or in behavior. Antikonie's clothes are courtly, her qualities are courtly (albeit for a knight), and her behavior is courtly: she fights the

¹⁰⁹A different perspective is put forward by Christine Haag, who argues that the reason for accepted male behavior of women is the patriarchal monistic view: A woman is just like a man minus key qualities and body parts, which explains why she might show some signs of male behavior. Christine Haag, "'Das Ideal der männlichen Frau in der Literatur des Mittelalters und seine theoretischen Grundlagen'", In *Manlichiu wîp, wîplich man*, Ingrid Benneqitz and Helmut Tervooren, eds., Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1999.

¹¹⁰James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 23.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 35.

attackers and knows how to “play chess”. Thus, what Gawan loves about her are not her female attributes, but her courtly characteristics, since they live in “a world in which the nobility of the body [...] provokes love”, not the respective sex markers.¹¹² I mostly agree with Schultz, but I think the scene in *Parzival* shows both courtly love as well as gender-specific desire. While Antikonie is fighting, Gawan gazes at her body “zwischen der hüffe unde ir brust” (between her hip and her chest), namely her “gelenke” (waist). While this is not a specifically female part, Wolfram usually expresses the beauty of ladies in their radiance and their red lips, as mentioned above. According to Schultz, other common female parts are the eyes and white skin, but he never mentions the waistline¹¹³. Antikonie’s waist seems to form an individualized appeal to Gawan, which could counteract the manly fighting. To sum up, the use of the chessboard in *Parzival* draws on both chess allegories: courtly love and politics/warfare. Their intersection creates a space in which the woman is able to step out of her confined passive role. Her active, male-oriented behavior is not only tolerated, but also praised. The lady can take on the role of the knight for a certain period of time and then return to her own role.

A similar situation occurs in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*, also from around 1210. When Tristan gets expelled from court and Isolde is supposed to be given to the lepers, the couple runs off together into the woods. In Gottfried’s version, their refuge, the *minnegrotte* is a highly stylized and idealized realm, far from reality. There is no hunger or discomfort, whatever the lovers do is solely for their entertainment and pleasure. One of their shared activities is

¹¹²Schultz, 83.

¹¹³Ibid., 24.

“so si des geluste
mit dem armbruste
pirsen in die wilde [...]
nâch dem rôten wilde jagen.“

(as they pleased, they prowled in the wilderness and hunted red deer)¹¹⁴

Isolde engages in the knightly activity of hunting, not because the circumstances require it, but because she enjoys it. Roger Caillois, who has expanded Huizinga's theories on games, identifies all activities such as combat, falconry and hunting to be games.¹¹⁵ When they engage in the game of hunting, according to Caillois, the lovers enter a different sphere dominated by rules that are different from the social norm. Indeed, the *minnegrotte* is so far removed from all courtly society that it provides the lovers with an anti-society, or their own society outside of the given conventional framework.

Therefore, Isolde's behavior at the grotto allows us to make no claims about the lady's agency within the court. Interestingly, Eilhart, who composed his *Tristrant* circa forty years earlier than Gottfried's *Tristan*, avoided the problem of female agency by adding a third person to their exile from court: Kurneival, Tristrant's mentor. Even during their hardship in the wilderness, Isalde does not have to partake in any manly activity, except for holding the horses while Kurneival and Tristrant build a hut. This is already described as a strain: “die frow dorst sich nit entschutten / die wyl hielt die pfert die wyß.“ (the lady was not allowed to relax, the white lady was holding the horses in the meantime)¹¹⁶ She engages in a male domain, but only for a short period of time, and only out of necessity.

¹¹⁴Gottfried, Rüdiger Krohn, *Tristan*, (Stuttgart: Reclam 1993), 17245f.

¹¹⁵Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 62.

¹¹⁶Eilhart and Danielle Buschinger, *Tristrant Und Isalde :Nach Der Heidelberger Handschrift Cod. Pal. Germ. 346*, Berliner Sprachwissenschaftliche Studien, Bd. 4, (Berlin: Weidler, 2004), 4713f.

As *Parzival* and *Tristan* both were written at approximately the same time and as both contain chess episodes, the question arises whether both use chess as an empowering motif for female agency. If so, this might lead to conclusions about the chess allegory in different genres, the epics compared to the poems. Furthermore, it would provide information about the historical status and pervasiveness of chess as well as about the notions of chess allegories. There are two incidents connected with chess in Gottfried's *Tristan*: Tristan's abduction by foreign merchants and Brangäne's keeping watch over a secret meeting of the lovers. The first scene does not have any women in it, but it is nevertheless interesting for our discussion of the medieval notion of the chess allegory. After both of Tristan's parents died, the noble marshal Rual takes care of his education. Soon enough, Tristan impresses everybody with his skills, be it speaking foreign languages, riding or "aller hande hovespil" (all kinds of courtly games), apparently including chess.¹¹⁷ One day, merchants from Norway come to Rual's country to sell their goods, and Tristan, on hearing that they sell falcons, wants to go and examine them. Rual accompanies him; they select falcons together and get ready to leave, just as Tristan sees

"ein schâchzabel hangen
an brete und an den spangen
vil schône und wol gezieret
ze wunsche gefeitieret
dâ bî hienc ein gesteine
von edelem helfenbeine
ergraben wol meisterlîche."

(a chessboard hanging there; the board and the metal fittings were beautiful and ornate and it was perfectly decorated. The pieces were hanging next to it; they were made from ivory and were expertly engraved)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Gottfried, 2120.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 2221ff.

He asks the Norwegians in their native tongue whether anybody is able to play chess, which bewilders them. One of them offers to play with him, and Tristan gladly accepts. Rual wants to return home, but leaves Kurneval, the mentor, with his foster son. Tristan plays and entertains the merchants so well, that they decide to abduct him and take him to their home country. They hoist anchor and sail away without Tristan and Kurneval noticing because

“jene die wâren verdâht
an ir spil sô sere
daz sî dô nihtes mere
niwan ir spiles gedâhten.”

(those were so preoccupied with their game that they didn't think of anything else but their game).¹¹⁹

After some time has passed, Tristan wins the game, but is already far out on the ocean with his kidnappers, unable to return.

The fact that the merchants can play chess well – if they were bad at it, it would certainly not have taken Tristan so long to beat them – is not in accordance with Jacobus' later view of chess players. In the first part of his *schachzabelbuch*, he explains why chess was invented: Xerxes from Babylon tried to educate the evil king Evilmerodach, who had his father killed and chopped into three hundred parts to feed him to three hundred vultures. Evilmerodach saw the game and wanted to learn it, but Xerxes replied that: “Das spil solt niemant lernen, nwr der an sich nâm junger sit vnd maint, das er sich liezz straffen.” (Nobody should learn this game except for somebody who adopts the manners of a student and who thinks he is willing to be reprimanded).¹²⁰ The king agrees

¹¹⁹Gottfried, 2314ff.

¹²⁰Jacobus, 28.

and learns to be virtuous by playing chess and studying the movements of the different characters. Being learned enough to play the game, the merchants should be able to impart better judgment on their situation and not abduct the foreigners. But perhaps the problem lies in their social status. Not having received the high education that was only available to nobility, they may know the rules of chess, but not understand the deeper meaning behind the game, for example which kind of societal order is exemplified and what kinds of allegories could be connected to it. Chess appears here not as an allegory for love or for battle, but as a wondrous event that robs them of their senses. If they were aristocratic, the chess game and Tristan's ability to play it would not have seemed so unusual. This example shows the power of chess. Chess is what makes Tristan stay on the ship and what makes Tristan attractive to the foreigners (together with languages). Finally, it is the means that the foreigners use to abduct him.

But the chessboard also significantly appears in the context of love. The second chess incident involves Brangäne trying to disguise a meeting between Tristan and queen Isolde, king Marke's wife. After the love potion has united them, they try to meet secretly to give way to their passion. When Tristan enters the designated chamber where the queen awaits him, "Brangaene ein schâhzabel nam. für daz lieht leinde si daz" (Brangaene took a chessboard and put it in front of the light).¹²¹ Unfortunately, she leaves the door open, which prompts the courtier Marjodo, who is looking for Tristan, to enter. He cannot see anything, because "dâ leinde ein schâhzabel vor" (a chessboard was leaning in front of it [= the light]), but he hears the lovers and hence discovers their

¹²¹Gottfried, 13506.

secret.¹²² Again in this episode, the significance of the chess board can be explained if we consider the two allegories of chess. On the one hand, it is “the catalyst for bringing star-crossed lovers together”, as it is used to try to safeguard the meeting.¹²³ The chess board’s use in *Tristan* in the context of the lovers’ tryst would recall for a medieval audience the chess allegory of love, even though no game is played. On the other hand, the chess board also reflects a political dimension in the lovers’ subterfuge and betrayal of the king. Secret lovers “maintain their good name at court at the same time they pursue an intense passion that threatens their standing at court.”¹²⁴ Not only are Tristan’s and Isolde’s reputations endangered, but also king Marke’s. When Brangäne tries to shield the light, it is to uphold the order of society. As long as neither Marke nor anybody else knows about their affair, it does not damage anyone’s reputation. Therefore, Brangäne is not only protecting the lovers, but also the king. Even after Marke found out about the relationship, “besteht [er] weniger auf eheliche Treue als auf Treue zu seinen höfischen Idealen.”¹²⁵ Representation is so important that even God sticks to the courtly codex. Isolde relies on “gotes höfscheit” (God’s courtliness), which enables her to succeed in her ordeal and to touch the hot iron without getting burned.¹²⁶

Like in the episode in *Parzival*, the two associations linked to the chessboard overlap to create a space for female agency. In this case, however, Isolde’s agency is

¹²²Gottfried, 13589.

¹²³Schafroth, 58.

¹²⁴Schultz, 142.

¹²⁵Kelley Kucaba, "Höfisch inszenierte Wahrheiten zu Isolds Gottesurteil bei Gottfried von Strassburg." In *fremdes Wahrnehmen — Fremdes wahrnehmen*, Wolfgang Harms and Stephen Jaeger, eds., (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1997), 81.

¹²⁶Gottfried, 15552.

expressed in her efforts to live out her love towards Tristan instead of being confined to the role of a passive adored lady and a passive wife who was given away to her husband.¹²⁷ This time, the problem arises when Marjodo does not read the chessboard as a socio-political allegory. Instead of recognizing its significance as a protector of social order, he sees only its association with love and stays to listen to the lovers. Here, as in the other scene, the chess pieces are of little importance. The allegories are established enough for the audience to draw associations with them as soon as the chessboard is mentioned.

In both epics, female agency develops as soon as the chess board appears and invokes associations both with love and with social order. Because it is a game, chess creates a space in which the lady is able to go beyond her usual boundaries, she is able to go into battle or be sexually assertive. Both domains were usually restricted to men, who were supposed to be good fighters and lovers. Antikonie and Isolde cross into this realm, but within a game, which legitimates their transgression. A difference between the poems, especially minnesong, and the epics become apparent. While the minnesong poems are strictly bound not only to the ideals of courtly love but also to the ideals of minnesong itself, the lady is more constricted to her passive role.

Not only textual, but also pictorial evidence of the intersecting associations with the game of chess exists. In the Manesse codex, one miniature depicts an author playing chess. In it, the Margrave Otto of Brandenburg (p. 13r) plays chess with a lady. With the exception of Herr Goeli who is depicted playing backgammon (p. 262v), Otto is the only

¹²⁷I will leave aside here the question whether she wants to live out her love or is forced to by the love potion.

minnesinger in the codex playing a board game. This miniature contrasts with the others that portray high-ranking minnesingers (one emperor, kings, dukes and margraves). In those, the poets are portrayed jousting or battling, practicing falconry or reigning and counseling others.¹²⁸ None of them are playing the knightly game of chess, nor is any of them portrayed with a single lady.

Before exploring the ways in which the different chess allegories influence the illumination and create a space for female agency, the question arises why Otto, of all minnesingers, is shown playing chess. Judging from his notorious nickname, *mit dem pfile* (with the arrow) one might expect to see him with an arrow through his head, or in combat. To answer this question, I will draw on Otto's life and poetry, taking into account his seven *minnelieder* in the Manesse codex. Prior to this, the illumination in question shall be examined closely. It depicts six people, Margrave Otto of Brandenburg, a lady, and four musicians. We seem to observe a scene of the pleasures of courtly life with games and music. Two of the musicians are playing their instrument – the trumpets, bearing Otto's coat of arms– and looking towards the chess players, indicating that they are providing entertainment for them. The two musicians on the left are looking towards the woman's side and seem to be saluting her– maybe a sign that she is winning. The other two musicians with tympanum and bagpipes are waiting their turn and looking away from the chess players, toward the right side of the illumination. Apparently, Otto is a cultivated man who appreciates both chess and music. Both Alfred Boerckel and von der Hagen believe that the lady is Otto's wife, Heilwig of Holstein. I cannot find any

¹²⁸In detail, the ones battling or jousting are Duke Henry IV of Silesia-Breslau, Duke Henry I of Anhalt, and Duke Johan of Brabant. King Conrad the Young and Margrave Henry III of Meissen are practicing falconry, while Emperor Henry VI, King Tyro of the Scots, King Wenzel II of Bohemia and the Margrave of Hohenburg are portrayed on their throne, reigning or instructing someone.

evidence from the illumination or the songs that it is Heilwig, or his later wife Jutta, or any other lady. If the lady is Heilwig, the depiction might be from the time when he was courting Heilwig rather than when he was already married to her, since the Margrave looks very young (he has neither facial hair nor wrinkles). However, “[t]he ‘young man without a beard’ represents an ideal of beauty that Middle High German writers usually force on their male lovers without any regard for biological plausibility.”¹²⁹ For a minnesinger, the portrayal as a young man would make more sense: he should court his lady, not be married to one, as this would run counter to the principle of unrequited, exalting *minne*. During the courting stage, he may demonstrate his knowledge of the seven knightly skills by playing chess.

Otto and the lady are both clad in conventional clothes and sit on a pedestal similar to that of many others in the codex. Above Otto’s head is his golden war helmet, and in the upper middle, is his coat of arms, a black eagle on a red background.¹³⁰ In general, red is the predominant color, reflecting his coat of arms on the one hand, and his multiple mention of *roter munt* in his poetry on the other hand – Otto’s and the lady’s lips are of a darker red and thicker than both the musicians’ lips and the lips of other minnesingers and ladies. This suggests that the lady of the illustration is the lady of his *minnelieder*. The scene’s focal point is the chessboard, which is seven by six squares big instead of the now common eight by eight. However, this does not mean that medieval illuminators were unfamiliar with chessboards; the *Carmina Burana*¹³¹ from the early

¹²⁹Schultz, 43.

¹³⁰Von der Hagen, 113.

¹³¹München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 4660/4660a.

thirteenth century as well as the *Willehalm*¹³² codex show chessboards in their exact measurements (see Appendix II). Judging from the pieces that the two players are holding, the chessboard would also be too small and is therefore not drawn to scale. The technical accuracy seems to be less important than the act of playing chess.

Otto's pieces on the board were identified by von der Hagen as "zwei Thürme und ein Springer oder Ritter; einen gelben Läufer hält er in der Linken"¹³³. The lady supposedly has "zwei Thürme, zwei Läufer und einen Ritter", and she is holding "einen gelben gefangenen Ritter in der Linken"¹³⁴. I strongly disagree with this breakdown, as it would not correspond to the rules of chess: there is no game once the king has been taken, and the game can never result in both kings being taken. Von der Hagen's interpretation leaves no king on the board, which is impossible. In *Chessmen*, Donald M. Liddell shows contemporary medieval European chess pieces. According to his examples, it seems more likely that Otto is left with his king, queen, a rook and a pawn or a knight.¹³⁵ The remaining black pieces are her king, a rook, a knight, a pawn and another piece, which is harder to identify and might be a bishop. The connection between the two players is underlined through their mirrored gestures: they both use their right hand to point toward the chessboard and their left hand to hold a chess piece, strangely even one of the same color (white, Otto's color). Von der Hagen suggests that this is a mistake in

¹³²Kassel, Landesbibliothek, 20 MS poet. et roman. 1.

¹³³Von der Hagen, 114.

¹³⁴Ibid., 114.

¹³⁵Donald M. Liddell, *Chessmen*, edited by Jean Maunoury, Gustavus Adolphus, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 29-37.

the illumination, but I deem this unlikely.¹³⁶ The illuminations are drawn with so much care and attention to detail (see the shapes of the single pieces), that I do not believe that such a careless mistake would have been made. In which situation would they both be holding pieces of the same color? Otto is holding a knight either because he picked it up to move it or because the lady took it and handed it to Otto. That she is holding one of Otto's bishops only has one explanation: she took it. Thus, she could have taken two pieces in one move, handed one to Otto and kept one, or she just took the bishop and is waiting for Otto to make his next move. Their gestures could also be interpreted in two ways. First, the woman could be showing Otto where she just took his bishop from. Second, she could be advising him and showing him where to put his knight. Moreover, since they appear to point toward the same field, they might be discussing the last move (probably hers, since she took the bishop).

Symbolically, it is fitting for the Margrave to hold a knight, since he himself is the knight courting the lady. This dual expression of knighthood suggests the complex connections made by Jacobus de Cessolis that "[a] knight looking at himself on the board, for example, would not simply see his identity mirrored, but would also be able to touch and move 'himself' across the board."¹³⁷ Chess is not only a game, but also a reflection upon Otto's character. That the knight has been "taken" by the lady alludes to the erotic aspect of the game; chess as an excuse to engage in a private, secluded exchange, where one can get closer under the pretense of moving the pieces on the board. As David Shenk puts it, "Young men and women played each other as an excuse for

¹³⁶Von der Hagen, 114.

¹³⁷Adams, *Power Play*, 38.

romantic intimacy – this in an age where physical privacy was otherwise almost non-existent.¹³⁸ Regarding games in general, Johan Huizinga states that play creates its own separate space, only accessible for the participants, with its own rules. Play can be regarded as a transitory stage, returning to the ordinary world when the game is over.¹³⁹ As such, it provides an ideal space for private conversation or even physical contact, as the outside world is left behind.

This illumination demonstrates the power of the *vrouwe* in courtly love and in chess (in the Middle Ages, the chess piece was called *künegin* as well as simply *vrouwe*): “traditional masculine and feminine roles [were reversed], granting the woman power over the man.”¹⁴⁰ She is no longer just checkmating him by her looks or her presence; she actively and skillfully plays the game to defeat him. Unlike the poet, the lady is not holding her self-representational piece, but a rook. Jacobus defines the rook as „des chünigs vicary oder verweser“ (the proconsul or legate of the king), who is thus closely connected to the king. This could be an allusion to an anecdote about Otto: Once, he was captured and had to be ransomed, allegedly by his wife (here represented by the lady).¹⁴¹ This would show her actual power, she could act on behalf of the king and he would have to rely on her to free him. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned at this point that at the time of the composition of the codex, the *vrouwe* was not yet the most powerful figure on the chess board, which did not change until the 15th century.

¹³⁸Shenk, 57.

¹³⁹Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

¹⁴⁰Yalom, 124.

¹⁴¹Boerckel, 55.

Judging from the conclusions above and from the fact that she has more pieces left on the board, the lady is winning this game of chess, and will checkmate Otto, not only in this game, but in his role as minnesinger, as he will “suffer, [...] submit, [...] become as if dead under the stunning effects of his lady”.¹⁴² The illumination in itself can be interpreted as an allegory for courtly love. Still, that does not solve the question why only Otto, and not some other minnesinger, was portrayed playing chess. So what do we know about Otto’s life that could relate to chess? He was born around 1238 and started reigning over Brandenburg in 1266 with his two brothers. Throughout his life, he was known to be generous, of high spirits, and friendly. In 1281, he became elector and fought successfully in several wars. When he was shot in the head with an arrow in 1280, he did not have the arrow removed for over a year fearing the inability of the doctors, thus earning him the nickname *mit dem pfile* (with the arrow). Seven years later, he was captured trying to win Magdeburg for his younger brother, and he had to be ransomed. Later, Pope Bonifatius VIII imposed an anathema on him, followed by the imperial ban by Albrecht I. Not much is known about his marital life; he married Heilwig of Holstein in 1262 and then later Jutta of Henneberg but remained childless until his death in 1308. The only possible connection between the illumination and Otto’s life is the incident where he was “checkmated” by the defenders of Magdeburg, and his wife had to rescue him, thus appearing more powerful than her husband, like the lady in the picture.

Another possibility is that the key to the illumination cannot be found in Otto’s life, but rather in his minnesong. In many cases, miniatures authorize the text they accompany, and “the hand pointing to the scroll tells the reader to associate image with

¹⁴²Yalom, 125.

text”. He is not holding a scroll, but his gestures – pointing at the chessboard – could tell the reader to associate chess with his poetry.¹⁴³ The Manesse Codex contains seven *minnelieder* of Otto. The first one praises winter, since the longer nights in winter give the poet more time to spend with his “minneklichen” (beloved) who, along with her red mouth (“ir minneklîcher munt”), should be blessed by God.¹⁴⁴ The second poem is focused on the arrival of May, but contrary to the first one, the longing for the “liuhtik roter munt” (shiny red mouth) is unfulfilled and causes the poet pain.¹⁴⁵ Unexpectedly, winter constitutes a happier time than spring. The open space in the Manesse codex indicates that more verses by Otto were expected, maybe some that complete the cycle from spring back to winter in his third poem, which basically repeats the first one. These first three poems form a unit through their seasonal theme and share images like *roter munt* (red mouth) and the *bluot* (bloom) connected to spring, but they do not use any chess language or metaphors.

The second poem cycle starts with a poem about “minne” and “unminne”, which he considers a sin.¹⁴⁶ Otto stresses the importance of *minne*, stating that men are worthless without her. If a man cultivates *minne*, he “waltet gutoer sinne” (has good intentions).¹⁴⁷ In the true spirit of *minne*, the fifth poem is a praise to Otto’s lady, who is

¹⁴³Jeffrey Ashcroft, “The Power of Love: Representations of Kingship in the Love-Songs of Henry VI and Frederick II, and in the Manesse Codex and the *Liber ad honorem* Augusti of Peter of Eboli”, In *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany 800-1500*, Björn Weiler and Simon MacLean, eds., (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 216.

¹⁴⁴Von der Hagen, 133.

¹⁴⁵Alfred Boerckel, *Die Fürstlichen Minnesinger Der Manesse'schen Liederhandschrift; Ihr Leben Und Ihre Werke*, (Wiesbaden: M. Sändig, 1969), 60.

¹⁴⁶Von der Hagen, 131

¹⁴⁷Boerckel, 60.

deemed to be beautiful by the Emperor and many other people. He addresses “[v]rouwe minne” (Lady Love) and again mentions the red lips that wounded him.¹⁴⁸ Other images are love as sickness and the (sexual) healing through the woman (“Diu mag mich wol heilen, unde krenken” [She can heal me and make me sick/harm me])¹⁴⁹. This praise continues in the next poem, comparing her to the sun, but also lamenting that he does not see her often enough. Maybe this causes him to ponder in his last poem that he was ready to let go of his love, but “diu liebe die hat [in] in banden gebunden wol an tusent seil” (love has bound [him] with a thousand ropes.)¹⁵⁰. He continues to stress how his heart longs for a union with his beloved and how saddened and wounded he is by her very red lips, coming back to his initial image. The poems all show a sense of sadness, which is interrupted by short moments of happiness when the beloved is visible to the poet or grants him her favor. The imagery is rather conventional, and the closest reference to chess is the word “beschach” in the last poem, which is only a phonetic agreement, since it means “it happened/occurred”.¹⁵¹

The connection between the illumination and his poetry is that he puts the lady first, lets her win and is checkmated by her, i.e. he suffers for and through her. This shows a different side of Otto. Knowing what a great knight he was, it would seem appropriate to portray him battling or jousting. Showing him with an arrow through his head would make him instantly recognizable, but neither of those depictions would

¹⁴⁸Von der Hagen, 132.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 132.

¹⁵⁰Boerckel, 62.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 63.

characterize him as a minnesinger. Since chess is a tactical and highly recognized game (unlike Herr Goeli's backgammon), it contributes to his representation as a connoisseur of the arts, a strategist and a devoted minnesinger at the same time. The illumination successfully deviates from his martial qualities to show a refined, devoted minnesinger. Like in Otto's songs, the lady seems to have the upper hand in the game and perhaps she is even pointing out her victory or instructing him how to play the game of chess – and of love – better.

Conclusion

To conclude, it becomes apparent that not only the knight, but also the queen is a fighting piece. Even though the poems suggested a clear chronological development of the chess allegory from courtly love to political issues, the epics demonstrate that the two allegories not only coexisted, but sometimes intersected. When the poets draw on both, then they create a space for female agency. Antikonie can be a fighter, Isolde can live out her secret relationship, and the lady prevails over Otto. Nevertheless, they are still embedded into the courtly code and part of society, since the notion of chess as a game creates a different context for their actions. Furthermore, even though they display agency, it is still restricted. After the chessboard fight, Antikonie is relegated to her usual social functions: entertaining the guests and being a beautiful, courtly lady. There are no consequences to her actions. The same holds true for Isolde, who could act out all her desires in the *minnegrotte* episode, but must return to court to clear up her name and regain her reputation. The lady's conquest of Otto in the illumination is also linked to the game of chess, which shows how closely connected this new agency is to the game: Only while chess is played (in whatever form), can the impetus for agency last. Insofar, it is similar to the love potion in *Tristan* or the grail in *Parzival*: magical objects that create a space for unconventional action. The difference is that the effect caused by chess is strictly geared towards women – neither Gawan's, nor Tristan's behavior is unconventional during the scenes connected to chess. This special connection might stem from the comparison of the lady to the chess queen, who made it from one of the least

powerful figures on the board to the single most powerful one. The ladies discussed have come a long way from minnesong to the illumination. But what never changed was the role of the king: the whole game is centered on him and only by checkmating him can one win. Figuratively, medieval women were slowly gaining power in a male-centered world (but definitely without winning over men). Genre plays another important role, which has not been explicitly covered here. I pointed out the different treatment of chess in minnesong and the epics, but did not go into detail about the didactical or political poems. To develop this project, I would like to expand on the notion of genre on the one hand, and to explore whether the power of the chess queen and of the literary characters associated with her corresponds to historical developments in the Middle Ages.

Appendix I: Poems

1. Reinmar der Alte, "Ich wirbe umbe allez, daz ein man"

131

Ich wirbe umbe allez, daz ein man

1, Ich wirbe umbe allez, daz ein man
ze werltlichen fröiden iemer haben sol.
daz ist ein wîp, der ich enkan
nâch ir vil grôzem werde niht gesprechen wol.
5 lob ich si, sô man ander frowen tuot,
daz genimt si niemer tac von mir vîr guot.
doch swer ich des, sist an der stat,
dâ si ûz wîplichen tugenden nie fuoz getrat.
dâ ist in mat!

MF 119,1

2, Als eteswenne mir der lîp
dur sînæ bæse unstæte râtet, daz ich var
und mir gefriunde ein ander wîp,
sô wil iedoch daz herze niender wan dar.
5 wol im des, daz ez sô rehte weln kan
unde mir der süezen arbeit gan!
doch hân ich mir ein liep erkorn,
dem ich ze dienste – und wære ez al der werlte zorn –
wil sîn geborn.

MF 119,11

3, Unde ist, daz mirs mîn sælde gan,
daz ich ab ir wol redendem munde ein küssen mac
versteln,

MF 119,37

gît got, daz ich ez bringe dan,
sô wil ichz tougenlichen tragen und iemer heln.
5 und ist, daz siz für grôze swære hât
und vêhet mich dur mîne missetât,
waz tuon ich danne, unsælic man?

MF 160,1

131

Ich strebe nach dem, was für einen Mann

1, Ich strebe nach dem, was für einen Mann
die Gesamtheit irdischer Freuden ausmachen muß.
Das ist eine Frau, die ich nach Wert und Würde
gar nicht gebührend preisen kann.
5 Lob ich sie, wie man andere edle Frauen lobt,
so nimmt sie mir das nie als genügend ab.
Doch schwör ich es, da, wo sie steht,
ist sie nie um Fußesbreite von weiblicher
Vollkommenheit abgewichen.

MF 119,1

Damit seid Ihr schachmatt!

2, Wenn mir manchmal mein Leib
in seiner üblen Wankelmütigkeit rät, hinzugehen
und mir eine andere Frau zur Freundin zu nehmen,
so will doch das Herz nirgends anders hin als zu ihr.
5 Wohl ihm, daß es so richtig wählen kann
und mir so süße Liebesmühe schenkt!
Auch habe ich mir eine Liebste erwählt,
zu deren Diensten – und brächte es die ganze Welt in
Wut –
ich geboren sein will.

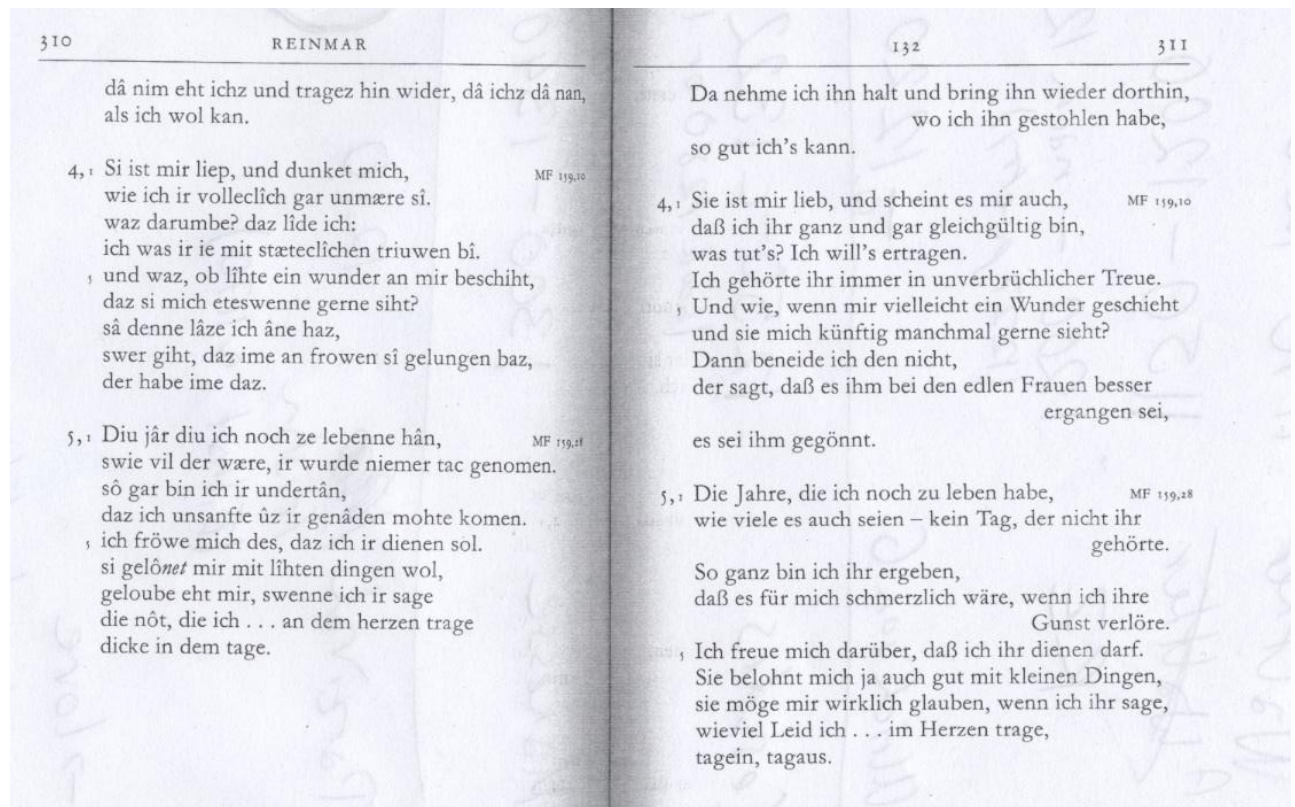
MF 119,19

3, Und ist es so, daß mein Glück es mir gönnt,
von ihrem redegewandten Mund einen Kuß zu
stehlen,
so möge Gott geben, daß ich damit davonkomme,
dann will ich ihn heimlich bei mir tragen und für
immer verbergen.
5 Doch ist es so, daß sie's für eine schwere Schmach
hält

MF 119,37

MF 160,1

und mich für mein Vergehen haßt,
was tue ich dann, ich Unglücklicher?



2. Ulrich von Gutenberg, “diu guote dô hat mir benomen”

diu guote dô hat mir benomen

mînen sin der ich bin undertan

sie ruoret mich an

mînen alten ban

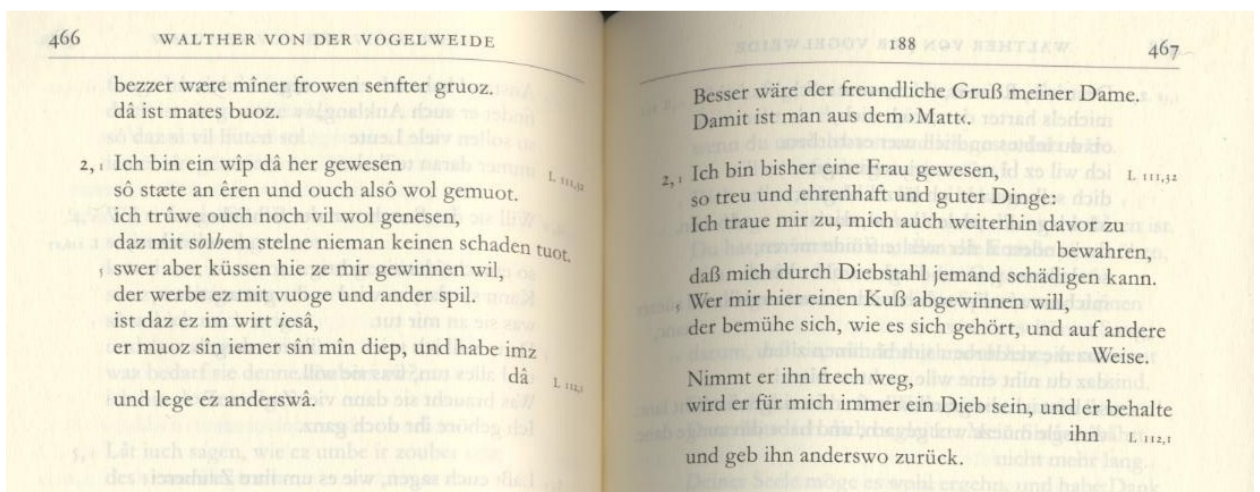
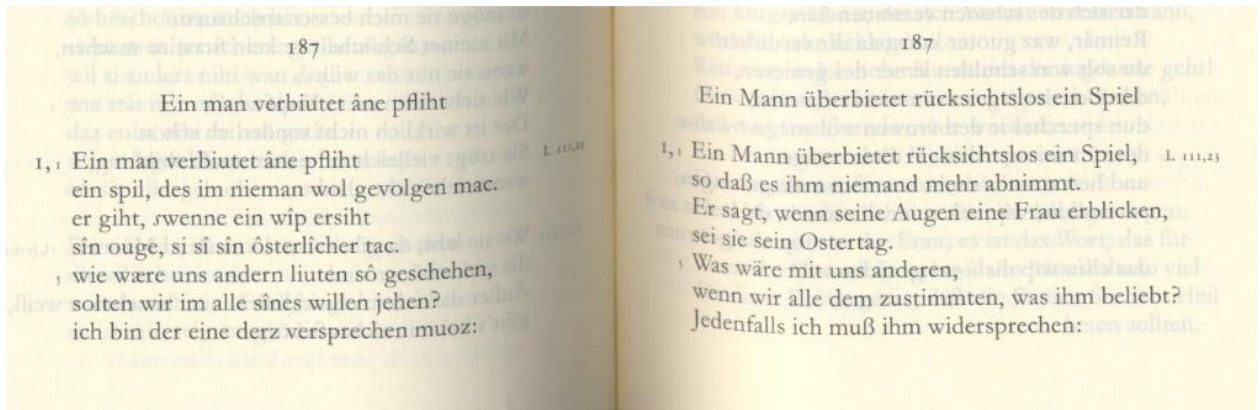
den muoz ich aber niuwen

ich hupf ir uf der verte nach

mich leit ir süezer ougen schâch

(The beloved one, who robbed me of my senses; I am her servant. She takes me at my old promise, which I have to renew. I follow her at once; her lovely eyes lead me into checkmate.)

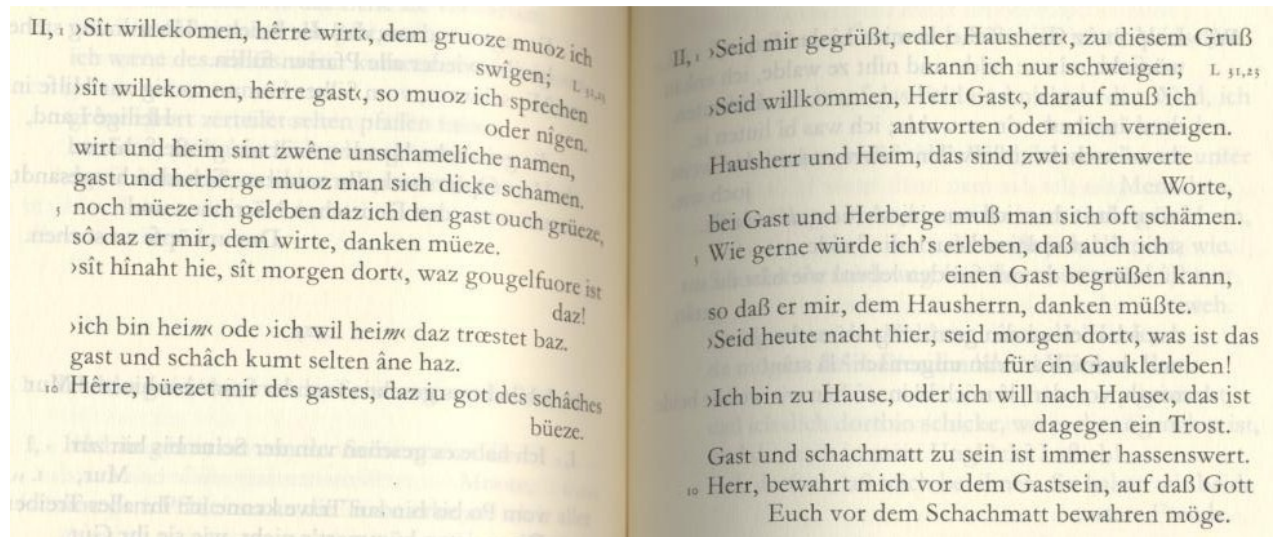
3. Walther von der Vogelweide, "Ein man verbiutet âne pfliht"



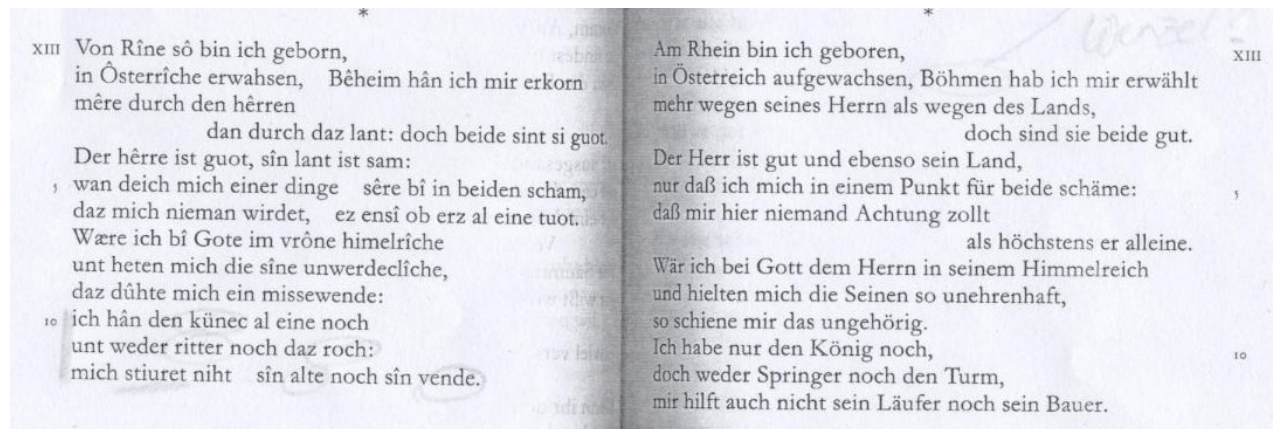
4. Walther von der Vogelweide, "Mir tuot einer slahte wille"



5. Walther von der Vogelweide, "Sît willekomen, hêre wirt"



6. Reinmar von Zweter, "Von Rîne sô bin ich geborn"



Appendix II: Illuminations

1) Margrave Otto von Brandenburg in the Codex Manesse

(Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. Germ. Cpg 848.)



2) Chess scene from Carmina Burana

(München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 4660/4660a.)



3) Chess scene from the Willehalm Codex in Kassel

(Kassel, Landesbibliothek, 20 MS poet. et roman. 1.)



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