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Contents

Wendy Wauters*

The Origins of the Furnace Motif: From Magico-Religious Ritual to Early Modern Tale of Makeability

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Abstract: The article delves into the fiery furnace motif and its evocations of the healing and makeability of men. Building on previous research conducted in religious history, art history and anthropology, a diachronic analysis of the textual and visual traditions of this motif is made. At its base lies the idea that the natural phenomenon of fire has a transformative power. This belief is present in several magico-religious rituals and in the visual imprint within Christian iconographical tradition. Both manifestations exist in conjunction and their evolution is intertwined. Herein lie the roots of the early modern secular motif of the furnace as a place of metaphorical transformation. Society may not have been aware of these previous attitudes, but the urban context does provide a fertile breeding ground for motifs such as *The Rejuvenation Furnace* and the so-called *Baker of Eeklo*. From the point of view of Christian ethics, it is interesting that the concentration of the furnace motif can serve as a seismograph of fluctuations in morality.

Keywords: iconography, magico-religious ritual, furnace motif, makeability of men, transformation

1 Introduction

> *You see, the furnace now is full with many a head and silly fool;*
> *until noon I'll bake them in fire, as they surely do require;*
> *servants and nobility, women and men equally;*
> *and young and old, and sane and mad; for there are flaws in every head.*[1]

1 "Gy ziet het, de oven is nu vol van menig hoofd en zotten bol: ik laet ze bakken tot den noen, zy hebben 't zeker wel van doen, zoo wel de dienaer als de heer, en vrouwen, man, al even zeer, en jong, en oud, en wys, en gek; want ieder hoofd heeft zyn gebrek". Verse from the poem *Oven à la Mode* from *Het masker van de Wereldt afgetrocken* (1649) by Adriaen Poirters.

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The concept of fire as a transformative force is as old as humanity itself, and this motif was incorporated into numerous different media world-wide. By building on previous research conducted in art history, anthropology, and religious history, this study will focus on the origins of the fiery furnace as an instrument of early modern human makeability. The oldest traces of this notion can be found in the performative actions of various indigenous communities. Unfortunately, it is impossible to trace the historical and geographical roots of these rituals precisely, since the materials concerned came from undocumented cultures. Only very few clues remain, and even those have undergone many mutations. Religious historians Mircea Eliade and Carl-Martin Edsman carried out extensive research into this subject.[2] Their publications elucidate, among other things, both the divine and demonic characteristics of fire and how they were directed by using these rituals. An important aspect are the rites where persons are placed in or near a furnace in order to free them from a negative substance. Similar activities are undertaken in ancient European dance rituals that were used to cure madness, as studied by art historian and anthropologist Paul Vandenbroeck.[3] A helpful addition to these remnants of oral tradition is the early Christian iconography where the motif of the furnace as a place for human transformation persisted. The idea was incorporated into both text and imagery, with its most well-known proponent being the Bible story about *The Fiery Furnace*. Nevertheless, the literature about the furnace motif in religious art is quite disparate; a comprehensive study was never undertaken. Sixteenth and seventeenth century expressions of the motif in secular art suffer from the same difficulty. The two most common depictions – *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* (German regions) and the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* (Southern Netherlands) – portray a burlesque procedure in which the furnace is used to transform discontented patients into better versions of themselves, both physically and mentally. These scenes were mass-produced image formulas commonly found on popular prints, which is why the literature about them has been mostly folkloristic in its approach. Therefore, the most prominent publications are in

2 See Carl-Martin Edsman, *Ignis Divinus. Le feu comme moyen de rajeunissement et d'immortalité: contes, légendes, mythes et rites* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1949), for the literary tradition of fire in the baking oven, the forge, and the pyre as a transformative power. See also Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago/London: Flammarion, 1978). Eliade takes the position that there is a "primordial myth" underlying the furnace motif. In his (at times somewhat undiscerning) search for this original myth, he broaches the matrixial explanatory model in which the furnace is seen as a "womb" in which raw materials have the potential to develop, see Eliade, *The Forge*, 38–9.

3 See Paul Vandenbroeck, ed., *De kleuren van de geest. Dans en trance in Afro-Europese tradities*, exh. cat. Antwerp, KMSKA (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju, 1997), 85–113.

Dutch or German, and the subject has been somewhat underrepresented in English-speaking circles. Furthermore, such peculiar makeability motifs are often either studied in isolation, or they are grouped together with unrelated sham operations according to the desired outcomes.[4]

This wide range of cultural expressions – from magico-religious rituals to secular serial production – makes it more difficult to examine the furnace as an achronic location of makeability. Crucial pieces of the puzzle are scattered across various academic disciplines. There has never been a cross-disciplinary study that focused on the method of the procedure (furnace) rather than its desired outcome (purification, conversion, rejuvenation etc.). Nevertheless, it is precisely by compiling an iconographic corpus that specific societal and moral ruptures can be revealed. The rather static motif functioned as a blank canvas on which to project the dreams and fears inherent to life in a changing world.

2 Magico-religious and early Christian origins

Since their earliest beginnings, human societies have been fascinated by the spectacle of fire. After all, this natural phenomenon can permanently alter the state of matter. It is a magical energy with the power to change the world and therefore it cannot possibly belong to this world.[5] Furnaces were a crucial survival tool in early civilisations as they were essential to the preparation of food as well as the manufacture of tools and weapons. It is therefore evident that a fireplace would be associated with deep symbolic meaning and strong ritualistic significance.[6] By means of performative actions, people tried to exert influence upon this invisible source of power. But not just anyone could successfully channel its energy: the "masters of fire" assumed this spiritual role.[7] The rituals they practiced incorporated the idea of an active collaboration between humans and nature, and possibly even the conviction that human

4 See esp. Hervé Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur bewerkt door molenaar en bakker smid en stoker: een volkskundig onderzoek," *Oostvlaamsche Zanten* 40, no. 6 (1965): 229–69; Hervé Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur bewerkt door molenaar en bakker smid en stoker: een volkskundig onderzoek," *Oostvlaamsche Zanten* 41, no. 1 (1966): 1–44; Maurits De Meyer, "Verjüngung im Glutofen – Altweiber- und Altmännermühle," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 60, no. 2 (1964): 161–67; Korine Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen: De bakker van Eeklo en de burgermoraal* (Zwolle: Catena, 1988).

5 See Eliade, *The Forge*, 40.

6 See Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 181. See also Eliade, *The Forge*, 81–2.

7 The power to use fire to transform matter is equated to participation in the divine world, see Ronald Newbold, "Nonnus' Fiery World," *Electronic Antiquity* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1–21 (11 & n32).

inventiveness was capable of replacing natural processes. Again and again, the masters took over the role of Mother Earth by accelerating and perfecting the growth of a raw material.[8] The rites can be divided into two categories: either subverting the demonic, destructive characteristics of fire or utilising its divine, purifying nature.

The evil nature of fire was usually situated within a metallurgical environment. Thanks to anthropologist Walter Cline, numerous examples from the African continent were preserved. In 1937, he made a close to exhaustive compilation of all reports – mostly written by missionaries – describing such rites as they were passed on from generation to generation.[9] The following summaries illustrate the belief in demonic forces that impeded the proper working of the furnace. Indeed, a successful "marriage of metals" required the sacrifice of a living being.[10] The aChewa (Malawi) enlisted the help of a witch doctor (*sing'anga*) in order to build a furnace. He would prepare a mix of herbs to be thrown at a pregnant woman, with the intent to cause a miscarriage. The witch doctor would then burn the lost foetus together with various herbs in a hole dug in the ground. This was followed by a further sequence of ritual acts, after which the location was considered suitable for building a functioning and beneficial furnace. The Tonga (Zambia and Zimbabwe) performed a similar ritual during which a placenta was flung into the furnace to guarantee a successful smelting process.[11] However, the majority of cases tended to use substitute sacrifices. Among others, the master smelters of the Fipa (southwestern Tanzania) and the Baushi (Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) sacrificed a fowl to release the demonic energy from the smelting process in the furnace.[12]

As regards the divine nature of fire, it was mainly applied for the purposes of healing. Within the context of his research into remnants of ancient European dance rituals for curing madness, Vandenbroeck cites several examples of the use of the healing nature of the furnace to repair both the psyche and the body of human beings. Essential herein was the total physical surrender to the furnace. One healing therapy was that of cauterising the madness, as described by the Benedictine monk Goffredo Malaterra in his *Historia Sicula* (1064). His chronicle recounts how Norman soldiers suffered from stress or anxiety psychosis during the siege of Palermo (1043). In order to achieve spiritual healing, they had to undergo a

8 See Eliade, *The Forge*, 57, 75.
9 Walter Cline, *Mining and Metallurgy in Negro Africa* (Wisconsin: George Banta, 1937), 5.
10 See Eliade, *The Forge*, 64, 67.
11 See Cline, *Mining and Metallurgy*, 119. See also Eliade, *The Forge*, 67–8.
12 See Cline, *Mining and Metallurgy*, 119, 121–2; Eliade, *The Forge*, 61–2, 68, 73.

treatment by furnace (*alla pratica del forno caldo*).[13] Furnace therapy was also part of a western Mediterranean cultural complex for the treatment of madness following a spider bite.[14] The exorcist ritual took place in and around a furnace, and may even have a medical explanation of sorts: there was an attempt to raise the body temperature of the patient to a healthier level after it had dropped due to the spider bite.[15] Yet this belief still mainly manifested itself at a symbolic level. The ailments caused by the *argias* – a name that literally refers to a type of spider but also carries the connotation of "widow", "old", or "grandmother" – caused the body to cool. After a dance ritual lasting three days, a furnace was heated and the patient was positioned as close as possible to it, again accompanied by song and dance. The specifics of this treatment differed depending on the geographical location.[16] A similar therapy – but used mostly for men rather than women – could also be found among the Corsican *zinevra*.[17]

Within Christianity, the furnace metaphor involving the baking of human beings saw various expressions. There were two applications of it in combination with the transformation of Christ: the incarnation in the womb/furnace and Christ suffering in the tomb/furnace. Given the topos of Christ as living bread, the furnace motif is an obvious choice. In the gospel of John (6:51) this imagery is explicitly reinforced: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world". This Bible verse inspired others, including Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (1265), to make the comparison between Mary's womb and a furnace: "He was like perfect bread after He had taken human nature; baked in the fire, i. e. formed by the Holy Ghost in the oven of the virginal womb".[18] The *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (14th c., attributed to

13 See Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 100 & n71. Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2013), 491 refers on this matter to Goffredo Malaterra, *Historia sicula*, II, cap. XVI (Rer. Ital. Script. V).
14 In the Sardic community, this practice continued up to the nineteenth century. See Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 100. See also Clara Gallini, *La ballerina variopinta. Una festa di guar* (Napels: Liguori, 1988).
15 Even the resulting transpiration was considered healing, see Max Caisson, "Le four et l'araignée. Essai sur l'enfourment thérapeutique en Corse," *Ethnologie française* 6, no. 3/4 (1976): 365–80 (365).
16 One of the variables is the body position of the patient in relation to the furnace; sometimes she is laying down inside the furnace, but she may also be turned on a spit above the fire, see Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 88, 100–1 & n72.
17 See Caisson, "Le four et l'araignée" for a psycho-analytical explanation.
18 As cited in Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947); ST I–II, q. 102, a. 3, ad 12. See Isaac

Johannes de Caulibus) contains a similar passage: "Today the living bread that animates the world has begun to be baked in the oven of the virginal womb".[19] Furthermore, Eliade points out that the parallels between growing an embryo in the womb and a craft involving the use of fire still persist in European vocabularies: *Mutterkuchen, placenta, gâteau*.[20] Explicit references to Christ's suffering body in the furnace are more rare. Based on what has been found so far, only Peter Crysologus mentions it in one of his sermons: "[Christ is the bread of heaven, who] sown in the Virgin, raised up in the flesh, kneaded in the Passion, baked in the oven of the tomb, reserved in churches, brought to altars, furnishes the faithful each day with food from heaven".[21] The expressions above do not however appear clearly in any traditional imagery. Only a tentative visual connotation can be found in the Parisian *Bibles moralisées* (early 13th c.) such as the *Codex Vindobonensis 2554*, which shows the Annunciation alongside the Israelites placing the bread in the oven (Lev 2:4).[22]

However, there are many other stories portraying the furnace as a location for human transformation, and several of those did leave a strong visual imprint. The Old Testament tale of *The Fiery Furnace* (Dan 3:1–33) is by far the most well-known.[23] There are Christian frescoes and reliefs on sarcophagi from as early as the time of the Roman catacombs that depict Sadrak, Mesak and Abednego being thrown into a fiery furnace on the orders of a seething Nebuchadnezzar.[24] The three youths refused to worship his golden idol, but they were saved from harm by divine

Morales, "The 'Bun of Life'," *Dominicana* (2015): https://www.dominicanajournal.org/the-bun-of-life/.

19 As cited in *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 21. See Elina Gertsman, ed., *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 92; Caroline W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1987), 260. See also Herman Pleij, *Dromen van Cocagne* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997), 148–50.

20 See Eliade, *The Forge*, 38–9.

21 See CCC 2837, quoting Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 67: PL 52, 392.

22 Jane W. Williams, *Bread, Wine, and Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 55 & n152. Williams also refers in this context to the Oxford Bible, Bodl. 270b, fol. 59v and the Vienna Bib. Nat. Lat. 1179, fol. 14.

23 Among other things, the frequent appearance of their pictures on small oil lamps from various Mediterranean regions is an indication of widespread interest, see Richard Stracke, "Sidrac, Misach, and Abdenago: The Iconography," *Christian Iconography* (2013): christianiconography.info/shadrachMishAbednego.html

24 Frescoes: 250–300, Rome, catacomb of Priscilla; 6th c., Rome, San Crisogono, burial tomb beneath the church on the southern wall. Reliefs: *Sarcophagus of Agape and Crescentianus*, c. 325–50, Vatican, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. no. 31489; *Sarcophagus*, end 4th c., New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 1991.366.

intervention. The inclusion of this story in the fifteenth century *Biblia Pauperum* was crucial to the subsequent dissemination of this imagery in the German regions and the Netherlands (Figure 1).[25] The typological arrangement of the three youngsters alongside the three men visiting Abraham (Gen 18:1–8) framed the narrative in a positive way.[26] Both types are also displayed with the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor as the antitype. However, there is a deviation from the ancient rituals described earlier. The transformation in this case occurs outside the furnace itself: it was not the Jews inside the furnace that were altered, but instead the bystanders were converted upon witnessing the divine intervention.

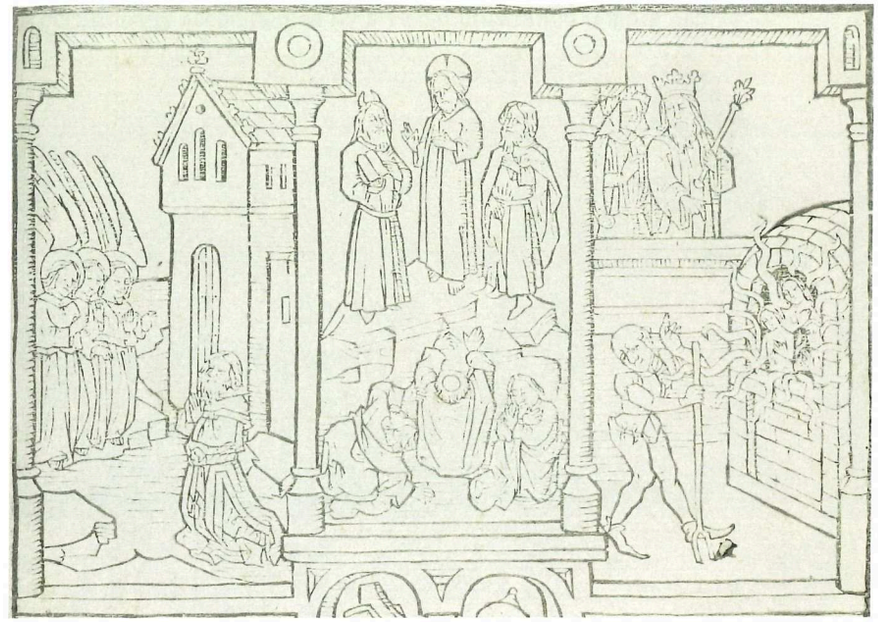

Figure 1: Netherlands or Germany, *The Fiery Furnace* (detail), in *Biblia Pauperum*, c. 1470, Washington, Library of Congress, Incun. X.B562 © Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division (Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection).

25 E.g. *The Fiery Furnace*, fol. 215r in *Biblia cu[m] concordantiis veteris et novi testamenti* (Lyon: Jacob Sacon, 1522), woodcut, Davis, University of California, Shields Library – Special Collections, inv. no. 1728A; Hans Holbein (II), *Nebuchadnezzar looks at three men in the furnace*, 1538, woodcut, 60 × 85 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-4511MM(R); Pieter Aertsen, *Worship of the Statue of Nebuchadnezzar*, c. 1560, oil on panel, 1132 × 843 mm, Rotterdam, Boijmans – Van Beuningen, inv. no. 1007 (OK).

26 See Edsman, *Ignis Divinus*, 79–80.

Late medieval manuscripts only sporadically feature the furnace motif. The Catalan *Sister Haggadah* (c. 1325–75) contains a rare depiction of the rescue of Abraham from the furnace of the Chaldeans. This is another case of a tyrannical ruler unable to countenance a refusal to worship his idols. Nimrod orders that Abraham be thrown into the fire, but through divine intervention he remains unharmed by the flames. Unfortunately, there is no recognisably depicted furnace construction, the image only shows a blazing pyramid of flames. A miniature portraying the martyrdom of Saint Eustace and his family from the Strasbourg *Elsässische Legenda Aurea* (1419) has the opposite issue (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Elsässische Werkstatt von 1418, *Martyrium des hl. Eustachius und seiner Söhne*, fol. 174r in *Elsässische Legenda Aurea*, 1419, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, inv. no. Cod. Pal. germ. 144.

The image quite clearly shows a furnace, but the text describes something entirely different, namely a hollow copper bull which was heated and used to torture the victims inside.[27] An example of a rather negative outcome can be found in the apocryphal narrative about Christ's childhood, the miracle of the children in the oven at Sext. When Jesus wishes to play with a group of children, their anxious parents hide them away in an oven. The parents swear to Him that there are only piglets in the oven, but this lie causes the children to actually transform into piglets. Via the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, this story finds its way to various Middle English and Anglo-Norman versions of the *Enfaunces de Jesu Christ* (late 13th c.) and it is only within this group of manuscripts that the story is occasionally accompanied by a visual illustration (Figure 3).[28]

Figure 3: England, S. E., *The Miracle of the Children in the Oven at Sext*, fol. 16r in *Holkham Bible Picture Book*, c. 1327–35, London, British Library, Add Ms 47,682 © The British Library Board.

Intercession by a divine power while being burned in an oven was also the subject of some stained-glass windows. In Chartres Cathedral we see the apostle

27 In the *Golden Legend* (Mâcon, Bibl. mun., Ms 0003, fol. 12v) from 1445–60 there is a correct visualisation of this story.

28 E.g. leaf (probably from a psalter prefatory cycle), c. 1250–75, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum Ms 1148-1993r; *Gesta infantiae salvatoris*, c. 1315–25, fols. 22v-23r, Oxford, Bodl. Ms Selden Supra 38; see Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity, and Devotion in Fourteenth Century England: Three Women Patrons and their Books of Hours* (London: The British Library, 2003), 275–8.

Thomas being thrown into a blazing furnace by King Mygdeus.[29] Thanks to divine intervention, the oven promptly cools down and Thomas is saved. A similar visual and thematic schema is present in Lincoln Cathedral. That window shows the legend of a Jewish glassblower from Bourges who throws his son into the furnace upon discovering he attends church. However, Mary intervenes and spares the child.[30]

The greatest difference between the magico-religious rites and the Christian imagery lies in the portrayal of the nature of fire. Whereas the furnace in the ritual experience was mostly a strong source of demonic power, Christian iconography focused on the positive outcome after a sacral intervention.[31] At the time of the first persecutions of Christians and also at the time of the reformatory polemic, the idea of a positive transformation was used to spread a message of hope. The story of the three Jews in the furnace served as a model for religious fortitude being rewarded both in the first centuries AD and in the sixteenth century. The many depictions of it launched a true visual tradition in the Netherlands and the German kingdoms, in which the transformation in the furnace was gradually equated with the idea of individual makeability.

The concept of the furnace as an instrument for the makeability of men was fully embedded within the secular culture of the late Middle Ages, when bizarre sham operations began to make an appearance.[32] The European written and visual culture, especially in the Netherlands, France, and the German regions, abounded with extractions of stones of madness, mills of rejuvenation, nose and tongue grinding, and blacksmiths forging new heads.[33] All of these were depictions of burlesque treatments that are symbolic or metaphorical in nature, and represent attempts to remove negative characteristics from a patient. It is within this context that motifs such as *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* and the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* developed into maturity.

29 French school, *St Thomas in India*, 13th c., window, Chartres Cathedral.

30 *The Jew of Bourges*, late 13th – early 15th c., window, Lincoln Cathedral.

31 Interesting in this respect is the cleansing fire of Purgatory, where the soul is purified before entering Heaven.

32 The social and cultural shifts taking place in the emerging urban society have been extensively analysed by Pleij – see esp. *Het gilde van de Blauwe Schuit* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1979) – and by Vandenbroeck – see esp. *Jheronimus Bosch: tussen volksleven en stadscultuur* (Berchem: EPO, 1987); *Beeld van de andere, vertoog over het zelf*, exh. cat. Antwerp, KMSKA (Antwerp, 1987).

33 See Wendy Wauters, *Een oven vol van menig hoofd en zotten bol*, MA thesis KU Leuven (2017), 29–41.

3 The Furnace of Rejuvenation

Two woodcuts by an anonymous German artist are the oldest known pair of images following the compositional scheme of *The Furnace of Rejuvenation*. *Jungman Machen* and *Der Jungofen für Frauen* are believed to date back to the first half of the sixteenth century (Figure 4).[34] Based on the mention of the publisher and the place of manufacture, a more accurate dating is likely to be around 1540/50.[35] Central to both designs is a *Glutofen*, corresponding roughly

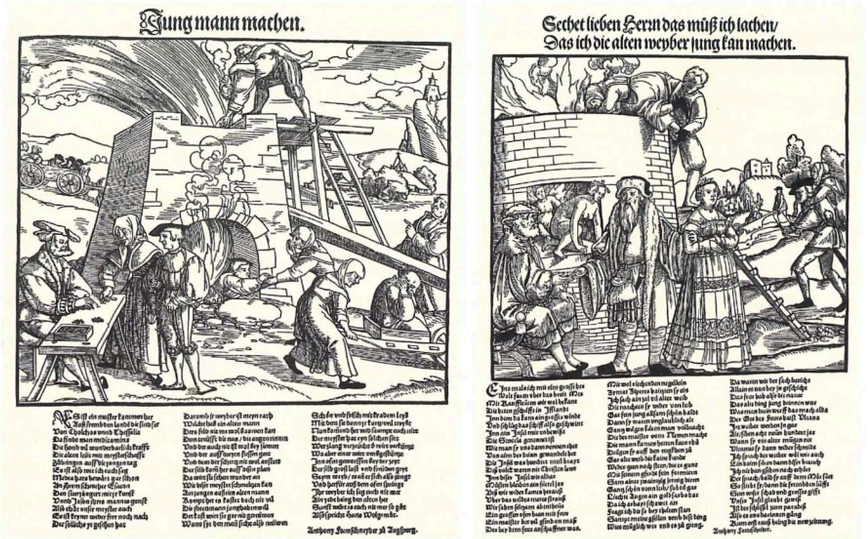

Figure 4: Anthony Corthoys (der Ältere) Formschneider, *Jungmann Machen* and *Der Jungofen für Frauen*, 1540/50, Gotha, Schlossmuseum Schloss Friedenstein – Kupferstichsammlung, inv. no. 40,4/819 and inv. no. 40,10/825.

34 Max Geisberg, *Bilder-Katalog zu Geisberg, Der Deutsche Einblatt-Holzschnitt in der ersten Hälfte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (München: Schmidt, 1930), 204, fig. 1184; Edsman, *Ignis Divinus*, 69–72; De Meyer, "Verjüngung im Glutofen," 164; William A. Coupe, *The German Illustrated Broadsheet in the Seventeenth Century: Historical and Iconographical Studies*, vol. 1, *Text* (Baden-Baden: Heitz, 1966), 159; Nils-Arvid Bringéus, *Volkstümliche Bilderkunde: formale Kennzeichen von Bildinhalt* (München: Callwey, 1982), 110.

35 "Antony Formschneyder zu Augspurg": Anthony Corthoys the Elder. His active period in Augsburg was between c. 1540 and 1570 according to De Meyer, and between 1543 and 1552

to the type of industrial furnace that was used at the time for ironworking.[36] In *Jungmann Machen* an elderly man is thrown into the open furnace from the top, while a remarkably younger man emerges from the opening below. All the men awaiting treatment are escorted by a female companion of a certain age. The richly dressed intermediary in the foreground collects money from an older woman and her rejuvenated spouse. The woodcut featuring women undergoing a transformation contains similar elements. At the top, a man lifts an elderly woman into the open furnace. However, in this composition, the young ladies emerge from the fire in a state of undress.

Two extensive texts composed in rhyme accompany the woodcuts. The copy of *Jungmann Machen* reveals its author in its final line: "Also spricht Hans Wolgemüt". This otherwise unknown person can therefore be considered as the writer of both stories.[37] The texts contain direct references to the furnaces in the images, but they also feature numerous new literary elements. In *Jungmann Machen*, all young women whose husbands have a runny nose or wrinkles, are childlike, or walk on three legs (using a walking stick), are encouraged to bring them to the rejuvenation furnace. The master of the furnace then performs the same ritual supposedly used by the Greek sorceress Medea to rejuvenate her father-in-law Aeson. Medea's method does not, however, correspond with Corthoys' depiction.[38] Instead of hurling the interested party bodily into the fire, the sorceress drew Aeson's blood, infused it with magical herbs, and returned it to his body.[39] In the text that accompanies *Der Jungofen für Frauen*, the author also references classical mythology. A traveller tells the tale of how he and several merchants were stranded on an unknown island named Senecla.[40] During their stay, they witness a rejuvenation process that takes place in the fire of a large furnace, tended by a "maister" (in this case the master of the fire) and his assistants. Once the women on the island reach the incredibly advanced age of 700 to 900 years, they are re-forged by the Roman god Vulcan.

according to Bringéus. See De Meyer, "Verjüngung im Glutofen," 165; Bringéus, *Volkstümliche Bilderkunde*, 110.

36 See Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur," 268.

37 See De Meyer, "Verjüngung im Glutofen," 161. The name Hans Wolgemüt appears several times in the region around Augsburg in the sixteenth century but there is no proven connection with the author of these texts. It is possible the name was merely intended to be figurative.

38 See De Meyer, "Verjüngung im Glutofen," 164; Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur," 267–8; Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 21.

39 See Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorfosen*, ed. & trans. H.J. Scheuer (Zalt-Bommel: naaml. venn. uitgevers-maatschappij & boekhandel v/h P.M. Wink, 1923), book 7, line 275–93.

40 The author may have meant "Senecta", which means "old age". See also Edsman, *Ignis Divinus*, 71 n27a.

The tone of this text is much harsher than the one for *Jungmann Machen*. The first few lines already mock those customers gullible enough to believe that such an absurd procedure could actually rejuvenate them.[41] By the end of the story, the location of the treatment is even revealed to be a false paradise, since, in return for their eternal youth the women of the island can never leave it alive. If they go out to sea, they die: "[for] the strange airs / are harmful to us and bad poison / [But] the isle – I can tell you that / for sure – is the key to Paradise".[42] The explicit mention that the island's inhabitants were heathens ("Diß volck waren nit christen lewt") is in line with this view. Indeed, the Church strongly condemned the popular belief in a pseudo-paradise on Earth, which was widespread in the Netherlands and the German regions. Church authorities warned against the eternal damnation that such a half earthly, half heavenly paradise would entail. If its inhabitants were to remain there longer than one year, it would become impossible to leave that place alive until the Day of Judgement, after which they would be damned for all eternity.[43]

The only other remaining depiction of *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* from the sixteenth-seventeenth century was created by Czech artisan Buryam Walda.[44] He was active in Prague around 1580 and besides this woodcut from 1594, only one other print by him is known.[45] Visually, Walda's depiction is very similar to Corthoy's woodcuts. The construction of the furnace is virtually identical to the one from *Jungmann Machen*, albeit mirrored. Even the couple with a wheelbarrow are comparable, as are the actions of throwing into the opening and helping the rejuvenated characters to their feet. The way one of the characters carries their partner on their back almost seems copied from *Jungofen für Frauen*. There are also textual parallels. The text in Czech tells the tale of a traveller who passes through Arabia and India to finally arrive on an island. He recounts spending two days hiding in a tree observing the rejuvenation process. Several literary elements of the story are also visualised, such as the large brickwork furnace and the use of a ladder to reach the top opening. Furthermore, the narrator describes how a 100-year-old woman refuses to set foot on the ladder unless her husband accompanies her, to which the master of the fire replies that he never burns men. The traveller expresses the intention to take the master with

41 "Sechet lieben Herrn das můß ich lachen / Das ich die alten weyber jung kann machen". (*See, dear gentlemen, that is why I have to laugh / Cause I can make the old women young [again]*). A complete transcription of the texts on both woodcuts, I owe to the skill of Luk Draye.

42 "So stirbt sy / dann die frembden lüfft / sein unser schad und grosses gift / unser Insel glaubt gewiss / ist der schlissel zum paradiss".

43 See Paul Vandenbroeck, *Utopia's Doom* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 18.

44 *The Furnace of Rejuvenation*, 1594, 395 × 280 mm, Berlin, inv. no. D-352-10.

45 *Apparition in the Sky at Prague*, 1580.

him to his native country, but the master does not wish to leave the island at that time. He does promise he will visit the homeland of the narrator in the future.[46] Such a proliferation of burlesque elements and dramatics is not found in the copy by Wolgemüt.

4 The so-called *Baker of Eeklo*

The few surviving depictions of *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* all feature rejuvenation. There are, however, at least sixteen known versions of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* from the sixteenth-seventeenth century and these show clearly how a similar composition evolved over time to express a very different meaning. The best known version is the painting in Muiderslot, believed to be a copy of a lost 1570/80 original by the Southern Netherlandish painters Jan Van Wechelen and Cornelis Van Dalem (Figure 5).[47] It shows a bakery in which several subjects are undergoing an absurd operation: their heads are being cut off by servants, collected in a large basket, covered with a liquid substance, and placed inside the oven. Awaiting their freshly baked heads, the patients temporarily have a cabbage placed on their shoulders. Meanwhile, the master baker welcomes some new customers, who are holding their already removed heads in their hands and awaiting their turn. Visually, the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* is composed completely differently from *The Furnace of Rejuvenation*. There are, however, remarkable similarities with one of the parade floats of the *Schembartlauf*, a carnival parade held in Nuremberg from 1449 to 1524/39. A *Hölle* (a float with a hellish scene) from 1513 displayed a jester baker who places miniature fools into his oven (Figure 6).[48] There are more than 80 surviving manuscripts with extensive testimonials about the well-attended parades and these reports are sometimes accompanied by detailed illustrations of the floats and costumes.[49] It is therefore plausible that this iconography was

46 Interpretation and translation of the original text, see Edsman, *Ignis Divinus*, 72.

47 Dated by Luuk Pijl on the basis of photographic material, see "Circle of Cornelis van Dalem and Jan van Wechelen – The Legend of the Baker of Eeklo," auction cat. *Christie's sale 5660, lot 8 (30/10/2014)* (London: Christie's, 2014): https://tinyurl.com/y6qvlspw.

48 See Wendy Wauters, "*Het uitkoken van de narheid* en zijn verwantschap met de geneeskunst en de alchemistische beeldtaal," *Volkskunde* 120, no. 2 (2019): 137–58 (139).

49 See Marcia Reed, "Fireworks and Fish Baskets: The Schembart Festival in Nuremberg," *Getty Research Journal* 4 (2012): 145–52 (145–6). The first printed version appeared in 1761: a publication by Georg Andreas Will about the history of the festival.

Figure 5: Southern Netherlands, *The So-called Baker of Eeklo*, c. 1570/80, Muiden, Muiderslot (on loan from Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), inv. no. A 4293.

widespread. In trying to determine the origin of this motif, the reference to the place name "Eeklo" is almost certainly a red herring. There is a consensus that it is based on a mistaken interpretation by Arthur Wijsman in 1937. He discovered a text on the back of one of the head-bakery paintings which mentioned "Eelco" and concluded it must be a reference to the town of Eeklo based on indications from Flemish expressions and soubriquets.[50] Even the

50 He links the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* to the term "being double-baked" (*dobbel gebakken zijn*), an expression dating back to the 1458 feud between Maldegem and Eeklo. Following the manslaughter of a man from Maldegem by a man from Eeklo, the court ordered a large sum be paid in compensation, and demanded the perpetrator beg forgiveness from the people of Maldegem. As they lost the court case and suffered the subsequent humiliation as well, the citizens of Eeklo were dubbed "double baked" by the citizens of Maldegem. See Arth. Wijsman, "De legende van den bakker van Eelco," *Oud Holland* 54 (1937): 173–77 (173, 175–6); Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur," 34. See also Willy L. Braekman, *Hier heb ik weer wat nieuws in d'hand: marktliederen, rolzangers en volkse poëzie van weleer* (Ghent: Stichting Mens en Kultuur, 1990): 361, 363.

Figure 6: *Anno 1513: 55e Schembart with Fountain and Furnace*, c. 1590–1640, *Nuremberg Shrovetide Carnival (1449–1539) – Schembartsbuch*, fol. 246r, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 346 © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

attribution to Van Wechelen and Van Dalem is problematic, as it is largely based on weak stylistic grounds.[51]

An explanation for the introduction of cabbages in this grotesque iconography can be found in the Dutch language.[52] Various authors have made the connection with old expressions: *een koolhoofd* (cabbage head) meant "a stupid person" and *het is maar kool* (it's only cabbage) was used to indicate something being total nonsense.[53] More important in this context is the expression *iemand*

51 The characters apparently look similar to figures by Van Wechelen and the view of the street is reminiscent of Van Dalem's oeuvre. Furthermore, a stylistic comparison is virtually impossible as only poor quality imitations are known of. See also Jan Briels, "*Amator Pictoriae Artis*. De Antwerpse kunstverzamelaar Peeter Steevens (1590–1668) en zijn Constkamer," *Jaarboek KMSKA* (1980): 137–226 (167–8, 224): The only supporting evidence is from a 1668 inventory that was composed after the death of the Antwerp art collector Stevens, which mentions Van Wechelen as the artist of *La Cuisine des Tétes*.

52 Vandenbroeck cursorily mentions a symbolic explanation where cabbage represents rebirth. If the head is considered the seat of the intellect, a new head is as good as a new mind: Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 101.

53 Deruelle references the expression "koolhoofd" in the auction catalogue of the Galerie Georges Giraux, in which one of the depictions of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* is included (Brussels 19-20/02/1954, p. 59, no. 491), see Marcel Deruelle, "Het Herbakken te Eeklo,"

een kool stoven, bakken (to stew, bake a cabbage for someone). This saying refers to a deceptive fabrication, a joke, or a prank where someone is fooled.[54] Also relevant is *iemand kool verkopen* (selling cabbage to someone), meaning to talk nonsense.[55] Particularly interesting in this context are the derivative expressions *een koolbakkerij* and *een koolbakker* (a cabbage bakery, a cabbage baker). The latter is a person who enjoys tricking others, and a cabbage bakery is a tall tale or a made-up story.[56] It seems plausible that the abovementioned painted scenes were originally referred to as *The Cabbage Bakery*. Nevertheless, there is not a single mention in any of the seventeenth-century art inventories in Antwerp that mention a work with such a name. Furthermore, there is also an etymological connection between the words for head and cabbage. The Middle Dutch name for a specific type of cabbage is *cabuyus*, which is derived from the Latin for head (*caput*).[57] Cabbage or headed cabbage (*capitate*) is a widely known and widely grown cabbage variety, recognisable by its leaves that grow very closely around the circular centre. If a certain type of cabbage was intentionally depicted in these scenes, then it was most identifiable with the above-mentioned variety. The absence of any expressions that correspond either descriptively or substantially to the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* outside of the Dutch language, is a strong indication that the prototype originated in the Netherlands.

Inventories from Antwerp reveal that the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* was a familiar motif. Alongside the extraction of the stone of madness (seventeen mentions), it is the most common sham operation included by Erik Duverger.[58] At least six paintings

Oostvlaamsche Zanten 4 (1964): 145–56 (146 n1). However, there is no confirmation of the existence of this expression to be found.

54 See F.A. Stoett, *Nederlandse spreekwoorden, spreekwijzen, uitdrukkingen en gezegden* (Zutphen: W.J. Thieme & Cie, 1923–1925), 489, no. 1234; "KOOL(II)," *Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal* (2007): https://tinyurl.com/y3unzc4v.

55 See François Halma, *Woordenboek der Nederduitsche en Fransche taalen* (Utrecht: Willem van de Water, 1710) s.n.; J.J.A. Goeverneur, *Gezamenlijke Gedichten en Rijmen* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1830–1874), 123.

56 According to Boekenoogen, the expression "een koolbakker" was known all over Holland, but Molema only refers to the city of Groningen; see G.J. Boekenoogen, *De Zaansche volkstaal. Bijdrage tot de kennis van den woordenschat in Noord-Holland* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1897), 491; Helmer Molema, *Wörterbuch der groningenschen Mundart im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Diedr. Soltau, 1888), 218.

57 See Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 38; "CABUUS(II)," *Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal* (2007): https://tinyurl.com/yyxwxqty.

58 See Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, 14 vols. (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1984–2009), vol. 1, 10, 24, 29, 98, 199, 250; *ibid.*, vol. 2, 106, 230, 347, 403, 436; *ibid.*, vol. 4, 73, 291, 455; *ibid.*, vol. 6, 102, 248; *ibid.*, vol. 11, 169. Of all the burlesque operations (extractions of

are described as showing the rebaking of heads (*schilderyken daer men de Hooffden herbackt*).[59] Two other titles probably refer to a scene with a blacksmith rather than a baker forging heads, and for one painting it is not clear whether the subject was a baker of heads.[60] The long tradition of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* in the iconography of the Netherlands allows us to map the shifts in how the subject is presented. As discussed, transformation was the overarching concept behind the furnace motif. However, the manner in which it was depicted in practice depended on the historical and geographical context. A first theme is the critical reflection on foolishness and credulity. In late medieval fools' iconography, the fool would usually be presented as a patient on whom various norms and values were projected. These ranged from cautionary moralisations to a yearning for a bygone primitivism. The fool lived in the Inverted World, which was a confluence of an ideal existence and total chaos. The narrative would always conclude that a return to the proper world – with its comforting logic and sophisticated morals – was preferable.[61] However, to be able to return, some type of healing or purification was required. Both the bakery and the forge were symbolic locations where attempts to cure the fools were undertaken, albeit to no avail. It is therefore not impossible that the initial meaning of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* was connected to curing madness.[62] Hazelzet recognises in the customers depicted the idea that everyone, irrespective of rank or position, is susceptible to credulity. The character to the far left is attired in luxurious clothing, suggesting he symbolises the nobility. The lady next to him is a nun and represents the clergy. The third client, a magistrate, exemplifies the middle class, and the fourth character, wearing simple garb, symbolises the peasantry.[63]

From the middle of the seventeenth century a substantial change in subject occurs: an explicitly moralising message is introduced, urging the audience to

stones of madness, mills of rejuvenation, blacksmiths forging new heads etc.) written about in Flemish folksongs from the early modern period on, the head-bakery was the most popular, see Braekman, *Hier heb ik weer wat nieuws in d'hand*, 357.

59 See *ibid.*, vol. 3, 157, 190, 310; *ibid.*, vol. 7, 298; *ibid.*, vol. 11, 169 (only two entries above, a stone extraction is listed). All the artists in Duverger are anonymous. See also note 51.

60 See *ibid.*, vol. 1, 242 (above the forger of heads there is a tongue sharpener as well); *ibid.*, vol. 10, 261. See also *ibid.*, vol. 10, 378: *een schilderij wesende een Sottinnebackene* (a painting with a fools' bakery).

61 Herman Pleij, "De zot als maatschappelijk houvast in de overgang van middeleeuwen naar moderne tijd," *Groniek* 23 (1990): 18–39 (31).

62 See Vandenbroeck, *De kleuren van de geest*, 102. The visual similarities to the painted versions of *The Dean of Renaix* (in manner of Bruegel, 1556 or later) appear to confirm this theme, see Wauters, *Een oven vol*, 45–7; Wendy Wauters, "The Stone Operation or The Dean of Renaix," in *Bruegel in Black and White. The Complete Graphic Works*, ed. Maarten Bassens and Joris van Grieken, exh. cat. Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium (Veurne: Hannibal Publishing, 2019): 256–9 (258).

63 See Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 13–6, 37.

follow a virtuous path. Moreover, the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* starts to appear in prints, which means it reached a very wide audience, as opposed to examples in paintings. One of the first printed variants appears in the sixth edition of *Het masker van de Wereldt afgetrocken* (1649, published by the widow and heirs of Jan Cnobbaert, Antwerp) by the Southern Netherlandish Jesuit and counter-reformational theologian Adriaen Poirters.[64] This publication contains a poem about the baker of heads, accompanied by an engraving by an anonymous artist. The illustration is inspired by earlier painted depictions, albeit in simplified form. In the introductory prose, Poirters insists a peaceful existence is within reach, as long as everyone does their part to contribute to it: "that irritable heads should not be too hard on others' impulsive moods and strange fancies, and so can somewhat forgive one another's shortcomings".[65] Furthermore, the introduction also explicitly states the ultimate goal of the treatment: the master shall re-bake the heads that were born under a bad sign to free them of their negative characteristics. The poem that follows is narrated by the master baker himself. First, he informs the reader about the different afflictions he can treat, for example by changing character traits or altering outward appearance. It is clear from the start that he considers his clientele to be gullible fools. The baker continues to sum up all his patients and their conditions. Both men and women, poor and rich are discussed. Included in the long list of flaws he must correct are: removing stupidity, bossiness, drunkenness, aggression, and vanity. The master baker concludes that in fact, every head suffers some shortcoming or another. The only customer on which the treatment has no effect is the fool Tiribus. The idea that it is futile to attempt to cure a fool of his madness is therefore still present in Poirters' poem: "Dear friends, it does not pay to ask, the oven cannot do this task: because when someone is born mad, whatever one bakes will turn out bad".[66] After the poem, Poirters concludes that re-baking is something each person must do for themselves. Everyone bears the responsibility to conduct themselves in a good and sensible manner as part of the community: "everyone must be their own Baker; this means, everyone must concern themselves with their own head, and transform

64 A copy of the sixth edition is preserved in Universiteit Utrecht, Bijzondere Collecties, LBKUN: RAR LMY Poirters 12. See Deruelle, "Het Herbakken te Eeklo," 148; Stalpaert, "De verjongingskuur," 32–3: Stalpaert notes that Poirters, who is well-versed in vernacular, never mentions the place name "Eeklo"; Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 41.

65 "dat de korsele hoofden malkanderens losse vlaghen ende vremde luymen weten te vieren, ende soo malkanderens ghebreken een weynighje weten toe te gheven" (p. 376).

66 "Lief vriendt, het is verloren moet, / wat dat ghy om den oven doet: / want is iemandt sot gheboren, / watmen backt, het is verloren" (pp. 386–7).

themselves into an affable and friendly person; tolerating one another's weaknesses with Christian patience."[67]

De nievw-iaerighe hoofdt-backerye, Van alder-hande Zots-hoofden has a similar structure (Figure 7).[68] Philibert Bouttats published this etching around 1700 in Antwerp as a New Year's print. Only a few details distinguish this design from the painted version of the bakers of heads. Clothing and hair styles have been

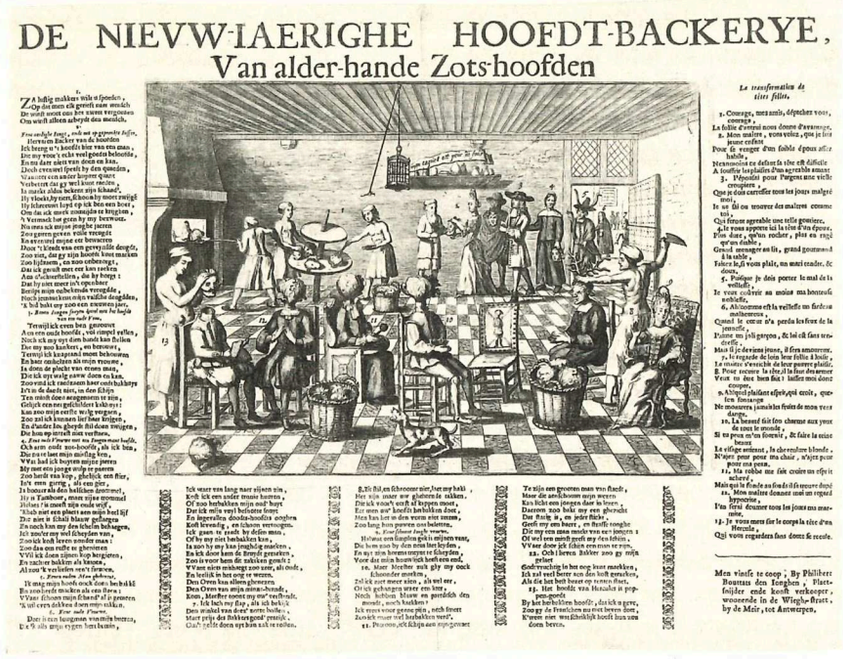

Figure 7: *De nievw-iaerighe hoofdt-backerye, Van alder-hande Zots-hoofden* (Antwerp: Philibert Bouttats de Jongere, c. 1700), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-82.931.

67 "een ieder moet sijnen eyghen Backer wesen; dat is, een ieder behoort sijn korsel hooft te breken, ende sich selven tot een ghevoeghsaeme ende vriendelijcke bywooninghe te buyghen; ontmoetende elckanderens kranckheydt met een Christelijcke lijdsaemheydt" (p. 387).

68 See Maurits De Meyer, *Populäre Druckgraphik Europas: Niederlande vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Callwey, 1970), no. 126; Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 6, 18; J.N. Keeman, "De Bakker van Eeclo, een cosmetisch chirurg *avant la lettre*?" *Nederlands Tijdschrift Heelkunde* 5 (1996): 183–6 (186); J.N. Keeman, "Cosmetische chirurgie, certificaten en de hoofdenbakker van Eeclo," *Nederlands Tijdschrift Geneeskunde* 147, no. 51 (2003): 2513–22 (2516).

updated to reflect current fashions and some of the clients have been given an accessory to clarify their negative characteristic. The caption explains their wishes in both Dutch and French. As in the previous poem, their wishes are rather varied, although in this case there is more emphasis on marital problems. The baker of heads is primarily expected to treat infidelity, disappointing sexual performance, or a lack of physical attractiveness, always at the request of the suffering partner. Only the final two clients are not suffering from relationship issues but have work-related problems. The reactions of the clients and the assistants are somewhat cynical in nature. This print also contains several elements that indicate it is making a mockery of the foolishness of the clientele.[69] The overall impression is that of a critical appraisal of those who seek salvation via an illusive quick fix born of (moral) laziness.

A little-known French mutation of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* from c. 1640 also appears to focus on the relationships between men and women. Unfortunately, analysing the content of this anonymous engraving entitled *Des hommes mettent dans un four de nombreuses têtes* is problematic as almost nothing is known about its original context.[70] It shows three couples spread out inside a shop interior (Figure 8). On the table, several male heads are on display and it appears as if the customers are choosing between the available models. On either side of the scene there are two baskets, one filled with animal heads (sheep, hog, donkey) and one with human heads. Front and centre are observed by one of the couples, the baker is administering a treatment in which the head of a patient is being manipulated. It is, however, unclear what action exactly he is undertaking. The postures are most similar to those of a barber wrapping the head of his client with warm towels. On the far left, a second baker is placing a head in the furnace. Three heads of cabbage on the floor are still clearly reminiscent of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo*. Laure Beaumont-Maillet situates the engraving within the iconography of the forger of heads Lustucru, a sham operation that was primarily associated with the battle of the sexes in the seventeenth century.[71] Men would come from far and wide to the blacksmith, hoping that he could re-forge their headstrong spouses into docile housewives.[72]

69 See Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 13–6; Keeman, "Cosmetische chirurgie," 2515–7.

70 Beaumont-Maillet notes a stylistic connection to the French engraver and painter Abraham Bosse (1604–1676), see Laure Beaumont-Maillet, *La Guerre des Sexes – XVe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986), 32. But the geographical origins of the print remain unclear.

71 See Beaumont-Maillet, *La Guerre des Sexes*, 32.

72 E.g. Anonymous (Normandy), *Lustucru forgeant la tête d'une femme*, c. 1600, woodcut, Paris, Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée. There are various versions of the theme, including many French, Italian, and German examples.

Figure 8: *Des hommes mettent dans un four de nombreuses têtes*, c. 1640, Paris, BnF, Département estampes et photographie, Rés. QB-201 (33)-FOL.

However, the wives had their revenge with subsequent prints showing gangs of furious women destroying Lustucru's smithy.[73] Given this context, there may be a clue to the meaning of the scene through the window of *Des hommes mettent dans un four de nombreuses têtes*: outside on the hilltop, someone is sieving human heads. Sieving one or multiple people usually referred to finding a suitable candidate for marriage.[74]

An extraordinary mix of fools' iconography and moralisation appears in the Amsterdam pastiche *Backery waer in men de hoofden verbackt, en goet maekt. En oock een remedie om die te versmeden op het aembeeldt. Als mede de wonderlijke KAEY-SNY[D]ER* (published by Willem van Bloemen, between 1694 and 1711) (Figure 9). In it, the baker of heads is explicitly related to a stone extraction, the

73 E.g. Jacques Lagniet, *Le massacre de Lustucru*, c. 1660, engraving in *Recueil des plus illustres proverbes divisés en trois livres* (Paris: Jacques Lagniet, 1663), Paris, BnF, Département réserve des livres rares, Rés. Z-1746; Le Clerc, *La grande destruction de Lustucru par les femmes fortes*, 1663, engraving, Paris, BnF, Département estampes et photographie.

74 E.g. Johann Theodor de Bry (after Monogrammist BKGF), *Two Women at a Dovecote with Fools*, 1596, engraving in Johann Theodor & Johann Israel de Bry, *Emblemata Saecularia* (Frankfurt: s.n., 1596), emblem 30, 104 × 98 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-BI-5216; *Sieving Men*, 1589–1613, fol. 51r in the *album amicorum* of Daniel von Reden, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Ir 2a.

Figure 9: *Backery waer in men de hoofden verbackt, en goet maekt. En oock een remedie om die te versmeden op het aembeeldt. Als mede de wonderlijke KAEY-SNY[D]ER* (Amsterdam: Willem van Bloemen, 1694–1711), Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek.

pre-eminent sham operation for curing madness.[75] Various visual elements from the smithy of heads complement this woodcut. Likewise, the frontispiece of the publication shows a baker of heads, this time combined with image fragments taken from Corthoys' *Jungmann Machen* and *Der Jungofen für Frauen*. Just as the imagery is a mishmash of motifs from multiple sham operations, the copy is also a collage of various fragments from three to six pre-existing writings. Both image and text refer back to Poirters' *Het masker van de Wereldt afgetrocken* for the head-bakery.[76]

Finally, another one of the desired results of the procedure was the wish to rejuvenate. This is depicted in two woodcuts produced in Augsburg by Abraham Bach (active period 1648/80), namely *Rejuvenation Furnaces for Men and Women* (Figure 10). Both compositions show a bakery in which men and women respectively are baked until they are young again. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the idea of the baker as the executor of a sham operation had spread to the German regions.[77] As in the depictions of *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* from Augsburg around 1550, Bach's scenes treat men and women separately.[78] Unfortunately, the poor

75 Elements of the extraction of the stone of madness correspond closely to *L'invention des Femmes* by Lagniet, c. 1660, engraving in *Recueil des plus illustres proverbes* (see also note 73). It shows a charlatan cutting the wickedness out of husbands on their wives' behalf.

76 See Wauters, *Een oven vol*, 60–4. See also Hazelzet, *Heethoofden, misbaksels en halve garen*, 47.

77 See also *Abbildung der wunderbarlichen Werckstatt des Weltstreichenden Artzts Simplicissimi*, 1669 or later, private collection: Wauters, *"Het uitkoken van de narheid,"* 151.

78 Due to the poor condition of the print, the title of the depiction of the women's bakery is illegible.

Figure 10: Abraham Bach, *Rejuvenation Furnaces for Men and Women*, c. 1648/80. Last seen at Karl & Faber in München (1966). Unfortunately, no better copy has been located © Scanned from Dorothy Alexander and Walter L. Strauss, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1600–1700: A Pictorial Catalogue*, vol. 1, A-N (New York: Abaris Books, 1977), 69, no. 34.

condition of both illustrations makes it difficult to analyse them in detail. That a bakery is being shown, is confirmed by the title on *Rejuvenation Furnace for Men*: "Ein Beckenhaus darst die alte Männer jung gebacken werden". A *Beckenhaus* was a common word for a bakery.[79] In terms of imagery, Bach's woodcuts show more similarities with Corthoys' depictions of the rejuvenation furnace than with examples of the so-called *Baker of Eeklo*. Prominently placed in the front of the *Rejuvenation Furnace for Women* is a cart filled with women. Leaning against the cart is a man who appears to be accepting money from a group of people. This seems to be reminiscent

79 "Verbeut inen [...] mül u. beckenheuser" (1525). See Hermann Knapp, *Die Zenten des Hochstifts Würzburg: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des süddeutschen Gerichtswesens und Strafrechts*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Guttentag, 1907), 247.

of the couples in Corthoys' rejuvenation furnace, where the characters deliver their other halves for treatment. *Rejuvenation Furnace for Men* uses the same compositional schema, except the cart in the front is filled with old men and the master of the fire is also subject to a gender reversal. She receives money from a woman who is flanked by two apparently older men. Meanwhile, the assistants in the background are the ones actually administering the treatment. One of them is kneading a patient in the dough trough and the second assistant is placing a customer in the baking oven, which already contains two other men who are baking until they are young again.

5 Conclusion

The furnace as an instrument for the makeability of human beings is widespread in time as well as space. The desired result is, however, specific to historical and geographical reality. A diachronic analysis of the traditions surrounding the theme reveals the cultural-historical foundations of the motif. At its base lies the idea that the natural phenomenon of fire has a transformative power. The only person who is able to direct its divine energy and repel its demonic aspects, is the master of the fire. This fundamental layer of meaning is already present in the rituals of indigenous communities. Regardless of time and place, there are multiple examples of rituals being practiced where men and/or women are placed in or near a furnace under the direction of a master of fire with the intention of removing a negative substance. Both the furnace structure itself and the person who is placed near it can be the subject of the purification. The second layer of meaning involves the visual imprint of this cultural reality within Christian iconographical tradition, whereby the story of *The Fiery Furnace* is most important to the medieval visual development. It focused on the positive outcome after a divine intervention, promoting spiritual fortitude during a time of religious turmoil. Even here, the furnace is seen as a source of power, instigating the transformation. These two layers cannot be separated without losing some of the meaning. They exist in conjunction with one another and their evolution is intertwined. The secular iconographical motif of the furnace as a place of transformation has its roots in the magico-religious beliefs.

Society at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century may not have been aware of the previous historical attitudes around the furnace. But the urban context of the time does provide a fertile breeding ground for the integration of iconographical motifs in which human makeability is represented by symbolic or metaphorical treatments. From the point of view of Christian

ethics, it is quite interesting that the concentration of these motifs can serve as a seismograph of fluctuations in morality. Indeed, it reflects a society in full transition, at the complex turning point where it is evolving away from older popular traditions towards new rules of behaviour. The raucous laughter and the grotesque in the visual and farcical culture defuses the tectonic pressures that accompany such change. Moreover, there is a need for a clear structure that the urbanite can use as a benchmark for their norms and values. Within the world of the grotesque, and in the context of the search for moral certainty, sham operations such as *The Furnace of Rejuvenation* and the so-called *Baker of Eeklo* emerge and develop. The most important evolution of the furnace motif is the introduction of the mocking tone. Purification and fortitude are exchanged for credulity and foolishness. The moral laziness of people who squander their money on nonsensical procedures is lampooned. Furthermore, the images always show the clients presenting another person and attempting to strike a bargain with the baker to transform them according to the wishes of their partner (younger, more beautiful, more docile, more intelligent). Both visually and textually, the bourgeois-Christian mantra of early modern society shines through, urging people not to interfere with the moral life of others.[80] Poirters expresses this fundamental concept of the early modern furnace motif best: "everyone must be their own baker."

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80 Judith Pollmann, "'Each should tend his own garden': Anna Bijns and the Catholic Polemic against the Reformation," *Church History and Religious Culture* 87, no. 1 (2007): 29–45.