



# The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France

*Stephen Perkinson*

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Anyone who has strolled through the halls of a museum knows that portraits occupy a central place in the history of art. But did portraits, as such, exist in the medieval era? Stephen Perkinson's *The Likeness of the King* challenges the canonical account of the invention of modern portrait practices, offering a case against the tendency of recent scholarship to identify likenesses of historical personages as "the first modern portraits."

Unwilling to accept the anachronistic nature of these claims, Perkinson both resists and complicates grand narratives of portraiture art that ignore historical context. Focusing on the Valois court of France, he argues that local practice prompted shifts in the late medieval understanding of how images could represent individuals and prompted artists and patrons to deploy likeness in a variety of ways. Through an examination of well-known images of the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century kings of France, as well as largely overlooked objects such as wax votive figures and royal seals, Perkinson demonstrates that the changes evident in these images do not constitute a revolutionary break with the past, but instead were continuous with late medieval representational traditions.

"A lively, well-researched, and insightful work of scholarship on late-medieval portraiture and its cultural and intellectual context. *The Likeness of the King* provides a strong account of late-medieval aesthetics and specific, concrete examples of image-making and the often political needs it served. It offers smart handling of literary, philosophical, and archival sources; close and insightful reading of images; and a willingness to counter received ideas."—Rebecca Zorach, University of Chicago

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