

A Marginal Follower of Fashion

Historians of fashion often look to the court of King Richard II when discussing the birth of *haute couture* the aspirant bourgeoisie started to ape the fashions of the court, having become sufficiently prosperous to afford the silks and luxury textiles that were such a hallmark of the age. The aristocrats, so as to preserve the outward and visible signs of their exclusive station in life, were compelled to change their codes of dress regularly; and even if the business of staying one step ahead did not yet quite involve the exhausting iterations of Milan or Paris or New York, the current mode of dress was used for the first time as a statement of exclusivity. One of the more outré crakow, a pointed, long-toed shoe, whose length steadily increased as the aristocrats sought to outrun their imitators! although physically outrunning anyone at all would have been impossible, for the toes eventually became so elongated that courtiers had to tie them to their legs so as not to trip over them. Crakows became popular in 1382 after the marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia; it was Bohemia where the fashion originated; Kraków in Poland is the city from which the shoe takes its name. Needless to say, Newfounder, Bishop William of Wykeham (d. 1404), would have had little patience with any foundationer who might have felt moved to flaunt crakows on his own feet state that it is absolutely forbidden to each and every scholar and fellow to wear red or green hose, pointed shoes or hoods with frogging, within the University or without).

New College was not, however, entirely free of specimens of the fashion. A manuscript in the Library, MS 242, has the remnant of an illumination (fol. 178r) of a man wearing a pair of crakows. Since the illumination, like the script, is datable to the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the picture may well be the earliest representation of crakows in English art. The volume was once richly illuminated, but this, alas, has been its ruin since whole leaves have been robbed for their decoration, the knife cutting crudely into neighbouring pages. The volume carries two works by the prolific Oxford philosopher Walter Burley, his *c* *Ethics* and *Politics*. The opening page to the *Ethics* (fol. 2r) is intact, showing a golden initial historiated with a vignette, displayed behind striped curtains, of the tonsured author presenting his book to a seated, bearded king-priest, cloaked in blue and holding a crossed staff. Substantial border bars to four sides use blocked colours of blue and violet with whg1TJETJTB 0 1 259.6 593.5 Tm() (of)3wi9e last quwith whg1TJETJmBT1 0 0 1



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