

## *Urbanization and its consequences: spatial developments in late medieval Flanders*

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An inquiry into the attitudes towards distance and space in the late medieval world is by no means an easy task, an inquiry into the consequences of urbanization for this attitude is next to impossible. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that urbanization, which involved or was directly related to a greater impact of secondary and tertiary activities in society, caused important shifts in the mentality of town-dwellers as well as of countryfolk and in this way it influenced the attitudes towards space and distance in particular. It also changed the realities of movement and therefore the perception of space<sup>1</sup>). But one must beware of too broad a generalization. There was no single urban way of looking at space or of perceiving distance. This not only largely depended upon the urban background of townsmen. It was as much determined by their economic activities, by their social background, by their intellectual or professional training, by their political awareness or by the personal skills of townspeople.

An abstract idea, such as spatial awareness of urban citizens seems indeed to be rather illusive. Can such an idea be equal to the sum of conceptions of the various groups within urban society? Even the sources regarding the urban governing elites do not agree. A careful analysis of the activities of urban messengers certainly indicates the wider interests of urban ruling classes. In defending the city's or the town's privileges, urban delegations and messengers were sent to the political and juridical centres of gravity in the county and the Burgundian state<sup>2</sup>). But these voyages merely indicate the political links the various towns and cities had. Thus, Ghent (the Council of Flanders and the Ghent magistrate),

1) For some general reflections on this topic, see the essay by P. ZUMTHOR, *La mesure du monde*, Paris, 1993, and for the impact of urban mentality and the urban way of life, esp. 111–141.

2) It is not surprising that delegations of the bigger cities and messengers from the three capital cities were much more numerous and that the average distance they travelled exceeded by far that of envoys from the smaller towns. Clear hierarchical patterns appear (P. STABEL, »Entre enclume et marteau. Les petites villes flamandes, les Membres de Flandre et le duc de Bourgogne«, in *Les relations entre princes et villes aux XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles: aspects politiques, économiques et sociaux. Centre européen d'études bourguignonnes (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> s.). Rencontres de Gand (24 au 27 septembre 1992)*, 1993, Neuchâtel, 91–105, for Hainaut see also J. M. CAUCHIES, »Messageries et messagers en Hainaut au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, in *Le Moyen Age*, 82, 1976, 89–123 and 301–341).

Lille (the duke's financial administration), Brussels (the ducal court and his close counsellors), Mechelen (the Great Council and Parliament) and occasionally Paris (the king's Parliament) were the political centres for most smaller and secondary towns in inland Flanders. The fewer urban delegations to economic partners, however, already suggest a completely different geography. Instead, the gateway-cities of Bruges and Antwerp, the major fairs like those in Ypres, Lille, Bergen-op-Zoom and the major trading partners (Hanseatic and Mediterranean merchants, wherever they were located, big grain markets such as the Ghent staple, etc.) now take the lead. Cultural links are even more scarce in the accounts and can be located in the major university cities (Leuven, Paris, Cologne, etc.) or in cities with high centrality (art products in the gateway cities of Bruges and Antwerp, but also in Brussels, Mechelen, Tournai). Ecclesiastical links focused on the diocese (Tournai, Théroouanne, Utrecht, Cambrai; in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ghent and Bruges), but could reach out as far as Rome. The analysis of only one source, the payment of urban envoys in the accounts, would be very misleading indeed. It usually focuses only a limited field of inquiry, the political contacts of towns, and it presents only a one-sided survey: the links of cities and towns as collectivities.

Spatial awareness, however, can also be very individual. There is no doubt that spatial awareness of farmers, who brought their agricultural goods to the urban markets, or of retail traders, who supplied the urban hinterland, differed fundamentally from that of the late medieval Flemish urban craftsmen or small-scale entrepreneurs, who both worked for an international export-market. The world of vagrants or travelling craftsmen differed from that of fixed workers. The world as it was perceived by merchants, brokers in international trade, big entrepreneurs was again much larger and more diversified than that of the latter social and economic groups, but was not necessarily identical to that of intellectual elites (scholars and humanists). Urban politicians, noblemen, courtiers and members of the ducal household had their own spheres of interest, not to say their own spheres of influence. Aldermen and burgomasters in the big cities, who could influence comital or ducal policies or played an important role in regional and sometimes even international politics, looked differently at the outside world than their colleagues did in the small market towns which were scattered all over the countryside. Yet all of these people were townsmen and all of them had an urban background.

Research into the spatial perception of town-dwellers very much remains undiscovered territory. Because of the lack of studies on transport and travel, this paper only intends to offer some possible preliminary remarks concerning the consequences of urbanisation for the division of space inside an urbanised region and the intentional or purely coincidental policies of towns and cities – as we shall see, the scale of urban settlements (size, central functions, links with the outside world) will prove to be a crucial variable – towards their surroundings and hinterland. In the Flemish case, this hinterland does not limit itself necessarily to the immediate agricultural surroundings of the town or city. Because of international trade links, the hinterland could cover a vast and sometimes very

heterogeneous area, even including regions and merchant cities in Eastern, Northern and also in Mediterranean Europe (from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards Flemish export industries would even count many customers in the Spanish New World). This paper will address some of the issues related to the urban impact on social, political and economic space and will also point at some possible socio-cultural variables.

## I. URBANIZATION IN FLANDERS

Foreigners who visited the Low Countries in the late middle ages, whether they were French chroniclers<sup>3)</sup>, Italian cardinals<sup>4)</sup>, Mediterranean merchants<sup>5)</sup>, German painters<sup>6)</sup> or Bohemian noblemen and their servants<sup>7)</sup>, they all could not but notice the many cities and towns, numerous and often very big, they were keen observers of the urban way of life of Flemish and Brabantine city-dwellers, of their cosmopolitan character and the richness and diversity of goods from Mediterranean, Western, Eastern and Northern Europe which were offered on their markets and they described this in often very wonderful terms. And their remarks were certainly justified. Exception made for Northern Italy, nowhere in medieval Europe, there were so many towns and cities, nowhere lived more people in an urban environment. This high level of urbanization certainly left its mark on mentality. Literature, art production, the school system etc., everything was focused towards an urban audience, towards urban consumers and towards urban markets.

It is significant that the landscapes painted by the so-called *Flemish Primitives* with a few exceptions were all dominated by towns and cities. Van Eyck, Memling or Van der Weyden painted urban subjects or placed their antagonists in front of an urban scenery<sup>8)</sup>.

3) »*Li país (Flanders) estoit si plains et si remplis de tous biens que merveilles seroit à raconter ... et tenoient les gens ens bonnes villes si grans estat que merveilles estoit à regarder.*« All this wealth in such a densely populated area also created a lot of trouble as the cities were envious of each other's wealth: »*chil de Gand sus le ville de Bruges, et cil de Bruges sus ceulx de Gand, et ensi les autres villes les unes sus les autres*« (J. Kervijn DE LETTENHOVE, *Oeuvres de Froissart*, Brussels, 1867–77, 9, 158).

4) L. VON PASTOR (ed.), *A. De Beatis. Die Reise des Kardinals Luigi d'Aragona durch Deutschland, die Niederlande, Frankreich und Oberitalien (1517–1518)*, Freiburg, 1905, 117–119.

5) L. GUICCIARDINI, *Beschrijvinghe van alle de Nederlanden, anderssins gheenoemt Neder-Duytslandt*, Amsterdam, 1612, p. 287, M. LETTS, *Pero Tafur. Travels and adventures 1435–1439*, London, 1926, 198–201, A. EVANS (ed.), *La pratica delle mercatura. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1936, 236 and J. E. DOTSON (ed.), *Merchant culture in fourteenth century Venice. The Zibaldone de Canal*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, Binghamton, New York, 1994, 15.

6) J.A. GORIS & G. MARLIER, *Le journal de voyage d'Albert Durer dans les Pays-Bas*, Brussels, 1970, 90–92.

7) M. LETTS, *The travels of Leo of Rozmital through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy 1465–1467*, Cambridge, 1957, 30–32 and 40–42.

8) Numerous examples in W. PREVENIER and W. BLOCKMANS, *The Burgundian Netherlands*, Cambridge, 1985. The image of the town in late medieval art in the Low Countries is discussed in P. STABEL, »De stad

This very urban world in contemporary painting was by no means fiction. It was no invention of visual artists working for urban art consumers. The core regions of the late medieval Low Countries (which were the counties of Flanders, Holland and Hainaut and the duchy of Brabant) counted numerous cities concentrated in a rather limited area. Countryfolk were never more than 10 to 20 km apart from the nearest town. Even the big cities, in the late medieval western European context one could even call them giant cities, such as Ghent, Bruges, Ypres, Lille, Douai, Tournai, Brussels, Leuven, Antwerp and Mechelen were concentrated in a very small area. The distance from Ghent to Bruges, cities with 60,000 and 45,000 inhabitants is scarcely more than 40 km. It was very easy, even for ordinary travellers, to go on a journey from Brussels to Mechelen (both centres of central government in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century) and return the same day. Well-equipped messengers were able to visit several big cities on the same day<sup>9</sup>). Moreover, to complete this urban landscape, there were very high numbers of small and middle-sized towns: more than 50 in Flanders, more than 20 in Brabant. The urban system in the county of Holland was characterised by many middle-sized towns at a very short distance from each other (Amsterdam, Leiden, Delft, Gouda, Haarlem, Rotterdam and the nearby bishop's town of Utrecht).

No wonder that cities and towns were nearly always on the horizon of painters. In more general terms, there can be stated that the urban way of life was omnipresent in these core principalities of the Low Countries. Not only the town dwellers themselves experienced this »urbanity«, the countryfolk as well were in constant contact with the urban experience, when going to urban markets, when meeting their, very often urban, landlords, when enjoying cultural activities or when visiting relatives in the nearby towns<sup>10</sup>).

Figures, however scarce they may be, are an overwhelming proof for the enormous impact of the urban way of life. About 33 % of the total population in Flanders were town-dwellers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a figure which would have been even higher in the two previous centuries. Equally high figures can be noticed in the neighbouring principalities, the county of Holland and the duchy of Brabant, together with the county of Flanders the core region of the Burgundian and Habsburgian Netherlands. Still very high urban ratios were also present in the county of Hainaut, in the princely diocese of Liège (the

in de laatmiddeleeuwse kunst: toneel van sociale activiteit of kunstenaarscliché», in P. STABEL, M. CARLIER and A. GREVE (eds.), *In het hart of in de marge van de laatmiddeleeuwse stedelijke samenleving. Een zoektocht naar de identiteit van stedelijke sociale groepen*, Leuven, 1996, forthcoming.

9) T. KANAOKA, »L'organisation et l'enregistrement des messageries du duc de Bourgogne dans les années 1420«, in *Revue du Nord*, 76, 1994, 275–298.

10) Further literature on urban-rural exchange in the Southern Low Countries can be found in P. STABEL, »Town and countryside in the Southern Low countries late 15<sup>th</sup>–early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Preliminary reflections upon changing relations in a pre-industrial economy«, in R. NÍ NÉILL (ed.), *Town and countryside in Western Europe from 1500 to 1939*, Leicester, 1996, 27.

basin of the River Meuse), in Walloon-Flanders (the region of Lille, Douai and Orchies, nowadays in the département du Nord, France) and in Artois (with the cities of Arras and Saint-Omer)<sup>11</sup>).

Nowhere in medieval Europe, there were also so many big cities in such a small area. A list of European cities with populations which exceeded 10,000 inhabitants around 1300 shows the precocity of urbanization in the Southern Netherlands, and in Flanders in particular<sup>12</sup>: Ghent, Bruges and Ypres in Flanders<sup>13</sup>, Lille and Douai in Walloon-Flanders, Arras and Saint-Omer in Artois<sup>14</sup>. But very quickly the other principalities were also characterised by dense urbanization: Brussels, Leuven, 's-Hertogenbosch and Antwerp in Brabant<sup>15</sup> and, of course, though still, one century before the spectacular rise of Amsterdam, only middle-sized, the many urban centres in the county of Holland (Dordrecht, Leiden, Haarlem, Rotterdam etc.)<sup>16</sup>. Besides these cities in the core principalities, there were also other big centres, such as the seigneuiry of Mechelen, which would become in the early

11) For the county of Flanders, see W. PREVENIER, »La démographie des villes du comté de Flandre aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Etat de la question. Essai d'interprétation«, in *Revue du Nord*, 65, 1983, 255–275 and P. STABEL, »Demography and hierarchy: the small towns and the urban network in sixteenth-century Flanders«, in P. CLARK (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1995, 206–228. The other principalities are dealt with in W. P. BLOCKMANS, G. PIETERS, W. PREVENIER, R.W.M. VAN SCHAÏK, »Tussen crisis en welvaart. Sociale veranderingen 1300–1500«, in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 4, Haarlem, 1980, 44–45 and P. KLEP, »Population estimates of Belgium by province (1375–1831)«, in *Historiens et Population. Liber Amicorum Etienne Hélin*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991, 485–508.

12) L. GENICOT, »Les grandes villes d'Occident en 1300«, in *Economies et Sociétés au Moyen Age. Mélanges offerts à Ed. Perroy*, Paris, 1973, 199–219.

13) W. PREVENIER, »Bevolkingcijfers en professionele structuren der bevolking van Gent en Brugge in de XIV<sup>e</sup> eeuw«, in *Album C. Verlinden*, Ghent, 1975, 269–303 and more recent data in M. BOONE & W. PREVENIER, »14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century. The dream of a ›city-state‹«, in *Ghent. In defense of a rebellious city*, Antwerp, 1990, 81. The population size of Ypres is discussed in H. PIRENNE, »Les dénombremens de la population d'Ypres au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle (1412–1506)«, in *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1903, 458–489.

14) A. DERVILLE, »Le nombre des habitants des villes de l'Artois et de la Flandre wallonne (1300–1450)«, in *Revue du Nord*, 65, 1983, 297.

15) R. VAN UYTVEN, »Brabantse en Antwerpse centrale plaatsen (14de–19de eeuw)«, in *Le réseau urbain en Belgique dans une perspective historique (1350–1850). Une approche statistique et dynamique. Actes du 15<sup>e</sup> Colloque International Spa 4–6 septembre 1990*, Crédit Communal, Collection Histoire, série in –8°, 86, Brussels, 1992, 29–43, id., »Les moyennes et petites villes dans le Brabant septentrional avant 1400«, in *Les petites villes en Lotharingie. Die kleinen Städte in Lotharingen. Actes des 6<sup>e</sup> journées lotharingiennes 25–27 octobre 1990*, Luxembourg, 1992, 67–68 and P. KLEP, *Bevolking en arbeid in transformatie. Een onderzoek in Brabant 1700–1900*, Nijmegen, 1981, 86.

16) A. M. VAN DER WOUDE, *Het Noorderkwartier. Een regionaal-historisch onderzoek in de demografische en economische geschiedenis van westelijk Nederland*, A.A.G. Bijdragen 16, Wageningen, 1972, I, 75–92 and 107–115, D. E. H. DE BOER, *Tussen graaf en grafiek. Sociale en economische ontwikkelingen in het middeleeuwse Noordholland tussen 1345 en 1415*, Leiden, 1978, 40–41 and J. D. H. HARTEN, »Die Verstärkerung der Niederlande und der Einfluss der Städte des Rhein-Maas-Deltas auf das Umland in der frühen Neuzeit«, in *Siedlungsforschung. Archäologie – Geschichte – Geographie*, 7, 1989, 131–147.

16<sup>th</sup> century for a short while the capital city of the Netherlands, and there were at least three very important bishop's cities. Tournai, Utrecht and Liège were all big cities but also capitals of their own territories and seigneuries<sup>17)</sup>.

The high urban ratios were, however, not only caused by the mere presence of the big cities. The middle-sized, secondary and small towns as well added by the mere presence of their number to the extremely high urban ratios<sup>18)</sup>. In the county of Flanders, half of the urban population lived in a small or a secondary town. The political and economic dominance of the capital cities did not allow the existence of real middle-sized cities. This meant that the Flemish urban system had its own characteristics in comparison with for example Brabant which shows a more normal rank-size-distribution. A hasty view of the urban network in the densely populated county during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries shows only the demographic, political and economic dominance of the bigger cities. Yet a more thorough investigation reveals the dynamic part played by the smaller towns. The difference in size with the cities of Ghent or Bruges was, however, very important: the big cities counted at the height of their development up to 45,000 to 60,000 inhabitants, whereas even the biggest secondary towns only had slightly more than 5,000 and the majority of small towns less than 2,000 inhabitants<sup>19)</sup>.

This enormous gap, which can be explained by the early development of the capital cities as industrial and commercial giants, determined the trends in urbanisation within the Flemish system. Yet, the small and secondary towns counted a very diverse number of settlements which could develop highly specialised functions. Even in a period of a constant but slow de-urbanization (mainly caused by the declining population of the big cities) and of spectacular economic changes (a startling proto-industrialization in the countryside, the decline of Bruges and the rise of Antwerp), the top group of these smaller towns (in the region of Ghent especially the secondary industrial towns and the administrative centres) have always been very dynamic in adapting to changing circumstances. They successfully combined an export-orientated industrial infrastructure with their service functions for their rural hinterland.

The demographic patterns have been an essential indicator in identifying general urbanisation trends. A closer scrutiny of the demographic behaviour in the smaller towns of the Ghent-province shows a pattern which is spatially as well as typologically determined. The towns with export industries played the most dynamic part. The other towns, however, which had only regional ambitions, followed more or less the trends set by the industrialized towns and countryside. Only the very small towns did not experience any

17) BLOCKMANS, a. o., »Tussen crisis en welvaart«, 50–51 and R. VAN UYTVEN (ed.), *De geschiedenis van Mechelen*, Tiel, 1991, 41–43 and 83–84.

18) P. STABEL, *Dwarfs among Giants. The urban network in Flanders (14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century)*, Leuven/Apeldoorn, 1996.

19) STABEL, »Demography and hierarchy«, 206–228.

major population change throughout the late middle ages and the beginning of the early modern period: the small scale of these towns, the stability of the urban market function and the minimal impact of export industries limited changes in the short run. They were, however, sensible to long-term changes in the morphology of the urban network. A few towns would even lose their urban functions completely in the early modern period, while others could create a distinct profile as markets for the proto-industrialized countryside.

But let us look now at the features which determine the functional infrastructure, and therefore the spatial characteristics and spatial aspirations of the Flemish cities and towns. These features can be found at various levels and concern very different aspects of the urban network in the county. The most obvious element to look at, although by no means the most decisive variable, is the political dimension. In a heterogeneous geographical and political entity such as the Low Countries, it is very difficult to assess the importance of for example urban autonomy, its impact on the political and juridical hinterland of the town, the weight of the capital cities etc.<sup>20</sup>). Yet the strong sense of urban identity, which was often defended with arms against the increasingly important presence of the Burgundian dukes, helped to create or at least the cities tried to formulate independence or autonomy, much in the same way as the Italian city-states<sup>21</sup>).

The concentration of people, capital and economic strength in the big cities even led in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to a favorable balance of power of the urban element against their lords, more in particular in Flanders. The biggest city in the Low Countries, Ghent, came closest to being an autonomous city-state in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>22</sup>). In the final stages of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, the balance of power shifted again, and this time for good, in favour of centralising forces. The extra-regional asset, which was brought by the

20) Various contributions on the impact of Brabantine cities on their hinterland by R. VAN UYTVEN, M. BOUSSE, Ph. GODDING and others were collected in *De verhouding tussen stad en platteland in Brabant: stedelijk imperialisme of zelfverdediging? De Brabantse stad IV*, Brussels, 1977. For the county of Flanders, see W. P. BLOCKMANS, *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van de middeleeuwen naar nieuwe tijden (1384-1506)*, Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 90, Brussels, 1978, 107-127 and M. BOONE, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen ca. 1384-ca. 1453. Een sociaal-politieke studie van een staatsvormingsproces*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 133, Brussels, 1990, 191-198.

21) The many revolts and uprisings against the centralising policies of the counts of Flanders in the 14<sup>th</sup> century are described in D. NICHOLAS, *Town and countryside: social, economic and political tensions in fourteenth-century Flanders*, Brugge, 1971. The difficulties during the reign of the first Burgundian dukes are dealt with in M. BOONE, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen* (which centres on the position of the most powerful city, Ghent). For the turmoil after the death of Charles the Bold and of Mary, his daughter, and during the reign of Maximilian of Austria: W. P. BLOCKMANS, »Autocratie ou polyarchie? La lutte pour le pouvoir politique en Flandre de 1482-1495 d'après des documents inédits«, *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire*, 140, 1974, 257-368.

22) W. PREVENIER and M. BOONE, »The dream of a city-state«, 85-87 (cf. n. 13).

arrival of Philip the Bold, the first Burgundian Valois duke to become prince in one of the principalities of the Low Countries and which was reinforced by the growing Burgundian possessions, was the most decisive element in this respect. The force of one or several cities was no longer a match for the power of the Burgundian and later the Habsburgian rulers<sup>23</sup>).

The big cities, however, had created in the 13th and 14th centuries their own administrative, fiscal and political infrastructure in order to control their respective hinterlands and, despite their weakening political and military importance, even during the reign of the later Burgundian dukes (John the Fearless, 1405–1419, Philip the Good 1419–1467, Charles the Bold 1467–1477, Mary of Burgundy 1477–1485) and later on the Habsburgian princes (Maximilian of Austria, Philip the Fair, Charles V 1505–1555 and Philip II 1555–1598) they would continue to broaden their impact on the rest of the county<sup>24</sup>). They could easily defend much of their prerogatives by using their ultimate lever of power, their hold on the fiscal apparatus in the county. Even in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the successive failed revolts against Philip the Good, Maximilian and Charles V had broken the military power and limited much of the political influence of the *Members of Flanders*, as the capital cities were called, the cities were able to enhance their influence on the organisation of fiscal practice in the county<sup>25</sup>).

The political and economic power of the Members of Flanders became visible in the spatial structures inside the county during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Each one of the four Members of Flanders (the three capital cities and the rural Franc of Bruges) more or less succeeded in creating its own sphere of influence and gradually also subjected their respective areas to a proper administrative organisation. The exact origin of the politically and fiscally most significant of these administrative structures, the so-called *quarters* («*quartiers*» or «*kwartieren*») is not precisely known. The quarters developed gradually. At their origin were various elements involving the juridical, military and fiscal traditions inside Flanders<sup>26</sup>).

23) W. PREVENIER, *De leden en staten van Vlaanderen (1384–1405)*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 43, Brussels, 1961, passim.

24) The fiscal organisation in the county of Flanders is discussed in A. ZOETE, *De beden in het graafschap Vlaanderen onder de hertogen Jan zonder Vrees en Filips de Goede (1405–1467)*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 56, 149, Brussels, 1994 and N. MADDENS, *De beden in het graafschap Vlaanderen tijdens de regering van keizer Karel V (1515–1550)*, *Standen en Landen*, 72, Heule, 1978.

25) For the growing control of the Members of Flanders on the fiscal apparatus, see esp. A. ZOETE, *Heffingen op het Gemene Land ten bate van de Vier Leden en de Drie Staten van Vlaanderen (1405–1419)*, in *Standen en Landen*, 70, 1977, 121–157 and J. CRAEYBECKX, *Aperçu sur l'histoire des impôts en Flandre et au Brabant au cours du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in *Revue du Nord*, 29, 1947, 87–108.

26) W. P. BLOCKMANS, *De volksvertegenwoordiging*, 117–127, M. BOONE, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen*, 191–196.



The political impact of the Members on their respective quarters, however, was very different. The quarter of Bruges contained the secondary and small towns within the Franc, but lacked a rural basis. The Franc of Bruges was completely rural except for the small towns of Eeklo and Kaprijke on the border of the region of Ghent. The influence of Ypres on its quarter was still more limited. The economic decay experienced during the late middle ages limited the city's political ambitions as the third Member. Only the first Member, Ghent, was able to dominate its hinterland (the rural parts as well as the smaller towns in it) in real terms for significant periods of time. When comital power was weak, Ghent could even aspire to an Italian-like city-state. However, the growing power of the centralising Burgundian dukes hampered the city's political aspirations. In the successive military confrontations of Ghent with the prince (1379–1384, 1451–1453, 1477–1492, 1540) the city gradually had to give up many of its prerogatives<sup>27</sup>.

The quarters were very much the result of the growing power of the capital cities in Flanders. The older administrative organization within the county was based upon the castellanies<sup>28</sup>. These were smaller entities, dominated by the secondary administrative capital towns in the county, towns such as Oudenaarde, Kortrijk and Veurne<sup>29</sup>. Within the castellanies, smaller entities still were headed by other towns, usually small market and industrial towns<sup>30</sup>. In this way the main administrative arteries of the county were inbedded into a hierarchical system, in the end run by the big capital cities<sup>31</sup>. Those did not only manage to attract commercial and industrial activity. They became crucial focusing points for administration, fiscality as well as military organization and this for their respective hinterlands. The institutional framework of quarters and of their subdivisions also had consequences for the smaller towns in the urban network. They often acted as

27) M. BOONE and W. PEVENIER, »The dream of a city-state«, 90–105.

28) The castellanies (»*châtellenies*« or »*kasselrijen*«) were a juridical subdivision of the jurisdiction of the territorial magistrates: the courts of law of the castellany. For their development from the 11th century onward: F. L. GANSHOF, *Recherches sur les tribunaux de châtellenie en Flandre avant le milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Ghent, 1932 and A. C. F. KOCH, *De rechterlijke organisatie in het graafschap Vlaanderen in de 13de eeuw*, Antwerp, 1953.

29) Formally speaking, the administrative capital towns and cities remained mostly outside the territory of the castellany. Yet most of the juridical and administrative action took place in the towns and cities. This phenomenon undoubtedly boosted urban centrality and urban functions towards their hinterlands. The towns were also sometimes able to influence the governing bodies of the castellanies directly. In the castellany of Aalst representatives of the two leading towns (Aalst and Geraardsbergen) decided on fiscal matters together with the aldermen of the castellany (W. P. BLOCKMANS, *De volksvertegenwoordiging*, 94).

30) However, not all towns had a proper administrative hinterland. Most small towns in coastal Flanders had no formal ties whatsoever with the rural districts in the Franc of which they were the economic centre.

31) The administrative organisation of quarters, castellanies and subdivisions of the latter was clearly a hierarchical concept. The hierarchy also extended to the castellanies themselves. The leading castellanies, or in other words the regions of the big cities, were treated as being more important. Some even had formal control over others.

intermediaries in the exchange between the capital cities and their hinterlands (juridical procedures, military organisation and the representative bodies). This role helped the small and secondary towns to define their own hinterlands. The process was of course closely guarded by the capital cities. Every incidence of dissidence in their quarter clearly interfered with the basis of their power. The assemblies of the quarter had to secure the political reliability of subordinates and suppress diverging opinions. The quarter was, however, also the main tool for the cities to act as representatives of the county in their often difficult talks with the prince or with the other Members<sup>32</sup>).

## II. URBAN DOMINANCE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND URBAN HIERARCHY

A few examples, in no way complete, may help to show the consequences of this organization for the spatial features of Flanders : an integrated, hierarchically developed urban system and a strong rural dependence or rather a strong urban-rural interdependence in which the urban element clearly dominates and organizes space.

The *juridical hierarchy* in the county was very much an urban one. Even the officers of the count, baillifs and sheriffs, resided mostly in the towns, sometimes even outside their juridical territory<sup>33</sup>). The baillif of the southern part of the castellany of Aalst for example resided in the town of Oudenaarde in *Crown-Flanders*, on the leftbank of the River Scheldt, the border between France and the German Empire ; his jurisdiction, however, lay on the other side of the river in *Imperial Flanders*<sup>34</sup>). At the same time a clear hierarchy of courts of law gradually developed, the so-called *hoofdvaart* or *chef-de-sens*, with again at the top the big cities and at the bottom the rural courts, which had to consult their immediate regional capital towns for juridical advice. These urban courts in their turn went to the bigger secondary capital towns, which consulted the magistrates in the big capital cities<sup>35</sup>). Although the system was in many ways voluntarily, it would prove crucial for the establishment of urban hinterlands.

32) See P. STABEL, »Entre enclume et marteau«, 91–100.

33) H. NOWÉ, *Les baillis comtaux de Flandre des origines à la fin du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels, 1928, 366–368 and J. VAN ROMPAEY, *Het grafelijk baljuwsambt in Vlaanderen tijdens de Bourgondische periode*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 62, Brussels, 1967.

34) VAN ROMPAEY, *Het grafelijk baljuwsambt*, 200–205.

35) This framework had developed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The principle of »hoofdvaart« was the recognition that the courts of law in the larger jurisdictions had more experience with the practice of justice (»vroedschap«). To improve jurisdiction, they could offer their knowledge to the smaller magistrates (R. MONIER, »Le recours au chef de sens au moyen âge dans les villes flamandes«, in *Revue du Nord*, 14, 1928, 5–19, NICHOLAS, *Town and countryside*, 301–314, BLOCKMANS, *De volksvertegenwoordiging*, 112–115. From the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the system was gradually undermined by the comital Council of Flanders, which attracted a lot of cases in appeal.

Gradually in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Flemish cities and towns developed further control over their hinterland, while at the same time attracting supplementary fiscal revenue<sup>36</sup>). The rural out-burghers (*buitenpoorters*, *bourgeois forains*) of the towns added in reinforcing the urban spatial influence over their surroundings<sup>37</sup>). The burghership was in effect one of the most important means which the cities and towns had of controlling their rural, but also their urban hinterland. Most small towns would experience this all too often, when the magistrate of Ghent claimed jurisdiction over cases in which out-burghers of the city were involved<sup>38</sup>). The out-burghers also clearly diminished the impact of feudal lords, while spreading urban justice into the countryside<sup>39</sup>).

The policy of attracting out-burghers was in first instance promoted by the counts. As the secondary capital towns were able to attract high numbers of out-burghers, the counts hoped to balance in this way the political stronghold of the big cities<sup>40</sup>). However, very quickly, the spatial distribution of out-burghers adapted to the balance of power in the county. The big cities had out-burghers in their respective quarters (sometimes even beyond these borders, e.g. the case of Ghent), the regional capital towns in their castellannies and the small market towns in their immediate surroundings. From a tool to counter feudal influence, out-burghership became a menace for the comital policies and the prince tried to limit the impact of out-burghers from the big cities. After the defeat of Ghent at the hands of Philip the Good in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the city's juridical prerogatives were substantially diminished. Although the great charter of 1477, after

36) J. VERBEEMEN, »De buitenpoorterie in de Nederlanden«, in *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 12, 1957, 81–99.

37) STABEL, *Dwarfs among giants* (cf. n. 18).

38) Examples in the small town of Eeklo in P. STABEL and L. STOCKMAN, »Het Bourgondisch Tijdvak«, in *750 jaar Eeklo*, Eeklo, 1990, 40.

39) Out-burghers were exempt from several seignorial duties, for example from the *best chapter*, the tax which was to be paid to the lord after the death of a serf or taxable person (P. BONENFANT, J. BARTIER, A. VAN NIEUWENHUYSEN, *Recueil des ordonnances des Pays-Bas. 1<sup>ère</sup> série: 1381–1506. Ordonnances de Philippe le Hardi, de Marguerite de Male et de Jean sans Peur, 1381–1419*, 2, Brussels, 1974, 329–333). Out-burghers could also, by a simple plea to the urban magistrate, withdraw their judicial cases from the rural courts and transfer them to the town (DE LIMBURG-STIRUM, *Coutumes des deux villes et du Pays d'Alost*, 1, Brussels, 1878, 416). The notarial competence of urban magistrates also offered possibilities for out-burghers with regard, for example, to trading transactions, pledges, the sale of immovable property and any other kind of voluntary law, especially the actions of the urban magistrates in their role as guardians of orphans. Last but not least, the statute of out-burgher conferred a not inconsiderable social prestige within the rural community.

40) E. THOEN, »Rechten en plichten van plattelanders als instrumenten van machtspolitieke strijd tussen adel, stedelijke burgerij en grafelijk gezag in het laat-middeleeuwse Vlaanderen. Buitenpoorterie en mortemain-rechten ten persoonlijke titel in de kasselrijen van Aalst en Oudenaarde, vooral toegepast op de periode rond 1400, in *Machtsstructuren in de plattelandsgemeenschappen in België*, Gemeentekrediet van België, series in –8°, 77, Brussels, 1988, 484–485. Despite the count's opposition, Ghent could not be prevented from establishing its own out-burghers throughout the county (M. BOONE, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen*, 243–244).

the death of Charles the Bold at Nancy, restored many of its old privileges concerning the burghership for a short period<sup>41</sup>), the eventual victory of Maximilian of Austria in 1492 resulted in Ghent being allowed to have out-burghers only in the rural parts of its quarter. The privilege of having out-burghers was abolished entirely after the defeat of the city by Charles V in 1540. Ghent was allowed to have *hagepoorters* only just outside the urban border<sup>42</sup>).

The numbers of out-burghers could be very important indeed. A big city, such as Ghent, recruited high numbers in its own agricultural surroundings, but also in more distant areas and, peculiar phenomenon, also in the small and secondary towns of the county<sup>43</sup>). The secondary towns recruited in their own castellany and also in the very small market towns. The small towns had only out-burghers in their immediate surroundings. Percentages of out-burghers in the countryside could be overwhelming. Between 60 and 93 % of all countrymen in the immediate hinterland of the secondary town of Kortrijk were out-burghers of this town. Other secondary towns, such as Aalst and Geraardsbergen in Imperial-Flanders, reached equally high numbers. In this way a large portion of the population, sometimes almost the total population in the Flemish countryside, was indeed »urbanised« de facto.

The same pattern can be acknowledged when studying flows of migration. As the area where towns recruited newcomers grew and correlated with the size and economic structure of the receiving town or city<sup>44</sup>), and as towns, which always showed a demographic deficit, needed a constant influx of migrants, ties with the countryside and the hinterland were strengthened again<sup>45</sup>). Moreover, the need for seasonal labour, the

41) J. DECAVELE, »De Gentse poortelij en buitenpoortelij«, in *Recht en instellingen in de oude Nederlanden tijdens de middeleeuwen en de nieuwe tijd. Liber amicorum Jan Buntinx*, Leuven, 1981, 69–70.

42) J. DECAVELE, *Keizer tussen stropdragers: Karel V 1500–1558*, Leuven, 1990.

43) An analysis of the distribution of Ghent out-burghers between 1477 and 1481 shows the city having 1,805 out-burghers (or, with their families, about 7,400 people); an extrapolation of their number up to 1492 gives a total of 3,800 out-burghers, or about 14,400 people. More than 86 % lived in the quarter itself (J. DECAVELE, »De Gentse poortelij«, 70–79).

44) Data in P. STABEL, *De kleine stad in Vlaanderen (14de–16de eeuw). Bevolkingsdynamiek en economische functies van de kleine en secundaire stedelijke centra in het Gentse kwartier*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, Brussels, 1996, 34–45 and E. THOEN, »Immigration to Bruges during the late middle ages«, in S. CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *Le migrazione in Europa (sec. XIII–XVIII)*. 25. *Settimana di Studio Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica »F. Datini«*, Firenze, 1994, 453–491. Although migration flows can only be measured with the biased data of the new burghers, nearly all towns in the 15<sup>th</sup> century southern Low Countries received a yearly average of 3–3.5 new burghers per 1,000 inhabitants. This figure applies for the big commercial centres such as Bruges and Antwerp, for the booming industrial towns and for smaller regional centres. Only the distance which newcomers travelled depended upon the size and economic structure of the receiving town.

45) A. VAN DER WOUDE, »Population developments in the Northern Netherlands (1500–1800) and the validity of the »urban graveyard« effect«, in *Annales de démographie historique*, 1982, 55–75, P. STABEL,

growth of service industries and therefore of urban middle classes needing staff and servants etc. created the need for a steady, though difficult to grasp, continuum of temporary migration towards and from the towns. This helped to spread further urban values in the country. The urban environment was certainly no strange new world for the Flemish countryfolk.

Townsmen also invested a substantial part of their income in the countryside and in the rural, or rather the mixed rural-industrial economy in the country. They acquired lands for agricultural purposes as well as for other use (leisure, social status, titles etc.). This constant capital flow also helped to integrate the rural world into a system of urban supply (grain, peat, meat etc.) and shaped its spatial organisation at the same time<sup>46</sup>. Very striking are the investments in the peat-producing regions in coastal Flanders and in the Four Offices (the region south of the Scheldt-estuary). Peat was the prime source of fuel for heating in the late medieval cities. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards real property of the senior Ghent patrician families was concentrated in the moors north of the city<sup>47</sup>. But wealthy townsmen were also very careful to establish personal links with other agricultural activities. They invested also in woodland, in arable land, in pastures, in regions producing building material (clayey soils, stone quarries, etc.)<sup>48</sup>. The analysis of urban real property in the countryside around Kortrijk shows more or less stable proportions between the possession of houses and farms (19 à 20 %), arable land (56 à 61 %), meadows (3 à 7 %), woodland (2 à 5 %) and different kinds of rents on agricultural holdings (13 à

*De kleine stad*, 27–53, A. SHARLIN, »Natural decrease in Early Modern cities: a reconsideration«, in *Past and Present*, 79, 1978, 126–138. See also the remarks of K. WESOLY in »Der weibliche Bevölkerungsanteil in spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Städten und die Betätigung von Frauen im zünftigen Handwerk (insbesondere am Mittel- und Oberrhein)«, in *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 128, 1980, 69–116.

46) R. VAN UYTVEN, »L'approvisionnement des villes des anciens Pays-Bas au moyen âge«, in *L'approvisionnement des villes de l'Europe occidentale au moyen âge et aux temps modernes*, Flaran, 5, Auch, 1985, 75–116 and NICHOLAS, *Town and countryside*, 272–303.

47) F. BLOCKMANS, *Het Gentsche stadspatriciaat tot omstreeks 1302*, Antwerpen- 's Gravenhage, 1938, 404–418 and E. THOEN, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijden. Testregio: de kasselrij van Oudenaarde en Aalst*, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis, 90, Ghent, 1988, 515–517, B. AUGUSTYN and E. THOEN, »Van veen tot bos. Krachtlijnen van de landschapsevolutie van het Noordvlaamse Meetjesland van de 12e tot de 19e eeuw, in *Historisch-Geografisch Tijdschrift*, 5, 1987, 97–112. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century these investment policies remained more or less the same, although the importance of investment in arable land and meadows in the regions south of the city grew significantly (L. WYNANT, »Peiling naar de vermogenstructuur te Gent op basis van de staten van goed 1380–1389«, in W.P. BLOCKMANS, a.o., *Studiën betreffende de sociale structuren te Brugge, Kortrijk en Gent in de 14e en 15e eeuw*, Standen en Landen, 63, Heule, 1973, 138).

48) See for instance examples in J. P. SOSSON, *Les travaux publics de la ville de Bruges XIV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles: les matériaux, les hommes*, Gemeentekrediet van België, Pro Civitate, Historische uitgaven, reeks in –8°, nr. 48, Brussels, 1977.

17 %)⁴⁹). Arable land, gardens and meadows were usually located in the immediate surroundings of the towns. Farms, houses, woodland and rents were bought at greater distances from the town walls.

As the Flemish urban economy was able to use parts of the surplus value of its industrial exports to import a lot of its grain supply from northern France, later on also from the Baltic, the structure of agriculture was changed profoundly, stimulating intensive husbandry (dairy farming, vegetables) and alternative crops (dyes, flax) and creating independent industrial hinterlands (weaving of linen and rough woollen cloth, later on the production of finer cloth such as sayes and mixed fabrics)⁵⁰). And again clear hierarchical patterns developed in function of urban markets. Even property relations in the countryside were influenced by the high degree of urbanization. Each city and each town had ambitions in creating and broadening urban real estate in rural areas. Burghers of small towns owned land in the immediate surroundings⁵¹). Inhabitants of the larger secondary towns had real property within the borders of their respective castellanies⁵²). Landowners from the big capital cities had real estate in nearly every part of the county and penetrated without difficulty into the hinterlands of the other towns⁵³).

Other parameters show the same hierarchical concept. Socio-cultural life in the county, this will come as no surprise, was dominated by the cities and towns. Yet here as well clear hierarchical patterns would develop concerning the organization of cultural, social or religious infrastructure as well as the regional impact of these activities. This can be

49) P. STABEL, *Patronen van verstedelijking in het laatmiddeleeuwse en vroegmoderne Vlaanderen. Demografische ontwikkelingen en economische functies van de kleine en secundaire steden in het Gentse kwartier (veertiende-zestiende eeuw)*, unpublished Ph. D., GHENT, 1994–1995, 518–536.

50) M.J. TITS-DIEUAIDE, *La formation des prix céréalières en Brabant et en Flandre au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels, 1975, 156–178 and more general remarks in A. VERHULST, *Précis d'histoire rurale de la Belgique*, Brussels, 1990, 103–108.

51) P. STABEL, »The urban network in the county of Flanders during the later middle ages and the 16<sup>th</sup> century«, in P. CLARK (ed.), *Towns and networks in early modern Europe*, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, working papers, 4, 1990, 13–29.

52) The real property of Oudenaarde burghers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was concentrated in a radius of 10 km on the left bank of the River Scheldt (the administrative hinterland of the town) and on the right bank, where a lot of rural weavers working for the Oudenaarde cloth and tapestry industries lived. Here both the institutional links and the economic interests have shaped the pattern of investments. The town-dwellers possessed mostly meadows in the valley of the Scheldt and arable lands and woodlands on the higher grounds (STABEL, *Patronen van verstedelijking*, 530–533 and C. SCHEERLINCK, *Het immobiliënbezit van de poorters te Oudenaarde en Pamele in de tweede helft van de vijftiende eeuw*, unpublished thesis, Ghent, 1986, 105–107).

53) WYNANT, »Peiling naar de vermogenstructuur«, 47–159 and NICHOLAS, *Town and countryside*, 275–277, which both describe the real property of Ghent burghers outside the city walls in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and STABEL, *Patronen van verstedelijking*, 518–536 for the secondary towns of Kortrijk and Oudenaarde and for the smaller towns of Tiel and Harelbeke in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. There was concentrated urban property in a radius of 15 km outside the Brabantine city of Leuven and more disparate property of townsmen up to 30 km outside the city walls (VAN UYTVEN, »L'approvisionnement des villes«, 96).

acknowledged for example by the organization of schools or the number of students each city or town sent to universities<sup>54</sup>). The matriculates of Leuven University from 1427 onwards and those for German, French or Italian universities show clear hierarchical patterns. There were many students from the big cities (especially at foreign universities), smaller numbers originated from secondary towns, still smaller numbers from small industrial towns. The small market towns on the other hand, dwarf towns, semi-rural settlements and the countryside hardly sent any student at all to the universities<sup>55</sup>). Yet this hierarchical pattern must be corrected because the secondary towns sent proportionally more student than the capital cities. The greater share of middle classes in urban society is certainly causing this discrepancy. As to the feedback of graduated university students returning to the Flemish cities and towns, the picture completely changes. The big cities now dominate the other components of the urban system<sup>56</sup>).

The same is true for the various expressions of elitist culture. Humanists in the 16th century, printers and booksellers in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century, painters, glassworkers, sculptors, embroiderers, all kinds of luxury crafts can only be found in the bigger centres, occasionally also in some bigger secondary towns<sup>57</sup>). More popular cultural events and organisations were spread more evenly in the urban network. Yet, here as well, tendencies of concentration in the bigger cities remained active and added to the more diversified nature of urban central functions in the bigger cities and towns. Several religious festivities and processions can be mentioned<sup>58</sup>), but also the spreading of literature

54) J. DECAVELE, »Het culturele en intellectuele netwerk : middeleeuwen en 16de eeuw«, in *Het stedelijke netwerk in België in historisch perspectief (1350-1850). Een statistische en dynamische benadering. Handelingen van het 15de Internationaal Colloquium. Spa 4-6 september 1990*, Gemeentekrediet van België, series in -8°, 86, Brussels, 1992, 365-383.

55) P. STABEL, »Socio-cultural criteria in the research on urban hierarchies: the small towns of Flanders in the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries«, in H. VAN DER WEE (ed.), *Dynamics and stagnation in the urban network of the Netherlands, 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries*, Workshop on Quantitative Economic History, 90.01, Leuven, 1990, 40-51.

56) STABEL, *Dwarfs among giants* (cf. n. 18).

57) A. ROUZET, *Dictionnaire des imprimeurs, libraires et éditeurs du XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles dans les limites géographiques de la Belgique actuelle*, Collection du Centre national de l'archéologie et de l'histoire du Livre, 3, Brussels, 1975 and G. GLORIEUX, B. OP DE BEECK (eds.), *Belgica Typographica 1541-1600. Catalogus librorum impressorum ab anno MDXLI ad annum MDC in regionibus quae nunc Regni Belgarum partes sunt. IV. Indices*, Nieuwkoop, 1994. Similar conclusions in S. CORSTEN, »Der frühe Buchdruck und die Stadt«, in B. MOELLER, H. PATZE, K. STACKMANN (eds.), *Studien zum städtischen Bildungswesen des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen, 1983, 9-32.

58) P. VANDENBROECK, »Stadscultuur in de Nederlanden ca. 1400-ca. 1600: ideologische zwaartepunten, evenwichtsmechanismen, dubbelbinding«, in *Driemaandelijks Tijdschrift van het Gemeentekrediet van België*, 44, 1990. In rural parishes the formal hierarchy within the processions was less pronounced and in any way not dominated by the corporate organisation of society (M. RUBIN, »Religious culture in town and country: reflections on a great divide«, in D. ABULAFIA, M. FRANKLIN, M. RUBIN (eds.), *Church and city 1000-1500. Essays in honour of Christopher Brooke*, Cambridge, 1992, 10-12).

and literary themes, chambers of rhetoricians and last but not least in the Flemish context the growth and development of highly specialised luxury industries (which would prove crucial for the urban economies in the bigger centres throughout the early modern period) and the development of the market for arts and crafts (guilds, workshops etc.)<sup>59</sup>. Urban hierarchy and spatial differentiation can even be seen in the social institutions, such as the various organisations of poor relief, the hospitals, urban pawn broking institutions etc. Remarkable in this respect is for example the organisation of lepre-houses. These were organised hierarchically, very much in the same way as jurisdiction or fiscality, and the big cities controlled every urban and rural institution in its own quarter.

### III. URBAN ECONOMY AND THE URBAN HINTERLAND

The analysis of the economic structures within the Flemish urban network shows also a clear process of spatial organization and spatial division of labour which developed along the already described hierarchical patterns. Moreover, diversification of urban central functions throughout the late middle ages and the early modern period enhanced the process of, what could be called, the »urbanization« of the countryside. In general, we can distinguish between three spatial levels, the local, the regional and the extra-regional dimension. Of these, especially the latter two will be addressed, as they help to establish patterns of spatial organization within the framework of urban systems.

The basic level of urban economies was without doubt the regional dimension. This consisted of the development of a local service infrastructure, the supply of town and countryside, the government of the town in all its aspects, the cultural and religious infrastructure and the internal social safety net. All these elements were essential for the survival of an urban community. The range of urban central functions constituted the essence of urban identity and for the very small towns it was the only reason for existence. But, as we have seen, institutional, political, juridical and even social elements were also crucial in creating an urban hinterland. Different staple rights had to secure urban supply<sup>60</sup>. Urban weights and measures were used in the countryside in order to make the market

59) STABEL, *Dwarfs among giants*, J. HEERS, »Les métiers et les fêtes «médiévales« en France du Nord et en Angleterre«, *Revue du Nord*, 54, 1972, 193–206 and R. VAN UYTVEN, »Scènes de la vie sociale dans les villes des Pays-Bas du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles, in *Actes du Colloque «La sociabilité urbaine en Europe du Nord-Ouest du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mémoires de la société d'agriculture, sciences et arts de Douai*, 8, 1983, 11–31.

60) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 256–258. See also R. HILTON, »Medieval market towns and simple commodity production«, in *Past and Present*, 109, 1985, 22–23 and S.R. EPSTEIN, »Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis : Sicily and Tuscany compared«, in *Past and Present*, 130, 1991, 3–50 and id., »Town and country : economy and institutions in late medieval Italy«, in *Economic History Review*, 46, 1993, 475.



region homogeneous<sup>61</sup>). Out-burgers in the countryside and the juridical procedure of *chef-de-sens* strengthened urban power in its hinterland. Moreover, the towns, and more in particular the regional capital towns of the *kasselrijen*, developed further central functions for fiscal and administrative functions.

The surrounding countryside became more and more important for the urban economies. In the traditional drapery it had already been a reservoir for cheap labour, especially in the preparing stages of the wool<sup>62</sup>). The urban entrepreneurs, however, were very careful to keep the levers of regional power in their own hands. In the new industries of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (linen, sayes, tapestries, etc.) the relation with the rural world became more complex. Labour intensive production in the export and service industries was rejected and transferred to the countryside<sup>63</sup>). The rural production of linen was especially traded through the urban markets and in the tapestry weaving in the western parts of the province of Aalst a widespread system of *putting-out* was established<sup>64</sup>).

Despite a very successful economic integration of town and countryside in the long run, in the beginning stages the conflict issues not were lacking; in periods of crisis the rural proto-industry was a natural scapegoat for the urban aldermen<sup>65</sup>). As the urban and rural economies were geared to one another, most of the debates disappeared and a func-

61) The cities and regional market towns were able to enforce the use of urban measures in their own hinterland at a very early stage (VAN UYTVEN, »L'approvisionnement des villes«, 95, P. STABEL, »Markt en hinterland: de centrale functies van de kleinere steden in Vlaanderen tijdens de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijd«, in *Het stedelijk netwerk in België in historisch perspectief (1350–1850). Een statistische en dynamische benadering. Handelingen van het 15de Internationaal Colloquium. Spa 4–6 september 1990*, Gemeentekrediet van België, series in –8°, 86, Brussels, 1992, 347 and P. VANDEWALLE, *Oude maten, gewichten en muntstelsels in Vlaanderen, Brabant en Luxemburg*, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis, 82, Ghent, 1984, passim). In the lesser urbanized regions, such as the county of Namur, the use of measures was fixed at a later stage, when the regional capital towns Namur and Dinant became dominant in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Yet the measures of the nearby Brabantine towns of Leuven, Nivelles and Wavre were also used (L. GENICOT, »La structure économique d'une principauté médiévale. Le comté de Namur du XII<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle«, in *Etudes historiques à la mémoire de Noël Didier*, Paris, 1960, 170–171).

62) On the different systems of putting-out in the traditional Flemish cloth industries, see R. HOLBACH, »Exportproduktion und Fernhandel als raumbestimmende Kräfte. Entwicklungen in nordwesteuropäischen Gewerbelandschaften vom 13.–16. Jahrhundert«, in *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte*, 13, 1987, 227–256 and id., »Some remarks on the role of putting-out in Flemish and Northwest-European production«, in M. BOONE, W. PREVENIER (eds.), *La draperie ancienne des Pays-Bas: débouchés et stratégies de survie (14<sup>e</sup>–16<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Leuven, 1993, 207–250.

63) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 200–215.

64) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 146–151 and 176–189, THOEN, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*, 980–1018, E. SABBE, *De Belgische vlassnijverheid. Deel 1. De Zuidnederlandse vlassnijverheid tot het verdrag van Utrecht (1713)*, Kortrijk, 1975 and E. ROOBAERT, »Het legwerkersbedrijf in het Land van Aalst, vooral te Geraardsbergen van ca. 1554 tot ca. 1564«, in *Artes Textiles*, 4, 1957–58.

65) STABEL, »Entre enclume et marteau, 91–105 and M. BOONE, »L'industrie textile à Gand au bas moyen âge ou les resurrections successives d'une activité réputée moribonde«, in M. BOONE, W. PREVENIER (eds.), *La draperie ancienne des Pays-Bas: débouchés et stratégies de survie (14<sup>e</sup>–16<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Leuven, 1993, 15–61.

tional division of labour between town and countryside was created: capital intensive sectors which demanded a high degree of technical know how and product control were located in the towns (expensive cloth in the 15<sup>th</sup> and fine linen and breweries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), while the massive production of goods of low added value happened in the countryside. Even some of the standardised, more expensive products demanding a relatively high degree of know-how could be trusted to rural workers (tapestries). But a strict, corporative and urban control on this new types of production remained in place<sup>66</sup>.

However crucial the function of the countryside in the industrial development of the towns was, the urban markets were in the first place collecting points for the extraction of the agricultural surplus and distribution points for central goods. In most towns, and especially in the smaller ones, this was the most important and often the only economic activity. The growing industrialization of the countryside gave this regional dimension of the urban economy a further stimulus, which from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onward led to a further specialisation of the urban central functions<sup>67</sup>. The emphasis lay on finished goods and on the tertiary sector. Some of the secondary towns could even attract an interregional significance: the semi-rural town of Ronse directed its woollen cloth production towards the internal market in the Southern Netherlands<sup>68</sup>, other towns exploited their strategic location on the main artery roads and rivers in the county to develop their grain markets<sup>69</sup> or could attract in the late 15th century a brewing industry for the home market<sup>70</sup>. Hierarchical industrial networks developed around the finishing industries of the big cities<sup>71</sup>.

66) For the organisation of the production of tapestries in and around Oudenaarde, see M. VANWELDEN, *Het tapijtweversambacht te Oudenaarde 1441–1772*, OUDENAARDE, 1979, 11–15 and the older contribution of H. PIRENNE, »Note sur la fabrication des tapisseries en Flandre au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle«, in *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 4, 1906, 644–656.

67) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 221–254.

68) G. GADEYNE, »Ronse, een grensgeval«, in *Album Carlos Wyffels*, Brussels, 1987, 161–176 and G. GADEYNE, P. VAN BUTSELE, »De bevolking van Ronse in 1559–1579«, in *Annalen van de Geschiedkundige Kring van Ronse*, 15, 1966, 97–108.

69) For example the secondary town of Aalst (STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 226–230 and M.J. TITS-DIEUAIDE, »Le grain et le pain dans l'administration des villes de Brabant et de Flandre au moyen âge«, in *Het openbaar initiatief van de gemeenten van België. Historische grondslagen (ancien régime)*, Gemeentekrediet van België, Pro Civitate, Historische uitgaven, 85, Brussels, 1984, 453–491). For the famous Ghent staple, see G. BIGWOOD, »Gand et la circulation des grains en Flandre du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle«, in *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 4, 1906, 397–460 and more recently M. BOONE, M. HOWELL, »Becoming early modern in the late medieval Low Countries: GHENT, Douai and the late medieval crisis«, in *Urban History*, forthcoming.

70) For example, the town of Menen gained much importance thanks to its brewing industries (A. VAN MARCKE, »De vrije brouwers te Menen in de 16de en 17de eeuw«, in *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring A. Rembry-Barth te Menen*, 1, 1972, 29–42).

71) Lille specialised during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century in finishing cloth from the neighbouring drapery towns, such as Menen and Kortrijk (D. CLAUZEL, S. CALONNE, »Artisanat rural et marché urbain: la draperie à Lille et dans ses campagnes à la fin du moyen âge«, in *Revue du Nord*, 72, 1990, 531–573, R. DUPLESSIS, *Lille and the Dutch revolt: urban stability in an era of revolution 1500–1582*, Cambridge, 1991 and STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 116–118).

But the urban markets themselves fitted also into a hierarchical pattern determined by the features of a central place system. The very small towns supplied goods with a low central value to a socially and spatially limited hinterland. The secondary markets were already more differentiated, could supply a broader area and a socially heterogeneous clientèle. The big cities and more in particular the commercial cities were at the top of the market hierarchy. They invaded the hinterlands of the secondary towns, could offer a complete range of goods and services and reached, as the distance from the city became more important, ever wealthier customers<sup>72</sup>). The same mechanisms can be seen in the migration flows: the migration area increased with the population size of the receiving town as did the social profile of the immigrant. In this way the occurrence of multi-stage migration from countryside to small towns and from small towns to bigger cities was not infrequent<sup>73</sup>).

Finally, there was the very important extraregional and international dimension of the Flemish urban network. Where the regional dimension of the small and secondary towns, because of their market function and political and economic significance in their region, was the key element for survival, and their interregional function could already enhance urban centrality and so their economic basis, the international dimension and industrial function was responsible for the changes within the urban system. The fate of the urban textile industries depended upon the organisation of the international market and upon its trade cycle. Especially the trade flows towards the *gateway* – Bruges in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Antwerp in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – were crucial in this respect. According to the international demand, the cities and towns directed their industrial production and organised their commercial activity, while in the course of the late middle ages the relationship with the rural linen and tapestry industries became more important.

The industrial organisation in the different types of late medieval Flemish towns had its own characteristics. Because of the lesser supply of highly skilled craftsmen in smaller centres, the switch to luxury- and refining industries, which had happened in the big cities, was not an option<sup>74</sup>). Instead, the emphasis was on the massive production of standardised goods with a high added value, such as the Oudenaarde tapestries and the Kortrijk linens. This policy had already led in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the growth of the cloth industry in secondary centres such as Dendermonde, Oudenaarde, Geraardsbergen and

72) P. STABEL, »Markt en hinterland: de centrale functies van de kleinere steden in Vlaanderen tijdens de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijd«, in *Het stedelijk netwerk in België in historisch perspectief (1350–1850). Een statistische en dynamische benadering. Handelingen van het 15de Internationaal Colloquium. Spa 4–6 september 1990*, Gemeentekrediet van België, series in –8°, 86, Brussels, 1992, 341–363 and id. *De kleine stad*.

73) STABEL, *De kleine stad* and id. »Demography and hierarchy«, 206–228.

74) H. VAN DER WEE, »Industrial dynamics and the process of urbanization and de-urbanization from the late middle ages to the eighteenth century. A survey«, in H. VAN DER WEE (ed.), *The rise and decline of urban industries in Italy and in the Low Countries (late middle ages–early modern times)*, Leuven, 1988, 307–381.

especially in the towns of the *Leie*-basin (Kortrijk, Menen)<sup>75</sup>. The same policy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century guaranteed further success for the draperies in Aalst, Kortrijk, Menen and Oudenaarde, well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>76</sup>.

The inevitable decline of the traditional drapery caused many urban centres to switch to alternative export-orientated industries. These experienced very often great success on the international textile market. Yet urban industries remained to a large extent dependent upon exogeneous flows : the international demand was often very volatile and the organisation of trade flows was far out of the reach of the local tradesmen. Foreign merchants residing in Bruges or Antwerp and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century more and more Flemish companies from Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent or Lille controlled production and directed output on the markets<sup>77</sup>. Only in a few secondary towns (Oudenaarde or Kortrijk) did local tradesmen or entrepreneurs develop independent activities. Their role, however, was mostly limited to being local agents of merchants in the gateway-cities. Usually the drapers, merchants or entrepreneurs were only active inside the urban hinterland or organised the transport of their goods to the gateway<sup>78</sup>. The trade in raw materials (dyes, wool) was completely out of their reach and remained concentrated in the big cities.

In the second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the flourishing of the cloth industry for the time being came to an end. Supply difficulties with English wool and several trade barriers, foreign competition and shrinking markets caused the decline of the Flemish and Brabantine traditional cloth industries<sup>79</sup>. Although the crisis was in no way general<sup>80</sup> and

75) J. H. MUNRO, »Industrial transformations in the North-West European textile trades, c. 1290–c. 1340: economic progress or economic crisis?«, in B.M.S. CAMPBELL (ed.), *Before the Black death. Studies in the crisis of the early fourteenth century*, Manchester, 1991, 110–148, id., »Urban regulation and monopolistic competition in the textile industries of the late medieval Low Countries«, in E. AERTS, J. H. MUNRO, *Textiles of the Low Countries in European Economic History. Proceedings of the Tenth International Economic History Congress, session B-15*, Leuven, 1990, 41–52, O. MÜS, »De verhouding van de waard tot de drapier in de Kortrijkse draperie op het einde van de 15e eeuw«, in *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis te Brugge (Emulatie)*, 98, 1961, 156–211 and F. MELIS, »La diffusione nel Mediterraneo occidentale dei panni di Wervicq e delle altre città delle Lys attorno al 1400«, in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, 3, 1962, 219–243.

76) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 155–174.

77) W. BRULEZ, *De firma Della Faille en de internationale handel van Vlaamse firma's in de 16e eeuw*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Klasse der Letteren, 35, Brussels, 1959, passim.

78) See, for instance, the activities of small cloth entrepreneurs in Kortrijk and Menen on the Bruges market.

79) J.H. MUNRO, *Wool, cloth and gold. The struggle for bullion in Anglo-Burgundian trade 1340–1478*, Brussel/Toronto, 1973.

80) Although very hard to quantify, export results remained particularly good in central and eastern Europe (S. ABRAHAM-THISSE, »Le commerce des draps de Flandre en Europe du Nord : Faut-il encore parler du déclin de la draperie flamande au bas moyen-âge«, in M. BOONE, W. PREVENIER (eds.), *La draperie ancienne des Pays-Bas: débouchés et stratégies de survie (14<sup>e</sup>–16<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Leuven/Apeldoorn, 1993, 167–206).

towards the end of the century there was even a revival of the traditional cloth industry in Kortrijk, Aalst and Oudenaarde<sup>81</sup>), the *élan* of this export industry was broken for good. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century only Menen would still be active as a small cloth town on the international market in Antwerp. The many attempts of the urban drapers, in the big cities as well as in the smaller production centres, to diversify their production or seek out other trade routes were only partially successful and the cloth industry would eventually decay together with the declining Bruges gateway in the starting years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The end of the drapery, however, did not mean the collapse of the Flemish urban system. New industries would replace it from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The massive development of the rural linen industry in the provinces of Aalst, Kortrijk and Oudenaarde offered the smaller towns the possibility to develop as transit markets towards the new gateway-city, Antwerp<sup>82</sup>). Moreover, the urban linen industry also seized the new opportunities. The changing demand towards light fabrics stimulated the production of high quality linens in Ghent, Bruges, Dendermonde, Tielt, Aalst and Kortrijk. In the latter town the industry would eventually develop to the production of damasks. Even the light drapery located in semi-rural towns such as Hondshoote and Ronse, was stimulated and spread to other towns. Urban brewing experienced a breakthrough and became thanks to the concentration of grain trade a very much urban phenomenon, e.g. in the towns on the River Dender such as Aalst and especially in the town Menen near the grain producing regions of Walloon-Flanders. Beer from the latter town was exported on a massive scale to the whole county and replaced partly Dutch and German imports. The biggest success, however, was certainly the tapestry industry of Oudenaarde in Southern Flanders. Because of massive immigration this town grew spectacularly.

Recovery did not happen only thanks to the development of new export industries, it was also generated by a process of differentiation within the urban service functions. The larger cities had already specialised in the production and distribution of luxury commodities during the previous century<sup>83</sup>). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the same process was repeated in the secondary towns. Service industries (retail trade, tailors, shoemakers, etc.) increased substantially their share in the urban economies<sup>84</sup>). The phenomenon became even stronger as the rapid development of rural industries created a growing demand for finished urban goods. The very small towns, however, never could develop strong luxury or finishing industries: even for the finishing of expensive cloth they produced, the drapers had to go to the big cities (Lille, Ghent).

81) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 172–174.

82) VAN DER WEE, *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy*, 2, The Hague, 1963, 185–190.

83) H. VAN DER WEE, »Structural changes and specialization in the industry of the Southern Netherlands 1100–1600«, in *Economic history Review*, 28, 1975, 203–221.

84) STABEL, *De kleine stad*, 251–253.

The uprising against Philip II from 1569 onwards was a significant turning-point. The trade through the gateway Antwerp collapsed for several decades and the combination of economic crisis, political upheaval, religious persecution and military events caused a massive emigration of skilled labour and the decline of the urban export industries. Yet, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were already signs of recovery. The industrial development and the service functions, which were created in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, were the breeding ground for a renewed growth<sup>85</sup>). It is significant that the urban ratios in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century hardly differed from those in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>86</sup>).

#### IV. URBAN HIERARCHIES AND SPATIAL PERCEPTION

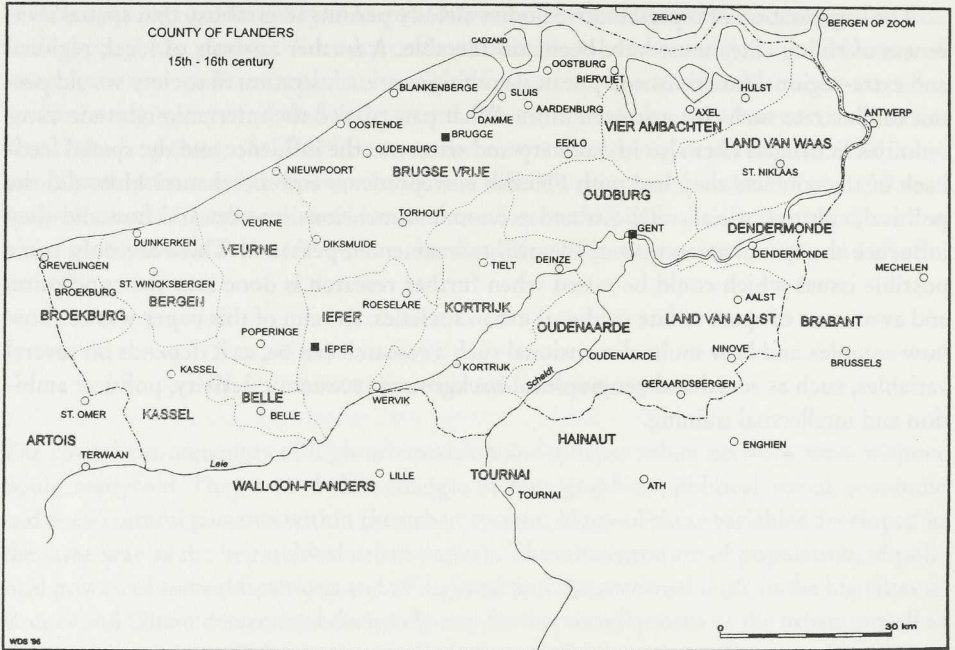
The spatial consequences of high urbanisation and a dense urban network were without doubt manifold. They caused clear changes in demographical, political, social, economic and even cultural patterns within the urban system. Many of these variables developed in the same way as the hierarchical urban pattern. The concentration of population, of political power, of central functions and of regional and international trade in the big cities of Bruges and Ghent determined decisively any further development of the urban as well as the rural structures. This can be clearly acknowledged in the political and economic dominance of the capital cities and the division into spheres of influence within the framework of the county.

The examples given in the previous chapters do not have the ambition to be either comprehensive or conclusive. Other parameters have to be looked at as well. The impetus of Burgundian and Habsburgian centralization, the tendencies of concentration of political and juridical power outside the county in the city of Mechelen and the Brabantine capital city of Brussels from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, changes of the international trade (the shift of the gateway from Bruges to Antwerp) and of industrial organization in the Low Countries as a whole and the consequences in the long run of de-urbanization in Flanders from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and in Brabant from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards need closer scrutiny. These elements will permit to establish with more detail how the spatial organization of urban economies and political practice has operated. Closer scrutiny of private documents (diaries, memoirs, private accouts, wills and probate inventories) will also allow whether the pattern established here is the consequence of spatial awareness of urban entrepreneurs, merchants, rentiers and politicians.

85) P. STABEL, »De-urbanisation and Urban Decline in Flanders from 1500 to 1800: the Disintegration of an Urban System?«, in D. McCABE (ed.), *European urbanisation, social structure and problems between the eighteenth and twentieth century*, Leicester, 1995, 87–108.

86) KLEP, »Population estimates of Belgium«, 497–498.

The organisation of representative bodies already permits to establish that spatial awareness of ruling elites must have been considerable. A further analysis of local, regional and extra-regional functions and political ambitions at each stratum of society would permit to illustrate such patterns even more. What part played the international trade communities in Bruges, later also in Antwerp and what was the influence and the spatial feedback of the contacts they had with Flemish entrepreneurs and merchants? How did the political, cultural, social, religious and economic dimensions interact and how did they influence the spatial awareness of Flemish townsmen en peasants? These are only some possible issues which could be raised when further research is done into the conception and awareness of space in late medieval urban societies. the aim of this paper was to show how complex and how multi-dimensional such a research can be, as it depends on several variables, such as social and geographical background, economic activity, political ambition and intellectual training.



The administrative organization of the county of Flanders in the late middle ages. – The quarter of Ghent consisted of the castellanies of the Oudburg (the surroundings of the city), of the Four Offices (*Vier Ambachten*) and of Waas north of the city, of the castellanies of Dendermonde and Aalst in the Denderbasin, of Oudenaarde along the River Scheldt and of Kortrijk in the Leie-basin. The Franc of Bruges (*Brugse Vrije*) was associated with the coastal castellanies of Veurne, Bergues and Bourbourg. The cities in these regions belonged to the purely urban quarter of Bruges while the quarter of Ypres consisted of the castellanies of Ypres itself and those of Bailleul (Belle), and Cassel.