

Burghers as Cultural Agents in the Low Countries and the Empire

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The general theme of this volume, Germany *and* Western Europe, leaves open the question whether we shall deal with comparisons or with influences. In some cases of particular cultural achievements such as the production of a manuscript or the construction of a major building, it may be possible to identify the intellectual authors and artists, to follow their movements and to compare their products. When we think of more encompassing processes such as the dissemination of types of governance or the use of written documents, it becomes much more difficult to point to causes and effects. We will first have to clarify which phenomena we consider to be crucial, to observe the timing of their appearance and impact, before it becomes possible to compare these data and to try and look for influences. Even then, it remains an open question if the phenomena under consideration were really linked, since they might have appeared simultaneously or in succession without any causal relation.

If we are looking for cultural transfers through space and time, its general conditions should be kept in mind: we need communication, mobility and the willingness to adopt different practices. None of these preconditions is self-evident; on the other hand, the intensity of communication and mobility, and a tradition of openness enhance the probability of transfers. Adoption mostly requires adaptation in order to incorporate innovations into another cultural universe. This mental attitude presupposes interaction, curiosity and the preparedness to change established traditions. Travelling certainly favoured the capacity of individuals and collectives to accommodate differences, change, and innovation. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that, while so-called novelty has been highly appreciated in industrial societies during the last centuries, this concept was generally considered in the later middle ages as a most undesirable category.

In the high middle ages, only privileged categories of persons had legally and materially the opportunity to travel: one thinks evidently of the nobility, the clergy, pilgrims, students, and, increasingly, merchants. The latter two categories have predominantly been recruited among the urban burghers, and they may have acted as agents of cultural transfer on a larger scale than the members of the first and the second estates. Their organization on the basis of their place of origin in *nationes*, *Hansen*, fraternities and guilds may have fostered among them sufficient self-confidence to make them assertive as a minority about their

own cultural background. Between 1333 and 1452, 1116 bachelors born in the Holy Roman Empire were admitted to the German nation of the arts faculty in Paris, 68% of whom were natives from the ecclesiastical province of Cologne. The German nation in the law university at Orléans attracted in the fifteenth century hundreds of young aristocrats, mostly from the Low Countries, while the proportion of Germans in the strict sense rose after 1500. Before the foundation of the university at Louvain in 1425, and during a good deal of the fifteenth century, students from the eastern provinces of the Low Countries normally went to German universities, mainly Cologne and Heidelberg¹). They had to envisage several acculturation processes: that to the international scholarly community using Latin, that to the various other students' nations, and yet another to the local community. Adaptation to the standards of the learned world was a prerequisite for each student, which turned him into an agent of a supranational culture. Besides that program of formal education, informal contacts between student communities and with the local population must have turned the larger university cities into places of high cultural interaction, and probably, also of cultural transfer. Graduates returned in their homes not only with an academic title, but also with a larger international experience, the experience with other contexts, products, and tastes.

Cologne fulfilled an essential cultural transfer function in more respects, due to its axial location on the Rhine and its close links with the entire Low Countries by rivers and overland. The intensive commercial relations in all directions obviously included the exchange of cultural goods – in the broadest meaning of the word – as well as personal contacts which necessitated mutual understanding and information of each other's practices. As the capital city of an ecclesiastical province, Cologne saw numerous visitors from the suffragan bishoprics. The flock of the diocese of Utrecht was entirely Dutch-speaking, while that of Liège consisted of Dutch and French speakers, which must have created translation problems since not only clerics had to deal with the metropolitan chair. For clergymen, the tradition of universalism and mobility within the Church was based on the use of Latin. This implies that insofar as they acted as bearers of linguistic or literary characteristics, it had to pass through the filter of translation. Mediation via Latin could be avoided by that other category of intercultural agents who were the merchants, at least from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards and as far as the written records were concerned.

Trade relations between Flanders and the Rhineland must have been a regular feature as early as the tenth century. In 977, the two great Benedictine abbeys in Ghent enjoyed toll privileges in the Empire²), while the Koblenz toll tariff from 1070, confirmed in 1104 by Emperor Henry IV, mentions Flemings trading in fleeces and wine³). In the middle of the

1) HILDE DE RIDDER-SYMOENS, Mobility, in: *A History of the University in Europe*. Vol. I. Universities in the Middle Ages. Hg. IDEM. Cambridge 1991, pp.280–304, esp.288–291.

2) MGH DD O II, Nr.148, 149.

3) *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*. I, Hg. K. HÖHLBAUM. Halle 1876, S.3, Nr.5.

twelfth century, the burghers and the archbishop of Cologne tended to protect their own trade on the Rhine and towards England. The city exploited from that time onwards a trade hall in London. In 1178, the citizens of Ghent saw their traditional free shipping on the Rhine forbidden by the archbishop. Germans became themselves regular visitors in Flanders and tended to draw the Flemish back by the end of the thirteenth century⁴). The same pattern applies to the Flemish trade with North-Western Germany, albeit it with some delay. In 1128, Flemings obtained free passage through Holland, probably on their way to the Baltic. By 1243 and 1244, burghers from Lübeck obtained safe-conduct in Holland and Utrecht, in 1252 Hamburg exchanged reciprocal privileges with the Flemish. From 1288 onwards, merchants from Ghent and Ypres were with those from Berlin the most frequent visitors of the Hamburg market, but since 1285 Lübeck started to oppose against Flemish trade in the Baltic⁵). Some Flemings penetrated into the magistracy in Lübeck before 1300, and a named Johann von Doway, probably a native from Douai, who was a councillor from 1280 to 1303, was sent repeatedly on diplomatic missions to Flanders in the years 1280 to 1283⁶).

The contracts warranted by the Ypres aldermen include merchants from Cologne and Lübeck since 1272, one from Hamburg in 1274, one from Soest in 1275 and two from Dortmund in 1276. The series which ends abruptly in 1291, contains nineteen contracts with men from Lübeck, and nine with people from Cologne⁷). Since Ypres was one of the five cities where the cycle of Flemish fairs were held, the Germans could enter into contact with the large numbers there of Frenchmen and Italians, as well as with merchants from England and Spain. Anyhow, since the 1220s the contracts in Ypres were written in French⁸), which implies that either brokers intervened to help the Germans understand what they subscribed, or that they had acquired themselves a sufficient mastery of that language. The negotiations between Germans and Flemings may anyhow have taken place in Rhinelandic German and Flemish, since the two languages differed only gradually. Flemish brokers may have helped the Germans in their contacts with foreigners, but the preserved acts don't mention such relations.

The linguistic variation between *Niederdeutsch* and *Niederländisch* should not have created all too many difficulties, as is shown by the extant correspondence in these languages in the Hanseatic sources. Each side used its own speech and was understood by the other.

4) FRANS BLOCKMANS, *Het Gentsche stadspatriciaat tot omstreeks 1302*. Bruges 1938, pp. 175–183.

5) BLOCKMANS, *Stadspatriciaat*, pp. 183–190.

6) WERNER PARAVICINI, *Lübeck und Brügge. Bedeutung und erste Ergebnisse eines Kieler Forschungsprojekts*, in: *Die Niederlande und der europäische Nordosten. Ein Jahrtausend weiträumiger Beziehungen (700–1700)*. Hg. HUBERTUS MENKE. Neumünster 1992, pp. 91–166, esp. 94–95.

7) CARLOS WYFFELS, *Analyses de reconnaissances de dettes passées devant les échevins d'Ypres (1249–1291)*. Brussels 1991, Nr. 439, 451, 611, 846, 1024.

8) GUILLAUME DES MAREZ, *La lettre de foire à Ypres au XIIIe siècle*. Brussels 1900, pp. 103–104.

Those hanse merchants who stayed for years in the Bruges *Kontor*, developed a mixed idiom perfectly understandable by all their partners⁹). Many Dutch words were incorporated in the Low German vocabulary¹⁰). Moreover, until well into the seventeenth century, the Germanic speaking inhabitants of the Low Countries called their own language *Nederduitsch*, *duuts*, *thiois*, *teutonic*, from which the English word *Dutch* has been derived. This makes it clear that language was all but an obstacle between the Low Countries, the Rhineland, Westphalia and the Baltic coast, in fact the *Hanseraum*. Especially the people living close to the linguistic border between Romance and Germanic languages in Liège, Hainault, Brabant and Flanders, were trained in keeping an open ear.

In none of these principalities do we have any indication suggesting that the linguistic differences might have created an obstacle to frequent intercourse, or that it might have hampered or complicated commercial relations. Language did, however, become a social marker in predominantly Flemish speaking cities in Flanders during the thirteenth century. Many urban patricians choose to distinguish themselves from the common people by the use of French, especially in symbolic forms such as their private seal, at the very moment when Latin was being replaced as the official written language by the vernacular¹¹). In Ghent, the oldest city account dating from 1280 was in Flemish. This is to be explained by the fact that this was an instrument in the popular revolts against arbitrary patrician rule. The bailiff's account, intended for the count's council, was in French still ten years later. In Ypres, the accounts, as the acts, switched from Latin to French, before turning definitively to Dutch in 1329. In Bruges, the accounts were in Latin until 1300; from 1302 onwards Dutch was generally used, except for some particular accounts in French¹²). These were political decisions depending on varying power relations and alliances. They demonstrate that the social competences within the social elites and their servants included at least some knowledge of the three languages. The capacity to switch immediately the languages from one year to another show that in these large commercial cities enough clerks were available who could write in different languages, and that the relevant terminology had already been developed in the preceding phase of the oral use of the vernaculars. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Latin, French and Flemish were used in parallel in administrations at various levels. In Ghent, for example, a regulation for the leper-house was drafted

9) H. J. LELOUX, *Mittelniederdeutsch und Mittelniederländisch in Brügge. Soll und Haben einer Geschäftssprache, Sprachkontakt in der Hanse*. Hg. P. ST. URELAND. Tübingen 1987, pp. 123–133.

10) GILBERT A. R. DE SMET, *Niederländisches im Niederdeutschen*, in: *Die Niederlande und der europäische Nordosten*, pp. 11–28.

11) BLOCKMANS, *Stadspatriciaat*, pp. 352–353.

12) J. VUYLSTEKE, *Gentsche Stads- en baljuwsrekeningen 1280–1336*. Gent 1900, pp. 1–7; GUILAUME DES MAREZ/E. DE SAGHER, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres de 1267 à 1329*. 2 vols., Brussels 1909–1913; CARLOS WYFFELS, *De rekeningen van de stad Brugge (1280–1319)*. 3 vols. Brussels 1965–1995, esp. vol. II, pp. 11 ff. (Dutch), and 848–852, 871–891 (French).

in Flemish in 1233, seventy years before the recognition of this language for the city as a whole¹³). The patricians needed the multiple linguistic competence to be able to communicate directly with the Flemish artisans, on the one hand, and with merchants from Northern and Southern France, England, Italy and Northern and Western Germany.

In Brabant, Utrecht, Guelders and Holland, the political and commercial links with the Romance-speaking world were much weaker, and the urban elites did not use a foreign language to show their elevated status. The oldest city accounts preserved in these principalities were those of Antwerp, dating from 1314 and 1325, and they were in Dutch¹⁴). The active role of Brabantine merchants in the long distance trade in textile products nevertheless required also for them linguistic skills in different vernaculars. No less person than Francesco Balduini Pegolotti, the representative of the Bardi company, obtained in 1315 in Antwerp for his native city Florence the same privileges as merchants from England, Germany and Genoa had received earlier¹⁵). Brabantine cloth was sold in the following century in southern France, Italy and further around the Mediterranean, but also in the South and South-East of the Empire. Gradually, merchants from the Rhineland visited more intensively the fairs at Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom, and travelled further to England, pushing out of their homeland the merchants and later on even the cloth from Brabant, as they had succeeded to do a century earlier with the Flemish. They mainly substituted cloth from Flanders by that from Brabant as long as it was cheaper, and repeated the same operation later on in the fourteenth century in favour of English cloth¹⁶). Anyhow, the relations between the most urbanized regions of Germany in the South, the West and the North, and the Low Countries remained intensive and personal.

A rare document informs us in detail how linguistic skills were acquired in a large commercial city like Bruges. A single copy has been preserved of a little manuscript from around 1360, with the text of a practical method to learn the terminology, the essential body of knowledge and practices relevant to all kinds of trades. Following an alphabetic order, this *Livre des Mestiers* consists of simple dialogues in French and in Dutch by a schoolmaster native from Hainaut. It offers an introduction in the large variety of finished

13) MAURITS GYSSELING, *Corpus van Middel nederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)*. 15 vols. The Hague 1977–1987. Reeks I. Ambtelijke bescheiden, dl. 1, nr. 3, pp. 20–29.

14) F. PRIMIS, *De stadsrekening van 1313. Het kapittel der lijftochten*, in: *Antwerps Archievenblad*, 2nd series 6 (1931), pp. 228–245; F. MERTENS, *De oudste stadsrekening der stad Antwerpen*. (*Codex Diplomaticus van het Utrechts Genootschap*, 2nd series, 4/1 (1857)); FRANS BLOCKMANS, *Le contrôle par le prince des comptes urbains en Flandre et en Brabant au Moyen Age*, in: *Finances et comptabilité urbaines du XIIIe au XVIe siècle*. Brussels 1964, pp. 287–338, esp. 287.

15) A. EVANS, Hg., F.B. Pegolotti: *La Pratica della Mercatura*. Cambridge Mass. 1936, pp. XVII–XXVIII, 236–237, 251–254.

16) RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN, *La draperie brabançonne et malinoise du XIIe au XVIIe siècle: grandeur éphémère et décadence*, in: *Produzione, commercio e consumo dei panni di lana*. Florence 1976, pp. 85–97, esp. 87, 91.

products, raw materials especially for the textile industry, places where textile was produced, weights, measures, coinage and trading customs of the different nations. An English-Flemish version was published at the end of the fourteenth century, a High-German-Flemish one in 1470¹⁷). The fast translation into English and the much later one into High-German may illustrate the variation in the need for such an instrument, either because of the smaller linguistic differences, or, and more probably, because of the alleged lesser sophistication of the trade with the regions in Southern Germany before 1470. Remarkably enough, there seems to have been no need of a translation into Low-German. The interaction between the Low Countries and the Hanseatic area may have been so close and so intense, and the linguistic variation so gradual, that other forms of information may have been more appropriate. One thinks of learning-by-doing and apprenticeships abroad, as these were customary in the German settlements in Bruges.

The fact that only one copy is preserved of this young tradesman's guide should not mislead us. Similarly, only seven different *Pratiche della mercatura* came to us, while there can be no doubt about their general use in Italy. Just because their format was small and their material form simple in order to be practical, these booklets were used and updated frequently, decayed and finally got lost. Similarly, only one transcription survives of the fourteenth-century Bruges Itinerary of trade routes, a text of twenty folios providing tables with the distance from Bruges to each of the important commercial cities in Europe, North Africa and the Near East and describing the routes¹⁸).

In the same category of practical documents, we may draw the attention to the scarce references we have about the ›law of the sea‹. As an offspring of long standing trade relations, legal practices known in the Western Mediterranean gradually became codified. In the last quarter of the thirteenth century, the same happened along the Atlantic and North Sea coasts in the so-called *Rôles d'Oléron* and the Law of Damme. The latter became introduced in the Baltic area, where it was labelled as Law of Lübeck. Scanty written proof exists of this transfer, but this must be attributed again to the practical and primarily oral nature of the transactions and legal procedures between Northern shippers. Their collective memories, learned in practice from forebears, formed their main source of law¹⁹).

17) JEAN GESSLER, *Het Brugsche Livre des Mestiers*. Bruges 1931; the date has been revised by RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN, *De datering van het Brugse »Livre des Mestiers«*, in: *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique* 48 (1977), pp. 643–653; PIERRE JEANNIN, *Der Livre des Mestiers: das älteste vielsprachige Kaufmannslexikon*, in: *Brügge-Colloquium des Hansischen Geschichtsvereins*. Hg. KLAUS FRIEDLAND. Cologne/Vienna 1990, pp. 121–130, is uninformed about the corrections by Van Uytven.

18) ALBERT DEROLEZ, *The Library of Raphael de Marcatellis*. Ghent 1979, nr. 54, p. 271.

19) H. POHLMANN, *Die Quellen des Handelsrechts. I. Mittelalter 1100–1500. Die gelehrten Rechte und die Gesetzgebung*. Munich 1973, pp. 801–834; K.-F. KRIEGER, *Ursprung und Wurzeln der Rôles d'Oléron (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte)*. Cologne/Vienna 1970.

Day-to-day practices supported the legal framework of long-distance trade. We know them in detail for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they must go back to the eleventh and twelfth. I am referring to negotiations by city aldermen from different regions. We must assume that in earlier centuries, trading privileges and agreements between for example merchants of Cologne and the count of Flanders, and between Ghent merchants and princes in the Empire, to which we referred above, had been negotiated by merchants themselves. They belonged to the local *hansa* or merchants' guild. The role of the princes and their councillors must have remained limited to the formal ratification, for which the merchants obviously had to pay a price. Around 1300, the guild revolution in Flanders, which had effects in neighbouring regions as well, introduced a clear distinction between the city administration and the merchants' guild. From then onwards, it would be the aldermen and their officials who carried on this type of negotiations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thanks to the preserved accounts, we are well informed about them for this period²⁰.

Now and then, delegations from the main Flemish and Holland cities travelled to a German city or even to the king's court when the *Reichsacht* had struck one of the fellow citizens. More frequently, the close contacts existing between the *olderlude* of the *Hanse-Kontor* and the city government of Bruges could not entirely prevent the escalation of commercial conflicts which then required negotiations on the level of the college of the main cities of Flanders, the Four Members or *Vier Leden*. Their correspondence with the member cities of the Hanse has partly been published in the *Hanserezesse* and the *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, and regularly diplomatic missions arrived either in the Hanse towns or in the Low Countries. Did these frequent contacts, as well as the steady presence of dozens, up to a maximum of over two-hundred Hanse merchants in Bruges, lead to a cultural transfer beyond that of the exchange of products? Taking into account the massive export of copper grave plates²¹, of wooden sculpted altarpieces and panel paintings, and, of course, that of stylish finished cloth and clothes, the Flemish cultural goods clearly found a market in the Baltic area. The intensity of the contacts over centuries, and the core position Flan-

20) W.P. BLOCKMANS, Vertretungssysteme im niederländischen Raum im Spätmittelalter, in: Der Ost- und Nordseeraum. Hg. KONRAD FRITZE/ECKHARD MÜLLER-MERTENS/JOHANNES SCHILDHAUER (Hansische Studien VII). Weimar 1986, pp. 180–189; IDEM, A Typology of Representative Institutions in Late Medieval Europe, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978), pp. 189–215; IDEM, Voracious States and Obstructing Cities: An Aspect of State Formation in Preindustrial Europe, in: *Cities & the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000–1800*, Hg. CHARLES TILLY/WIM.P. BLOCKMANS. Boulder 1994, pp. 218–250; IDEM, Konfliktregelung der Hanse in Flandern (1393–1451), in: *Die Niederlande und der europäische Nordosten*, pp. 209–219.

21) KLAUS KRÜGER, Flämische Grabplatten im Ostseeraum. Kunstdenkmäler als historische Quelle, in: *Die Niederlande und der europäische Nordosten*, pp. 167–208; IDEM, *Corpus der mittelalterlichen Grabdenkmäler in Lübeck, Schleswig, Holstein und Lauenburg (1100–1600)*. Stuttgart 1999.

ders occupied in its relations with the Hanse²²⁾, allow us to point here to real cultural influence. Architectural imitations in Hanse-cities of the Bruges style of building in brick, may be quoted as an example²³⁾.

However, not every aspect of Netherlandish culture was copied. There were refusals and, overall, nobody would claim a Netherlandish dominance ever existed in the Hanse region. It can be argued, on the other hand, that the activity of Hanse merchants in the Zuiderzee- and IJssel-cities and in Flanders, triggered the commercial development of Holland from the mid-fourteenth century onwards²⁴⁾. The Dutch developed cheaper competition by their export of beer, cloth, herring and refined salt collected at Bourgneuf. Moreover, their shipbuilding industry developed bigger, faster and more functional ships, by which they superseded the Hanseats as long-distance bulk carriers, even in the Baltic. Contacts and interaction have manifold and unforeseen effects. The Dutch may never have created their famous *maatjes* trade if they had not seen the conservation methods current in Schonen in the later decades of the fourteenth century. We have to observe that overseas contacts are different in their nature from those overland. Overseas trade in the Baltic and North Sea had to carry bulk goods, in which handling many people were involved. The effects of the exchange had a diffuse impact on the life of thousands of men, their families and the supplying trades. In contrast, a few *fabrende Gesellen* might help to introduce new techniques and styles, be it in architecture or in drapery. The famous overland route between Cologne and Bruges flourished until well into the fourteenth century²⁵⁾, up to the point that rising demand and competition made the waterway around via Dordrecht more advantageous. In the meantime, the higher classes in the Flemish and Brabantine cities had become so enthusiastic about wines from the Rhine valley, that these remained appreciated and priced higher than French wines²⁶⁾. This constitutes a fine example of German cultural influence on the Low Countries.

22) MICHAEL NORTH, Geldumlauf und Wirtschaftskonjunktur im südlichen Ostseeraum an der Wende zur Neuzeit (1440–1570). Sigmaringen 1990, pp. 41–58.

23) WERNER PARAVICINI, Bruges and Germany, in: Bruges and Europe, Hg. VALENTIN VERMEERSCH. Antwerp 1992, pp. 98–127; RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN, Flämische Belfriede und südniederländische städtische Bauwerke im Mittelalter, in: Information, Kommunikation und Selbstdarstellung in mittelalterlichen Gemeinden. Hg. ALFRED HAVERKAMP. (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs 40) Munich 1998, pp. 125–159.

24) WIM BLOCKMANS, The economic expansion of Holland and Zeeland in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, in: Studia Historica Oeconomica. Liber Amicorum Herman van der Wee. Hg. ERIK AERTS/ BIRGIT HENAU/PAUL JANSSENS/ RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN. Leuven 1993, pp. 41–58.

25) RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN, Landtransport durch Brabant im Mittelalter und im 16. Jahrhundert, in: Auf den Römerstrassen ins Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Verkehrsgeschichte zwischen Maas und Rhein von der Spätantike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert. Hg. F. BURGARD/A. HAVERKAMP. Mainz 1998, pp. 471–499.

26) RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN/BRUNO BLONDÉ, Wijnverbruik te Antwerpen en 's-Hertogenbosch in de zestiende eeuw, in: Liber Amicorum Dr. J. Scheerder. Tijdingen uit Leuven over de Spaanse Nederlan-

Overall, we have to admit that contacts along waterways allowed far greater transport capacities than overland. Cologne could profit from both. It controlled the Rhine trade which reached the Low Countries via Arnhem and Nijmegen; the northern direction via the river IJssel was the easiest connection to Northern Germany; Flanders, Zeeland, Brabant and England were accessible via Dordrecht and the waterways through Holland. Nevertheless, the growing importance of the four yearly fairs at Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom gave a new impetus to the overland roads during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, especially for high-value products such as finished cloth, spices, arts and crafts, and, in return, wine, silver and copper. These fairs' main hinterland was the Rhineland and further East and South²⁷). Antwerp's leading role in the European economy from the 1480s onwards, would be inconceivable without its close connections with the booming cities in southern Germany and their products from Swabia, Saxony and Tirol.

In conclusion of this section on trade relations, one can observe that from the tenth to the sixteenth century, overland routes were essential to connect the Rhineland and its further hinterlands with Brabant, Flanders and England. Flemings and Brabanters were being superseded by merchants from the Rhineland as the active carriers of this trade from the late twelfth century onwards. The river connections between the Rhineland, Holland and the Utrecht region stimulated the trade with the Hanse cities which, in its turn, triggered the development of the Dutch maritime expansion in the Baltic area from the late fourteenth century onwards, by increasingly taking over the connection with the North Sea and the Atlantic coasts. Important reciprocal influences could be traced as a consequence of this lasting and intensive exchange, both in the sphere of material goods and in that of less tangible cultural effects.

Elaborating the theme of the use of languages in city administrations mentioned earlier with regard to the accounts, we should point to recent research on the use of languages in charters in Holland and Zeeland. This has shown that it was effectively in those milieus that the switch to the vernacular occurred the earliest. The count's court and chancellery followed decades later, and ecclesiastical institutions much later again. Moreover, the transition spread from South to North. A draft of an urban privilege for Middelburg, the main city in Zeeland, is preserved from 1217, while a formal issue was promulgated only in 1254. The 1217 version in Latin must have been translated from an older text in Dutch, which

den. Leuven 1987, pp. 107–126; RAYMOND VAN UYTVEN, *Transport van Rijnwijn naar Brabant; Het wijnverbruik in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden: van feestdrank tot statussymbool*, in: *Van Rank tot Drank*. Brussels 1990, pp. 110–114, 252–262.

27) HERMAN VAN DER WEE, *The Growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. 3 vols. Leuven/ The Hague 1963, vol. 2, pp. 75–82; C. J. F. SLOOTMANS, *Paas- en Koudemarkten te Bergen op Zoom 1365–1565*. 3 vols. Tilburg 1985, pp. 286–290, 1556–1567.

may have dated from before 1190.²⁸⁾ Cities in the county of Holland followed in 1267 (Delft), 1277 (Dordrecht) and 1280 (Haarlem). The chancellery of the counts of Holland used Dutch predominantly from 1285 onwards. The quantities of the preserved charters also reveal the spread of the official use of written documents from South to North, especially from the commercial centre Dordrecht, to secondary places. So, 128 charters dating from between 1276 and 1300 are preserved for this city, while the numbers for Middelburg, Delft and Haarlem accounted merely to 24, 22 and 25 respectively²⁹⁾. The preserved charters show that other written documents must have been practised, since prescriptions were formulated repeatedly about them in the charters. In Middelburg, in 1217 a *carta tributi* was mentioned, listing all the burghers owning a house or a parcel in the city, and who therefore were entitled to testify before the local court. The 1256 charter similarly refers to a *dieve brief* listing those banned for theft.

However, the process was all but rectilinear and its trajectory differed by principality. Latin remained currently used for particular types of documents in the chancelleries of the main cities in Brabant during the whole fifteenth century. In 's-Hertogenbosch it was only in 1552 that Dutch formally replaced Latin as the official language for charters concerning real estate transactions. At the request of parties, it nevertheless remained in use afterwards. This may well be a relict of the thirteenth century when, as it had been demonstrated for Middelburg, the existence of a catalogue of real estate served as the official enactment of all transfers of landed property. On the other hand, the city had received a privilege in Dutch by the duke of Brabant as early as 1291, and inserted various quotes *in teutonice*. Charters had thus become a highly formalised type of document, alongside with the registers from which expeditions were produced. These were kept in Dutch in Ghent since 1350 and in 's-Hertogenbosch since 1367. The increased use of written records required the appointment of a higher number of city clerks competent in the writing of at least two languages. In the latter city, they were four, for a population of about 15,000. About 7,000 charters must have been issued by the aldermen during the 125 years between the first preserved from 1242, and the earliest preserved register, in 1367³⁰⁾.

28) JAAP KRUISHEER, Het ontstaan van de oudste Zeeuwse stadsrechtsoorkonden, in: Ad Fontes. Opstellen aangeboden aan prof. dr. C. van de Kieft. Amsterdam 1984, pp. 275–304.

29) E.C. DIJKHOF, Het oorkondenwezen van enige kloosters en steden in Holland en Zeeland 1200–1325. PhD-thesis University of Amsterdam 1997, chapter II (commercial edition under preparation). See also his articles: Zegelen in Middelburg, in: Archief. Mededelingen Kon. Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen (1992) pp. 57–87; De verschriftelijking in Zeeland: de doordringing van het ambtelijk schriftgebruik in de omgeving van de stadsbesturen en de ambachtsheren in de dertiende eeuw, in: Zeeland 9 (2000), pp. 2–9.

30) GEERTRUI VAN SYNGHEL, Observations on the Entry and Copying in the Cartularies with Charters of the Province of North Brabant, in: Secretum Scriptorum. Liber Alumnorum Walter Prevenier. Leuven/Apeldoorn 1999, pp. 77–92. This author prepares a PhD thesis on this subject, expected at the University of Leiden in 2003.

The mastery of various languages must have been a requirement for merchants in the Low Countries, albeit that only Flemings may have been mostly fluent in French; the passive understanding of Low German must be hypothesized generally. Clerks must have been able to write in Latin, French and Dutch in the principalities on the linguistic borderline: Liège, southern Brabant and Flanders. The use of writing in the vernaculars spread from major commercial centres to minor ones, later on to the prince's chancelleries, to reach the ecclesiastical institutions only decades later. Social and political relations influenced the formalisation of the cultural competences, such as the elitist use of French in Flanders and that of Latin for real estate transactions in 's-Hertogenbosch. The analysis of the acts issued by the lords of Breda and Bergen op Zoom shows that the transition to the use of the vernacular has been gradual process, occurring here somewhat later than in neighbouring Flanders, Zeeland and Holland. Much depended on the question if it was a traditional monastery where the document was drafted and written in Latin until well into the fourteenth century, or the urban community. The latter led in Breda to a charter in Dutch as early as 1259, at a time when the aldermen (*schepenen*, *Schöffen*) were still currently using Latin.³¹⁾

Even within such a relatively small area as the Low Countries, considerable regional cultural particularities were to be noticed, which themselves may have stimulated the competence to deal with manifold differences. With regard to the relations between the Low Countries and the Empire, these observations encourage to focus on the relations between major commercial cities. They were the focal points of various cultural streams, and, probably consequently, they were spearheading the cultural change.

So far, commercial relations and their cultural effects have been discussed. In the final section of this paper, I shall turn to comparisons of a more structural kind, first demographic data. Around 1500, the Low Countries counted some 2.7 million inhabitants and an average population density of 33 per square kilometre. By that time, the German Empire counted some 12 million persons at a density of 18 per square kilometre³²⁾. In Jan de Vries's categories of 'urban potential', the southern Low Countries reached by 1500 a level of 80% – as compared to the summit constituted at that time by Venice and its region –, the rest of the Netherlands and the Lower Rhineland 50%, the city belt in Southern Germany reached 40% and the rest of Germany 30% or less³³⁾. Only Cologne could compete in size with

31) M. DILLO, G.A.M. VAN SYNGHEL, Hgg., *Oorkondenboek van Noord-Brabant tot 1312. II. De heerlijkheden van Breda en Bergen op Zoom*. The Hague 1999.

32) WIM BLOCKMANS/WALTER PREVENIER, *The Promised Lands. The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369–1530*. Philadelphia 1999, pp. 151–154; HORST RABE, *Reich und Glaubensspaltung. Deutschland 1500–1600*. Munich 1989, pp. 27–28; ROGER MOLS, *Population in Europe 1500–1700*, in: CARLO CIPOLLA, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Glasgow 1974, pp. 38–39.

33) JAN DE VRIES, *European Urbanization 1500–1800*. Cambridge Mass. 1984, pp. 158–161.

Ghent, Antwerp, Bruges and Brussels, while Augsburg and Lübeck were in size comparable to second rank cities such as Mechelen and 's-Hertogenbosch.

Recent studies on urbanization have stressed the importance of the density of urban networks, as well as their relation to the hinterland. Urban hierarchies have been expounded for the Low Countries in line with the Christaller model. The control of especially the largest cities over a quarter or large division of a principality, has been demonstrated in detail for Flanders and Brabant, and in a lesser degree for other principalities as well. Flanders was an extreme case, since five major cities obtained from the early thirteenth century onwards a far reaching control over their respective hinterlands³⁴. The causes of this situation can be identified: first, the very uneven rank size distribution, in which Ghent and Bruges each had a population four to six times as large as that of the next largest towns in their quarter; second, the high market integration in which the main cities were the necessary geographical nodes, especially through their dominance of the waterways; third, the weakness of territorial power and the distance of the sovereigns. Successive military interventions of French kings in the course of the years 1297–1385 could not outweigh the dominance of the capital cities.

In Brabant and Holland, the largest cities were not so overwhelming in comparison to the middle-sized ones. Their land-locked location did not make any of them the geographically necessary focus before Antwerp became the most important harbour after Bruges's decline in the 1480s. Several cities in Brabant remained under the control of a lord (Diest, Breda, Bergen op Zoom, Gembloux, and, in a purely geographical sense, also Mechelen)³⁵. Generally, the nobility kept relatively more power vis-à-vis the cities which developed later than those in Flanders and remained considerably smaller until 1500. In Flanders, the main cities had such an overwhelming position that they were able to build up a tight control over the waterways. Bruges secured its control over the Zwin sea-branch, and the cities along it, especially Sluis, while Ghent obtained the monopoly of river shipping and a staple for grain. Their domination of their quarter gradually tended to include all kinds of advantages for their own citizens over those of the smaller towns and villages. The ingredients of this domination started with the privileged treatment of the capital's burghers in its jurisdiction regarding the hinterland. The city's aldermen acted as the obligatory instance for all cases involving its own citizens and forbade any appeal at the count's high court. The dominant city took the precedence and eventually the lead of the militia in its quarter in the count's campaigns and, in time of revolt, it claimed military commandment in the region. Dominant cities regulated market conditions within their quarter very much in their par-

34) *Le réseau urbain en Belgique dans une perspective historique (1350–1850)*. Brussels 1992; PETER STABEL, *Dwarfs among giants. The Flemish Urban Network in the Late Middle Ages*. Leuven/Apel-doorn 1997.

35) *De heerlijke stad*. Eds. TH. E. A. BOSMAN/J. P. A. COOPMANS/B. C. M. JACOBS. Assen/ Maastricht 1988.

ticular interest. They used their activity in the representation of the county towards the count and foreign authorities in their own advantage by negotiating all kinds of particular advantages and privileges, including permanent tax reductions and the disproportional distribution of subsidies. The periods of relatively weak princely government and repeated revolts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, left the major Flemish cities the opportunity to establish their domination over their hinterlands³⁶.

When the mightier dukes of Burgundy tried to introduce a firmer, more centralised government and jurisdiction, they stumbled over and again on the tough resistance of the pre-existing power structures. The intensive control over territories corresponding approximately with present-day provinces, some 5000 square kilometres, was now challenged by larger statecraft having far greater financial and military means at its disposal than previous princes and than each of the great cities individually. These means were used effectively to reduce the autonomy of the major cities, after the failure of administrative, political and juridical pressure. Through its regional and central courts, the central state offered to all subjects alternative judicial instances and procedures. These became increasingly popular, not only because of the higher, and even more professional instance they offered to parties seeking justice; the prince's courts gradually imposed themselves as hierarchically superior to those of the major cities, and less partial since they were able to curtail the latter's selfishness in favour of a more equitable justice. A stronger state thus offered protection against economic exploitation by the largest cities. This ideal image was complicated, however, by the state's recurrent financial needs, especially in periods of external war. Under such pressure, the state still needed the large cities' collaboration which resulted in the consolidation of their elites' role as profit-seeking mediators shifting the fiscal burden as much as possible towards the countryside. Although the largest cities in Brabant and Holland did not have an equivalent impact on their hinterlands, the pattern also applies as a tendency to them.

Can such a power structure be compared with any region in Germany? Obviously, the most urbanized areas here were the Rhineland, the Hanseatic North and the Swabian South, in which none of the cities enjoyed such a territorial overweight. Here, the rank-size distribution seems to have been more gradual and the princely and aristocratic powers more immediate. Geographic conditions certainly were a part of the limitations to urban growth and the formation of strong urban networks, especially in the Rhineland³⁷. The

36) W.P. BLOCKMANS, *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen 1384–1506*. Brussels 1978, pp. 107–127; WALTER PREVENIER/MARC BOONE, *The Dream of a City-State*, in: *Ghent, Apology of a Rebellious City*. Ed. JOHAN DECAVELE. Antwerp 1989, pp. 81–105.

37) FRANZ IRSIGLER, *Stadt und Umland im Spätmittelalter: zur zentralitätsfördernden Kraft von Fernhandel und Exportgewerbe*, in: *Zentralität als Problem der mittelalterlichen Stadtgeschichtsforschung*, ed. E. MEYNEN. Cologne/Vienna 1979, pp. 1–14; PETER MORAW, *Cities and Citizenry as Factors of State Formation in the Roman-German Empire of the Late Middle Ages*, in: *Cities & the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800*, eds. CHARLES TILLY/WIM BLOCKMANS, Boulder 1994, pp. 100–127.

Rhine was a formidable commercial axis and it certainly favoured urban growth, but its sheer length and the narrowness of its valley between Bonn and Koblenz, hampered the commercial interests to act collectively against aristocratic powers. The long trading routes thus remained highly vulnerable because the cities were unable to establish themselves a firm control over the river nor over a territory. Territorialisation could therefore not emanate from the larger cities, as it did in the more land-locked regions of southern Germany; there, some independent imperial cities such as Nuremberg could really form small territorial states. The relatively low urban density, however, still excluded the urban society to gain a greater political weight. Unlike the Netherlandish, Northern or Swabian cities, the cities in the Rhineland did not form one or several stable urban leagues either. The scattered power structure there prevented thus the optimal defence of the commercial interests, which increased the transaction costs and had a negative influence on the long-term growth of trade in the region.

Citizens, merchants and shippers were insufficiently protected by the system of territorial peaces, *Landfrieden*, since the aristocratic and princely elements were still dominant. The dukes of Schleswig, Holstein, Mecklenburg and Brandenburg had a larger territorial impact by which they could slowly subdue the formerly quasi-autonomous Hanse cities from ca. 1450 onwards. The balance of power can be expressed in relatively precise figures of the volume of expenditure. In the fifteenth century, most German cities, such as Basle, Berne, Frankfurt, Schwäbisch Hall, Lucerne, Munich and Vienna had at their disposal the equivalent of between 0.2 and 1 tonne of pure silver. Only Nuremberg's spending rose from 1.5 to 2.7 tonnes. On the other hand, the archbishop of Cologne and the princes of Brandenburg, Saxony, Bohemia and Ansbach had more than 1 tonne to spend, Württemberg around two tonnes, Bavaria, the Palatinate and Tirol about three. Austria had 4.5 tonnes to spend, while the Holy Roman Empire had at its disposal 5 tonnes only by the end of the century³⁸). However fragmentary, two conclusions can be drawn from these figures: none of the cities had ever the means to oppose by itself the neighbouring aristocrats and princes; among the princely powers, no single dominant force arose either. State organization, both on the territorial and the imperial level, developed lately, and therefore it was unable to stabilize class relations and pacify the territory. In the various principalities of the Low Countries, the process of the formation of a dynastic union under the dukes of Burgundy introduced a number of territorial and supra-territorial institutions which strengthened the central state considerably vis-à-vis the local powers³⁹). The fiscal potential of the dukes reached a level of 14 tonnes, obviously a multiple of any of their counterparts in the

38) MARTIN KÖRNER, Expenditure, in: *Economic Systems and State Finance*. Ed. RICHARD BONNEY, Oxford 1995, pp. 398–399.

39) BLOCKMANS/PREVENIER, *The Promised Lands*, pp. 103–153; PHILIPPE GODDING, *Le Conseil de Brabant sous le règne de Philippe le Bon (1430–1467)*. Brussels 1999; MARIO DAMEN, *Staat van Dienst. De gewestelijke ambtenaren in Holland en Zeeland 1425–1482*. Hilversum 2000.

Empire. Here, on the contrary, feuding remained current until well into the sixteenth century. Princely courts, hierarchically superior to the various local jurisdictions, were introduced at least a century later than in Flanders and Brabant⁴⁰.

During their difficult years in the Low Countries, from 1477 to 1486, Archduke Maximilian and his councillors came into contact with a state organization which was far more developed and disposed of much greater resources, both on the level of the state as on that of the individual cities. Their observations might have contributed to the reforms introduced in the Empire from 1495 onwards. It has to be noted, however, that the intense and massive contacts between burghers, merchants and administrators of cities in the Empire and in the Low Countries, had spread knowledge about each other on a much broader scale several centuries earlier already. Why, then, did the German cities not simply introduce representative government with thirty to forty meetings per year, control over coinage, foreign trade and the distribution of the fiscal burden? Simply because *die Verhältnisse nicht so waren*. Advance in one region can not easily be transferred to another, they have to fit within the whole social system. What we did observe, were reciprocal impulses, variation within both ›East‹ and ›West‹, and a pattern of dissemination of innovations through centres such as market places, courts and ecclesiastical institutions. Their density and linkages may well have been *the* determinant factors. The comparison of these factors in different regions should anyhow have sharpened our insight.

40) H. DE SCHEPPER/J.-M. CAUCHIES, Legal tools of the Public Power in the Netherlands, 1200–1600, in: ANTONIO PADOA SCHIOPPA, ed., Legislation and Justice. Oxford 1997, pp. 229–268.