

COURT AND CIVIC SOCIETY

IN THE BURGUNDIAN LOW COUNTRIES
c.1420-1530



Andrew Brown and Graeme Small

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**COURT AND CIVIC SOCIETY
IN THE BURGUNDIAN
LOW COUNTRIES c.1420–1530**

selected sources translated and annotated with an introduction

by Andrew Brown and Graeme Small

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For George, Imogen and Myrna
and
for Jamie, Louis and George

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NOTE ON COINAGE AND MONEYS OF ACCOUNT

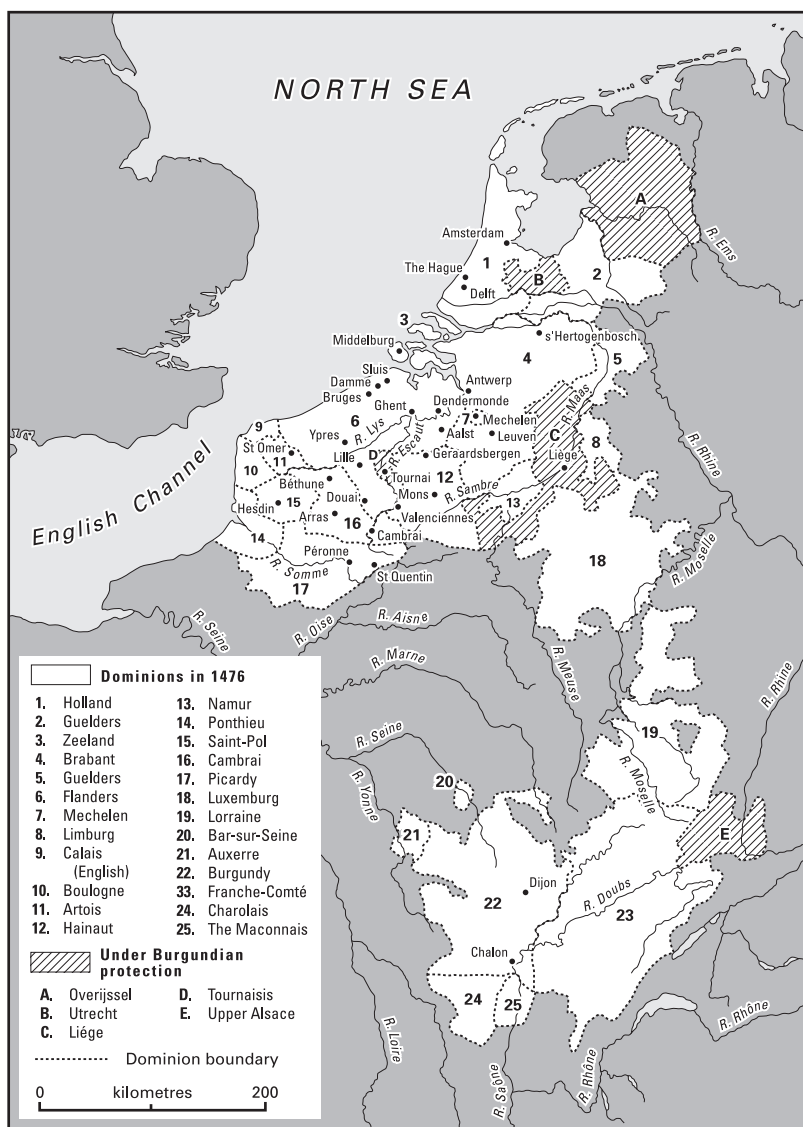
The many systems of money of account used in the Burgundian Low Countries were generally based on pounds (*livres*, abbreviated *ℓ*), shillings (*sous*, abbreviated *s*) and pence (*deniers*, abbreviated *d*). The most common in ducal accounts (of the receivers general) was the pound of 40 Flemish groats, the groat being a silver coin in circulation in Flanders. Unless otherwise stated, all references to pounds, shillings and pence relate to this money of account. Receivers also sometimes used a royal money of account known as the pound of Tours (*livre tournois*), which was generally worth 36 Flemish groats. Town accounts used these monies of account and others too. Most important for our purposes is a money of account used in Bruges, the Flemish pound (*pond groot*), made up of 240 Flemish groats (and therefore equivalent to 6 pounds of 40 groats). The Flemish pound of Paris (*Parisis*) also figures as a money of account in Bruges, and was worth 20 Flemish groats.

There were many types of coinage in circulation too, and these were subject to periodic revaluations. The gold coins mentioned in the course of this book were the *écu* (valued at 40 groats), the *philippus* or *ridder* (introduced by Duke Philip in 1433, and valued at 48 groats) and the florin (c.40 groats). The standard silver coins in circulation were the Flemish groat and the *stuiver* (valued at 2 groats). *Miten* were small copper coins: 24 made up a groat. After the unification of coinages of the Burgundian Netherlands in 1433, moneys of different regions were tied in fixed relation to each other (such that the pound of 40 groats was equivalent to 1.5 pounds of Brabant).

For further detail on these matters the reader may consult P. Spufford, *Monetary problems and policies in the Burgundian Netherlands (1433–96)* (Leiden, 1977).

ABBREVIATIONS

ADN	Archives départementales du Nord (Lille)
PCEEB	Publications du Centre européen d'études bourguignonnes
RN	Revue du Nord
SAB	Stadsarchief Brugge



Map of the Burgundian dominions, 1476

INTRODUCTION

Court and civic society

The terms chosen for the title of this book may still strike some readers as strange bedfellows. The court in our period has been described as ‘a closed world’, ‘an enchanted storehouse for the most precious treasures of its time’, ‘shielded from the outside ... [and] rigidly organized within by rules designed to preserve proper social distances’.¹ By that reckoning civic society was, if not the polar opposite, then at least a culture apart, physically separated and essentially distinct from a ‘courtly universe’ which gravitated around the person of the prince. The sense of a gulf between city and court has been perpetuated, in the case of the Burgundian Low Countries, by the long-standing influence of Johan Huizinga’s *Herfstij der Middeleeuwen* (variously translated).² The ‘forms of life, thought and art’ in the lands of the Valois dukes and their Habsburg successors represented the glorious autumnal flourish of a declining civilisation, but this was a culture centred around the court, not the great cities of the Low Countries.³ The contrast with Burckhardt’s *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* is marked. In the North, the Burgundian court was the last refuge of a ‘high and proud civilisation’; in the south, the city of Florence was the cradle of modernity.

That fifteenth-century Europeans did not subscribe to Huizinga’s view of Burgundian civilization has become abundantly clear in recent years. The impact of the cultural forms of the Low Countries in the later Middle Ages has led scholars to ‘rethink the Renaissance’ as a time when Burgundian arts predominated – in painting, court architecture

1 S. Bertelli, ‘The courtly universe’, in S. Bertelli, F. Cardini and E. Garbero Zorzi (eds), *Italian Renaissance courts* (London, 1986), pp. 7–38, at pp. 17, 19, 35.

2 E. Peters and W.P. Simons, ‘The new Huizinga and the old Middle Ages’, *Speculum* 74 (1999), pp. 587–620; J. Huizinga, *The autumn of the Middle Ages*, transl. by R.J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996) (all subsequent references are to this edition unless otherwise stated).

3 W. Prevenier, ‘Culture et groupes sociaux dans les villes des anciens Pays-Bas au Moyen Âge’, in J. Duvoisquel et al. (eds), *Les Pays-Bas bourguignons: Mélanges André Uytendaele* (Brussels, 1996), pp. 349–59.

or textiles, for instance.⁴ It has also become increasingly common to explore how the tastes of the dukes and their entourage were shared by the townsmen of the Low Countries among whom they lived.⁵ In music, one can no longer speak of a court style entirely distinct from that of the city, at least in Bruges.⁶ Jan van Eyck was a court painter in receipt of an annual pension, but he also worked for Flemish *poorters* (or privileged burghers), perhaps most famously alderman Joos Vijd and his wife Lisbette Borluut from Ghent, for whom he produced his *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* [14].⁷ The accounts of the ducal household record considerable expenditure on the purchase, upkeep and transport of tapestries, but the wills of townsfolk from Tournai and Douai reveal that the ownership of tapestry goods of differing scale and quality was also widespread.⁸ The presence of the city in the work of Gérard David, Hans Memling and other artists of the Burgundian Netherlands is hardly surprising given where these men came from and who they commonly worked for.⁹ Art production did not – could not – thrive on commissions from the court alone.

The work of Van Eyck emerged, not from some moribund and introspective court civilisation severed from its taproot, but in a dynamic world of cultural interactions within court and civic society. The forms which these interactions took, as well as the individuals and corporate bodies who participated in them, will be the subject of the selection of documents translated and annotated in this book.

4 M. Belozerskaya, *Rethinking the Renaissance: Burgundian arts across Europe* (Cambridge, 2002).

5 R. Van Uytven, 'Splendour or wealth? Art and economy in the Burgundian Netherlands', *Transactions of the Cambridge bibliographical society* 10 (1992), pp. 101–24 (repr. in his *Production and consumption in the Low Countries, 13th–16th centuries* [Aldershot, 2001]); S. Cassagnes, *D'art et d'argent: Les artistes et leurs clients dans l'Europe du Nord (XIV^e–XV^e siècle)* (Rennes, 2001).

6 R. Strohm, *Music in late medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985), p. 93.

7 E. Dhanens, *Van Eyck: the Ghent altarpiece* (London, 1973). The nouns *poorter* (individual) and *poorterij* (class) derive from Latin *portus* or Dutch *poort* meaning 'gate', and designate the oldest of the bourgeoisie resident within the city gates.

8 Cf. L. de Laborde, *Les ducs de Bourgogne: étude sur les lettres, les arts et l'industrie pendant le XV^e siècle*, 3 vols (Paris, 1849–52); E. Soil de Moriamé, *Les tapisseries de Tournai: les tapissiers et les hautlisseurs de cette ville* (Tournai, 1891).

9 P. Stabel, 'Social reality and artistic image', in M. Carlier et al. (eds), *Core and periphery in late medieval urban society* (Leuven-Apeldoorn, 1997), pp. 11–32, at p. 19.

The Burgundian lands

The dynasty associated with Burgundian civilisation was French in origin, stemming from the marriage in 1369 of the son of King Charles V of France, Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy (1363–1404), to Margaret of Male, daughter of Louis of Male Count of Flanders.¹⁰ When Philip became ruler of the lands to which his wife was heiress in 1384, a new group of dominions emerged in two principal blocks: in the north, the counties of Flanders and Artois; in the south, the duchy and county of Burgundy, joined with the counties of Nevers and Charolais. In between lay a few less significant lordships, such as Rethel. Philip the Bold contracted marriage alliances for his many children, a practice which raised the prospect of further expansion into the Low Countries, but both he and his eldest son, John the Fearless (1404–19), devoted much of their energy to expanding their influence in the kingdom of France during the troubled reign of Charles VI. It was not until John's murder in 1419 by his rivals in France and the subsequent alliance of his own son, Philip the Good (1419–67), with the English, that the dukes of Burgundy came to spend the majority of their time in their dominions. It becomes possible to speak of Burgundian court society more convincingly from this period on – hence the starting point for our book.

The itinerary of the court changed markedly as a result of Burgundian expansion into the Low Countries under the third Valois duke. Philip the Good's principal acquisitions were the county of Namur (1420), the duchy of Brabant (1430), the counties of Holland, Zeeland and Hainaut (1433) and the duchy of Luxembourg (1443), all of which lay in the north. Burgundians from the south continued to occupy key positions at court for reasons discussed below, including the chief steward of the household (*maître d'hôtel*) and memoirist Olivier de La Marche cited so often in our texts. But by this period the dukes rarely lived in the south. Charles the Bold was born in the duchy of Burgundy but made only one significant visit to the region during his reign, in 1473–74. Territories which the court rarely visited were certainly not unimportant, nor should we assume that the authority of the regime was weak there. The duchy of Burgundy made substantial contributions to ducal coffers in the form of indirect taxes under Philip the Good and remained fiercely loyal to the dynasty, partly thanks to the role of its elites in the governance of the ducal dominions as a whole. The county of Holland also received relatively few visits from the court, but

10 For greater detail see under 'Select Bibliography' the works by R. Vaughan; W. Blockmans and W. Prevenier; A. Brown; and B. Schnerb.

was successfully assimilated thanks to careful handling of indigenous factions, the integration of key figures within the local comital administration, and the deployment of influential courtiers as governors in the county.¹¹ The relative infrequency of ducal sojourns in these regions nonetheless underlines the fact that the prince and his entourage were habitually drawn not simply to their northern territories in general, but to the southern Netherlands and the north of France in particular. In terms of its customary location the court was Brabantine, Flemish or Artesian, rather than Dutch or Burgundian.

The duke and his extended entourage were thus commonly to be found in one of the most densely urbanised regions in Christendom. The urban network was dominated by Ghent and Bruges, but many other large centres of population lay close by. In 1500, it is estimated, twenty-four of the thirty towns in north-west Europe with populations in excess of 10,000 were to be found in the Low Countries.¹² Between 31 per cent and 45 per cent of the population of the ducal dominions in the north are calculated to have lived in towns or cities, the highest proportion of any European region outside central and northern Italy, and close to the figure of 40–50 per cent which Braudel considered to be the threshold of the modern economy.¹³ The dukes of Burgundy had rural residences they could use, such as the ducal castle at Hesdin with its labyrinth and mechanical amusements.¹⁴ But the court was never very far from significant urban centres even when it was to be found in these rural locations, and it was particularly in the cities that the dukes were inclined to reside (at least when they were not on campaign, as Charles the Bold frequently was). Bruges, Lille, Ghent and Saint-Omer (in that order) received regular visits from the court or elements of it, but most of the time spent by Philip the Good and Charles the Bold in cities was spent at Brussels.¹⁵ Similar patterns emerge in the itineraries of the duchesses. Although she eventually withdrew from court life, Isabella of Portugal (married to Philip the Good in 1430) often lived in

11 M. Damen, 'Linking court and counties: the governors and stadholders of Holland and Zeeland in the fifteenth century', *Francia* 29 (2002), pp. 256–68.

12 J. De Vries, *European urbanisation 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 29.

13 *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden: Middeleeuwen*, iv (Haarlem, 1981), pp. 44–6; F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme XVe–XVIIIe s. I, les structures du quotidien: le possible et l'impossible* (Paris, 1979), p. 425.

14 B. Franke, 'Gesellschaftsspiele mit Automaten – "Merveilles" in Hesdin', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 24 (1997), pp. 135–58.

15 E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La Ville des cérémonies: Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 384.

the capital of Brabant, while her daughter-in-law and granddaughter were to be found in Ghent.¹⁶ Cities were inevitably the location for great court events. The launch of the Order of the Golden Fleece took place in 1430 on the market place at Bruges, where the spectacle was witnessed by an indigenous urban audience and merchants from all over Christendom (chapter 3). Though it occurred in the south, we may also recall that Jacques de Lalaing's *pas d'armes* of the Fountain of Tears was held in 1449–50 on the island of Saint Laurent directly opposite the centre of Chalon-sur-Saône, the second largest commercial centre in Burgundy, its through traffic boosted that year by a papal jubilee.¹⁷

The unexpected demise of Charles the Bold while fighting the coalition of Swiss and the men of Lorraine at Nancy in 1477 led to a disruptive period of external threat and internal revolt, first under Charles's only child, Mary of Burgundy, who also met an early death due to a hunting accident in 1482, then under Mary's Habsburg husband Maximilian I, who finally secured the position of Philip the Fair, his son by Mary, ten years later. Residence of the court in large cities was more problematic during this period, although it continued in Brussels once the ducal palace was rebuilt in 1480, and recommenced in cities where the worst of the troubles had occurred, notably Ghent.¹⁸ New urban centres of Burgundian power also began to emerge. Charles the Bold's great reforms of the Burgundian state brought several institutions of government to Mechelen in the 1470s, and in the period of Philip the Fair's rule (1492–1506), followed by the regency of his sister Margaret of Austria on behalf of Charles, Philip's son (1507–15, 1519–30), the city began to rival Brussels as a capital of the Burgundian dominions.¹⁹ At the same time Antwerp and Amsterdam were emerging as significant commercial centres in the Low Countries, rivalling and ultimately supplanting Bruges, the decline of which may be attributed to the

16 M. Sommé, 'Les déplacements d'Isabelle de Portugal et la circulation dans les Pays-Bas bourguignons au milieu du XVe siècle', *RN* 52 (1970), pp. 183–97; see also *Het prinselijk Hof ten Walle in Gent* (Ghent, 2000), pp. 79–84.

17 A. Annunziata, 'Teaching the *Pas d'armes*', in H. Chickering and T. Seiler, *The study of chivalry* (Kalamazoo, 1988), pp. 557–82, at pp. 567–74.

18 A. Smolar-Meynart, 'Le palais de Bruxelles: des origines à Charles-Quint', in A. Smolar-Meynart and A. Vanrie (eds), *Le palais de Bruxelles* (Brussels, 1991), pp. 15–90, at p. 46; D. Lievois, 'Het Hof ten Walle in Gent ten tijde van Keizer Karel V', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde te Gent*, New Series 54 (2000), pp. 135–91.

19 W. Prevenier, 'Mechelen: lieu de mémoire de Bourgondische Nederlanden', *Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor wetenschappen en kunsten. Academiae analecta*, New Series, no 9 (Brussels, 2001).

increasing difficulties of trade and manufacture.²⁰ Conflict with France ensured that Burgundian power became ever more concentrated on the urbanised Low Countries from 1477 on. Although the counties of Burgundy and Artois were returned to Maximilian by the terms of the treaty of Senlis in May 1493, the duchy of Burgundy itself, and certain other territories in France, were not.

The cry of Burgundy continued to resonate for the dynasty which ruled the Low Countries after 1477. The Valois line survived in Mary, her son Philip the Fair and her grandson Charles V, the last two taking the names of their ducal ancestors. Despite prominent departures for royal service, many important servants of the ducal regime stayed loyal to Mary of Burgundy and Philip.²¹ Among other continuities in the post-1477 period, Burgundian institutions such as the Order of the Golden Fleece were upheld and even expanded. Maximilian was at first rejected by both the Flemish cities and members of the highest nobility of Flanders, who had learned to work together and saw themselves as guardians of the Burgundian legacy.²² Yet the new German ruler was not unreceptive to the Burgundian past himself. The incorporation of the ancient kingdom of Burgundy within the Empire in the eleventh century ensured that the idea of Burgundy was a familiar element of Habsburg political culture, and in 1508 Maximilian even contemplated the resurrection of the title.²³ It is true that Charles V's wider empire kept him occupied far from the Low Countries for much of his adult life: the convenient dynastic date for the end of our volume relates not to the Emperor but to his aunt, Margaret of Austria, regent in the Low Countries until her death in 1530. But Charles remained strongly attached to the idea of Burgundy, establishing the provinces of the Low Countries as a separate part of the empire known as the 'Burgundian circle' in 1548, and famously expressing the wish to be buried with his ancestors the dukes at Dijon.

20 R. Van Uytven, 'Stages of economic decline: late medieval Bruges', in J.-M. Duvoisquel and E. Thoen (eds), *Peasants and townsmen in medieval Europe: Studia in honorem Adri-aan Verhulst* (Ghent, 1995), pp. 259–69 (repr. in his *Production and consumption in the Low Countries*).

21 H. Cools, *Mannen met macht: Edellieden en de moderne staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse landen (1475–1530)* (Zutphen, 2001).

22 M. Boone, 'Élites urbaines, noblesse d'état: bourgeois et nobles dans la société des Pays-Bas bourguignons', in J. Paviot (ed.), *Liber amicorum Raphaël De Smedt* (Leuven 2001), pp. 61–85, at pp. 81–2.

23 G. Small, 'Of Burgundian dukes, counts, saints and kings, 14 CE–c.1500', in J. Bolton and J. Veenstra (eds), *The ideology of Burgundy* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 151–94.

Urban society

Relations between the Valois and Habsburg rulers of the Burgundian dominions and the great cities in which they commonly resided were stormy at several points between 1420 and 1530, and underlying conflicts and tensions are important in comprehending the significance of many of the documents that follow. The formation of the Burgundian state brought unprecedented fiscal pressure to bear on the towns.²⁴ The mechanisms used to raise money at Lille to meet ducal demands led to the ‘pillaging’ of the municipal treasury, particularly under Charles the Bold – a prince who kept nearly 40 per cent of the incomes he permitted the town council to raise in the 1470s.²⁵ Many of the rights and privileges acquired over the years by municipal authorities could now seem at variance with the interests of the ruler. At Valenciennes, for instance, the town’s right to grant asylum to murderers fleeing from other jurisdictions was an unwelcome anomaly to Philip the Good, who abolished it in 1455.²⁶ Given the numerous potential sources of friction between ruler and municipality, it is unsurprising that several major revolts erupted and were suppressed with varying degrees of difficulty.²⁷ The most enduring (although not the only) rising of the 1430s occurred at Bruges.²⁸ In the following decade tension between the ducal regime and Ghent developed from 1447, and led to a bloody war which was not settled in the duke’s favour until 1453 [13, 14].²⁹ Charles the Bold’s accession witnessed revolts in a number of towns, including Mechelen and Ghent [15], and on his death many municipalities exploited the weakness of the new dynasty to reassert their privileges.³⁰ But conflicts

24 M. Boone, ‘Les Ducs, les villes et l’argent des contribuables: le rêve d’un impôt permanent en Flandre à l’époque bourguignonne’, in P. Contamine et al. (eds), *L’impôt au Moyen Âge, II. Les espaces fiscaux* (Paris, 2002), pp. 323–41.

25 D. Clauzel, *Finances et politique à Lille pendant la période bourguignonne* (Dunkirk, 1982), pp. 193–7.

26 J.-M. Cauchies, ‘Valenciennes et les comtes de Hainaut (milieu XIIIe–milieu XVe siècle): des relations politiques mouvementées’, in L. Nys and A. Salamagne (eds), *Valenciennes aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Valenciennes, 1996), pp. 67–88, esp. pp. 82–4.

27 J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, ‘Patterns of urban rebellion in medieval Flanders’, *Journal of Medieval History* 31 (2005), pp. 369–93.

28 J. Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand van 1436–38* (Kortrijk, 1997).

29 J. Haemers, *De Gentse opstand, 1449–53. De strijd tussen rivaliserende netwerken om het stedelijke kapitaal* (Kortrijk, 2004).

30 W. De Pauw, ‘De opstand van 1467 te Mechelen’, unpublished *Licentiaat* thesis, University of Ghent 2002–3 (consultable at www.thesis.net); R. Van Uytven, ‘1477 in Brabant’, in W. Blockmans (ed.), *1477: Marie de Bourgogne* (Kortrijk, 1985), pp. 253–85.

between city and state were most widespread during our period in the years of Maximilian's regency, from 1482 to 1492. Several urban centres witnessed major revolts, notably Ghent in 1485 and in 1487–92, and Bruges in 1485 and 1488–90. It was not until the reign of Philip the Fair that lengthier periods of peace between the ruling dynasty and its most important cities were restored, although Ghent's rebellions were far from over even then.³¹

It would be misleading, nonetheless, to reduce the history of relations between the ruling regime and the major urban centres of the Burgundian dominions to the story of the origins, course and consequences of rebellions. The maintenance or re-establishment of peace and prosperity depended on the fostering of mutually advantageous relations between the prince and his urban subjects, at least the most influential and powerful among them. In most cities, here as elsewhere, the apex of urban society was occupied by a small elite whose wealth and dominance of municipal office marked them out from the rest of the population. In Leuven, the leading group consisted of industrialists and merchants on the one hand and urban landowners of old standing on the other, the latter in many respects close to the nobility in lifestyle.³² Below the elite lay the mass of the population, foremost among them the heads of the guilds. In some cities, guildsmen aspired to and attained a substantial role in municipal government, at Brussels and Tournai in the course of the fifteenth century, for example, and more enduringly in Ghent where, with the exception of the period from 1454 to 1477, municipal government was divided between 'The Three Members' of the *poorterij*, the 53 small guilds and the weavers.³³ But despite wider participation in government in these cases, few would now concur with Pirenne's vision of the cities of the Low Countries as early democracies.³⁴ Some guild deacons led a lifestyle not dissimilar to that of wealthier social groups, particularly in sectors producing luxury goods, and the guilds were increasingly becoming a closed

31 J.-M. Cauchies, *Philippe le Beau* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 79–84; J. Decavele (ed.), *Ghent. In defence of a rebellious city* (Antwerp, 1989).

32 R. Van Uytven, *Stadsfinanciën en stadseconomie te Leuven van de XIIe tot het einde der XVIe eeuw* (Brussels, 1961), esp. p. 594 et seq.

33 M. Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen, ca. 1384–ca. 1453* (Brussels, 1990); G. Small, 'Centre and periphery in late medieval France: Tournai, 1384–1477', in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *War, government and power in late medieval France* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 145–74.

34 H. Pirenne, *Early democracies in the Low Countries: urban society and political conflict in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, trans. J. Saunders (New York/London, 1963).

and hereditary milieu.³⁵ Governments which incorporated the guilds were scarcely less prone to the problems of nepotism and patronage which outsiders might detect in rule by patriciate.³⁶ If, as it seems, the description of Philip the Good's dominions as 'the Promised Lands' by the former courtier Philippe de Commines does indeed hold some truth, the bulk of the city's population in employment benefited less than guild masters, entrepreneurs or urban property owners from favourable economic conditions.³⁷ Workers in Bruges enjoyed higher salaries than those in some other cities, and within our period the middle third of the fifteenth century was a time of greater prosperity for many living in the Burgundian dominions, but on the whole the lower social orders led a precarious existence.³⁸ Short of a revolution, the labouring classes were never likely to occupy a role in government, tending instead to swell the ranks of the discontented during periods of revolt discussed above. Close to them but also marginalised was a disparate sector of the population which is hard to quantify, including prostitutes, criminals and beggars.³⁹

Urban society thus broadly defined was organised in ways that afforded a large measure of social control to civic elites. Aldermen appointed or at least vetted those responsible for the districts into which all sizeable towns were divided. At Bruges there were six such districts in the city, subdivided into a total of 119 'circles'.⁴⁰ Neighbourhood and parish organisations fulfilled a number of important functions: the keeping of the watch and wall-work, fire prevention and fire fighting, the breaking of ice on communal water supplies and the payment of certain taxes,

35 A. Derville, 'Les élites urbaines en Flandre et en Artois', in *Les élites urbaines au Moyen Âge: XXIV^e congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur* (Rome, 1996), pp. 119–35.

36 M. Boone and W. Prevenier, 'The "city-state dream"', in Decavele (ed.), *Ghent*, pp. 81–105, at p. 88.

37 M. Jones (ed. and trans.), *Philippe de Commines. Mémoires. The reign of Louis XI* (Harmondsworth, 1970); R. Van Uytven, 'La conjoncture commerciale et industrielle aux Pays-Bas bourguignons: une récapitulation', in Duvosquel et al. (eds), *Les Pays-Bas bourguignons*, p. 435–51.

38 J.-P. Sosson, *Les travaux publics de la ville de Bruges, XIV^e–XV^e siècles* (Brussels, 1977), and 'Le "petit peuple" des villes: indispensables mesures et mesures impossibles?', in P. Boglioni et al. (eds), *Le petit peuple dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 2002), pp. 191–211.

39 G. Dupont, 'Marginale groepen in de stedelijke samenlevingen in de late Middeleeuwen', in D. Heirbaut and J. Lambrecht (eds), *Van oud en nieuw recht. Handelingen van het XV^e de Belgisch-Nederlands Rechtshistorisch Congres* (Antwerp, 1998), pp. 219–40.

40 R. Van Uytven, 'Scènes de la vie sociale dans les villes des Pays-bas au XV^e siècle', *Mémoires de la Société d'agriculture, sciences et arts de Douai*, Fifth Series, 8 (1980–2), pp. 11–31, repr. in his *Production and consumption in the Low Countries*.

but also recreational pursuits, including neighbourhood participation in city-wide festivities (see chapter 4). In some towns, such as Ghent, local neighbourhood officials were responsible for the settlement of minor disputes.⁴¹ The fulfilment of these roles brought city dwellers into routine contact and encouraged the creation and observation of hierarchies among them. Beyond the neighbourhood, many other incorporations defined relations between town dwellers and emphasised the authority of a few. Clearly the professional organisation of the guilds placed the masters in a central position, themselves answerable in certain matters to town councils. Religious confraternities afforded a preponderant role to civic elites, such as the fraternity of the Holy Blood in Bruges in which all but 2 of the 73 recorded members from 1469 to 1500 had served as city magistrates (see chapter 6).⁴² Recreational organisations such as the chambers of rhetoric which held poetry and theatrical competitions within and between cities have been characterised in similar fashion [19a–c].⁴³ Needless to say, jousting fraternities (mainly in the fourteenth century) and archery or crossbow guilds (more widespread in the fifteenth) placed requirements upon their members in the cities of the Burgundian dominions which could only be fulfilled by the relatively well-off [17a–b, 18a–b]. Given the levers of power at the disposal of civic elites, it is tempting to describe the communities in which they lived as ‘conformist totalitarian societies based on mutual surveillance’.⁴⁴ If this claim appears excessive for such large communities as the cities of the Low Countries, the forms of social organisation outlined here do lend a semblance of credibility to the description of Ghent in one of our sources: ‘while the number of people is very great, the multitude itself does not give rise to confusion, for they are all numbered and known in their innermost thoughts by those whose task it is to govern and lead them, such as the deacons and the aldermen, the shopkeepers, the constables and the men responsible for the hundreds and tens in the various parishes and streets, in the member of the small guilds as in that of the weavers’ [14]. One can also readily understand

41 Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen*, pp. 124–9.

42 A. Brown, ‘Ritual and state-building: ceremonies in late medieval Bruges’, in J. van Leeuwen (ed.), *Symbolic communication in late medieval towns* (Leuven, 2006), pp. 1–28, at p. 15. There were, though, guilds which included a much wider membership (See chapter 6).

43 H. Pleij, ‘Geladen vermaak: Rederijkerstoneel als politiek instrument van een elite-cultuur’, *Jaarboek van De Fonteyne* 25 (1975), pp. 75–104, at p. 103.

44 Y. Grava, ‘La mémoire, une base de l’organisation politique des communautés provençales au XIVe s.’, in *Temps, mémoire, tradition au Moyen Âge* (Marseille, 1983), pp. 69–84, at p. 82.

how popular frustration might accumulate against a civic elite which monopolised office to its own advantage (or, as the same source has it, 'the wicked plundering thieves who consume our very entrails, and in the prince's name ... grow fat on our worldly goods and stuff their sacks'). Among the principal benefits of office was systematic gift-giving paid out of public funds for members of the elite on the occasion of great civic festivities, or at some important point in the life of the office-bearer. The practice evolved to promote social and political cohesion within the city.⁴⁵ In Ghent, where municipal gift-giving was particularly widespread, one of the greatest beneficiaries in the fifteenth century was the master carpenter Daneel Van Zeveren, nicknamed 'Liver-eater' by his enemies because of the monetary gifts amounting to the equivalent of several years' salary for a master guildsman which he received during a career in municipal government spanning three decades. On average these networks of sociability consumed between 12 and 15 per cent of the municipal budget of Ghent in the period 1400–1460. The less complex political scene of other towns may have reduced the need for such outlays, but similar gifts at Lille still amounted to more than 7 per cent of that city's revenues.⁴⁶ Social control brought significant material benefit for the governing elite.

City and state

It was among these groups, and the organisations in which their members fraternised with kin and friends, that the princely state found its strongest urban support. Civic elites exercised control over the wider urban population and were the key to unlocking the fiscal potential of large urban centres. It is therefore unsurprising that in many cities the overlap between such groups and princely government became marked, particularly where organs of ducal government were based [19b]. Lille was a primary recruiting ground for members of the ducal *chambre des comptes* which was located in the city.⁴⁷ In Dijon, at least 79 municipal office-bearers (31 of them mayors of the city) held

45 M. Boone, 'Dons et pots-de-vin, aspects de la sociabilité urbaine au bas Moyen Âge: Le cas gantois pendant la période bourguignonne', *RN* 70 (1988), pp. 471–87, notably pp. 476–7.

46 Clauzel, *Finances et politique*, p. 153.

47 M. Jean, 'Aux marges du royaume: la chambre des comptes de Lille en 1477', in P. Contamine and O. Mattéoni (eds), *La France des principautés: Les chambres des comptes aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles* (Paris, 1996), pp. 27–41, at pp. 37–8.

a post in the ducal administration between 1300 and 1450.⁴⁸ In Ghent, members of the ducal council responsible for justice came in the majority from the patriciate of the city.⁴⁹ Official service of the princely state during a period of tenure of municipal office was forbidden or frowned upon for obvious reasons, but this did not prevent former or future magistrates from holding a post in the prince's administration at other times. There are certainly examples of wealthy townsmen who held municipal office and do not seem to have been attracted to the service of the Burgundian state, such as Simon Borluut of Ghent, brother-in-law of Joos Vijd who commissioned Van Eyck's great altarpiece for the church of St John's in Ghent [14].⁵⁰ This group of urban notables – if indeed such families really did constitute a recognisable group – is deserving of further study. But historians have emphasised more often the numerous cases of townsmen who rose to high office under the dukes, among them two Brugeois who became chief stewards of the household, Pieter Bladelin under Charles the Bold and Pieter Lanchals under Maximilian I; the Brussels magistrate Jean II Hinckaert, who became master of the ducal forest of Soignes near the capital of Brabant; or the mayor of Leuven Lodewijk II Pynnock, who was a squire in the ducal entourage.⁵¹ The incentives to procure office through the court were considerable. The recipients of financial reward and prestige in the service of the princely state could usually offer greater prospects of advancement to their supporters than other patrons, thereby creating or strengthening local and regional networks which were dependent on the Burgundian court, the public source of patronage, for their prosperity and standing [15].⁵² Not all sectors in all civic elites participated fully in this experience, of course. Some of the most vociferous and active opponents of the Valois and Habsburg

48 T. Dutour, 'Les relations de Dijon et du duc de Bourgogne au XVe siècle', *PCEEB* 33 (1993), pp. 5–19, at pp. 16–17.

49 J. Dumolyn, 'Les conseillers flamands au XVe siècle', in R. Stein (ed.), *Powerbrokers in the late Middle Ages: The Burgundian Low Countries in a European context* (Turnhout, 2001), pp. 67–85, esp. pp. 76–84.

50 Boone, 'Élites urbaines, noblesse d'état', pp. 79–80.

51 G. Milis-Proost, 'Bladelin (Pieter)', *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek* 2 (Brussels, 1967), cc. 61–3; M. Boone, 'Biografie en prosopografie, een tegenstelling? Een stand van zaken in het biografisch onderzoek over Pieter Lanchals', *Millennium* 7 (1993), pp. 4–13; P. De Win, 'The lesser nobility of the Burgundian Netherlands', in M. Jones (ed.), *Gentry and lesser nobility in late medieval Europe* (Gloucester/New York, 1986), pp. 95–118, at p. 106; A. Smolar-Meynart, 'Bruxelles face au pouvoir ducal', in Duvoisquel et al. (eds), *Les Pays-Bas bourguignons*, pp. 373–84, at pp. 376–7.

52 J. Dumolyn, 'Investeren in sociaal kapitaal: Netwerken en sociale transacties van Bourgondische ambtenaren', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 28 (2002), pp. 417–38.

regimes emerged from among the ranks of leading guildsmen during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example.⁵³ The civic elite was the breeding ground for both opponents and supporters of the Burgundian regime. But it is important to recognise that even among the guilds of Flanders, the dukes had their stalwarts [15]. The powerful shippers of Ghent tended to support Valois and Habsburg rulers whose authority extended far beyond the county into the many lands where the haulage industry plied its trade.⁵⁴ One such haulier was George Chastelain, the official historian of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, and the single most-cited source in Huizinga's study of Burgundian court culture.⁵⁵ The chronicler's father had contracted a marriage within the lesser nobility, which afforded him access to at least three overlapping networks that help explain George's social ascension: one centred on the governing elite of Ghent and related organs of sociability, such as the prestigious crossbow guild of Saint George; another linking several Flemish aristocrats of the Masmines family, among them local office-holders at the lower end of the scale, and a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece at the top; and a third gravitating around Chastelain's great-uncle, Jan van Culsbrouc, who was a member of the higher clergy in Ghent with considerable experience as a ducal diplomat. Not everyone enjoyed the opportunities open to George Chastelain, but the example does demonstrate how deep the networks associated with the court might reach to perform an integrative function. Patrons, brokers and clients existed at many social levels: the ultimate patron was the prince.

Service at court: nobles and townsmen

Townsmen might enter court service in a number of ways – as legal or financial specialists, provisioners or simple servants – but it was unusual for them to accede to high office within the household. In this primarily noble milieu, standing was dictated in large measure by one's pedigree:

53 M. Boone, '*Armes, courses, assembles et commocions. Les gens de métiers et l'usage de la violence dans la société urbaine flamande à la fin du Moyen Âge*', *RN* 87 (2005), pp. 7–33.

54 D. Nicholas, *The metamorphosis of a medieval city: Ghent in the age of the Van Artevelde* (Lincoln NE/London, 1987), pp. 224–67.

55 G. Small, *George Chastelain and the shaping of Valois Burgundy* (Woodbridge/Rochester NY, 1997), pp. 9–50, and 'When *indiciaires* meet *rederijers*: a contribution to the history of the Burgundian "theatre state"', in J. Oosterman (ed.), *Stad van koopmanschap en vrede* (Leuven, 2005), pp. 133–61.

squires 'might rise in estate according to their virtues', acknowledged La Marche, but 'the house they came from' was also a relevant factor in their progress (or lack of it) [4]. Some townsmen did indeed attain noble status, and so could claim to come from a house of noble standing; but the process was commonly a slow one, and was rarely achieved within three generations.⁵⁶ Proof of nobility over no fewer than four generations was a membership requirement of the Order of the Golden Fleece [10], the ultimate expression of the noble's pre-eminence in the prince's entourage: although the Order was quite distinct from the court, those members who were recruited from the highest aristocracy of the ducal dominions played a central role in its affairs, as many of our texts and the accompanying notes make plain. The primacy of nobility and its attendant values could result in expressions of disdain for the non-noble who rose through court service. Arnout van Gouy, who held high civic office in Ghent when Philip the Good entered the city in 1458 [14], was described in choice terms by the noble chronicler Jacques du Clercq: 'he was from a lowly background in the town of Douai, bourgeois or merchants, and he conducted himself with such cunning that he was *bailli* of Douai for a long time, then he became high *bailli* of Ghent, and he was in Cyprus and elsewhere on several embassies for Philip, duke of Burgundy, and he profited so much from playing dice and the exercise of justice and in other ways that he became a rich man, and he bought several fine lordships and had his eldest son made a knight, even though at the outset he wasn't worth more than one hundred *écus*, so they said'.⁵⁷ Given the desire of the successful non-noble at court to assimilate in order to advance, we would do well not to exaggerate the differences between him and his noble colleagues; nor should we underestimate the power which the well-placed non-noble might exert over those deemed by social convention to be his betters [8]. But the dominant ideology of the court most certainly emerged from the ideals of the knightly classes. The public weal lay in the hands of a chivalric elite, albeit one which valued learning as well as prowess.⁵⁸

For the nobility of the Burgundian dominions, the court performed a more direct integrative function by bringing many of its members

⁵⁶ Boone, 'Élites urbaines, noblesse d'état', p. 76.

⁵⁷ Jacques du Clercq, *Mémoires*, ed. F. de Reiffenberg, 4 vols (Brussels, 1835–6), ii, p. 341.

⁵⁸ A. Vanderjagt, 'Classical learning and the building of power at the fifteenth-century Burgundian court', in J. Drijvers and A. MacDonald (eds), *Centres of learning* (New York/Cologne, 1995), pp. 267–77; J. Hexter, 'The education of the aristocracy in the Renaissance', in his *Reappraisals in history* (London, 1961), pp. 45–70.

together to serve and receive reward on a part-time basis.⁵⁹ At the hub of the wider court lay the households of the prince, his wife and other members of the family, each with a contingent of attendants who served in the chamber, pantry, cellar and stables [esp. 4, 6]. The work of these positions was mostly carried out by subordinates, while the office-bearers could find themselves entrusted with tasks of government, such as representing the duke at meetings of the estates or offering counsel. But the ceremonial duties of office were important as we shall see [e.g. 4, 5], and holders were expected to be present at court during their terms of service, often three or six months at a time, in some instances all year round. The household *ordonnances* [6] which first appeared in the late fourteenth century for the ducal court but became more frequent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries identified the office-bearers and defined their conditions of service, notably the number of subalterns and horses assigned to each of them, and whether the latter were to be fed at the duke's expense directly (*a livree*), or whether the officer would receive compensation for their upkeep at a daily rate of 3 *sous* per servant or horse (*a gaiges*).⁶⁰ Attendance and payment of wages were noted in a second set of documents, the daily record of household expenses known as the *écroes* (daily rolls of expenditure).⁶¹ Payment of *gaiges* was in reality just one of the many benefits the court office-bearer might expect to obtain from the prince. Gifts in the form of money, cloth, horses or precious objects could be received as a result of some important event in the life of a member of the ruling dynasty, or to meet some need of the servant. In a memorandum written for Philip the Good in 1439, the ducal chamberlain Hue de Lannoy estimated that the prince could allocate around 7.5 per cent of his budget to meeting the cost of such gifts.⁶² This figure – which is close, as we have seen, to expenditure on gifts as a proportion of municipal budgets – was matched by recorded expenditure in the accounts of Charles the Bold's household thirty years later.⁶³

59 W. Paravicini, 'The court of Burgundy: a model for Europe?', in R. Asch and A. Birke (eds), *Princes, patronage and the nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 70–102.

60 M. Sommé, 'Que représente un gage journalier de 3 sous pour l'officier d'un hôtel ducal à la cour de Bourgogne au XVe siècle?', in J.-P. Sosson et al. (eds), *Les niveaux de vie au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999), pp. 297–315. See also H. Kruse and W. Paravicini (eds), *Die Hofordnungen der Herzöge von Burgund, I: Herzog Philipp der Gute, 1407–67* (Ostfildern, 2005)..

61 H. Kruse, *Hof, amt und Gagen: Die täglichen Gagenlisten des burgundischen Hofes (1430–67) und der erste Hofstaat Karls des Kühnen (1456)* (Bonn, 1996).

62 R. Vaughan, *Philip the Good* (2nd edn, Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 259–60.

63 M. Damen, 'Gift exchange at the court of Charles the Bold', in M. Boone and M.

'The gift was everywhere' in the Burgundian dominions.⁶⁴ Office too was in the gift of the prince, and the court afforded the most direct means of accessing it. A ducal fruiterer could pick up the post of city gate-keeper from the duke, a task he might then delegate to a subordinate, but through which he naturally expected to receive an emolument and additional influence.⁶⁵ Princely control over church appointments provided further scope for patronage.⁶⁶ The career of the ducal *valet de chambre* Jean Coustain [8] provides an example of the many opportunities that might be seized by someone in close proximity to the prince (although not of the loyal service which the duke expected in return for his gifts). Daily rates of pay were therefore part of a wider picture of integration and reward at court. Although the 3 *sous* per mouth which office-bearers received to meet the living costs of subalterns was adequate, *gaiges* functioned more as a form of retainer and as a calibration of rank than as a salary properly speaking.⁶⁷ For the great courtiers, such as Charles the Bold's servant Gui de Brimeu, a man of many income streams, these sums provided a mere trickle of revenue.⁶⁸

Household service recorded in the ordonnances and *escroes* brought the courtier into a wider network in which members of the elite were obligated to the prince and to one another. Sometimes these bonds existed for life. It was common practice for a court servant to solicit a member of the ruling dynasty to act as godparent for his or her offspring. (The count of Charolais fulfilled the role eight times in 1457 alone.) At the very least such relations generated a gift for the child, but sometimes a more enduring relationship developed. Philip the Good's confidant and first chamberlain Philippe Pot was his own godson, and Pot held at least two children over the baptismal fonts in his master's name.⁶⁹ Court careers could begin early, particularly if one entered as a page [4]. They might also last a long time, like the career of Isabelle de Moraille

Howell (eds), *'In but not of the market': movable goods in late medieval and early modern urban society* (forthcoming).

64 A. Derville, 'Les pots-de-vin dans le dernier tiers du XVe siècle', in Blockmans (ed.), 1477. *Marie de Bourgogne*, pp. 449–71, at p. 451.

65 H. Kruse, 'Der burgundische Hof als soziales Netz', *Francia* 29 (2002), pp. 229–55, at p. 249.

66 P. Van Petegem, 'Les Rôles des bénéfices à la collation princière', *PCEEB* 38 (1998), pp. 229–46.

67 H. Kruse, 'Philipp der Gute, der Adel und das Geld', in H. Von Seggern and G. Fouquet (eds), *Adel und Zahl* (Ubstadt-Weiher, 2000), pp. 149–64, at p. 160.

68 W. Paravicini, *Guy de Brimeu* (Bonn, 1975), pp. 421–3.

69 M.-T. Caron, *La Noblesse dans le duché de Bourgogne, 1315–1477* (Lille, 1987), p. 511; Small, *George Chastelain*, p. 77.

who served Philip the Good's mother, third wife and son before finally receiving – like many who had completed decades of service – a pension for life in 1447.⁷⁰ Long careers encouraged the development of an *esprit de corps* which helped the dynasty weather the storms of 1477.⁷¹ The presence of youth encouraged marriages within the court elite which were brokered by the duke, duchess and other leading courtiers [5].⁷² A court marriage might be used to further the fortunes of the bride and groom in very direct ways: these have left remarkable documentary traces [7c]. Less apparent in the historical record, but no doubt fundamental to the nature of Burgundian power, were the informal bonds which, one suspects, were constantly forming and reforming between the politically powerful, their allies and their clients at court. George Chastelain believed that Guillaume Fillastre, bishop of Toul, 'was launched by the hand of the lord of Croy and the marshal of Burgundy' when he rose to become head of the ducal council; 'everything changed at that point, with new faces and new ways of doing things, all of them nonetheless for the good'.⁷³ The threat of factional strife among competing groups at court was evident and erupted most dramatically in the reign of Philip the Good, notably between the Rolins and the Croys [7b].⁷⁴ The problem was easy to anticipate and difficult to avoid: nevertheless, its importance should not be overestimated in a court in which a Portuguese lady-in-waiting (Isabella de Souza) could become the wife of a nobleman from Champagne (Jean de Poitiers) [5]; a Burgundian equerry (Olivier de La Marche) the 'singular friend' of a Ghenter (Chastelain); or a Hainaut lord (Antoine de Croy) the political patron of a bishop from eastern France (Fillastre).

The diverse attachments generated by court service helped counter-

70 E. Bousmar and M. Sommé, 'Femmes et espaces féminins à la cour de Bourgogne', in J. Hirschbiegel and W. Paravicini (eds), *Das Frauenzimmer* (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 47–78, at p. 51.

71 M. Sommé, 'Les Jeunes Nobles à la cour de Bourgogne sous Philippe le Bon', in W. Paravicini and J. Wettlaufer (eds), *Erziehung und Bildung bei hofe* (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 71–89. A celebrated exception was Philippe de Commines, who came to court 'at the end of [his] childhood, at the age when [he] could ride a horse', but who abandoned Charles the Bold in 1472: J. Calmette and G. Durville (eds), *Philippe de Commines: Mémoires*, 3 vols (Paris, 1924–5), i, p. 4.

72 Bousmar and Sommé, 'Femmes et espaces féminins', pp. 58–60.

73 George(s) Chastel(l)ain, *Oeuvres*, ed. J.C. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 8 vols (Brussels, 1863–6), iii, pp. 332–3.

74 W. Paravicini, 'Acquérir sa grâce pour le temps advenir: les hommes de Charles le Téméraire (1433–67)', in A. Marchandisse and J.-L. Kupper (eds), *À l'ombre du pouvoir: Les entourages princiers au Moyen Âge* (Geneva, 2003), pp. 361–83, notably pp. 369–74.