

‘How one shall govern a city’: the polyphony of urban political thought in the fourteenth-century duchy of Brabant

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ABSTRACT: This article examines late medieval urban political thought. By means of an intertextual methodology that combines the efforts of continental scholars and English literary historians, it provides new insights into the political ideas that circulated within the towns of the fourteenth-century duchy of Brabant. A qualitative analysis between different source types, that originated amongst socially diverse groups, will indicate that political ideas had a polyphonic character. Indeed, ideas were constantly reconstructed and reshaped by the social groups that used them and the context in which they were uttered. During the fourteenth century, the Brabantine citizenry was involved in an ideological battle that was fought with similar, but adaptable, weapons.

Literary works possess great value for the historian of political thought. As indicated by John Watts, medieval texts put flesh on theoretical notions and thus helped to shape the content of public and social life.¹ As such, several medievalists have started to investigate their political and ideological discourses. Important pioneers that still dominate the field are English literary historians like Vincent John Scattergood, Paul Strohm, Steven Justice and Wendy Scase. By analysing the intersections between texts, their historical context and contemporary politics, they have demonstrated that literary works voice several political ideas with the aim to spread them. Reconstructing reality was not the primary concern of medieval authors. In contrast, when writers commented on political

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¹ J. Watts, *The Making of Politics: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009), 262.

affairs, they did so from their own point of view and with the intention of educating their contemporaries. Medieval histories from the reign of Richard II, for example, served as cautionary lessons for his successors. Through the failings of this deposed monarch, kings were reminded of their duties.² As political and ideological instruments, texts had the very practical intention of shaping contemporary society. Despite the merits of their innovative contextual approach, English literary historians have almost exclusively studied court literature and parliamentary petitions.³ Given that a similar thematic focus also dominated research on other regions, such as France, scholars have paid little attention to texts that originated within an urban context.⁴ Consequently, the overlaps between ideological discourses and urban political thought still remain ambiguous.

The initiative for the study of urban political thought was nonetheless given by an English scholar. In her ground-breaking article in the *Urban History Yearbook*, the predecessor of this journal, Susan Reynolds argued that the political history of urban centres could only be fully understood if their political thought was taken into account.⁵ Despite the rigour of previous research on English towns, it is still a historiographical commonplace that these centres, with the exception of London, were relatively small and powerless in comparison to the crown. As a consequence, English (literary) scholars have only recently started to examine urban political discourse extensively.⁶ In contrast, the political culture and socio-economic history of towns in highly urbanized regions on the continent, such as the Low Countries, the Rhine region and northern Italy, have long formed a central part of historical research. It is generally acknowledged that these late medieval cities were important political players whose power and influence was equal to and sometimes even surpassed that of their landlords. Continental scholars were thus quicker to answer Reynolds' call. To study the political ideas that circulated in continental towns, they have investigated a great variety of sources, such as city accounts, customals, court records, acts of negotiations, petitions

² V.J. Scattergood, 'Remembering Richard II: John Gower's "Cronica Tripartita"', "Richard the Redeles", and "Mum and the Sothsegger"', in V.J. Scattergood (ed.), *The Lost Tradition: Essays on Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (Dublin, 2000), 200–25.

³ V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century, 1399–1485* (London, 1971); P. Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, 2005); S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1994); W. Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272–1553* (Oxford, 2007).

⁴ M. Aurell, *La vielle et l'épée. Troubadours et politique en Provence au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1989); K. Bourassa, 'Counselling Charles VI of France: Christine de Pizan, Honorat Bovet, Philippe de Mézières, and Pierre Salmon' University of York Ph.D. thesis, 2014.

⁵ S. Reynolds, 'Medieval urban history and the history of political thought', *Urban History Yearbook*, 9 (1982), 14–23.

⁶ S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977); C. Fletcher, 'News, noise and the nature of politics in late medieval English provincial towns', *Journal of British Studies*, 56 (2017), 250–72; C. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns, 1250–1530* (Oxford, 2017).

and charters.⁷ What is more, the results and methodology of the English literary historians have inspired them to take a closer look at the cross-overs between urban literature and political ideas.⁸ However, by treating discursive works as detached case-studies, these scholars have isolated their innovative results. Furthermore, they have drawn up unnatural boundaries between different types of documents, especially chronicles and petitions. The few studies that do take multiple sources into account are still too limited in scope, focusing on a particular social group, such as the craft guilds, or political principle, mainly the ubiquitous concept of 'the common good'.⁹

To demolish these demarcations while incorporating the methods of English literary historians into the study of late medieval urban political thought, this article proposes a more structural intertextual methodology. By extensively comparing the political discourse of an urban poem with that of other well-contextualized and socially diverse contemporary sources, I will provide a sharper and more dynamic view on the functioning of late medieval urban political thought. After all, by only considering one particular case, previous studies reduced political ideas to inflexible elements. As Christopher Fletcher has noted, many scholars have separated texts and their voiced ideas by placing them into glass cases and seeing them merely as evidence, rather than a functioning part of medieval society.¹⁰ This is a problematic move, since political thought has very real practical applications. Political actors can always be called upon to legitimize their actions, and they are only able to do so with the ideas that circulate within their society. The scope of concrete political actions and the changes that might be possible under given circumstances are therefore determined by political thought.¹¹ Specifically, I will compare an urban poem with two petitions of the craft guilds and one ducal charter. This comparison is feasible as boundaries between different source

⁷ J. Haemers and C. Liddy, 'Popular politics in the late medieval city: York and Bruges', *English Historical Review*, 128 (2013), 771–805; J. Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1384–1506)', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), 5–23.

⁸ E. Isenmann, 'Ratsliteratur und städtische Ratsordnungen des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Soziologie des Rats, Amt und Willensbildung, politische Kultur', in P. Monnet and O.G. Oexle (eds.), *Stadt und Recht im Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 2003), 215–497; C. Hess, 'Nigra crux mala crux: a comparative perspective on urban conflict in Gdansk in 1411 and 1416', *Urban History*, 41 (2014), 565–81.

⁹ V. Vrancken, 'United in revolt and discourse: urban and noble perceptions of "bad government" in fifteenth-century Brabant (1420–1)', *Journal of Medieval History*, 43 (2017), 579–99; E. Lecuppre-Desjardin and A.L. Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th–16th c.)* (Turnhout, 2010); J. Dumolyn, '"I thought of it at work, in Ostend": urban artisan labour and guild ideology in later medieval Low Countries', *International Review of Social History*, 62 (2017), 389–419.

¹⁰ C. Fletcher, 'Morality and office in late medieval England and France', in N. Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England*, vol. V (Woodbridge, 2008), 182.

¹¹ Q. Skinner, 'Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action', in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge, 1988), 97–118.

types were much more flexible in the late Middle Ages than historians presume. Indeed, various types of texts were often written by the same author, or by authors belonging to similar social strata. In addition, literary scholars such as Scase have already demonstrated that there were close links between governmental sources and discursive texts.¹²

To realize these objectives, this article will investigate the political ideas that circulated within the towns of the fourteenth-century duchy of Brabant. In contrast to other regions, such as Flanders, the political thought of the urban centres of Brabant has thus far received little attention. This duchy was nevertheless the birthplace of 'How one shall govern a city' (original: *Hoemen ene stat regeren sal*), an extremely influential Middle Dutch poem that quickly became popular throughout the Low Countries, the Rhine Region and the north of the Holy Roman Empire. In Heike Bierschwale and Jacqueline van Leeuwen's study, the poem is classified as the oldest preserved example of the late medieval textual tradition of 'urban lessons'. The genre of 'urban lessons' emerged in the context of the gradually increasing responsibilities, influence and political power of urban governors. Works belonging to this textual tradition are characterized by their didactic focus on urban government.¹³ The precise date of origin of 'How one shall govern a city' is unknown, but it is clear that the poem was written during the first half of the fourteenth century. The oldest preserved version of the poem was added to the Brussels manuscript of the Middle Dutch discursive work 'The mirror for laymen' (*Der Leken Spieghel*), written between 1325 and 1330. Its author is anonymous, but the poem can be associated with the top social strata of the urban population. After all, 'How one shall govern a city' was clearly meant to serve as a mirror for the urban governing elite, whom it literally addresses and whose responsibilities it lists. Moreover, it was inscribed on the walls of several town halls like those of Brussels (c. 1401/21), Bremen (c. 1491) and Emmerik (c. 1564).¹⁴ By analysing the discourse of 'How one shall govern a city', this article aims to add the case of Brabant to the international historiography on urban political thought.

To analyse the political ideas of the fourteenth-century Brabantine citizenry, I will employ discourse analysis.¹⁵ Linguists have shown that keywords or discursive points can be used as central signifiers of political thought.¹⁶ I will therefore focus on the ways in which different social

¹² F. Van Oostrom, *Wereld in Woorden: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1300–1400* (Amsterdam, 2013), 39; Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, 14–18; Scase, *Literature and Complaint*.

¹³ H. Bierschwale and J. van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll: Deutsche und Niederländische Stadtrechtslehren des Mittelalters* (Frankfurt, 2005).

¹⁴ W. van Anrooij, "'Hoemen ene stat regeren sal.'" Een Vroege Stadstekst uit de Zuidelijke Nederlanden', *Spiegel der Letteren*, 34 (1992), 139–57.

¹⁵ For a general introduction, see H. Van den Berg, 'Discoursanalyse', *Kwalon*, 26 (2004), 29–39; T.A. Van Dijk, 'Critical discourse analysis', in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen and H.E. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Malden, 2001), 352–71.

¹⁶ R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976).

groups interpreted and used the keywords that were essential in 'How one shall govern a city', like 'justice', 'the common good', 'unity' and 'communal money'. This qualitative analysis will help provide new insights into the ideas which shaped urban politics in the dynamic late medieval era. For reasons of feasibility, this article will only investigate political thought about the ideal way of governing. By focusing on the densely urbanized duchy of Brabant, I will highlight the ideological discourses of urban texts and the exchange of political ideas between the socially diverse craft guilds and governing elites. In comparison with the English case studied by Scattergood and Strohm, the political discourse of Brabant can be qualified as more distinctively 'urban' and thus contains the voices of many town dwellers. Indeed, I argue that political ideas had a polyphonic character because of which they were constantly changing in line with the social groups that used them and the political context in which they were uttered. But before we can turn towards the analysis of urban political thought, a brief overview of the historical context of fourteenth-century Brabant is essential.

A balancing of powers: politics in the fourteenth-century duchy of Brabant

The political history of the fourteenth-century duchy of Brabant is characterized by a dynamic balance of powers. At the top stood the duke, whose hereditary status as landlord went unquestioned by his subjects. But even so, the dukes of Brabant should not be seen as omnipotent figures.¹⁷ In contrast to other landlords, such as the kings of England, the dukes of Brabant were involved in a constant power struggle with the mighty towns and nobles within their dominion. During the late medieval period, towns such as Brussels, Leuven and Antwerp increasingly succeeded in restricting ducal sovereignty.¹⁸ Next to this power struggle on the 'national' level of the duchy, there also existed many tensions within the towns. Medieval urban centres were hierarchically divided communities, in which social groups with diverse interests lived in close proximity to each other. The government of these complex communities was monopolized by elite families (*geslechten* or *goede lieden* in Middle Dutch). However, their policy was increasingly challenged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by politically excluded groups, such as the craft guilds (*ambachten* or *neeringen*), resulting in a large number of urban revolts. In spite of this great threat to their authority, the Brabantine

¹⁷ S. Boffa, *Warfare in Medieval Brabant 1356–1406* (Woodbridge, 2004), 80–6.

¹⁸ R. van Uytven, 'Vorst, adel en steden: een driehoeksverhouding in Brabant van de twaalfde tot de zestiende eeuw', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis*, 59 (1976), 93–122.

urban elite were able to preserve their monopoly on urban government until the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹⁹

Since the twelfth century, the towns of Brabant had received several privileges from their landlord. To finance their policy and cope with their debts, the dukes of Brabant became largely dependent on the wealth of the towns, and every time their landlords asked for financial aid, the cities demanded privileges in return. As a result, the urban centres became powerful political players which were not only able to organize their government in an independent manner, but also obtained a great deal of control over the ducal policy.²⁰ The dukes fought back. During his reign, Duke John III (c. 1300–55) succeeded in regaining a part of his sovereignty. But due to the state of ducal finances and the wealth and demographic potential of urban centres, the political power of the towns could no longer be broken.²¹ Moreover, John III's problematic succession gave the urban elite the chance to extend their political influence even further.

In 1355, John III followed his sons into the grave, leaving behind three daughters, Joanna, Margaret and Marie. Since the privilege that the king of the Romans, Philip of Swabia (c. 1177–1208), had granted to Duke Henry I of Brabant (c. 1165–1235) in 1204, the dukes of Brabant could pass on their lands to female successors. John III had, however, died before appointing one of his three daughters as his sole successor. As a result, the duchy was at risk of being divided into three. To avoid this fate, 44 towns and 139 nobles and knights joined together to support the claims of John's eldest daughter Joanna (c. 1322–1406) and her husband Wenceslaus I, duke of Luxembourg (c. 1337–83). In exchange for the support of their subjects, the new duke and duchess had to recognize the first *Blijde Inkomst* or 'Joyous Entry' of 1356. In essence, the 'Joyous Entry' was an extended and written version of the traditional inauguration oaths that the dukes of Brabant had to swear at the beginning of their reign. The drafting of this inauguration charter was the result of intense negotiations, in which the towns played a prominent role. Although the 'Joyous Entry' quickly lost its legal force, its value for the historian remains great.²² The many obligations, rights and limits on the ducal power that are laid down in this charter provide great insight into the fourteenth-century political thought of urban elites and nobles in Brabant.²³ The comparison of the political discourse of the

¹⁹ R. van Uytven, 'Het gewicht van de goede steden', in R. van Uytven *et al.* (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Brabant: van het hertogdom tot heden* (Leuven, 2004), 118–25.

²⁰ H. Vandecandelaere, 'Een opstand in "zeven aktes" Brussel 1303–1306', *Brusselse Cahiers*, 40 (2008), 14–16.

²¹ Van Uytven, 'Vorst, adel en steden', 101.

²² The first 'Joyous Entry' lost its legal force after only a few months. During the war of succession between Count Louis II of Flanders and Wenceslaus, the urban governments of Leuven and Brussels after all broke their oath of loyalty recorded in the inauguration charter by siding with the count. In the end, Wenceslaus was able to win back terrain and negotiate a peace settlement with Louis II.

²³ V. Vrancken, *De Blijde Inkomsten van de Brabantse hertogen. Macht, opstand en privileges in de vijftiende eeuw* (Brussels, 2018), 58–65.

'Joyous Entry' of 1356 with that of 'How one shall govern a city' will thus lead to interesting results.

Until the end of the fourteenth century, the towns of Brabant were exclusively governed by elite families. Contrary to the standard historiographical assumption, it is futile to make a clear-cut distinction between the urban elite and the nobility of Brabant. After all, these groups were closely connected by having a similar lifestyle, numerous fiscal transactions and several intermarriages.²⁴ Finally, recent research has indicated that there was also much common ground between the political ideas of these social groups.²⁵ Besides the social and governing elite, we can divide the urban population, at the risk of oversimplifying, into two more social groups, the middling sort of people and the lower social strata, which includes wage workers and unskilled labourers. The middling sort of people were mainly members of the craft guilds, which can be defined as associations of workers with the same occupation. The (long-distance) trade of the products that these crafts produced was regulated by associations of merchants or guilds (*Gilden*). Because of different economic and political prerequisites and sources of income, the craft guilds and the urban elite were distinguishable social groups.²⁶ This social fault-line was, however, not absolute. Indeed, there existed a constant flow between the crafts and the governing elite. By the late medieval period, the craft guilds had developed into power bastions that influenced governance, by handing in petitions, forming ever-changing political alliances with both the duke and the urban elite and so on. Nevertheless, it still took many years of struggling before the crafts permanently obtained the right to be voted onto the 'bench' of the alderman. The social and political tensions that were the result of this unequal urban power balance reached a boiling point in a series of popular revolts across western Europe. In addition to a transparent government, the most common demands of late medieval rebels were political accountability, participation and representation.²⁷

In Brabant, revolts for example broke out in Antwerp, Brussels, Mechelen and Leuven.²⁸ In Leuven, a revolt erupted in 1360 that would last nearly a quarter century.²⁹ Tensions were at their highest in 1360 and 1378, when the craft guilds succeeded in seizing power to the detriment of the urban elite. In 1378, the craft guilds even besieged the town hall

²⁴ Van Uytven, 'Vorst, adel en steden'. For more information on the nobility of Brabant, see M. Damen, 'Heren met banieren. De Baanrotsen van Brabant in de vijftiende eeuw', in M. Damen and L. Sicking (eds.), *Bourgondië voorbij: de Nederlanden 1250–1650: liber alumnorum Wim Blockmans* (Hilversum, 2010), 139–58.

²⁵ Vrancken, 'United in revolt'.

²⁶ While the craft guilds acquired a living from manual labour and production, the wealth of the urban elite derived from trade and large land holdings.

²⁷ Haemers and Liddy, 'Popular politics'.

²⁸ Van Uytven, 'Het gewicht van de goede steden', 124–5.

²⁹ H. Vander Linden, *Histoire de la constitution de la ville de Louvain au Moyen Âge* (Ghent, 1892); J. Cuvelier, *Les institutions de la ville de Louvain au Moyen Âge* (Leuven, 1935).

of Leuven and threw 16 aldermen out of the window.³⁰ Despite the resultant violence, the revolt of 1378 had a peaceful beginning in which the united craft guilds of Leuven handed over two petitions to the alderman of the town and Duke Wenceslas. Petitioning was a ubiquitous practice across late medieval Europe. As written weapons, petitions formed the standard means of conveying complaints to the ruling elites. In Leuven, as in the Low Countries in general, petitions took the form of political pamphlets, listing and justifying complaints about government actions. Usually petitions were drafted by a jurist, who wrote down the demands of the rebels in a legal jargon that used all the known juridical clichés. Research has indicated that petitions nevertheless form an ideal source for uncovering the political ideas and lamentations of the craft guilds.³¹ The first of the petitions of Leuven was handed over by the leaders of the craft guilds in March, and the second was composed by the aldermen that the craft guilds had appointed after a revolt in July. Seeing as textile craft guilds, in particular the weavers, played a great role during the revolts of Leuven, it is likely that they had a major impact on the content of the petitions.³² The inclusion of the petitions of the craft guilds of Leuven will thus provide a socially diverse perspective to the intertextual comparison made in this article. Through the comparison of the sources analysed, the relation between the political ideas of the urban elite and those of the craft guilds will be examined in the next section. In what ways were political ideas used? And to what ends?

**'Those who want to govern a city, shall follow these rules':
urban political thought in Brabant**

Although the author of *'How one shall govern a city'* is anonymous, the poem is often attributed to Jan Van Boendale (1280 or 1290–1350 or 1351 or 1365). Van Boendale was born in the area around Tervuren (near Brussels) and was a city clerk of Antwerp. Besides his activities as a scribe, he was also a literary author whose name is associated with famous Middle Dutch discursive and narrative texts like the *Brabantse Yeesten* and *'The mirror for layman'*.³³ As mentioned above, the oldest preserved version of *'How one shall govern a city'* was added to the Brussels manuscript of this last work. Because of this connection, it is tempting to credit the poem to the author of *'The mirror for laymen'*, and by extension Van Boendale. However, it is uncertain if the author of *'The mirror for laymen'* recorded, copied or

³⁰ J. Haemers, 'Governing and gathering about the common welfare of the town. The petitions of the craft guilds of Leuven, 1378', in J. Dumolyn *et al.* (eds.), *La comunidad medieval como esfera pública* (Sevilla, 2014), 156–9.

³¹ W. Ormrod *et al.* (eds.), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (Woodbridge, 2009); Haemers, 'Governing and gathering', 159–60.

³² Haemers, 'Governing and gathering', 153–69; J. Haemers, 'Bloed en inkt. Een nieuwe blik op de opstand te Leuven, 1360–1383', *Stadsgeschiedenis*, 7 (2012), 141–64.

³³ Van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden*, 143–75.

wrote the poem. In addition, Van Boendale's authorship for 'The mirror for laymen' is highly uncertain, so his authorship for 'How one shall govern a city' is even more dubious.³⁴

For this reason, it seems wise to avoid conclusions based on the identification with a specific authorial figure such as Van Boendale. Instead, my analysis begins with the author's social profile, as a likely employee of the governing elites. If we take a closer look at the social profile of known authors of other 'urban lessons', a general pattern emerges. Johann Von Soest, Johannes Rothe, and many others, all wrote 'urban lessons' similar to 'How one shall govern a city', albeit in other cities, specifically in the Rhineland. Most of these authors were employed by the city council of their respective towns.³⁵ Seeing as they were not themselves members of the council, they were exempted from the rotation of governors that was established during the late medieval period. As a result of their long-term careers in the political heart of medieval towns, these authors acquired a good understanding of politics, and thus had the necessary skills to write 'urban lessons'.³⁶

'How one shall govern a city' was written somewhere between 1330 and 1350. If the poem existed before 1330, it would most likely have been added to all manuscripts of 'The mirror for laymen'. The poem could not have been written after 1350, since the Brussels manuscript was drafted around this time. It is no coincidence that the poem originated precisely within this period. During the turbulent fourteenth century, it aimed at reminding urban governors of the ways in which they ought to rule. This purpose is indicated by the poem's title and opening sentence: 'Those who want to govern a city, shall follow these rules.' That the subsequent governmental guidelines are obligatory is not only made clear by the imperative opening but also by the threat at the end of the poem: 'and where one is lacking thereof, then the town is in danger'.³⁷

If contemporary governors wanted to avoid the destruction of their town, and thus the basis of their power, 'How one shall govern a city' states that they must provide consistent justice for both the rich and the poor, defend the freedom and the autonomy of the town and be

³⁴ W. van Anrooij, 'Stand van zaken: Jan van Boendale en de Antwerpse School', *Nederlandse letterkunde*, 5 (2000), 86–99.

³⁵ D. Adrian, 'Penser la politique dans les villes allemandes à la fin du Moyen Âge. Traités de gouvernement et réalités urbaines', *Société Française d'Histoire Urbaine*, 38 (2013), 175–94; P. Monnet, 'Bien commun et bon gouvernement: le traité politique de Johann von Soest sur la manière de bien gouverner une ville (Wye men wol eyn statt regyrn sol, 1495)', in Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi*, 89–106.

³⁶ R. Stein, 'The Antwerp clerk Jan van Boendale and the creation of a Brabantine ideology', in M. Damen, J. Haemers and A. J. Mann (eds.), *Political Representation. Communities, Ideas and Institutions in Europe (c. 1200 – c. 1690)* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 205–25.

³⁷ For the complete, and translated, text of 'How one shall govern a city', see the appendix to this article. This translation and the cited Middle Dutch text are based on the edition: 'Hoemen ene stat regeren sal', in J. Van Boendale, *Der Leken Spieghel, leerdicht van den jare 1330*, vol. III, ed. M. De Vries (Leiden, 1844–48), 142, and the Brussels manuscript of *Der Leken Spieghel* (Royal Library of Belgium, Manuscripts Department, 15658, r. 122).

loyal towards the prince. Furthermore, they have to maintain the urban privileges and follow a healthy fiscal policy, that was free from corruption and in which proceeds of taxation benefited all. If all these guidelines were followed, the poem states that towns would enjoy internal harmony and the actions of urban government would be in line with the common good. Seeing as the urban population was made up of different interest groups that constantly interacted with each other, towns were hubs of social conflict.³⁸ Harmony or *concordia* was therefore not only a central concept of Christian discourse, but was also a common element in urban moral and medieval thought.³⁹ The common good, or the *utilitas publica*, was the most used political concept of the late medieval period. Rulers were seen as accountable to their subjects, and their government was thus expected to be in the interests of the whole community. Governing elites and politically powerless groups all employed the concept of *utilitas publica* to legitimize their actions. After all, who can be opposed to something which is desired by, and benefits, the majority of the population?⁴⁰

In only 18 lines, 'How one shall govern a city' touches on many of the core elements of late medieval urban political thought. The governmental principles that are written down in this poem circulated widely in towns across western Europe. Notwithstanding their different economic and political context, the socially diverse citizenry of Flemish, French, English, Italian, German and Brabantine towns seemingly adhered to similar political ideas.⁴¹ This apparently unambiguous character has caused a dichotomy in the historiographical debate about urban political thought. In her aforementioned article, Reynolds states that: 'Unlike people in the middle ages (so far as I understand the middle ages) we live in an age of ideological conflict about political principles.'⁴² On the contrary, several scholars argued that ubiquitous political concepts were still highly disputed within medieval towns. By studying how political principles were used and interpreted, these researchers stress the flexibility and

³⁸ R. Verbruggen, *Geweld in Vlaanderen: macht en onderdrukking in de Vlaamse steden tijdens de veertiende eeuw* (Bruges, 2005), 9–12.

³⁹ A. Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Ithaca, 1984), 70; J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, '"A bad chicken was brooding": subversive speech in late medieval Flanders', *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), 72.

⁴⁰ Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi*.

⁴¹ M. Boone and J. Haemers, 'Bien commun: bestuur, disciplineren en politieke cultuur', in A.L. Van Bruaene, B. Blondé and M. Boone (eds.), *Gouden eeuwen: stad en samenleving in de Lage Landen, 1100–1600* (Ghent, 2016), 124–64; R.A. Rotz, '"Social struggles" or the price of power? German urban uprisings in the late Middle Ages', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 76 (1985), 68–83; J. Whittle and S.H. Rigby, 'England: popular politics and social conflict', in S.H. Rigby (ed.), *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages* (Malden, 2003), 68–83; C. Beck, 'Common good and private justice: letters of marque and the *utilitas publica* in fourteenth-century Marseilles', *Journal of Medieval History*, 41 (2015), 88–106; J.M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Oxford, 2006).

⁴² Reynolds, 'Medieval urban history', 20.

conflicting tendencies of urban political thought.⁴³ In an article that compares the political culture of Bruges and York, Christian Liddy and Jelle Haemers moreover argue that unrest within late medieval towns arose precisely because of divergent interpretations of the values of civic government and the concept of 'citizenship'.⁴⁴

Following the latter, I argue that urban political thought is simultaneously similar and contested. The linguistic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel de Certeau will clarify this standpoint. In his work on the turmoil of 1968, de Certeau drew attention to a practice which he called 'prise de parole', the adaptation of the discourses of the societal elites by politically excluded groups in order to proclaim an alternative point of view; or: 'different usage of a language already made'.⁴⁵ Political discourses are thus formed by claiming and reinterpreting existing discourses. It is self-evident that the late medieval political and social situation substantially differs from the one described by de Certeau. But seeing as both twentieth- and fourteenth-century subordinate groups and governors constantly interacted with each other, his theory remains applicable to late medieval political discourse. Additionally, Jan Dumolyn and Haemers have already discovered similar patterns as de Certeau during late medieval urban revolts in Flanders.⁴⁶ Bakhtin formulated the notion of 'heteroglossia' to indicate another's speech in another's language, or the polyphony of discursive and social forces in a text.⁴⁷ In other words: 'A political language is a work of many hands'.⁴⁸ The urban political discourse of fourteenth-century Brabantine towns did not exclusively belong to the governing elite. On the contrary, it was constantly used by socially diverse groups. Correspondingly, the governmental principles that are written down in 'How one shall govern a city' are also prescribed in the 'Joyous Entry' of 1356 and the petitions of the craft guilds of Leuven from 1378.⁴⁹ Because they were employed by differing actors, political ideas

⁴³ S.H. Rigby, 'Urban "oligarchy" in late medieval England', in J.A.F. Thomson (ed.), *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), 62–86; G. Naegle, 'Armes à double tranchant? Bien commun et chose publique dans les villes françaises au Moyen Âge', in Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi*, 55–70; Watts, *The Making of Politics*; J. Dumolyn, 'Urban ideologies in later medieval Flanders. Towards an analytical framework', in A. Gamberini, J.P. Genet and A. Zorzi (eds.), *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th–17th Centuries* (Rome, 2011), 69–96.

⁴⁴ Haemers and Liddy, 'Popular politics', 803–5.

⁴⁵ M. de Certeau, *La prise de parole. Et autres écrits politiques*, ed. L. Giard (Paris, 1994), 64: 'usage différent d'un langage déjà fait'.

⁴⁶ Dumolyn and Haemers, '"A bad chicken was brooding"', 45–86.

⁴⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the novel', in M. Holquist (ed.), C. Emerson and M. Holquist (trans.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, 1981), 259–422.

⁴⁸ Strohman, *Politique*, 19.

⁴⁹ The editions used here are the following: A. Schayes, *Analectes archéologiques, historiques, géographiques et statistiques concernant principalement la Belgique* (Antwerp, 1857), 346–7 and 358–9; *De Blijde Inkomst van de hertogen van Brabant Johanna en Wenceslas. Een inleidende studie en tekstuitgave*, ed. R. Van Bragt (Standen en Landen, 13) (Leuven, 1956), 95–107. For a thorough analysis of the contents and context of these sources, see Haemers, 'Governing and gathering', 153–69; Vrancken, *De Blijde Inkomsten*.

had multiple and ever-changing meanings. I will give two examples of this polyphonic character of urban political thought, focusing on what exactly the widespread and fundamental ideas of the necessity of justice and the maintenance of a healthy and stable fiscal policy meant to the diverse social groups involved.

Justitia: privileges, banishments, accountability or an extension of power?

Justitia or justice, one of the four cardinal virtues, has been thought to inspire human behaviour throughout history. During the late medieval period, justice was seen as a central political virtue. Noble literature from the Burgundian age describes a land without justice as a robber's den, while lady justice frequently appears in paintings.⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, the necessity of fair justice forms a central idea in 'How one shall govern a city', the 'Joyous Entry' of 1356 and the petitions of the craft guilds of Leuven. According to 'How one shall govern a city', urban governors, in order to be just, had to provide equal judgements for both the rich and the poor, defend the urban privileges and banish criminals.

'Those who want to govern a city shall..., not let her privileges be broken.' Liberties, freedoms, statutes or privileges were central elements in the identity of the Brabantine citizenry. Since the political power and independence of late medieval towns stemmed from these documents, every new landlord who ascended the throne had to swear to uphold the rights and freedoms of the land. Statutes further stipulated the prerequisites of diverse social groups and thus not only determined the power balance between the landlord and his subjects, but also dictated the relations and inequalities between the different social layers of the urban population. Privileges gave city dwellers something to lose. The desire to preserve urban privileges was not only strong within Brabant, but formed an integral part of the political culture of west European towns. By analysing city registers, Lynn Gaudreault for instance indicated that the safeguarding of urban privileges was seen as the primary task of the council of Brignoles (located in the south of France).⁵¹ The 'Joyous Entry' and the petitions of Leuven finally characterize compliance with urban liberties as an essential condition for justice. As such, Joanna and

⁵⁰ A.J. Vanderjagt, *Qui Sa Vertu Anoblit: The Concepts of Noblesse and Chose Publique in Burgundian Political Thought (Including Fifteenth Century French Translations of Giovanni Aurispa, Buonaccorso Da Montemagno, and Diego de Valera)* (Groningen, 1981), 45–77; Watts, *The Making of Politics*, 131–53.

⁵¹ L. Gaudreault, *Pouvoir, mémoire et identité: le premier registre de délibérations communales de Brignoles: 1387–1391, édition et analyse* (Montpellier, 2014), 133–64; A. Wauters, 'Les serments prêtés aux villes principales du Brabant par les ducs lors de leur inauguration', *Compte-rendu des séances de la commission royale d'histoire*, 14 (1887), 82–98; R. Stein, 'Introduction', in R. Stein and J. Pollmann (eds.), *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300–1650* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 1–18.

Wenceslas stated in the 'Joyous Entry' that 'Further we promise, swear, confirm and ratify to all our good subjects, to always hold firmly to all their freedoms, charters...and all their other charters, privileges and customs...without breaking, or in any way reacting against them.'⁵²

Following the interpretation of justice in 'How one shall govern a city', the 'Joyous Entry' articulates several regulations regarding the banishment of criminals. As dispensers of justice, rulers had a responsibility to protect their innocent subjects from criminals. By removing culprits from their community, governors not only defended their subjects, but also decreased criminality and thus ensured the realization of civic harmony. The inauguration charter prescribes that the duke had to banish convicted rebels, murderers, thieves and sexual offenders. In addition, he could not lift the exile of murderers without first arranging a peace settlement with the family of their victims.⁵³

Thus far, we have seen how the understanding of justice expressed in the petitions of Leuven and the 'Joyous Entry' was similar to that of 'How one shall govern a city'. However, the 'Joyous Entry' and the petitions add the extra requirement of accountability. Moreover, they disagree on which steps governors have to take in order to fulfil this condition. To make sure that legal officers did not abuse their power and were held accountable for the actions they took during their service, the 'Joyous Entry' emphasizes the necessity of an investigation: 'Further we promise them, that somebody, every year, will make a visit of the roads of our lands, to make sure that all judges and all the persons that in our land of Brabant received the power to do justice or injustice, from now on and from year to year have to give accounts.'⁵⁴ The petitions of Leuven go a step further. According to the craft guilds, the aldermen of Leuven had sealed documents that were harmful to the citizenry. To avoid a repetition of such corrupt governmental practices, supervision of the legal activities of the aldermen alone was not enough. To ensure justice by accountable rulers, the locus of legal power within the town of Leuven had to be expanded so to include representatives of the craft guilds, who until then had been excluded from political and legal power.⁵⁵ Specifically, the petitions state that: 'next they desire that they will lay the seal of the city into the hands of the good men, the craft guilds and the brothers of the guild, so that

⁵² *De Blijde Inkomst van Johanna en Wenceslas*, 105: 'Voirt hebben wi gheloefte, ghesworen, gheconfirmeert ende gheratificeert allen onsen goiden lieden,...alle hare vrieheiden, charteren..., ende alle haer andere charteren, privilegiën, coustumen..., die te houdene vaste ende ghestede tot eweliken dagen..., sonder breken, ocht daer jegen te doen ocht te doen doen in eniger manieren.'

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 100: 'Voirt gheloven wi hen, dat men alle jaer een besuec doen sal van ons lants wegghen, dats te wetene, dat alle rechteren ende alle dieghene, die in onsen lande van Brabant macht hebben van onsen wegen rechte ochte onrechte te doen, dat die voirt aen van jaer te jaer rekenen selen.'

⁵⁵ Haemers, 'Governing and gathering', 158–61.

it cannot be bought'.⁵⁶ The proposed shared control of the city's seal would have given the crafts a controlling mechanism through which they could interfere with the promulgation of urban law. The craft guilds of Leuven were not alone in the belief that their participation and approval in urban law-making was an essential requirement for having fair justice. Scholars have recently noted that similar demands were expressed by the artisans of several cities in the Upper Rhine region, Flanders and England and correspondingly formed a part of the international trends within late medieval political thought.⁵⁷ As a result, the urban discourse on *justitia*, like a chameleon, took on a different colour every time it was claimed by a specific social group.

Healthy finances: fair taxes, participation or trade?

The desire for participation and transparency closely relates to the governmental requirement of fiscal probity, which features in all three of the discussed sources. In the course of the fourteenth century, finances often roused emotions. The taxpaying population of most west European towns believed that the urban treasury should be fiscally sound and stable. A city could not, and should not, live beyond its means. Around 1300, it even became an established pattern that the financial excesses and corruption of rulers were no longer acceptable in the eyes of the urban population.⁵⁸ Accusations and suspicions of corruption therefore played an important role in the outbreak of late medieval urban revolts. As a result, the main purpose of the institutional reforms of the towns of Brabant between 1334 and 1336 was to improve their fiscal administration. After these reforms, the craft guilds were, however, still excluded from government and had little idea about how their tax money was spent.⁵⁹

If urban governors wanted to avoid future rebellions against their authority, 'How one shall govern a city' stresses that they would have to manage the urban funds well. The management of the fiscal administration of the city was the obligation of the ruling elite, who had to use tax money to the greatest benefit. The poem does not mention any concrete steps governors had to take to realize these guidelines. Luckily, the two petitions of 1378 and the 'Joyous Entry' from 1356 elaborate on this subject. For example, the petitions of the craft guilds of Leuven propose that deficiencies within the urban finances could be remedied by

⁵⁶ Schayes, *Analectes archéologiques*, 347: 'Item, voirt begerden sy dal men den zegel van der stad leggen in der goeden lieder hant ende andere ambachts ende guldbrueders, so dat men niet vereopen en mach.'

⁵⁷ O. Richard and G. Zeilinger (eds.), *Politische Partizipation in spätmittelalterlichen Städten am Oberrhein* (Berlin, 2017); Haemers and Liddy, 'Popular politics'.

⁵⁸ J. Dumolyn, 'Les "plaintes" des villes flamandes à la fin du xiii^e siècle et les discours et pratiques politiques de la commune', *Le Moyen Âge, revue d'histoire et de philologie*, 121 (2015), 383–407.

⁵⁹ Van Uytven, 'Het gewicht van de goede steden', 125.

the collection of overdue taxes. To indicate whose debts the city could cash, the petitions suggest an inquiry of the city's excises (*assisen*): 'Item, they desire that everyone who managed the excises within the aforementioned term..., and not yet fully paid them, that they make them paid their debts or give them credit.'⁶⁰

The 'Joyous Entry', in turn, emphasizes the responsibility of the duke and duchess to safeguard Brabantine trade. In particular, they had to defend merchants and make sure that they could travel without sustaining damage. Therefore, the 'Joyous Entry' restricts the ducal perquisites on the manipulation of coinage and toll levels. The charter subsequently decrees that the subjects of Brabant were henceforth exempted from ducal debts to which they had not agreed: 'with regard to all debts and promises, that are owned by us or by our predecessors...and that can harm or negatively influence our land, and to which neither our towns nor our land...agreed, we shall henceforth regard our good subjects of our lands as exempted'.⁶¹ A necessary provision, since merchants from Brabant had been arrested abroad due to unpaid ducal debts.⁶² Similar demands for a stable economic climate that stimulated investments and trade were formulated all over western Europe. The expression 'all merchandise shall have its course' was for example commonplace in late medieval England.⁶³ What is more, Dumolyn demonstrated that this commercial discourse, despite concealing their different interests, unified the citizenry of fifteenth-century Bruges. For instance in 1488, when the great council of Bruges, a representative body that consisted of 6 captains of the burghers and 54 deans of the craft guilds, handed over a petition to the city magistrates. In this petition, the great council mostly addressed problems that concerned trade, like the protection of staple rights, the improvement of infrastructure and severe punishments for corrupt officials who extorted foreign merchants.⁶⁴

The Leuven petitions of 1378 join in this international trend. In the course of the fourteenth century, the dukes of Brabant were not the only ones with debts. The city of Leuven also owned a considerable amount of money to creditors, which had resulted in the imprisonment of Leuven merchants. Similar to the 'Joyous Entry', the petitions thus urged the city to pay its debts. To ensure further that trade could flourish, the craft guilds

⁶⁰ Schayes, *Analectes archéologiques*, 346: 'Item, begherden sy dat alle die ghene die assisen binnen den voirschr. termine gehadt hebben..., ende diese niet vol betaelt en hebben, dat men hen dat achterstelle doe betalen oft haren borghen.'

⁶¹ *De Blijde Inkomst van Johanna en Wenceslas*, 98: 'als van allen scouden ende gheloeften, die wi ocht onse voirseten sculdich sijn..., daer onse lande mede ghecrent ocht gheachttert mochten sijn, daer onse stede noch onse land...gheconsenteert en hebben, ende dat wi hier af onse goide liede van onsen landen scadeloos houden suele'.

⁶² P. Avonds, *Brabant tijdens de regering van hertog Jan III (1312–1356): de grote politiek krisissen* (Brussels, 1984), 40–4.

⁶³ A.F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130–1578* (Aldershot, 2005), 277.

⁶⁴ J. Dumolyn, "'Our land is only founded on trade and industry': economic discourses in fifteenth-century Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), 374–89.

also requested that the duke extended the validity of a recent charter that guaranteed the free circulation for Leuven citizens in the duchy.⁶⁵ While similar to those of the Bruges' petition, the commercial demands of the petitions of Leuven are far less elaborate. After all, and contrary to the 'Joyous Entry', the safeguarding of trade was not the main focus of the petitions of 1378. The crafts of Leuven saw their involvement for the creation of a transparent fiscal policy as essential. In contrast to 'How one shall govern a city', they saw the management of urban finances as the collective responsibility of the taxpaying population, not a duty of the urban elites alone. A stable and sound fiscal policy was subjected to control. As such, the crafts not only demanded that the positions of the fiscal officials would be divided amongst the urban elite, the guilds and the crafts, but also stressed the necessity of 'legal accounts': 'all the common money of the city henceforth be collected and spent, and hereof they shall make legal accounts'.⁶⁶ In order to be legal, accounts needed to be in the interest of the common good, verifiable and accessible to the craft guilds. Such a transparent and accountable fiscal policy could bring an end to the suspicions of corruption.

Once again, the demands of the Leuven crafts were not unique, but were for example also stipulated in English petitions, like the one that the artisans of York handed over in 1475, and which insisted that they would be involved in the election of the financial offices within their city.⁶⁷ Moreover, researchers have indicated that accusations of corruption were a common thread in discussions about the ideal forms of government, and thus functioned as rhetorical weapons that helped to undermine the legitimacy of the political authority of opposite groups in power.⁶⁸ For the late medieval period, Watts has shown the workings of this mechanism within the English court.⁶⁹ The petitions of Leuven demonstrate that charges of corruption also played a strategic role in urban political conflicts.

Like the various interpretations of *justitia*, trade, participation and taxes were central principles of the international urban discourse on fiscal probity. However, they were differently interpreted according to the social groups that used them and the time and place in which they were uttered. As such, the difference in emphasis between the petitions of York, Bruges and Leuven can be explained by their distinct political and economic context. While the crafts of Leuven and York were still fighting

⁶⁵ Schayes, *Analectes archéologiques*, 346 and 359.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 345 and 359: 'al 't gemeen goet van der stat vortane altoez innemen selen ende ute geven, ende dair af wittege rekeningene doin'.

⁶⁷ Haemers and Liddy, 'Popular politics', 792.

⁶⁸ R. Kroeze, A. Vitória and G. Geltner, 'Introduction. Debating corruption and anticorruption in history', in R. Kroeze, A. Vitória and G. Geltner (eds.), *Anticorruption in History. From Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Oxford, 2018), 1–17.

⁶⁹ J. Watts, 'The problem of the personal: tackling corruption in later medieval England, 1250–1550', in Kroeze, Vitória and Geltner (eds.), *Anticorruption in History*, 91–102.

for political transparency and representation, the fifteenth-century artisans of Bruges, who were represented on the 'bench' of the aldermen since 1304, had more pressing economic concerns. After all, during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, their town gradually started to lose its status as a centre of international trade.⁷⁰ The different usage of comparable discourses in various contexts thus indicates that urban political thought was a *site of struggle* in itself.⁷¹ Moreover, the flexible and inherently different interpretations of political values and principles not only caused contemporary conflicts, as Liddy and Haemers showed, but were also influenced by them. As living implements, ideas played an active and strategic role within their own society.

Conclusion

Urban literary works not only put flesh on theoretical notions but also indicate that political discourse was claimed and manipulated by many social groups. Like justice and the maintenance of a healthy fiscal policy, the other governmental requirements prescribed in 'How one shall govern a city' were widespread within diverse source types, amongst social groups and across western Europe. The varying usage and interpretations of these principles makes clear that urban political ideas were constantly reconstructed and reshaped by the differing social groups that used them and the context in which they were uttered. Ideas were not carved into stone, but were created and recreated to fit the interests of their consumers. When they are taken out of their glass cases, it becomes clear that political ideas were living implements that caused and steered political conflicts. The addition of the Brabantine case to the international debate on political thought makes clear that different social groups composed their own written heritages. By claiming urban discourse, they moreover intermingled their voices with urban (didactic) literature.

The fourteenth-century population of Brabantine towns was involved in an ideological battle that was fought with similar, but adaptable, weapons. In addition to previous research, the case of Brabant makes clear that in order to further their interests, social groups not only differently interpreted political concepts, but were also ideologically selective. In spite of stating that its guidelines would contribute to the realization of an ideal government that promoted the common good, 'How one shall govern a city' mainly defends the interests of the urban elite. Indeed, by prescribing several socially inspired guidelines, yet at no time recognizing the craft guilds' common desire for political participation, this urban poem tries to

⁷⁰ A. Brown and J. Dumolyn (eds.), *Medieval Bruges, c. 850–1550* (Cambridge, 2018); Dumolyn, "'Our land'", 374–89.

⁷¹ Dumolyn, 'Urban ideologies'.

convince contemporary rulers to alter their policy in such a manner that the power of the city is safeguarded and the politically excluded masses are appeased by selective concessions. By warning them not to perform an arbitrary policy, *'How one shall govern a city'* thus tried to stabilize the governors' regime. After all, if revolts could be avoided, the power monopoly of the urban elite had a greater chance of survival. Political change could insure the preservation of their power. This purpose stands in sharp contrast with the craft guilds' different interpretations of the poem's governmental guidelines and their emphasis on representation, transparency and accountability.

Reynolds' innovative recognition of the importance and distinctive character of urban political discourse rightfully altered the direction of research on political thought. However, the intertextual comparison of the Leuven petitions, the 1356 *'Joyous entry'* and *'How one shall govern a city'* suggests that there existed more conflicting ideas that can be classified under the common denominator of urban political thought than she originally assumed. To underpin further this hypothesis, the next step is a thoroughgoing comparison and synthesis of the political ideas of more various sources, diverse social groups and different geographical regions. How can international trends within late medieval urban political thought be explained further? What is the significance of the different use of these comparable discourses across western Europe? Such research will provide much-needed insights into the political thought of the late Middle Ages and, by extension, its dynamic and complex political culture.

Appendix: the original Middle Dutch text, and English translation, of *'How one shall govern a city'*

Hoemen ene stat regeren sal	How one shall govern a city
1 Die ene stat willen regeren,	1 Those who want to govern a city,
2 Selen dese poente hanteren:	2 Shall follow these rules:
3 Eendrachtech sijn met trouwen,	3 Be united in loyalty,
4 Ghemene orbore anscouwen,	4 Observe the common good,
5 Hoer vriheit niet laten breken,	5 Do not let her privileges be broken,
6 Om ghemeen dinc dicke spreken,	6 Often talk about communal affairs,
7 Dstat bevelen den vroeden,	7 Put the city government in the hands of the wise,
8 Tghemeene ghelt nauwe hoeden	8 Carefully administer the communal money
9 Ende keren te meester baten,	9 And use it to the greatest benefit,

Appendix: *Continued*

Hoemen ene stat regeren sal	How one shall govern a city
10 Te vriende houden domsaten,	10 Keep their neighbours as friends,
11 Te rechte houden ghelike	11 To consider poor and rich
12 Als wel darne als de rike,	12 Equal for justice,
13 Vaste houden hoer statute,	13 Stay with their statutes,
14 Die quade altoes werpen ute,	14 To always expel those who are evil,
15 Ghetrouwe sijn den here.	15 Be loyal to the prince.
16 Dits der oudere wisere lere;	16 These are the teachings from the wise of old;
17 Ende waer een ghebrect van desen,	17 And where one is lacking thereof,
18 Daer staet die stat in vresen.	18 Then the town is in danger.