

Reclaiming the Common Sphere of the City: The Revival of the Bruges Commune in the Late Thirteenth Century

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Due to a lack of documents, especially when compared to the sources available for Italy, little is known about the early political and social history of the Flemish towns. For the later Middle Ages we are far better informed on the frequent social and political struggles that characterised the vibrant but tumultuous Flemish urban landscape. The early days of this ‘rebellious tradition’ and the important role of communal popular politics in medieval Flanders in general, however, have been neglected.¹ While sources are scarce, there are two notable exceptions that provide insight into urban political dynamics in the twelfth century, a period of demographic, industrial and commercial expansion that shaped the Flemish urban landscape. One exception is the well-studied commune of Saint Omer, which has rich archives for this early period.² The second is the remarkable ‘diary’ of the Bruges notary Galbert written soon after the murder of Count Charles the Good in 1127.³ As an extraordinary text for this phase of the Middle Ages, the diary has been widely used by scholars, but it also provides a unique view of Bruges’ topography and its economic, social and political structures. However, because the Bruges city archives were lost in a fire in 1280, there are few other documents surviving before a revolt that would become known as the ‘Great Moerlemaye’ broke out in the city that same year.⁴ This revolt was one incident in an extended series of riots and disturbances at the end of the thirteenth century.

In France and the German-speaking territories, revolts in this wave of the late 1200s were usually carried out by a conglomeration of social groups, with the common programme being collective resistance against abuses of power by urban regimes led by

closed patrician elites.⁵ Between 1245 and 1320, the towns of Northern France and Flanders proved to be a veritable seedbed for social turmoil.⁶ In 1245, the first strikes (called *takehans*) took place in Douai, and others followed in 1276.⁷ In the 1240s there were several uprisings of weavers in the duchy of Brabant, while in the years 1252 and 1274-75, the textile workers of Ghent went on strike. In 1275, a group of rebels even succeeded in overthrowing the government and electing a new board of aldermen – though two years later the ruling families (the *virii hereditarii* as they are called in the sources) managed to resume control over urban institutions. ‘*Multipliciter sunt abusi*’, the Ghent commoners wrote to French King Philip III on 7 November 1275.⁸ Finally, in 1280, a general popular revolt spread throughout the region. Disruptions of international trade, as happened in the wool trade with England in the 1270s, could provoke merchants to join these rebellions. Similar uprisings took place in 1279-81 in Tournai, in 1280-83 in Saint-Omer, in 1281 in Ypres (the so-called *Cockerulle*), in 1280-1281, and also in 1280 in Ghent. The petitions drafted during these revolts claimed that they were formulated ‘*pro utilitate communi*’, in the wording of the Ghent document. This urban social and political polarisation in the final quarter of the thirteenth century represented a real turning point in the history of the urban communes of this region and resulted in new concepts of city government that were strongly influenced by corporatist ideas propagated by the craft guilds. The final outcome of this movement was the Flemish Revolution of 1302, launched by the Bruges revolt against the occupying French army on 18 May (the so-called ‘Bruges Matins’ or ‘Good Friday’) and culminating in the spectacular victory of the Flemish army of artisans and peasants over the French royal *ost* at Courtrai on 11 July. The Flemish revolutionary movement was soon followed by revolts in the towns of Brabant, in Liège, in Saint-Omer and other

places.⁹ Some of these succeeded, while other ones failed, but all left a decisive mark on urban politics in the Southern Low Countries.

The objective of the present article is to re-evaluate this revolutionary period of the final decades of the thirteenth century which ushered in a new political system in certain major cities of Flanders and Northern France. This was a system based on a renegotiated balance between merchant and guild power within the communal body politic, a body politic which the new system also ideologically redefined. For this reason, while the undersigned authors have always been reluctant to speak of ‘revolution’ in regard to other urban collective actions in Flanders, for the events of the year 1302 we do not hesitate to use this heavily loaded term. We will analyze this political revolution as a hegemonic struggle over the concepts of the ‘commune’ and ‘the commons’. Fundamentally, the Flemish revolutionary movement between 1280 and 1302 was an attempt to revive the original communal ideology, which still remained the implicit source of legitimate urban rule. However, by the beginning of the thirteenth century this political and ideological conception of the commune, mostly formulated in terms of customary law and as part of a contractual relationship with the prince, whether he was the Count of Flanders, the King of France or another lord, had in practice been replaced by the oligarchic rule of a ‘patrician’ class of merchants and urban landowners. This patrician elite might have a more ‘open’ form, as was the case in Bruges, where it was based on membership in the merchant guild. The ruling group had a more closed character in other cities, as in Ghent, where a caste of patrician lineages of urban landowners, the above-mentioned *viri hereditarii*, assumed total control of city government.¹⁰ Drawing on a comparison with the Italian movement of the *popolo*, that started half a century earlier but had similarities with the medieval Flemish movement, we argue that, between approximately 1280 and 1305, among the Flemish craft guilds a

new conception of urban space and the social and political body of the city developed. In this new conception of urban space and the social and political body of the city, ‘political guilds’, similar to those in many German towns¹¹, recreated an ideological hegemony that both revived and transcended the politics of the original commune. As Bruges offers the most extensively documented example for this period, we shall focus on this commercial metropolis, which had witnessed spectacular demographic and economic growth after the late twelfth century and was developing into the gateway trade city for the North Sea region during the late thirteenth century.¹²

In this article, we will demonstrate that subordinated citizens creatively used ideas and concepts of political legitimacy that were also held by the ruling elite. The point of reference of the urban commons in their revolts of the 1280s (the so-called ‘*meentucht*’, or ‘(*ghe*)*meente*’) was the twelfth-century ‘commune’, the sworn association which regulated and governed its own affairs. Therefore, we shall argue that the *meentucht* of the thirteenth century cleverly used the sophisticated discourse on these communes to define its self-understanding and legitimise its political choices. As John Watts concludes in his general survey on late medieval politics, the ‘commune’ was one of the essential structures of high and late medieval political life. The diversity of the terms used to describe this new form of power that emerged in the High Middle Ages and the different shape that the ‘commune’ took in diverse regions does not alter the fact that a new recognisable and reproducible political concept was born in the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹³ The availability of the ‘commune’ helped to legitimize certain kinds of institutions and practices, to influence the ways in which power was exercised, to inspire the spread of copies and adaptations, and, we add, also to motivate and justify political protests by urban subject populations. In this sense, our paper develops a new direction in the study of the legitimacy of political authority, as it considers the

acceptance of power by the governed as an essential element of authority. While Jean-Philippe Genet described the ‘mécanismes légitimants essentiels’ of elites in the authoritative state, the same mechanisms apply to the political power of urban rulers. Not only the content of their political visions but also the perception and interpretation of these ideas by common townsmen are crucial in fully understanding the legitimacy of power.¹⁴

The Communal Movement in Flanders

In the swampy and infertile county of Flanders, the city came into existence as a specific social formation during the eleventh century, spurred by increased agricultural productivity which led to demographic growth, the intensification and extension of regional and international commerce, and the creation of powerful abbeys and comital castles as centres of administration.¹⁵ At some point between the regimes of Count Baldwin V (1035-1067) and William Clito (1127-1128), so it is generally held, the Flemish towns became autonomous entities distinct from the countryside.¹⁶ The earlier Truce and Peace of God movements, which had now become a *pax comitis*, encouraged particularly by counts Baldwin VII (1111-1119) and Charles the Good (1119-1127),¹⁷ played an important role in urban emancipation. As elsewhere in Europe, the idea of the *pax* provided an ideological framework in which burghers could express their desires to be free from knightly extortion and arbitrary justice, such as ordeals and judicial duels, and, most importantly, to have peaceful markets and freedom from tolls to improve trade and industry. These urban conceptions of peace were widely disseminated at the beginning of the period of long-term economic growth in Flanders. The classic view of Henri Pirenne which privileges the role of international merchants as the creators of urban life may now be outdated but cannot be completely discarded, as trade and the

export-oriented textile industry were crucial factors in the development of towns such as Arras, Bruges, Ghent, Ypres and Saint-Omer.¹⁸ Communal peace was to protect its members against knightly violence, pillage and extortion. It was not revolutionary, however, because the fundamental ties of dependence between lords and their subjects were not broken by the commune, and subjects continued to pay their land rents.¹⁹ The Flemish counts, often portrayed in chronicles and other texts as righteous defenders of merchants extorted by noblemen, had interests parallel to the young urban populations in this development. Subsequent counts, notably Philip of Alsace at the end of the twelfth century, also took measures to stimulate growth. Philip was probably the most economically perspicuous Christian prince of his time.²⁰

The term commune (*communione suam sicut eam juraverunt*) was explicitly used for Saint-Omer, but most towns used different words for what was essentially the same phenomenon. These notions in the sources for the Flemish communes and those of neighbouring regions, such as Hainaut and Brabant, point to their fundamental socio-economic, political, legal and ideological features: *pax* (Valenciennes) for the peaceful and secure situation they intended to preserve; *amicitia* (Aire-sur-la-Lys), for the mutual aid among and free consent of the sworn men of the *coniuratio*; or *cora* or *keure* (Brussels), for the ‘chosen law’.²¹ These communal organisations were part of a much broader historical development, including first the Lombard communes in Italy, beginning at the end of the eleventh century, and those in central Italy from the middle of the twelfth century.²² The sworn oath of city-dwellers, often including knights, ministerials and clerics as well as merchants and artisans, was the basis of what German historians have called the *Eidgenössische Bewegung*, from the formation of the *Schwurgemeinschaften* in the eleventh century.²³ Thus, the Flemish communes were an integral part of the northern European communal wave. In 1077 there was a revolt in

Cambrai against the local bishop, which eventually led to a commune in 1101/1102. The year 1074 saw a similar revolt in Cologne, followed by the establishment of a formal commune in 1112. Similar developments occurred in Mainz, Worms and Speyer beginning in the eleventh century. In northern and central France, famous examples include the communes of St Quentin (c. 1160), Le Mans (1070), Beauvais (1096), Noyon (1108-1109), Amiens (approximately 1113) and Laon (1112, with recognition as an *institutio pacis* in 1128).²⁴ The violent nature of the communal revolution in Laon in 1112, documented by Guibert de Nogent, was rather exceptional, while most Flemish and Italian communal regimes merely reconfigured the institutional power structures while continuing the domination of the same ruling classes.²⁵ The creation of a commune did not necessarily mean that a revolutionary regime assumed power. The commune of London of 1191, for instance, did not lead to substantial changes in the ruling elite.²⁶ In contrast to the communal movements in many Italian, French and German cities, the Flemish communal movement did not feature violent upheavals and confrontations with the authority of local lords or bishops. Rather, it was a process of gradual and steady urban emancipation, sanctioned by strong Flemish counts who seem to have realized at an early stage that granting privileges of jurisdiction and limited self-rule and liberating merchants from excessive tolls and arbitrary seigniorial violence also served their own economic interests.

From the perspective of social history, one might say that urban communes became accepted as permanent political and legal institutions precisely because they were positioned at the most efficient level of power to provide for the basic needs of urban residents: administration of justice for a closely-packed group of people; management of common property, such as markets and sea and river ports; and appropriation of imperial tolls and taxes farmed out to individuals.²⁷ The Flemish communes had to

accomplish these tasks in order to reduce high transaction costs, resulting from the climate of seigniorial violence and insecurity surrounding the expansion of the young cities. Thus, Flemish urban organisation was based on principles ordering a society reinforced by mutual oaths of men who had to live, work, own property and trade together in a densely-built environment and needed peace and security for that purpose. These principles, combined with older elements from Germanic law, were the basis for the customary laws of the commune.²⁸ The growing complexity of the city and ideas about its government caused the original Bruges commune (*'communio'*) to evolve into a community (*'communitas'*). The same process occurred, for instance, in St Quentin. While the twelfth-century commune tried to manage justice and preservation of peace by common consent, the thirteenth-century urban community already used elaborate laws and institutions which made a full jurisdiction over citizens possible.²⁹

The Flemish medieval commune – and its counterparts elsewhere in Europe – was much more than a political and constitutional community. It also established ideological legitimacy in the form of a powerful and long-lasting set of ideas with an accompanying sign language of buildings, walls, gates, towers, bells, clocks and the intimidating but unifying rally cries and solemn oaths of brotherhood and mutual aid. The urban commune was a common space of local saints and collective devotion and an arena for ritualized expressions of both violence and peace. It was a common space of markets and collective properties. It controlled infrastructure, streets, roads, rivers, canals, common fields and fishing areas, and defended them from usurpation by outsiders, such as powerful neighbouring lords. Though riddled with visible and potential conflicts and sharp inequalities, the commune was an ideological metaphor for both internal cohesion and vengeance against outside enemies. It was an inclusive form of exclusion. While the commune could destroy its internal enemies by exiling and humiliating them and

demolishing their houses, it also organised violent expeditions against external foes. In short, the medieval commune possessed a specific form of political and symbolic economy that was both distinct from and integral to the systemic logic of feudal society. It is central to our argument that this communal ideology of urban space would remain a catalyst for popular mobilisation for centuries after its inception. For years to come, Flemish popular politics was expressed in the political languages and symbolic sign systems of the communes, as these were held to be legitimate discourses for politics and actively reproduced by broad swathes of the population.

The institutions and the ruling elites of the early communes

Typical terms for the earliest European urban elites from the tenth century were the *burgenses meliores*, *probi homines* and *seniores*, but *milites* were always present within the city as well.³⁰ Which real social groups these terms specified is not clear. In the Italian cities, social categories such as *cives* or *milites* were still vague in this period.³¹ The Lombard *maiores* or *milites*, sometimes also called *nobiles* in the chronicles, were a heterogeneous upper social layer, which consisted of landowners, comital and episcopal officials, judges, jurists and rich merchants around the year 1000.³² Early historians of the Italian communes, such as Ottokar, already remarked that the communal movement was not that revolutionary, since it was based on the mere reshuffling of the existing ruling elites. In the future urban territory, there were knights, sometimes ministerial knights of unfree status, or other vassals of the local count or bishop. Merchants, officials, notaries and jurists could become *scabini* or *iudices*. As time passed, the sources increasingly divided the urban population into the *maiores* and the *minores*, sometimes also with a class of *mediocres* distinguished.³³ In the German cities of Cologne, Trier and Mainz, for instance, these originally distinct social groups, in all

their regional variations, eventually merged into a new ‘patrician’ elite. The rest of the urban population included artisans, runaway serfs, *censuales* living in the city and other immigrants.³⁴ Likewise, the Bruges elite of the early twelfth century appears as a heterogeneous melting pot, still fluctuating and dynamic. Galbert wrote about a burgher who was a kinsman of a noble, another burgher who was the brother-in-law of a knight, and a knight who adopted the son of a shoemaker. Moreover, when he refers to the *sapientes*, the *meliores*, the *discreti*, the *prudentes* or the *fortiores* as urban elites, it seems that eloquence, moral qualities and personal prestige could still be more important than strict definitions of social class.³⁵

By 1127, communal institutions in Flanders appear to have been functioning for generations. Since Galbert mentioned several meetings of the burghers of Bruges and Ghent, it is very likely that there were different types of communal general assemblies, similar to those of Italy. Italian communes had a relatively high degree of political participation in popular meetings, which the scattered sources called *parlamentum*, *concio* or *arengo*. Nevertheless, the popular crowds attending these meetings merely cheered in acclamation at the decisions made by the consuls to whom the real power belonged. The basic communal competences, however, were judicial. Thus, a *iudex* called Folpertus mentioned by Galbert may have been a communal judge. In many cases, names of communal institutions and their functional methods remain unclear, while the sources only vaguely mention an urban elite of *potentiores*, *probi* or *honestes viri*. What is clear, however, is that people were constantly meeting, discussing and swearing oaths together.³⁶ Therefore, they were called ‘sworn men’ (*jurati* in Latin, *gezworenen* in Middle Dutch), a term which might refer to the entire body of city residents, as well as to the people chosen by them and charged with judging internal matters.³⁷ At the end of the twelfth century, however, the strong Alsatian dynasty who

ruled Flanders reversed this situation of popular participation in communal politics, while in Italy, and in some parts of Germany as well, princely power continued to weaken. This is a fundamental difference in the political balance of power between these areas and Flanders, where the princely dynasty was strong and efficient.

The ‘privileges’ granted by Count Philip of the centralising Alsace dynasty sealed his efforts to destroy the communal autonomy of the cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres. Philip took control of the market places and forbade burghers to carry arms. Between approximately 1180 and 1280, the Flemish cities became ‘cities of law’, and everywhere the original communes withered away.³⁸ Comital authority initiated a long, though sometimes uneasy, alliance with patrician city governments, which disintegrated in the late thirteenth century when the urban elites betrayed the count to ally with the King of France. The ruling classes of merchants and landowners, in a close alliance with local clerical elites and with the practical and ideological support of the mendicant orders, assumed full power through the boards of aldermen, the *scabini*, which had been an institution of the count. Only a remnant of the original communal institutions, about which we know little, still existed in the ‘councils’ of ‘sworn men’, by now also under control of the aldermen. The charters granted to the major Flemish towns by Philip of Alsace between 1165 and 1177 ultimately eliminated Flemish communal institutions such as the *jurati*.³⁹ As communal ideas and forms of political organization further evaporated during the thirteenth century, urban society became increasingly diversified as a result of capital accumulation by some in the booming Flemish economy. Contemporary sources emphasized the difference between *li riches et li povres*.⁴⁰ The poor were legally excluded from power. A 1242 privilege for Bruges explicitly stated that no men ‘doing manual labour’ could participate in city government, and leading positions were strictly reserved for members of the ‘Flemish Hansa of London’, a

merchant guild, which included merchants under the control of Bruges who were involved in trade with England and members from other cities of Western Flanders. The charter also regulated the yearly selection of new aldermen and decreed that men from the same family could no longer be aldermen at the same time. These measures, probably taken to prevent a single faction from dominating urban politics, show that the principal urban families had reached an agreement to govern the city together – perhaps because they knew that such a coalition would be better able to withstand an uprising of the commoners. This charter stipulated that if someone working with his hands (*manuoperarius quicumque fuerit*) wanted to become alderman, he had to abstain from manual labour for a year and a day and become a member of the ‘Flemish Hansa of London’. The city ‘council’ could unanimously refuse to seat an alderman appointed by the count but its general competence remains unclear and it does not seem to have a lot continuity with older communal institutions.⁴¹

The development of social conflict and the guilds

When Bruges attained its mature communal form in 1127, there were already social contradictions present within the burgher population. Nevertheless, as the city developed over the next two centuries, social divisions grew more polarized through processes of growth and accumulation in commerce and industry than they had been in the commune of the early twelfth century. This social gap became clearly spatialized as a dichotomy between the inner and outer city replaced the original complementary bipolarity of *burgus* and *oppidum* that had been typical for the first phase of the urban development of Bruges. The proletariat increased as more people immigrated from the countryside, attracted by urban economic opportunities and probably driven by high rural birth rates as well. Social divisions inside the first wall became less important as

new social boundaries were created between the town and its new industrial suburbs. As the city exploded and the industrial and port quarters grew, the labouring classes in suburban areas were increasingly perceived as dangerous groups who had to be contained and restrained. They also became the subject of much moralizing. Legally, the new immigrants did not belong to the commune of Bruges, though they obviously posed problems, both in terms of taxation and security. If the suburb was not within the town's jurisdiction, a 'toll-free' black market of commodities, not subject to city taxes or wage regulations would inevitably develop.⁴² The suburbs hosted crime, prostitution and social unrest. For the patricians spatial control over the suburbs was crucial and necessary to maintain their grip on socio-economic relations and repressive political power. The powerful thirteenth-century merchant class therefore adopted the strategy of extending its spatial, economic, social, political and moral control over the artisans, wageworkers and *Lumpenproletarians* who populated the fringes of the town. In order to achieve this goal, the city government combined its policing through the use of force and law with the ideological and spiritual activities of the mendicant orders. Poor relief, or rather controlling the poor, however, was not left to the secular or regular clergy. The numerous Bruges hospitals and almshouses remained firmly under the control of the patrician class, joined in the fourteenth century by guild leaders. Patricians pursued this policy in conjunction with the clergy, particularly the mendicant orders, through a variety of measures and institutions.⁴³ In the second half of the thirteenth century, the complete monopoly of the merchant-capitalists in the production and selling of textiles seems to have been broken by a new class of drapers.⁴⁴

The sharp social polarization created by economic accumulation and massive immigration of cheap labour into the cities of Flanders and northern France increased the anxiety of patrician rulers. Beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, there was an

increase in strikes, riots and other collective actions by artisans. To identify these actions, the sources use *aliances*, *takehans*, *vergaderinghen*, *meentuchten* and other terms. In 1277, immediately after the city limits of Bruges were extended to encompass the industrial suburbs, the aldermen revised the privileges of the drapery and began to use the newly-formed craft guilds as tools of government. Although Flanders was not the earliest region to develop craft guilds, its guilds eventually gained significant political power in city governments, only to be matched by some locations in Germany and by Florence in certain periods. Many Italian cities had already developed *arti* by 1200, and some even before that date. Other terms were also used to denote the same phenomenon. In Piacenza, for instance, the craft guild was called a *paratico*, and in Verona, a *misterium*. Like the latter town, also Cremona and Bologna already had craft guilds around 1250. In Paris, the earliest ones were attested by approximately 1150, and most of the remainder existed by 1200. In Cologne guilds developed between the middle of the twelfth century and 1330. The records of the cities of Southern France showed guild organisation by approximately 1250.⁴⁵

Therefore, it seems that the urban authorities in Flanders had halted the development of guilds much longer than was the case in other regions, but by the middle of the thirteenth century guild formation could no longer be avoided. At first, Bruges guilds formed as organizations of mutual aid, but soon, probably when the authorities realized that the organizations could not be suppressed, the city government appointed supervisors to control them. Initially, the Flemish craft guilds of artisans and petty shopkeepers were directly supervised by the merchant class and its political institutions which governed the city. To this group it seemed better to have the guilds exist under their rule than as dangerous clandestine organisations, but clearly the merchants could also use them as instruments to regulate trade and industry, especially in the

provisioning and textile sectors. Although documentation is scanty, it appears that these guilds had a mixed leadership of overseers appointed by the city government and of craftsmen themselves. Although the craftsmen were never allowed to elect their own leadership, gradually more power and participation was granted to the guilds. They were asked to give advice on industrial and commercial regulations, they had their own financial organization (usually for charity or under that pretext), and they also had a military capacity in the city militia.⁴⁶ In texts of the 1270s and 80s there seems to have already been a legal distinction between the *porters* (burghers), in the strictest sense of the patricians, and the *ambochters*, the guildsmen.⁴⁷

The Moerlemaye

Now that the artisans were legally incorporated into the urban structure, they paid full taxes, and their degree of organization was improving, they also wanted to participate in the political life of the commune, that is, the common management of urban finances and infrastructure. In 1280, the aldermen of Bruges decreed that no more than seven people could attend a meeting, on pain of a ten-pound fine. Among the seven people, the dean (*deken*) and the majority of the sworn men (*vinders*) had to be present and the meeting had to take place in the Burg in the afternoon (*tusschen alvondere tiid ende vespere tiid*). Guildsmen could no longer have their guild meals and meetings. Their guild money was also confiscated, because the aldermen feared the guilds might use it to win sympathy for their cause, to go on strike, or even to arm themselves. Only religious and charitable guild activities would be allowed in the future. There was good reason for the anxiety of the patrician class. Somewhere between 28 September and 5 October 1280, a ‘meeting of the commune’ (*meentucht*) of Bruges demanded that all laws and regulations (*alle cuere*) should be ‘improved’ by the aldermen and twenty

people to be selected by the commune. In the next few years there are traces in the urban accounts of meetings *burgensium, textorum et aliorum de officiis communibus in domo Symonis Bancs factis pro cora draperie ordinanda et facienda*, meaning guildsmen – albeit only as advisors – at the house of an important draper.⁴⁸

We do not know the precise nature of this popular assembly, but it is clear that it represented the political demands of the guildsmen who had recently been incorporated into the city. The text explicitly mentioned that those men who had formerly lived in the seignory of Sijsele still did not enjoy full burgher rights. Undoubtedly, the *meentucht* represented a conspiracy of sworn men who now claimed to represent the commune in its entirety. Prosopographical evidence shows that a number of well-established merchants joined this movement, probably in a struggle over political power with rival family clans.⁴⁹ The *Moerlemaye* was the first time that the Bruges organized labour force appeared on the political stage in a violent but organized manner and used traditional communal ideas and rituals such as the *droit d'arsin*, the right to burn the houses of individuals who did not serve the common good of the city. Scholars have been divided over the meaning of the name 'Moerlemaye'. Wijfels thought it was a combination of 'morren' (to mutter) and 'maaien' (fiercely waving one's arms), in reference to the sounds and gestures of the angry crowd. The philologist De Keyzer, however, thought it derived from the root *moerle*, from *morrelen*, a frequentative of *morren*, to mutter (latin *murmurare*) and that *maye* is a sort of suffix to substantiate this verb.⁵⁰ At any rate, both explanations connect it to the speech act of muttering, a fundamental act in the preliminary stages of Flemish revolts and medieval revolts in general.⁵¹

'Lord, the meeting of the commons of Bruges asserts to you that the aldermen and the council made a law weighing so heavily on the commoners that this discord in the city

is the result of it', began the petition of the Bruges *meentucht*.⁵² We have translated *meentucht* with its two different meanings, although it must be acknowledged that this interpretation remains rather speculative. *Meentucht* can mean both the 'commoners' and 'the authority of the commons in their meeting'. These mean: first, the body of citizens of the '*poert*' (the *portus* or city) apart from its rulers (the aldermen); and secondly, the age-old idea of the popular meeting, the *coniuratio* of sworn men so central to the beginning of communal politics. When the petition of the *meentucht* was presented, negotiations with the urban government were already underway. The text says that 'it was convened by the aldermen and the council with most of the crowd' (*metter meenste menechte*, suggesting that there had been a discursive situation in an assembly) to transfer the city accounts, clearly to place them under the control of the citizens. This promise had not been kept, 'and the commune desires that it should be done'. In this statement, the term used for commune was *meente*, a shorter form of *ghemeente*. An ordinance from later in the same year, 28 September 1280, after the repression of the first phase of the Moerlemaye revolt, shows that *meentuchten*, in the plural, could mean a kind of revolutionary assembly, as collecting money was strictly forbidden in these meetings, because that money would have been used as a strike fund. The ordinance also prohibited 'sitting in a guild' (*ghilde te sittene*), organizing a guild meeting (*meentucht van ghilde te makene*), or having a guild meal (*in ghilde tetene*) within one mile of the city.⁵³ 'Guild' in this sense must be understood in its original meaning, dating to Carolingian times, of a sworn association of mutual aid including a ritual meal and drink (*potacio*).⁵⁴ It is also interesting to note that some of these clandestine meetings clearly took place in the suburbs and surrounding countryside, where it would have been easier to maintain secrecy.

Therefore, the precise legal or institutional definition of the *meentucht* of Bruges in 1280 is elusive, but the word clearly designated a popular meeting representing popular power and reminiscent of the original communal institutions and ideas. This is, in fact, obvious: *ghemeen*, *meente*, *meentucht* is the Dutch equivalent of *communitas*, or the medieval Latin *communio*. The Middle Dutch ‘*ghemeente*’ is directly related to the medieval German ‘*Gemeinde*’, which is an eight-century loan translation from the Latin word ‘*communitas*’.⁵⁵ The Germanic words ‘*gemeen*’ (in Dutch) and ‘*Gemeinde*’ (in German) are therefore based on Latin originals, and equate with French, Spanish and Italian derivatives. But what exactly do these terms mean? ‘*Communio*’ consists of two roots, ‘*com*’ and ‘*munis*’. ‘*Com*’ implies a sense of being ‘together’, while ‘*mein*’ and ‘*munis*’ stand for ‘contribution’, ‘tribute’, or ‘tax’.⁵⁶ When the two roots are combined, the words ‘*communio*’ and ‘*gemeen*’ refer to a tributary people, or, in a political context, to people who pay taxes in a polity. Hence, the word ‘*-tucht*’ in ‘*meentucht*’ means ‘authority’ or ‘regime’.⁵⁷ These terms were not only used in Bruges. In 1275 and 1297, political protesters in Ghent called themselves ‘*le coumun*’ or ‘*le commun de Gant*’.⁵⁸ In a letter sent to Robert of Béthune, the son of the count of Flanders (as the count was in France, his son was the addressee) in October 1280, the Bruges ‘commons’ presented themselves as the ‘*meentucht*’, ‘*meintucht*’ or ‘*meente*’.⁵⁹ ‘*Die ghemeente van den Damme*’, a small port near Bruges, also submitted a petition to Robert in 1280. They used the term ‘*ghemeentucht*’ in the same document, and in 1299 the ‘*mentucht*’ of Damme complained to the count about the abuse of power by the local bailiff Jan van den Stene.⁶⁰ The first attested use of the term appears in the statutes of the Ghent leper’s house in 1236, though it is clear that the text is a translation from Latin. In addressing the welfare of the house’s residents, the statutes employ the phrase ‘*de gemene nutscepe*’ (the ‘common utility’). In 1260, the term ‘*ghemeen*’ appears autonomously in

an agreement on building of dikes around a polder by the ‘*ghemeenten van den lande*’ (the ‘communities of the land’) in Saafinghe. In the third quarter of the thirteenth century, a text refers to the ‘*ghemente van Sente Pieters*’ to identify a village community whose members lived nearby the powerful abbey of St Peter in Ghent.⁶¹ In sum, the first uses of the word ‘*gemeen*’ in Dutch show that the term referred to a collectivity of people involved in the administration of an economic concern, such as the management of a hospital, the government of lands protected by a dike system, or the rule of a village or town. Perhaps through representatives, the identified ‘common’ people collectively administered the group they belonged to, possibly by contributing financially to the collectivity.

Clearly, the revolt of the *meentucht* did not represent a pure form of class struggle. The rebels included ‘new men’ and even some disgruntled members of the upper merchant elite bent on manipulating the crowd for their own commercial interests against their rivals in power. This does not mean, however, that the revolt was not fundamentally popular in nature. The demands of the *meentucht* came from a typical kind of *Bürgeropposition*, a coalition of different social classes with a programme of fiscal and social justice and political participation.⁶² For a rebellious alliance to claim that they were the real ‘meentucht’, the true commune of the city, implied that they were ideologically and politically reclaiming this concept of legitimate political, legal and moral organization. Even though the elite elements of the rebel party may have prevailed in the second stage of the revolt, a careful reading of the 1280 petition leaves no doubt about the popular nature of this text. Finance and taxes were at the heart of the commoners’ demands and would remain part of the core rebel ideology for centuries.⁶³ The arguments of the commoners were clear: when the city government wanted to give someone a gift (likely to a member of the merchant class), the advice of the *meente*

should be asked ‘since they pay for it themselves’. Moreover, the commoners claimed, this had been ‘a usage and a custom’, perhaps referring to an older communal custom no longer followed by the urban elite. The *meentucht* also targeted a specific corrupt city clerk, Nicolas van Biervliet, who had unlawfully acquired a house and a 100-pound annuity from the city.⁶⁴ They also thought the excise taxes were far too high and wanted the aldermen and twenty additional men appointed by the *meentucht* to ‘improve’ all the laws.

Without assuming Otto von Guericke’s romantic view of the *Deutsche Genossenschaftrecht*⁶⁵, the reference point of the term ‘*meentucht*’ and its derivatives, ‘*ghemeente*’, ‘*meente*’ etc., was surely the eleventh- or twelfth-century urban sworn association partially empowered to regulate and govern its own affairs by a contractual relationship with the prince. The thirteenth-century ‘*meentucht*’ cleverly used the already developed discourse on the commune to define its own self-concept. To define ‘*meentucht*’ as a fundamentally ‘oppositional principle’, as Gudrun Gleba did, however, seems to go too far, though she is right when she claims that terms such as ‘*Gemeinde*’ were used to undermine the authority of the political opponents of the commons.⁶⁶ ‘*Communitas*’ was an authoritative principle of thought that inspired both rulers and subordinate citizens in their political actions. Both parties saw in it an urban community, perhaps idealized, in which rulers acted for the common interest of every citizen, though there was always the inevitable discussion on whose particular interests were truly ‘common’. The *Moerlemaye* was also a ‘communal revolt’ because its repertoire of strategies, such as burning down opponents’ houses, was typical for communal political revolts. In a letter of 5 October 1280, Robert of Bethune, the son of the count, blamed *au commun de le ville de Bruges et as maistres qui les gouvernent*, referring to those elements of the upper classes siding with the *meentucht*, who had

become ‘lords’ of the city (*et vous soiés asseignori de le vile*) by arresting people and putting them in prison, ‘which you cannot do’ (*que faire ne poéis*) because, by the privileges of Philippe of Alsace issued a century earlier, criminal law was the exclusive jurisdiction of the count and the aldermen he appointed. The commoners had also broken into the coffers which contained charters and the city treasury to take possession of these symbols of city power.⁶⁷

The Revolution of 1302 and the Rise of a Guild Regime

In the 1280s the rebellious craftsmen, eager to reclaim their place in government and urban finances, still had a long way to go. One of the guilds’ main demands was the right to choose their own leaders. In 1280 at both Bruges and Damme, the ‘*meente*’ demanded that guildsmen be governed by a proper administration, led by ‘*deken ende vinders*’ (‘dean and arbiters’), as the commune of Damme specified, elected by ‘us, the craftsmen’ (‘*wie, ambochtslieden*’).⁶⁸ Although the 1280 wave of revolts was generally unsuccessful, the ruling class did have to make concessions and could no longer deny the economic, political and military power of the guilds. During the final decades of the thirteenth century, the young craft guilds strengthened their organizations and asked more systematically for their advice on economic matters, but they were politically excluded and under the strict control of the city government. Wealthier groups, such as frustrated merchants who did not belong to the inner circles of the city government, as well as men who were likely richer artisans (the *ditiores de communitate*), exploited this situation and attempted to revive the demands of the popular classes, opposed to the patrician caste that dominated power and increasingly closed itself off from new membership.

While the sparse sources on the Moerlemaye revolt only offer us a glimpse of social and political reality, the revolutionary events in Flanders around 1300 are better documented and allow us to formulate hypotheses on the beginning of this movement. After the French king annexed the county of Flanders in 1297, a strange, ephemeral political coalition came into existence. Since the Flemish patricians, or *majores*, long alienated by the policies of Count Guy de Dampierre, and most Flemish nobles had chosen the side of King Philip the Fair, members of the count's family and those few nobles who remained loyal to him were forced to depend on the power of the lower and middle classes, especially those from Bruges and Ypres. This feudal conflict converged with an intra-urban social conflict to produce a general revolt under the leadership of the Bruges weaver Pieter de Coninck, first by Bruges artisans and later by artisans from other Flemish cities. In May 1302, the French army of occupation and their patrician allies in Bruges were massacred in the so-called 'Bruges matins' incident. The guildsmen, aided by the relatives of Count Guy, would not stop until they had obtained political rights after the Battle of the Golden Spurs (at Courtrai on 11 July 1302). The rebel forces humiliated the French chivalric army and their Flemish patrician allies, an event that shocked the elites throughout Europe.⁶⁹ The *Annales Gandenses*, the account of these events written by a Ghent friar who was sympathetic to the people, referred to the *communitas* as a political actor in its own right, in the same way that the *meentucht* had been. The friar used the term to refer to an institution but also a social coalition of guild members, the (*mechanici*) *vulgares* or *minores*, and wealthier individuals (the *divites* or *ditiores de communitate*).⁷⁰

The sources called the *communitas*, an institution not as clearly organized as the Italian counterpart of the *popolo*, a *societas*, which also refers to a sworn institution.⁷¹ Throughout the *Annales Gandenses*, the *communitas* was discursively contrasted with

the *majores* and the aldermen. It thus appears to mean ‘those not in power’, while still conveying the connotation of ‘the people as a whole’. In fourteenth-century England, the words ‘commons’ and ‘commoners’ referred to the entire urban community, but the meaning of these words had shifted by the sixteenth century to designate the lower classes.⁷² Heather Swanson noted that the terms ‘commonalty’ or ‘*communitas*’, which had originally applied to the entire borough community, including the mayor and aldermen, changed in meaning during the late thirteenth century. By the fourteenth century it was applied to the mass of citizens as distinguished from the ruling body, or the so-called ‘*probi homines*’ of the town.⁷³ And also in late medieval Germany, the creation of the collectivity which called itself the ‘*Gemeinde*’ at the end of the thirteenth century, did not originate from a theoretical model with prior assumptions, but from concrete pre-existing local structures which preceded the appearance of ‘*Gemeinde*’ in the sources.⁷⁴

As we have seen, in 1280, the Bruges craft guilds were still controlled by patrician overseers appointed by the government and seemed as yet politically immature. After 1302 this changed, as the guilds acquired and fulfilled political, legal, military and ideological functions in addition to their social, economic, charitable and devotional ones. At this point the age of the commune transformed into the age of corporatism, even if the latter retained some of the former’s basic features. In 1280, the commons did not request permanent representation in government by delegates from the guilds, but they did want to appoint half of the aldermen and councilors. When the city government received a new constitution in 1304 from Philip of Chieti, Guy’s youngest son who was ruling in his father’s absence, this new and more inclusive body politic of Bruges was governed by what would later be called the ‘Nine Members’ of the city (the ‘*negen leden*’), corporate bodies of different craft guilds and groups of burghers, charged with

electing the aldermen. In theory, the guilds could appoint nine of the aldermen and nine of the ‘councilors’, who were minor urban officials.⁷⁵ During the periods of guild rule, Florence used a similar body metaphor of the political ‘members’ to that which was developed in cities such as Bruges and Ghent between 1302 and 1360. In Flanders the concept of representative government also replaced the idea of direct rule by wise men which had characterized the early commune. The demographic and social reality was very different. In 1127, judging by its area, Bruges had a maximum population of 5,000 persons, and probably numbered less. In 1280 the city had at least 40,000 people, and maybe more (the first reliable population number is 45,000 in 1338, and that was after the great famine of 1316-1317).⁷⁶ Now it was no longer possible to have direct representation in a general city council which assembled in a field next to the city. The same was true for other Flemish cities.

These old-fashioned assemblies were now replaced by what was to become the new institutional and ideological form of the northern European commune: the corporatism of the political guilds. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the position of the guilds in the city’s balance of power was at its peak. For the next two hundred years, the principal demand of the guilds in Bruges would be that nine of the thirteen members of the aldermen’s benches were to be actually selected by these Nine Members, though prosopographical research shows this was rare in practice and wealthier groups still dominated city politics.⁷⁷ As we have seen above, since the end of the thirteenth century, the term *poorter* (literally ‘burgher’) also became more restricted in meaning, limited to designating a burgher who was not a member of a guild. It appears that this term reflected the previous situation when those living within the first walls of the city, hence the richer patricians, either merchants or landowners, had been the only burghers with full legal status. In the final quarter of the thirteenth century, there had already

been a discursive opposition between ‘burghers’ and ‘guildsmen’ (*porters ende ambochters*) in the sources.⁷⁸ The notion of ‘porters’ had already narrowed to those who did not belong to a craft guild, even though in other usages it still held the wider meaning of any burgher of the city. For a short time after 1302, the guilds also controlled city neighbourhoods through the institution of the ‘Hundredmen’ (*hondertmannen*), who were justices of the peace responsible for solving minor conflicts and exercising some social control. This was a rival institution to the Headmen of the *Zestendelen* (the main quarters of the city), which fulfilled those functions both before and after. The Headmen were chosen only from the *poorters* while the Hundredmen were recruited from the guilds as well. In the final analysis, the new constitution of 1304 was a compromise between the guilds and the patricians, a joint determination of urban space in its metaphoric form of the body politic.

While the rebels who had reclaimed the 1280 commune failed to obtain political power, the next generation won an important victory in 1302 and presented for the first time a guild-based alternative to patrician dominance over urban space. The craft guilds were eager to control trade and industry themselves, which equated to controlling the urban fabric and its political, financial, fiscal, infrastructural and spatial organization, the entire ‘body’ of the town. After 1302, the guilds translated this goal into new strategies of spatial, material, legal and symbolic control. For the guilds, control over urban space equaled control over urban finances and taxation, since public money was largely spent on the material infrastructure of the city. The ideology of the commune was based on common control over urban material space by a group of sworn men, regulating at the same time justice and peace, including market organization and economic relations. Because the guilds had developed as political institutions (*politische Zünfte*), the rebels’ program in 1280 was an attempt to revive the old idea of the commune, an idea that had

been gradually lost in the later twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, due to the rise of the patrician class as a separate social entity with no loyalty to the communal ideal of the sworn oath of equal men, even if such an ideal was probably a fiction from the start. After this battle was won in 1302, it brought revolutionary change to the political system in the major cities of Flanders at least. However, after their victory in 1302, the guildsmen did not exclude the patricians but entered into a pragmatic but unstable political compromise by allowing the patricians to remain a part of the body politic. Just as the Italian *popolo* fractured into the *popolo grasso* and *popolo minuto*, the unstable coalition between the comital family and the guilds or commons was soon broken. By 1309 at the latest in Bruges and Ghent, the richer guilds, such as the brokers, butchers and fishmongers, began to side with the old Lilly faction, which was gradually slipping back into power, especially against the textile guilds.⁷⁹ In the fourteenth century, the textile guilds were the primary challengers to the power of the count and the urban elites. Economic and demographic crises, growing internal oligarchization within the guilds themselves, and conflict between different guilds, such as the fullers and weavers in Ghent, would characterize this new phase in Flemish urban politics.

The Flemish *meentucht*: a parallel to the Italian *popolo*?

In fact, this movement of the *meentucht* in Bruges and elsewhere in the North between 1280 and 1302 closely resembled the agitations of the *popolo* in the northern and central Italian cities, albeit with a time lag of half a century. The major difference, however, was that in Italy ‘the commune’ was not revived but overthrown by the new regime of the *popolo*, even though the reasons were identical: the political authorities and the social groups that monopolized them were no longer perceived to represent the whole citizenry (or ‘the people’), who had become much larger in numbers and much more

socially and economically differentiated.⁸⁰ After a successful revolt, the *popolo* created its own institutions, next to those of the commune, or even in opposition to the commune, such as those created by the Orvieto *minores*, who rebelled in the early thirteenth century to protect their interests against the ruling elite.⁸¹ Thus, under the *popolo*, dual institutions developed, with a *podestà* and a *capitaneus populi* or *capitano del popolo*.⁸² In Flanders, however, the institutional solutions after 1302 were quite different and usually achieved a compromise between guilds and patricians in town government. In these two medieval regions, the motives of the movement were partially based on class and partially due to a lack of circulation and openness within the elites. In Bruges and Ghent, the uprisings were manipulated by so-called ‘new men’, even though the majority of the rebels belonged to the craft guilds.⁸³ Similarly, in a 1228 revolt of the *popolo* in Bologna, wealthy merchants had led the *arti* to overthrow the old regime of the consuls approximately a half century earlier.⁸⁴

The Italian *popolo*, a political movement that eventually also became institutionalised, had a social base of minor property owners, small merchants and shopkeepers, artisans, and even notaries and doctors. Since these social groups were joined by elements from the ruling classes and their captains were often recruited from the nobility, the *popolo* can certainly not be considered an unambiguous class phenomenon, just as the Flemish *meentucht*, as we have explained above, also did not have a ‘pure’ class base. Between 1280 and 1302, the Flemish guilds as well had to look for allies from the elites, especially merchants, drapers, brokers and others who had amassed wealth but had no political power, and frustrated scions of the older patrician lineages who wanted to use the popular classes to settle scores with their enemies. This occurred in the Moerlemaye, as Wyffels and Bardoel have proven with prosopographical evidence.⁸⁵ In a similar fashion to the Bruges rebellious alliance of 1280, mixed *ceti popolari* in many Italian

cities rebelled against closed groups of magnates, called *potentes*, *casati*, *maiores*, *milites*, and other terms designating the urban elites in the sources, between 1200 and 1250. The magnates ruled because of their wealth, family ties and prestige, or through their positions as officials for lords and bishops, or as jurists and judges. As in the Flemish case, the repertoire of collective actions of the Italian *popolo* was fundamentally communal. They occupied town squares and communal palaces; they expelled their enemies, destroyed their houses and confiscated their goods. They began agitating in 1200 and gradually rose in power and importance, until *popolo* regimes had attained power in Florence, Piacenza, Lucca, Siena, Bologna, Genoa and other cities by 1250. In Modena, for example, the *popolo* began formulating its demands in 1229 and finally took power in 1250, with the institution of the *societa generale del popolo*. The *popolo* movement in the Lombard towns reached its zenith around 1250, when it became a general phenomenon in Northern and Central Italy.⁸⁶ The *popolo* had three main goals, which were very similar to those of the Flemish rebels. The *popolo* first wanted to break the monopoly on power of the noble clans (*consorterie* or *alberghi*) and replace them with a leader chosen from the guilds and neighbourhood militias, the *capitano del popolo*. The *popolo* of Florence proclaimed anti-magnate laws that excluded many families from power, sometimes even exiling them, prohibited speculation and factional strife, and forced magnate families to swear oaths of fidelity to the city. Secondly, the *popolo* tried to shift taxation from regressive indirect taxes to progressive taxes on property. Its third goal was to institute a program re-establishing law and order to replace the violence of noble feuds.⁸⁷

As an institution, the *popolo*, or *societas populi*, was usually formed from the ranks of the guilds (the *società d'arti*) and the popular neighbourhood militias (the *società d'armi*). The nucleus of the Italian popular party was primarily the infantry of the

twelfth-century communal army, the *pars peditum*. In the course of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, these *minores* developed their own political consciousness, often based on their work in crafts and their residence on the city's periphery, another similarity to the Flemish popular classes. This consciousness developed into the more formal structure of the neighbourhood militias, usually formed as a defence against the factional violence of the *magnati* and the craft guilds.⁸⁸ There were Flemish equivalents to the Italian popular militias and neighbourhood-based organisations (the *compagnie*, or *società d'armi*, and the *vicinanze*), although in Flanders these groups played more limited roles. Galbert of Bruges certainly described the military exploits of groups of citizens in 1127 but these militias still seem to have lacked the institutional organization of their Italian counterparts. However, by the thirteenth century there is evidence of organized urban militias in the Flemish towns. The *Annales Gandenses* mentions that the Bruges and Ghent guilds had their own tents and military banners by 1300. *Capitanei communitatis* ('captains of the commons', or the Dutch equivalent, 'hoofdmannen') led the *peditibus bene armatis de communitate*. These were armies that kings and lords had to fear, as the battle of the Golden Spurs demonstrated.⁸⁹ Hence, in this respect as well, the Italian militias were chronologically more advanced than the Flemish ones. Moreover, as outlined above, the Italian craft guilds (*società d'arti*) were independently organized earlier than the Flemish guilds, even though the Italian guilds ended up being less important in urban politics than Flemish and German guilds.⁹⁰

Perhaps the closest comparison to the large Flemish cities was Florence, a city that was not truly representative of general trends in Italian urban history. Florence underwent periods of guild rule in 1293, 1343-1348, and the Ciompi regime in 1378-1382, broken up by decades of purely elite rule or precarious balances of power, before the

government developed into a complete oligarchy after 1400. The Florentine craft guilds had a corporate approach to political organisation, rooted in their class interests. As in Bruges, Ghent and Ypres, thirteenth-century demographic and social changes, especially immigration from the countryside, caused a transformation in the political balance of forces in Florence which challenged the dominance of the military and commercial elites. As the city developed from a centre of international and regional trade into a more complex industrial centre, social structure grew increasingly diverse. In addition to growth in the artisanal proletariat, there were more middle-class guild masters, shopkeepers and professionals, such as notaries and doctors, who demanded political participation. For the next three centuries in Florence, as in Flanders, conflict and balance between the popular and middle classes on one side and the elites on the other dominated political life. As in Flemish and many German towns and cities, guilds became political and legal institutions that not only regulated their rank and file, but also sought an established position as ‘members’ of the urban body politic, often sparking and an oligarchic reaction and using symbolic and physical violence to achieve their goals.⁹¹ Thus, Najemy called the *popolo* movement ‘the first politically effective and ideologically sustained challenge to an elite class, a challenge that succeeded, not in displacing the elite, but in transforming it’.⁹² This exact process happened in Bruges and in some other major towns of the Southern Netherlands half a century later. Apart from this chronological lag, the fundamental difference between the two movements seems to be that the Italian *popolo* created its own institutions alongside those of the old commune and soon requested a *podestà* from outside to rule the city, while power-sharing between the guilds and the *poorterie*, using the metaphor of the ‘members’ of the body of the city, became the political and institutional solution in the major cities of Flanders. In the long term, even though many more political battles in

the cities would follow during the later Middle Ages, this Flemish political compromise between guild power and oligarchy seems to have been a more stable one than the Italian one, and it created new forms of political legitimacy fully grounded in a communal and corporate ideology typical for the Netherlands.

¹ J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, *Patterns of urban rebellion in medieval Flanders*, in *Journal of Medieval History*, 31, 2005, p. 369-393; S. Cohn, *Lust for liberty. The politics of social revolt in medieval Europe, 1200-1425. Italy, France, and Flanders*, Cambridge Mass., 2006; J. Braekevelt, F. Buylaert, J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, *The politics of factional conflict in late medieval Flanders*, in *Historical Research*, 85, 2012, p. 1-31; M. Boone, *The Dutch Revolt and the medieval tradition of urban dissent*, in *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11, 2007, p. 351-375; P. Arnade, *Beggars, iconoclasts, and civic patriots. The political culture of the Dutch Revolt*, London, 2008.

² A. Giry, *Histoire de la ville de Saint Omer et de ses institutions jusqu'au XIV^e siècle*, Paris, 1877; A. Derville, *Saint Omer: des origines au début du XIV^e siècle*, Lille, 1995. There are also a few isolated documents on communal organization for smaller towns like the *amicitia* of Aire-sur-la-Lys or early charters of liberties, such as the one for Geraardsbergen (F. Blockmans, *De oudste privilegiën*, in *Nederlandsche Historiebladen*, 1, 1938, p. 23-24).

³ G. Brugensis, *De multro traditione et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriae*, J. Rider (ed.), Turnhout, 1994; J. Rider, *God's Scribe. The historiographical art of Galbert of Bruges*, Washington, 2001.

⁴ C. Wyffels, *Nieuwe gegevens betreffende de 13de eeuwse 'demokratische' stedelijke opstand: de Brugse 'Moerlemaye' (1280-1281)*, in *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, 132, 1966, p. 43; A. Bardoel, *The urban uprising at Bruges, 1280-81. Some*

new findings about the rebels and the partisans, Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, 72, 1994, p. 761-791.

⁵ See for instance the brilliant study on the German protest of 'die Gemeinde', albeit that it happened in the fourteenth century: G. Gleba, *Die Gemeinde als alternatives Ordnungsmodell. Zur sozialen und politischen Differenzierung des Gemeindebegriffs in den innerstädtischen Auseinandersetzungen des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*. Mainz, Magdeburg, München, Lübeck, Köln, 1989, p. 257.

⁶ A. Leguai, *Les troubles urbains dans le Nord de la France à la fin du XIIIe et au début du XIVe siècle*, in *Revue d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, 54, 1976, p. 281; M. Mollat and P. Wolff, *Ongles bleus, Jacques et Ciompi. Les révolutions populaires en Europe aux XIVe et XVe siècles*, Paris, 1970, p. 59-65.

⁷ G. Espinas, *La vie urbaine de Douai au Moyen Age*, I, Paris, 1913, p. 226-269; F. Brassart, *Emeute des tisserands, 1280 (vers le mois d'octobre)*, in *Souvenirs de la Flandre Wallonne*, 2^e série, 3, 1882, p. 123-129; M. Boone, *Social conflicts in the cloth industry of Ypres (late 13th – early 14th centuries): the Cockerulle reconsidered*, in M. Dewilde, A. Eryvynck and A. Wielemans (eds.) *Ypres and the medieval cloth industry in Flanders. Archaeological and historical contributions*, Ypres, 1998, p. 147-155.

⁸ *Quae omnia publice profiteamur ad petitionem nostram et ad utilitatem publicam rationabiliter et legitime facta esse*, the petition continued (edited by L. Warnkönig, *Flandrische Staats- und Rechtsgeschichte bis zum Jahr 1305*, Tübingen, 1836, II (2), p. 68-69).

⁹ The latest synthesis is R. Van Caenegem (ed.), *1302. Le désastre de Courtrai. Faits et mythes de la bataille des Eperons d'Or*, Antwerp, 2002.

¹⁰ F. Blockmans, *Het Gentsche stadspatriciaat vóór 1302*, Antwerp, 1938; W. Prevenier, *La bourgeoisie en Flandre au XIIIe siècle*, in *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, 1978, p. 407-428.

¹¹ K. Schulz, *Die Politische Zunft. Eine die spätmittelalterliche Stadt prägende Institution*, in W. Ehbrecht (ed.), *Verwaltung und Politik in Städten Mitteleuropas. Beiträge zu Verfassungsnorm und Verfassungswirklichkeit in altständischer Zeit*, Köln, 1994, p. 1-20.

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²⁴ Vermeesch, *Essai sur les origines*, p. 105, 113; P. Desportes, *Le mouvement communal dans la province de Reims*, in *Les chartes et le mouvement communal*, Saint-Quentin, 1982, p. 105-122.

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³⁸ L. Vanderkindere, *Choix d'études historiques*, Brussels, 1909, p. 310-311. R. Van Caenegem and L. Milis, *Kritische uitgave van de "Grote Keure" van Filips van de Elzas, graaf van Vlaanderen, voor Gent en Brugge (1165-1177)*, in *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, 143, 1977, p. 207-257.

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⁴⁶ C. Wyffels, *De oorspong der ambachten in Vlaanderen en Brabant*, Brussels, 1951, p. 103.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61-78.

⁴⁸ Wyffels, *Nieuwe gegevens*, p. 104-107.

⁴⁹ See the publications of Wyffels and Bardoel quoted in note 4. However, these historians seem to be blind to any kind of autonomous action by the popular classes and even contradict the evidence they edit themselves. The analysis of the Moerlemaye by T. Boogaart (*Reflections on the Moerlemaye: Revolt and Reform in Late Medieval Bruges*, in *Revue belge de philologie et d'Histoire*, 79, 2001, p. 1133-1158), is less 'elitist' but suffers from a few factual errors and overemphasizes the 'ritual' aspects of the revolt, even though these are in themselves a very valuable contribution to the debate, to the detriment of social and political struggle.

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⁵¹ J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, *A bad chicken was brooding. Subversive speech in late medieval Flanders*, in *Past and Present*, 214, 2012, p. 45-86.

⁵² Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Coutumes de la ville*, I, p. 232.

⁵³ Ibidem, pp. 237-8.

⁵⁴ Cfr. O.G. Oexle, *Gilde und Kommune. Über die Entstehung von 'Einung' und 'Gemeinde' als Grundformen des Zusammenlebens in Europa*, in P. Blickle (ed.), *Theorien kommunaler Ordnung in Europa*, München, 1996, p. 75-97.

⁵⁵ G. von Olberg, *Gemeinde*, in R. Müller (ed.), *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, Berlin, 1998, XI, 1-3; G. Dilcher, *Gemeinde*, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, Munich, 1999, IV, 1209-1211.

⁵⁶ See M. Philippa, F. Debrabandere and A. Quak, *Etymologisch woordenboek van het Nederlands*, Amsterdam, 2004, and M. De Vries and L. te Winkel, *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, The Hague, 1889, both under 'gemeen'. The English word 'common' has the same etymological origins, see H. Kurath (ed.), *Middle English*

Dictionary, Ann Arbor, 1959, II, 438-441; and E. Klein, *A comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language*, London, 1971, 152.

⁵⁷ Philippa, Debrabandere and Quak, *Etymologisch woordenboek*, lemma ‘tucht’.

⁵⁸ See, respectively: G. Espinas and H. Pirenne, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’industrie drapière en Flandre*, Brussels, 1909, II, p. 382; J. Vuylsteke, *Uitleggingen tot de Gentsche stads- en baljuwsrekeningen, 1280-1315*, Ghent, 1906, p. 78.

⁵⁹ Wyffels, *Nieuwe gegevens*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ See, respectively: A. De Smet, *De klacht van de ‘Ghemeente’ van Damme in 1280*, in *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire*, 115, 1950, p. 9; and H. Nowé, *Les baillis comtaux de Flandre: des origines à la fin du XIVe siècle*, Brussels, 1929, p. 435.

⁶¹ M. Gysseling (ed.), *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)*, The Hague, 1977, I, p. 21, 71, 291.

⁶² K. Czok, *Zunftkämpfe, Zunftrevolutionen oder Bürgerkämpfe*, in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl Marx-Universität Leipzig, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 8, 1958-1959, p. 129-143.

⁶³ W. Prevenier, *Utilitas communis in the Low Countries (13th-15th centuries): from social mobilisation to legitimation of power*, in 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 centuries*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 210-216.

⁶⁴ Wyffels, *Nieuwe gegevens*, p. 106.

⁶⁵ We refer to O. Von Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, Berlin, 1868-1881, 3 vols.

⁶⁶ ‘*Sie erweist sich als ein oppositionelles Prinzip, in dem das bisher im Stadtre Regiment vorherrschende hierarchische, von oben nach unten ausgerichtete Herrschaftskonzept wesentliche Umformungen erfährt*’ (Gleba, *Die Gemeinde*, p. 252).

⁶⁷ Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Coutumes de la ville*, I, p. 2398.

⁶⁸ De Smet, *De klacht*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Dumolyn and Haemers, *Patterns of urban rebellion*, p. 373-374.

⁷⁰ H. Johnstone (ed.), *Annals of Ghent*, London, 1951, pp. 16-18, 21, 30, 95.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 19. On other occasions, this chronicle also speaks of the *amici comitis*, which could also be considered a ‘faction’, see J. Braekevelt et al., *The politics of factional conflict*, p. 21-2.

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⁷³ H. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: an urban class in medieval England*, Oxford, 1989, p. 120.

⁷⁴ Gleba, *Die Gemeinde*, p. 251.

⁷⁵ J. Mertens, *Bestuursinstellingen van de Stad Brugge (1127-1795)*, in W. Prevenier and B. Augustyn (eds.), *De Gewestelijke en Lokale Overheidsinstellingen in Vlaanderen tot 1795*, Brussels, 1997, p. 323-332.

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⁷⁸ For instance Espinas and Pirenne, *Recueil de documents*, II, p. 371.

⁷⁹ Johnstone, *Annals of Ghent*, p. 95.

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⁸¹ D. Foote, *Lordship, Reform and the Development of Civil Society in Medieval Italy. The Bishopric of Orvieto, 1100-1250*, Notre Dame, 2004, p. 87. For what follows, see C. Zey, *Autour des soulèvements communaux en Italie septentrionale et centrale aux XI^e et XII^e siècles*, in Depreux (ed.), *Révolte et statut social*, p. 131-147; A. Zorzi, *The Popolo*, in J. Najemy (ed.), *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance*, Oxford, 2004, p. 145-164; E. Crouzet-Pavan, *Enfers et paradis. L'Italie de Dante et de Giotto*, Paris, 2001, p. 132-135.

⁸² Fasoli, *Oligarchie*, p. 15-16; R. Davidsohn, *Die Populärbewegungen im italienischen Städten bis zur Mitte des XIII. Jahrhunderts*, in Id., *Forschungen zur Geschichte von Florenz*, Berlin, 1908, IV, p. 8-29.

⁸³ C. Wyffels, *Nieuwe gegevens*, p. 43. About these *homines novi* in Ghent: R. Märtns, *Wertorientierungen und wirtschaftliches Erfolgsstreben mittelalterlicher Grosskaufleute. Das Beispiel Gent im 13. Jahrhundert*, Köln, 1976.

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⁸⁵ See the articles quoted in note 4.

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⁸⁹ J.F. Verbruggen, *The art of warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1977, p. 128-132; (quotations from) Johnstone, *Annals of Ghent*, p. 13, 21.

⁹⁰ G. Fasoli, *Le compagnie delle armi a Bologna*, Bologna, 1933.

⁹¹ J. Najemy, *Corporation and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280-1400*, Chapel Hill, 1982, p. 3-13 and passim; A. Stella, *La révolte des Ciompi. Les hommes, les lieux, le travail*, Paris, 1993.

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