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***Court and City, a tense Relation in the Burgundian Netherlands***

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Medieval lords and rulers tended to show off their supremacy by building strongholds, fortresses and residences on locations which were prominent in the landscape. Beyond the obvious tactical advantages of sitting on top of a mountain, the high visibility of such constructions permanently marked their holder's position and should have impressed subjects and travellers. As the heads of a seigniorial hierarchy, territorial princes also possessed a number of such elevated castles and fortresses, testimonies of a memorable history. Some of these were situated in or close to cities, as it was the case in Mons, Namur, Limbourg or Dinant. Besides these traditionally military functions, princes also liked to reside in places near woods with great hunting facilities, both for their entertainment and for the provisioning of the household. Examples of these were Le Quesnoy, Tervuren, Male, Hesdin, and The Hague. Not all of these places developed substantial urban functions, as it was the case for the latter two. Only in the third instance came residences in cities without the attractions of the mountains and the woods. The following reflections will mainly deal with these locations. The questions to be addressed concern the motivations princes had to reside in cities where their castle did not stand at a distance from other buildings and did not rise higher than those; which problems they encountered there, and which tendency can be observed in the choices the princes of the houses of Burgundy and Habsburg made in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In each of the territories the dukes of Burgundy acquired, they inherited the residences of the territorial princes who had been their predecessors. As long as they were traveling around their possessions, with the intention to make their rule felt effectively, these various residences proved to be very helpful, even if the first two dukes, Philip the Bold and John the Fearless, spent much of their time in Paris rather than in their own territories. The situation changed dramatically during Philip the Good's reign, especially since his conquest, between 1427 and 1435, of no less than seven principalities adjacent to Flanders and Artois, his core lands in the Low Countries. As it appears from their itineraries, Dukes Philip and Charles hardly spent any time in any of these new possessions, with the sole exception of Brabant. Of the time Philip and Charles passed in the Low Countries, they were mostly in Flanders, mainly in Bruges, Ghent and Lille: 45 and 52 per cent respectively. Brussels followed with 39 and 31 per cent, and, at great distance Artois, with 11 and 14 per cent. Hainaut evidently did not belong to their priorities, as they were there only four and three per cent of their time. They just made brief passages through their peripheral principalities in the North (Holland and Zeeland) and South (Namur, Luxemburg, Picardy). Apart from Philip's later years, Bruges, Ghent, Brussels, Lille, Saint-Omer and Arras marked the area in which most of the duke's mobility occurred within the Low Countries. By implication, the residences in the previously independent principalities lost their function, and became the seats of the governors and the regional high courts.

It has to be noted that the residences most frequented in the Low Countries were located in the largest cities. It is well known that the local authorities of Bruges, Ghent, Lille, and mostly Brussels made great efforts to embellish the existing

residences in order to attract the court's presence.<sup>1</sup> They invested in the prestige of their city, as the court surely attracted lots of visitors. It also was a matter of principle that the principalities saw with regret and some anxiety that the dukes' territorial extensions inevitably led to his increased absence from their territory, and it was feared that this would lead to a lesser concern with their interests. The easiness of access to the decision-makers therefore may equally have played a role in the willingness of the magistrates to contribute substantially in the residences' reconstruction. It remains therefore even more striking that the dukes conceded to this concern of their subjects only in the case of Brabant, the most prestigious duchy among their new acquisitions, whose Estates had toughly negotiated about the respect of their privileges before agreeing to Philip's succession in 1430. This remark supports Werner Paravicini's earlier observation about the relatively great number of Brabantine noblemen recruited to the court.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the political arguments local magistrates may have had to induce the dukes to reside within their walls, they may also have expected that the presence of the court, with its hundreds of persons and horses, and the visitors it attracted, would give a strong impulse to the local market in general, and for the luxury sector in particular. Indeed, several members of the high nobility bought their residences on the Coudenberg in Brussels, close to the duke's palace, which created a spin-off effect. There can be no doubt that some local crafts did profit from the increasingly regular presence of the court since the 1450s, as it has been shown for the metal workers and luxury crafts such as the tapestry weavers.<sup>3</sup> Other luxury crafts, however, were less sensitive to the court's location, as commissions could very well be executed without a continuous and close contact between the patron and the artist. Further on, the economic impact depended very much of the size of the city, its social and economic structure: the larger and economically more diversified, the smaller the relative impact of the court as an additional factor of demand. As the court was mostly on the move, the effects of its presence were not necessarily lasting and structural. The production of illuminated books may have been stimulated by the court, but not precisely in the main residence cities. Miniaturists in Valenciennes and Mons received numerous commissions from the duke and members of his court while these resided mostly in Brussels; the concentration of skilled artists in those places was sufficient to provide them work which often lasted many months, longer anyway than the unpredictable mobility of the patrons. Similarly, Ghent and Bruges continued to be great centres of book production in 1480s until around 1530, at a time when the court resided mainly elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> It has been estimated that the economic impact of the court's residence represented 0.4 per cent of the revenue of the city of Ghent, 0.7 of that of Bruges, and 2.5 of that of Brussels.<sup>5</sup> In the sixteenth century, the court became more stabilised in Malines until 1530, and in Brussels from 1531 onwards, by which its economic impact surely has grown.

So far, we looked at the motives local authorities may have had to try and lure the princes to choose residence within their walls. But why should the princes have accepted to stay within city walls, the gates of which may be closed against their will, and where they found themselves closely surrounded by burghers which might suddenly turn into a dangerous crowd? In the 1430s, Duke Philip experienced uprisings in Ghent and in Bruges truly threatening his person. In Ghent, members of his Council of Justice had been threatened in 1432, and in September 1434, the urban militia disarmed his bodyguard, detained him under virtual arrest and forced him to agree to a long list of their grievances.<sup>6</sup> In Bruges, Duchess Isabel was insulted by local craftsmen when she left the city during the first outbreak of the revolt in 1436. All those who had held office in the urban magistrate over the last thirty years were

arrested under the suspicion of bad governance and corruption. In May 1437, the duke entered the city with an army to receive her submission, but the urban militia closed the gate when he was on his way to his palace with only the vanguard of his troops. They found the craftsmen in arms attacking them fiercely, in which battle the duke had a narrow escape but several of the most senior captains and courtiers, among whom the Lord of l'Isle Adam, lost their life.<sup>7</sup> Duke Charles got into serious trouble during his inaugural entry in Ghent in 1467, and Maximilian, the Roman King, was even kept as a prisoner during three months and a half in Bruges in 1488.<sup>8</sup> After each of the urban revolts, the relations between the prince and his subjects were redefined in the sense of the imposition of restrictions on the urban autonomy. These acts were celebrated publicly in order to show to all citizens who had prevailed in the conflict. After the formal submission of the Bruges magistrates whom he had commanded to appear at his court outside the county, in Arras in 1438, Duke Philip ceremonially restored his loving relations with the city as soon as 1440, during a highly elaborated theatrical entry procession where he was staged in comparison with Christ's Advent in Jerusalem, as the entry was held in December.<sup>9</sup> In one of the battles during the Ghent revolt of 1447-1453, Duke Philip lost a much-beloved son. Afterwards, he imposed a formal submission ritual before he made his entry and restored relations in 1458, albeit under severe sanctions and institutional reforms. Duke Charles took an even much harsher attitude towards rebellious cities. He let his troops destroy the city of Liège and considered the same fate for Ghent and Malines because the riots during his inauguration. After due consideration, he decided to restrict himself and to humble a delegation of the Ghent magistrate he had summoned to his court in Brussels, outside the county of Flanders, and to impose his tight control over the election of the urban government.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of his life, Duke Philip chose to reside most of his time in the newly extended palace on the Coudenberg in Brussels. It offered the advantages of the large forest in its immediate vicinity and its location on the top of a hill offering a gorgeous view over the city, while keeping a safe distance from it. Moreover, Brussels was a much calmer place than Ghent and Bruges, where the large and very influential artisan's crafts had a long-standing tradition of rebellion. Duchesses Margaret of York and Mary of Burgundy mostly stayed in the Prinsenhof in Ghent, and there it was that they had to give in to the furious crowds crying for the decapitation of the chancellor Hugonet and governor Humbercourt. After the long revolt against Maximilian from 1482 to 1492, during which his young son and heir to the throne Philip the Fair was kept as a hostage, the court withdrew from Flanders.<sup>11</sup> Margaret lived as a dowager in Malines, which Duke Charles had already chosen as the seat of his central institutions. Margaret of Austria would equally stay in Malines as the governor general, from 1507 till her death in 1530. She extended her residence in an elegant renaissance style, and she stimulated a varied and interesting cultural environment.<sup>12</sup>

How then, is it to be explained that Duke Philip stayed in Bruges and Ghent for 25 per cent of the time he spent in the Low Countries, and Duke Charles even 45 per cent, as compared to 39 and 31 per cent respectively in Brussels? The contrast between father and son is partly due to the former's preference for Brussels at the end of his life. On the other hand, Philip's longer reign and fewer long-lasting absences made that, in numbers of days, his presence in the Flemish cities was still very considerable. The most obvious explanation for this seems to be the interest these cities represented and the advantages they could offer due to their very large size and their core position in the economy of the whole region.

Since Duke Philip the Bold, it was clear that financial and commercial services were nowhere else so well provided as in Bruges. International merchants and bankers could rapidly lend, change and transfer money to all relevant places. Each of the dukes felt the need for close relations with prominent Italian merchants who could furnish large quantities of the most refined silk, velvet, gold cloth, other exquisite textiles as well as furs, and who were at the same time interested in investments and transactions of essential importance for the dukes. The family Rapondi from Lucca had branches in Bruges and Paris and these were well positioned to make the very important money transfers from the royal treasury to that of the duke. They provided the refined robes for the double marriage between the heirs of Burgundy and Bavaria-Hainault in 1385. Giovanni Rapondi financed the building of the tower and fortress in Sluis due to protect the harbour against an English invasion. The family financed both the failed crusade of 1396 and the tribute to free John the Fearless, as they financed the war to reinstall John of Bavaria as the bishop-elect of Liège in 1408.<sup>13</sup> Only in the commercial metropolis Bruges was it possible to find the complex commercial and financial organisation, and the level of capital accumulation required for such transactions.<sup>14</sup> The close personal relations and the trust between Duke Philip the Bold and his commercial partners gave him a huge tactical advantage to rivalling princes. Trust is built on personal contacts, and therefore proximity between the duke and the merchants residing in the West-European main-port was essential. The later dukes maintained close relations with several Italian commercial partners, of which the collaboration between Duke Charles and Tommaso Portinari, the head of the Medici bank in Bruges, is the best known.

More generally, the large cities, and especially Bruges as the centre of international trade, were ideal locations for contacts, where information, goods and services of all kinds were abundant. These places were easy to reach, and there always were lots of opportunities for communication. These facilities obviously were convenient for the centre of government. The citizens of the large cities in their turn had lots of affairs for which they appreciated the opportunity to approach court members directly. With regard to public finance, Ghent and Bruges were, with their joint theoretical share of 29.488 per cent, the largest contributors to the subsidies granted to the princes by the county of Flanders. Each of these cities was the capital of a 'quarter' (the secondary towns and countryside under their supervision) which together paid 62.19 per cent of the amount due by the county. In application of a distribution established in 1471 and maintained in the sixteenth century, this principality normally contributed one quarter of the subsidies agreed upon by the States General of the Low Countries.<sup>15</sup> This meant that their voice was determining both on the level of the county as in the whole of the Low Countries. For that reason, Duke Philip in 1447 first came to Ghent in the general assembly of the aldermen and deans of the crafts to launch his proposal for the introduction of a permanent salt tax along the model of the French *gabelle*. Their refusal effectively led to the end of the idea.

Overall, the government's income consisted increasingly of taxes and subsidies negotiated with the representative assemblies. In towns and cities, these monies were collected through indirect taxes, mainly on consumption goods and trade. Periods of warfare immediately led to increasing financial demands from the government, which, if granted, led to the increase of the cities' public debt and of indirect taxes. The urban population thus rapidly felt the fiscal effects of warfare, which might be aggravated by disturbances of trade leading to unemployment and further decrease in the workers' income. Therefore, representative assemblies generally opposed warfare, which the princes tended to consider as one of their primary prerogatives and a matter of their personal honour. This tension was constantly felt during the century

of Burgundo/Habsburg wars against Valois France, from 1465 to 1559. Each period of war provoked a steep rise in taxation, part of which continued over years through the lasting repayment of the debts engaged to get the money quickly. The opposition by the subjects' representatives may have slowed down the process a little, but ultimately they could not stop it. Princes simply launched the wars at will and made the subjects face the consequences. As taxes always arrived too late for their noble enterprises, they increasingly relied on loans by great bankers. In the end, these had to be paid back just as well by tax money, but then with high interests added. As the size of the armies, the cost of the equipment and the defensive infrastructure grew dramatically during the sixteenth century, military expenses drove the major states into financial crises by the 1550s, creaming off the economic growth and the wealth of European and colonial populations.<sup>16</sup>

For these reasons, negotiations about taxation used to require a lot of dealings with the leaders of the main cities. These frequently implied special demands for advanced payment of instalments, for which the cities had to sell annuities which they guaranteed to pay off during one or two lifetimes at a rate which varied by market conditions, normally including an interest rate. This means that, possibly as a part of the negotiations for a new subsidy, the princes pressurised the magistrates to agree to grant credit at the expense of the urban tax payers and under the guarantee of the cities' regular income. In this whole process of obscure wailings and dealings, corruption loomed large. This incrimination was voiced time and again in the revolts which most often found their motivation in economic disturbance through international conflicts, and the consequently rising taxes on consumption, as for example in Ghent in 1432, Bruges 1436, and also in other cities in 1467, 1477 and in the 1480s. In each of these cases, the prince and his or her court were present in the city when the riots broke out, they were directly involved, addressed and their counsellors inculpated and some even sentenced by an improvised court of justice.<sup>17</sup> The court's relations with the major cities in the Low Countries thus were double-faced: the cities were attractive for their opportunities for communication and contact, the great variety of services and goods available, their infrastructure, and their immense financial assets. Good relations with the major cities were the clue to control over the highly urbanised territories as a whole. Moreover, as we already saw, the cities could be instrumental as the scenery for mass spectacles demonstrating the prince's political ambitions. The sheer number of inhabitants and the extension of the urban space offered unique opportunities for mass communication in a direct, mainly visual contact. Apart from inaugurations and other entries, all the transitional rites of the dynasty were appropriate to foster the people's emotional involvement with their rulers. The people of Bruges cheered enthusiastically in May 1478 when Duchess-dowager Margaret of York showed them on the Market Square her newly baptised godson Philip, 'all naked'.

'She took his little balls in her hands and said: "Children look at your newly born lord young Philip, descending from the Emperor's seed." When the commune saw that it was a son, they were most joyful, thanking and praising the Lord for having given them a young prince.'<sup>18</sup>

Only one year after the deep crisis of authority in the Low Countries, it was important to make the highly political point of the continuity of the 'Burgundian' dynasty. Similarly, the entire city mourned in deep grief at her accidental death merely four years later. The emotional bonds between the rulers and the people eased their sometimes tense relations, due to economic and political pressures. The cities therefore offered the ideal platform for the court to show off its most glorious and attractive side, which, in the end, was a very cheap way to deal with political

problems. Far cheaper anyway than risking a revolt or even an internal war, because, as it was stated by 'the wisest part' of Duke Philip the Good's counsellors advising him about the sanction to be imposed on the city of Bruges after its revolt of 1436-1438: 'in the duke's interest and that of his successors, it would be better to found a city such as Bruges rather than to demolish it.' Duke Charles had this advice retrieved by one of his counsellors after the revolt of Malines during his Joyous Entry on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1467. He was advised to act as did his father: 'And one could say similar things about Malines which is, as it appears, such a worthy member [of your domain].'<sup>19</sup>

In the long term, one can observe the tendency to concentrate the residences in the Low Countries in centrally located, relatively peaceful, large cities where the main central institutions also had their seat. The court gradually relinquished the older residences of the former territorial princes, as those had become peripheral. This applies to Namur, The Hague, Mons, Luxemburg, Arnhem, Utrecht, Arras, Lille, and in the end even to Bruges and Ghent. They continued to host the provincial institutions, the high court and the Chamber of Accounts. Malines, from 1474 to 1530, and then Brussels from 1531 onwards, no longer were simple residences among others, they were the capitals, where the permanence of the court encouraged the aristocracy to construct their residences in the surroundings, and thus to contribute to a lively political as well as administrative centre with a continuous stream of visitors showing off their status. The tendency towards concentration into a single permanent capital reflects the consolidation of the central state in the Low Countries, just as well as the evolution towards a more bureaucratic organisation of the government. Mary of Hungary and Margaret of Parma ruled as the Governors general from the Coudenberg palace in Brussels. Whenever she liked to have some time for her personal pleasures, Mary retired to her hunting lodges in Mariemont, Turnhout and Binche.<sup>20</sup> It was in the latter that she organised the feasts in chivalric style in honour of Prince Philip on his inaugural tour in 1549. As a modern professional ruler, she had separated court pleasures from governmental functions.

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