

THE POLITICAL RANKING AND HIERARCHY OF THE TOWNS  
IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL DUCHY OF BRABANT\*

*EL RANKING POLÍTICO Y LA JERARQUÍA DE LAS CIUDADES  
EN EL DUCADO DE BRABANTE EN LA BAJA EDAD MEDIA*

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*Abstract:* This paper analyses the hierarchy and ranking of the towns of the Duchy of Brabant within the Estates, the principality's representative political institution. It seeks to answer the question why social and economic changes in the urban landscape were not, or only partly, reflected in the political sphere. An analysis of a series of convocation lists of the Estates on the one hand, and subscription lists of charters on the other, make it clear that a distinction can be made between the towns and the so-called liberties, and that a neat territorial hierarchy is applied between these two categories. Although the four "capitals" and three other important towns headed the urban hierarchy, both as regards attendance and the order in which they were placed, there was certainly space for other minor towns, both ducal and seigniorial, to participate in the political arena. The ranking of a town implied certain rights and (financial) obligations and was also expressed symbolically, for example in wine gifts and in seating arrangements at the meetings of the Estates. Whereas the formal political hierarchy within the Estates was quite rigid, other rankings of a military and fiscal character were subject to change.

*Keywords:* political representation; urban hierarchy; political ranking; order of precedence; Duchy of Brabant; Burgundian Low Countries; Philip II; Later Middle Ages

*Resumen:* Este artículo analiza la jerarquía y el ranking de las ciudades del ducado de Brabante en su principal institución política representativa, los llamados Estados de Brabante. El objetivo de este artículo es intentar buscar una respuesta a la pregunta de por qué los cambios sociales y económicos en las ciudades no se manifiestan de forma total o parcial en el ámbito político. El análisis de una serie de listas de convocatoria de los Estados demuestra que había una diferenciación entre las ciudades y las llamadas "libertades", y que además dentro de estas dos categorías se aplicaba una jerarquía territorial. Aunque las cuatro 'capitales' y otras tres ciudades importantes están en la cabeza de la jerarquía urbana, tanto en lo que se refiere a la participación como en el orden en el que están mencionadas, había espacio también para que otras ciudades más pequeñas participaran en el escenario político. El ranking de una ciudad llevaba consigo no sólo el disfrute de algunos derechos sino también el cumplimiento de algunas obligaciones, sobre todo de índole financiera, y que se expresaban simbólicamente, como por ejemplo en las donaciones de vino y en el orden de precedencia durante las reuniones de los Estados. Aunque la jerarquía política dentro de los Estados por lo general era bastante rígida, otros rankings como por ejemplo los militares y fiscales sí estaban sujetos a cambios.

*Palabras clave:* representación política; jerarquía urbana; ranking político; orden de precedencia; Ducado de Brabante; Países Bajos Borgoñones; Felipe II; Baja Edad Media

SUMMARY

1. Introduction.– 2. Hierarchy in the convocation lists.– 3. Hierarchy in the attendance lists.– 4. Rank and order: fixed or flexible? – 5. Conclusion.– 6. Bibliography.

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1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Toda Brabante se reparte en quatro toparchias o braços principales, que son Anvers, Lovayna, Bruselas y Bosleduc, las cuales tienen debaxo de su jurisdicción otra villas, lugares y aldeas. Siguen a Anvers, Herentals y Liere, por las cuales passa el río Nethe, y a Lovayna la villa de Tienen o Thenae, que está a la ribera del río Gheete, que de allí va a Halen, y entra después en el río Demer. A Bruselas sigue Vilvorden, por la qual passa el río Zeyna. Son sujetas a Bosleduc las villas de Eynthoven, que está fundada sobre el río Dommele, y Helmont, por la qual passa el río Aade<sup>2</sup>.

This is how the Spanish courtier Juan Calvete de Estrella describes the duchy of Brabant in *El felicísimo viaje del muy alto y muy poderoso principe don Phelippe*, printed in 1552. Calvete de Estrella (†1590) accompanied the heir to the throne, Philip II, on his grand tour through the Low Countries in 1549-1550 and his report, characterized as a *magnificent project of political and cultural propaganda*, was widely disseminated in the sixteenth century<sup>3</sup>.

However propagandistic his intentions may have been, Calvete de Estrella gives a quite accurate description of the duchy of Brabant. It was divided into four administrative parts (which Calvete refers to as *toparchias*, or jurisdictions, and *braços*, literally arms but here it can be translated as parts) in which the four major towns –Antwerp, Leuven, Brussels, and ‘s-Hertogenbosch– dominated the others politically, juridically, and economically. The division into four districts was established in the 1430s by the Duke Philip the Good (r. 1430-1467). This structure was a reform of an older territorial arrangement of the duchy in six districts, dating back to Duke Hendrik I (r. 1190-1235), which had been further elaborated by Duke Jan I (r. 1267-1294), and had found its final shape under the regency of Jan III (r. 1312-1355)<sup>4</sup>.

It is notable that Calvete de Estrella stresses the importance of the rivers: he mentions the Nete, the Gete, the Demer, the Zenne, the Dommel, and the Aa (see Map 1). The proximity of waterways was a condition for the rise of most of the towns within the urban network of Brabant since the rivers were at the same time essential arteries of communication within and across

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<sup>2</sup> Calvete de Estrella, *El felicísimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXIX.

<sup>4</sup> Kerremans 1949, pp. 11-29, 53-54.

the borders of the duchy. The duchy of Brabant was a densely populated and highly urbanized territory in the heart of the Low Countries. However, the population and level of urbanization were unevenly spread over the duchy. The most densely populated area was the north-south axis, comprising the towns of Antwerp, Malines (which had a separate seigniorial status within the duchy), and Brussels. In contrast, the most southern and northern districts of the duchy, Walloon Brabant and 's-Hertogenbosch respectively, were far less populated<sup>5</sup>. In fact "founding" towns in this last area around 1200 was a deliberate policy of the duke to establish his power and influence in the North against his rival neighbours, the counts of Holland and Guelders<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast to the counties of Flanders and Holland, where in the late Middle Ages a multipolar urban network developed, in Brabant the town of Brussels stood out in political terms, becoming the favourite residence of the dukes and thus the centre of the ducal administration. In economic terms, however, Antwerp –mentioned as the first of the four major towns by Calvete de Estrella– surpassed the other three, taking over the role of Bruges as main port of the Low Countries<sup>7</sup>. Leuven had the most prestigious political position within the duchy, but stayed behind in terms of demographical and economic growth and political power. Already in 1438 the Castilian nobleman Pero Tafur, when travelling through the Low Countries, contrasted Antwerp and Leuven, noting on the former that *esta çibdad es grande*, whereas the latter was characterized as *una muy grant çibdat, pero mucho despoblada*<sup>8</sup>.

The hierarchisation of towns is a classical theme in the historiography of the medieval and early modern Low Countries and the case of the duchy of Brabant has been treated by Raymond van Uytven in several articles<sup>9</sup>. Van Uytven made a ranking for the Brabantine towns in the fourteenth and sixteenth century and used primarily economic and demographic indicators, but also some political and even religious and cultural criteria. In a comment

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<sup>5</sup> Stabel 2007, pp. 33-34; Van Uytven 1992a, pp. 30-35.

<sup>6</sup> Steurs 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Stabel 2007, p. 35; Blockmans 2010, pp. 540-544; Van Uytven 1992a, p. 31; Van Uytven 2000, p. 145. It is noteworthy how Calvete de Estrella describes the town of Antwerp in 1549: "El tercer braço es la riquíssima y populosa villa de Anvers que con mucha razón se podía llamar plaça del mundo, pues en ella se hallan juntas y en tanta abundancia todas las cosas que Dios ha criado, que se proveen d'ella las otras ciudades y pueblos de la christianidad y aun fuere d'ella". Calvete de Estrella, *El felicíssimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 376. More than a century before, in 1438, the Castilian nobleman Pero Tafur already describes the town in similar terms: "Esta es, la feria que aquí se faze, la mejor que en el mundo todo ay, é sin dubda, quien quisiese ver el mundo junto, ó la mayor parte dél en un lugar ayuntado, aquí se podría ver". Tafur, *Andanças*, ed. Vives Gatell, pp. 258-259.

<sup>8</sup> Tafur, *Andanças*, ed. Vives Gatell, pp. 258-260; Van Uytven 1992a, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*; Van Uytven 1992b; Van Uytven 2000.

on Van Uytven's research Claude Bruneel stressed that the choice and the relative weight of the criteria can be debated, and that the interdependency of the towns may be more important than their place in the hierarchy<sup>10</sup>. In 1995, Étienne François argued that cultural indicators can give a completely different picture of the urban network than demographic and economic data, in his case that of Germany around 1600<sup>11</sup>. In his footsteps Robert Stein made an analysis of the urban network in the late medieval Low Countries with a cultural approach. His conclusion was, however, that the economic development and the commercial connections of the towns were reflected both in the cultural and political urban network<sup>12</sup>. As yet the political ranking within the urban network in the Low Countries has not been researched in depth. The present article therefore does not focus on the economic or demographic hierarchy of the Brabantine towns, already established by Van Uytven, and also does not examine the cultural network. Instead it seeks to analyse the political ranking of the towns within the Estates of Brabant in the late Middle Ages. It was at the assemblies of this political representative institution that the balance of power among the towns was established and political relationships vis-à-vis the duke, the nobility, and the clergy took shape.

For a better understanding of the dominant position of the towns within the political arena, it is crucial to analyse their internal hierarchy and the turnout of the urban representatives at assemblies of the Estates. In the first part of this article, an analysis of a series of convocation lists of the Estates of Brabant from the fifteenth century sheds light on the composition of the towns as the third estate. This overview is then compared with the attendance of the towns at eleven important meetings of the Estates in the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth century. The third and last section of the article explores other sources that reveal more about the political ranking of the towns, such as wine gifts and seating arrangements at the assemblies. Moreover, fiscal and military surveys help to demonstrate that the changing economic and demographic circumstances were key in changes in the political hierarchy.

The demographic and economic importance of the towns in the Low Countries was expressed politically in their continuous dialogue with the overlords of the principalities. Most princes became financially dependent on the towns in the later Middle Ages, when they were confronted with rapidly increasing costs to maintain their households, their growing administrative

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<sup>10</sup> Bruneel 2000, pp. 95-102.

<sup>11</sup> François 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Stein 2010, pp. 65-69.

bodies and, last but not least, to finance their military ambitions. The regular income from their demesnes did not suffice to fill their treasuries, and they had to make a formal request to their subjects (mainly the towns) before imposing new extraordinary subsidies (*aides*). In return, the towns, together with the prelates and nobles united in the Estates, could ask for new privileges. This is how political representation developed in most principalities of the Low Countries from the thirteenth century onwards<sup>13</sup>.

The Estates of Brabant, defined as an institutionalized platform for deliberation, date from the last decade of the thirteenth century. The then Duke of Brabant, Jan I, issued privileges to the seven major towns of Brabant, the owners of lordships, and the clergy, in exchange for the grant of an extraordinary subsidy. In these charters, the duke seems for the first time to acknowledge (or even confirm) the three orders in Brabant as separate representative groups, although at that time they did not, of course, form coherent political unities but consisted of individuals or entities bound together by common interest and social status<sup>14</sup>. The Estates then grew into a mature institution thanks to the practice of regular meetings: more than 1,600 sessions were recorded between 1356 and 1430<sup>15</sup>. This gave rise to both a powerful political elite and a sophisticated political discourse on representation and governance.

What is more, the Estates played a crucial role during several political crises. From 1248 to 1430, almost all successions to the ducal throne of Brabant were problematic, and the Estates, especially the four major towns, seized these opportunities to obtain more control of ducal power<sup>16</sup>. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, Brabant gradually became integrated into the Burgundian composite state: indirectly in 1406, through a collateral branch of the Dukes of Burgundy, and directly in 1430<sup>17</sup>. In 1430, the Estates of Brabant officially chose Philip the Good from no fewer than seven pretenders to the ducal throne.

## 2. HIERARCHY IN THE CONVOCATION LISTS

Convocation lists were administrative documents used by the princely chancery to convene an assembly of the Estates. These documents listed the names of the men and institutions that could (or should) be summoned for

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<sup>13</sup> Blockmans 2010, pp. 533-545; Boone 2005; Stein 2014, pp. 60-85.

<sup>14</sup> Van Uytven 1966, pp. 434-435.

<sup>15</sup> Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 773-909.

<sup>16</sup> Blockmans, Van Uytven 1969, pp. 399-424; Vrancken 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Laurent, Quicke 1939; Stein 1994, pp. 167-206.

a meeting of the Estates. Four of these lists of the Estates of Brabant, two originals and two later copies, have been preserved; these documents are dated 1406, 1415, 1464, and 1489<sup>18</sup>. The making of these lists stemmed from an urban tradition: from around the middle of the fourteenth century the leading towns of Brabant used similar lists to convene the knights in their districts for joint meetings of the second and third Estates<sup>19</sup>. The lists are revealing sources, because they are not only an expression of the political interaction between the prince and the ecclesiastical, noble, and urban elites of the duchy, but also a representation of the diverse hierarchies among and within the three estates.

All convocation lists were made on the occasion of special political events. The drawing up of the convocation lists of 1406 and 1415, for example, was closely connected with the inauguration of a new duke: 1406 saw the inauguration of Anthony of Burgundy (r. 1406-15), second son of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Flanders (r. 1384-1404); in 1415 Anthony's son Jan IV (1415-1427) succeeded him as duke. In the 1380s, Philip the Bold had already laid the foundations for the Burgundian takeover of the duchy. The creation of a "pro-Burgundian party" among the nobility and urban elites of the duchy was one of the key elements of this policy<sup>20</sup>. After the death of Duchess Joan in 1406 and again after the death of Duke Anthony in 1415, the three estates gathered together in Leuven to inaugurate their new duke<sup>21</sup>. For these essential assemblies it was important that the entire duchy was represented, and therefore new convocation lists were drawn up.

In order to be inaugurated, the new duke had to acknowledge the *Blijde Inkomst* (literally "Joyous Entry"), which was in fact a charter in the form of a contract between the prince and the Estates of Brabant, granted for the first time in 1356 by Joan and her husband Wenceslas of Luxembourg (r. 1355-1383)<sup>22</sup>. The Estates would only recognize the new prince if he promised to preserve the Brabantine *res publica* as formulated in the *Blijde Inkomst*. He had to promise, for example, to procure good justice for his citizens, not to alienate any part of the territory, and not to start a war without

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<sup>18</sup> For more information on the authors and the trustworthiness of the copies, see the edition of the lists by Damen 2016b.

<sup>19</sup> See for example the convocation list of Brussels from 1350, containing the names of 54 knights, listed in Gorissen 1956, pp. 90-92.

<sup>20</sup> Laurent, Quicke 1939, pp. 74-89.

<sup>21</sup> Van Boendale, *De Brabantsche yeesten*, ed. Bormans, vol. III, p. 3; Ansems 1699, pp. 17-19.

<sup>22</sup> Van Boendale, *De Brabantsche yeesten*, ed. Bormans, vol. II, pp. 4-6; Uyttebrouck 1975, p. 477; Van Bragt 1956, pp. 6-8.

the consent of the Estates<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, in the second article of the *Blijde Inkomst*, it was stipulated that the charters of the duchy would be kept in Leuven, locked up in a treasure chest of which the three keys would be kept by the duke, the town of Leuven, and the town of Brussels. This article was repeated in the *Blijde Inkomst* throughout the late Middle Ages and was a clear sign of the primary political status of Leuven and Brussels<sup>24</sup>.

Still, the prince considered Leuven the first town of the duchy and it remained the first town where a new duke of Brabant would make his official first entry up until the end of the sixteenth century. There, in the city hall, he promised not only to observe all the articles set out in the charter of the *Blijde Inkomst*—that is concerning the entire duchy— but also to respect the rights and privileges of the town as granted by his predecessors. After Leuven, the new duke would visit Brussels, and in the fifteenth century the fixed order of the next stops of his inauguration tour was Antwerp, ‘s-Hertogenbosch, Tienen, Zoutleeuw, Nivelles, and finally Maastricht<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the political hierarchy of the towns was already expressed in the itinerary of the duke. In addition, it was only in Leuven and Brussels that the articles of the *Blijde Inkomst* were read aloud, stressing the primary political status of the two towns. In all towns both the political officeholders and the *gemeynte* (community) assembled in the main squares were required in turn to swear their loyalty to the new duke<sup>26</sup>.

All convocation lists, except that of 1464, have a similar structure and were drawn up in accordance with the traditional territorial subdivision of the duchy into six districts, to facilitate the practical summoning of the members of the Estates; these six districts were manageable for messengers, since they had to deliver all the letters of convocation within a short period of time<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, the towns and liberties in each district are mentioned at the end, that is after the prelates (the first estate) and the bannerets, knights, and esquires (the second estate).

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 20-35; Stein 1994, pp. 249-250.

<sup>24</sup> Van Bragt 1956, p. 96; Vrancken 2017, pp. 8-9; Avonds 1984, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> Wauters 1887, pp. 85-94; Vrancken 2017, pp. 67-71.

<sup>26</sup> This still happened in 1549 when Prince Philip of Habsburg had to take his oath: “Luego que uvo subido el Príncipe (...) començo el Chanciller de Brabante con gran acatamiento a leer en público lo que avía el Príncipe de jurar el Ducado de Brabante (...). El juramento fue recibido sobre los Santos Evangelios (...) y fue la suma d’ello en substancia: Que defendería y gobernaría justamente a Brabante y el Chanciller y los Magistrados juraron fidelidad, y que le serían fieles, y buelto el Chanciller a la multitud del pueblo (...) preguntándoles si tenían por rato y firme lo hecho y dicho y jurado por él y por los Magistrados, alçando todos sus manos derechas (...) dixerón a bozes que sí”. Calvete de Estrella, *El felicíssimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> For a similar practice in the county of Holland, see Janse 2010, pp. 168, 170.



Map 1. The towns of the duchy of Brabant.

The administrative hierarchy of the list –which may have had a practical reason– closely reflects the political hierarchy in the duchy. The convocation lists all start with the district of Leuven and end with the French-speaking district of Walloon Brabant in the south. So the top and the bottom of the hierarchy are quite clear. The order of the remaining four districts, however, changed in the fifteenth century. To start off with, the order was Brussels,



Tienen, 's-Hertogenbosch, and Antwerp, reflecting the recent reintegration of Antwerp into the duchy. In 1489, however, the order was Brussels, Antwerp, 's-Hertogenbosch, Tienen. The upward mobility of Antwerp is noteworthy, and it certainly reflects the economical, demographical, and political weight of the district and capital at the end of the fifteenth century.

For each of the six administrative districts of the duchy, the “capital” is mentioned first, followed by the other towns (*oppida* in Latin, *steden* in Dutch), with the liberties (*franchisie* in Latin, *vrijheden* in Dutch) mentioned at the end. No distinction is made between the towns and liberties which belonged to the jurisdiction of the duke and those that belonged to nobles as enfeoffed lordships. Not all towns and liberties received an invitation for an assembly of the Estates; at least 127 towns and liberties can be identified in late medieval Brabant, whereas the convocation lists listed just 46: 23 towns and 23 liberties (Tables 1 and 2)<sup>28</sup>. So there is a sharp distinction between towns and liberties that were involved in the process of decision-making and those that were not.

In this political context, towns can be defined as conglomerations which had been granted an urban charter, either from the duke or from a nobleman. Moreover, the essential characteristic of these towns was not their demographic “weight”, but –due to their role in the defence of the duchy– their fortified character<sup>29</sup>. Around 1565 Ludovico Guiccardini described 26 walled towns in Brabant. It comes as no surprise that his list is identical to the 23 towns mentioned in the convocation list of 1489, with the addition of Maastricht, Meegen, and Grave<sup>30</sup>. Maastricht was not located in the duchy proper (see Map 1), but was an imperial town, the lordship of which was shared (*condominium*) between the duke of Brabant and the prince-bishop of Liège from the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards<sup>31</sup>. The town was listed among the towns of Brabant in a convocation list for the Estates General in 1464, as well as in lists in fifteenth and sixteenth century narrative and literary sources<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, Maastricht was the only town apart from the seven leading towns that received an original copy of the charter of the Joyous Entry of a new duke in the fifteenth century<sup>33</sup>. This indicates that the town was a fully accepted

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<sup>28</sup> Steurs 1973.

<sup>29</sup> Vermeesch 1961, pp. 44-46; Boffa 2004, pp. 133-134; Van Uytven 2000, p. 131-132. Compare Laughton, Jones, Dyer 2001, pp. 334, 339, who considered population size and wealth, as well as “physical size, the complexity of the street patterns and the presence of commercial zoning”, to be the key characteristics of towns.

<sup>30</sup> Guiccardini, *Beschryvinghe*, ed. Montanus, p. 48; Van Uytven 1982, pp. 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Uyttebrouck 1975, p. 62. This is also mentioned by Calvete de Estrella, *El felicissimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 558.

<sup>32</sup> Damen 2016b, no. [652]; Van Uytven 1982, pp. 52-53; IJsewijn 1969, pp. 13, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Vrancken 2017, p. 124.

member of the duchy's polity. Apart from the four "capitals", Guiccardini distinguishes another three "small capitals": Tienen, Zoutleeuw, and Nivelles. Here he refers to a thirteenth century tradition in which seven leading towns were frequently mentioned together when obtaining privileges from the duke<sup>34</sup>. In the convocation lists Nivelles and Tienen are indeed mentioned before the other towns in their respective districts; Zoutleeuw did not form a proper district but belonged to the district of Tienen. Historically, Nivelles and Tienen were the urban centres of the districts of Walloon Brabant and Tienen. However, they lost their leading political status with the integration of Tienen into the district of Leuven, and the administrative division of Walloon Brabant between the districts of Brussels and Leuven in the 1430s<sup>35</sup>. Nivelles was definitely the most important town of Walloon Brabant, in both demographical and political terms. Nevertheless, it is clear that Nivelles could not compete with the towns in the centre and north of the duchy; even the letters of convocation for the Estates for French-speaking Nivelles were written in Dutch<sup>36</sup>.

A liberty was a place that had received certain privileges from an overlord, for example the right to organize a market<sup>37</sup>. It had less potential than a town in terms of inhabitants and economic development, although in Brabant some liberties (Turnhout and Hoogstraten for example) had more inhabitants than some towns (Hannut and Landen)<sup>38</sup>. In some cases we see liberties being 'promoted' to the status of town, at least on paper: the liberties of Eindhoven and Helmond, for example, both in the district of 's-Hertogenbosch, are first mentioned as towns in the convocation list of 1489. Tiny places like Lummen, Lommel, and Eersel, are first listed among the liberties in the same document, although they had been considered as such since the fourteenth century<sup>39</sup>. So although there was a formal distinction between towns and liberties, upward mobility was possible. Downgrading did not occur, though it was possible for a town or liberty simply not to participate in the meetings of the Estates (see below).

Another feature of the lists is the fixed order in which the towns and liberties are listed. In both the districts of Antwerp and Tienen, for example, no fewer than six towns are mentioned, always in the same order. In the case of Antwerp, the order is Antwerp, Lier, Herentals, Bergen op Zoom, Steenberg, Breda. The order is probably determined by the fact that the first

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<sup>34</sup> Avonds 1984, pp. 205-206; Van Uytven 1982, p. 7 and the list on p. 44; Van Uytven 1966, p. 419.

<sup>35</sup> Coppens 2000, pp. 627-629.

<sup>36</sup> Bousmar 2012, pp. 141-142.

<sup>37</sup> Guiccardini, *Beschrijvinghe*, ed. Montanus, p. 48: "want zy hebben vrye marckten".

<sup>38</sup> Steurs 1973, p. 142; See on the term *oppidum* Van Uytven 1982 p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Damen 2016b, nos. [720], [797], and [795]; Steurs 1973, pp. 164, 184, 290-291. On Eersel and Lummen, see also Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 64, 443.

three towns were “ducal”, whereas the latter three were seigniorial towns held in fief from the duke by noblemen, who were invited to attend the assemblies of the Estates as well. Steenberghe numbered very few inhabitants (380), but historically it was a shared seigniorship of the lords of Breda and Bergen op Zoom, towns that were ten to twelve times bigger in demographical terms. The order of the towns of Walloon Brabant is Nivelles, Jodoigne, Hannut, and Gembloux, which remained the same throughout the fifteenth century. Interestingly, two of these towns, Nivelles and Gembloux, received their urban charter from nearby abbeys<sup>40</sup>.

Table 1. Towns in the convocation lists and subscriptions of charters.

	Number of charter subscriptions, 1312-1422 <sup>41</sup>	Average place number in charter subscriptions
Leuven	11	1.0
Brussels	10	2.0
Antwerp	7	3.0
's-Hertogenbosch	9	3.7
Tienen	10	4.5
(Maastricht) <sup>42</sup>	3	5.3
Zoutleeuw	11	5.6
Nivelles	11	6.5
Lier	11	8.9
Herentals	11	9.5
Jodoigne	10	12.7
Diest	9	14.3
Vilvoorde	9	14.6
Hannut	6	14.7
Aarschot	9	14.9
Breda	9	15.9
Zichem	9	16.4
Halen	8	16.5
Bergen op Zoom	10	16.7
Landen	7	17.1
Steenbergen	9	18.1
Gembloux	4	22.3
Helmond	5	24.8
Eindhoven	5	25.8

<sup>40</sup> Zylbergeld 1988.

<sup>41</sup> Based on the lists published in Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 442-444.

<sup>42</sup> Only mentioned in the convocation list of 1464. Damen 2016b, no. [652].

### 3. HIERARCHY IN THE ATTENDANCE LISTS

In short, the hierarchy in the convocation lists is very clear. A distinction is made between towns and liberties, and a neat territorial hierarchy is applied between these two categories. But how did this work in the practice of daily politics? What can be said about the participation of the towns and liberties in the assemblies of the Estates and their mutual hierarchy? In 1975, André Uyttebrouck concluded that the towns were the most active participants in the meetings of the Estates: in the period from 1355 to 1430 they attended about 75 per cent of all sessions. Not surprisingly, the four capitals –Leuven, Brussels, ‘s-Hertogenbosch, and Antwerp– were the most frequently represented<sup>43</sup>. They even held several meetings only among the four of them, or even among three or two. Leuven and Brussels, especially, held bilateral meetings<sup>44</sup>.

Although the dominant position of the four capitals is clear, the political role of and the hierarchy among the other towns and liberties is far less obvious. To measure the political rank of the towns and liberties I aggregated the subscriptions of eleven charters, dated between 1312 and 1422, which testify to some crucial moments in the political history of the duchy. Although this may seem a somewhat limited text corpus, there are no similar acts with subscription lists known for the rest of the fifteenth century. From these subscriptions, I calculated both the attendance rate and the relative position of each town and liberty (Tables 1 and 2). These charters are the only sources which give us an accurate indication of the attendees at a meeting, although they do not provide a picture of a typical assembly. On the contrary, most of them concern extraordinary political events. However, the subscription figures do give an indication of the potential turnout of the third estate at the assemblies. They show that all these events were attended by a large number of towns and liberties, ranging from 16 in 1398 to 45 in 1372 (in that year including six towns from Limburg and the Lands of Outremer, which were united in a personal union with Brabant).

The subscriptions show a clear political hierarchy, which is expressed both in the turnout and in the order in which the towns are mentioned. Most of the towns attended more than half of the meetings (see Table 1: 6 to 11 subscriptions out of 11). Only five towns attended all of these important meetings: Herentals, Leuven, Lier, Nivelles, and Zoutleeuw. Four towns attended ten meetings, and a further seven towns attended nine meetings.

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<sup>43</sup> Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 447-459.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 452-459.

This means that there was an active group of delegates from sixteen towns. Interestingly, most of the seigniorial towns formed part of this group. Of the “big four”, only Leuven attended all meetings; the other frequent attenders were middle-sized and even small towns like Bergen op Zoom, Jodoigne, and Herentals. The relatively low attendance rate of Antwerp (7 subscriptions) is due to the fact that from 1356 to 1406 the town belonged to the Count of Flanders and hence was not convoked within the Estates of Brabant.

The order in which the towns are mentioned in the subscriptions corresponds with their status, that is among the leading 18 (Table 1). The leading position of the four capitals Leuven, Brussels, Antwerp, and 's-Hertogenbosch, always placed in that order, is evident, directly followed by Tienen, Zoutleeuw, and Nivelles. The first time these towns are mentioned together is in 1194, when they act as witnesses to a peace treaty concluded by Duke Hendrik I of Brabant and Count Baldwin VIII of Flanders and Hainaut<sup>45</sup>. In the thirteenth century there were numerous bilateral treaties between Antwerp and other towns of Brabant –e.g., in 1242, 1249, and 1262– but in the thirteenth century the towns were never ranked in a formal way (or at any rate there is no paper evidence of this)<sup>46</sup>.

The question remains how the ranking of the towns came into being in the fourteenth century. The order was not linked to the year the towns received their first urban charter, as in that case 's-Hertogenbosch would have taken first place. It probably had to do with the order in which the former counties and lordships were integrated into the duchy. In that case Leuven did have the oldest rights, since it was the counts of Leuven who became dukes of Brabant in the twelfth century. Moreover, the urban charter of Leuven served as an example for that of many towns in Brabant, albeit that the towns in the margraviate of Antwerp adopted the laws of the Scheldt town<sup>47</sup>. Although in political and economic terms Leuven was surpassed by Brussels and Antwerp in the fifteenth century, the order in which the towns were named remained the same. Even Calvete de Estrella was aware of this order when describing the towns in his chronicle around 1549: *Brusselas tiene el segundo lugar después de Lovayna en el Ducado de Brabante*<sup>48</sup>.

The sequence in which the towns and liberties are mentioned in the subscriptions normally follows the order of these places in the convocation lists. This means there was a clear awareness of this hierarchy, which the

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<sup>45</sup> Favresse 1938, p. 376.

<sup>46</sup> Mertens, Torfs 1846, pp. 529-531. For similar bilateral treaties of Leuven, see Camps 1979, pp. 367-368.

<sup>47</sup> Van Uytven 1992b, p. 83.

<sup>48</sup> Calvete de Estrella, *El felicísimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 169.

clerks who wrote these charters took care to apply. To return to the example of the towns in the district of Antwerp: Lier and Herentals are always listed after Antwerp, although Herentals is sometimes mentioned before Lier. The three seigniorial towns Bergen op Zoom, Steenberghe, and Breda are always mentioned in that order in the fourteenth century subscriptions, although in the fifteenth century Breda is listed before the other two. This probably had to do with the princely status of the new lord of Breda, Engelbert I, Count of Nassau, from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Another typical seigniorial trio that are mentioned together are Diest, Aarschot, and Zichem in the district of Leuven<sup>49</sup>. Zichem is normally mentioned as the last of these three towns in the subscriptions, with Diest and Aarschot alternating in first and second place.

One noteworthy feature is the relatively high ranking of the town of Maastricht (5.3), which was discussed above. At the lower end of the ranking we find the towns of Gembloux, Eindhoven, and Helmond. The ranking of these towns is even comparable to the ranking of the liberties; in fact, Eindhoven and Helmond are considered liberties until the convocation list of 1489, where they are placed among the towns<sup>50</sup>.

Another striking feature is the complete absence of the town of Malines. Situated in the heart of the duchy of Brabant, the town had always been a semi-independent lordship, belonging to the count of Flanders. It was only from 1430 onwards that it was reunited in a personal union with the duchy of Brabant under the reign of Philip the Good<sup>51</sup>. It is therefore no coincidence that the town does not figure in either the convocation lists or in the subscription lists. Nevertheless, the town was sometimes convoked for meetings of the Estates of Brabant and served as a meeting place for the Estates on several occasions<sup>52</sup>. Malines even managed to obtain a central position next to Brussels, thanks to the fact that Duke Charles the Bold (r. 1467-1477) chose the town for the settlement of a central court of justice and a central audit office for the entire Low Countries<sup>53</sup>. What is more, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century the town functioned as the political capital, since Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V and his governor of the Low Countries from 1507 onwards, established her residence there<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Van Uytven 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Damen 2016b, nos. [349], [350], [606], [607].

<sup>51</sup> Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 45-46.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 445, 456.

<sup>53</sup> Stein 2014, 183-189.

<sup>54</sup> Van Uytven 2000, p. 146.

Table 2. Liberties in the convocation lists and subscriptions of charters.

	Number of charter subscriptions, 1312-1422 <sup>55</sup>	Average place number in charter subscriptions
Genappe	6	16.5
Turnhout	6	17.5
Hoogstraten	1	20.0
Dormaal	4	23.3
Overijse	4	25.8
Tervuren	5	26.4
Wavre	2	26.5
Duisburg	1	27.0
Merchtem	4	28.8
Grez	2	30.0
Oirschot	2	30.5
Sint-Oedenrode	3	31.0
Mol	1	32.0
Oisterwijk	3	32.0
Kapelle-op-den-Bos	4	33.3
Asse	2	33.5
Eersel	2	37.0
Sint-Genesius-Rode	1	40.0
Braine-l'Alleud	1	43.0
La Hulpe	-	-
Lommel	-	-
Lummen	-	-
Oss	-	-

The attendance rate and the ranking of the liberties show a sharp contrast with those of the towns (Table 2). On average, they attended less than half of the meetings, which is considerably below the frequency of the towns. Five liberties attended just one of the eleven important meetings of the Estates, and four did not show up at any meeting. This demonstrates that the liberties had a lower political profile than the towns. The low turn-out probably had to do with the fact that the administrations of the liberties had to pay for the costs of travel and lodgings for the delegates.

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<sup>55</sup> Based on the lists published in Uyttebrouck 1975, pp. 442-444.



Map 2. The liberties of the duchy of Brabant.

The liberties with the highest attendance rate are Genappe, Tervuren, and Turnhout. Moreover, Genappe and Turnhout have the highest ranking among the liberties. Turnhout, which had many more inhabitants than many towns, was even listed among the towns in the convocation list of the Estates General of 1464<sup>56</sup>. It

<sup>56</sup> Damen 2016b, no. [655].



is no coincidence that all three towns hosted ducal residences, and that the Estates sometimes organized assemblies there<sup>57</sup>. The ranking of the other liberties ranges from 20 (Hoogstraten) to 43 (Braine-l'Alleud). All this indicates that most of the liberties only showed up on exceptional occasions such as, for example, the confirmation of the urban league of 1355 (with 44 towns and liberties attending), the confirmation of the Charter of Kortenberg in 1372 (45), and the proclamation of the *Nieuw Regiment* (New Government) in 1422 (33).

#### 4. RANK AND ORDER: FIXED OR FLEXIBLE?

The political hierarchy among the Brabantine towns is not only reflected in administrative documents, but was also expressed in more subtle ways. In the late Middle Ages, town administrations all over Europe used to offer gifts of wine to dignitaries and authorities who visited the town<sup>58</sup>. In Brabant delegates of the Estates who attended an assembly would receive a wine gift from the town administration as well, either in the town hall or in a tavern or guest house. Wine gifts were a token of respect for a visitor and could serve as a sign of recognition of the services the visitor had rendered in the past or would render in the future for the benefit of the town<sup>59</sup>. The town accounts of Leuven testify to the widespread nature of this practice.

Interestingly, there are some clear differences between the wine gifts for members of the three estates. First, unlike the nobles, the urban delegates received wine as an anonymous group and not as individuals; in the accounts, they are registered as “the town of Antwerp” or “the town administration of Brussels”. In that sense, there is a striking parallel with the convocation lists and the subscriptions of the charters, where the names of the urban delegates were also not recorded. In the charter of 1312 there is mention of *the aldermen and council of the towns and liberties of Brabant* and in 1372 *the good people of the towns and liberties of Brabant*; in 1422 it is specified that a wine gift was presented to the *burgomasters, aldermen, sworn representatives, and councillors*<sup>60</sup>.

Secondly, the urban delegates received not only less wine than the representatives of the first and second estate, but also less prestigious wines.

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<sup>57</sup> Uyttebrouck 1991; Vermeesch 1961, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> Derville 1985, p. 451; Van Uytven 1986, pp. 160, 174-175; Boone 1988; Damen 2005; Damen 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Groebner 2002, pp. 22-23; Damen 2005, pp. 77-82; Damen 2006.

<sup>60</sup> 1312: “scepenen ende raet van den vorghenoemden staeden ende vriheiden van Brabant; 1372: “goide luede van den steden ende vrieheiden van Brabant”. Van der Straeten 1952, vol. II, pp. 19, 41. 1422: “commoengenmeisteren, borgermeesteren, scepenen, gesworenen ende rade”. Vrancken 2017, p. 151.

In Leuven, abbots and nobles received 3-4 *stoop* of wine (one *stoop* is approx. 2.5 litres) whereas the towns received 2-3 *stoop*. Moreover, abbots and nobles always received more of the more highly prized and expensive red wine from Burgundy (Beaune), whereas the urban delegates had to content themselves with the less prized white Rhine wine<sup>61</sup>. This is understandable since the nobles had a higher social status and (probably) a larger following among whom they had to distribute the wine. Then again, there is also a discernible hierarchy among the urban delegates: in May 1473 the delegates from Brussels and Antwerp received one *stoop* of wine from Beaune and three *stoop* of Rhine wine; those from 's-Hertogenbosch and Tienen received three *stoop* of Rhine wine; those from Zoutleeuw, Bergen op Zoom, and Diest received two *stoop*; and finally those from Herentals, Nivelles, Lier, Aarschot, Helmond, Eindhoven, and Landen received only one *stoop* of Rhine wine<sup>62</sup>. Although the quality of the wine probably had to do with the ranking of the towns, the differences in quantity were related to the number of delegates each town sent. As mentioned above, the town administration paid for their delegates' travel and lodging expenses. Apparently the smaller towns had lower budgets and sent fewer delegates than the bigger ones.

The capitals normally sent a delegation of three or four members, consisting of one or two burgomasters and aldermen, and one or two secretaries or pensionaries. Whereas the burgomasters and aldermen were political office holders who changed each year, the secretaries and pensionaries were administrative officers who served the town for years or even decades at a stretch. Some of these administrators had a university background –since 1425 Leuven hosted the only university of the Low Countries after the town administration had successfully lobbied the duke and his councillors<sup>63</sup>. They constituted the administrative, financial, and juridical memory of the town and were crucial for the negotiations during the assemblies, especially when it came to negotiations with the duke's delegates on new subsidies<sup>64</sup>. What is more, at the end of the fifteenth century it even became customary, in negotiations with the delegates of the prince both within the Estates of Brabant and the

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<sup>61</sup> See on the prices and prestige of the Rhine wine compared to the Beaune wine Van Uytven 1998, pp. 30-32, 48.

<sup>62</sup> Leuven, Stadsarchief inv. no. 5099 f. 86r-87r.

<sup>63</sup> Nelissen 2000, pp. 46-49. Nelissen rightly doubts the contemporary anonymous chronicler's view that the duke had first had offered to establish a university to Brussels. The chronicler alleges that the town refused because the students "would deflower the people's children and disturbance, discord, and disagreement would then arise". ("Segghende dat die studente in bindere / violeren soudent der liede kindere. / Ende dat dan risen mochte in der stat / onraet, gescille ende debat"). *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Vrancken 2017, pp. 137-142.

Estates General, for the pensionary of Brussels or Leuven to act as spokesman on behalf of the three estates<sup>65</sup>.

The size and political position of the town thus determined the number of delegates and hence the quantity and quality of the wine received. Another way of expressing differences in rank and status was the seating arrangements during the assemblies of the Estates. Meetings of the Estates General, for example, attracted delegates from all the different principalities of the Low Countries: Brabant, Flanders, Holland, Zeeland, Hainaut, Artois, Luxembourg, Namur etc. From the first meeting of the Estates General in 1464, the most prestigious seats, at the right-hand side of the prince, were given to the delegates of the duchy of Brabant: the abbots on the front bench and the nobles behind them. The delegates from the county of Flanders were normally seated at the left-hand side, opposite and mirroring those from Brabant. The urban delegates sat opposite the prince, between the representatives of the first and second estate. The delegates of the Brabantine towns were seated on the front two or three benches, with behind them those of the Flemish towns. The Flemish delegates repeatedly complained about their position; they claimed not only the most privileged position but also the spokespersonship, but to no avail<sup>66</sup>. As Tim Neu puts it for the early modern Estates of Hessen-Kassel, ceremonies and seating arrangements of the Estates were essential since they not only constituted the Estates as an institutional body but also *symbolized the socio-political rank order and (...) structured the instrumental procedures of deliberation*<sup>67</sup>.

In contrast to the political environment of the Estates, the order and rank of the towns was constantly put to the test in other areas and could change in the course of time. Some examples from the military and fiscal sphere can clarify this. The four capitals played a crucial role in the ducal army, at least in relation to the mobilization and leadership of the urban militias, which consisted of companies of archers and artillery<sup>68</sup>. In June 1418 an interesting dispute arose between Antwerp and Leuven about their leadership within the ducal army that was preparing an expedition to Dordrecht in the county of Holland. The representatives from Antwerp were of the opinion that the forces from Lier should follow them, since the town was situated in the district (margraviate) of Antwerp. However, the Leuven representatives maintained that Lier had always followed them, probably due to the fact that Antwerp did not form part of the duchy from 1357 to 1406. Finally, in a judgement worthy

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<sup>65</sup> Wellens 1968, pp. 134-141.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 129, 142-143.

<sup>67</sup> Neu 2010, p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Boffa 2004, 133-158.

of King Solomon, it was decided that the militia from Lier would stay at the border in the town of Breda, so that both Antwerp and Leuven could maintain their rights; the danger of discontent in the army was averted. The marching order of the urban militias in the subsequent military campaign –which ended in the terrible defeat of the Brabantine army– was Brussels, Leuven, Antwerp, and finally ‘s-Hertogenbosch<sup>69</sup>. On this occasion, Brussels took the lead and not Leuven.

Brussels had already challenged Leuven’s leading role in 1340. At that time both towns wanted to lead the army in the military campaign against Tournai. Duke Jan III judged in the same manner as his successor would do in 1418, i.e., without hurting the sensibilities or pride of either town: when the ducal army marched against Flanders or Hainaut then Leuven would take the lead, whereas in the case of a campaign against Liège, Brussels would head the army. Moreover, in each case the town in charge would have the right to camp at the right-hand side of the duke, whereas the other town would sleep at his left-hand side<sup>70</sup>. Due to the altered socio-economic circumstances, Brussels was probably able to mobilize more men-at-arms than Leuven. This is confirmed by the lists of ransoms paid for all men-at-arms of the Brabantine army after the battle of Baesweiler in 1371: among the 27 *routes* (companies) of the army led by Brabantine captains, we encounter not only the *amman* and the viscount of Brussels, but also some other members of the urban elite and high ranking nobles who had acquired citizenship of the town for political and legal reasons<sup>71</sup>. In short: disputes between the towns on matters of precedence were mostly solved in a pragmatic way –the military potential of Brussels easily matched or even surpassed that of Leuven– without taking into account the traditional political hierarchy.

It is clear that the patricians of Brussels were not happy with their eternal second place. In the same military campaign of 1340, according to the chronicler Jean le Bel, some of them even accepted a large amount of money (*grand argent*) from the French king to convince their counterparts

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<sup>69</sup> Van Boendale, *De Brabantsche yeesten* III, ed. Bormans, p. 341, 344. I thank Robert Stein for this reference. See also Boffa 2004, pp. 179-180.

<sup>70</sup> Boffa 2004, p. 180; Ansems 1699, pp. 116-118. In thirteenth-century Holland the town of Leiden, second only to Dordrecht in the urban political hierarchy, had the special privilege of guarding the count’s tent during a military campaign. Jansen, Hoppenbouwers 1979, p. 8. In late medieval Hainaut the town of Mons had the privilege (or rather obligation) to guard the count’s tent with twelve archers. Waale 1990, p. 101.

<sup>71</sup> De Raadt 1904; Charruadas 2015, pp. 298-300, 306 (footnote 66); Govaerts 2016; Damen 2017, pp. 266-267; Godding, 1962, pp. 45-48. It concerns the *routes* of Jan van Redelgem, Amman of Brussels; Jan van Bouchout, Lord of Bouchout and Viscount of Brussels; Jan Clutinc; Hendrik van Boutersem, Lord of Bergen op Zoom; Hendrik van Cuijck, Lord of Zaventem and Sterrebeek; Jan van Zevenborn, Lord of Cranendonck; Jan van Wittem, Lord of Wittem.

from Leuven, Antwerp *and of all the other towns*, to leave the army and return to their homes, so that the duke and his noble vassals would not be able to maintain the siege. Jean le Bel maintains that *because of their greatness and pride, these citizens from Brussels always wanted to be the greatest of Brabant, although the town of Leuven was the head*<sup>72</sup>. Evidently the chronicler disapproved of these pretensions and claims to the first place in the urban hierarchy. In 1466, on the occasion of the joyous entry of Charles the Bold into Brussels, the urban patricians again challenged Brussels's second place, but this time more subtly, in an allegorical play in which the former counties of Brussels of Leuven are mentioned specifically in that order and not the other way around<sup>73</sup>.

Apart from military duties and honours, the towns also had financial obligations towards the duke. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the custom grew that the seven major towns of Brabant paid a third of the subsidies granted to the duke. Another third had to be paid by the other towns and villages in the countryside, and the final third was paid by the abbeys and monasteries. However, in the fifteenth century the part paid by the monasteries was significantly reduced, to twelve per cent in 1451, and to just four per cent in 1473<sup>74</sup>. This meant that in the end most of the subsidies were paid by the towns and liberties on the one hand, and by the villages of countryside on the other. Traditionally, the part that had to be paid by the seven towns was apportioned like this: Leuven would pay a third, Brussels another third, and the final third was divided between Antwerp, 's-Hertogenbosch, Tienen, Nivelles, and Zoutleeuw<sup>75</sup>. High rank meant high taxes in return.

In the fifteenth century, under Burgundian rule, this repartition of the fiscal burden changed. On several occasions, a special committee was formed to count the number of hearths in the duchy in order to spread the burden of the taxes more evenly. In 1438, for example, it was decided that all the hearths in the towns of the four capitals had to pay 18 *sous*, whereas the towns of Zoutleeuw, Nivelles, Lier, Herentals, Bergen op Zoom, Breda, Diest, Aarschot, Zichem, Helmond, and Eindhoven would pay only 13 *sous* per hearth. A third category was formed by the towns of Tienen, Vilvorde,

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<sup>72</sup> "aucuns bourgeois de Bruxelles, qui par leur grandeur et orgueil ont toudis voulu estre les plus grands de Brabant, combien que la ville de Louvaing en est le chief". Le Bel, *Chronique*, ed. Viard and Deprez, p. 210. Citation also mentioned by Avonds 1985, p. 9; Avonds 1984, p. 186. See also Charruadas 2015, p. 299.

<sup>73</sup> Stein 1998, pp. 310, 318.

<sup>74</sup> Moureaux-Van Neck 1966, pp. 65-70; Van Uytven 1968, pp. 98-106; Cuvelier 1912, p. CIX. Cuvelier notes that at the end of the fifteenth century the monasteries were put again on a share of 12%.

<sup>75</sup> Moureaux-Van Neck 1966, p. 75.

Steenbergen, Landen, Hannut, Gembloux, and Jodoigne, which would pay just 11 *sous*<sup>76</sup>. This created a new hierarchy based on the supposed wealth of the inhabitants of these towns. This hierarchy changed several times in the course of the fifteenth century. In 1496, for example, Antwerp was charged more per hearth than the other three capitals *because of its growth and its economy*; Bergen op Zoom and Diest formed a third category; and the remaining towns made up the fourth category<sup>77</sup>.

All this indicates that whereas the financial and fiscal hierarchies were subject to change, the political hierarchy of the towns was more difficult to transform. But in architecture both Brussels and Antwerp found a new way to express their political ambitions. Brussels invested heavily in the construction of a new town hall in the first half of the fifteenth century. This building included a magnificent tower and a gallery where the oath ceremony during a Joyous Entry could take place, which could be witnessed by the crowds on the central market square. In this way Brussels directly challenged Leuven's traditional political primacy<sup>78</sup>. Leuven was relatively late in responding by building a new town hall in gothic style, which was not finished until the 1470s. In its turn in the 1560s Antwerp built a new town hall in Renaissance style which had to visualize its status as the most important metropole of the Low Countries. The town halls were monuments of urban identity and political representation and it was in the biggest rooms of these buildings where the Estates gathered<sup>79</sup>. The new buildings all imposed a heavy burden on the urban budget but, in the eyes of the contemporary administrators, they definitely reinforced the towns' position and prestige.

## 5. CONCLUSION

During his inauguration tour through Brabant in 1549, Philip II visited only the four capitals, where he was officially inaugurated, and the two seigniorial towns of Breda and Bergen op Zoom. The privileged status of these two seigniorial towns was due not only to the fact that they were on the prince's itinerary, but also that their lords were two high-ranking nobles, William of Orange and Jan IV van Glimes respectively. They played or were to play an important role in the royal household. Philip stayed in Brussels for a long time, where numerous tournaments were organized, both in the

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<sup>76</sup> Cuvelier 1912, p. CV.

<sup>77</sup> Cuvelier 1912, pp. CCXXII, 166: "overmits hueren augmentacien ende neeringen".

<sup>78</sup> Blockmans 2010, p. 639.

<sup>79</sup> Kohl 2013, pp. 199-200.

town and at the princely residence of the Coudenberg<sup>80</sup>. In Leuven, he stayed for only four days. However, it was the town of Antwerp that prepared an entry *que como era tan grande y tan sumptuoso quanto nunca en memoria de hombres vio*<sup>81</sup>. So whereas Antwerp organized the most magnificent entry, it was Brussels that could offer the infrastructure that suited the needs of a princely court. The tour is symptomatic of the development of the bipolar urban network in the duchy of Brabant. At the same time it is an indication that the political role of the towns was significantly different from the fourteenth century. The time when the towns could influence ducal politics or even take over ducal government was over: now the balance of power had shifted to the prince, his administrative apparatus, and the nobility<sup>82</sup>.

There was a clear urban hierarchy in late medieval Brabant and a vivid administrative memory, embodied both by ducal and urban administrators, was the custodian of this ranking, no matter what happened in terms of economic and demographic changes within the urban network. The convocation lists of the Estates of Brabant are a clear expression of this hierarchy. The territorial division that determined the place of the towns and liberties in the convocation lists was set aside in the subscription lists of the charters that were analysed in this article. These subscriptions make clear that there was a sharp distinction between the towns on the one hand and the liberties on the other, the latter only showing up at moments of crucial political importance. Although the four capitals and the other three major towns led the urban hierarchy, both in attendance and in the order in which they were placed, there was certainly room for other minor towns, both ducal and seigniorial, to take part in the political arena.

The urban ranking also came to the fore in other ways, especially in matters of precedence. Wine gifts to urban delegates corresponded with the size and political position of the town that had sent them. At the meetings of the Estates General the leading political role of Brussels and Leuven was apparent, despite the rapid economic and demographic development of Antwerp. The place of a town in the urban hierarchy not only denoted a certain political status –expressed on paper, in wine gifts, in seating arrangements, and in the magnificence of political buildings– but also implied certain rights and obligations of a military and financial character. These rankings were constantly subject to change and did not necessarily overlap with the formal political hierarchy within the Estates.

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<sup>80</sup> Damen 2016a.

<sup>81</sup> Calvete de Estrella, *El felicísimo viaje*, ed. Cuenca, p. 376.

<sup>82</sup> Van Uytven 1976, pp. 113-121.

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