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## 7 Reconstructing the Development of Governmental Organisation

### Tasks and Limitations in Source Publication

Handbooks on constitutional history give us insight into clearly defined institutions, their competences, their activities, their membership. Perfect handbooks, moreover, produce clear-cut hierarchies of institutions and their relations. As the following essay seeks to demonstrate, such descriptions are unrealistic. To quote the French institutional historian Prentout, 'Jamais une institution médiévale ne sort toute armée d'un acte constitutif'<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the problem is more characteristic of the medieval period than of later times, since medievalists observe the earliest developments, differentiation and specialization of institutions. Nevertheless, the medievalist's experience may be helpful for the interpretation of the ongoing institutional change in early modern times as well.

One of the main problems in studying medieval institutions and editing their sources is defining the institutions themselves. If we stick to the constitutional categories, we risk losing sight of essential phenomena just as much as if we rely on the documentation of these institutions in the archives as our sole point of reference. Thanks to the relentless collection of fragmentary, indirect data we now have a rather precise idea of representative institutions in the Low Countries during the later Middle Ages. Institutions such as the assemblies of Estates and the Estates General proved to be far less important than dozens of factual configurations of cities, rural districts and other authorities or private persons. Usually three, four, five or six major cities clearly outweighed all other participants, but certainly had no monopoly or any other fixed scheme. Flexibility and variation were the rule. Territorial borders rarely restricted representative activities in any way. Thus, during the fifteenth century, fishermen from towns and villages along the North Sea coast from Dunkerque to Beverwijk belonging to the three main principalities of Flanders, Zealand and Holland, met whenever safety at sea was threatened. They came together regularly during such periods and were capable of organising and financing themselves in order to protect their boats. In the same way, textile manufacturing centres in Flanders, Brabant, Holland and Hainault conferred during the 1430s to try and forge a common economic policy vis-a-vis England.<sup>2</sup>

We would never have known of these institutional practices, which were of great political and economic importance, from constitutional acts alone. Their frequency, scope, and significance became clear only after

countless references had been culled from a variety of sources. Since contemporaries did not always create archives, reconstructing informal institutions from bits and pieces of information may be considered one of the main purposes of publishing medieval sources.

The *English Parliament* forms a great exception, since its origins in the royal council gave it access to the regular services of the chancery which recorded parliamentary acts from the beginning.<sup>3</sup> On the Continent, few representative institutions kept archives since they did not establish a stationary office until well into the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> As a result, historians have imagined institutions and published their alleged sources long before they even existed. The case of the German Reichstag is most revealing: its impressive series of 'Akten (altere Reihe)' contains all sorts of documents related to court meetings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while according to Peter Moraw it was not until about the 1470s that some kind of a representative structure started developing within the Empire and a constitutional act was granted only by 1495. However interesting all the published documents may be, the suggestion that they all pertained in some way to the selfsame institution must now be considered an historical fallacy.<sup>5</sup> In this case, it was inspired by the eagerness of the Second German Empire to trace the roots of its representative traditions back to the Middle Ages, as had been done in England.

However necessary it may be to reconstruct organisations from various sources if they did not keep archives themselves, we must remain fully aware of the artificial nature of our intervention. The nationalist motives of nineteenth-century scholars are easily detected, but what about our own misconceptions? Do we not still think too much in terms of present-day borders, at the risk of dismembering historical entities? Germans and Poles have both published their parts and parcels of the Acts of the Prussian Assemblies of Estates, which are clearly marked by the editors' viewpoints at the time.<sup>6</sup> Problems of this nature inevitably affect the ongoing publication of regional charter collections restricted to the territory of the modern Kingdom of the Netherlands<sup>7</sup>, or of city accounts and atlases in Germany which cover only parts of the former duchy of Guelders.<sup>8</sup> Even if historians are dependent on funds from regional or national authorities, they should not always accept existing borders if these do not coincide with those of the period they are studying.

International collaboration is only beginning to solve some of these anomalies but should be carried on. The Hanserecesse series is an excellent example of how a large public organisation can be reconstructed, even though it has no archives of its own and was not limited by national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> The complex organisation of the German Hanse has been reconstructed through the activities of its members, as recorded in various types of documents preserved in dozens of archives. The selection cri-

teria for this collection were the meetings of various kinds and composition, around which all related documents were published, summarized or referred to if they were already published, especially in the parallel series of the Acts<sup>10</sup> Although our technical means and staff sizes now seem to have expanded astonishingly by comparison to a century ago, it seems most unlikely that an international enterprise of the scope and scale of the Hanse documents will ever be realised again Take, for instance, the Vatican sources why are we unable to launch or even continue some kind of international project in order systematically to uncover both the papal and the princely interventions in nominations, ecclesiastical policy and the huge registers of law suits? Earlier in this century, steps were taken to unlock these monumental archives through indices of names, descriptions of the various funds and the publication of sample documents<sup>11</sup> International collaboration was even envisaged to give some access to the 7,011 volumes of the *Registrum supplicationum*, dating from between 1342 and 1823 For the first decade, 2,511 petitions concerning only present-day Belgium were summarised in one volume of a thousand pages<sup>12</sup> Can we ever hope to gain a thorough understanding of the political and moral influence of the Church in the pre-Reformation period without access to its vast documentary series?<sup>13</sup>

Here in the late twentieth century, we find ourselves in some disarray notwithstanding our greater international openness and the immensity of our means compared to those of previous generations, the great publication programmes have slowed in every country and new initiatives are very difficult to launch, especially on the international level We have apparently been working in too much depth, and scattered our resources over too many small endeavours Individual proposals will always seek the security and limitations of a short-term project Only institutions can afford to take a broader view of the priorities and deficiencies of the existing publications Once priority has been given to a long-term activity, re-evaluations should not unnecessarily disrupt programmes designed to support research over decades if not centuries However, the slow pace of such programmes contradicts the alleged centrality of the topic for a broad range of research If these sources are so highly relevant, they should be made accessible as soon as possible The means available for a programme should thus be proportionate to its importance Moreover, recent technological advances compel us to reconsider the efficacy of technologies that are rapidly being superseded Thus we must be careful whenever we reconsider long-term priorities, but given the growing gap between our goals and our accomplishments, there seem to be good reasons for doing so

Reappraising the effectiveness of our efforts should help us identify priorities in those fields in which source disclosure must be undertaken

Then we must reconsider our methods of publication, since so many more techniques are now available. This brings three questions to mind

- 1 What will the needs of future generations of researchers be?
- 2 What would be the optimum added value of new publications in relation to the existing collections?
- 3 In what form should we make the documents available?

Although answers are necessarily speculative, we must maximise our efficiency: our means are limited and some questions seem more relevant or even urgent to a particular generation than others. We can try to propose at least some of our generation's priorities, taking into account the full range of techniques available today.

My point of departure is that all previous efforts continue to be extremely helpful. Notwithstanding all the improvements in editorial techniques and our criticism of the work of scholars of previous centuries, we are still using source publications printed in the eighteenth century such as Rymer's *Foedera* or the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*. Options for new priorities can be formulated more easily at certain stages just because other work has been performed previously. Our questions and suggestions are thus cumulative, not exclusive.

In the field of governmental organisations, we can readily agree that publication in extenso of all documents from before 1300 is desirable. Precisely because of their fundamentally innovative character in a world that was shifting from oral to written culture, the earliest stages of the development of literacy demand the greatest attention. Once the pattern of the activities of an institution has been established and expounded through a classical edition, it should be much easier for researchers of later periods to follow the process of institutional differentiation. Before the revolution in literacy, the scarcity of the sources that have come down to us, the relative complexity of their interpretation (from both an external and an internal point of view), and their fragility seem to be sufficient reason to consider their full edition as a legitimate priority. This may even be feasible.<sup>14</sup> For the sources in Dutch, the task has already been carried out magnificently by an individual scholar<sup>15</sup>, but evidently the Latin sources for that period are far more extensive. So many of them have been published already that a bibliographical survey of the editions would be helpful, even in addition to the invaluable service Setcedoc£ provides by making available Latin texts before 1200. For narrative sources written in the modern Netherlands, a repertory of individual texts has already proven its great usefulness, while a similar work is being compiled for Belgium.<sup>16</sup>

From the fourteenth century onward, bureaucratisation means that full publication of documentary series per type of source cannot possibly be realised.<sup>17</sup> Choices must be made, for which I suggest the following criteria

1 we need, for didactic and heuristic purposes, modern editions of all available types of documents,

2 preference has to be given to large series of documents, difficult to consult without guidance, but crucial for their references to a multiplicity of actors,

3 particular sources can be published if they are especially informative for a wide scale and scope of research,

4 full publication of extensive series, or of sources belonging to a type preserved in great quantity, is to be considered only if their intrinsic value by form and/or content justifies it, in this respect it may sometimes seem more productive to publish a text in full than to summarize or encode it and thus preclude some types of uses, this applies in particular to texts in which the exact wording is sophisticated and therefore relevant,

5 the edition of an important source or combination of sources can be expected to be used frequently and to save future researchers in the field considerable time and money

The availability of a source should be discussed is it worth investing in a new edition of an important early fourteenth-century chronicle because the existing nineteenth-century edition can be improved, or would it be better to invest in texts that are as yet unknown?

In my view, priority should be given to editions to which an editor can add considerable scholarly value, combining sources preserved in different places and of a different type, to save the time and effort of greater numbers of users. The reconstruction of the activities of institutions that have no proper archives, or the creation of guides to large and complex archives are highly labour-intensive tasks requiring searches in various sources and locations. The added value for the user is high and that makes such efforts worthwhile, provided the content is of sufficient scholarly interest.

The amount of work and the material costs involved, which slow down the pace of publication, as compared to the huge programmes carried out a century ago, require well-considered choices. But even if we set some priorities among the masses of sources to publish, we must keep our limitations in mind. Can we strive for completeness if at the same time we opt for less labour-intensive forms of publishing sources than their complete edition? Generally we will have to think in the future about more varied forms of publication than the printed books with full texts, summaries and tables we are accustomed to. Publication in extenso cannot constitute a priority for most of the documentary series that postdate 1300, if we wish to see results within our own lifetimes. We thus reflect very specifically upon (a) the selection of the most valuable sources to be made easily accessible for researchers all over the world, (b) the method

of presentation most appropriate in each case. We must also consider whether publication in extenso is still relevant in the case of very extensive documentary series of which many volumes have already appeared. The educational benefits of showing a wide range of scholars throughout the world, the possibilities and the difficulties of interpretation may have been achieved by then. In the case of, for example, the *Resolutien der Staten-Generaal*, would a more compact form of presentation not be preferable, precisely because the volumes up to 1625 were so elaborate? We already have an excellent example. In the course of this century a group of devoted researchers published a solid, four-volume edition of the sentences of the Court of Holland that summarised purely procedural matters. One hopes an index of names will be brought out soon. It covers the first twenty years of the Court's history, from 1427 to 1447.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter the registers become more diversified and voluminous, and there is no thought of continuing the series. In the meantime, however, it opened a line in research, highlighting the potential of these judicial registers. In combination with a clear inventory and microfilms or microfiches of the preserved series, the published volumes can be expected to facilitate further research based on this type of source.

I would urge specialists and users to evaluate their arguments and decide what prevails in a particular case: the more labour-intensive or the more labour-extensive methods. If the conclusion of this examination should be that the density and richness of the information continue to require an elaborate critical presentation with references to various related sources in which the editor adds much information from her or his personal experience, then this type of edition remains absolutely defensible and should even be sustained by additional personnel in order to make essential sources available even sooner. If, on the other hand, the conclusion were that the existing volumes adequately display the possibilities of the sources and that researchers have been prepared to continue on their own, why not proceed then to the mechanical reproduction of all the series, on microfiche, for instance, if this is still the most efficient solution? This would make the complete series of sources available immediately, allowing for much wider research possibilities than time-consuming books. Again, this would not mean any depreciation of previous editorial techniques or investments, since researchers would be helped enormously by the work done already for the earlier years.

Anyhow, we should stop thinking along the same lines that editors have thought along until recently: books with texts necessarily in extenso, elaborate critical apparatuses and indices as the highest possible editorial goal. We need courage to leave behind nineteenth-century scholarship, as for example in the case of the edition of medieval charters. Ten years ago already Walter Prevenier, the famous diplomatist and editor of charters

from around 1200, pleaded for restrictions in the conspicuous display of erudition (especially when the originals are preserved)<sup>19</sup> Nor should we continue to argue that series launched at a given moment should necessarily be completed in the same shape. In the meantime, the techniques of reproduction and word processing have changed so dramatically, that a re-evaluation of all our efforts is required.

The one source/one book relationship should be questioned and traditional editorial practices should be followed only after they have been compared to other means of dissemination in each and every case. CETEDOC demonstrates the wide variety of new questions that were made possible by computerizing the major sources in Latin before 1200. Users of quantitative data are probably better served by electronic data-banks offering opportunities for statistical manipulation, addition, linkage and combination with other series. Data-banks may more generally become a higher priority than outright source publication. A splendid example of a qualitative data-bank based on extensive research on a representative institution is the famous series of prosopographical studies of British MPs, which revised our understanding of how Parliament functions.<sup>20</sup> Without this data collection we might never have known how interwoven the Houses of Parliament are, both in their personal links and in their procedures. For a political elite of such national importance, such a way of handling primary sources certainly offers great advantages for various types of research. The organisational principle of this work shows another way of reconstructing the activities of institutions: not merely through their acts and paperwork, but also through the networks of their personnel. These magnificent books are certainly of great value in their actual form, but in addition to them, electronic devices of conservation and dissemination would allow more rapid and less expensive consultation of the files, the ability to include adaptations while research proceeds more easily, and more possibilities for linking data than in a book with indices. Various other categories can be thought of to form large prosopographical data-bases rather than, or in addition to, editing primary sources. Consider, for instance, the electronic files of university students, reconstructing their complete careers on the basis of previous editions of roils per institution.

Turning the focus at least in part from straightforward edition to the compilation of data-banks would be made possible by choosing mechanical forms of source reproduction which have been well introduced already by solid editions. They could replace some of the more standardised forms of editing in print. For some sources, to be selected by the criteria mentioned above, labour-intensive editing may well be continued, when the community of specialists agrees about the necessity of continuing to invest disproportionately high efforts in extraordinarily rich funds.

In conclusion, I think the time has come to discuss the selection of sources for publication and the methods most appropriate for each. Generally, the result of this reappraisal might be the ways of unlocking the documents, which should be selected according to the function of the volume and the complexity of the documents, the expected uses and the publications of similar sources that have previously appeared. A greater flexibility in presentation could be accompanied by a more reserved display of erudition in specific areas such as medieval charters. Summing up, I see the following set of possibilities, to be evaluated for each type of publication:

1 Large series of documents will continue to be edited in extenso in multiple volumes, with references to related sources, indices and a limited critical apparatus. However, such 'core series' should be restricted to documents of great, possibly international, interest, and used for various kinds of research. The *Resolutien der Staten-Generaal* might well be eligible for such a classification given the uniqueness of the institution in world history and its great national and international power in various fields. If the research community agrees, the publication programme should be accelerated.

2 Equally important to publish in books are selections of sources combined to show the activities of organisations, brought together by qualified editors whose work adds great value to the text of the selected sources and saves the users considerable time. Examples of this are in the medieval section of the RGP series, the charters' collections, the varied economic sources and the documents about the assemblies of cities and estates.

3 Demonstration that particular sources are of great exemplary or individual interest also qualifies them for integral publication in separate volumes. The documents to be published should be carefully chosen on the basis of the intrinsic value of the text and/or its material form and on the criterion of the publication of samples of possibly all types of documents, especially those dating from before 1300. The relevance of the text in its historical setting for historical research should be obvious. The value of the demonstration-book(s) would be highly enhanced by linking them by other means to the broader tradition of sources of the same type.

4 Electronic data banks should replace printed publication for compiled information liable to be completed and manipulated, especially statistical data series and prosopographies.

5 Repertories or guides to particular types of sources could be printed inexpensively and revised regularly, in addition to the demonstrative publication of some excellent examples. Ideally, the repertories would refer to microfiches or otherwise mechanically reproduced original sources. A fine example of this procedure has been elaborated for the jurisdictional archives of the Great Council at Mechlin from 1465 to

1580<sup>21</sup> The correspondence of Duke Charles of Burgundy is now accessible in an inventory containing full references and a severe selection of well-chosen quotations. This way, we now have an overview of the more than 3,550 letters, which has the great advantage of being available now, offering a complete list and every means of identifying further finding locations, as well as indices<sup>22</sup>

6 Diverse forms of mechanical reproduction should be considered as the only realistic means of unlocking large documentary series. Their accessibility should be enhanced by partial publications and repertoires. Good examples of this procedure are to be found in the selective edition of the central accounts of the Burgundian state in 1416-1420 and of all types of accounts of the officers of the Count of Holland in selected years of the fourteenth century<sup>23</sup>. In both cases, microfilms are available of the whole series. The publication has effectively stimulated research based on this type of source.

Only by diversifying publication methods can we ever hope to cover reasonable segments of the documentary series we think should be unlocked for the broader scholarly community.

### Notes

- 1 H. Prentout, *Les Etats provinciaux de Normandie*, vol 1 (Caen, 1925) 36, as quoted by W. Prevenier, *De leden en de Staten van Vlaanderen (1384-1405)* (Brussel, 1961) v.
- 2 *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis der dagvaarten van de Staten en steden van Holland voor 1544* 1 1276-1433. W. Prevenier and J.G. Smut, eds. RGP (2 vols, 's-Gravenhage, 1987-91), *Handelingen van de Leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen*. W. Prevenier, W.P. Blockmans, A. Zoete, eds (6 vols, Brussel, 1961- )
- 3 *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (3 vols, London, 1783), *Rotuli Parliamentorum Angliae Haecenus Inediti, 1279-1373*, H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, eds. Camden Society 3rd Ser. LI (London, 1935)
- 4 The States of Holland created the office of 'landsadvocaat' in 1480. H. Kokken, *Steden en Staten. Dagvaarten van steden en Staten onder Maria van Bourgondie en het eerste regentschap van Maximiliaan van Oostenrijk (1477-1494)* ('s-Gravenhage, 1991). In Flanders, it was only the revolutionary situation of the 1580s that prompted the preservation of resolution registers. H. Van Houtte, *Tafels van de resolutieboeken der Staten van Vlaanderen*. Vol 1, 1580-83, 1614-31 (Brussel, 1936), W.P. Blockmans, *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van middeleeuwen naar nieuwe tijden (1384-1506)* (Brussel, 1978) 54-59.
- 5 P. Moraw, 'Zu Stand und Perspektiven der Standeforschung im spätmittelalterlichen Reich' in H. Boockmann, ed. *Die Anfänge der standischen Vertretungen in Preussen und seine Nachbarländern*. Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien 16 (München, 1992) 15-22.
- 6 *Acten der Standetage Preussens unter der Heischaft des Deutschen Ordens*. M.

- Toppen, ed (4 vols, Leipzig, 1878 ff), *Akta Stanow Prus Kiolewskich (1479-1526)* K Gorski, M Biskup, I Janosz-Biskupowa, eds (8 vols, Torun, 1955-1993)
- 7 Compare in this regard the different approaches to a charter collection, one based on the historical boundaries of two former principalities, and the other working within the present-day borders *Oorkondenboek van Gelre en Zutphen tot 1326* E J Harenberg, M S Polak, E C Dijkhof, eds RCP ('s-Gravenhage, 1980- ), and *Oorkondenboek van Noord Brabant tot 1312* H P H Camps, M Dillo, G A M van Synghel, eds RCP ('s-Gravenhage, 1979- )
  - 8 W Kuppeis, *Die Stadtrechnungen von Geldern 1386 1423* (Geldern, 1993), M Wensky, *Straelen, Wachtendonk* (2 vols, Koln-Bonn, 1979-80)
  - 9 *Hanserezesse, Abt I (1256-1430)* K Koppmann, ed (8 vols, Leipzig, 1870 ff), *Abt II (1431 1476)* G van der Ropp, ed (7 vols, Leipzig, 1876 ff), *Abt III (1477 1506)* D Schaefer, ed (9 vols, Leipzig, 1881 ff)
  - 10 *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* K Hohlbaum et al eds (11 vols, Leipzig-Halle-Weimar, 1876 ff)
  - 11 The publication of the *Repertorium Germanicum*, a remarkable initiative launched by the Prussian Institute in Rome, is still going on, despite lengthy interruptions, there is apparently no international collaboration *Verzeichnis der in den papstlichen Registern und Kameralakten vorkommenden Personen, Kirchen und Orte des Deutschen Reiches, seiner Diozesen und Territorien, vom Beginn des Schismas bis zur Reformation* Various eds 8 sections of several vols each (1916-1993)
  - 12 *Archivalia in Itale belangrijk voor de geschiedenis van Nederland* G Brom, ed RCP (3 vols, 's-Gravenhage, 1908-14), examples of petitions dating between 1342 and 1502 have been published in vol 1, 467-520, interesting comments of the publisher about the publication strategy can be found on 469-71 See also *Romeinsche bronnen voor de kerkelyk staatkundigen toestand der Nederlanden in de 16de eeuw* G Brom and A H L Hensen, eds RCP ('s-Gravenhage, 1922) containing primarily correspondence on the highest level The Belgian publication is *Suppliques de Clement VI* U Berliere, ed
  - 13 At the beginning of this century a number of volumes were published in the series *Analecta Vaticano Belgica* with petitions to and letters from the popes in Avignon, for the period 1300-1600, documents related to papal indulgences, some full texts and some fragments, have also appeared *Codex documentorum sacratumissimarum indulgentiarum Neerlandicarum* P Fredericq, ed ('s-Gravenhage, 1922), the same scholar edited the accounts of indulgences in some years in the bishoprics of Utrecht, Liege and Mechlin
  - 14 For an estimate of the number of original charters preserved in French archives (45,000 for the period 1100-1300), see W Prevenier, 'Ontsluiting van bronnen uit de 'middeleeuwen' in K Kooijmans e a *Bron en publikatie Voor drachten en opstellen over de ontsluiting van geschiedkundige bronnen, uitgegeven by het 75 jarig bestaan van het Bureau der Rijkscommissie voor Vaderlandse Geschiedenis* ('s-Gravenhage, 1985) 17-19 I do not agree with the author's objections to publishing the oldest texts
  - 15 M Gyseling with the assistance of W Pijnenburg, *Coipus van Middelnederlandsr Teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)* Reeks 1, ambtelijke bescheiden (9 vols,

- 's-Gravenhage, 1977), Reeks 11, literaire handschriften (6 vols, 's-Gravenhage, 1980-87)
- 16 M Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium van verhalende historische bronnen uit de middeleeuwen Heiligenlevens, annalen, kronieken en andere in Nederland geschreven verhalende bronnen* ('s-Gravenhage, 1981)
  - 17 Prevenier, 'Ontsluiting van bronnen', 18-20
  - 18 *Memorialen van het Hof (den Raad) van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland, van den secretaris Jan Rosa* A S de Blecourt et al eds (4 vols, Haarlem-Leiden, 1929-1988)
  - 19 Prevenier, 'Ontsluiting van bronnen', 21-24
  - 20 J S Roskell, L Clark and C Rawcliffe, *The History of Parliament The House of Commons 1386-1421* (4 vols, Stroud, 1992)
  - 21 *Chronologische Lijsten van de Geextendeerde Sententien berustende in het archief van de Grote Raad van Mechelen* J Th de Smidt, E I Strubbe et al eds (6 vols, Brussel, 1966-1988) combined with regional and local inventories and microfilms
  - 22 *Der Briefwechsel Karls des Kühnen (1433-1477)* inventar W Pataviciu, S Dunnenbeil, H Kruse et al eds (2 vols, Frankfurt, 1995)
  - 23 *Comptes generaux de l'Etat bourguignon entre 1416 et 1420* Recueil des Historiens de la France M Mollat, R Favreau, R Fawtier, eds (6 vols, Paris, 1965-76), *De rekeningen van de grafelykheid van Holland uit de Beierse periode* D E H de Boer, D J Faber, H P H Jansen, eds RGP (3 vols, 's-Gravenhage, 1980- )