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Urban politics and the role of guilds in the city of Utrecht (1250-1450)

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Conclusion and discussion

The object of my thesis was to explore the development of urban politics in the city of Utrecht in the period of about 1250 to 1450. Three issues were specifically addressed, notably the development of the city's political institutions, seen from the viewpoint of social and political groups seeking representation and influence; the development of political discourse and urban historiography; and the role of violence in urban politics. The aim was foremost to uncover dynamic processes within the period under consideration, and not to present a static view of 'late medieval' institutions, practices or political culture in Utrecht. Late medieval urban government was in constant change, and in this period, particularly from the late fourteenth century, some outlines of early modern urban politics could be discerned. The main traits of development that have been distinguished in the chapters will be brought together here and some paths for further research will be discussed.

In general, this study argues that the case of Utrecht deserves to be more fully integrated into the historiography of craft guilds and urban politics in the late medieval Low Countries. Within this area, Utrecht was no anomaly but formed an integral part of the developments that have generally been distinguished in the cities of the Southern Low Countries (and likewise in the German Rhine area). Differences in urbanisation, demography and economic structures, such as often observed between the Northern and Southern Low Countries, definitely played a role. They can in general explain differences in development between smaller towns and larger cities. However, there was no geographical division at work with regard to the susceptibility of middle-sized cities, such as Utrecht, to political conflict and the development of a more representative urban government. In these cases, political and other factors, such as the specific political set-up of medieval episcopal cities, should be integrated more fully into models of explanation.

As an old episcopal centre and the largest city of the Northern Netherlands, Utrecht was in many respects unique in this region, but not in comparison with other, often likewise middle-sized episcopal cities in Northwestern Europe. If this study helps to understand Utrecht's normality and at the same time uniqueness in the development of its urban politics (because every town or city was fundamentally different), it will already have achieved an important goal.

Development of political institutions

One of the aims of my research was to assess how Utrecht's city government in the late Middle Ages evolved on the spectrum between a closed or 'oligarchic' government and a more open, representative government, and what the factors were behind this evolution. The analysis in the first two chapters aimed specifically to establish how the relationships between the guilds and the city's old merchant and ministerial elite (the knightly 'patricians'), and between the craft guilds themselves, translated into the development of political institutions, the distribution of power and the development of a ruling elite in the period between 1250 and 1450.

The analysis of chapter 1 focused on formal election arrangements and on the partly unwritten rules about the distribution of seats in the city council and in superior positions like those of the mayors and the superior guild elders (*overste oudermannen*). It also assessed the actual access to positions of power at an individual or family level, considering questions such as the mobility rate among magistrates.

This chapter showed first of all that there were major changes in the composition and accessibility of Utrecht's city government in the period under scrutiny. The most drastic transformation took place with the introduction of the guild ordinance of 1304. This ordinance gave rise to a political community that (according to the constitution of 1340-1341) consisted of all the guild members with citizen rights, and therefore included for the first time the middling groups of independent artisans, traders and retailers in the city. Even the old patrician families and newer families with a ministerial status were gradually incorporated into the craft guild system from 1307, and did not form their own corporation or electoral college as they often did elsewhere (compare for instance the *poorterij* in Southern cities).

The second most striking development was the creation, in the course of the fourteenth century, of a 'council elite' (*Ratselite* in German). This new ruling elite had already emerged by 1402, when the first yearly lists of city magistrates started to appear. At first sight, the elite was made up of members of old patrician families and of newly integrated ministerial families from the countryside, as well as members of families with an artisan or petty trading background that had moved up in their guilds. Knightly families, therefore, gained positions of power again, but now from within the craft guilds and only after their adaptation to the new dominant, corporate system. In practice, the council elite occupied most of the seats in the city council and the superior positions, and tended to have much longer careers in government than their fellow citizens. The analysis

of rates of mobility showed that the fifteenth-century city government of Utrecht in this respect closely resembled the governments of neighbouring smaller towns in the Northern Low Countries that are usually called 'oligarchic'. Especially in the election to superior positions, family background proved to be more important than guild representation. However, the open system of guild representation and elections in Utrecht remained largely intact throughout the period and until 1528. In addition, the membership of the guilds (with citizen rights) had a constitutional right to be consulted in a number of important matters. This constitutional framework made Utrecht's city government fundamentally more open and representative than many other towns without guild representation.

The third conclusion of chapter 1 concerned the distribution of power between the political guilds. The development of a council elite went hand in hand with a guild system which gave some guilds much better opportunities than others to acquire positions of power and influence in local government. Partly, this hierarchical system was regulated via the formal distinction between fourteen major and seven lower guilds. This distinction was first mentioned in 1341, but it reflected general attitudes towards artisanship and trading, as well as local differences in economic importance. The difference between major and lower guilds regulated to a certain extent the possibility to obtain seats in the council. But there was also an informal hierarchy. Within the set of fourteen major guilds, especially, those representing trades and handicrafts that were more active on regional or longer-distance markets such as the textile merchants (*wantsnijders*), regional traders and producers-retailers of luxury goods (e.g. *riemsnijders*), turned out to have more, and more influential, representatives in the city council than those primarily active on the local market with common commodities, such as the bakers or the butchers. This informal 'hierarchy of guilds' in Utrecht went against the professed equality of the (major) guilds.

Differences in access to power and influence between the craft guilds were prone to lead to political competition and tensions, as may be shown by the instances of revolt, amongst others by the butchers. In addition, there could be tension within craft guilds about the representation of different socio-economic interests at the level of the guild leadership and the choice of other representatives in the city council. These types of internal tensions were not studied within the framework of this thesis, but this would be highly desirable to better understand the actual power distribution in the city between economic sectors and social groups. However, the importance of the guild hierarchy in Utrecht should not be overrated either. Contrary to other cities where some guilds were completely excluded from representation (e.g. the fullers in Ghent and the minor guilds in

Florence), all Utrecht guilds (major and lower) had the same number of elders in the assembly of elders and all elders were involved in the election of the superior elders. This may have reflected the relative equality between different trades and crafts. Furthermore, chapter 1 showed also that one should be careful to simply equate guild representation in Utrecht with the representation of socio-economic groups or interests, as the guilds developed into political institutions that also welcomed members from outside the trade or craft. However, this development was arguably less far-reaching in lower guilds as well as in major guilds with a large hereditary membership such as the bakers or butchers.

Many of the conclusions in the first chapter pertained to the period from about 1340, when the city laid down its constitution in the *Stadsboek*. The function and composition of the city council itself was registered first around this time. For the period before, the lack of administrative sources makes it more difficult to draw conclusions about the government's development and composition. Neither the guild ordinance of 1304, nor any other written source from before the 1340s, provides any information about basic facts & figures, be it the number of craft guilds involved in the ordinance or even what their names were (with the sole exception of the bakers who were mentioned in the 1304 ordinance). Still, from the relative stability of the local guild system, it could be posited that Utrecht probably counted 21 'common guilds' from the start. This contrasts with cities such as Liège, where the number of political guilds varied considerably in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth century.¹

How Utrecht's political institutions may have developed in the less well-known period between 1304 and 1340, and what factors were behind the creation of the dominant guild system in Utrecht, is the subject of chapter 2. A starting point for my analysis was to look beyond the short episode of 'guild revolution' and its accompanying crisis, and examine the longer term before and after in which local political institutions and practices changed more gradually. In this case, this meant studying their advance in urban politics from the moment the craft guilds are first mentioned in the sources, in the 1260s, until the proclamation of the guild constitution around 1340.

The analysis of this chapter showed first of all that the integration of the citizenry and the guild community, in practice and through the guilds' discourse or communication strategy, was an important factor in the guilds' advance from the late thirteenth century onwards. On the one hand, the guilds' elders made use of the existing communal discourse, claiming to represent the interests of the citizenry as a whole towards the ruling elite of patrician families. On the other hand, they offered non-patrician citizens a chance

¹ Xhayet, 'Le rôle politique', and compare for other cities Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt*, 809-811.

to organise themselves politically and be mobilised via the guild militias. The existence of these militias can be demonstrated in Utrecht from 1307, but they probably emerged in the thirteenth century, as they did in many other cities. Furthermore, the organisation of the craft guilds facilitated the institutionalisation of their political influence, through the assembly of the guild elders as well as the *morgenspraken*. The militias, in their turn, made it possible for the guilds to take over local defense systems and the organisation of the nightwatch. This take-over also conveyed the message that the guilds defended the interests of the citizenry as a whole.

Secondly, it could be shown that external political actors and circumstances were of paramount importance for the political chances of the craft guilds in Utrecht. Not only around the crucial year of 1304, but also in the first decades thereafter, the guilds were able to profit from the relative weakness of the bishop, from recurring periods of war and financial crisis, and from the existence of different political actors within and outside the city in order to be integrated into and ultimately take over local government. In particular, they were able to take advantage of the traditional bonds between patrician families in the city (in this period mostly the Lichtenberg family), ministerials in the countryside and the count of Holland. By fighting them in the city government and in military confrontations in the countryside, such as in 1304-1305 and the 1330s, the guilds found a common enemy. This supported their message that they strived for the common good and interests of all the citizens, unlike the patrician families who were susceptible of outside influence. Also, after first enjoying the military protection of the Flemish in 1304, from 1305 onwards they found an ally in the bishop of Utrecht, who recognised and enlarged the guilds' role at multiple occasions in order to strengthen his own position. It was mostly the political context and contingencies, therefore, both locally and regionally, that made the dominant position of the guilds in Utrecht possible.

The guild ordinance of 1304 brought important institutional changes, such as the guild elders' role in electing the city's councillors as well as a high degree of autonomy for the 'common guilds'. However, the major changes took place in the years and decades afterwards, again under the influence of political circumstances and in a largely informal way. Among these changes, the creation of the city council in which the guild elders were fully integrated by 1340, and the emergence of the two mayors and two superior guild elders were especially important. The constitution of 1340-1341 formalised these changes and defined the political community as the assembly of the membership with citizenship in the 'common guilds'. At this point, the transformation of the Utrecht craft guilds into full-blown political institutions was complete.

A striking observation for the period before 1340 is that the Utrecht craft guilds apparently emerged and acted as a political unity, witness the fact that there is only mention of the common guilds (*ghemene ghilden*) and the common guild elders (*ghemene oudermanne*), never of specific guilds. This may partly be due to a lack of sources, but it also seems to have been part of a conscious political and discursive strategy of the guilds that was an important factor for success.

In short, the findings of the first two chapters suggest that the advance of the craft guilds was in many ways a watershed in the history of political institutions in Utrecht. Not only did they have an impact on the development of these institutions, but also on that of political practices and political discourse, as well as on the rise of a new ruling elite in the city. In this council elite, a number of individuals and families originating from the (mostly major) guilds were able to take part, forming a kind of 'guild elite'. In all, notable socio-political processes were at work leading from a government controlled by a knightly patriciate, first to a relatively stable and representative, guild-dominated government, and then, gradually, to a government dominated by a new ruling elite. These were long-term processes reaching from the first political activities of the craft guilds in the 1260s until the late fourteenth century, when the new council elite was taking form.

This study does not concur with researchers who argue that the advent of the political guilds did not generally change the essentially closed or 'oligarchic' character of late medieval urban government.² Against a reductive view of 'alternating elites', it can be shown for the case of Utrecht that political institutions, practices and ideology changed fundamentally towards formal representation of the non-elite citizenry in urban politics. This did not prevent new ruling elites from taking shape, such as Utrecht's council elite, nor that some guilds, by tradition or practice, became more influential than others. However, the topic of oligarchy and oligarchisation should be studied preferably in the context of the ruling elite's behaviour (e.g., towards popular protest) and be judged against local constitutional frameworks, and not by the small number of those elected into government positions only. As Heinz Schilling and others noted, the rule of small elites was in itself not incompatible with corporate ideas of government, as long as the elite did not claim all power or close itself off completely.³

² Farr, *Artisans in Europe*, 164-190, at p. 180: "None of the German revolts was about equality, and everywhere oligarchy endured, even if the personnel changed in and in some cases widened"; Watts, *The making*, 109-112.

³ Schilling, 'Civic republicanism', 28-30 and *passim*.

At this point it is too early to draw conclusions about processes of oligarchisation in Utrecht's city government, even though it might be presumed on the basis of the city council's attitude towards the butchers' guild in the 1430s that something like it was set in motion. More research needs to be done, however. It could focus on, for instance, the actual influence of the assembly of the membership of all the guilds (*gemene morgenspraak*) vis-à-vis the city council in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. In general, more research should be directed towards the social and economic power base of council elite members and families, and to their power networks, both within city government circles, and outside, also after 1450. This type of research is usually based on prosopography.

Political discourse and urban historiography

Chapter 2 suggested that discourse and conflict (within and outside the city) were deployed strategically by the advancing craft guilds in Utrecht to impose their views on the organisation of Utrecht's city government. They were also eager to lay down the new arrangements in the *Stadsboek*, which functioned as a kind of constitution for Utrecht's city government in the two centuries to come. The project to register constitutional arrangements went together with the further development and archiving of other registers by the city council. The fourteenth century marked the beginning of the city's more systematic recordkeeping.⁴ Could the endeavour to register the new power relations in the city and the administration of the city council also have spurred the development of an urban historiography in Utrecht? This was the subject of chapter 3.

Chapter 3 aimed specifically to examine the chronicle known as the Dutch Beke (*Nederlandse Beke*). This regional history of the Sticht (princebishopric) Utrecht and the County of Holland was produced in or near Utrecht around 1393 as a translation and continuation in the vernacular of Johannes de Beke's original *Chronographia*. As Antheun Janse already found, the Beke continuation was adapted to fit the interests of an elite, lay audience in Utrecht, and probably written by someone in or near the city government.⁵ Janse hypothesised that the author was Utrecht's town clerk Jan Tolnaer Jr (†ca 1403). This chapter aimed to take the analysis further. Did it convey a specifically urban or civic discourse and did it aim to create a collective memory of the city of

⁴ For this process, see in general Muller, *Rechtsbronnen* IV.

⁵ Janse, 'De Nederlandse Beke'.

Utrecht, or of its ruling group? And could more be said about the probable context of origin, its author and primary audience?

The analysis in this chapter showed that the author of the Dutch Beke indeed voiced an urban standpoint throughout the chronicle. He consistently positioned citizens and the city of Utrecht as loyal and indispensable supporters of the bishop and ascribed positive values to them. The role of the city also becomes more prominent as the chronicle moves on. Especially in the continuation (relating events between 1346 and 1393), the city and its citizens play an increasingly crucial role in defending the interests of the bishop and the Sticht in political, military and financial matters. The author also paid specific attention to (military) initiatives of the city's army in the countryside and their military leaders. In his view, the interests of city, bishop and territory coincided, showing in this respect similarity to contemporary town chronicles of other German cities.

In his addition to Beke's original chronicle the continuator clearly wanted to pay more attention to the history of the city. His interpolations and additions are mostly concerned with fourteenth-century events that took place in the territory and city of Utrecht. A relatively large part of this is concerned with strife between elite (knightly) families and 'parties' in the city. It could be shown that the author chose a distinctive discursive strategy in these episodes. On the one hand, the author linked party strife and internal discord in general to chaos, unrest and weak or absent episcopal rule. On the other hand, he consistently framed only one of the Utrecht parties within the negative discourse of party strife, mentioning almost exclusively their unlawful violence and repeated expulsion from the city. This was the party of Lambert de Vries (in 1304) and their political heirs, popularly known as the Gunterlingen. Their opponents, the Lichtenbergers, are never mentioned in the Dutch Beke as a party; on the contrary, members of this family appear only as high-status, knightly men who knew how to feud and make war, but who fell victim to acts of illegitimate violence.

The one-sided attitude of the author towards the Utrecht parties could be shown to closely follow the official discourse of the city council in the last decades of the fourteenth century. Shortly after a violent clash in 1379 and 1380, the Gunterlingen were exiled from the city and their supporters made non-electable to the city council (in 1384). At the time that the Dutch Beke was finished, around 1393, this policy was still valid, but the times were unstable and consensus was shaky. It is probable, therefore, that the Dutch Beke's narrative construction was expressly meant to support and legitimise the actions of the city's ruling group and the victorious Lichtenbergers.

Another conclusion from the author's rendition of local political conflict is that he focused almost exclusively on conflicts within the knightly elite, and much less on the larger context of protest and revolt within the city. This contrasts with archival sources and the rendition of events in other continuations of the *Chronographia*, such as the contemporary Latin Continuation V. These continuations describe the clashes around 1346 and 1380 as conflicts between large groups of citizens in which guilds and guildsmen played an important part. Despite the lack of interest in popular politics, however, the author of the Dutch Beke could also be shown to support the rule of the craft guilds in the city and thus to follow the official corporate discourse of the city in that respect too.

The analysis of the Dutch Beke strengthened the hypothesis that this chronicle was written in Utrecht government circles and that its aim was at least partly to shape the collective memory of local events for the purpose of supporting and legitimizing the city council's consensus and policies. The Dutch Beke may thus be seen as the tentative beginnings of urban historiography in the city of Utrecht. The evidence that the author used criminal records, as well as the probable partisanship of the town clerk Jan Tolnaer Jr make it more plausible that he was the author of the Dutch Beke, even though there is no hard evidence for this identification. It was argued that the author targeted his chronicle primarily at a select group of ruling families in Utrecht with ministerial status and a knightly lifestyle (among whom the family of Lichtenberg figured prominently). Apart from being interested in a mix of local and regional history of elite politics and knightly warfare, these families were also able to pass on the chronicle to their aristocratic relatives and contacts in the countryside and at the courts of neighbouring territories, enabling perhaps in this way the wide dissemination and popularity that the Dutch Beke would enjoy in the years and decades to come.

In all, it can be concluded from the findings in chapter 2 and 3 that the corporate discourse, which was built on older communal discourse, became dominant in Utrecht in the first half of the fourteenth century. This conclusion coincides with findings for cities elsewhere where craft guilds acquired a role in local politics.⁶ The corporate discourse was also embraced by the author of the Dutch Beke around 1393, who presented the craft guilds with local pride, even though he did not give the subject much thought. The same accounts, *mutatis mutandis*, for Utrecht's former patrician and other knightly families, who probably constituted the Dutch Beke's primary audience. However, the findings on

⁶ See e.g. Black, *Guilds and civil society*, 66-70.

this late-fourteenth-century chronicle also suggest that not only the craft guilds continued to shape urban political discourse, but that it was also molded towards the end of the fourteenth century by the ruling families or ‘parties’ in the city council in order to serve their own political interests. Follow-up research is necessary to see how Utrecht’s political discourse evolved further in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. In general, the findings on the Dutch Beke presented here suggest that more research can be done on the development of urban historiography in Utrecht.

Violence and political groups in urban politics

As the Dutch Beke and archival sources amply document, late medieval Utrecht knew recurrent outbreaks of political conflict and party strife within its walls. In these clashes popular politics apparently coincided with elite feuding and faction strife in order to claim power and influence in the city council. Similar coalitions or parties have been found in many late medieval towns and cities all over Europe and seem to be an essential characteristic of the period of the late Middle Ages. Sometimes such conflicts are called ‘endemic’ for this period, but in my view this label does not have added value for the explanation or clarification of the phenomena studied. An example of the violent tradition in Utrecht is the opposition between the Gunterlingen and Lichtenbergers in the fourteenth century, which seemed to divide the whole urban community. The backgrounds to the formation of these groups and coalitions, and the role of violence in urban politics in general, were studied in the last two chapters.

The analysis of chapter 4 focused primarily on providing an explanation for the frequent participation of elite families and factions in popular revolts, and the apparent growth of elite leadership in violent political encounters in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. For the purpose of this chapter, the ‘conundrum’ was analysed at a more structural level, arguing that it was the shifting conditions of organising political action in this period that made elite leadership more attractive and common.

First of all, it was argued that the organisation of violence was a necessary precondition for success in politics, not only in the countryside, where the violence was denominated as feuding or warfare, but also in urban politics. The many examples of violent political strife in the city and how these were dealt with indicate that people in the countryside and in cities shared a similar culture of violence. Violent outbursts of faction strife, revolts and armed assemblies in the central market square (the *Plaets* in Utrecht)

went hand in hand with peaceful bargaining and consultation, and both could be considered normal forms of political action in the medieval city. The ability to form coalitions, mobilise supporters and make violent threats could in this context be considered equally important as the ability to use violence itself, since the former could deter the opponent into complying with one's demands. Hence, the prevailing culture of violence may provide an explanation for the ubiquity of broad coalitions in urban politics, in Utrecht as elsewhere in the Low Countries or Germany. In German historiography, similar observations in the past have led to the introduction of the terms *Bürgerkämpfe* or *innerstädtische Auseinandersetzungen* instead of the older *Zunftkämpfe*.

Secondly, the culture of violence was reflected in the most common forms of medieval political organisation: those of the elite family or faction with its armed supporters; neighbourhood militias; and brotherhoods of the early communes and guilds. Following Otto Oexle's argument, the latter were based on an oath-bound association (*coniuratio*) which aimed to establish solidarity between equal members promising each other (physical) protection and support. The goals of these associations were as much political as they were military. The same goes for the groups of protesting commoners who were bound together in 'unities' (*eninge*) or alliances and held illegal 'meetings', in the words of later medieval urban authorities. Such terms are also indicative of oath-bound associations that aimed at mutual protection and solidarity.

Thirdly, as political success was dependent on the ability of political groups to organise violence, the possibilities for non-elite citizens (i.e. those outside the political establishment) to do this successfully were arguably limited. This chapter argued that their chances in the late medieval city became even worse as time went on. As has been observed in many cities, later medieval urban governments in Europe typically developed along this path: they acquired more governing and judicial powers as they became more autonomous, and as a result, they increasingly demanded obedience from their citizens and 'subjects', and started to criminalise popular dissent and armed protest along the way. This development has generally been observed in cities in the Low Countries and Germany from the later fourteenth century onwards. In cities where craft guilds were integrated in local government and these governments became more stable, additional evolutions took place. As the leadership of craft guilds became part of the establishment, they became less apt to act as vehicles for popular protest, but tended to take sides with the privileged (guild) elite instead. Consensus-building within the city government and elite formation thus went hand in hand with the exclusion of those outside the establishment and the loss of craft guilds as agents for popular politics.

Meanwhile, as the conditions for the organisation of popular politics became less favourable, dissatisfied guildsmen, citizens and groups of other urban dwellers had to find other ways to get into action and organise themselves politically while keeping the risk of repression as low as possible. Finally, it was argued that this context stimulated elite leadership of popular protest and revolts. Elite leaders, whether they came from within or outside the urban elite, could offer effective protection, practical military leadership, and a more favourable negotiating position towards authorities. The observed forms of collaboration with, or subordination to, elite leaders could thus stem primarily from the practical goal of forming successful political action groups. This conclusion goes against the conventional idea of pre-existing ties of socio-economic dependence or patronage, and instead moves to acknowledge the agency of revolters within the context of their collective opportunities and strategies. In the longer run, however, elite leadership of popular movements probably did have the result to create bonds of dependency and clientelism in the city.

A closer analysis of how elite-led groups functioned in Utrecht in the fifteenth century and how these affected urban politics was offered in the last chapter, which analysed the practices of political violence in the city of Utrecht in the period of 1400-1430. This was a period of extensive warfare and party strife that involved various principalities in the Northern Netherlands and showed strategic links between the leaders of parties and factions across several territories. Also, extended regional power strife was reflected in the schism that arose after the death of bishop Frederik of Blankenheim in 1423. In this period of great political instability, four successful changes of power and about ten attempted coups took place in or near the city of Utrecht.

Chapter 5 showed first of all that the violent power conflicts in the city in this period were very similar to the wars that were waged at the same time in the countryside. The city council of Utrecht was only one (though important) scene of power strife within this regional context and consequently seemed to have limited ability to follow a course of its own. For one thing, the leading faction or party – in this period mainly the Lichtenbergers – attempted to manipulate the city council into using the available public means of violence to advance their causes and those of their allies in the region. For another, the underlying faction – which was often exiled – tried to return with force to its former position of power and influence in cooperation with its allies and supporters.

The core of all such competing groups was formed by a small number of leaders from a few prominent families with their in-laws, who belonged to the top of the local clerical and urban ruling elite. An example were the leaders of the Lichtenbergers in this

period, who held positions as mayors, city councillors or sheriff, while their relative Jacob van Lichtenberg was provost of the Utrecht chapter of Saint Peter. Usually, the leaders of opposing factions were supported by other relatives and allies, both within the city as well as in its wider surroundings. Some of these were powerful, quasi-independent lords such as the those of Montfoort or Gaasbeek. The faction leaders surrounded themselves with servants, wearing livery (*caproen* or *cledere*), and tried to distribute their livery among larger groups, as it appears from recurring prohibitions by the city council in this period. However, it proved to be difficult to estimate the size and social composition of these supporting groups. Part of them could be identified as guildsmen, but others as urban dwellers without citizen rights. The specific motives of guilds, groups or individuals are usually unknown, but it is clear that public dissatisfaction with the wars and the city's (financial) dealing with these was at least one of the reasons to get into action. Apart from these groups, administrative sources also frequently mention the participation of paid militants from both inside and outside the city. This indicates that elite leaders on both sides were able to deploy considerable financial resources in order to stage violent coups with what were essentially private militias.

Successful power changes tended to be the result of a wave of popular dissatisfaction followed by carefully prepared military action. The latter involved strategic planning, mobilising supporters inside the city in the hours before the coup and establishing a window of opportunity to get inside the gates. Most of the unrest and the violence that followed was located near the *Plaets* and the residences of prominent opponents. In response, the city government defended itself by calling to arms the able-bodied citizens through the tolling of the bells. It could also be shown that the coups were hardly internal affairs alone. An important element of successful coups was the physical presence of powerful allies in support of local faction leaders.

The role of the city council in these years was ambiguous. Often, it seemed to be dominated by factional politics, which may be explained partly by the difficult political circumstances it faced during the wars and the Utrecht schism. However, at several instances the city council also attempted to curb the factions' influence and violence, amongst others by prohibiting citizens to carry arms, or to wear or distribute livery.

To summarise, chapters 4 and 5 showed that violence was in many ways a normal aspect of late medieval urban politics, not unlike how this was in the countryside and at the level of territorial politics. At the same time, city governments gradually became more apt in criminalising and repressing violent political action. In Utrecht, the consensus that was

needed for this stance grew as a corollary of the formation of a stable corporate government from the 1340s onwards, which was accompanied by the gradual emergence of a new ruling elite. Criminalisation of political violence was directed first of all against popular forms of protest, i.e. against those outside the political establishment of the successful guilds and elite families, but also, tentatively, against elite factions. The latter was more difficult, however, as the same (partisan) families held positions of power within the city council, e.g. as superiors, and were part of multiple influential networks that extended beyond the city into the Utrecht church and the regional elite. As a result, the political ambiguity of the city council stood out, especially in the turbulent first decades of the fifteenth century.

The next step in research would be to verify and examine in more detail the hypotheses presented in chapter 4 about the role of violence and particularly about the role of craft guild leadership in the development of consensus in urban politics. Such research may be limited to the case of Utrecht (or another city), or address a wider range of cities and towns in a comparative study. In the latter case, it would undoubtedly uncover local and regional variation, caused by differences in the actual position and role of craft guilds in local government and variations in their socio-economic make-up. In cities where craft guilds only had a consultative role, for instance, or where they remained in competition with patrician governing bodies and representatives, guild elders may have been agents of popular revolt and protest in the city for a longer time. The situation may also have been different in cities where the guild leaders themselves were not part of the daily government of the city, such as was the case in Liège.⁷ In addition, differences in power between craft guilds within a city could have a big impact on the development of consensus, or the lack thereof. A result of this research could therefore be a more precise characterisation and periodisation of developments in the leadership and formation of political action groups, and the factors underlying this evolution. It might also clarify the continuing lines of development in revolt and popular politics, whether or not as part of craft guild politics, from the late Middle Ages into early modern times.

In conclusion, therefore, the findings of this thesis call for a more nuanced and dynamic view of the role of craft guilds in late medieval urban politics. In cities where they became government institutions, as in Utrecht, their role was bound to change from being agents of popular politics and revolt in the city, to representing city government itself.

⁷ Xhayet, 'Le rôle politique', 364-365.

This, in its turn, had a large impact on their own (internal) functioning and development.⁸ The present study indicates that the episcopal city of Utrecht may have been quite exceptional: here, former patrician and ministerial families were soon after 1304 allowed to enter craft guilds and exercise political influence from within them. In neighbouring cities, this was not the case (Flemish and Brabantine cities), or not this early (episcopal cities).⁹ The practical consequences of such constitutional arrangements need to be studied more. In most cities with some kind of craft guild participation in government, however, ‘guild elites’ are known to have developed.

Exactly how exceptional the development of Utrecht’s urban politics and the role of its craft guilds was in comparison to those of other cities and towns in the Low Countries and Germany remains therefore a question that still waits for an answer. This thesis focused primarily on institutional and socio-political developments, and the related evolution of political discourse and the role of violent political action in the city. For these and other research paths that I may not be able to imagine now, I believe the groundwork has been laid.

⁸ See also, recently, Dumolyn, ‘Guild politics’; and Irsigler, ‘Zur Problematik’, 61, 68.

⁹ Compare Liège, where this happened in 1384, Cologne (1396) and Strasbourg (1362), see Xhayet, ‘Le rôle politique’; Militzer, ‘Führungsschicht und Gemeinde’; Von Heusinger, *Die Zunft*, 186-188.

