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

behorende bij het proefschrift van J. Smithuis:

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

I

Three elements were crucial in the gradual advance of craft guilds in urban politics in Utrecht: favourable political circumstances, mobilisation of the non-elite citizenry and a unified discursive strategy based on the representation of the interests of the citizenry as a whole.

II

Despite the apparent equality between the 21 ‘common guilds’ (*gemene gilden*) in Utrecht’s city constitution, save the formal differences in representation between 14 major and 7 lower guilds, the distribution of power in the city government from 1402 shows a significant informal hierarchy among the major guilds that gave more power and influence to interests of (inter)regional trade and less to primarily local economic interests.

III

The organisation of violence was a core element of the design of political action groups in the late medieval city, including that of craft guilds.

IV

Fifteenth-century faction leaders in Utrecht behaved much as aristocratic lords in the countryside in establishing their own private militias for power strife in and outside the city of Utrecht.

V

The *Dutch Beke* (ca. 1393) should be considered and studied as a Utrecht, urban chronicle rather than a regional chronicle.

VI

‘Oligarchisation’ should not be taken for granted and thus has no explanatory value for the development of urban government in the late Middle Ages; it is the changes in power distribution, political practices and discourse that need to be analysed and elucidated.

(Cf. T. Diefenbach, ‘Why Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” is not an iron law – and how democratic organisations can stay “oligarchy-free”’, *Organization studies*, first published online 5 February 2018, doi:10.1177/0170840617751007).

VII

The transformation of craft organisations into political guilds had a large impact on their functioning and internal organisation, but it did not necessarily obliterate their socio-economic character; in Utrecht, it rather strengthened it in the beginning, and afterwards, the changes were not the same in all the guilds.

(In reaction to: F. Irsigler, ‘Zur Problematik der Gilde- und Zunftterminologie’, in: B. Schweineköper [ed.], *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* [Sigmaringen 1985] 53-70, at 61.)

VIII

For craft guilds to take over local government may look like the ultimate political goal for non-elite citizens, but its success depended greatly on the guilds being able to maintain their non-elite character, which they generally did not; this calls for a reevaluation of the role of non-elite citizens in cities and towns with more limited guild participation, or with other types of burgher participation, where they were better able to keep their dual position.

(In reaction to: F. Wahl, ‘Participative political institutions in pre-modern Europe: Introducing a new database’, *Historical methods* 49 [2016] 67-79; and J. Dumolyn, ‘Guild politics and political guilds in fourteenth-century Flanders’, in: J. Dumolyn, J. Haemers, H.R. Oliva Herrer and V. Challet [eds.], *The voices of the people in late medieval Europe. Communication and popular politics* [Turnhout 2014] 15-48.)

IX

Even small differences in culture can cause great misunderstandings.