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The Antwerp clerk Jan van Boendale and the creation of a Brabantine ideology

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In March 1508, a remarkable confrontation took place in the town of Ghent, when the Estates General met to discuss the correct order of precedence during the meeting: who had the right to speak first, the deputy of Brabant or the deputy of Flanders? This was a serious question because both the honour and the potential influence of the delegations were at stake. After all, the first speaker could set the tone, and all others had to relate their point of view to his. It was therefore logical that the governor of the Habsburg Netherlands, Archduchess Margaret of Austria, ordered the Parliament of Malines to investigate the issue. The Chancellor of Brabant, Jan van der Vorst (c.1460-1509) remarked that the Brabantine deputies of course should have precedence, because:

<p>The duchy of Brabant is a very old thing, because it is the largest part of the duchy of Lorraine, which is very old, so old that it used to be a kingdom, and later an archduchy, and that many emperors and great kings have emanated from it; and the county of Flanders is very new, since not so many years ago it was a lordship governed by a forester of the King of France.</p>	<p>La duchié de Brabant est ungne chose bien ancienne car s'est ungne et de plus grandes parties de la duchié de Lothier, laquelle est toute ancienne et telle qu'elle souloit estre royaulme et après archiduchié et que hors d'icelle beaucop des empereurs et grans roys sont ysus et la conté de Flandre est chose toute nouvelle, car il n'y a point grant nombre d'ans qu'elle fust ung seigneurie gouvernee par ung forestier du roy de France ...¹</p>
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¹ Robert Wellens, "Le droit de préséance dans les assemblées des États Généraux des Pays-Bas au XVe siècle", *Anciens Pays et Assemblées d'États* 47 (1968), pp. 113-147. Quotation at p. 144. On Jan van der Vorst: Paul de Win, "Jan van de vorst (ca. 1460-1509), Kanselier van Brabant. Een casus van sociale promotie", *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 71 (1988), pp. 29-49.

Even if at this time both principalities were governed by the later Emperor Charles V, their representatives apparently continued to be identified with the history and famous princes of their own respective principalities: the Brabantine delegates with their duchy and the great kings and emperors; the Flemish, for their part, with their forester.

The quotation shows that there was more to the ideology of the representative institutions or Estates than is generally assumed. In general, scholars refer to the Latin, learned and abstract notions that form the basis of their ideology, such as the famous maxim *quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbetur* (what concerns all is to be approved by all), derived from Roman Law, or the concept of *bonum commune* (common good) used by Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, and other late medieval theorists.² Other scholars have maintained, on the basis particularly of administrative sources, that the aims of the representative institutions more or less coincided with the interests of the urban oligarchies: the maintenance of law and order and the protection of privileges and commercial interests. Most authors, furthermore, are determined that the towns' ideology is opposed to the prince.³ This latter characteristic appears not to be borne out by the confrontation in 1508: here, on the contrary, the ideology of the Estates of Brabant, the "set of cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie and thereby to some degree justify and legitimate either the status quo

² See, for instance, A. Marongiu, *Medieval parliaments. A comparative study*, Studies presented to the International commission for the history of representative and parliamentary institutions 32 (London, 1968), pp. 33-37; Antony Black, *Political thought in Europe 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 24-28 and 162-169; Janet Coleman, *A history of political thought from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 42-46; Robert Stein, Anita Boele and Wim Blockmans, "Whose community? The origin and development of the concept of Bonum commune in Flanders, Brabant and Holland (12th-15th century)", in *De bono communi. The discourse and practice of the common good in the European city (13th-16th c.) Discours et pratique du Bien Commun dans les villes d'Europe (XIIIe au XVIe siècle)*, ed. E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, A.-L. van Bruaene, Studies in European urban history 22 (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 149-169.

³ See, for instance, Jan Dhondt, "Ordres ou puissances. Études l'histoire des assemblées représentatives en Belgique du XIIe au XVIIIe siècle", in *Estates or powers. Essays in the parliamentary history of the southern Netherlands from the XIIth to the XVIIIth century*, ed. W.P. Blockmans, Anciens pays et assemblées d'États 69 (Heule, 1977), pp. 25-49 (at p. 29); W.P. Blockmans, "Representation (since the thirteenth century)", in *The new Cambridge medieval history VII, c. 1415-c. 1500*, ed. C. Allmand (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 19-64 (at pp. 50, and 53); Jan Dumolyn, "Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1384-1506)", *Urban history* 35 (2008), pp. 5-23 (at p. 22).

or movements to change it”, is related to the symbolism of dynastic history.⁴ To find an explanation for this, we should turn to literary sources.

The production of literary sources can only rarely be related to medieval or early modern representative institutions. The Estates and other representative bodies were not yet so institutionalized as to have a clearly defined administrative staff that could produce such works. In this article, I argue that the genesis of the *Brabantsche Yeeften* — “the deeds of the dukes of Brabant” — is closely related to the assumption and exercise of power by the Brabantine towns during the reign of Duke John III (r. 1312-1355), and that it was written to legitimize this situation.⁵ This chronicle is all the more interesting because the Duchy of Brabant formed part of the western Low Countries, one of the most urbanized regions of Europe, which fostered a tradition of representation going back to the twelfth century.

In order to position Jan van Boendale and his work in the political vicinity of the Brabantine Third Estate, I will start by tracing a brief biography of the author, situating him in the urban elites of the town of Antwerp. Subsequently, I will turn to the genesis and the contents of the *Brabantsche Yeeften*. Finally I will connect the genesis of this chronicle to the political events taking place during the reign of Duke John III.

Jan van Boendale

Though we possess only a few biographical data about Jan van Boendale, it is clear that his working life more or less coincided with the reign of Duke John III of Brabant. A couple of lines in a short didactic work written in 1330 provide the most concrete information we can rely on:

⁴ Allan Johnson, lemma “Ideology”, in *The Blackwell dictionary of sociology. A user's guide to sociological language* (Malden, Oxford 2000); compare the overview by Jan Dumolyn, “Urban ideologies in later medieval Flanders. Towards an analytical framework”, in *The languages of political society. Western Europe, 14th-17th centuries*, ed. A. Gamberini, J.-Ph. Genet and A. Zorzi (Rome, 2011), pp. 69-86 (at pp. 69-71).

⁵ For an overview of the history of the Estates of Brabant, see Jan Dhondt, “Les assemblées d'États en Belgique avant 1795”, in *Estates or powers. Essays in the parliamentary history of the southern Netherlands from the XIIth to the XVIIIth century*, ed. W.P. Blockmans, *Anciens pays et assemblées d'États* 69 (Heule, 1977), pp. 181-247 (at p. 185, and 209-210). For their position during the reign of John III: Piet Avonds, *Brabant tijdens de regering van hertog Jan III (1312-1356). Land en instellingen*, Verhandelingen KAWLSK, Klasse der letteren 136 (Brussels, 1991), pp. 249-250, and 221-264. The indication ‘Estates of Brabant’ dates only from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century: André Uyttebrouck, *Le gouvernement du duché de Brabant au bas Moyen Âge* (Brussels, 1975), p. 434.

I, Jan [de] Clerk salute all people who see, read, and hear this work. I was born in Tervuren, where I was called Boendale. I now live in Antwerp, where I have written the letters of the aldermen for many years.	Alle die gene die dit werk Sien, lesen ende horen, Die gruetic, Jan, gheheten Clerc, Van der Vueren gheboren Boendale heet men mi daer, Ende wone tAndwerpen nu, Daer ic ghescreven hebbe menech jaer Der schepenen brieven, dat seggic u. ⁶
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Indeed, in the surviving administrative sources of the town of Antwerp we find intermittent mention of a Jan de Clerk alias Jan van Boendale in the years between 1312 and 1365. Most scholars assume he was born in the final decades of the thirteenth century and died in 1351; the later mentions are considered to refer to a namesake. Most telling are the details in the municipal accounts for the year 1324, which is unfortunately the only year in this period from which the accounts have survived. Here it becomes clear that Boendale was the most important servant of the town, the only one who earned an annual salary of 35 livres tournois as town clerk and as steward of the cloth hall. Only the town's learned attorney, a certain Master Leonard, came close; he earned 27 livres.⁷ Boendale's high social status is confirmed by other information. In his hometown he lived next door to the wealthy merchant Herman Suderman.⁸ Boendale's two known patrons belonged to the political elite as well: Willem Bornecolve was alderman of Antwerp, whilst Rogier van Leefdaal was one of the most prominent and powerful noblemen of the Duchy of Brabant, counsellor of Duke John III, and an agent for Antwerp.⁹

⁶ Jan van Boendale, *Jans teesteye*, in *Nederlandsche gedichten uit de veertiende eeuw van Jan Boendale, Hein van Aken en anderen*, ed. F.-A. Snellaert (S.l., 1869), pp. 137-86 ll. 1-8.

⁷ F.H. Mertens, *Oudste rekening der stad Antwerpen*, Codex diplomaticus neerlandicus 2nd series 4,1 nr. 2 (Utrecht, 1857), pp. 54-55; P. Génard, "Jan van Boendale", *Het taelverbod* (1853), pp. 152-210 (at pp. 176-77).

⁸ Wim van Anrooij, "Literatuur in Antwerpen in de periode ca. 1315-1350, een inleiding", in *Al t'Antwerpen in die stad. Jan van Boendale ende literaire cultuur van zijn tijd*, ed. W. van Anrooij et al., *Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de Middeleeuwen* 24 (Hilversum, 2002), pp. 9-16.

⁹ Robert Stein, "Jan van Boendales Brabantsche Yeesten, synthese of antithese", *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 106 (1991), pp. 198-219 (at p. 187); Frits van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse letterkunde, 1300-1400* (Amsterdam, 2013), pp. 145 and 159; Avonds, *Brabant, land*, pp. 30-31.

As a town clerk, Jan van Boendale is one of the few authors of the first half of the fourteenth century who was closely connected with the urban elites and therefore with the Brabantine Third Estate. Like his colleagues in the other towns, he was involved in the deliberations of the towns and the Estates as an assistant to the aldermen. What is more, even when an alderman had the formal mandate of the town, he only held his position for one year at a time. The town clerks, on the other hand, often remained in service for very many years — as did Jan van Boendale — and amassed a great deal of knowledge, influence and power due to their long experience. In this respect, it is not surprising that they often acted as spokesmen for their towns. In Boendale's case, we know that he visited a meeting of the Brabantine towns in 1312. In 1324, he paid one visit to Leuven and eight to Brussels, where the duke resided; he also undertook several journeys to Flanders.¹⁰ These details, incomplete as they are, place Boendale at the heart of the mutual deliberations of the Brabantine towns; he must have been one of the architects of their cooperation.

The scarce evidence of Boendale's activities as a town clerk does not explain his reputation of course, which is due to the fact that he wrote several important works in Middle Dutch rhyme. There has been a long and complex discussion on the question of which works can be attributed to him. Now most scholars agree that Boendale wrote at least six works of a historiographical and/or moralizing nature (see Table 10.1).

<i>Brabantsche Yeeften</i>	1316-51 (six versions)	Rhyme chronicle on the history of Brabant
Short Chronicle of Brabant — first version	1322	First summary of the <i>Brabantsche Yeeften</i>
<i>Der leken spiegel</i>	c. 1325-30	Moralizing work
<i>Jans Teesteye</i>	c. 1330-40	Moralizing work
Short Chronicle of Brabant — second version	1332-33	Second summary of the <i>Brabantsche Yeeften</i>

¹⁰ D. Papebrochius, *Annales Antverpienses ab urbe condita ad annum MDCC*, ed. F.H. Mertens and E. Buschmann (5 vols, Antwerp, 1845-1848), I, p. 83; Jan van Boendale, *Der leken spiegel. Leerdicht van den jare 1330*, ed. M. de Vries (3 vols. Leiden, 1848), I, p. cxv; Mertens, *Oudste rekening*, passim; compare Génard, "Jan van Boendale", pp. 183-84; Geertrui van Synghel, "*Actum in camera scriptorum oppidi de Buscoducis*": *De stedelijke secretarie van 's-Hertogenbosch tot ca. 1450* (Hilversum, 2007), pp. 301-2.

<i>Van den Derden Eduwaert</i>	Post-1340	Chronicle on King Edward III of England
<i>Melibeus</i>	1342	Moralizing tale
<i>Boec van der wraken</i>	1345-51	Moralizing / historiographical work

Table 10.1 Works attributed to Jan van Boendale¹¹

To a certain extent, Boendale's urban background is obvious from his literary work, as he expresses a strict attitude toward the magistrate and its moral obligations. We often find references to the concept of *bonum commune*. In *Der leken spiegel* (Laymen's mirror) he inserted, for example, a chapter 'Hoemen een stat ofte een lantschap regieren sal' (On the way one should govern a town or country). Here, Boendale argues on the basis of Roman examples that the selfish attitude of many magistrates, rulers and their advisors is a great danger for society, and that they should be guided by the interests of the community (*gemeen orbaer*). In this respect, his work is very similar to that of many of his German colleagues.¹² On the other hand, it is striking that the town of Antwerp itself is virtually absent from his work.

To Boendale, the prince is more important than the town. This is obvious in part from passages in his didactic work. In *Der leken spiegel* he discusses how the institution of princes first came about. According to Boendale, a problem arose when villains began to terrorize the ordinary, hardworking people so they could profit from the fruits of their labour. In order to protect themselves, the people made a new law, which was to be enforced by a guardian they would appoint:

¹¹ Boendale's authorship of three other works is disputed: *Sidrac*, *Boec Exemplaar* and the *Dietsche Doctrinael*. Compare Van Anrooij, "Literatuur in Antwerpen", p. 13; Van Oostrom, *Wereld in Woorden*, p.143.

¹² Piet Avonds, "Ghemeyn oirbaer. Volkssoevereiniteit en politieke ethiek in Brabant in de veertiende eeuw", in *Wat is wijsheid? Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. J. Reynaert a.o., (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 164-80; Ursula Peters, *Literatur in der Stadt. Studien zu den sozialen Voraussetzungen und kulturellen Organisationsformen städtischer Literatur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur 7 (Tübingen, 1983), pp. 255-62; Heike Bierschwale and Jacqueline van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll. Deutsche und niederländische Stadtregimentslehren des Mittelalters, Kultureller Wandel vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit* 8 (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), passim.

<p>This is how princes arose, as I have heard: not just on their own, but because the common men elevated them to lordship, so that they would liberate and protect the people continuously from violence and outrage and ensure everyone was given his due.</p>	<p>Aldus hebbic vernomen Dat heren toe sijn comen, Niet bi hemselves allene, Maer mids den volke ghemene, Diene verhieven te herein, Om dat hi tfolc zoude vrien Ende beschermen, vrooch ende spade, Van crachte ende overdade, Ende elken tsine zoude doen gheven ...¹³</p>
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In another chapter of *Der leken Spiegel*, Boendale explicitly associates princely obligations with the care for the common good:

<p>It is not a game to be a prince, because more than anyone else they ought to be concerned about and occupied with governing the land for the common good and to the honour of God.</p>	<p>Here te sine en es gheen spel; Want hen meer dan iemanne el Altoes behoert te sine Beide in sorghe ende in pine, Hoe si dlant moghen regeren Sfolcs orbore ende te Gods eren.¹⁴</p>
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The *Brabantsche Yeesten*, written in the period between 1316 and 1351, provides a particularly good illustration of the emphasis Boendale put on the prince.

The Brabantsche Yeesten

The *Brabantsche Yeesten* is one of the major rhyme chronicles in Middle Dutch.¹⁵ In or shortly before 1316, the Antwerp alderman Willem Bornecolve, who belonged to a patrician

¹³ Boendale, *Der Leken Spieghel* I, ch. 35 ll. 55-63.

¹⁴ Ibid., III, ch. 12 ll, pp. 1-6.

¹⁵ The only available edition of the *Brabantsche Yeesten* was published in 1839 by Jan-Frans Willems (1793-1846), father of the Flemish movement. The edition perhaps has historical interest as a monument of rising Flamingantism, but is completely unsuitable for scholarly research. Willem de Vreese already noted that the edition was full of inaccuracies, often rendering the text incomprehensible: [Jan van Boendale], *De Brabantsche Yeesten: of Rymkronyk van Braband*, ed. J.F. Willems (Brussels, 1837), henceforth this edition will be referred to as *BY*; W. de Vreese, *Bouwstoffen*, in *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek*, ed. J. Verwijs and J. Verdam, 10 vols., (The Hague, 1885-1971), **X**, p. 141.

family, ordered Boendale to write a chronicle on the lineage of the dukes of Brabant. In Boendale's words:

<p>I am resolved to discover the truth, and to write in Middle Dutch rhyme about the origins of the Brabantine dukes, and about their names and the kind of life they lived, and how long they reigned.</p> <p>So you will clearly hear their descent, from their very origins, as lord Willem van Bornecolve from Antwerp asked and ordered me to.</p>	<p>[Ic hebbe] mi ghenomen ane Dat ic die waerheit wille ontdecken, Ende in Dietscher rime vertrecken Wanen die hertoghen yerst quamen; Ende mede hoe waren hoer namen; Ende wat levene si antierden; Ende hoe langhe si meest regneerden; ... Soe moechdi claerlijc verstaen Van beghinne thercomen al, Alsoe mi bat ende beval Van Antwerpen her Willem, Bornecolve noemt men hem.¹⁶</p>
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Essentially, Boendale traced the lineage of his own duke, John III of Brabant, back to the sixth century, when a certain Pippin of Landen was the first duke to reign over the region where later Brabant was situated.¹⁷ To structure the narrative, he divided his chronicle into five books, each of which treated the ancestors of the Brabantine dynasty according to their status (Table 10.2).

Book no.	Number of lines	Status of the dynasty	Time scope (approx.)
I	1701	Mayor of the Merovingian kings and dukes of Lorraine and Brabant	600-768
II	5917	Kings and emperors of the Frankish Empire and France	768-1008

¹⁶ *BYI*, ll. 10-20.

¹⁷ See *BYI*, ll. 235-59, where the regions of Brabant, Hesbaye, and the Castle of Landen are mentioned.

III	2116	Counts of Leuven	1008-1106
IV	1518	Dukes of Lower-Lorraine and Brabant	1106-1288
V	900	Threefold dukes of Lower-Lorraine, Brabant and Limburg	1288-1316

Table 10.2 Structure of the *Brabantsche Yeesten* as written in 1316¹⁸

This genealogical line enabled Boendale to emphasize the two most exemplary ‘dukes of Brabant’: Pippin III, the Short, and Charlemagne. Furthermore, he can show that the ducal dynasty had its roots in the Lower-Lorrainian soil; because he considers Brabant to be the centre of Lorraine, Boendale highlights a territorial continuity as well. In addition to all the emperors, kings, dukes and counts that stem from the dynasty, he lists the rulers over Lower-Lorraine, even when they are not directly related to the Brabantine dynasty.¹⁹ His main point, though, is that the destinies of dynasty and territory are intertwined. This is obvious when he relates that for a certain period the dynasty was deprived of its rightful possession of Lorraine — by treason of course. Happily they were united again from the days of Duke Godfrey I (r. 1095-1139):

In this way [Lower-] Lorraine fell to the dynasty to which it rightfully belonged, as Our Lord himself ordained.	Aldus quam soe Lothrike Ten rechter ore sekerlike, Daert te rechte wesen soude, Alsoet Onse Here selve woude ... ²⁰
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Boendale did not invent the genealogical structure and territorial continuity of the *Brabantsche Yeesten* himself. He translated, extended, and set to rhyme the lineages developed in a series of Latin genealogies and short chronicles, notably the *Genealogia illustrissimorum ducum Lotharingie et Brabantie*, that had been written several decades

¹⁸ The numbering of the verses in this table refers to the edition of the *Brabantsche Yeesten* by J.F. Willems.

¹⁹ *BY* II, ll. 5866-5911

²⁰ *BY* I, ll. 2099-2102.

before.²¹ The first three books are predominantly a selection derived from Jacob van Maerlant's world chronicle, the *Spiegel historiael*, which is integrated into the existing genealogical structure. The fourth book is a rhymed translation of the *Chronica de origine ducum Brabantiae*. So essentially Boendale fulfils the promise he makes in the introduction to his work: to translate the tradition of the Brabantine lineage into Middle Dutch verse. It is only from the beginning of the fifth book that Boendale addresses his own time and discusses things he has seen or heard talked about, now apparently without using other sources.

Nevertheless, we should not be deceived by the dynastic character of the *Brabantsche Yeesten*; Boendale's admiration for the dukes is conditional — and his point of view appears to be in line with the expectations of the towns as well. When he has lamented the death of Pippin III the Short, in a passage derived from Jacob van Maerlant's *Spiegel Historiael*, Boendale adds a personal note, in which he reminds princes (in general) of the obligations they have with regard to sobriety and the maintenance of justice:

<p>In this way God, comforter of all of us, elevated the Brabantine lords; for he granted them the honour because they were full of faith and virtue, and honoured the Holy Church and ever increased God's glory. If lords lived like this nowadays, God our Lord would give them fortune and victory likewise. But things have changed, and one can observe how the lords are more interested in luxury and in the possessions of their subjects than they are in dealing with justice.</p>	<p>Dus heeft God, onser alre troest, Gehoecht die Brabansche heren; Want hi gonste hen der eren, Overmids dat si in horen dagen Trouwen ende doechden plagen, Ende die heilige kercke eerden, Ende Goeds lof altoes meerden. Wouden heren alsoe noch leven God, onse Here, soude hem geven Gelucke ende sege mede, Alsoe hi desen heren dede; Mar dair uut eest al gegaen. Men siet die heren meer staen Na weelde, ende na der luden goet, Dant na gerechticheit doet.²²</p>
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²¹ Compare Robert Stein, "Brabant en de Karolingische dynastie. Over het ontstaan van een historiografische traditie", *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 110 (1995), pp. 329-51 (at p. 334).

²² *BY I*, ll. 1683-1697.

When he completed the 1316 version of the *Brabantsche Yeeften*, Boendale expressed the intention to continue his work if noteworthy developments took place, and so he did.²³ Over the following decades he added lines to his work at irregular intervals, when ordered to do so by a patron or when urged by his own enthusiasm. We can distinguish at least seven phases in the genesis of the *Brabantsche Yeeften* (see Table 10.3).

	Text of <i>Brabantsche Yeeften</i>	Year (approx.)	Subjects treated
1	Book I l. 1-book V l. 900	1316	Ancestry of Duke John III
2	Book V ll. 901-1302	1318	War against the ‘Eastlords’
3	Book V ll. 1303-1504	1324	War against the ‘Eastlords’ and the Count of Holland
4	Book V ll. 1504-2169 + an addition to book IV	1330	War against the ‘Eastlords’
5	Book V ll. 2170-3910	1335	War against the great coalition of seventeen princes
6	Book V ll. 3911-3948	1348	The coalition of John III and Edward III and the urban league between Brabantine and Flemish towns; marriage of the Duke’s children; several current issues
7	686 lines that are not included in Willems’s edition	1351	Current issues; flagellant movement

Table 10.3 Genesis of the *Brabantsche Yeeften*

In 1318, for instance, Boendale added 400 lines, and in 1324 another 200 lines, and so on until 1351. We should remember though, that the continuations are additions to the existing text of the *Brabantsche Yeeften*; for this reason, they propagate the same genealogical lines as the 1316 version.

In the continuations of 1318, 1324, and 1330, Boendale deals with the wars waged by Duke John III against a group of princes situated in the territory between the Maas and the

²³ *BY* V, ll. 877-885.

Rhine, the so-called “Eastlords” (*Oostheren*). Time and again, he tells us, the dukes of Brabant were obliged to defend their territory against the aggressive intentions of the Eastlords, and time and again they were victorious. The following quotation can serve as an example; it occurs at the end of Boendale’s account of yet another victorious campaign by the Duke and his army against the town and lordship of Fauquemont:

You Eastlords, be well aware that you would do better to let the lion sleep than to wake him, because you will be the first to pay for it if you provoke him to stretch his limbs.	Ghi oestheren, weet wel dat Ghi liet den leu slapen bat Dan ghien dicwile aldus wect Want als hi sine lede uut strect Ende ghien in die side hebt ghenoept, Soe sidi deerste diet becoept.
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Subsequently he lists all the dukes who have fought the Eastlords in the past, from Henry I (1183-90) to the reigning duke John III, who has recently conquered Sittard and Fauquemont.²⁴ The Duke is not alone in his victorious quest though, for God and his subjects help him:

Thank God for all the good things he has so often done for you; then you will prosper in the future. And thank your subjects too, lord, for you know well that there is no lord on earth who has more loyal subjects than you have, fine noble prince, as they often show you.	Ende danct Gode van dien goede Dat hi u dicke heeft ghedaen, Soe moghedi in spoede volstaen; Ende danct uwen lieden met, Here, want ghi dat wel wet, Dat here op ertrike en leeft Die ghetrouwer volc heeft, Dan ghi doet, edel prince fijn: Dat doen si u dicke wel in scijn. ²⁵
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In this same period, Boendale also drastically altered the older parts of the *Brabantsche Yeesten*. He added several chapters to book IV, elaborating on the Battle of Worringen of 1288. This was the epic battle fought by a Brabantine army, under the command of Duke

²⁴ *BYV*, ll. 2085-2168; quotation ll. 2085-2090.

²⁵ *BYV*, ll. 2324-2332.

John I, over possession of the Duchy of Limburg. The duchy's situation in the region between the rivers Maas and Rhine made this a suitable illustration of Brabantine superiority over the Eastlords.²⁶

Apart from the accounts of recent events, Boendale added two chapters at the end of his chronicle. These appear first in the 1318 version, but are also included in the 1324, 1330 and 1335 versions. Boendale simply inserted any other additions before these two final chapters, so they functioned as an epilogue to his chronicle. The chapters comprise a panegyric on the Duke and the Duchess. The first is entitled "About the ways of John III" (*Van des derden Jans seden*), the second "About his wife, good Mary" (*Van der goeder Marien sinen wive*). The chapter on John III, which numbers 58 lines, opens:

Even if this third John was young, his manners were such as is honourable for princes.	Nochtan dat dese derde Jan Van daghen was een jonc man, Soe haddy aen hem manieren Die lants heren wel tieren.
He was a severe and strict judge, and he was mighty lord of his land. He was ordinary and good-natured.	Hy rechte sterc ende sere Ende was altemale here Gheweldich van sinen lande. ²⁷

The lines go on to elaborate on the Duke's court and his generosity, thus presenting him as an ideal prince, who took care of the common good in an exemplary manner: "these are all honourable characteristics that do credit to princes".²⁸ The second new chapter is devoted to

²⁶ In the oldest version of the *Brabantsche Yeesten*, written around 1316, only 132 lines are devoted to the Battle of Worringen. Now more than 2000 lines have been added, for the most part borrowed from the fifth part of the *Spiegel historiael*, written in 1315-16 by Lodewijk van Velthem. It is likely Boendale himself made these changes, since they are handed down in three of the five surviving manuscripts, but we cannot be sure. Compare Robert Stein, "Wanneer schreef Jan van Boendale zijn *Brabantsche Yeesten*?", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 106 (1990), pp. 262-80; Wim van Anrooij, "Boendales 'Boec van der wraken'. Datering en ontstaansgeschiedenis", *Queeste* 2 (1995), pp. 40-53. Compare Dirk Schoenaers, "My es leet dat ics vergat. De vijfde partie van Lodewijk van Velthem en het vierde boek van Jan van Boendales *Brabantsche Yeesten*", in *De boeken van Velthem. Auteur, oeuvre en overlevering*, ed. B. Besamusca, R. Sleiderink and G. Warnar (Hilversum, 2009), pp. 231-50.

²⁷ Leiden University Library, Letterkunde (Ltk) 1019, fol. 155r.

²⁸ Dit sijn al seden van eeren / Die wel voegen lands heeren. Ltk 1019, fol. 188r.

John III's wife Marie d'Evreux (ll. 1303-1335), who is not just beautiful, but sober, merciful, gracious devout and mild in character as well:

Now it would be very impertinent if I were to forget the good Mary, the wife of that John I just mentioned. O deceit, I bid you to depart far from here when we speak of this woman. ... All you women should mirror yourselves in this young woman and take example from her virtue.	Nu waert grote onmate Dat ic der goeder Marien vergate, Jans wijf, dair ic af sprac nu. Alle archeyde, ic ghebiede u Dat ghij verre van hier trect Daer men van deser vrouwen spreect. ... Ghij vrouwen ghemeenlike Spieghelt u in dese joegt Ende nempt exempel aen hoer doecht. ²⁹
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These chapters are a worthy conclusion to a chronicle about the Brabantine dynasty. They underline the general purpose of the *Brabantsche Yeeften* as a chronicle on the legendary and honourable lineage of the dynasty.

Political context

The points at which Boendale started to compose his *Brabantsche Yeeften* and the later continuations were closely related to the growing political, military and financial involvement of the major towns in the ducal administration. The first version was completed in 1316, when the Duchy of Brabant had just recovered from a serious financial and political crisis. In 1288, John I of Brabant (r. 1269-94) had won the battle of Worringen. The ideological impact of this pitched battle was enormous, and it was explored in songs and chronicles for many years to come — even in the *Brabantsche Yeeften* itself, as I mentioned before. This was a great victory, certainly, but at what cost? The financial consequences were disastrous, and the elaborate lifestyle of Duke John I and his son John II (r. 1294-1312) did not improve matters. When John II died he left his duchy on the brink of bankruptcy.

The dukes' insolvency — and the commercial interests involved — resulted in a growing involvement of the Third Estate in the politics of the duchy. The commercial class of great merchants was very influential in the urban magistracies, and the major towns

²⁹ Ltk 1019, fols. 156r-156v; compare *BY* V, l. 1302 footnote.

embarked on a policy of cooperation to balance princely power. In exchange for financial support, and relief of debts, they demanded political influence.³⁰ Matters came to a head during the last month of Duke John II's reign. On 27 September 1312, John II issued the edict known as the *Charter van Kortenberg*, in which he promised "all our subjects and lands" several fiscal, juridical and administrative privileges. John's death on 27 October of the same year complicated things, as his successor was still underage. A group of powerful nobles populated the ducal council and thus filled the resulting power vacuum. If we can believe the account Boendale wrote down in his *Brabantsche Yeeften*, these unscrupulous men acted in their own interests and had no eye for the interests of the towns and the merchants.³¹ In July 1313, the major Brabantine towns — Leuven, Brussels and Antwerp among others — negotiated an urban league in order to stage a coup d'état. The text of the urban league's charter clearly illustrates their intention. It was concluded

because of the good favour and friendship we have always borne, and will continue to bear, towards our beloved lord the duke, because we observe that he is honourable and advantageous, and that he needs the unity of his land very much, and because we observe that if the good people of the country are united our lord the duke is stronger and more powerful, and all of us with him.	omme die goede jonste ende die groote vriendtschap ende trouwe die wy altoos ghedraghen hebben, ende draghen selen t'onsen lieven heere den hertoghe, ende wy sien dat grootelycks syn eere ende syn oirbore es, ende hy wale behoeft dat syn landt sta in eendrachtigheden ende in goeden poente, ende wi oock aene sien es dat sake dat de goede lieden van den lande eendrachtigh syn, ende wel overeendraghen, dat onse heere die hertoghe te starcker ende te machtiger zyn zal ende wi alle met hem. ³²
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³⁰ Raymond van Uytven, "Het gewicht van de goede steden", in *Geschiedenis van het hertogdom Brabant. Van het hertogdom tot heden*, ed. R. van Uytven (Zwolle, 2011), pp. 118-125 (at pp. 118-119); Raymond van Uytven, "Vorst, adel en steden. Een driehoeksverhouding in Brabant van de twaalfde tot de zestiende eeuw", *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 59 (1976), pp. 93-122 (at pp. 98-99).

³¹ The *Brabantsche Yeeften* itself is one of the main sources of information: BY V, ll. 711-778.

³² Edition: *Den luyster en de glorie van het hertogdom Brabant* (...) (3 vols., Brussels, 1699), I, pp. 75-76.

The quotation is revealing: the young Duke John III is considered to be the heart of the union, as the personification of the community of the land.³³

The revolt was successful, and the cooperating towns managed to instate councillors of their own choice in the ducal council and thus dominate policy until 1320 or 1321, when John III reached his age of majority. In the meantime, they reorganized ducal finances on the basis of a subsidy of 40,000 livres tournois at most. The towns provided a large part of the money due, using the common resources generated by indirect taxation, the assizes paid by the inhabitants.³⁴ Given the political circumstances in the years 1314-1320/1321, and especially the 1313 urban league, the tenor of the *Brabantsche Yeesten* is hardly surprising. The towns claimed to act in the interest of the common land; John III is put forward as the heart of their cooperation and he therefore functions as the symbol of the union. With its dynastic approach, tracing back the origins of the Brabantine house to Merovingian times, and its emphasis on famous ancestors like Charlemagne and Pippin III and on the territorial continuity going back to time immemorial, the *Brabantsche Yeesten* legitimizes the position of the young duke, heightens his prestige, and stresses the power of the unified towns. As I mentioned above, Boendale was not the first to depict the famous lineage of the Brabantine house, but his *Brabantsche Yeesten* constituted the first translation into vernacular rhyme. This enormously broadened the intended audience. Thus the chronicle underlines the unity of Brabantine society, gathered around the most tangible symbol available: the duke.

Most of the continuations can likewise be connected to the growing financial or military involvement of the towns. Duke John's finances were continuously in distress, and only with the help of his town he could pursue his ambitious international policy. The towns supported their duke by paying aids (*beden*), or by summoning the urban militias in exchange for political influence. The continuations of 1318 and 1324 coincide with the military

³³ Avonds, "Ghemeyn oirbaer", pp. 173-74.

³⁴ Jos van der Straeten, *Het charter en de Raad van Kortenberg*, Universiteit Leuven. Publicaties op het gebied der geschiedenis en der philologie, 3rd series 46, 47 (Leuven, 1952), pp. 31-32; Piet Avonds, *Brabant tijdens de regering van hertog Jan III (1312-1356). De grote politieke krisissen*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schone kunsten van België. Klasse der letteren 114 (Brussels, 1984), pp. 17-22, and 49-55; Raymond van Uytven, "Van buitengewone beden tot accijnsoctrooien in het laatmiddeleeuwse Brabant", in *Bruxelles et la vie urbaine. Archives, arts, histoire. Recueil d'articles dédiées à la mémoire de A. Smolar-Meynart*, ed. F. Daelemans and A. Vanrie (Brussels, 2001), pp. 727-48 (at p. 735 and passim); H.S. Lucas, *The Low Countries and the Hundred Years' War, 1326-1347* (Ann Arbor, 1929), pp. 102-30 and passim.

campaigns John undertook in these years at the request of and with the participation of the towns: in 1318 urban militias were involved; in 1324 the town of Antwerp paid its duke a sizeable sum.³⁵ The background of the 1330 continuation is less clear, but it may again have been prompted by new financial sacrifices on the part of the towns, even if these are not attested in other sources. This is at least what Boendale suggests when he remarks that, even if it was expensive, the campaign was glorious and sensibly executed. And “no one complains about the expense if one aims at good causes and honour”. At the same time, we can observe renewed political activity by the towns in 1332.³⁶ The 1334 continuation is doubtlessly provoked by the national enthusiasm unleashed by the successful defence of Brabantine territory and coincides with the enormous sum of 411,800 livres tournois that the towns, abbeys and the common land had to produce to meet the fines and compensations their duke had to pay according to the concluding treaty of Amiens.³⁷ Finally, the towns allowed the Duke several new financial aids in 1348, on the occasion of the marriage of his children — which is the subject of a chapter in the *Brabantsche Yeeesten*.³⁸ In this way, the *Brabantsche Yeeesten* legitimizes the financial involvement of the towns in ducal policy by glorifying the duke and stimulating the pride of the Brabantine subjects.

The genesis of the *Brabantsche Yeeesten* was clearly linked with the growing power of the Brabantine towns, and the chronicle was very popular during Boendale’s lifetime. A reconstruction shows that at least six manuscript copies were made in the first half of the fourteenth century. In addition, Boendale composed two short versions, one in 1322 and a second in 1333/1334, that have been viewed as an advertisement aimed at potential buyers of his *Brabantsche Yeeesten*.³⁹ However, in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the following century, virtually no traces of its influence can be found. It is only from 1430 onwards, when Brabant became part of the Burgundian personal union and lost its independence, that the genealogical lines, personages and events Boendale had recorded became very popular. In the 1430s and 1440s, Petrus de Thimo, pensionary of the town of

³⁵ Van Uytven, “Van buitengewone beden tot accijnsocctrooien”, pp. 734-35; Raymond van Uytven, “Edele Brabant, were di”, in *Geschiedenis van het hertogdom Brabant. Van het hertogdom tot heden*, ed. R. van Uytven (Zwolle, 2011), pp. 103-13 (at pp. 111-12).

³⁶ *BY V*, ll. 1987-1994; compare the “*boerde*” (joke), that Boendale tells *BY V*, ll. 2013-2030; for the growing involvement of the towns, see: Van der Straeten, *Het charter en de Raad*, pp. 79-82; Avonds, *Brabant, land*, pp. 249-50.

³⁷ Avonds, *Brabant, krisissen*, p. 179

³⁸ Claire Dickstein-Bernard, *La gestion financière d’une capitale à ses débuts: Bruxelles, 1334-1467* (Brussels, 1977), pp. 390-91; *BY V*, ll. 4687-4766.

³⁹ Van Anrooij, “Literatuur in Antwerpen”, pp. 10-12.

Brussels — a position comparable to that of Jan van Boendale — commissioned an unknown poet to produce a new continuation of the *Brabantsche Yeesten*, bringing the chronicle up to date, to the year 1430. Subsequently the whole work was copied to serve in the municipal secretariat of Brussels. A few years later, the famous Emond de Dynter (c. 1375-1449) used the lines developed and the texts written by Boendale for his own *Chronica nobilissimorum ducum Lotharingiae et Brabantiae ac regum Francorum*, completed in 1445 or 1446 and dedicated to the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good. Even if De Dynter made his career as secretary of the dukes of Brabant and Burgundy, he remained closely connected with the Brabantine Estates and we may assume that he expressed their views.⁴⁰

Boendale's concepts were suitable for a more general audience as well. In 1498, the *Brabantsche Yeesten* was used as the main source for *Die alder excellenste Cronyke van Brabant*, the first printed chronicle of Brabant, printed in Antwerp by Roland van den Dorpe, to be reprinted in 1512 and 1530. The coats of arms of the seventeen princes, who in 1332-34 had tasted defeat against the heroic Brabantine unity, were put on display during a procession in Leuven and during the Joyous Entry of Charles V in Bois-le-Duc in 1515. From 1448 onwards, the local guilds formed a living genealogy of the Brabantine dynasty which annually paraded through the streets of Brussels during the procession of Our Lady.⁴¹ It is therefore no coincidence that in 1508 Chancellor Jan van der Vorst used the history of the duchy and the dukes to illustrate the superiority of Brabantine representatives.

Conclusion

Only rarely can the production of a literary source be connected with representative institutions. In this article, I discussed the genesis of Jan van Boendale's *Brabantsche Yeesten* in relation to the political history of Brabant in the first half of the fourteenth century. As a town clerk, Jan van Boendale was closely related to the magistrate of Antwerp in a period of growing involvement of the Brabantine towns in national politics. Initially, in the 1316 version, the *Brabantsche Yeesten* was meant as a legitimization of the towns' revolt against a

⁴⁰ Robert Stein, *Politiek en historiografie. Het ontstaansmilieu van Brabantse kronieken in de eerste helft van de vijftiende eeuw*, *Miscellanea Neerlandica* 10 (Leuven, 1994), pp. 92-95, 101-124, and passim.

⁴¹ Robert Stein, "Seventeen. The multiplicity of a unity in the Low Countries", in *The ideology of Burgundy. The promotion of national consciousness, 1364-1565*, ed. D'A.J.D. Boulton and J. Veenstra, *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History* 145 (Leiden, 2006), pp. 223-85 (at p. 251); Jaap Tigelaar, *Brabants historie ontvouwd. Die alder excellenste cronyke van Brabant en het Brabantse geschiedbeeld anno 1500*, *Middeleeuwse studies en bronnen* 118 (Hilversum, 2006), p. 40.

group of selfish noblemen in the ducal council. The frequency of the continuations, their correspondence to the financial involvement of the towns, and the number of copies made show that the chronicle served a similar legitimizing purpose over the succeeding decades.

The views expressed in the *Brabantsche Yeesten* confirm several general assumptions scholars have made with regard to the ideology of the representative institutions. The maintenance of law and order and the importance of the *bonum commune* are both of major importance to Boendale, as is shown explicitly in his moralizing works, but implicitly also in the *Brabantsche Yeesten*. However, where this chronicle is concerned, the widely held idea that the ideology of the representative institutions was opposed to the princes can only be accepted with great caution. Boendale does not negate the prince; on the contrary, the duke is of fundamental importance as a political and symbolic focal point of society. The view expressed is understandable when one takes the political circumstances into consideration.

For the cooperating towns of Brabant it was difficult indeed to find useful symbols and concepts that could be used to reflect the abstraction of a medieval principality that they represented. The lack of tangible symbols was especially felt when they became involved in national financial and foreign policy and financed this involvement from the common purse. Jan van Boendale started to compose his *Brabantsche Yeesten* at a time when the Brabantine towns of Leuven, Brussels and Antwerp were striking a blow at the misbehaviour of members of the ducal council during a period of financial crisis. The continuations were dictated by the rhythm of the financial and military involvement of the towns. Boendale presented the outstanding dynastic history and the figure of the duke as symbols of unity and as a subject of pride, thus legitimizing the policy of the cooperating towns. With his *Brabantsche Yeesten*, Jan van Boendale struck a chord in his countrymen. Even after the Brabantine dynasty and the autonomous Duchy of Brabant had perished, in 1406 and 1430 respectively, his chronicle remained popular and still symbolized the imagined community — or perhaps it is better to speak of the imagined polity — of Brabant.

We may well wonder whether the *Brabantsche Yeesten* — and thus the Brabantine case — is unique in its dynastic approach. This appears not to be the case. A quick scan through the *Encyclopedia of the medieval chronicle* reveals that several dynastic chronicles came into being — or were adapted or continued around this time in the towns of the Low Countries. In about 1300, for instance, Melis Stoke, who acted as a secretary not only to the count of Holland, but also to the magistrate of the town of Dordrecht, composed a continuation of the existing *Rijmkroniek van Holland*. More than a century later, a town secretary of Delft probably wrote the so-called *Goutsch Cronijxcken*. In the late fifteenth century, several

versions of the *Flandria generosa* were written in the Flemish towns, and the official rhetorician of Bruges, Anthonis de Roovere, wrote a continuation to it.⁴² Further research may show whether the circumstances of their development are comparable to those of the *Brabantsche Yeeesten*.

⁴² See the lemmas “Rijmkroniek van Holland”, “Goutsche Cronijxcken” and “Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen”, written by Jan Burgers, Antheun Janse and Johan Oosterman in *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. G. Dunphy (Leiden, Boston, 2010).