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# SPIES, INSTIGATORS, AND TROUBLEMAKERS:

## *Gendered Perceptions of Rebellious Women in Late Medieval Flemish Chronicles*

Lisa Demets

*Women's participation in medieval revolts has puzzled many scholars. Recent consensus is that women in the Low Countries were involved in a variety of insurgent activities, apart from violent actions. In this article, I will turn to a lesser-used source to investigate the different and often violent roles women played in various forms of sedition, factional wars, and uprisings in the late medieval County of Flanders. Chronicles have often been dismissed as unreliable. However, they offer an indirect insight into the stereotyped aspects of female and male roles in revolts. Various Flemish chroniclers point to the danger of female spies and secret messengers, particularly to the influence of the wives of aldermen on urban politics. These women were not described as anomalies. On the contrary, their capacity to disturb political order is a recurrent theme in narrative sources.*

### Introduction

On October 28, 1322, Jacquette Espilliet and Margot Cauche disrupted the peace of the marketplace in Douai and instigated the commune to attack the grain merchants. After the riot, both women were banished, along with sixteen men.<sup>1</sup> Because of their “bad words,” their tongues were cut off, a typical punishment in Flemish customary law for initiating a riot.<sup>2</sup> In Ypres a century later on January 13, 1429, Marie van Coyeghem was banished from the County of Flanders “*up den pit*,” meaning she would be buried alive if she returned.<sup>3</sup> Marie had sung a political song disgracing the aldermen of Ypres. Both of these cases highlight the participation of medieval women in insurgent activities in late medieval Flemish cities. Nevertheless, examples of rebellious women can scarcely be found in registers of the juridical prosecutors or aldermen. Recent research for the nearby Duchy of Brabant has highlighted the presence of women in these sources.<sup>4</sup> Their statistical role, however, seems to be minimal; five percent of the criminal cases in Brabantine towns dealt with female criminals of all sorts, and only ten percent of the cases concerning political slander involved women.<sup>5</sup> Researchers have thus concluded that some female rebels

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did participate in insurgent activities in late medieval towns, but caution that these women were exceptional.

In recent years, researchers have contested the assumption that women's absence in criminal records was related to the fact that women were simply less violent than men.<sup>6</sup> Administrative or judicial sources offer only fragmented and biased information because these documents only processed and recorded convicted women, not all women committing crimes. What Natalie Zemon Davis noted for the early modern period seems to apply to the Middle Ages as well: women may rarely appear in judicial sources for medieval revolts simply because judicial authorities were less willing to prosecute women.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in this contribution, I will address the issue of women's roles during revolts from another perspective. Although an analysis of administrative and judicial sources is indispensable, I will focus on chronicles to address the issue. Chronicles have often been dismissed as unreliable, but administrative sources are equally biased. There is a clear gender bias in the legal process; the juridical prosecutors, the aldermen, and even the clerks writing the reports were all men.

Historiographical or narrative sources could, therefore, offer an equally relevant insight into the stereotyped role divisions between men and women in various urban conflicts. Specialists in medieval revolts such as historian Samuel Cohn too easily concluded that medieval women were first and foremost described as victims of revolts in chronicles, not as active participants.<sup>8</sup> Literary historians like Herman Pleij have pointed out the recurrent theme of the "angry woman or wife" in medieval literature.<sup>9</sup> Both literary tropes (the victim and the angry wife) have been related to the overall misogyny in the Middle Ages. This explanation seems simplistic and ahistorical. I will show how such literary tropes reflect late medieval political ideology on the one hand and refer to real and recurrent political actions of women in medieval revolts on the other.

To do so, I will focus on the late medieval County of Flanders—and the city of Bruges in particular—as case studies from this region can contribute to the current debate in a specific way. Based on historical research, scholars agree that medieval women in the County of Flanders (in the large commercial towns in particular) had a relatively better legal and social status than their female counterparts in Southern Europe. This was related to a combination of various factors: the specific marriage pattern (Flemish women usually waited until their early twenties to take a husband); the typical organization of the household (limited to the nuclear family); the importance of customary law (both girls and boys had similar hereditary rights, in contrast to the Roman law); and the high level of commercialization of the region.<sup>10</sup> Of course, there are other aspects to consider. Flemish

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girls enjoyed the same elementary education as boys from the late thirteenth century onwards. As a result, Flemish women were able to read, write, and count just as well as most men.<sup>11</sup> Women could obtain individual citizenship in late medieval Flemish towns. In some cities, such as Bruges and Ghent, female citizens could even grant their foreign-born husbands citizenship.<sup>12</sup> Women could also join craft guilds and religious confraternities (up to certain levels) and were involved in the shops and taverns of their husbands, resulting in various independent widows continuing the family business after the death of their spouses. In short, women were overall more present in the public sphere in the County of Flanders.

Historians currently tend to agree that women's roles were more and more constricted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the County of Flanders, and in the Southern Low Countries in general.<sup>13</sup> However, Flemish women never lost their ability to move and work in public spaces. In 1567, the Italian merchant Lodovico Guicciardini still emphasized the—in his eyes, remarkable—public engagement of women in the Southern Low Countries: “They [these women] are very plain and occupied and always busy, not only with housekeeping, which is of little interest to men, but they are equally involved in buying and selling goods, and using their hands and mouth, taking part in all other male affairs.”<sup>14</sup> Guicciardini even pointed at the potential danger of female insurgency, directly related to this public visibility: “This practice, when associated with natural female ambition, makes them far too bossy, in some cases too quarrelsome, and far too proud.”<sup>15</sup> Were medieval Flemish women too quarrelsome?

Also, the available narrative source material for the County of Flanders is exceptionally rich. In this article, I will focus on examples of Flemish urban historiography, i.e., chronicles written by and for city-dwellers dealing with the history of the town in a specific or a broader way: the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen* (the Excellent Chronicle of Flanders), the Diary of the Bruges notary Rombout de Doppere, and the anonymous *Boeck van al 't gene datter gheschiedt is binnen Brugghe sichtent jaer 1477 tot 1491* (Book of Everything that happened in Bruges between 1477 and 1491).<sup>16</sup> These chronicles were all written in the city of Bruges, one of the largest commercial towns in Flanders, at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>17</sup> They are each connected to the Flemish Revolt against the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian of Austria (1482–1492).<sup>18</sup> In 1482, Maximilian claimed the regency over his son, the Burgundian heir, Philip the Fair, after the death of his wife, Mary of Burgundy. This regency was highly contested in the County of Flanders, resulting in a civil war which lasted for almost ten years. The narrative sources under scrutiny here are embedded in this conflict. For instance, some particular manuscripts of the *Excellente Cronike* were written by late medieval rebels.

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One manuscript was written in 1485 by Jacob van Malen, a Bruges cloth seller engaged in the revolt. At the time of writing, Jacob van Malen was imprisoned in the Tower of Burgundy in Sluis, nearby Bruges, by Maximilian's troops.<sup>19</sup> Other *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts were indirectly related to the wider social and political network of anti-Habsburg factions in Bruges. Together, these chronicles provide us with an interesting inside perspective from (male) urban rebels on the presence and position of female insurgent actors during various revolts and conflicts.

### **Women and Revolt in the Middle Ages: A Turbulent Historiography**

Twentieth-century political historians have struggled to acknowledge medieval women's roles in the politics behind revolts. They have interpreted the so-called premodern revolts (before the French Revolution) first and foremost as food riots, and women's participation in them as understandable since "protecting the hearth" was in their biological nature.<sup>20</sup> By inciting a mob against the grain merchants, Jacquette Espilliet and Margot Cauche were thus merely answering their instinctive need to protect their offspring from starvation. According to this view, there was no underlying political discontent in women's insurgent activities in the *Ancien Régime*. Historian Charles Tilly criticized this division between modern and premodern revolts by emphasizing the equally ritualized and political aspects of the "premodern" riot.<sup>21</sup> This view has led even further to the marginalization of female rebels in historical research. Medieval historians Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers argued that for the Low Countries, the absence of women in medieval uprisings was related to the male-centered organization of the craft guilds, which were often the breeding ground for urban discontent.<sup>22</sup> Cohn concluded that most women did not act as insurgents, but rather as counter-revolutionaries supporting the princely regime in Italian city revolts, as women were excluded from the political networks in Italian factional conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

Recent research on insurgent activities has focused more on speech acts, with the illicit speech of ordinary men and women excluded from the dominant political classes receiving new attention. This has resulted in greater visibility of female rebellious behavior. Women's speech was especially recognized as capable of destabilizing authoritative discourses and power structures.<sup>24</sup> During the Late Middle Ages, women were severely punished for speaking contentiously in public, which the earlier case of Marie van Coyeghem illustrates. Medieval historian Ellen Kittell showed how the Southern Low Countries were characterized by an increasing prosecution of female slander and insurgency in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup>

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Although literary historian Mary-Catherine Bodden related this increased prosecution to the conservative patriarchal repression strategies of the public authorities, Haemers and medievalist Chanelle Delameillieure pointed to the potential threat of sedition and transgression of existing political boundaries that both ordinary men and women posed.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in the case of the Southern Low Countries, gender historian Jonas Roelens, among others, has recently questioned to what extent these prosecutions reflect a limitation (or “repression”) of women’s public activities or, if they reflect, instead, women’s omnipresence in the public sphere.<sup>27</sup>

Women’s unruly speech acts are only one aspect of voicing discontent. Both the sources and histories characterize physical violence as a predominantly masculine activity, while they interpret other “more gentle” forms of contention and resistance as more favorable for female participation. I will illustrate how late medieval urban chroniclers in Flanders—who were, as far as we know, all men—did recount the violent participation of women in revolts. After a thorough reading of the chronicles mentioned above, while relating these accounts to their specific political writing context (discourse analysis), I argue that these urban historiographical sources reveal the diverse roles women could play in revolts. First, there were the various narratives of female violence and gendered weaponry such as *mortierstocken* (mortar pestles) that Flemish women typically used. These urban chroniclers did not mark these violent women as “exceptional,” but considered it rather obvious that women equally took up tasks during revolts or sieges. Second, a recurrent theme in these urban chronicles is the lack of prosecution of female spies and messengers. Third and finally, women entered the stage as political actors equally capable of disturbing political order. Women’s access to power, however, is always considered subversive by these chroniclers. The stories of powerful women within the network of rebels plotting murder reflected real anxieties of both readers and writers of the examined chronicles in late medieval Flemish urban society.

### **Beyond Literary Constructs: Women as Innocent Pawns or Violent Players?**

Medieval women often were represented as victims of violent conflicts in the chronicles under scrutiny here. In the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*, women were frequently described as the victims of rape and pillaging. Narrating the Ghent war of the 1380s in Flanders, for instance, the Bruges chroniclers of the *Excellente Cronike* described in detail how Ghentenars “pillaged and raped women and abducted the rich daughters in the cities of Alost and Dendermonde.”<sup>28</sup> I tend to examine such descriptions as liter-

ary tropes, without minimizing the actual violence against women during medieval conflicts. The allegory of the female body was an important aspect of late medieval urban political culture, especially in the Low Countries. One of the most omnipresent political allegories in the Flemish cities from the late fourteenth century on was the representation of the city as a virgin, the so-called city maiden.<sup>29</sup> Women's bodies represented the integrity of the community. The violation of this integrity, the urban privileges or its territory, can thus be symbolized by the violation of the female body itself. Accounts of sexual assault of women served as a means to demonize the enemy. As is the case here: the Bruges political elite was the main audience of these *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts, and the Bruges ruling elite opposed the revolt instigated by the Ghentenars in the 1380s, which explains the anti-Ghent perspective.

The consistent recording of sexual violence against women by medieval chroniclers could have underlying meanings. A similar discursive strategy of demonizing the adversary because of their actions towards women can also be illustrated by a late fifteenth-century example. In the *Boeck van al 't gene*, the anonymous chronicler narrates how in October 1490—towards the end of the Flemish Revolt against Maximilian of Austria in Bruges—four Bruges burgher women were violated on their way from Damme to Bruges by “the German enemies.” Their clothes were cut in pieces, and they were forced to walk half naked to Bruges. The Bruges chronicler did not hide his contempt for the actions of the Habsburg army, which he described as “impudent.”<sup>30</sup>

Although recent research tends to see the use of physical violence as an exclusively male activity, violent women are omnipresent in the *Excellente Cronike*. However, the method of violence and, in particular, their access to arms was gendered. The fifteenth-century *Excellente Cronike* describes how some women attacked the Count of Flanders and his army with pestles, wounding his knight's horses during the Revolt of Maritime Flanders against Count Louis of Nevers (1323–1328). The women did this “with such force and strength” that the prince was forced to retreat.<sup>31</sup> Again, we should be careful interpreting this passage: the city of Bruges sided with the peasants against Count Louis of Nevers, who is depicted negatively in these Bruges chronicles. The fact that the army of the count was defeated by a female crowd could also be an insult towards the Count of Flanders.

Female violence was clearly not a taboo in the late medieval chronicles under scrutiny here. Moreover, women were largely involved with the defense of the city during revolts or sieges. The *Excellente Cronike* frequently recites how female burghers stayed in the city to protect it from invaders during armed confrontations. During the Ghent war against Flemish Count

Louis of Male and the Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold (1379–1385), for instance, militias led by Ghent patricians left the city to conquer the surrounding smaller towns of Nevele and Deinze. According to the *Excellente Cronike*, the Ghent women stayed in the city to protect the marketplace, the walls, and the gates.<sup>32</sup> In the Bruges revolt of 1436–1438, the *Excellente Cronike* describes how in 1437, the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good approached the city of Bruges with his army. Simultaneously, Bruges women initiated the disruption and encouraged their husbands to go armed to the market square.<sup>33</sup> In 1479, during the war between the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian of Austria and Louis XI of France, the chronicle describes how both men and women from Aardenburg defended the city against the French army.<sup>34</sup> Some years later, in 1488 during the Flemish Revolt, the *Excellente Cronike* narrates how the women in Damme, a port city outside of Bruges, killed many “enemies” by throwing cobblestones and rocks from the city walls onto the Habsburg troops.<sup>35</sup> According to the *Boeck van al 't gene*, on August 28, 1490, towards the end of the Flemish uprising, the Bruges city government ordered that all the city gates should be guarded by at least two women.<sup>36</sup> Most noteworthy is that these women were expected “to be armed,” probably referring to iron weaponry, in contrast to most descriptions where medieval women were only mentioned using sticks (particularly the pestles from mortars, a kitchen tool) or stones.<sup>37</sup>

A particularly interesting event took place, not in one of the major Flemish towns, but in Nieuwpoort, a small port city by the North Sea. This event was recorded around 1495 in only one manuscript of the *Excellente Cronike*, which was commissioned and owned by a burgomaster of Nieuwpoort, Jacob Meeze.<sup>38</sup> This manuscript has an extended eyewitness report of the June 1489 Siege of Nieuwpoort. At the time, Nieuwpoort sided again with the Habsburg party. Leading the revolt and supported by a French army, the Flemish towns of Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres tried to regain control of the port city. This contemporary manuscript mentions how women played a leading role in the defense of the city. The Nieuwpoort women not only prepared kettles full of tar, but they also threw the heavy kettles on the French mercenaries.<sup>39</sup> Other women armed themselves with pestles or filled pots with ashes and all kinds of iron objects to hurl at the soldiers. As the chronicler describes, the ash was meant to blind the soldiers, the iron to wound them. The chronicler praises the women for their inventiveness. Their participation in the defense of the city did not seem anything other than normal to the writer.



## Female Spies and Secret Messengers in Late Medieval Flanders

Recurrent themes in these chronicles point toward specific tasks attributed to women in revolts. Women were regularly occupied with defending the city, and pestles were gendered weapons clearly associated with female aggression.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it is striking how often women are described as secret messengers or informants.<sup>41</sup> The fifteenth-century *Excellente Cronike* narrates how in May 1302, at the onset of the Bruges Matins or Good Friday revolt, the French regent Jacques de Châtillon entered the city of Bruges with his French troops. An English knight informed his innkeeper's wife about de Châtillon's plans to slaughter the Bruges inhabitants. The innkeeper's wife in turn warned the Bruges militia who had fled the city the night before de Châtillon's arrival. At night, the Bruges citizen soldiers successfully re-entered the city and slaughtered the French army. In the early fourteenth-century chronicles—the most reliable eyewitness for the Bruges Matins is an anonymous Ghent Franciscan monk who wrote the *Annals of Ghent* around 1310—this story is completely absent.<sup>42</sup>

The theme of the wife as informant pops up in various stories in the fifteenth-century *Excellente Cronike*. In a similar way, a woman warned the Bruges troops that the Ghentenars were planning to lay siege during the previously mentioned Flemish Coast Uprising in 1327.<sup>43</sup> In the contemporary fourteenth-century accounts of the Cistercian monk from the Clairmarais Abbey, Bernard of Ypres and his continuation of the *Flandria Generosa A*, the story is absent. This is odd, as the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen* in which the story appears was based on his text.<sup>44</sup> The sudden occurrence of this literary trope in these late fifteenth-century chronicles can be explained in various ways. The contemporary fourteenth-century chronicles were written by clerics, whereas the *Excellente Cronike* was written by and destined for urban milieus. Overall, these urban writers gave more attention to women, who entered the stage as informants on multiple occasions and often determined a crucial outcome of the uprising.

Moreover, the presence of female informants hints at an actual problem specific to the late fifteenth-century political situation in the County of Flanders. Like the *Excellente Cronike*, the *Diary of Rombout de Doppere* offers an eyewitness account of the turbulent events during the uprising against the Habsburg archduke, Maximilian of Austria, in Bruges at the end of the fifteenth century. Rombout de Doppere narrates how various women were caught carrying letters from the archduke addressed to his allies and "some good friends" in Bruges.<sup>45</sup> According to de Doppere, these women were examined (tortured), but not prosecuted. The chronicler clearly disagreed with this policy of the rebellious regime in Bruges. He continues

by saying that these women should have been punished more severely, as women were frequently mobilized by the archduke's party to stay in contact with their supporters in Bruges.<sup>46</sup> Another contemporary anonymous eyewitness source, the *Boeck van al 't gene*, points to the same problem. The chronicler mentions that, on June 16, 1488, a female messenger was caught carrying various letters from Tournai to Bruges. In this particular case, the woman was punished with public humiliation on the scaffold.<sup>47</sup> The role of female spies and messengers has lately received some attention in historical research for the early modern period, but for the Middle Ages, research is again limited.<sup>48</sup> Still, female messengers and spies were not an anomaly in the Middle Ages, nor were they restricted to the Low Countries. In 1269, a list of the spies of the commune of San Gimignano in Northern Italy was incorporated in a memorial book.<sup>49</sup> Nearly all of the spies on that list were women.

The Flemish chronicle writers cite the lack of severe penalties for female spies. Rombout de Doppere argued that "they [the city government] should prosecute her in order for things to change."<sup>50</sup> This correlates with existing research on female spies in other periods. Considered as marginal to political organizations, women were less likely to be stopped and examined when entering or leaving the city. This had some odd consequences such as male-to-female crossdressing. The *Boeck van al 't gene* mentions how wanted men were often caught trying to leave the city dressed as women. On August 7, 1490, a former alderman of Bruges, Jacob van Ghuleken, was caught dressed as a woman trying to leave the city while pretending he was going to the city of Tiel to buy butter with some merchant women.<sup>51</sup> On November 21 of that same year, the "enemies" (i.e., the Habsburg troops) tried to enter Bruges dressed as women while carrying baskets full of fish to sell at the market.<sup>52</sup>

These contemporary cases point to a supposed gendered difference in medieval prosecution. Still, there is no direct indication of an official policy of tolerance towards female criminals in the Middle Ages. In his *Corte instructie in materie criminele* (*Instruction on Criminal Justice*) published in 1510, the Flemish jurist Filips Wielant did not imply special treatment for women.<sup>53</sup> For instance, wives should be tortured first (while their husbands stood by).<sup>54</sup> Only pregnant women should be excluded from torture.<sup>55</sup> For the crime of "conspiracy against the prince," Wielant even suggested that women should be punished more harshly than men because it is "more horrible for women to commit such a crime than men."<sup>56</sup> Medieval reality, however, seems to have been less straightforward than Wielant's juridical instructions might suggest. During the Bruges uprising of 1436–1438, the Great Council of Bruges—a political body with a large number of craft guilds

represented and in charge during the uprising—decided on April 22, 1437, to prohibit the questioning of women in torture procedures.<sup>57</sup>

Although the Bruges notary Rombout de Doppere complained about the lack of punishment for women during the Flemish Revolt, the *Boeck van al 't gene* in contrast discusses the various prosecutions of women in the most rebellious period of the uprising in Bruges between 1488 and 1490. On February 26, 1488, while the Habsburg archduke was imprisoned in the Craenburg house at the market square, a rack was moved from the Belfry “to torture and examine some women.”<sup>58</sup> Most of the cases mentioned by the *Boeck van al 't gene* were women accused of deviant speech. Furthermore, these insurgent women were always mentioned anonymously, whereas men were mentioned by name in similar cases. For instance, on May 6, 1488, Pieter van Ghend and an anonymous woman were tortured for speaking “offensive words against various inhabitants of the city of Bruges.”<sup>59</sup> The woman was publicly humiliated on the scaffold and banished, whereas Pieter van Ghend was set free. The chronicle does not mention why their punishment differed, but it could mean the woman played a more leading role. Another typical but less severe penalty for “loose-tongued” contentious women was “to wear the stone.” Burdened with heavy stones, these women had to walk through the city, often jeered at by the urban crowd.<sup>60</sup> On July 19, 1488, two women were forced to “wear the stone” because of “various offensive words.”<sup>61</sup> Still, it would be too bold to conclude from these case studies in the *Boeck van al 't gene* that the rebellious regime of 1488—the year the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian was imprisoned in Bruges—punished women more frequently and severely than had previous city governments; it might be a case of this particular chronicler’s greater interest as opposed to an increased frequency of punishment.<sup>62</sup>

### **Women as Instigators in Factional Conflict: Gertrude de Scuetelare in the Bruges Revolt (1436–1438)**

As previously mentioned, female spies and messengers were used by the Habsburg party to stay in contact with their allies in Bruges. Since the Flemish Revolt was rooted in an internal urban factional war between supporters and adversaries of the Habsburg rule, an investigation of women’s roles in factional struggles in these chronicles might prove useful. The notary Rombout de Doppere described a specific case of a woman explicitly supporting the Habsburg party in 1482 by wearing clothes with the Habsburg coats of arms. She was publicly speaking “very fierce and bad words.” The woman was arrested but later released through the mediation of a nobleman.<sup>63</sup> It is interesting in the context of factional politics that she

was wearing visible Habsburg heraldic signs on her clothes. Members of different factions often proclaimed association by ostentatiously wearing the clothes of their chosen factions.<sup>64</sup> This case clearly demonstrates that such practices were not limited to men, and that women, who were not strangers to public, populated spaces sent a message that could not be ignored.

Yet, the role of women in factionalism has been minimized by several researchers.<sup>65</sup> Cohn contends that women's remarkable participation and leadership in popular revolts began in the sixteenth century, resulting from the growth of stronger, more repressive states that pressured men and families to rely more heavily on their kinswomen, who might be treated more indulgently than their male relatives.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, far more scholarly attention has been given to women's political roles in revolts in the early modern period than in the Middle Ages.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, some cases under scrutiny here point to a political role for elite women in factional war as early as the fifteenth century. An important aspect of factional alliance is marriage, as factional members were often related through familial ties.<sup>68</sup> The influence of the ruling elites' wives and daughters on political offices has been sufficiently investigated at the highest political level, such as kingdoms, duchies, and counties.<sup>69</sup> Remarkably, this has not yet been applied to the local political elite. The social standing and authority of the wives and daughters of burgomasters and aldermen should be considered as well.

Chronicles frequently describe women in a leading role in medieval *vendetta*. Recent research has illuminated the function of Florentine women in the Guelf-Ghibelline factional war in Giovanni Villani's chronicle.<sup>70</sup> There are various examples from the Low Countries as well: literary *exempla* warning aldermen against the interference of their wives or other female relatives in urban politics. As mentioned previously, the literary trope of the "bad wife" is omnipresent in medieval narrative sources, but this motif has often been too quickly interpreted by scholars as an indication of general misogyny. However, the continuous focus on wifely interference, especially in fifteenth-century chronicles, might point to an actual problem medieval writers wanted to address. Stories warning against the political interferences of wives in urban politics reflect actual anxieties in urban society.

In the Duchy of Brabant, we find this literary trope in the fifteenth-century continuation of the *Brabantse Yeesten*, written in the networks of the Brussels city government. On March 26, 1388, an old war hero and wealthy patrician of the city of Brussels, Everard t'Serclaes was attacked, mutilated—they cut off his foot and removed his tongue—and left to die by confidants of Sweder of Abcoude, Lord of Gaasbeek.<sup>71</sup> In the description of this event in the fifteenth-century version of the *Brabantse Yeesten*, it is not Sweder but his wife, Anna van Leiningen, who is blamed as the mastermind behind the

attack.<sup>72</sup> The theme of the wife as instigator of violent factional wars was also physically present in the town hall of another Brabantine city. In 1468, the city council of Leuven ordered a diptych with a unique theme by the famous painter Dirk Bouts: the Justice of Emperor Otto III.<sup>73</sup> The emperor, on the bad advice of his wife, sentenced an innocent count to death. The painting was destined for the new town hall in Leuven and hung there for several years. Such justice panels were typical for the cities of the Low Countries and were made as warnings for the aldermen against vices such as corruption and injustice.<sup>74</sup> The aldermen of Leuven were warned against not only wifely interference, but also general female guidance in politics.

Turning our focus back to the County of Flanders, similar exempla can be found in the chronicles under scrutiny here. The most remarkable case is apparent in two manuscript versions of the *Excellente Cronike*. These manuscripts memorialize the same rebellious woman, Gertrude de Scuetelare.<sup>75</sup> As the *Excellente Cronike* was intended for the ruling elite of Bruges at the end of the fifteenth century, the story probably served as some kind of negative *exemplum iustitiae* similar to the justice panel of the Leuven city government. There are, however, also contemporary indications that Gertrude was involved in the Bruges revolt of 1436–1438.

In 1436, Bruges stood up against the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good.<sup>76</sup> This uprising was rooted in an internal factional conflict in Bruges itself. On August 26, 1436, the sheriff, Eustachius Brix, was killed by an angry mob. The unrest had been ongoing for several months as a consequence of the disappointment after the failed siege of Calais and the costs of defending the nearby port Sluis against the English fleet. On April 18, 1437, events escalated. The burgomaster of the aldermen, Morissis of Varsenare, was killed in the marketplace in Bruges along with his brother Jacob. Morissis and Jacob belonged to a faction strongly tied to the Burgundian duke. They had outspoken pro-French connections and were opposed to any treaty with England. Meanwhile, another party gained influence in Bruges, merely by siding with the craft guilds. Vincent de Scuetelare should be considered their unofficial leader, as he was appointed Bruges Captain during the revolt. His sister Gertrude was married to the burgomaster of the commune, Lodewijk van de Walle. The Scuetelares were an influential and wealthy Bruges family of innkeepers and brokers ("*hosteliers*") with strong commercial trade connections in England.<sup>77</sup>

The *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts offer an interesting version of the immediate cause of Burgomaster Morissis of Varsenare's death. Explaining the inclusion of this anecdote in the *Excellente Cronike*, the scribe based the reliability of his story on his first-hand sources: "Because there was such secret envy between the families of Bruges to rule, this resulted in great

sorrow as you can read hereafter. None of this was publicly revealed, it is nonetheless true, because I, who wrote this, was informed by those who were kin and blood of the instigators of this horrifying evil."<sup>78</sup> The Bruges discord reflected the internal tensions between the Bruges clans or, as the scribe phrases it, the mutual envy between the power-hungry patrician families. A leading role in this plot was awarded to a family member of the previously mentioned de Scuetelare family, Gertrude de Scuetelare, the sister of the Bruges Captain Vincent. As stated in the *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts, Gertrude envied the Varsenares who attained noble rank due to their relationship with the duke and the many seigneuries they controlled. Her husband, the second burgomaster Lodewijk van de Walle, who was related to the Varsenares, had an inferior rank and political position.

The *Excellente Cronike* tells how Gertrude initiated peace negotiations with the Duke of Burgundy by sending him several letters urging him to invite her husband to the negotiating table.<sup>79</sup> In this way, Gertrude wanted to secure the positions of her husband, her son Joos, and her brother Vincent after the revolt. Lodewijk van de Walle was sent to the duke who, upon his advice, agreed—according to the writer—to a detrimental peace treaty between Bruges and Duke Philip the Good. However, Gertrude's plan failed. Duke Philip sent for the first burgomaster, Morissis of Varsenare, to ask his opinion on the matter. When Morissis heard of his cousin's actions, he immediately confronted Lodewijk. Afterwards, Lodewijk informed his wife, and Gertrude immediately summoned her brother Vincent and gave him the order to kill the burgomaster. According to the text, she said: "This Morissis should be assaulted as quickly as possible, and beaten to death before he reveals to the commune the counsel we have decided, or otherwise we shall all be dead people."<sup>80</sup> Subsequently, Vincent de Scuetelare gathered the most cruel men of Bruges, the scribe continues, and convinced them to kill the burgomaster, claiming falsely that Morissis was meeting secretly with the duke.

On April 18, 1437, de Scuetelare and his allies killed not only the burgomaster, but also his brother Jacob. In response, Philip the Good moved his troops to Bruges. The resultant violent conflict lasted for months, but in the first months of 1438, Bruges finally surrendered to the duke. Heavy repercussions followed. Many insurgents were executed, and even more were banished for life. Both Joos van de Walle and Vincent de Scuetelare were beheaded on the scaffold at the marketplace. Interestingly, both Lodewijk van de Walle and Gertrude de Scuetelare were banished, which may indicate that Gertrude was perceived as being part of the conspiracy immediately after the revolt. Indeed, both Lodewijk and Gertrude were mentioned in a

pardon letter some years later and even received a yearly income, so they did not have to live in poverty after the confiscation of their goods.<sup>81</sup>

The *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts offer an alternative course of events. According to these manuscripts, Gertrude and Lodewijk were both imprisoned in the Castle of Wijnendaele, outside the city, and the Great Council of the duke sentenced Gertrude to death, but “because of her female dignity,” she was discharged by the intercession of the Lord of Cleves (and other courtiers, both noblewomen and noblemen). The writer clearly disagreed with this minimum penalty. The chronicler states that “she should have been beheaded like a man.”<sup>82</sup> This refers to the death penalty difference between men and women in Flemish customary law: women were buried alive, whereas men were hanged or beheaded (depending on their social status).<sup>83</sup> After this, the chronicler emphasized the exemplary function of Gertrude by continuing with, “and she should have been buried at the marketplace and on her gravestone should be written: *‘Here lies a fierce woman, who by means of her viciousness brought the prince in fear of his life, and to the city of Bruges she brought great discord.’*”<sup>84</sup>

This source clearly sees Gertrude, not Lodewijk, as the principal agent in this affair. Gertrude is thus staged as the main character in the family feud setting the cousins against each other, whereas her husband and her brother (who in reality had at least a leading role in the uprising) were merely functioning as her spokespersons. Of course, the story of Gertrude, similar to the justice panel by Dirk Bouts, is embedded in old literary and biblical tropes.<sup>85</sup> The role of Gertrude as the main conspirator and mastermind behind the murder of the Bruges burgomaster is certainly exaggerated and served other causes. Most likely, it minimized the roles of her husband and brother—the de Scuetelare and van de Walle family remained an important Bruges family throughout the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, she was certainly involved in the factional conflict within Bruges, as she was included with those punished after the revolt. The specific case of Gertrude was thus made into an example, a warning against the general interference of female kin in urban politics. The *Excellente Cronike* writers—like other contemporaries such as Rombout de Doppere and the anonymous writer of the *Boeck van al ‘t gene*—were clearly frustrated that women were less harshly punished for their involvement in revolts than men. The inclusion of this case in some late fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Excellente Cronike* could only have had actual meaning if it implies that there were indeed women interfering too much in urban politics in late-fifteenth century Bruges. In other words, the exemplum of Gertrude provided insight into existing contemporary problems, such as during the Flemish Revolt at the end of the fifteenth century, the historical context in

which these *Excellente Cronike* manuscripts were written. Unfortunately, it is hard to find more evidence referring to these women, who often operated in the shadows of urban politics.

## Conclusion

Contemporary urban historiographical texts and chronicles, written by city-dwellers in particular, had a lively interest in the urban revolts of late medieval Flanders. These medieval writers clearly did not see women as anomalies in their stories. Although scholarship has often categorized these rich sources as nothing more than "fictions," such narrative sources can offer a fruitful insight into the mindset of urban rebels, reflecting actual social anxieties towards female political interference and violence. On several occasions in the Bruges chronicles under scrutiny here, almost unconsciously to the male writers, women enter the scene as violent insurgents. The *Excellente Cronike*, for instance, mentions various groups of anonymous women fighting for their cause. Nevertheless, there are clear literary *topoi* concerning female rebellious behavior. This demonstrates the significance of women as symbols through which medieval writers constructed their own version of history, a way of interpreting the events and sending a message. Such roles attributed to women could have various underlying meanings related to medieval urban ideology. As previously mentioned, the rape of women was used as a symbol in these chronicles for the violation and suffering of the entire community through warfare and violence.

Still, women were frequently mentioned as violent participants, wielding pestles and throwing stones to defend the city walls against foreign invaders. This conclusion is not only relevant for understanding the function of women in revolts, but also more generally relates to the history of crime and the false assumption that women were less violent than men. Although women's use of physical violence was omnipresent and clearly not a taboo in these Flemish chronicles, the weaponry is obviously gendered: women are rarely mentioned handling iron weapons; instead they worked with whatever was available: mostly large wooden pestles found in medieval kitchens.

Many scholars have pointed at the favorable legal position of women in the Low Countries, and as a consequence, their ability to move more freely in the public sphere. Indeed, late medieval Flemish chroniclers specifically emphasized the danger of women functioning as spies and messengers. The involvement of female kin in urban politics was also a recurring issue. The case of the burgomaster's wife, Gertrude de Scuetelare, shows how these medieval writers considered such powerful "angry" women a threat, as they



were often at the center of family feuds. There are also various examples from the broader Southern Low Countries warning aldermen against the interference of their wives or other female relatives in urban politics. The continuous focus on wifely interference in the fifteenth century points to actual contemporary issues these writers wanted to address. These cases illustrate how women operating in the public sphere were not perceived as problematic, but rather it was their involvement in the higher political levels of society that troubled people. Moreover, these narrative sources do not display a growing repression of rebellious women during the fifteenth century (as it is frequently mentioned that these women were not prosecuted or punished), but rather a growing fear of the consequences of female interference in urban politics.

With lifetime banishment and physical mutilation, Jacquette Espilliet and Margot Cauche suffered a far worse penalty than the sixteen men who were only exiled for a few years from Douai in 1322. Still, the fifteenth-century Bruges chronicles repeatedly focused on the fact that women were punished less severely than men. In some cases, this could imply a real threat to the rebelling side. For this particular reason, the Habsburg authorities seemed to have deliberately used women as secret messengers to stay in contact with their supporters in the city during the Flemish Revolt of 1482–1492. According to these Bruges chroniclers, these women were not severely punished, which encouraged recidivism. These medieval writers thus point to a clear gendered difference between women and men when it comes to punishment during and after uprisings. Neither legal nor juridical sources support this idea. In this way, reading chronicles on women's involvement in revolts leads to interesting research questions that deserve further investigation.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Georges Espinas, *La vie urbaine de Douai au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 1913), vol. 4, 151.

<sup>2</sup>Raoul Charles Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht in Vlaanderen van de XIe tot de XIVe eeuw* (Brussel: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone kunsten van België, 1954), 193–194.

<sup>3</sup>Isidore Diegerick, *Les drapiers Yprois et la conspiration manquée: épisode de l'histoire d'Ypres, (1428–1429)* (Bruges: Vandecasteele-Werbrouck, 1856), 27–28. A sentence “*up den piit*” refers to the death penalty for women in the County of Flanders: being buried alive, whereas men were often hanged or beheaded. Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht*, 163–165.

<sup>4</sup>Jelle Haemers and Chanelle Delameillieure, “Women and Contentious Speech in Fifteenth-Century Brabant,” *Continuity and Change* 32, no. 3 (2017): 323–347; and Jelle Haemers, Andrea Bardyn and Chanelle Delameillieure, *Wijoenwereld. Vrouwen in de Middeleeuwse stad* (Antwerpen: Vrijdag, 2019).

<sup>5</sup>Haemers, *Wijoenwereld*, 165, 180, and 185.

<sup>6</sup>Anne-Marie Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007). Manon van der Heijden and David McKay, *Women and Crime in Early Modern Holland* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

<sup>7</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 146; and Vincent Challet, “Un village sans histoire? La communauté de Villeveyrac en Languedoc,” in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe: Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrer, and Vincent Challet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 133.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Cohn, “Women in Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” in *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2017), 208–219, 210. For analysis of women in the judicial sources of the *Jacquerie* revolt (1358) in France see: Justine Firnhaber-Baker, “The Social Constituency of the *Jacquerie* Revolt of 1358,” *Speculum* 94 (2020), 689–715.

<sup>9</sup>Herman Pleij, “Wie wordt er bang voor het boze wijf? Vrouwenhaat in de middeleeuwen,” *De Revisor* 4, no. 1 (1977): 38–42.

<sup>10</sup>Although this north-south division is under discussion by recent scholarship, it is still the most prevailing conviction. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 291–293; Andrea Bardyn, “Women in the Medieval Society,” in *Golden Times: Wealth and Status in the Middle Ages*, ed. Véronique Lambert and Peter Stabel (Tiel: Lannoo, 2016), 283–318, 283; Peter Stabel, “Single Women in the Urban Economy of Late Medieval Flanders (Thirteenth–Early Fifteenth Centuries),” in *Single Life and the City, 1200–1900*, ed. Julie De Groot, Isabelle Devos and Ariadne Schmidt (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2015), 27–49; Peter Stabel, “Women at the market: gender and retail in the towns of medieval Flanders,” in *Secretum scriptorum. Liber alumnorum Walter Prevenier*, ed. Wim Blockmans, Marc Boone and Thérèse de Hemptinne (Leuven: Garant, 1999), 259–276; Martha Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Martha Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300–1550* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 196–227; and Shennan Hutton, “Women, Men

and Markets: The Gendering of Market Space in Late Medieval Ghent,” in *Urban space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 409–431.

<sup>11</sup>Marc Boone, Thérèse de Hemptinne and Walter Prevenier, “Gender and Early Emancipation in the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period,” in *Gender, Power and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jessica Munnes and Penny Richards (Edinburgh: Pearson Longman, 2003), 21–39, 23–24; Hilde Symoens and Bert De Munck, “Education and Knowledge: Theory and Practice in an Urban Context,” in *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100–1600*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–254; and Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, “Every Woman Counts’: A Gender-Analysis of Numeracy in the Low Countries during the Early Modern Period,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41, no.2 (2010): 179–208.

<sup>12</sup>Martha Howell, “Citizenship and Gender: Women’s Political Status in Northern Medieval Cities,” in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carpenter Erlor and Maryanne Kowaleski (London: Athens, 1988), 37–60; and Jonas Roelens, “Visible Women: Female Sodomy in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Southern Netherlands (1400–1550),” *BMGN/Low Countries Historical Review* 130, no. 3 (2015): 3–24.

<sup>13</sup>Ellen Kittell and Mary Suydam, “Introduction,” in *The Texture of Society. Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Ellen Kittell and Mary Suydam (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), xi–xxv; and Eric Bousmar, “Neither Equality nor Radical Oppression: the Elasticity of Women’s Roles in the Late Medieval Low Countries,” in *The Texture of Society*, 109–127.

<sup>14</sup>Lodovico Guicciardini, *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania inferior* (Antwerp: Willem Silvius, 1567), 30–31.

<sup>15</sup>Guicciardini, *Descrittione di tutti I Paesi Bassi*, 30–31.

<sup>16</sup>Nineteen manuscripts of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen* were preserved. Seven manuscripts show a particular Bruges view on Flemish history. On the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen* and the manuscript variance: Lisa Demets, “The Late Medieval Manuscript Transmission of the ‘Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen’ in Urban Flanders,” *The Medieval Low Countries* 3 (2016): 123–173. Rombout de Doppere (1432–1502) was a cleric, notary, rhetorician, and secretary of the suffragan bishop Gillis de Baerdemaker. His *Diary*— which is actually an urban chronicle on Bruges politics and urban life—only fragmentarily survived. Hendrik Callewier, “Leven en werk van Rombout de Doppere,” *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis Brugge* 150 (2013): 219–244; The *Boeck van al ’t gene* still waits for a proper edition and its own research. *Het Boeck van al ’t gene datter gheschiedt is binnen Brugghe sichtent jaer 1477, 14 februarii, tot 1491*, ed. Charles Louis Carton (Gent: C. Annoot-Braeckman, 1859).

<sup>17</sup>There are also Ghent manuscript versions of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*, but these are adaptations of the original Bruges text: Demets, “The Late Medieval Manuscript Transmission,” 123–173.

<sup>18</sup>On the Flemish Revolt: Jelle Haemers, "Factionalism and State Power in the Flemish Revolt (1482–1492)," *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 4 (2009): 1009–1039; Jelle Haemers, *For the Common Good. State Power and Urban Revolts in the Reign of Mary of Burgundy (1477–1482)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); and Jelle Haemers, *De strijd om het regentschap over Filips de Schone. Opstand, facties en geweld in Brugge, Gent en Ieper (1482–1488)* (Gent: Academia Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup>On the seven Bruges manuscripts of the *Excellentie Cronike* and its embeddedness in the Flemish Revolt: Lisa Demets and Jan Dumolyn, "Urban Chronicle Writing in Late Medieval Flanders: The Case of Bruges During the Flemish Revolt of 1482–1490," *Urban History* 43, no. 1 (2016): 28–45.

<sup>20</sup>George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: a Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England: 1730–1848* (New York: Wiley, 1964); Yves-Marie Bercé, *Révoltes et révolutions dans l'Europe moderne: XVIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1980); Louise Tilly, "Food Entitlement, Famine, and Conflict," in *Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing Food Production and Consumption Patterns on Society*, ed. Robert Rotberg and Theodore Rabb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 135–51; and Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident, XIVe–XVIIIe siècles: une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 181–182.

<sup>21</sup>See for instance: Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup>Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, "'A Bad Chicken Was Brooding': Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders," *Past & Present* 214, no. 1 (2012): 45–86, 65: "The sources of the Flemish towns do not reveal any female voices in this context. And apart from the girl singing the rebellious song mentioned above, literary texts stereotyping women as gossips or the occasional chronicle depicting them in emotional scenes, fearing for the fate of their rebel husbands, they remain conspicuous by their absence in the context of revolt."

<sup>23</sup>Samuel Cohn, "Chapter 6: Women, Ideology and Repression," in *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt In Medieval Europe, 1200–1425: Italy, France, and Flanders*, ed. Samuel Cohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 130–156; and Samuel Cohn, "Women in Revolt," 208–219.

<sup>24</sup>Mary-Catherine Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England: Speaking as a Woman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 143; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 12; and Haemers and Delameillieure, "Women and Contentious Speech," 323–347.

<sup>25</sup>Ellen Kittell, "Flemish Female Misdeeds. A Speculation," in *Female Power in the Middle Ages. Proceedings from the 2. St. Gertrud Symposium Copenhagen, August 1989*, ed. Karen Glente and Lise Winther-Jensen (Copenhagen: B. Stougaard Jensen, 1989), 105–128; and Ellen Kittell, "Reconciliation or Punishment: Women, Community and Malefaction in the Medieval County of Flanders," in *The Texture of Society*, 3–30.

<sup>26</sup>Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 143; Haemers and Delameillieure, "Women and Contentious Speech," 339.

<sup>27</sup>Roelens, "Visible Women," 5.

<sup>28</sup>On the Ghent war of 1379–1385: Roger Demuyneck, "De Gentse Oorlog (1379–1385). Oorzaken en karakter," *Handelingen van de Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 5 (1951): 305–318. Bruges, Public Library (hereafter BPL), ms. 437, fol. 194v. This manuscript contains an (extended) version of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*. For more information on the *Excellente Cronike* manuscript variation, and a codicological description of the manuscript: Demets, "The Manuscript Transmission," 152–153 (no. 2).

<sup>29</sup>Lisa Demets and Jan Dumolyn, "La ville comme Sainte Vierge. Un aspect de l'idéologie urbaine en Flandre médiévale (fin du xive siècle–début du xvie siècle)," *Cahiers électroniques d'histoire textuelle du Laboratoire de Médiévisique Occidentale de Paris* 9 (2016): 24–52; and Bart Ramakers, "Van maagden en poorten. Stadsmetaforen in historische toneelstukken," in *Nederland stedenland: continuïteit en vernieuwing*, ed. Ed Taverne, Jaap Evert Abrahamse and Judith Van den Bos (Rotterdam: nai010, 2012), 178–192.

<sup>30</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 387.

<sup>31</sup>Douai, Municipal Library (hereafter DML), ms. 1110, fol. 119r. The first part of the manuscript contains a version of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*. The second part, which was added later, is a version of the diary of Rombout de Dopere. For a codicological description of the manuscript see: Demets, "The Manuscript Transmission," 164–165 (no. 13).

<sup>32</sup>BPL, ms. 437, fol. 223v.

<sup>33</sup>BPL, ms. 437, fol. 296r.

<sup>34</sup>DML, ms. 1110, fol. 400v.

<sup>35</sup>DML, ms. 1110, fol. 450r.

<sup>36</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 359.

<sup>37</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 357–358.

<sup>38</sup>The Hague, Royal Library, ms. 132A13. For a codicological description of the manuscript see: Demets, "The Manuscript Transmission," 172–173 (no. 19).

<sup>39</sup>The Hague, Royal Library, ms. 132A13, fol. 523rbis–523vbis.

<sup>40</sup>On the role of Flemish women in medieval armies and militia see: Jan-Frans Verbruggen, "Vrouwen in de middeleeuwse legers," *Revue Belge d'Histoire Militaire* 24 (1982): 617–633.

<sup>41</sup>On the dispersion of information during uprisings see: Maria Antonia Carmona Ruiz, "The Perception of Popular Discourse in Late Medieval Chronicles: The Case of the 'relacion de las comunidades de Castilla'," in *The Voices of the People in Late*

*Medieval Europe: Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Hipolito Rafael Oliva Herrer and Vincent Challet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 63–71.

<sup>42</sup>Paul Trio, "Vlaanderen de Leeuw. Het relaas van de slag bij Kortrijk opnieuw aan de bronnen getoetst," *Omtrent 1302*, ed. Paul Trio, Dirk Heirbaut, and Dirk Van den Auweele (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2002), 207–228.

<sup>43</sup>DML, ms. 1110, fol. 120v.

<sup>44</sup>Saint-Omer, Municipal Library, ms. 769, fols. 119v–127r.

<sup>45</sup>DML, ms. 1110, fol. 453r.

<sup>46</sup>DML, ms. 1110, fol. 483v en. 484v.

<sup>47</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 229.

<sup>48</sup>For instance: James Daybell, "Chapter 6: Gender, Politics and Diplomacy: Women, News and Intelligence Networks in Elizabethan England," in *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101–119; and Nadine Akkerman, *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). There has been no systematic research for the medieval Low Countries. In his analysis of communication strategies of rebels during the Flemish uprising in 1302, Haemers mentioned the wife of a weaver from Tournai carrying letters from the rebels to their supporters in Ghent. Jelle Haemers, "Een brief van Pieter de Coninck aan Sint-Omaars (1306). Over schriftelijke communicatie van opstandelingen in veertiende-eeuws Vlaanderen en Artesië," *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis te Brugge* 154 (2017): 3–30, 8. Also in fifteenth-century Lille, female spies were frequently active: Eric Bousmar, "Du marché aux bordiaux: hommes, femmes et rapports de sexe (gender) dans les villes des Pays-Bas au bas moyen âge. Etat de nos connaissances et perspectives de recherche," in *Core and Periphery in Late Medieval Urban Society: Proceedings of the Colloquium at Ghent (22nd–23rd August 1996)*, ed. Myriam Carlier, Anke Greve, Walter Prevenier and Peter Stabel (Leuven: Garant, 1997), 61.

<sup>49</sup>Arrigo Castellani, *La prosa italiana delle origine. I. Testi toscani di carattere pratico* (Bologna: Patron editore, 1982), nr. 46: "Memorie di pagamenti alle 'spie' del comune di San Gimignano (sg. 1269)."

<sup>50</sup>Original phrase in Middle Dutch is as follows: "men die corrigiere zo dat de zake verandert wiert." DML, ms. 1110, fol. 483v.

<sup>51</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 348–349.

<sup>52</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 399–400.

<sup>53</sup>Filips Wielant, *Corte instructie in materie criminele*, ed. Jos Monballyu (Brussel: Paleis der Academiën, 1995), Cap. 57, Art. 12; and Jan Dumolyn, "The Legal Repression of Revolts in Late Medieval Flanders," *The Legal History Review* 68, no. 4 (2000): 479–521.

<sup>54</sup>Wielant, *Corte instructie*, Cap. 26.

<sup>55</sup>Wielant, *Corte instructie*, Cap. 30.

<sup>56</sup>Wielant, *Corte instructie*, Cap. 48.

<sup>57</sup>Jan Dumolyn, *De Brugse Opstand van 1436–1438* (Heule: UGA, 1997), 222–223.

<sup>58</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 195.

<sup>59</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 219.

<sup>60</sup>Van Caeneghem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht*, 198.

<sup>61</sup>*Het boeck van al 't gene*, 235. The chronicle also mentions two cases of female contentious speech for 1489 and 1490, at the end of the revolt: *Het boeck van al 't gene*, 267 and 420.

<sup>62</sup>It has been suggested that the writer of the chronicle was somehow involved in the criminal prosecutions in Bruges.

<sup>63</sup>DML, ms.1110, fol. 466r.

<sup>64</sup>Dumolyn, *De Brugse Opstand*, 165–166. Braekevelt et al., “The Politics of Factional Conflict,” 23.

<sup>65</sup>Jonas Braekevelt, Frederik Buylaert, Jan Dumolyn, and Jelle Haemers, “The Politics of Factional Conflict in Late Medieval Flanders,” *Historical Research* 85, no. 227 (2012): 13–31.

<sup>66</sup>Cohn, “Women in Revolt,” 216.

<sup>67</sup>For example: Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” 124–151; Rudolf Dekkers, “Women in Revolt: Popular Protest and its Social Basis in Holland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Theory and Society* 16, no. 3 (1987): 337–362; and Samuel Cohn, *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>68</sup>Braekevelt, et al., “The Politics of Factional Conflict,” 21.

<sup>69</sup>See for instance, the contributions in Theodore Evergates, ed., *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

<sup>70</sup>Péter Bokody, “Florentine Women and Vendetta: The Origin of Guelf-Ghibelline Conflict in Giovanni Villani’s *Nuova Cronica*,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 37 (2017): 5–14.

<sup>71</sup>Remco Sleiderink and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze, “Everard t’Serclaes, faits et récits sur un héros bruxellois / Everard t’Serclaes, een Brusselse held in feiten en verhalen,” in *Le monument T’Serclaes/T’Serclaes Monument. Restauration et légendes / Restauratie en legendes*, ed. Paula Cordeiro (Brussel: Mardaga, 2018), 18–43.

<sup>72</sup>Jan van Boendale, *Brabantse Yeesten*, ed. Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie (Sdu Uitgevers/Standaard Uitgeverij: Den Haag/Antwerpen, 1998), Cap. 82, v. 9075–9091.

<sup>73</sup>Frans van Molle, "La Justice d'Othon de Thierry Bouts: sources d'archives," *Bulletin de l'Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique*, no. 1 (1958): 7–17; and Maurits Smeyers and Katharina Smeyers, *Dirk Bouts (ca. 1410–1475): een Vlaams primitief te Leuven* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

<sup>74</sup>Another famous example of a justice panel is the *Judgement of Cambyses* by Gerard David, commissioned by the Bruges aldermen in 1488 but only finished after the revolt. The original theme was adapted to fit the new pro-Habsburg attitude of the postwar aldermen. Samuel Mareel, "Mirrors of Justice. Justice Panels in the Netherlands," *Call for Justice: Art and Law in the Low Countries, 1450–1650*, ed. Samuel Mareel (Mechelen: Hannibal, 2018), 40–62.

<sup>75</sup>BPL, ms. 437 and Brussels, Royal Library, ms. 13072–73.

<sup>76</sup>For a general description of the revolt see: Dumolyn, *De Brugse Opstand*, 147–295.

<sup>77</sup>Walter Prevenier, "Les perturbations dans les relations commerciales anglo-flamandes entre 1379 et 1407. Causes de désaccord et raisons d'une réconciliation," in *Economies et sociétés au Moyen Age. Mélanges offerts à Edouard Perroy* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1973), 477–497.

<sup>78</sup>Original quote in Middle Dutch is as follows: "Want daer was zulken grooten heymelicken nijt tusschen den gheslachten van Brugghe om tbovenzitten, zodatter groot verdriet of quam alzo ghij hiernaer lessen muecht. Al en wast in tghemeene niet gheopenbaert, het was nochtan warachtich, want ic, die dit ghescreven hebbe, was zelve gheinformeirt van hemlieden die zibbe ende bloet waeren van den upstelders van den gruwelicken quade." BPL, ms. 437, fol. 292r.

<sup>79</sup>BPL, ms. 437, fol. 292v.

<sup>80</sup>Original quote in Middle Dutch is as follows: "Dese Morissis moet haestelicke overvallen wesen ende dootghesleghen eerdat hij openbaert den commune den raedt die wij ghesloten hebben, of anders wij zin alle doode menschen." BPL, ms. 437, fol. 293r.

<sup>81</sup>Dumolyn, *De Brugse Opstand*, 282.

<sup>82</sup>BPL, ms. 437, fol. 301r.

<sup>83</sup>Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht*, 163–165.

<sup>84</sup>BPL, ms. 437, fol. 301r.

<sup>85</sup>The story shows some resemblance to the story of Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39–45. See for instance: Rosalind Brown-Grant, *French Romance of the Later Middle Ages: Gender, Morality, and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61.