



Civic Cohesion in Turbulent Times: Galbert of Bruges, the Urban Community and the Murder of the Count of Flanders in 1127

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1 INTRODUCTION

After the year 1000 we see that cities started to develop in many areas in Western Europe. One of the regions where this can be seen to make its mark on the existing landscape, power relations and mentalities, is the region of Flanders where towns such as Ypres, Lille, Gent and Bruges became important trading and urban centres.¹ A unique and in many ways revealing source providing insight into such an urban community is the *History of the Murder of the Flemish Count Charles the Good*, composed by Galbert of Bruges. Galbert wrote his work soon after 1127, the year that the Flemish count was brutally attacked and killed while

¹ Adriaan Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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he was praying in the Church of St. Donatian. Galbert's history was not very popular during the Middle Ages, but especially since the work was edited by Henri Pirenne in 1891 it became a classic for medieval historians.² This was partly due to Pirenne's conviction that we are dealing with an almost unmediated window into the twelfth century. For Pirenne Galbert's history work was the result of a careful but naïve chronicler of events, as the unique journalistic structure of the work—it is structured by events taking place on particular days, almost like a personal journal—and his own account of his reporting activities suggests. In a remarkable passage, which conveys something of the vividness of this text, Galbert tells us that:

in the midst of such a great uproar of events and the burning of so many houses – set on fire by burning arrows shot onto the roofs of the town by night from within the castle and by brigands from the outside in the hope of stealing something for themselves – and among so many dangers during the nights and so many conflicts during the days that I, Galbert, since I had no place for writing, noted down on tablets a summary of the events that were going on until at some point, in a longed-for moment of peace during the night or day, I could set in order the present description according to what had happened. And in this way, constrained as I was, I transcribed for the faithful what you see and read.³

We now know, however, mainly thanks to Jeff Rider and Alan Murray, that Galbert was no detached observer of his world, but rather an author writing with clear objectives.⁴ Moreover, Galbert was an author who was

² Galbert of Bruges, *Histoire du meurtre de Charles le Bon, Comte de Flandre (1127–28)*, ed. Henri Pirenne, Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire 10 (Paris: Picard, 1891); see Jeff Rider, 'Galbert of Bruges' 'Journal'. From Medieval Flop to Modern Bestseller', in *Verbalende bronnen. Repertoriëring, editie en commercialisering*, ed. Ludo Milis, Véronique Lambert, and Ann Kelders, Studia Historica Gandensia 283 (Gent: Opleiding Geschiedenis Universiteit Gent, 1996), 67–93.

³ Galbert of Bruges, *De multro, traditione, et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriarum*, c. 35, ed. Jeff Rider, CC Continuatio Mediaevalis 131 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), 81; I used the translation Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder, Betrayal, and Slaughter of the Glorious Charles, Count of Flanders*, trans. Jeff Rider (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), here 65–66.

⁴ Fundamental is Jeff Rider, *God's Scribe. The Historiographical Art of Galbert of Bruges* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001); Alan Murray, 'Voices of Flanders: Orality and Constructed Orality in the Chronicle of Galbert of Bruges',

able to deploy clever rhetorical devices. As a notary, Galbert was less well trained in writing a sophisticated Latin, but as an author he used direct speech and suggestive details quite effectively to make his point. Moreover, careful reading makes it clear that Galbert did rewrite certain parts of his text and that he did make an effort to turn it into a coherent narrative. Yet his work is not easy to interpret. One of the reasons why it is so hard to grasp is that it is unfinished. We do not know why Galbert did not finish his work, but because it remained unfinished, we do not have a coherent and polished narrative. Instead, loose threads and thoughts remain in the narrative that were not developed to their logical conclusion. This disadvantage is at the same time one of the advantages of Galbert's work, for it shows us an author still in the middle of his work.

Another factor which makes this text so intriguing is that Galbert did not just write his account in order to convince an audience. Certainly, he tried to turn the murdered count into a saint, and he put the blame for this crime at the door of Bertulf, the powerful provost of the chapter of St. Donatian and his relatives. For a long period, he was also convinced that William Clito, son of count Robert of Normandy and favourite of the French king Louis VI, the Fat, had to be the lawful successor of Count Charles. But his journal is not only an occasionally biased and coloured account of these eventful times, it is also a quest for meaning. In this work we observe an author struggling to find a deeper meaning in the events in Flanders of his time. Galbert found it hard to understand and to explain why the good count Charles had to be murdered, why the provost of his chapter, Bertulf, participated in this act and why William Clito was replaced after a serious civil war by Thierry of Alsace as successor of Charles. It is precisely these doubts and this sometimes unresolved quest for meaning that makes Galbert's work so intriguing.

Galbert is writing at a time when the inhabitants of Bruges act as a group. The town community is clearly a political factor, which presupposes political organisation of some sort. As stated in the recent history of Bruges, edited by Andrew Brown and Jan Dumolyn, it is clear that although we have no official documents that prove the existence of a civic community in Bruges, such a commune must have existed at the time that Galbert wrote his journal. Dumolyn, Declercq and Haemers observe that

Handelingen van de Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent 48 (1994): 103–119; Jeff Rider and Alan Murray (eds.), *Galbert of Bruges and the Historiography of Medieval Flanders* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

‘Galbert of Bruges’ description of events following the murder of Count Charles the Good in 1127 appears to show Flemish burgers as emancipated and political conscious groups, fully prepared to take up arms to protect their rights’.⁵ The early history of Flemish urban communes remains somewhat unclear because of a lack of sources, leaving room for different interpretations particularly concerning the role of oath-taking, violent revolt and the contribution by the counts of Flanders to the process, but the aforesaid authors conclude that between the reigns of Robert the Frisian (r. 1071–1093) and William Clito (r. 1127–1128), ‘the Flemish towns became in effect, if not in legal practice, largely autonomous bodies separated from the countryside’.⁶ For Bruges no documents survive that were employed to establish this urban community nor do we have documents that were employed in its functioning, prior to Galbert. It is in Galbert’s text that we see this early urban community coming to light. Through Galbert we know that there existed some form of urban law, that the citizens of Bruges acted as a collective and that they were treated as a partner by the count, nobles and the French king.⁷

The work of Galbert of Bruges has, of course, been used to reconstruct the early history of Bruges since the nineteenth century, by famous and competent historians such as Henri Pirenne, François-Louis Ganshof, Adriaan Verhulst, Bert Demyttenaere and others.⁸ Manfred Groten has provided us with a study of what Galbert teaches us about the political organisation of the town of Bruges, or rather the lack thereof.⁹ This paper

⁵ Jan Dumolyn, Georges Declercq, and Jelle Haemers, ‘Social Groups, Political Power and Institutions I, c.1100–c.1300’, in *Medieval Bruges 850–1550*, ed. Andrew Brown and Jan Dumolyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 124–151, here 126.

⁶ Dumolyn, Declercq, and Haemers, ‘Social Groups, Political Power and Institutions’, 129.

⁷ Dumolyn, Declercq, and Haemers, ‘Social Groups, Political Power and Institutions’, 129–130.

⁸ François-Louis Ganshof, ‘Le droit urbain en Flandre au début de la première phase de son histoire (1127)’, *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 19 (1951): 387–416; Adriaan Verhulst, ‘Les origines et l’histoire ancienne de la ville de Bruges (IXe–XIIe siècle)’, in *Anfänge des Städtewesens an Schelde, Maas und Rhein bis zum Jahre 1000*, ed. Adriaan Verhulst (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996), 225–240; Albert Demyttenaere, ‘Galbert of Bruges on Political Meeting Culture: Palavers and Fights in Flanders During the Years 1127 and 1128’, in *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages*, ed. Paul Barnwell and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 151–192.

⁹ Manfred Groten, ‘In tanto tumulto rerum. Die Bürger von Brügge in Galberts Bericht über die Ermordung Graf Karls von Flandern 1127’, in *Vielfalt der Geschichte*.

will not review or evaluate their work, but will focus on the position of Galbert himself. His text provides us with a unique occasion to see how an inhabitant of Bruges saw himself in relation to the urban community. This may not seem obvious since we do not know much about Galbert as a person. Therefore, we first need to see what we can say about him.

2 GALBERT OF BRUGES

Apparently, Galbert was employed as a scribe in the chancellery of the Flemish counts in Bruges, at the time the administrative centre of the comital domains and of the county of Flanders. The comital chancellery was headed by Bertulf. As such, Galbert was subservient to the very man he and other contemporaries held responsible for the murder of the Flemish count. The comital chancellery and administration were run mainly by the collegiate chapter of St. Donatian and Galbert was probably associated with this institution, although he never identifies himself as a member of that institution or speaks about the canons as his closest associates. Galbert had been taught to write in Latin and had a basic education in grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and he demonstrates some knowledge of scholastic ideas about the working of the human mind. There is no reason to suppose that he studied in Laon, although he makes the remark that a number of *scholares* from Bruges were studying there. It is clear, however, that Galbert was a man of some education, and apparently, he was a clergyman in minor orders.¹⁰

Now we might think that the views of a clergyman on his relation to the urban community are not particularly interesting, because some clerics, such as Galbert's near contemporary Guibert of Nogent, depicted the urban community in traditional negative terms.¹¹ Galbert is different, however, as we will see. It is clear that Galbert was well informed about

Lernen, Lehren und Erforschen vergangener Zeiten. Festgabe für Ingrid Heidrich zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. Sabine Happ and Ulrich Nonn (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2004), 126–140.

¹⁰ On Galbert's education, see: Rider, *God's Scribe*, 21–22.

¹¹ Guibert de Nogent, *Monodiae*, particularly III.7, ed. E.R. Labande, *Autobiographie. Les classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Age* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1981), 320–321; Guibert's testimony of the revolt in Laon has been an almost classic text for the rise of the town in medieval Europe; see, e.g. the discussion in Dominique Barthélemy, 'Lectures de Guibert de Nogent (Autobiographie, III, 1–11)', in *Les origines des libertés urbaines: Actes des 16^e Congrès des historiens médiévistes de*

what was going on not only in the town of Bruges, but also in the wider world of the county of Flanders. He must have received his information from different sources and seems particularly well-connected to the townspeople of Bruges. Jeff Rider suspects that he lived ‘a relatively secular life’.¹² There is no indication of any opposition in Bruges between the town’s people and the clerics related to the collegiate chapter of St. Donatian. The provost Bertulf and his family seem to have acted often in concordance with the town, also because both parties had a common enemy in the family of Thanemar van Straten.¹³ The ties between the town’s people and the clerics associated with running the comital administration seem to have been rather tight. Jeff Rider, at the moment the foremost specialist on Galbert, even goes so far as to conclude that our twelfth-century historian composed his chronicle as ‘a townsman writing for his fellow townsmen’.¹⁴ In Rider’s words,

[Galbert] had a clear idea of the people for whom he was writing, could see their faces in his mind, could imagine them reading or hearing what he had written, could imagine their reactions; and the people he imagined were not, or at least not mostly, bishops, abbots, archdeacons, schoolmasters, cathedral clergy, monks, kings, counts, or barons, but notaries, clerks, town knights, and important townspeople, that is minor officials, employees, and small businesspeople, so to speak, rather than people who directed and managed major institutions of the day.¹⁵

If Rider is correct, Galbert’s work is a privileged source for this inquiry, as we have a text written by someone from a young urban community writing from within. As such, it provides us with evidence of how a member of such an urban centre thought about the community, how he identified with it, or distanced himself from it. It shows us how a citizen—if we may use that word here—imagined the city and citizenship. Now let us see how Galbert thought and writes about the city of Bruges and its citizens.

Penseignement supérieur (Rouen 7–8 juin 1985) (Rouen: Publications de l’Université de Rouen, 1990), 175–192.

¹² Jeff Rider, ‘Introduction’, in *Galbert of Bruges, The Murder*, trans. Rider, xxxii.

¹³ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 45, ed. Rider, 95.

¹⁴ Rider, ‘Introduction’, xix.

¹⁵ Rider, ‘Introduction’, xix.

3 GALBERT AND THE BODY POLITIC IN BRUGES

City and citizenship might look like grand terms for what actually was a rather small town. Although in its age Bruges was one of the major urban centres in Europe, in modern eyes it was only a big village, with around 5000 inhabitants.¹⁶ At the time it was not the seat of an episcopal see, and thus not a *civitas*. In general, Galbert's terminology follows this contemporary convention: he employs the term *civitas* only for the major ecclesiastical centres with a cathedral. But there are noteworthy exceptions. In chapter 47, for instance, he seems to use the word *civitas* in a more general sense when he describes how almost all the citizens of Flanders objected to William of Ypres as their new count because he was born a bastard. Galbert is here referring to a letter sent by the French king Louis the Fat, and here he speaks about *omnes fere de civitatibus* where he probably meant more than just the inhabitants of Tournai or Tournai, technically the only *civitates* in the county.¹⁷ One could argue that Galbert here mimicks the words of the French king, but it seems that *civitas* might mean more than just episcopal town. In an important chapter where Galbert describes the cooperation that existed between the towns in Flanders, Galbert refers to the citizens (burgenses) of the *civitates* and *castra* of Flanders, associating both *civitates* and *castra* with citizens.¹⁸

We see that Galbert uses the word *burgenses* here for inhabitants of *civitates* as well as *castra*. With the word *castrum* Galbert denotes sometimes castles, but at times, as in this passage, also towns (adjacent to

¹⁶ Jan Dumolyn, Marc Ryckaert, Brigitte Meijns, Heidi Deneweth, and Luc Devliegher, 'The Urban Landscape I: c.1100– c.1275', in *Medieval Bruges 850–1550*, ed. Andrew Brown and Jan Dumolyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 52–85, here 54.

¹⁷ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 47, ed. Rider, 97. *Igitur - quia terra conturbata est et conjurationes jam factae sunt in persona Willelmi ut violenter regnum obtineat, et contra eum omnes fere de civitatibus adjuraverunt se nullo modo Willelmum illum in comitem recepturos eo quod spurius sit, natus scilicet ex nobili patre et matre ignobili quae lanas carpere, dum viveret ipsa, non cessaret - volo et praecipio vobis, sine dilatione coram me convenite et communi consilio eligite comitem utilem vobis qualem et terrae et incolis praeesse consenseritis* [emphasis mine].

¹⁸ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 53, ed. Rider, 102. *Nam ex civitatibus Flandriae et castris burgenses stabant in eadem securitate et amicitia ad invicem ut nihil in electione nisi communiter consentirent aut contradicerent.*

castles).¹⁹ In chapter 2 he describes how the people in Flanders during the serious famine of 1125 that plagued them fled to *civitates et castra* to buy bread. These *castra* were probably also urban centres. Sometimes Galbert is more precise and speaks about the *suburbium* around the castle.²⁰ The towns in Flanders were therefore, in his eyes, closely associated with their castles, and thus with the claims on violence by the counts of Flanders. Such *castra* were associated with a marketplace and characterised by security, an absence of arms and by the peace of the count.²¹

In chapter 75 Galbert uses a somewhat different topography. Here he describes how, in the course of the conflict, the killers of the count were more and more confined to specific spaces in the city, one of the literary motives identified by Rider. The killers first felt unthreatened and walked around freely. Then they were confined to the town which Galbert calls *vicus loci nostri* here. They were then pressed to protect the *villam et suburbium nostrum*, by a wall and ditch. From there they had to retreat to the castle and after that to church of St. Donatian and later to the tower of the church. Finally, they ended up in a dungeon. Again, we see the castle at the centre of Galbert's topography, closely associated with comital power and with the church of St. Donatian.²²

We have seen that Galbert uses the term *burgenses* to denote the inhabitants of towns, *civitates* and *castra*. With the term *burgenses*, he refers to the citizens of Bruges—mostly as *burgenses nostri*—Gent, Oudenaarde, Mons, St. Omer and sometimes, as we have seen, to the citizens of Flanders in general. Occasionally Galbert also uses *suburbani* for those

¹⁹ See: Raoul van Caenegem, Albert Demyttenaere, and Luc Devliegher, *De moord op Karel de Goede door Galbert van Brugge* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1999), 115, fn. 13.

²⁰ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 27, ed. Rider, 65. *Proinde accessum fecit Gervasius cum potentia sua versus castrum in quo sese praemunierant traditores, circumiens excursus et praeveniens transitus illorum circa suburbium castrum.*

²¹ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 1, ed. Rider, 7. *Tandem videns gratiam pacis omnibus jucundam, indixit per terminos regni ut sub quiete et securitate absque armorum usu communiter degerent, quicumque aut in foro aut infra castra manerent et conversarentur, alioquin ipsis plecterentur armis quae ferrent. Sub hac ergo observantia arcus et sagittae et subsequenter omnia arma postposita sunt in forinsecis locis sicut et in pacificis.*

²² Galbert, *De multro*, c. 75, ed. Rider, 128; for the theme of confinement in Galbert, see Rider, *God's Scribe*, 68–69. See also: Jeff Rider, 'Le concept de l'espace urbain chez Galbert de Bruges (1127–1128)', in *Espaces et Mondes au Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque international tenu à Bucarest les 17–18 octobre 2008* (Bucarest: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, 2009), 387–396, for a somewhat different reading.

living near the castle.²³ His most favourite term to denote the citizens is, however, *cives*. Whereas he uses the word *burgenses* 20 times in his chronicle, *cives* or one of its declensions is employed more than 170 times.²⁴ In chapter 3 Galbert distinguishes between *cives* on the one hand and *incolae terrae* on the other. For him, it seems, *cives* were clearly distinct from those who lived on the land.²⁵

Most of the times the term *civis* is used for the people of Bruges, and it is interesting that Galbert almost nowhere speaks about individual citizens. This in marked contrast to when he is speaking about aristocratic or ecclesiastic personalities, which are often presented as named individuals, as real personalities. The urban community, however, is, in the eyes of Galbert, precisely that: a community, with no room for individuals. In the chronicle the townspeople almost always act as a group and although Galbert occasionally refers to disagreement among them, he never provides any details about specific individuals or families within the town. Although Galbert must have known the local community in Bruges quite well, he always presents them as a group. In chapter 35 he explains his stance as follows:

Given the confusion and endless number of things going on, I did not note down what individuals (*singuli*) did but noted down with an intent mind only the things that were accomplished by common edict during the siege and by common action in the fighting and their causes ...²⁶

This is understandable, but when Galbert speaks about noblemen or prelates, he does talk about individual actions. The result of his approach is that the town community almost acts as an organic unity.

There is one instance where a fissure appears in the unanimity of the citizens of Bruges. This occurs the day after the murder in the Church of St. Donatian, when Bertulf and his men are still freely walking around. When the abbot of St. Peter's in Gent arrived in Bruges to transport the body of the dead count to his abbey, the poor of the town are the first to

²³ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 25 and 52, ed. Rider, 61 and 101.

²⁴ Word counts performed through Brepolis.

²⁵ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 3, ed. Rider, 11. *Cervisiam quoque interdixit confici ut eo levius et melius abundarent pauperes, si a cervisia conficienda cessarent tempore famis cives et incolae terrae.*

²⁶ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 35, ed. Rider, 81.

notice that Bertulf and his fellows are trying to get rid of the body of the count. They notice Bertulf's actions, because they are waiting in line for the alms that the provost is dispensing. The other citizens were avoiding all contact with the killers of the count, so Galbert states, clearly with the objective to clear his fellow citizens of any complicity in the acts. Bertulf was apparently seeking support for his faction by handing out alms to the poor, yet it is interesting that only here the unanimity of the townspeople seems to have been fractured. The poor (*pauperes*) might be associated with the killers, and the *prudentes et discreti* should remain free of such associations.²⁷

When Bertulf and the abbot of St. Peter's in Gent tried to move the dead body of count Charles, not only the poor came in action. The canons of St. Donatian, the church over which Bertulf as provost presided, also opposed moving the body and when they felt threatened by Bertulf, they armed themselves with boards, stools and candelabra and rang the church bells in order to mobilise the citizens who swiftly came to their assistance armed with swords. This show of force of the citizens made an impression and Bertulf and his companions backed down and promised not to act against the wishes of the citizens.²⁸ Galbert's sympathy here clearly lies with the citizens of Bruges, and it is interesting that he describes the canons at this point as closely cooperating with the citizens, even against their provost and his powerful companions. This confirms our view that the canons felt associated with the town, perhaps regarded themselves even as part of the town community, as we concluded when looking at Galbert's position in town.²⁹

Yet the townsmen were not as aloof from the faction that killed the count as Galbert presents it here. Somewhat later he has to concede that they took part in deliberations with the provost, his brother the castellan and the nephews. Galbert adds that they did so only in order to keep informed of the sly plans of the killers and their companions, but this sounds more like an excuse. Interestingly he does not refer to the citizens as *cives* here, but in this context uses the term *suburbani*,

²⁷ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 22, ed. Rider, 53.

²⁸ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 22, ed. Rider, 55.

²⁹ Steven Isaac, 'Galbert of Bruges and the Urban Experience of Siege', in *Galbert of Bruges and the Historiography of Medieval Flanders* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 89–106, here 103–104. This discusses the 'remarkable solidarity of the town's clergy with the townspeople'.

perhaps a way to avoid compromising the *cives*.³⁰ Furthermore, Bertulf would have ordered the townsmen to prepare defence works around the *loca suburbani*, that is the town area around the castle, to be prepared against anyone with bad intentions. The citizens acted as Bertulf wanted, but, Galbert adds, with different intentions. Again, he seeks to dissimulate cooperation between Bertulf and the citizens of Bruges, who when reading between the lines were implicated a lot more in the affair than Galbert is willing to admit. Everyone worked day and night to build towers, ramparts and exits, a task in which the clergy worked side by side with the laity, Galbert writes, perhaps implicating that he himself took part in it as well. Galbert here writes to exonerate the urban community of cooperating with Bertulf and his men and this again shows how closely Galbert felt associated with it.

The tide turned for Bertulf and his men when on the 8th of March a nobleman Gervaas van Praat started a violent attack on them. According to Galbert the citizens of Bruges—the *burgenses*—did not feel free to show their joy when hearing about Gervaas' actions, because they were afraid of Bertulf and his men, who still moved freely and powerfully among them, he writes. Again, we can read this as a defence of the town by Galbert, who tries to cover up the fact that not everyone in the city may have been as happy with this turn of events as he wants his readers to believe. Looking closely at this story (chapter 27), we can observe that the urban community was in fact divided. Galbert informs us that some among the citizen body sent secret messengers to Gervaas and his men to swear trust, friendship and pledges of security. They swore that they would avenge the murder of count Charles and that they would let them into the town as brothers. This was all done in secret without Bertulf's men knowing about it, but it was also kept secret from most of their fellow citizens, except for a few wise men (*paucos sapientiores loci*) who acted thus for everyone's benefit, Galbert writes.³¹ We may wonder what really happened here. Was this a private initiative of some local individuals or families who had ties with Gervaas, or was this really a decision reached by the urban community in secret? It is clear that there was actually substantial support among the people of Bruges for the coup staged

³⁰ Galbert uses the term 'suburbani' only two times in the whole text, here c. 25 and in indirect speech in c. 52, ed. Rider 61 and 101.

³¹ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 27, ed. Rider 65–67.

by Bertulf and his men, as is indicated, for example, by the judicial inquisition that was instigated by the French king and William Clito into the murder of the count.³² So we have to conclude that there was tension and dissent within the town of Bruges.

When the following day some of the citizens had let Gervaas and his men in, those who were unaware of the secret embassy, and that was a major part of the population (*pars plurima*), accompanied the men of Bertulf fully armed. Galbert goes on to tell us that at that moment part of the population supported Bertulf and his men, while another part supported Gervaas, but once the secret pact was made public, all sided with Gervaas against the murderers of the count. Although Galbert here sketches some form of disagreement among the citizens, he only speaks in general terms and never mentions any particular persons, not even those wise men who had taken the initiative to start secret negotiations with the party of Gervaas. The tensions were also miraculously solved once the secret pact became known. This seems a bit hard to believe and should better be viewed as another instance of the way in which Galbert exonerated his townsmen in participating in the coup led by Bertulf.

A clear sense of local identity emerges from the way in which Galbert distinguishes the citizens from Bruges from those of the nearby urban centre of Gent. He relates how soon afterwards a number of leading noblemen gathered near Bruges, among whom the castellan of Gent and Diksmuide as well as the advocate of St. Peter's abbey in Gent. They negotiated with the citizens for admission into the town and when they promised to leave the town unharmed, they were allowed to enter.³³ The noblemen apparently had asked assistance from the city of Gent and on the 14 and 15th of March a group of armed people from Gent arrived at Bruges. Galbert describes the *burgenses* from Gent in a very negative way. They are a bunch of greedy looters, robbers, murderers and scoundrels, but apparently also skilful soldiers experienced in siege warfare. The arrival of their fellow citizens from Gent must have alarmed the townsmen from

³² For this inquisition see: Alan Murray, 'The Judicial Inquest into the Death of Count Charles of Flanders (1127)', *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 68 (2000): 47–61. The text is edited as 'Enquete et jugement de chiaus qui le conte Charlon avoient ochis', in *Walteri Archidiaconi Terranensis, Vita Karoli Comitis Flandriae et Vita Domni Ioannis Morinensis Episcopi quibus subiunguntur poemata aliqua de morte comitis Karoli conscripta et quaestio de eadem facta*, ed. J. Rider, CC Continuatio Mediaevalis 217 (Turnhout: Brepols 2006), 199–209.

³³ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 30 en 31, ed. Rider, 73–75.

Bruges and they made an effort to withstand them when they entered the town. It would have come to a military confrontation, had not the wiser men from both sides come to an agreement. The men from Gent had to take an oath not to harm the town or the possessions of the citizens of Bruges and they had to send away all those who had accompanied them just for the sake of looting.

Galbert describes the military skills of the people from Gent with some admiration, but he also accuses them, when they managed to enter the castle, of being more interested in looting than in fighting. When some men from Gent wanted to gain hold of the dead body of count Charles to move it to Gent, it again nearly came to a violent confrontation were it not that the wiser men (*sapientiores*) stepped in once more. The greed of the people from Gent is criticised by the story Galbert tells about the way a young man from the mob from Gent (*ex Gendensium turba*) came to his end. When he had been able to enter the church of St. Donatian and started to loot the place, the lid of the chest that he was plundering fell on his head and thus he ended his life.³⁴ This was a punishment well deserved, is Galbert's implicit message here.

That many citizens felt sympathy for Bertulf and his companions is clear from an episode in which the associates of Thanemar van Straten occupied the house of Bertulf in the castle and triumphantly had put up their family banners there. This enraged the citizens of Gent to such a degree that they resorted to their weapons and wanted to hang Thanemar's nephews. In doing so they were cheered on by those members of Bertulf's party who had fled into the church. It is in this context that Galbert for the first time in his works speaks positively about Bertulf and his fellows, contrasting their friendly and honourable treatment of anyone in the town and the county, with the pride of those supporting Thanemar. According to the crowd who had gathered in the marketplace, it was Thanemar and his nephews who were to blame for the death of count Charles, not the men of Bertulf, who at that moment were in such dire straits in the besieged church of St. Donatian.³⁵

On the 20th of March the French king Louis VI, the Fat, came to Flanders, to the town in Arras, to settle the problems in the county and to advance his own candidate for the countship. The king deemed it

³⁴ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 42 and 3, ed. Rider, 92–93.

³⁵ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 45, ed. Rider, 95.

necessary, however, to invoke the support of the Flemish towns and it is particularly in the negotiations that were initiated to seek a new count for Flanders—there were no less than five serious candidates: William Clito, William of Ypres, Thierry of Alsace, the son of countess Geertruida of Holland and the count of Bergen—³⁶ that we see the institutional power of the Flemish towns. They clearly had a say in who would be their next ruler, at least in the eyes of Galbert. Galbert described the political deliberations that took place in Bruges among the citizen and the powerful people from the immediate neighbourhood of Bruges. Galbert clearly knows what was going on in town and there are no signs that he did not sympathise or identify with the town as such. He also sympathises with the role the towns of Flanders (*civitates et castra burgensia*) and particularly with the leading role that the city of Gent took in the process. At this point there is no sign of the irritation with the people from Gent that Galbert demonstrates elsewhere.³⁷ The rivalry with the town of Gent was apparently less important when the towns cooperated to defend their common interest against the nobility.

Galbert explicitly refers to the privileges that the town received upon acceptance of the new count. They were freed from paying any rent for their possessions or toll and they received the right to amend their customary laws. The agreements were confirmed by oath-taking by the parties involved. By citing these provisions Galbert underscored the agreements, never giving any indication that he had misgivings concerning these urban privileges.³⁸

In chapter 59, Galbert describes tensions between one of his heroes, Gervaa van Praat, who had been appointed castellan in Bruges, and the urban community. The townspeople came to the defence of one of their members after this person had had contact with the besieged thus transgressing a rule forbidding such contacts. The arrest of one of the citizens by the new castellan was clearly a sensitive issue which could easily turn

³⁶ See: Martina Häcker, 'The Language of Misogyny in Galbert of Bruges's Account of the Murder of Charles the Good', in *Galbert of Bruges and the Historiography of Medieval Flanders* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 126–144, here 129–130.

³⁷ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 51–54, ed. Rider, 100–103.

³⁸ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 55–56, ed. Rider, 103–106.

into a violent confrontation between the castellan and the urban community.³⁹ This indicates once more that the town was not as opposed to the besieged as Galbert depicts it and that there were in fact many members of the community who had close contacts with the besieged, through family ties as in this case, or through bonds of friendship. In this conflict Galbert describes the castellan as the wiser party and seems to distance himself from the urban community.

More rifts became visible between the urban community and the new count William Clito. This had to do with the fact that the count initiated an inquisition in which he tried to identify and punish those who had provided assistance to the party of Bertulf.⁴⁰ Apparently quite a number of citizens had been involved. Another point of friction was that the count still allowed his knights to raise toll on the people from Bruges, although he had freed the citizens by privilege from paying toll.⁴¹ Similar conflicts arose between the new count and the major towns of Ypres, St. Omer and Gent. William Clito had disturbed the relations with the towns and a number of aristocrats in such a way that these towns came to an agreement to break their bond of fealty with this robber and persecutor (*raptor et persecutor*).⁴²

Bruges eventually sided with Thierry of Alsace in agreement with Gent and the major towns in Flanders. Galbert was not convinced that this was the right choice and particularly in chapters 116 and 117, at the end of his work in a part that he clearly has not thoroughly edited, he aired his doubts. William Clito had defeated Thierry at the battle of Akspoelle and Galbert seems to have regarded this as a kind of ordeal. He describes how William and his men had prepared for the battle by undergoing a collective form of penance. No one in Bruges, so Galbert states, dared to reveal the true cause of the defeat and of the ensuing catastrophes. By citing Paul's letter to the Romans 13,1 'Every person should be subject to every power', Galbert indicated what he regarded as the cause of all evil befalling on the town of Bruges, a view underscored with more scriptural references. In these later chapters Galbert is no longer identifying himself unambiguously with the civic community in Bruges but is distancing

³⁹ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 59, ed. Rider, 110–111.

⁴⁰ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 87, ed. Rider, 137 and see fn. 30 above.

⁴¹ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 88, ed. Rider, 138.

⁴² Galbert, *De multro*, c. 95, ed. Rider, 143.

himself from it. He is also questioning the unity of the community when he writes that when a wise person gave his opinion, he was immediately silenced with the vilest arguments. Rider suspects that Galbert may here describe his own effort to change the general opinion.⁴³ At least it is clear that Galbert feels alienated from the body politic of Bruges at the time.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Now that we have followed Galbert's story from the murder of count Charles the Good on the 2nd of March 1127 up to the death of William Clito on the 29th of July 1128, paving the way for the succession of Thierry of Alsace as the undisputed new count of Flanders, we can draw some conclusions regarding Galbert's ideas and ideals of citizenship. Although he was a cleric in service of the count, Galbert clearly identified himself as a member of the civic community in Bruges. That civic community was first and foremost an undivided body politic. In the turbulent period that Galbert describes, a period in which the county of Flanders was torn by civil conflict and where many parties used violence as a means to attain their political ends, the town of Bruges always acted as a unified body politic. Although within the town there were clearly different groups supporting the party of Bertulf and others supporting Gervaa of Praat, Galbert chose to present the town as a unity. Probably acting as one man corresponded not only to the legal definition of the town as a corporation but was also the best way in which towns could play a role in the fierce competition for power and wealth in the county. The citizens of Bruges had to stand together to obtain their ends. They were clearly able to defend themselves militarily, even against the French king if necessary. They were also able to take part in political deliberations with other cities and with the leading aristocrats and were capable to draw up legal documents to defend their case. The powerful town of Gent is sometimes seen as a partner, sometimes as a rival, particularly with regard to the issue of the final resting place of the body of the dead count. More than the towns of Ypres or St. Omer, we see a certain ambivalence with regard to Gent, a town that as a 'proximate other' perhaps stirred stronger emotions.

⁴³ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 118, ed. Rider, 164; trans. Rider, *The Murder*, 181, fn 536.

What was it that they were fighting for? For Galbert political order under leadership of a competent count seems to have been of primary importance. A good count ensured peace in the region and thus ensured prosperity. Such a political order was divinely ordained and should be respected at all times. Galbert was also sympathetic towards self-governance within the town, and he was opposed to aristocrats levying tolls on merchants. On the role of citizens in choosing their counts, he is more ambivalent. In a crisis situation such as the one following upon the murder of Charles the Good, it seems towns can, and perhaps should, play a role, yet he also puts quite some emphasis on hereditary rights and in the end, it is always God who ordains.

Finally, we may ask who Galbert regarded as being part of the civic community in Bruges. It has already been remarked more in general that women are absent in Galbert's work, and this is all the more the case for the women in the town of Bruges.⁴⁴ The only place where they play a minor role is near the end of the book, when they occur as bemoaning the loss of their husbands after the lost battle of Akspoele.⁴⁵ The civic community of Bruges seems a male community. In a few remarkable places where women might have acted to make their views public, they are described and treated as witches (*incantatrix*).⁴⁶ In the same place where Galbert speaks of the women of Bruges, he also speaks about the unfree (*servi et ancillae*). Serfdom is, of course, a major theme in the chronicle, since it was the allegation that Bertulf and his family were of unfree descent, that caused their uprising. But as the allegation of serfdom was used to silence the opposition by Bertulf and his companions, so do the serfs remain silent in Galbert's story. Galbert as a cleric feels part of the civic community and priests also are regarded thus, although they are not always appreciated by Galbert. Yet at the end of his work Galbert feels less attached to the body politic of Bruges and as such gives us some idea

⁴⁴ Häcker, 'Misogyny'; Nancy Partner, 'Galbert's Hidden Women. Social Presence and Narrative Concealment', in *Galbert of Bruges and the Historiography of Medieval Flanders*, 109–125; Isaac, 'Urban Experience', 97–98, suggests that women may have played a role in military activities; Albert Demyttenaere, 'The Tears of Fromold. The Murder of Charles the Good, Homoeroticism, and the Ruin of the Erembalds', *ibid.*, 145–179, here 145–150.

⁴⁵ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 114, ed. Rider, 160. *Tunc nostri loci conjuges viros suos, filii patres, servi et ancillae dominos suos perditos deflebant.*

⁴⁶ Galbert, *De multro*, c. 110 and 112, ed. Rider, 155–156.

about the situation of those who were not in the lead and whose voices were neglected by the leading men of the township. The civic community had to stand together to survive these turbulent times, but in this male-dominated society many voices were suppressed, and we should not forget that women and the unfree were an integral part of this society, although in Galbert's view of citizens and citizenship they did not belong.

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