The Politics of Factional Conflict in Late Medieval Flanders

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In his influential study on political factions in medieval Europe, Jacques Heers demonstrated the importance of factionalism in the political life of the Middle Ages, at the level of cities and regions as well as at the 'national' level. The bulk of his empirical evidence, however, came from Italy, which was the core region of party strife.[1] Heers provided precious few examples from regions such as Flanders or Brabant which had the same unusually high degree of medieval urbanisation as Northern and Central Italy. A decade later, the American specialist on medieval Flanders, David Nicholas, who had translated Heers' French work into English, followed the latter's model very closely in applying it to the major industrial centre of Ghent during the Age of the Arteveldes, the famous rebel leaders who sided with England against the counts of Flanders and the Kings of France. However, his conclusions have not been generally accepted by most historians of the Low Countries.[2] Nicholas appeared to have overestimated the role of family feuds in the great fourteenth-century upheavals in Flanders in order to downplay the role of the guilds and of social and political struggle in general. In this sense, Nicholas' vision seems to have partially echoed the often virulent anti-Marxism of Heers, who was intent on proving that there was no such thing as "class struggle" in medieval society.

However, Nicholas' adaptation of Heers' monograph to late medieval Flanders must first and foremost be understood as a reaction against the paradigm established by the Belgian medievalist Henri Pirenne. While Pirenne was certainly no Marxist, he, his students and later adherents of the Ghent school of medieval history interpreted the Flemish revolts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a form of "democratic" class struggle.[3] The 'vertical' organisation of factions or parties became the key for Nicholas to explain political violence in the later medieval city rather than the 'horizontal solidarities' of the guilds or a sense of common interests among the urban labouring classes in general. In the present state of historical research, this juxtaposition seems to the undersigned authors to create a false opposition, as one frame of explanation need not necessarily to exclude the other. Both interpretations should be considered in a complementary fashion to reach a balanced position. Thus, while it is widely accepted that medieval Flanders had a perennial tradition of social struggles, factional conflicts and feuds between powerful patrician families were also part and parcel of the political repertoire of the Low Countries, especially in its densely populated cities.[4] To this end, this article endeavours to reformulate this historiographical problem and to return it to its rightful place on the research agenda.[5] In fact, Nicholas was certainly right in suggesting that the importance of factional conflict and the role of family clans and their feuds in Flanders have been underestimated by other historians. The prominent medievalist Wim

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Blockmans interpreted this phenomenon primarily within the framework of the rise of the 'modern state' during the period of Burgundian rule over the Netherlands.[6] Private feuds and political conflicts between factions or parties based on clan structures, he argued, were suppressed by the consolidation of an incumbent princely state. While the political authority of the Burgundian dukes certainly increased in fifteenth-century Flanders, this angle seems too narrow to encompass fully the complex features of partisan strife in medieval Flanders.

In this article, we will seek to explain the continual resurgence of forms of partisan conflict, through investigation of the social structure of 'families' and 'factions' and the socio-economic, political and ideological fields of tension in which they functioned. First, an analysis of the medieval terminology used to describe factions shows that medievalists have underestimated the social complexity of factions and the difficulty of reconstructing their political and ideological meanings. We then examine three characteristics of factions which transformed them into full-fledged political actors in the Flemish cities: first, their internal social cohesion as networks formed among family members and through patronage relationships; second, the economic and financial resources factions held at their disposal; and third, the ideological and political agendas which encouraged factions to fight each other. These three factors provided the motivation and the means for factions to challenge each other in the late medieval towns. This article will also connect factionalism to the tensions between different strata in the urban community. Factions were usually dominated by members of prominent families who often took advantage of the social and political complaints of the corporate middle classes and urban labourers in order to use men from middle and lower groups as foot soldiers in one elite family's struggle for power against other elite families. However, artisans and wage workers were not merely weak-willed instruments in the hands of opportunistic elites, because urban craft guilds never sided with a faction without considering their own interests. Instead, guildsmen hoped to realise their own political aspirations by taking sides in conflicts within the upper layers of urban society. In this sense, factional strife was shaped by an interplay of vertical network alliances and horizontal class solidarities. The specific socio-political constellation in which a faction was embedded therefore explained its existence and opposition to rival parties. Over time, changes in social relationships within the late medieval city led inexorably to the redrawing of the boundaries that defined the methods and the outcomes of factional conflicts. During the period studied in this article (roughly 1280-1500) there was also a considerable evolution in the political relations between the towns and the counts of Flanders, as the military and financial power of the Dukes of Burgundy steadily increased after they had assumed rule of the county in 1384. While the major cities of Ghent and Bruges were still formidable adversaries to Louis of Male in the 1370s, by the middle of the 15th century, Philip the Good had enough financial and military means to defeat them.[7]

Some notes on terminology

Before turning our attention to the social, economic and political structures that shaped factional strife in medieval Flanders, a few conceptual remarks are in order. In Dutch-language historiography, a paradigm established by historians from the northern Netherlands dominates scholarly terminology on factional strife. In their studies of the Holland factions of

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[6] W. Blockmans, 'Vete, partijstrijd en staatsmacht. Een vergelijking (met de nadruk op Vlaanderen)', in *Bloedwraak, partijstrijd en pacificatie in laat-middeleeuws Vlaanderen*, ed. J. Marsilje (Hilversum, 1990), 9-33; for a similar approach in a later period, see: W. Beik, 'Urban factions and the social order during the minority of Louis XIV', *French Historical Studies*, xv (1987), 66-7.

[7] As we discussed elsewhere, see J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Patterns of urban rebellion in medieval Flanders', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxi (2005), 369-93; S. Cohn, *Lust for liberty: The politics of social revolt in medieval Europe, 1200-1425. Italy, France, and Flanders* (Cambridge Mass., 2006); M. Boone, 'The Dutch Revolt and the medieval tradition of urban dissent', *Journal of Early Modern History*, xi (2007), 351-75.

the 'Hooks' and the 'Cods' (*Hoeken* and *Kabeljauwen*), Dutch historians distinguished between the concept of a 'faction' (which operates inside a single town) and a 'party' (which operates within a wider geographical framework).[8] Obviously, the distinction between geographic levels is an important one. Marco Gentile, one of the leading modern specialists on the factional conflict between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, the most notorious of medieval political parties, also distinguishes between local, institutionalised factions, which operated as types of corporate groups in cities the size of Parma, for example, and the pan-Italian 'meta-factions' (*metafazioni*), such as these two famous parties. It was power politics and pragmatic realism rather than a coherent ideological alliance that determined the position of a faction in a particular city-state.[9] However, we will use these concepts interchangeably, since contemporary sources used them as synonyms (*factiones* was the usual Latin equivalent for different forms of the word 'parties' in the vernacular). It should also be noted that a rigid distinction between town and countryside or between nobles and burghers seems to do little justice to the extensive geographical range of late medieval elites in the county, nor is it useful as an empirical starting point.[10] Flemish factions were primarily a phenomenon of the urban elites and middling groups, but at certain points, especially around 1300, both the nobility and rural groups also played roles in factions. Last but not least, the princely state and its officials played a significant role in the dynamics of factional conflicts, and the aspirations and strategies of this state elite transcended local politics. For this reason, we will refrain from adopting the historiographical distinction between factions and parties. Similarly, we shall speak of 'political factions' in general, rather than of 'urban factions'.

Lilies and Claws
The primary image of partisan strife in medieval Flanders is the struggle between the 'Lilies' and 'Claws' that eventually led to the defeat of the French army at Courtrai by Flemish militias in 1302. This event is the Flemish equivalent of the Battle of Bannockburn, the medieval harbinger of Scottish independence in the medieval era (at least in nineteenth- and twentieth-century readings of these events with a romantic, nationalist twist). This episode has consequently dominated historiographical views of parties and factions in medieval Flanders. In Dutch these party names were supposed to be the *Leliaerts* (Lilies) and the *Klauwaerts* (Claws), the latter also being referred to as the *Liebaerts* (Lions). The Lilies were a coalition between King of France and the patrician elites of the Flemish cities, while the Claws or Lions consisted of Flemish artisans and peasants who supported Count Guy of Dampierre in his attempts to preserve political autonomy vis-à-vis his feudal overlord. What deserves our attention is that these party names, like their alleged political background, are to a large degree the product of nineteenth-century myth formation, which used this battle as a prefiguration of modern conceptualisations of Flemish national identity.[11] First, the name 'Klauwaerts' is probably not authentic. Around 1300, there were two 'parties' in Flanders in

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[8] H. Brokken, *Het ontstaan van de Hoekse en Kabeljauwse twisten* (Leiden, 1981); D. Roorda, *Partij en factie: de oproeren van 1672 in de steden van holland en Zeeland, een krachtmeting tussen partijen en facties* (Groningen, 1961); H. Brand, *Over macht en overwicht. Stedelijke elites in Leiden (1420-1510)* (Leuven, 1996), 99-101; Van Gent, *Pertijelike saken*, 427-8.

[9] See the introduction of M. Gentile ed., *Guelfi e Ghibellini nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (Milan, 2005) and *idem*, 'Casato e fazione nella Lombardiadel Quattrocento: il caso di Parma', in *Famiglie e Poteri in Italia tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, eds. A. Bellavitis and I. Chabot (Rome, 2009), 151-187.

[10] J. Dumolyn, *Staatsvorming en vorstelijke ambtenaren in het graafschap Vlaanderen (1419-1477)* (Antwerp, 2003), 140-1; F. Buylaert, 'La noblesse et l'unification des Pays-Bas. Naissance d'une noblesse bourguignonne à la fin du Moyen Âge?', *Revue Historique*, cxxxii (2010), 3-25.

[11] A new monograph on this 'Flemish Revolution of 1302' is under preparation under the joint authorship of Jan Dumolyn, Véronique Lambert and Walter Prevenier. See also V. Lambert, 'De Guldensporenslag van fait-divers tot ankerpunt van de Vlaamse identiteit (1302-1838): de natievormende functionaliteit van historiografische mythen', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, cxv (2000), 365-391.

the sense that individuals chose between two sides, but Walter Prevenier has pointed out that they were usually described as *le partie le roy* on the one side, and *le conte de Flandres et sa partie* on the other. In this setting, only one of the two parties seems to have had a fixed party designation. Around 1316, a Ghent Franciscan – the author of the *Annales Gandenses* – distinguished between the *aliquorum majorum de villa, qui vocabuntur Liliardi* and the *amici comitis*; and the Brabantine chronicler Lodewijk van Velthem wrote in 1315 about *twee partien, lilyarte en lyebaerts*.[12] The catchphrase *Klauwaert* in fact only makes its first appearance in the Flemish sources at the end of the fourteenth century. Some versions of the so-called *Flandria Generosa C* chronicle tradition include a party song which uses 'Klauwaerts' to designate the Ghent faction of Philip of Artevelde, who clashed in the 1380s with the patrician elite of Bruges (who were given the name *Leliaerts*)[13]. Although further research is needed, it seems that the names of the parties owed more to literary construction than to the actual contemporary perceptions of factionalism in early fourteenth-century Flanders, while *Leliaerts* was a contemporary appellation. This situation sharply contrasts with similar conflicts elsewhere, such as those between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, the Black and the White Guelfs, or the Hooks and Cods, since those party names do appear very frequently in contemporary sources. As such, the famous case of '1302' provides a powerful warning of the fact that medieval parties did not hesitate to attribute their own party names to earlier competing groups that they considered precursors to their own struggle.

This also has far-reaching implications for the social and political interpretation of the Flemish factions who clashed at the turn of the fourteenth century. They seem to have been less clear-cut and coherent than originally thought. According to Prevenier, political opportunism and a mix of motives determined the choice of 'party' in those days. Political power in the cities attracted the patricians, bribery by means of loans and annuities drew the nobility, social and economic demands secured the corporate middle groups, anglophile sympathies or commercial interests attracted merchants, and, last but not least, family solidarity and patronage relationships influenced individual choice.[14] This case study once again questions whether factions were purely the result of opportunist choices made on the spur of the moment, or whether the composition of factions must be understood as an echo of structural solidarities and loyalties in medieval society. It also sheds new light on the stakes and ideas behind partisan struggle and on the possible reasons why urban masses supported one faction in its struggle with a rival party in town.

Terminology in the contemporary sources
An analysis of how factions were described socially provides us with a useful approach towards the social and political structures that underlay factional strife in late medieval Flanders. In Italy, where this terminology has probably received the most scholarly attention, a faction was called a *societas*, or a *consorzio* or expressions such as *e' figlioli* (and their children) or *quegli della casa degli* (those from the house of) were used to indicate factions. A *casata* or a *consorteria* was the usual term employed for the powerful family clans that formed the core of the factions. In Genoa, the great families were called the *alberghi*. The sources also use the Latin term *pars*. Another name for the Ghibellines was the *Pars imperii*, and the Guelfs were also called the *Pars ecclesiae*.[15] Similar to Italian discourses on the great

[12] W. Prevenier, 'Leliaards en Klauwaards voor en na 1302. Loyauteit, collaboratie en opportunisme', in *Omtrent 1302*, eds. P. Trio et al. (Leuven, 2002), 142; *Annales Gandenses*, ed. F. Funck-Brentano (Paris, 1896), *passim*.
[13] C. van de Graft (ed.), *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen* (Arnhem, 1968), 73.
[14] W. Prevenier, 'Motieven voor leliaardsgezindheid in Vlaanderen in de periode 1297-1305', *De Leiegouw*, xix (1977), 280.
[15] Heers, *Parties and political life*, 28-30; *idem*, 'Consorterie familiari alla fine del Medioevo', in *La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del Rinascimento*, ed. G. Chittolini (Bologna, 1979), 301-321; G. Tabacco, *L'Italie medievale* (Chambéry, 2000), 210, 244; F. Bruni, *La città divisa. Le parti e il bene comune da*

evils of factional conflicts[16], Flemish juridical and historiographical sources employ a semantic field with a strong normative and moralistic component. It evokes an ideological opposition between concepts such as *conspiratio* and *coniuratio* (driven by a desire for *singulier prouffit)* and urban *concordia* (the prerequisite for the *bien public,* or the common good). Unsurprisingly, canonical texts on the body politic (St. Augustine, John of Salisbury or Thomas Aquinas) provide the theoretical underpinnings of this opposition. Italian sources clearly use *pars* – from which the word 'party' derives – as something antithetical to the interests of the commune as a whole.[17] In vernacular sources, both in Middle Dutch and Middle French, the discourse on factional conflicts is also constructed around the relation of the term faction with concepts such as *convenances* (agreements) *allianchien* (alliances), *bendes* or *benderien* (bands), *sects* (sections), *convocaciones et congregaciones illicitas* (illicit assemblies and societies), *ongheoorloofde verghaderingen* (unauthorised meetings), *monopoles* ('monopolies', meaning both cartels of merchants and workers' strikes), *partijlichede* (partiality) and *confederacions*. The general situation of political discord was often described as *ghescille* (differences, conflicts), *werringhen* (disorders), *hayne* (hatred), *divisions et parcialitéz* or *rancunes et divisions* (ill-will and divisions).[18] *Discors et discentions* was an expression that pointed to factional conflict, but was probably used in a more general sense to describe uprisings.[19] A particular faction could be given the name of its protagonist, such as the Ghent faction of Danneel Sersanders in 1447 that was referred to as *Daniel et ses amis* (the aforesaid Daniel and his friends).[20]

Typical for a faction as a *coniuratio* (conspiracy) was the *verzworen eede* (sworn oath), but this was also a key element in every type of urban corporate group that originated as a *Schwurvereinigung* or an *universitas*, *amicitia* or *corpus* (guild or commune). There is a considerable overlap with these terms, which must all be situated in the corporatist discourse of the medieval era. Apparently, members of such factions spoke of 'we and ours' (*nous et les notres*). Chroniclers tell us that this expression was no longer allowed after the sovereign abolished the faction.[21] *Partie houden* (literally: 'to hold a party') was referred to taking sides for or against something or someone in a political or military conflict.[22] One could also

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Dante a Guicciardini (Bologna, 1986); L. Lopez, 'Contrasti e fazioni ceti potere e governo nell'Aquila di altri secoli (1254-1806)', *Bullettino della Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia Patria*, lxxxv (1995), 87-126; D. Smail, 'Factions and Vengeance in Renaissance Italy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxxviii (1996), 781-9; P. Grillo, 'Borghi franchi e lotte di fazione tre fondazioni vercellesi negli anni 1269-1270', *Studi Storici. Rivista Trimestrale*, xlii (2001), 397-412; V. Mazzoni, 'Dalla lotta di parte al governo delle fazioni. I guelfi e i ghibellini del territorio fiorentino nel Trecento', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, clx (2002), 455-514.

[16] M. Gentile, 'Discorsi sulle fazioni, discorsi delle fazioni. "Parole e demonstratione partiale" nella Lombardiadel second Quattrocento', in *Linguaggi politici nell'Italiadel Rinascimento*, eds. A. Gamberini and G. Petralia (Pisa, 2006), 381-408.

[17] J. Hyde, 'Contemporary views on faction and civil strife in the thirteenth and fourteenth century', in *Literacy and its uses. Studies on late medieval Italy*, ed. J. Hyde (Manchester, 1993), 64.

[18] *Chronijcke van Ghendt door Jan van den Vivere en eenige andere aanteekenaars der XVIe en XVIIe eeuw*, ed. F. de Potter (Ghent, 1885), 18-19; *Dagboek van Gent van 1447 tot 1470, met een vervolg van 1477 tot 1515*, ed. V. Fris (Ghent, 1901), i, 106, ii, 83; *Annales Gandenses*, 21; Th. de Limburg-Stirum, *Codex diplomaticus Flandriae inde ab anno 1296 ad usque 1325* (Bruges, 1875) i, 38, 329-32; O. Van Dixmude, *Merkwaerdige gebeurtenissen, vooral in Vlaenderen en Brabant, en ook in de aengrenzende landstreken: van 1377 tot 1443*, ed. J.J. Lambin (Ypres, 1835), 34-5.

[19] Th. de Limburg-Stirum, *Cartulaire de Louis de Male* (Bruges, 1898), i, 49.

[20] Archives départementales du Nord, Lille (ADN), B 1284, 15836.

[21] *Dagboek van Gent*, i, 106. A similar prohibition was issued after the Bruges rebellion of 1436-38: *en deffendant expressement a toutes parties, d'un coste et d'autre, de non jamais pour les choses dessus dictes avenue empeschier, mesfaire, mesdire ne reprochier l'un l'autre en aucun maniere* (Stadsarchief Brugge (SAB), Political charters, 1st series, 1005).

[22] ADN, B 1706, 55r -57v.

asemblé, or *partielic verghaderingen houden* (to assemble in partial meetings).[23] In general, the term 'party', both in Latin and the vernacular languages, seems to be the most representative contemporary term for a political faction. In 1307, the French King refers in a letter to the Count of Flanders to the *nobiles et ignobiles* who *pro parte nostra fuerunt*.[24] An undated inquiry from the fourteenth century describes the troubles between *le partie nostre seingneur le roy* and *le partie ses adversaires* in Damme, and mentions their composition in terms such as *leur compaingnon* or *autres leur amis et leur aidans*.

Cohesive and dense networks: kinship

The semantic association of factions with kinship and comradeship in the quotations above reveals the social composition of medieval factions. Terms such as friendship and alliance clearly demonstrate that internal cohesion is a crucial characteristic of factions. Prior research into partisan struggles in medieval and early modern Europe informed by social theory has shown that factions consisted of an amalgam of familial relationships, social networks, economic partnerships and enduring friendship.[25] The anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain described factions as social groups with vague boundaries and unclear recruiting mechanisms. Unquestionably, faction members have affection towards one another, stemming from bonds of friendship.[26] Factions are dynamic organisations constituted by means of network formation, informal ties and personal relationships. As a consequence, a faction can be considered an amorphous cluster of high-density social networks.[27] These social networks, rising from day-to-day contact between people, unite members of the faction and create mutual trust, which functions as a conductor of the internal exchange of information, ideas and goods. Trust between the members generates marriages and other family alliances while simultaneously engendering distrust vis-à-vis those who do not belong to the faction. In short, an intense social cohesion, i.e. a high density of strong and durable internal networks, is crucial to the survival of the faction. Mutual confidence also facilitates the transference of economic goods within a faction. Factions channels information, safeguard political secrets, exclude non-members and generate social connections. Hence, the trust between the members of a faction is essential for its existence.

Sources from medieval Flanders often describe the members of a faction as someone's *mannen, vrienden, maghen, knechten ende hulpen* (men, friends, kin, servants and helpers). The first part, '*mannen, vrienden, maghen*', points to what Boissevain called the core (or nucleus) of a faction, while the second part '*knechten ende hulpen*' refers to the so-called periphery.[28] A faction's core always consisted of a network of kin, traditionally called *vrienden ende maghen* in Dutch. The word *vrient* could mean both 'friend' and 'kinsman', but

[23] Stadsarchief Gent (SAG), series 212, 1, 61r.

[24] Limburg-Stirum, *Codex diplomaticus*, ii, 62; and i, 329-332 (for the following case).

[25] L. Martines, *April blood. Florence and the plot against the Medici* (Oxford, 2003); C. Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and faction in a medieval commune* (Princeton, 1991); E. Ives, *Faction in Tudor England* (London, 1979); R. Shephard, 'Court factions in early modern England', *Journal of Modern History*, lxiv (1992) 723-728; G. Xhayet, *Réseaux de pouvoir et solidarités de parti à Liège du Moyen Age, 1250-1468* (Liège, 1997); E. Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore, 1998); D. Smail, 'Faction and Feud in Fourteenth-Century Marseille', in *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. J. Netterstrom and B. Poulsen (Aarhus, 2007), 113-32.

[26] J. Boissevain, *Friends of friends: Networks, manipulators and coalitions* (New York, 1974), 192-205; R. Nicholas, 'Factions: a comparative analysis', in *Friends, followers, and factions: A reader in political clientelism*, ed. S. Schmidt (Berkeley, 1977), 57-58.

[27] The concept of 'density' refers to the large number of social relations the members of a cluster in a network shared with each other, see M. Emirbayer and J. Goodwin, 'Network analysis, culture, and the problem of agency', *American Journal of Sociology*, ic (1994), 1447-9 and J. Padgett and C. Ansell, 'Robust action and the rise of the Medici, 1400-1434', *American Journal of Sociology*, xcviii (1993), 1310.

[28] Boissevain, *Friends of friends*, 195-200.

at other times it had a clear political connotation, while *maagscap* usually meant 'kinship' but sometimes also referred to a society or association. *Bloet* or *zibbe,* then, exclusively referred to actual family ties, 'relations by blood'.[29] In Douai, terms such as *lignage, parens, proïsmes, amis, amis charnels* were used, and particularly the classic pair, '*parens et amies*'. The term 'friends' was a central concept in the designation of factions.[30] A striking example of how dense cohesion could be within a faction's core is provided by the faction of Willem Moreel from Bruges during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. In the Flemish Uprising of 1482-92, this faction took a stand against Maximilian of Austria's party. Two high-density networks made up the faction's core: Willem Moreel's network on one hand and his political companion Maarten Lem's on the other. Willem Moreel's son-in-law Boudewijn van Heldinghe, his brother Lieven and the latter's brother-in-law Jan de Keyt held important political offices during the period when Willem's faction controlled Bruges, and as a consequence we can count them among the members of his faction. The same goes for the socio-professional network around Maarten Lem. His brothers-in-law Jan and Antoon van Nieuwenhove, Cornelis Breydel, and Arnoud Adornes belonged to influential families of merchants and entrepreneurs in the prosperous port. Through marriages and professional contacts, the members of this network were closely connected, both among themselves and with members of the other network. The faction's core around Willem Moreel and Maarten Lem formed a social safety net for its members in times of need, offered guarantees for risky trade transactions, and, what is more, protected its members in case of political attack. When, for instance, Willem Moreel and his two companions were imprisoned by a rival faction in December 1481, their substantial bail was paid by six other members of their network.[31] Kinship and friendship provided the strongest glue for the internal cohesion of a faction.

The importance of kinship relations as a constituent for political factions is hardly surprising, considering the importance of kinship in pre-industrial societies. Also, a similar observation has already been noted for Italian political factions. This does not mean, however, that there were no regional differences in medieval Europe. The typical North-Italian *consorterie* or consortial lineage consisted of multiple households who often elected their own *consul* among the leading men of the extended family.[32] From the twelfth century onwards, *consorteria* had outer and inner circles of members, with the latter being primarily recruited from a larger group of agnatic relatives while the outer circle was defined in formal contracts and could also include persons who were not even kinsmen. Many of the great lineages or *alberghi* of Genoa included such 'artificial kindred people'.[33] The *consorteria*, however, were much more closely knit together than were the extended families of the Flemish towns. Though the research into family structures in cities such as Ghent and Bruges is far less developed than its Italian counterpart, it is clear that there were considerable differences from the Italian situation. In Flanders, the household structure of the nuclear family was clearly the most dominant form of kinship organisation. There is no parallel between a Flemish urban patrician lineage and an Italian *consorteria* or *casata*, which often held property, such as a rural or urban tower house, often with a whole compound, a chapel, and even family baths, in

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[29] P. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Maagschap en vriendschap: een beschouwing over de structuur en de functies van verwantschapsbetrekkingen in het laat-middeleeuwse Holland', *Holland*, xvii (1985), 69-108; M. Danneel, 'Vrienden en magen in de bronnen van de laat-middeleeuwse Brugse weeskamer', *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis*, xxxvi (1982), 33-9.

[30] K. Oschema (ed.), *Freundschaft oder 'amitié'? Ein politisch-soziales Konzept der Vormoderne im zwischensprachlichen Vergleich, 15. - 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2007).

[31] This case is studied in detail in J. Haemers, 'Factionalism and state power in the Flemish Revolt (1477-1492)', *Journal of Social History*, xlii (2009), 1009-39; and *idem*, *For the common good. State power and urban revolts in the reign of Mary of Burgundy, 1477-1482* (Turnhout, 2009).

[32] Tabacco, *L'Italie medievale*, 210.

[33] D. Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge Mass., 1985), 88-89.

common.[34] These Italian family clans often controlled entire urban neighbourhoods as their private dominions, with their central *palazzo* or *domus magna* in the middle and smaller houses for their family members and the poor they maintained. They had their own semi-official forms of institutionalised political and judicial power, including private militias to dominate areas of the urban landscape.[35] Though Flemish elite families were quite visible and influential in cities like Ghent or Bruges and also invested in impressive residences and almshouses for the poor, they never achieved a comparable spatial domination nor mounted a comparable show of strength. In Flanders, nuclear families did consider themselves part of a lineage – that is, an extended family comprised of a set of the nuclear families that shared an ancestor in the male line – but they preferred to live in separate dwellings. Despite the different residential pattern, extended families of the Flemish urban elite could definitely function as an powerful social, economic and political unit.[36] As did the Italian *consorterie*, those families controlled joint commercial and financial holdings (see below). The profits of these businesses was intensively deployed to patronise clients and mobilise men and resources in times of factional conflict.

Cohesive and dense networks: patrons and clients
The composition of a faction was not only shaped by kinship, but also by relationships of dependence and service. This is especially true of the faction's periphery, which was connected to the core more often by patronage than kinship. Clients came from the same social environment as members of the faction's core, and from political alliances with members of the urban middle class or lower echelons of society. Though each of these groupings will be examined separately, continuous overlaps between them are noticeable. First, the 'household' structure included resident staff, as was the case in the Roman *familia*. The Italian family clans measured their power not only by the size of their common properties under patriarchal authority but also by the number of 'men' they could mobilise, including a large number of kinsmen, whom the clan had to support financially, and groups of clients and faithful followers who were in the clan's sphere of influence. These clients and followers ranged from functionaries, clerks, vassals from urban and rural properties, to any armed man who would wear their colours. This combination of horizontal and vertical networks of kinsmen and clients transformed the extended family into a full-fledged political faction.[37] Similarly, the French-Flemish *mesnie*, the equivalent of a Middle Dutch *mesniede* or also *huus*, for instance, included *valets*, *garçons*, *valetons* and *meskines*.[38]

Research on English, German, and Spanish towns has shown that clients of powerful faction members could also be found in the urban middle class, particularly from guilds. In York in 1381, for instance, the wealthy merchant John de Gisburn joined forces with leading figures in the craft guilds in order to take control of the city.[39] In this case, factional divides within the urban elite led to an alliance between one of the ostracized factions and middle

[34] *Ibidem*, 89; S. Bertelli, *Il potere oligarchico nello stato-città medievale* (Firenze, 1978), 47-48.
[35] Heers, 'Consorterie familiari', 301-306.
[36] E. Thoen, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late Middeleeuwen en het begin van de Moderne Tijden* (Ghent, 1988), i, 169-70 and J. Dumolyn, 'Patriarchaal patrimonialisme. De vrouw als object in sociale transacties in het laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaanderen: familiale strategieën en genderposities', *Verslagen van het Centrum voor Genderstudies van de Universiteit Gent*, xii (2003), 169. See also F. Kent, 'Review essay. A la recherche du clan perdu. Jacques Heers and "family clans" in the Middle Ages', *Journal of family history*, i (1977), 77-8 who criticized Heers' assumption that shared residences are a necessary condition for extended families to function as a network.
[37] Bertelli, *Il potere oligarchico*, 49-50.
[38] Blockmans, 'Vete, partijstrijd', 22.
[39] C. Liddy, 'Urban conflict in late fourteenth-century England: The case of York in 1380-1', *English Historical Review*, cxviii (2003), 19; see also R. Dobson, 'The rising of York, Beverley and Scarborough', in *The English Rising of 1381*, eds. R. Hilton and T. Aston (London, 1981), 123.

class groups, who used the factional split within the urban elite to further their own political demands. As the revolt of Ralph Holland in London in the 1440s shows, the creation of such an alliance often propelled the existing regime's political opponents to power.[40] There are similar examples from late medieval Germany, early-modern Spain, and late medieval Flanders.[41] In Ghent, for instance, Daneel Sersanders, allied with his aforementioned '*amis*', that is, the deans of the smaller guilds, in order to be elected as head dean of the city in 1447. In exchange, his clients were appointed as aldermen after Sersanders became head dean.[42] The case of Willem Moreel, who also appointed clients to city offices after he was elected burgomaster, demonstrates that this kind of partnership created not only political dependency but also social ties. Marriages were concluded between families of the elite members of Moreel's faction and representatives of the craft guilds. These social ties transformed the opportunistic political coalition between elite factions and middle class groups into a durable and solid league.[43] We will discuss below whether these political and social bonds were solely inspired by opportunistic motives, or also by common ideas on the exercise of power. The Moreel case, as well as the York and London examples, demonstrate that the ascendancy of the faction of craft guilds and elite members went hand in hand with the introduction of new political rules, which required accountability of the rulers and political participation for the city's corporate organizations.

Parties also located clients in the city's lower echelons, men who fetched and carried in exchange for alms and protection. In Italy, these kinds of clients were sometimes referred to as *seguaci* (literally 'followers') or by the expression *con loro seguito* ('with their retinue').[44] Flemish sources used the term 'helpers'. *Aidans* or *hulpers* typically designated the servants or clients who followed directives of a familial network in the sense of servants or clients, while *ghesellen* (companions) seems to have had the more general meaning of the 'party faithful'. At least, this was the case for the Scaecs, a powerful noble lineage based in the city of Courtrai. The Scaecs and two other prominent families formed the core of the network, while the *hulpers* were recruited from the lower classes.[45] Incidentally, *hulpere* was often used to refer to 'a follower of a group of insurgents', as in the rumour that was spread about Lambert van Tideghem in 1353. This deacon of the smaller guilds of Ghent was accused of having been the *hulpere* of a conspiracy of weavers, when he had in fact reported it to the aldermen.[46] In 1386, Jan Groeninc, a rich but heavily indebted burgher of Bruges, was supposed to have organised an *allianche, congregacion et asanblée* (alliance, gathering and assembly) in order to destroy all the *bonnes gens* of the city. He was probably active in commerce himself, but his followers were mainly textile workers.[47] This case may involve more of a coalition of equal partners than a faction, but the example shows that it is often hard to distinguish between a faction (sometimes temporary in nature) built around a prominent

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[40] C. Barron, 'Ralph Holland and the London Radicals, 1438-1444', in *The English medieval town: A reader in English urban history, 1200-1540*, eds. R. Holt and G. Rosser (London, 1990), 160-183. More general: H. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: an urban class in medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), 122.

[41] For Germany and Spain, see, respectively: A. Haverkamp, '"Innerstädtische Auseinandersetzungen" und überlokale Zusammenhänge in deutschen Städten während der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts', in *Stadtadel und Bürgertum in den italienischen und deutschen Städten des Spätmittelalters*, eds. R. Elze and G. Fasoli (Berlin, 1991) 89-126; L. Corteguera, 'Popular politics in composite monarchies: Barcelona artisans and the campaign for a papal bull against hoarding (1580-5)', *Social History*, xxvi (2001), 22-39.

[42] J. Haemers, *De Gentse opstand (1499-1453). De strijd tussen rivaliserende facties om het stedelijke kapitaal* (Kortrijk, 2004), 138-46.

[43] Haemers, *Factionalism and state power*, 1019-23.

[44] Heers, *Factions and political life*, 112.

[45] De Limburg-Stirum, *Cartulaire de Louis de Male*, i, 554.

[46] *Ibidem*, i, 422.

[47] J. Mertens, 'Twee (wevers)opstanden te Brugge (1387-1391)', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, cx (1973), 5-20.

family and a more loosely-knit conspiracy which aimed to execute a coup or had another very specific political goal.

Sign systems of the faction
To strengthen the cohesion between core and periphery, factions employed various sign systems, such as designations, attire, battle cries, and songs. In late medieval Ghent, slogans about Jacob van Artevelde, the heroic leader of the revolt of the 1330s against the French king, were cried long after his death.[48] We already mentioned the song of the Bruges Lilies in 1380. However, the sources more frequently attest to visual signs of parties. The author of the *Annales Gandenses*, the principal source on the political crisis of 1302, describes how both parties in Ghent wore their own specific attire.[49] In 1412 John the Fearless forbade the practice of nobles distributing *livrees de robe*, or in Middle Dutch *clederen van paruren* (liveries) to commoners in order to deploy them as a kind of shock troops to demolish the houses or mills of opponents in feuds.[50] In Lille, tensions rose in 1420, because both knights, squires and *confrairies* (this is probably a reference to shooting guilds) had distributed *cottes et parures* and organised *congregations et assemblees illicites* at weddings and other festive occasions. Both nobles and non-nobles distributed 'to their officials, familiars, servants or those from their lineage who had received courtesies or other favours', a phrase which clearly expresses patronage relationships.[51] The individuals who received those tokens were largely 'poor workers and other people of small estate' (*povres gens laboureurs ou d'autre condition ou petit estat*) which indicates that elite networks actively tried to establish a broader base of support within Lille society. The ordinance proclaimed by Philip the Good in 1453, just after the subjection of the rebellious city of Ghent, is even more explicit. The duke expressed regret that city-dwellers had fought during the civil war and that nobles, merchants and other citizens had distributed *robes de livree et parures de draps* to their followers. In the future, he ordered, this was only allowed for 'people and familiars of their households, their bailiffs, receivers, sergeants and deputies'.[52] It remained permissible to dress a network of relations, friends and servants with the outward signs of the patron or head of the family in question, as it had been in the past. However, the duke did intervene when this display of retinue led to factional struggle or when liveries identified opposing parties in an open and armed conflict ,– as it had during the Ghent rebellion. Incidentally, the cities often supported the dukes in this effort, not only by promulgating laws with similar content but also by repeatedly urging the duke to address this problem during meetings with city representatives.[53]

The stakes: power and money in the city
In late medieval Flanders, as in England and Italy, chroniclers and moralists often criticized factions for moral deficiencies and failing to embrace justice and the common good.[54] Those commonly held ideas pinpoint the sources of factional strife: that it is real and likely to boil up

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[48] *Dagboek van Gent*, i, 129.
[49] Prevenier, 'Leliaards en Klauwaards', 141.
[50] Blockmans, 'Vete, partijstrijd', 29.
[51] They gave *parures* to *autres que a leurs officiers, familiers, domestiques ou de leur lignaige pour ce recoivent courtoisie ou autres amitiés* (ADN, B 1602, 103r).
[52] *Que nul chevalier, escuier, bourgois, marchant ne autre de quelque estat ou condition qu'il soit es mettes et termes de votre dit office ne baille* […] *aucunes robes de sa livree ne parure, se non seulement aux gens et familliers de son hostel, a ses bailliz, receveurs, sergens et censiers* (SAG, series 93, nr. 607). See also Lille, Archives Municipales, pièces aux titres, 74 (1418) for a similar ordinance to the bailiff of Lille.
[53] W. Blockmans, *Handelingen van de Leden en Staten van Vlaanderen. Regering van Filips de Goede* (Brussels, 1990), i, 642.
[54] P. Strohm, *Hochon's arrow*: *The social imagination of fourteenth-century texts* (Princeton, 1992), 31; E. Coleman, 'Cities and communes', in *Italy in the central Middle Ages*, ed. D. Abulafia (Oxford, 2004), 56; and J. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Oxford, 2006), 58.

in everyday interaction; that it engages momentary passions and fosters long-term grudges; that possession of mayoral and aldermanic posts secures effective power and it is worth caring about; that alignments involve not only individuals but also larger units like craft guilds and households. In one of his treatises, the Flemish jurist Filips Wielant († 1520) also designated a revolt resulting from anger and factionalism as a criminal act.[55] Such 'great malice' often guided urban politics in Bruges, as the fifteenth-century Flemish chronicler known as Olivier van Dixmude pointed out.[56] While describing a factional conflict in Bruges in 1407 in which the 'de Scutelare' clan, supported by Duke John the Fearless, tried to take over city government, Van Dixmude condemned the family's moral behaviour as it attempted to coalesce with the craft guilds. Envy was a problem in the whole of Flanders, he said, because when dining together, they actually wanted to eat the heart of their dining companions ('commensals').[57] These stories, from both normative judicial and narrative sources, consider factional conflict, without exception, to be negative. This may be moralistic rhetoric, but it does refer to the heart of the matter. After all, what was often at stake in urban faction struggle was control over 'public' resources and the possibility of skimming them for familial profit. In addition, political or judicial offices offered opportunities for large-scale corruption. Accordingly, both parties in the Bruges conflict of 1407-1411 accused each other in turn of corruption, acting for their own *avancement ende promocie*, for their *singulier prouffit*, and not in the general interest of the city.[58]

Wim Blockmans is therefore right in suggesting that power in the city, especially access to the city's economic and financial surplus, was the main issue in party struggles.[59] In his treatise on the Guelfs and Ghibellines, the Italian glossator Bartolus of Sassoferrato similarly did not consider ideological difference between supporters of the Pope or Emperor to be the main *raison d'être* of the Italian urban factions. Instead, he situated the roots of Italian factionalism in the struggle for public office and the resulting income.[60] When different groups from the political and economic elites in Bruges confronted each other, these networks did not articulate extensive social programmes to distinguish themselves from their opponents. Instead, they collided over their shared desire for a dominant position in the urban political arena.[61] The core of Willem Moreel's faction in this commercial metropolis, for instance, had considerable economic and financial resources at its disposal, as a consequence of its activities in the Bruges marketplace. Willem Moreel was an influential spice merchant who, with other members of his network (such as Jan de Keyt), led a mercantile company that had branches in Antwerp and Rome. Maarten Lem's brothers-in-law descended from important merchant families (Cornelis Breydel was from a family of butchers, Jan van Nieuwenhove was a broker, Arnoud Adornes was an international merchant, one of many in Bruges). It is striking that the Bruges faction supporting Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg, who opposed Willem Moreel's network in the 1480, also had important merchants and bankers among its members, such as the Houtmaerct brothers. In other commercial cities at the time, most certainly in the Italian cities, the leading networks behind factions also

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[55] *Uuyt hate, uuyt nyde of uuyt eeneghe parcialité* (F. Wielant, *Corte instructie in materie criminele*, ed. J. Monballyu (Brussels 1995), 80).

[56] *Groote nyt* (Van Dixmude, *Merkwaerdige gebeurtenissen*, 34-35).

[57] *Ende aten ende dronken deen metten anderen; die wilden deen sanders herte gheheiten hebben, ende toochden dicken deen den andren scone ghelaet, maer bachten rugghe waest al venyn* (*Ibidem*, 40).

[58] V. Fris, 'Het Brugsche calfvel van 1407-1411', *Bulletin de l'Académie d'Archéologie de Belgique*, 1910, 135.

[59] Blockmans, 'Vete, partijstrijd', 32-3.

[60] Heers, *Factions and political life*, 54-5; A. Marongiu, 'Il regime bipartitico nel trattato sui guelfi e i ghibellini', in *Bartolo da Sassoferrato. Studi i documenti per il VI centenario* (Milan, 1962), ii, 335-7.

[61] F. Buylaert, 'The 'Van Boschuysen affair' in Leyden. Conflicts between elite networks in late medieval Holland', *Francia*, xxxv (2008), 113; H. Boockman, 'Spätmittelalterliche deutsche Stadt-Tyrannen', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, cxix (1983), 88-91.

belonged to the wealthy merchant classes and were thus motivated by very obvious economic and financial interests in their struggle for power. Conflicts over honour and revenge sometimes led to strife, but factionalism was primarily fuelled by the jockeying for specific political and economic interests or valuable and sometimes scarce commodities and goods, rather than vendettas.[62]

In addition to forming the heart of the struggle between Bruges factions, the economic and financial resources at their disposal provided the necessary logistical support for their coups. Certainly for Bruges, core members of patrician factions were in fact business partners as well as relatives. As the following examples show, economic interests of factions and the general welfare of the city were particularly interwoven in the important commercial metropolis that was Bruges. The term *ghesellen* (companions) or, in Middle French, *compagnons*, was not only used to refer to members of a faction, but also to economic networks. For a *ghezelscip in coopmanscepe* (companions of commerce) could refer to a company of tradesmen.[63] The core of the de Scutelare faction, brought to power in Bruges by Duke John the Fearless in 1407, was a venerable family of hostellers and merchants with longstanding trade relations with England. To justify exiling members of the rival Honin faction, a very similar clan of wealthy merchants and hostellers, the duke and his allies allegedly argued that the Honin faction had seriously disrupted the Bruges textile industry, brokerage and trade by their monopolistic practices (*grans aliances et compagnies*).[64] The chronicler Olivier van Dixmude also reproached the Honin faction for 'bad government' (*qualic beleet*), because they had 'taken and used the goods of the city for their own benefit' during their decade of rule now ended by John the Fearless and the de Scutelare faction.[65] Commercial ties could therefore provide the binding agent of a faction and the joint exploitation of city finances was all too often at stake. Carlos Wyffels identified a party within the Bruges elite which opposed the count in the 1280s. Composed of burghers who traded with England and were defending their economic interests, this party managed to gather a large following in Bruges society, thereby increasing the pressure on its opponents within the political elite.[66] In this case, as in others discussed above, both economic interests and political aspirations motivated a faction to fight its rivals in order to obtain important positions on the city council.

Factional conflict in Flemish cities therefore crystallised primarily around seats on the boards of aldermen. The composition of the urban political elite was by definition in a state of continual flux, as families died out, became impoverished or moved. The ruling power network constantly renewed itself by cooptation, but the inclusion of one family often implied the exclusion of another family who also had sufficient financial resources to cherish political ambitions.[67] In late medieval Flemish cities great wealth was required for individuals and families who wanted to acquire a seat on the bench of alderman, but the overlap between the economic and political elites was never complete. There were invariably well-to-do groups in late medieval cities who did not hold office in the city government. While this was sometimes a conscious choice, often a family did in fact have the will and the necessary financial

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[62] E. Crouzet-Pavan, *Enfers et paradis. L'Italie de Dante et de Giotto* (Paris, 2001), 152.

[63] O. Mus, 'De Brugse compagnie Despars op het einde van de 15e eeuw', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, ci (1964), 88. In 1307, the Flemish Count declared that 'each man has been the other's brother and business partner in war' (*Elc heeft anders gheweest broeder ende venot in 't orloghe*, see De Limburg-Stirum, *Codex diplomaticus*, ii, 63).

[64] L. Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Inventaire des archives de la ville de Bruges* (Bruges, 1887), iv, 3.

[65] *tGoed van der steide ghenomen ende gheorboort* (Van Dixmude, *Merkwaerdighe gebeurtenissen*, 37).

[66] C. Wyffels, 'Nieuwe gegevens betreffende een 13de eeuwse 'demokratische' stedelijke opstand: de Brugse 'Moerlemaye' (1280-81)', *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis*, cxxxii (1966), 38-54.

[67] See also J. Netterstrom, 'The study of feud in medieval and early modern Europe', in *Feud in medieval and early modern Europe*, 9-68.

resources to hold political office, but was still not included within the circle of individuals and families who controlled the composition of the city's boards of aldermen. Obviously posing an inherent threat to the established elite, these families on the sidelines sometimes succeeded in constructing an alternative power structure by forming networks among themselves, which might take advantage of the sovereign's financial problems, for instance, during the annual renewal of city offices. Factionalism was entwined with the conflict between the segment of the socio-economic elite who controlled political offices and the segment that saw itself deprived of the benefits of power.

A Battle for Ideas?
As early as 1960, the Italian medievalist Gaetano Salvemini followed the lead of Bartolus of Sassoferrato in claiming that historians had unfairly reduced the perennial struggle between Guelfs and Ghibbelines to a political conflict between those supporting the Pope and those supporting the Emperor. Salvemini called them *partite locale* who fought each other not for ideological positions, but first and foremost for local reasons. In his eyes, these parties were power networks who sought to dominate only their own towns and exclude their local enemies, driven often by petty motivations, such as clientage, friendship, personal hatred and suspicion.[68] The Flemish comital family and the middling groups from the Flemish towns, the *amici comitis* from the events of 1302, were strange bedfellows who also showed very little 'ideological' cohesion. They operated rather under the motto 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. But should we then completely exclude the role of ideological discourse in medieval party strife? Although factional conflict often grafted onto family feuds, it would be a mistake to reduce factional conflict to feuding. Jan van Nieuwenhove, the Bruges merchant who was one of the main supporters of Maarten Lem in his struggle against Maximilian, for instance, had a cousin of the same name who was in fact on Maximilian's side. The cousins belonged to a particularly wealthy merchant family who explicitly called itself a *gheslachte* (lineage) and buried both cousins in the family chapel, but this did not necessarily insure ideological or political coherence in times of factional conflict. The ideological component made recruiting of faction members much more complex than simple reliance on divisions between blocks of familial power.[69] It is important to recognise that ideological bones of contention often caused divisions within families, but that shared political ideas could also be a crucial element in welding the core and periphery of a faction together into a powerful political player on the urban stage.[70]

A specific discourse grounded in an ideal of good government could inspire a faction to take up arms against a rival group, or defend a particular political constellation. In Flanders, as in the York and London revolts, factions often strove for more accountable systems of government and political participation for groups which were excluded from power, such as the craft guilds. Willem Moreel's faction devoted itself to preserving the political autonomy that Bruges had obtained after the death of the Duke of Burgundy in 1477. Moreover, the party fought for political participation of the guilds in urban government. This faction clearly defended those ideas because the network of Willem Moreel and Maarten Lem had allied itself with the craft guilds. Several networks of tradesmen in the corporative middle classes of Bruges found a stalwart defender of the guilds' privileges in Moreel's faction who,

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[68] G. Salvemini, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295* (Turin, 1960), 6, 65.
[69] F. Buylaert, 'Gevaarlijke tijden. Een vergelijking van machtsverwerving en machtsbehoud bij stedelijke elites in laatmiddeleeuws Holland en Vlaanderen,' *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, cxix (2006), 318-9, 326-7.
[70] As religious issues would be at the core of factional conflict in sixteenth-century Europe, see J. Block, *Factional politics and the English Reformation, 1520-1540* (Woodbridge, 1993), 2-3; A. Duffin, *Faction and faith. Politics and religion of the Cornish gentry before the Civil War* (Exeter, 1996); D. Luebke, *His majesty's rebels. Communities, factions & rural revolt in the Black Forest, 1725-1745* (Ithaca, 1997).

maybe partly out of opportunism and partly out of conviction, supported a model of urban government that ensured political participation for trades and at the same time supported far-reaching interference of citizens into the central government. In the course of 1481, a rival faction made clear that they supported greater influence of the court in city government. Reacting against the attempts of the court to limit the political and corporative autonomy of cities and guilds, Willem Moreel's faction decided to take up arms in a coalition with the Bruges artisans. In order to prevent this coup, the count had the principal faction leaders locked up in the early morning of 10 December 1481.[71] Both the guilds and the networks around Willem Moreel benefited from mutual cooperation; a similar view on city government strengthened the cohesion between the different branches of the faction.

Though this example shows that the guilds allied with an elite faction to obtain rights of political participation, the ideological involvement of broader layers of the population in the political struggle between factions, and their reasons for involvement in factions' peripheries, are often hard to explain. Some Flemish examples are, after all, ambiguous. At first, the craft guilds seem to have had only a limited autonomous political role, and the leaders of rebellious groups in urban society usually belonged to elite circles. The *Moerlemaeye* uprising in Bruges in 1280, certainly foregrounded the social and political demands of middle groups, who primarily requested more financial control over urban government. The so-called *meentucht* (literally: 'the commune') which organised the popular party, coalesced with wealthy merchants who found it hard to obtain a seat in the council of aldermen.[72] After the revolt, the merchants took seats on the city council, but did not grant political rights to their former allies in the commons. It is difficult to determine the motivation of a third party in the political game. In some cases, distrust arose within a coalition between an elite faction and commoners, which demonstrates that diverging interests or ideas about how towns should be governed could lead to a split in these type of coalitions. In 1436-37, a high-ranking leader of one of the warring Bruges elite factions during the major revolt of that city against Burgundian Duke Philip the Good cautioned the other members of his network not to let *den commune* (the commoners) notice their scheming, 'otherwise we are all dead men'.[73] Elite networks often did succeed in manipulating the lowest social groups, as they did to the radical 'criers' (*crijsschers*) in Bruges, who were 'ignorant' (*onnozel*) of the patrician 'betrayal', but, the chronicler adds, 'they believed the deceivers and thus greatly deceived themselves'.[74] In these source fragments, the ideological or economic motivations of manual labourers and tradesmen had for supporting powerful families in their partisan struggles are difficult to ascertain. However, the lack of clear statements in the source material does not mean that the masses were like putty in the hands of powerful leaders.

State power and the court
It is clear that the Count, and later the Duke of Burgundy ruling as count of Flanders, was often the one who benefited most from factional conflict. Sometimes he could play one faction off against another, as Count Guy of Dampierre did in 1302 when he moved swiftly to support the political complaints of artisans against the urban elite in order to curtail the elite's claim to power. Classic interpretations of the 1302 events contend that the alliance of the Count and the tradesmen against the French King and the patricians was in fact unnatural and opportunist, and could only have been temporary. A few years later, 'the Count's party' no longer really existed. In 1319, Count Robrecht of Bethune, son and successor of Guy, again

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[71] Haemers, *For the common good*, 100.
[72] C. Wyffels, 'Nieuwe gegevens', 38.
[73] *Anders wij zin alle doode menschen* (*De cronicke van Vlaanderen*, ed. M.-R. Dauwe (unpublished master's thesis, University of Ghent, 1987) 352).
[74] *Ghaven gelove den bedrieghere ende bedroghen hemzelven grootelicke* (*Ibidem*, 355).

supported the Ghent Lilies against the common people.[75] During an uprising in Bruges in 1321-1322, the two camps which opposed each other cut right across social differences. Even the famous rebel leader and weaver Pieter de Coninck (usually known to English speakers as Peter the King) and his less significant comrade the butcher Jan Breydel were now on opposite sides of the fence – while they made part of the same faction in 1302.[76] The tactics of the Flemish Counts and Burgundian Dukes henceforth focused on dividing to rule and putting factions who supported state interests in power in every city. An urban faction in Bruges was able to promise John the Fearless in 1407 that it would 'to be helpful with life and goods, and with kinship', in other words, with the support of the faction's core.[77] As we have discussed elsewhere, in the 1440s Philip the Good developed a pro-ducal faction in Ghent and even facilitated conspiracies to eliminate his opponents.[78] The prince also promoted the emergence of a 'ducal faction' by introducing his personal motto into a number of shooting guilds, whose members now started to wear it as a badge on their liveries. This provides a sharp contrast with earlier legislation against the use of such factional tokens.[79] The continuous development of local and central bodies of justice in the course of the fifteenth century – the Council of Flanders and the Great Council of the Duke – only increased the Burgundian dynasty's opportunities to interfere in factional strife. Using judicial evocation, transferring a legal case from the jurisdiction of a city's aldermen to the jurisdiction of the princely tribunal, the duke could resolve a factional dispute in his favour in his own courts, or make a gesture of conciliation which served to reinforce his power in the city divided by factional conflict.[80]

But the active interference of central government in factional conflict did not provide a structural solution to the social and political tensions in the city. Consequently, after the duke or count left the city, factions often resumed monopolizing power or fighting against each other. Several acts of ducal legislation, however, might indicate that the court tried to prevent factional divisions in urban society in the long term, namely by stipulating measures against the concentration of power in the hands of a specific network. Such measures included the prohibition of any hereditary transmission of a position in the urban government, the obligation to alternate terms of office, the exclusion of illegitimate children from office-holding, a ban on combining multiple offices, and, last but not least, restrictions on the degree on kinship between magistrates.[81] However, a closer examination of the sources shows that this legislation was usually nothing more than a princely confirmation of urban legislative initiatives. As was the case in Sicilian and English cities in the late Middle Ages, Flemish

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[75] V. Fris, 'Les origines de la reforme constitutionnelle de Gand de 1360-1369', *Annales du XXe congrès de la fédération archéologique et historique de la Belgique*, 1907, 4. Ten years earlier, for that matter, he had already done so in Aardenburg (C. Wyffels, 'De oudste rekening der stad Aardenburg (1309-1310) en de opstand van 1311', *Archief. Uitgegeven door het Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen*, 1949-50, 10-11).

[76] J. Sabbe, 'De opstand van Brugge tegen Graaf Robrecht van Bethune en zijn zoon Robrecht van Kassel in 1321-1322', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, cvii (1970) 217-49.

[77] *Ghehelpich wesen met live ende met goede en met maechscepen* (*De cronicke van Vlaanderen*, 351).

[78] J. Dumolyn, 'Les réseaux politiques locaux en Flandre sous la domination bourguignonne: les exemples de Gand et de Lille', *Revue du Nord*, lxxxviii (2006), 309-29.

[79] Examples can be found in State Archives Ghent, Raad van Vlaanderen, nr. 7351, 199v, 220r, 222v, 217r, 239r.

[80] *Quant ainsi seroit qu'il y advendroit aucun semblable cas entre grandes parties notre dit seigneur le peut adez attraire a lui* (ADN, B 17696).

[81] See for example the general ordinances of 1431and 1446 aimed against favouritism and corruption during the renewal of the benches of the aldermen (G. Espinas, *Coutumes des pays et comté de Flandre. Privilèges et chartes de franchise de la Flandre. Tôme I. Actes generaux et Flandre Française* (Brussels, 1959), i, 25-8; J. Van Leeuwen, *De Vlaamse wetsvernieuwing: een onderzoek naar de jaarlijkse keuze en aanstelling van het stadsbestuur in Gent, Brugge en Ieper in de Middeleeuwen* (Brussels, 2004)), together with several local interventions throughout the 15th century, for example in Aardenburg, 1428 (L. Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Coutumes des pays et comté de Flandre. Quartier de Bruges. Coutumes des petites villes et seigneuries enclavees* (Brussels, 1890) i, 121-2); the Liberty of Bruges, 1442 (Idem, *Coutumes des pays et comté de Flandre. Coutume du Franc de Bruges* (Brussels, 1879), ii, 300-1) or Damme, 1439 (ADN, B 1353, 15731).

craft guilds or urban commons often proclaimed such stipulations whenever they had the political resources to do so. These were attempts to stabilise urban politics by alleviating the tensions between different segments of urban society, particularly among the elites.[82] The counts were not the true instigators of this urban legislation, and moreover, they were usually the first to violate its stipulations. In 1414, for example, John the Fearless accepted a large sum of money from a faction from the political elite of the castellany (rural district) of Veurne, a small Flemish town, to abolish the annual election procedure for the aldermen. Henceforth, individuals could obtain a lifelong appointment as an alderman, which enabled the ruling faction of the castellany to strengthen its grip on local government and common finances.[83] When some decades later, in 1436, the urban elites tried to levy taxes on the commoners of the castellany in order to pay the remainder of the money owed to the duke for their monopoly, a revolt arose among the intended taxpayers.[84] Only the armed intervention by the two principal clans of the castellany, the van der Burghts and the Knibbes, who ironically happened to be gathered in force at the aldermen's quarters to settle a personal feud, saved the day for the established castellany elite and the duke's partisans. The Burgundian state does not seem to have cared much about power struggles between elites or their attempts to gain local power, as long as they generally supported ducal authority and were willing to supply the financial requirements of the dynasty.[85] In 1475, Duke Charles the Bold strengthened the political power of the dominant faction in Ypres, one of the three capital cities of the county of Flanders, by granting a lifelong appointment to the city's aldermen. Rival groups vehemently contested this move, and coalesced with the craft guilds after the unexpected death of the duke on the battlefield of Nancy in January 1477. They imprisoned and fined the aldermen who had been favoured by the late duke.[86] These examples show that the attempts of the court to strengthen their grip on urban politics by favouring one faction above another often exacerbated tensions between factions rather than pacifying them. Indeed, it occasionally benefited the prince not to pacify such a conflict, because it opened up venues to establish a stronger grip on the unruly cities of the county. As soon as he had reached his own ends, he would try to abolish the factional conflict he had hitherto exploited.

The opportunistic attitude of the court vis-à-vis urban factional conflict and the unpredictable consequences of this policy emerge from a detailed analysis of struggle in Bruges in the early fifteenth century.[87] In 1407, Duke John the Fearless organized a kind of 'coup' against the Bruges board of aldermen in order to undermine the dominant faction of the Honin family, who, in alliance with other merchant families, had favored the political autonomy of the city. The duke reversed a banishment order against members of the rival Scutelare faction, who then convinced powerful members of the urban craft guilds to join them in a temporary alliance to overthrow the Honin family and their allies. During the 1407 election procedure of the city aldermen, a procedure in which craftsmen had the right to vote, the de Scutelare faction managed to take possession of the leading city offices. Together with his new clients, the duke seemed to have won this conflict without difficulties, but it turned out to be a pyrrhic victory. Some years later, the craft guilds rebelled against the de Scutelare faction because it had not kept the promises it had made to gain their support. The de

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[82] Compare with B. McRee, 'Peacemaking and its limits in late medieval Norwich', *English Historical Review*, cix (1994), 867; F. Titone, *Governments of the Universitates. Urban communities of Sicily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (Turnhout, 2009), 214.

[83] J.-M. Cauchies, *Ordonnances de Jean sans Peur, 1405-1419* (Brussels, 2001), 213.

[84] Apparently under the guise of subsidies owned to the duke for the – unsuccessful – expedition against Calais early in 1436, which failure eventually lead to the Bruges revolt of 1436-1438 (see J. Dumolyn, *De Brugse Opstand, 1436-38* (Kortrijk, 1997).

[85] ADN, B 17657; Algemeen Rijksarchief (Brussels), Trésor des chartes de Flandre, first series, nr. 918.

[86] Haemers, *For the common good*, 250.

[87] Fris, 'Het Brugsche calfvel', 183-200.

Scutelares had violated the rights of the craft guilds by attempting to diminish the political influence of the guilds' representatives in the town council. A short, but intensive clash between this pro-ducal faction and the craft guilds, who now established an alliance with the opposing faction of the Honin family, in turn removed the de Scutelares from power. This new ruling alliance then revoked the measures that had been proclaimed earlier by the de Scutelare faction and the craft guilds to allow the duke access to the city finances. This story demonstrates that interference of the prince in local politics could be very counter-productive. The power of the princely court in Flanders was fragile because of the extensive political autonomy of the main cities in the county. The patronage relations cultivated by court members could not always break the pre-existing economic, political and social bonds that constituted the networks of urban factions.

Conclusion: unity and division in the urban community
While the political ideal of the medieval city was always one of harmony and unanimity, the political reality was dominated by faction and division.[88] Factions (*factiones*), or parties (*partes*), are perennial features of an urban community which had disintegrated into different divided part(ie)s. Though it often led to disastrous effects, party politics was unavoidable in city life because of economic diversification, division of labour, and competition among social groups. Even if parties claimed to speak for some general 'communal interest' or to defend the 'common good' of all citizens, in reality they sought to promote the interests of particular groups in urban society. In the late medieval Flemish cities, faction formation and factional interests were largely determined by a combination of international political and economic relationships, local oppositions of a socio-economic and political nature, ideas about how cities should be governed, conflicts of honour and interests between rivalling elite networks, power struggles between these networks and other social groups, and changing political opportunities. The urban factions in medieval Flanders had a concentric pattern with a core – usually with great social cohesion due to extensive family ties between members – and a periphery – mostly consisting of political clients, such as artisans who supported the core for economic, political and/or ideological reasons. Although it is sometimes difficult to understand why corporative groups and common labourers supported factions led by patrician families, in most cases it is clear that urban artisans strategically used elite divides to achieve their political aims. There were numerous conflicts in Flanders (as in other regions in late medieval Europe) in which craft guilds obtained representation in city government during a factional clash between mighty elite families. The stakes of such conflicts were high, which explains their intensity as well as the increasingly frequent interventions of the central government. The growing political influence of the Burgundian dynasty in urban factional conflict in Flanders is unmistakable, but the growth of state power probably did not lead directly to a decrease in 'private violence'. In fact, the dukes were not averse to exploiting existing social tensions to reinforce their own power base in that particular city. As such, the very ambition of the emergent Burgundian state to solidify its political ascendancy over the Flemish urban network lured the Dukes into the quagmire of factional strife in Flemish society, a dangerous venture which produced unpredictable results.

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[88] M. Mullet, *Popular culture and popular protest in late medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1987), 21.