

REWRITING CHRONICLES IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT. THE MIDDLE DUTCH 'EXCELLENT CHRONICLE OF FLANDERS' TRADITION

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Abstract

The fifteenth-century Low Countries witnessed the emergence of prose chronicles written in the vernacular. The most important medieval Flemish chronicle tradition in the vernacular was the 'Excellent Chronicle of Flanders'. This tradition probably started shortly after 1423, when the so-called *Flandria Generosa C* was translated into Middle Dutch. A number of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts survive, in addition to a printed version of 1531. Like many other medieval chronicles, the *Excellente Cronike* tradition is an 'open text', in which authorship interacts with the text's relationships to other texts, with practices of speech, aurality and discourse, and with readers and listeners within certain social and cultural environments. Selected case studies linking different manuscripts to specific milieus in the urban environments of Ghent and Bruges illustrate this interaction.

Key words: Flanders – Historiography – Urban Culture – Réécriture – Manuscript Studies

Introduction: the *Flandria Generosa* and the *Excellent Chronicle* of Flanders

In the 1160s, a Flemish monk, probably from the Abbey of St Bertin in Saint-Omer, composed a Latin genealogy of the Flemish counts. This *Genealogia Comitum Flandriae*, also known today as the *Flandria Generosa A*, started as a fairly straightforward genealogical list of the counts of Flanders covering the period between 792 and 1164.² Over time, writers expanded and developed the text, turning the somewhat dry account into a full-blown chronicle full of

¹ This article is the result of an interdisciplinary approach. Codicological research has been carried out by Snijders and Villerius; social-historical, historiographical and literary perspectives have been introduced by Dumolyn and Oosterman; general methodological and theoretical reflections on the textual tradition were formulated by Snijders, Dumolyn and Oosterman. We thank Marc Boone, Lisa Demets and two anonymous referees for their comments.

² The name was first applied in the seventeenth century, see A. Kelders, 'Flandria generosa', in: G. Dunphy, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, Leiden and Boston, 2010, pp. 621-622.

faits divers and embellishments.³ Subsequent ‘authors’ or ‘scribes’ (the distinction is hardly a fruitful one) continued to rewrite the story, a process which produced three separate versions of the chronicle, now commonly known as the *Flandria Generosa A*, *B*, and *C*. Together they constituted the principal Latin chronicle tradition circulating in Flanders between the twelfth and early fifteenth centuries. The three traditions differed significantly in the time frame and subjects they covered, as well as in their general outlook.⁴

In the Low Countries, prose chronicles were written in the vernacular for the first time in the fifteenth century. Although prose chronicles were also produced in courtly or clerical milieus, specifically in the urbanized county of Flanders this process accompanied the development of a literary culture dominated by societies of ‘rhetoricians’ (the so-called *rederijkers*).⁵ Soon after 1423, the *Flandria Generosa C* was translated into Middle Dutch.⁶ This translation began the most important medieval Flemish vernacular chronicle tradition, and comprises a sizeable corpus of late medieval manuscripts as well as a printed version edited in 1531 by Willem Vorsterman.⁷ As some of these versions were known to

³ A. Kelders, ‘Tot verbreding der kennis en ontwikkeling der vaderlandsliefde. Kronieken ter perse’, in: L. Milis, V. Lambert and A. Kelders, eds, *Verhalende bronnen. Repertoriëring, editie en commercialisering*, Ghent, 1996, p. 35-36; Id., ‘Laverend tussen de hof der historie en de warande der literatuur. Kroniekschrijving in het graafschap Vlaanderen’, in R. Jansen-Sieben, J. Janssens and F. Willaert, eds, *Medioneerlandistiek. Een inleiding tot de Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, Ghent, 2000, pp. 170-171.

⁴ J.-M. Moeglin, ‘Une première histoire nationale flamande. L’Ancienne chronique de Flandre (XII^e-XIII^e siècles)’, in: D. Barthelemy, J.-M. Martin, eds, *Liber largitorius: Etudes d’histoire médiévales offertes à Pierre Toubert par ses élèves*, Genève, 2003, pp. 455-476; J. Rider, ‘Une chronique de Flandre du XII^e siècle revisitée. Vers une nouvelle édition de la “Flandria Generosa” A et B.’, lecture delivered at the Royal Library in Brussels on 7 June 2012, organised by Le Réseau des médiévistes belges de langue française (we thank the author for allowing us to cite this paper).

⁵ A.-L. Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille: Rederijkerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400-1650)*, Amsterdam, 2008.

⁶ The *Flandria Generosa C* was based on the so-called *Continuatio Claromariscensis* of the *Flandria Generosa A*, which usually ends with the events of the year 1423, see V. Fris, ‘La Chronycke van den lande ende Graefscpe van Vlaenderen de Nicolas Despars’, *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire*, 5e serie, vol. 11, 1901, pp. 556-565.

⁷ W. Vorsterman, ed., *Dits die excellente cronike van Vlaenderen*, Antwerp: W. Vorsterman, 1531. All the relevant manuscripts and editions are included in the online database *Narrative Sources of the Southern Low Countries*, hosted by Ghent University, under the direction of Jeroen Deploige. The main secondary works on this tradition are: V. Fris, *Ontleeding van drie Vlaamsche kronijken: kronijk van Jan van Dixmude, Memorieboek der stad Gent, Dagboek der Gentsche collatie*, Ghent, 1899; V. Lambert, *Chronicles of Flanders 1200-1500. Chronicles Written Independently from ‘Flandria Generosa’*, Ghent, 1993; J. Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand van 1436-1438*, Kortrijk, 1997, passim; J. Oosterman, ‘De Excellente cronike van Vlaenderen en Anthonis de Roovere’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde*, vol. 118, 2002, pp. 22-37; A. Kelders,

contemporaries by the title *Die excellente cronike van Vlaenderen* ('The excellent chronicle of Flanders'), researchers have usually referred to the Middle Dutch translations of *Flandria Generosa C* as the 'Excellent Chronicle'. This was a body of texts that circulated predominantly in the urban environments of the prosperous region of Flanders during the rule of the dukes of Burgundy and their Habsburg successors.

The chaotic collection of manuscripts and print editions of the *Excellent Chronicle* was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by the erudites Lambin, Serrure, Blommaert and De Smet, who classified them into three separate traditions: the 'Chronicle of Flanders', the 'Chronicle of Jan van Dixmude' (based on an unjustified attribution), and the '*Excellent Chronicle*'.⁸ However, the existence of 'three traditions' had never been substantiated by any serious attempt to construct *stemmae codicum* and they have only been maintained in existing repertoires as a result of a lack of further interest in this body of manuscripts.⁹ Even a superficial look at the manuscripts reveals that they form a far more complex of variants of this Excellent Chronicle-tradition.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this nineteenth-century subdivision has remained present in historical literature up to the present, even if most scholars only used one or several variants of the text to study specific historical questions and have never thoroughly tackled the question of how these texts were transmitted.

A different consequence of the subdivision of the Middle Dutch *Flandria Generosa C* into three traditions has been a considerable ambiguousness in the terminology used to conceptualize and describe the *Excellent Chronicle*. The words '*Excellent Chronicle*' can presently refer to

'De geschiedenis van Vlaenderen herzien en aangevuld. Recyclage en tekstuele innovatie in de laatmiddeleeuwse Flandria Generosa-kronieken', *Millennium. Tijdschrift voor Middeleeuwse Studies*, vol. 19, 2005, pp. 156-169.

⁸ C.R. Serrure and Ph.M. Blommaert, eds, *Kronyk van Vlaenderen van 580 tot 1467*, 2 vols, Ghent, 1839-1840; J.-J. Lambin, ed., *Dits de Chronike ende genealogie van den prinsen ende graven van den Foreeste van Buc, dat heet Vlaenderlant, van 863 tot 1436*, Ieper, 1839; J. De Smet, ed., 'Laetste deel der Kronyk van Jan van Dixmude', in: Id., *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, Brussels, 1856, vol. 3, pp. 31-109. Two of the manuscripts that were the basis of the two first editions have now been identified as Ghent, University Library, 590 and 6181. The manuscript(s) used by De Smet was / were lost when Ypres was destroyed during World War I.

⁹ Notably in the first version of the *Narrative Sources of the Southern Low Countries*-database, which is now in the process of being thoroughly adapted. The ongoing PhD-research of Lisa Demets will provide a more thorough codicological description of the entire body of manuscripts and further study of their relations.

¹⁰ Fris, 'Ontleeding' (as in note 7) already understood this, even if he did not dispose of all the relevant manuscripts.

- a) the entire corpus of Middle Dutch translations of *Flandria Generosa C*. This tradition consists of approximately fifteen surviving late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts.¹¹
- b) the manuscripts within a) that were specifically referred to as versions of the ‘*Excellent Chronicle*’ by Lambin, Serrure, Blommaert and De Smet as they were supposedly closely related to c)
- c) in 1531, the Antwerp printer Vorsterman based a print edition of the *Excellent Chronicle* on a selection of about fifteen manuscripts. Some scholars prefer to reserve the name ‘*Excellent Chronicle*’ for this printed edition alone.¹²

In this article, we will focus on the Middle Dutch corpus of translations of the *Flandria Generosa C* as a whole, and – by means of a case study – suggest an alternative way to frame its manuscripts. To avoid further terminological confusion, we will use the term ‘*Excellent Chronicle*(-tradition)’ in its broadest sense to refer to each and every Middle-Dutch manuscript or print edition that was directly or indirectly translated from the *Flandria Generosa C* and we propose that this will be the future standard usage of the term. As we will show, the Middle Dutch scribes working on manuscripts from the *Excellent Chronicle*-tradition proved just as eager as their predecessors had been to rewrite and continue the story.

Whilst we argue that the entire structure of three separate text traditions should be discarded, this does not mean that the manuscripts cannot be organized into different ‘branches’ or ‘families’ altogether. The origin of the tradition that was traditionally called the ‘*Excellent Chronicle*’ proper (item b in the list above) and dates from the 1430s until the death of Mary of Burgundy, can almost surely be attributed to Anthonis de Roovere, a master stone mason, rhetorical poet and playwright of Bruges, who is considered one of the major late medieval writers in the Dutch language.¹³ He chiefly wrote about the events in his hometown, so

¹¹ Most of these were clearly written before the 1531 printed edition, even though it is difficult to establish the dates for some. Moreover, it is possible that additional manuscripts containing fragments of this textual tradition might be located in other libraries in the future. For instance, recently the Public Library of Bruges acquired a late 15th-century leaflet (with shelf number Bruges, Public Library, ms. 727) with a rhetorical poem on Mary of Burgundy. Probably it was made as a loose leaf, making clear that these rhetorical poems indeed circulated individually before they were incorporated in the *Excellente Chronicle*.

¹² V. Fris, ‘La Chronycke van den lande ende Graefscpe van Vlaenderen de Nicolas Despars’, *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire*, 5e serie, vol. 11, 1901, pp. 556-565.

¹³ Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1110; Bruges, Public Library, 436 and 437; The Hague, Royal Library, 435; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits néerlandais 106; on Anthonis de Roovere and the *Excellent Chronicle*, see: J. Oosterman, ‘De Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen en Anthonis de Roovere’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, vol. 118, 2002, pp. 22-37.

that we will designate the manuscripts that are based on his work the 'Bruges branch' of the *Excellent Chronicle*. However, this branch is not internally homogeneous: De Roovere inspired his own 'sub-branches', versions and variants. Moreover, different manuscripts of the *Excellent Chronicle* contain rhetorical poems written by De Roovere, along with poems added by Jacob van Malen and others.¹⁴ After the Bruges rhetorician died in 1482, several copies and continuations of the chronicle were made by Rombout de Doppere, Jacob van Malen, Andries de Smet and several other unknown scribes as well.¹⁵

Identifying the *Excellent Chronicle*'s interpretative communities

It is possible to identify a wide range of different ideological perspectives within the *Excellent Chronicle*.¹⁶ Evidence from the manuscripts indicates that author-scribes emphasized, enlarged, reduced, or omitted specific passages of the text as they worked on their copies. The sections attributed to Anthonis de Roovere, for instance, show a great deal of sympathy for the actions of the Bruges middle classes during the 1436-1438 revolt. These sympathies are far less visible in manuscripts that do not belong to the Bruges-branch, but probably originated in Ghent; these tend to reflect a wider Flemish perspective.¹⁷ The *Excellent Chronicle* manuscripts thus display considerable differences in their ideological

¹⁴ S. Mareel, 'Politics, Mnemonics, and the Verse Form: On the Function of the Poems in the Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen', in: W. Blockmans, T-H. Borchert, N. Gabriels, J. Oosterman and A. van Oosterwijk eds, *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, Turnhout, 2013, pp. 249-254; J. Oosterman, 'Scattered Voices. Anthonis de Roovere and other Reporters of the Wedding of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York', in: Blockmans e.a., eds, *Staging* (as in note 14), pp. 241-247; besides the rhetorical poems by De Roovere and Van Male, two of the manuscripts (Bruges, Public Library 436 and Douai, Municipal Library 1110) contain series of some shorter poems, mainly on the themes of death and memory, stemming from a now lost collection owned by Jacob van Male, see the Bruges ones edited by A. Dewitte, 'Dertig puntgedichten uit de 16^e eeuw, Brugge 1555?', *Biekorf*, vol. 81, 1981, pp. 111-117 (but incorrectly dated to the sixteenth century) and the Douai ones edited by A. Ricour, 'Anthonis de Roovere, poète de Bruges au XV^e siècle', *Bulletin du Comité Flamand de France*, vol. 1, 1857-1859, pp. 347-355.

¹⁵ Oosterman, 'De Excellente Cronike' (as in note 11). On De Doppere, see H. Callewier, 'Leven en werk van Rombout de Doppere (ca. 1432-1502)', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, vol. 150, 2013, pp. 219-244.

¹⁶ J. Dumolyn, 'The Terrible Wednesday of Pentecost: Confronting Urban and Princely Discourses in the Bruges Rebellion of 1436-1438', *History*, vol. 92, 2007, pp. 3-20; Id., 'Criers and Shouters. The Discourse on Radical Urban Rebels in Late Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Social History, Societies and Cultures*, vol. 42, 2008, pp. 111-136.

¹⁷ E.g. Ghent, University Library G 6181 (pseudo-Jan van Dixmude), Ghent, University Library 433, Ghent, University Library 590, Brussels, Royal Library IV 579, 19562, II 1934 (apparently from the region of Oudenaarde/Ename), 21880 and 18002 (with a more general 'Flemish perspective').

viewpoints and narrative strategies.¹⁸ Some manuscripts reflect local values while others seem to be more supportive of the policies of the Burgundian dukes. In general, it seems that the audience of the Latin versions of the *Flandria Generosa* – who needed relatively extensive schooling and thus can be presumed to have been largely noble or clerical in nature – enjoyed a distinctly ‘Flemish’ point of view. The audiences who read the vernacular versions of the *Excellent Chronicle*, on the other hand, often – though not always – seem to have enjoyed a more localised (and usually urban) perspective.

Our main objective is to analyse the reception of the *Excellent Chronicle* by its audiences. We regard these audiences as ‘interpretive communities’ that shared certain manuscripts of the *Excellent Chronicle* as objects of interpretation. An interpretative community, according to the term’s inventor, Stanley Fish, designates a group of readers or listeners who agree on a single interpretation of a specific text because they share similar assumptions.¹⁹ In other words, we are not concerned with the ‘intentions’ of the *Excellent Chronicle*’s main ‘authors’, such as Anthonis de Roovere or Romboudt de Doppere. Neither are we primarily interested in the question of the Chronicle’s supposed ‘urban’ or ‘dynastic’ character at this point.²⁰ Instead, we want to know how the interpretation of the *Excellent Chronicle* was shaped by local scribes, who adapted the work for small interpretative communities they were themselves part of.

¹⁸ We follow the arguments of the New Philology, which we will shortly outline below, that a manuscript should not be considered as a ‘document’ that ‘contains’ a ‘version’, ‘variant’, or ‘redaction’ of a ‘work’. Instead, we regard the manuscript as an integral whole. A manuscript’s audience experienced the text, paratexts, layout, illuminations, and general materiality of the manuscript in unison, and these various aspects influenced one another. We therefore choose to say that the manuscript as object communicates messages, displays differences and so on, instead of saying that ‘the versions/variants/redactions’, the ‘*mise en page*’, or the ‘illuminations’ that are ‘contained’ in the manuscript do these things. For a discussion of these issues, see T. Snijders, ‘Work, Version, Text and Scriptum: High Medieval Manuscript Terminology in the Aftermath of the New Philology’, *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 266–96.

¹⁹ S. Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*, Cambridge, Mass., 1980.

²⁰ Scholars used to emphasise the ‘national’ Flemish character of the *Excellent Chronicle* until Paul Trio suggested that the urban features of the historiographical genre in the Flemish lands during the Late Middle Ages deserve more attention. Even though dichotomies between ‘urban’ and ‘courtly’ culture are now often dismissed by social, cultural, literary and art historians, posing this tension as a point of departure for analysis does remain a useful analytical approach, see P. Trio, ‘The Chronicle Attributed to “Olivier van Dixmude”: a Misunderstood Town Chronicle of Ypres from Late Medieval Flanders’, in: E. Kooper, ed., *The Medieval Chronicle*, vol. 5, Amsterdam, 2005, pp. 211–223.

It bears emphasizing that it is both hard and not very profitable to make distinctions between ‘original authors’, ‘continuator’ and ‘copyists’ for this kind of research.²¹ We want to investigate how the manuscripts of the *Excellent Chronicle* were presented to their audiences, and how those audiences could have read them. For that purpose, it is of little interest whether a particular fragment of text was written by an ‘author’ who was faithfully ‘copied’, by a ‘continuator’, or by a ‘scribe’ who diverged from his model by design or accident. As the scribes who worked on the *Excellent Chronicle* usually changed sections without explicitly notifying their audiences that they were diverging from their exemplars – as was, of course, the norm throughout the medieval period – a medieval reader had no way to distinguish between fragments from ‘authors’ such as De Roovere and changes made by scribes. From a more theoretical point of view, one could argue that the changes that were made by a ‘scribe’, however minor they might be, are not intrinsically less valuable or less important than the major changes that were made by ‘authors’. For these two reasons, this article will concentrate on the work of the person who was physically writing a manuscript. For brevity’s sake we will use the term ‘scribe’ to describe this person, who may have authored and/or copied and/or compiled and/or annotated and/or rubricated and/or illuminated (a part of) the manuscript.

Even though we regard the audiences of the *Excellent Chronicle* as ‘interpretive communities’, they functioned in a slightly different manner than Fish proposed in his model. Reflecting on the ways in which literary communities interpret a modern, printed (and therefore unchangeable) text, Fish noted that a single text can be interpreted in radically different ways. This led him to conclude that ‘the text cannot be the location of the core of agreement by means of which we reject interpretations’.²² Instead, he argued that this core of agreement is located in the community that interprets (or ‘produces’) the text. In the medieval situation, however, the mutability of the text itself changed its relationship to the interpretative community. In the context of the fifteenth-century Chambers of Rhetoric, some author-scribes of manuscripts, who were also members of particular Chambers, may have incorporated the distinctive interpretative strategies of these small communities into their work. A number of these fifteenth-century author-scribes of the *Excellent Chronicle* seem to have belonged to the interpretative communities who ‘produced’ the texts. Other author-scribes were likely

²¹ See A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. 2 edn, Aldershot, 1988; and P. Gehrke, *Saints and Scribes: Medieval Hagiography in its Manuscript Context*, Berkeley, 1993.

²² Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?*, p. 342.

connected to specific urban elite families, who were known to favour distinct interpretations of Flemish history that stressed specific elements of local identity or certain genealogies. These strategies were highly effective ways to strengthen the social and ideological cohesion of a local group. For this reason, when we see signs that a particular version circulated in a specific social environment, we may be able to illuminate the unique features of individual *Excellent Chronicle* interpretative communities through a detailed study of the manuscripts and extant evidence of the surrounding social network. As we will show, even though the methodology needed to link manuscripts to their specific social environments is inevitably complex and conditional, this type of approach is not only possible but fruitful.

Considering the number of available manuscripts and their crucial importance as historical and literary sources, the *Excellent Chronicle* is a remarkably under-exploited textual corpus. The fact that it is not available in any satisfactory modern edition has thwarted research. Only a few of the manuscripts have been published, all in pre-critical nineteenth-century editions.²³ Because they are available, historians most often cite these editions, but they offer a skewed impression of the *Excellent Chronicle*'s significance, which does not rest solely in its detailed records of everyday urban life and Burgundian splendour. The precious illustrations of some of the unedited manuscripts testify to their cultural importance, and a detailed analysis of the preserved manuscripts would further our insight into the small-scale literary communities in the late medieval Low Countries.²⁴

Following Paul Zumthor, one might say that this textual tradition is not just a series of 'documents' but a true literary *monument* offering insight into the culture of the urbanised county of Flanders. In the Middle Dutch language context, the corpus comprises an unusually large body of manuscripts that this society considered worthy of preservation and dissemination. Zumthor and Fish both emphasise that the literary function of such a 'monument' lies in its reception by a given community rather than in the intentions of the 'author'.²⁵ Consequently, we are not advocating the edition of an imagined 'archetypical version'

²³ See the references in note 8.

²⁴ The illustrated manuscripts all belong to the 'Bruges branch': Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1110; Bruges, Public Library, 437; Brussels, Royal Library, 6173 (13073-74); New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, 435; The Hague, Royal Library, 435; on these drawings, see O. Vassilieva-Codognet, 'The Portraits of the Counts of Flanders and the Coloured Drawings of the Douai Manuscript of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*', in: W. Blockmans, T.-H. Borchert, N. Gabriels, J. Oosterman and A. van Oosterwijk eds, *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, Turnhout, 2013, pp. 255-270.

²⁵ P. Zumthor, 'Document et monument. À propos des plus anciens textes de langue française', *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, vol. 97, 1960, pp. 5-19.

of the *Excellent Chronicle* in the philological tradition of Karl Lachmann, nor is this article a plea to edit the 'best version(s) of the text' following the later model of Jean Bédier.²⁶ Moving away from traditional historicist ideas of 'errors', 'interpolations', 'manipulation', or 'historical accuracy' and 'veracity' deployed in the classic philological study of manuscripts, Zumthor's concept of *mouvance* implies that medieval texts generally show considerable instability and variety in their transmission. In addition to alteration of vernacular dialects and vocabulary, entire sections of the text can be omitted, replaced, or modified. This textual practice is closely connected with the anonymous authorship typical of medieval literature and the idea that a text was not the intellectual property of a single, or even of several, authors.²⁷

Ten years after Zumthor coined the term *mouvance*, Gérard Genette advanced the field by introducing the concept of *réécriture* or rewriting, a form of 'trans-textual relation'. In Genette's terminology the author/scribe edits a new version (the *hypertext*) of an existing text (the *hypotext*) by making formal changes on the level of the signifiers, and/or semantic changes on the level of the signified.²⁸ These ideas took the field of medieval history by storm. In his provocative 1989 pamphlet *Éloge de la variante*, Bernard Cerquiglini argued that medieval texts should essentially be analysed in terms of their variety and each distinct version is in itself worthy of study.²⁹ His challenge led to the emergence of the 'New' or 'Material' Philology in a special issue of *Speculum* in 1990, which argued that 'errors' do not obscure the author's message but are valuable additions from a scribe who took on an authorial role.³⁰

Like many other medieval chronicle traditions in the vernacular, the *Excellent Chronicle* tradition is an 'open text', 'un texte en train de se faire' (Zumthor), in

²⁶ The method to reconstruct an 'Urtext' or 'Archetype' is generally ascribed to Karl Lachmann (1793-1851), although he never succinctly formulated 'his' method himself, see: S. Timpanaro, *Genesi del metodo del Lachmann* (1981; English trans. by G. W. Most, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, Chicago, 2005). The best exposition of the Lachmannian method is generally considered to be the work by P. Maas, *Textkritik*, Leipzig, 1950; for a recent evaluation, see Snijders, 'Work, Version, Text and Scriptum' (as in note 18). The 'best text' approach was developed by J. Bédier, 'La tradition manuscrite du Lai de l'Ombre: réflexions sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes', *Romania*, vol. 54, 1928, pp. 161-196, 321-356.

²⁷ P. Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paris, 1972, pp. 65-75; and see also Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (as in note 21).

²⁸ G. Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, Paris, 1982.

²⁹ B. Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la Variante: Histoire Critique de la Philologie*, Paris, 1989.

³⁰ *Speculum* 65:1 (1990), ed. S. Nichols. John Dagenais took this argument as far as to argue that it is essentially pointless to try to compare two manuscript texts to one another; see J. Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de Buen Amor*, Princeton, 1994; for a way out of this impasse, see Snijders, 'Work, Version, Text and Scriptum', pp. 266-96.

which authorship interacts with the text's relationships to other texts, practices of speech, the practice of reading a text aloud to an audience (called 'aurality'),³¹ discourse, as well as the readers and listeners in their social and cultural environments.³² Analysis of rewritten material in individual manuscripts can thus provide the researcher with valuable information about the literary strategies of specific social groups and, in the end, about the literary culture of late medieval Flanders.

Manuscripts as objects and discourses

Full analysis of the cultural and ideological significance of the *Excellent Chronicle* would ideally involve systematic study of all its manuscripts, looking for textual variants in spelling, syntax, narrative structure and content. This effort entails use of the classical philological methods, yet must also consider the manuscripts in their material forms as evidence of networks of historiographical production and consumption.

As the New Philology has emphasized, codices should be studied as objects, in relation to their ideological content and readership, as well as described from the classical perspective of codicology. Even though there are descriptions of most of the *Excellent Chronicle* manuscripts in catalogues, the manuscripts need closer examination to gather necessary palaeographical, chronological and codicological data and investigate their layered structures. Moreover, when the text of the Chronicle was transmitted, purely linguistic sign systems were not the only factors that mattered. The manuscript's entire physical structure, composition and history must be analysed. Its binding and 'paratextual' elements (glosses, marginal notes, rubrics and other annotations, captions like 'Nota' and various enumerations) determined whether the work was read in relative isolation or as part of a much broader intertextual network, while the manuscript's layout

³¹ J. Coleman, 'Interactive Parchment: the Theory and Practice of Medieval English Auralty', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 25, 1995, p. 64.

³² B. Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris, 1989; and see also S.G. Nichols, 'Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum*, vol. 65, 1990, pp. 1-10; S. Wenzel, 'Reflections on (New) Philology', *Speculum*, vol. 65, 1990, pp. 11-18. K. Busby, ed., *Towards a New Synthesis? Essays on the New Philology*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1993; R.T. Pickens, 'The Future of Old French Studies in America: The "Old" Philology and the Crisis of the "New"', in: W.D. Paden, ed., *The Future of the Middle Ages: Medieval Literature in the 1990s*, Gainesville, 1994, pp. 53-86; W. Williams-Krap, 'Die Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Methode. Rückblick und Ausblick', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, vol. 25, 2001, pp. 1-21; M. Baisch, *Textkritik als Problem der Kulturwissenschaft*, Berlin, 2005; M. Goullet, ed., *Écriture et réécriture hagiographiques: Essai sur les réécritures de Vies de saints dans l'Occident latin médiéval (VIII^e-XIII^e s.)*, Turnhout, 2005.

largely determined its communicative functionality. Physical features further underline the mutability of medieval texts and the polysemous nature of their interpretation.³³ This material-philological approach has to be combined with analysis of the ideological discourses in the textual corpus. This entails focusing on key ideological passages, either discussions of controversial political events and issues, or narratives of collective memory and identity, which often treat civil and political strife in the cities of Bruges and Ghent and the wider county of Flanders. Ideological discourse analysis connects the dynamics of *mouvance* in the *Excellent Chronicle* to the social, political and cultural structures of late medieval Flanders. It can also illuminate the role of author-scribes in the interpretative communities and socio-cultural networks of late medieval society.

Before beginning the analysis of the codicological and textual evidence itself, we first consider the environments surrounding production, circulation and consumption of these manuscripts. Previous scholarship focused on whether these chronicles were fundamentally ‘urban’ or ‘dynastic’, which is perhaps an overly simplistic dichotomy. The urban/dynastic opposition can be refined and nuanced through the consideration of three other features that influenced the way these manuscripts were produced and received.

The first question deals with the *geographical scope* of these manuscripts. Do they focus the reader’s attention on events within a single city, or on the entire county of Flanders? Do they ideologically identify with a city or the county and show a local or national pride, perhaps in opposition to ‘outsiders’? As we have noted, a number of the manuscripts identify predominantly with the city of Bruges. Other *Excellent Chronicle*-manuscripts tend to focus on the Burgundian dynasty, though some gradually depart from the princely orientation in order to focus on the city of Ghent, which suggests that there might have been a ‘Ghent branch’ in addition to the ‘Bruges branch’. For example, in coverage of the Ghent revolt of 1449-1453, some of the manuscripts focus exclusively on the actions of the urban militias, while downplaying or ignoring the duke’s counter moves.³⁴ Similarly, a chronicle outside the *Excellent Chronicle*-tradition that is usually

³³ For the influence of layout on a manuscript’s communicative function, see T. Snijders, *Manuscript Communication: Visual and Textual Mechanics of Communication in Hagiographical Texts from the Southern Low Countries, 900-1200*, Turnhout, 2014.

³⁴ For instance: Ghent, University Library, 433 f° 216: according to this manuscript the Ghent forces quit their siege on Oudenaarde when they heard of the arrival of John of Burgundy and his army. John of Burgundy’s army only attacked the rearguard of the Ghent militia. The scribe therefore presented John of Burgundy’s victory as an attack on already retreating soldiers, rather than an outright defeat by a superior Burgundian army which forced the Ghent militia to flee and leave behind all their siege equipment.

attributed to (pseudo-)Oliver van Dixmude has a clear Ypres perspective, identifiable because events in the rest of Flanders appear less prominently or are considered from an Ypres perspective. According to the text, (pseudo-)Oliver van Dixmude served twice as an alderman of the city.³⁵

Secondly, there is an important distinction within the discursive ‘genres’ or forms of these historiographical manuscripts. Most of them were produced in a period when there was no consensus over the ‘best’ form of historical writing. Very different types of historiography all enjoyed great popularity, so that scribes could not fall back on a uniform vision of the kind of information that a chronicle was supposed to contain, or the form in which it should do so.

One popular type of historiography was constituted by the highly localised, annalistic texts called *memorieboeken* or ‘memorial books’. There are roughly forty surviving late medieval and early modern of these ‘memorial books’ for Ghent alone.³⁶ Mainly structured around annual lists of the urban magistrates, they were interpolated with comments on events of the year. *Excellent Chronicle* manuscripts also contain lists of magistrates, usually from Bruges, but the narrative prose is more continuous, and the lists do not structure the text to the degree characteristic of the ‘memory book’ genre.

Whereas scholars sometimes distinguish the broader type of the ‘urban chronicle’, it is clear that this umbrella term is often too general to accurately reflect the variability between chronicles from an urban context. An anonymous Bruges chronicle from the late fifteenth century, also independent from the *Excellent Chronicle*, titled the ‘Book of Everything that has Happened in Bruges between

³⁵ Trio, ‘The Chronicle’ (as in note 20); J.J. Lambin, ed., *Merkwaardige gebeurtenissen, vooral in Vlaenderen en Brabant, en ook in de aangrenzende landstreken: van 1377 tot 1443*, Ypres, 1835.

³⁶ A.-L. Van Bruaene, *De Gentse memorieboeken als spiegel van stedelijk historisch bewustzijn (14de tot 16de eeuw)*, Ghent, 1998; F. Buylaert, J. Haemers, T. Snijders and S. Villerius, ‘Politics, Social Memory and Historiography in sixteenth-century Flanders: Towards a Research Agenda’, *Publications du Centre Européen d’Études Bourguignonnes*, vol. 52, 2012, pp. 195–216; J. Haemers, ‘Social Memory and Rebellion in Fifteenth-Century Ghent’, *Social History*, vol. 37, 2011, pp. 443–463. Bruges ‘memory books’, which have never been the object of any study, are preserved in the public library of Bruges and the Royal Library of Brussels. An Ypres example of this genre, also neglected, which only exists in a nineteenth-century edition since the original was lost, is P. Van de Letewe, *Vernieuwing der wet van Ypre van het jaer 1443 tot 1480, met het geene daer binnen dezen tyd geschiet is*, Ypres, 1863. Other similar Ypres fragments are I.L.A. Diegerick ed., ‘Episode de l’histoire d’Ypres, sous le règne de Marie de Bourgogne, 1477’, *Annales de la Société d’Émulation de Bruges*, vol. 10, 1848, pp. 230–449; and J. Justice, ‘La répression à Ypres après la révolte de 1477. Documents faisant suite à l’“Episode de l’histoire d’Ypres sous le règne de Marie de Bourgogne”’, *Annales de la Société d’Émulation de Bruges*, vol. 41, 1891, pp. 16–59.

1477 and 1491', relishes in relating crimes and scandalous events in Bruges, while major political issues are a secondary concern.³⁷ Another Bruges chronicle written by the notary and rhetorician Rombout de Doppere in the same period is primarily a moralist complaint on current events. In a Douai manuscript, a text of the *Excellent Chronicle* appears along with this Bruges chronicle, which appears to serve as a sequel to the *Excellent Chronicle*.³⁸ Finally, it should be noted that whereas the chronicles are mostly written in continuous prose, some of them are interrupted by rhetorical poems with moral messages or chronograms.³⁹

In short, the strict dividing lines between various 'genres' or 'forms' of chronicles do not accurately reflect medieval reality. Scribes who set out to copy the *Excellent Chronicle* were not obliged to conform to a specific 'type' of chronicle, so that they were free to steer their work in idiosyncratic directions. As the case studies below demonstrate, the result was strikingly divergent manuscripts. One scribe focused on 'national history', exhibited a pro-French rather than a pro-Flemish point of view, and avoided anecdotal material and embellishments.⁴⁰ A second scribe favoured classical tales of knightly heroism, added touches of chivalric romance, attributed dialogues to his long-dead heroes and integrated mythical elements into his chronicle, thereby merging the modern analytical genres of historiography and chivalric romance.⁴¹ A third scribe did not favour the French court or chivalric epics, but sought to emphasise the role of the Borluuts, a prominent Ghent urban elite family, in the history of Flanders whenever possible. His work merged two genres, the 'dynastic' or 'urban' chronicle and the 'family' chronicle.⁴²

Thirdly, as we have said, 'aurality' was a significant component of the distinct *social milieus* in which urban historiographies were written, circulated, read and heard. Aurality, or public reading, was still a widespread practice in the late medieval Low Countries, within elitist literary circles as well as at meetings

³⁷ C. Carton, ed., *Het boeck van al 't gene datter gheschiedt is binnen Brugghe sichtent jaer 1477, 14 februarij, tot 1491*, Ghent, 1859.

³⁸ Callewier, 'Rombout' (as in note 15), the text is edited by H. Dussart, ed., *Fragments inédits de Rombout De Doppere découverts dans un manuscrit de Jacques De Meyere*, Bruges, 1892, and, interestingly, part of it was also copied into the same manuscript as a version of the *Excellent Chronicle* (Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1110).

³⁹ For instance: Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1110, f° 43r: A moral message after the death of Robrecht de Fries. *Die in zyn liden es verduldich // God es hem en goet hende sculdich*. [He who is patient in his sufferings is owed a good death by God].

⁴⁰ Ghent, University Library, 590.

⁴¹ Ghent, University Library, 6181.

⁴² Ghent, University Library, 433.

of corporate organizations and religious confraternities.⁴³ Many *Excellent Chronicle*-manuscripts seem to have circulated in literary circles, which also produced rhetorician and pre-rhetorical poetry, prayers and allegories. There was, for example, a distinct literary circle around the Bruges 'Gruuthuse-manuscript' in the 1400s, and the city of Ghent was home to a similar circle.⁴⁴ However, some *Excellent Chronicle*-manuscripts also show evidence of links to a specific family (such as the Borluut manuscript mentioned above),⁴⁵ include lists of city government officials (as in a memorial book), and cite official documents, suggesting that the author-scribes had urban connections. For these reasons, it would be anachronistic to make rigid distinctions among 'literary chronicles' from Chambers of Rhetoric, 'urban chronicles' written by city clerks,⁴⁶ and 'family chronicles' penned by proud members of patrician or noble families.

The *Excellent Chronicle*, as a Zumthorian *monument* of Flemish histories, was at its heart a collection of good stories. However, to satisfy the burgher values of the late medieval cities, the texts had to be morally and politically instructive as well as recreational. These texts combined knowledge and entertainment into a series of stories that suited the pragmatism and esthetical values of the urban elites. This combination is exemplified by three core chronicle manuscripts, which were embellished with rhetorical poems with moral messages or chronograms.⁴⁷ Author-scribe Jacob van Malen inserted short poems at every dynastic change in the Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty.⁴⁸ These poems were

⁴³ S. Fleischmann. 'Philology, Linguistics and the Discourse of the Medieval Text', *Speculum*, vol. 65, 1990, pp. 20-21 and see in general, P. Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix: de la 'littérature' médiévale*, Paris, 1987 and H. Pleij, 'Met een boekje in een hoekje? Over literatuur en lezen in de Middeleeuwen', in: Id., *Komt een vrouwtje bij de drukker... Over gezichtsveranderingen van de literatuur uit de late Middeleeuwen*, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 99-140; O.S.H. Lie, 'Middel nederlandse didactische literatuur in verzen en in proza: van mondelinge voordracht naar leescultuur?', in: F.P. van Oostrom and F. Willaert, eds, *De studie van de Middel nederlandse letterkunde: stand en toekomst*, Hilversum, 1989, pp. 201-221.

⁴⁴ For a recent state-of-the-art summary of the research on the Gruuthuse manuscript, see: F. Willaert, ed., *Het Gruuthuse-handschrift in woord en klank: nieuwe inzichten, nieuwe vragen*, Ghent, 2010; for Ghent, see: H. Brinkman, 'Het Comburgse handschrift en de Gentse boekproductie omstreeks 1400', *Queeste*, vol. 5, 1998, pp. 98-113.

⁴⁵ But also New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, 451.

⁴⁶ This seems to be the case for the 'Book of Everything that has Happened' (see note 37), and even more clearly for the so-called 'Diary of Ghent'. V. Fris, ed., *Dagboek van Gent van 1447 tot 1470 met een vervolg van 1477 tot 1515*, 2 volumes, Ghent, 1901-1904.

⁴⁷ Besides the two manuscripts discussed more extensively here, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, manuscrits néerlandais, 106 contains a large number of excerpts from the Dutch translation of the *Dicta Catonis*, see F. van Buuren, *Den duytschen Cathoen: naar de Antwerpse druk van Henrick Eckert van Homberch. Met als bijlage de andere redacties van de vroegst bekende Middel nederlandse vertaling der Dicta Catonis*, Hilversum, 1998.

⁴⁸ J. Oosterman, 'Het poëzie-album van Jacob van Male' (forthcoming).

probably taken from a miscellany he owned or borrowed that has since been lost. Van Malen's choices were diverse; he included poems by the recently deceased Antonis de Roovere, the mid-fourteenth-century Brabantine moralist and chronicler Jan van Boendale, and even older poets.⁴⁹ Excerpts of ethical and devotional poetry added to these two chronicle manuscripts situated the narratives of Bruges and Flanders within the broader framework of moral values held by the urban circles in which the rhetoricians occupied a central position.⁵⁰ Similarly, another copy, now in New York, used the medieval Dutch translation of the world chronicle *Fasciculus Temporum* to add the history of the popes to the Flemish framework of the *Excellent Chronicle*.⁵¹

Three case studies

There is no evidence that the Middle Dutch manuscripts existed in socially or geographically distinct communities that produced their own 'traditions' or even 'branches'. Since we know that almost all the author-scribes who worked on the *Excellent Chronicle* came from either Ghent or Bruges, it would be surprising that they had been completely unaware of each other's textual production. Admittedly, Ghent and Bruges were very large cities with about 65,000 and 45,000 inhabitants in the fourteenth century. However, although not all literary production necessarily took place within them, the chambers of rhetoric became ever more active in the course of the fifteenth century, writers gathered in established meeting places, and they were sponsored by rich burghers and corporate institutions. Interest was high in literary achievement and historical writing, which must have encouraged considerable exchange of forms and ideas. Even more importantly, the rhetoricians were highly competitive. Chambers from different towns met frequently to dazzle one another with new compositions, establishing intense networks of intellectual and poetic exchange.⁵²

⁴⁹ The diversity of texts and views is similar to that of many 15th-century miscellanies from the Southern Low Countries, see: H. Kienhorst, 'Middel nederlandse verzamelhandschriften als codicologisch object', in: G. Sonnemans, ed., *Middeleeuwse Verzamelhandschriften uit de Nederlanden*, Hilversum, 1996, pp. 58-59 and P. Wackers, 'Het belang van de studie van de verzamelhandschriften', *ibid.*, pp. 27-28, 36.

⁵⁰ See also Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille* (as in note 5), pp. 201-204.

⁵¹ New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, 435 and see W. van Anrooij, 'Werner Rolevincks "Fasciculus temporum". Variatie in handschrift en druk', in: P. Hoftijzer and K. van Ommen, eds, *Bronnen van kennis. Wetenschap, kunst en cultuur in de collecties van de Leidse Universiteitsbibliotheek*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 56-63.

⁵² J. Oosterman and B. Ramakers, *Kamers, kunst en competitie. Teksten en documenten uit de rederijkerstijd*, Amsterdam, 2001, p. 107-117; A.-L. van Bruaene, "'A wonderfull tryumfe, for the wynnyng of a pryse": Guilds, Ritual, Theatre, and the Urban Network in the Southern Low Countries, ca. 1450-1650', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 59, 2006, pp. 374-405.

The case study below shows that author-scribes changed the text of their exemplars to achieve specific objectives with the new manuscripts, rather than to make pretty copies of the older work. To a certain extent, they reformed the text into a functional tool that fulfilled an existing need. The first manuscript, Ghent, University Library, Ms. 590 (henceforth: Ghent 590) is a medium-sized codex of about 20 by 30 centimetres that served as the basis for the nineteenth-century edition of the *Chronicle of Flanders* by Serrure and Blommaert.⁵³ The second, Ghent, University Library, Ms. G. 1681 (henceforth: Ghent G.1681) is a smaller manuscript of about 14 by 20 centimetres, usually classified in the *Pseudo-Jan van Dixmuide*-tradition. The third, a medium-sized manuscript, Ghent, University Library, Ms. 433 (henceforth: Ghent 433) was selected for this case study because it has never been studied before, and thus provides us with an unclassified test-case.⁵⁴ In what follows, we will briefly examine these three manuscripts to show that their classification in terms of nineteenth-century 'traditions' obscures rather than helps our understanding of these objects, but that they are much better understood from the point of view of their material characteristics and interpretive communities.⁵⁵

The first thing to note is that the three manuscripts are quite comparable in terms of their general contents. They follow the usual outline of the *Excellent Chronicle* by maintaining a chronological *narratio* following the order of the lords of Flanders. Ghent 433 starts with the Trojan war 'when the world had been around for 4100 years',⁵⁶ but quickly progresses to the year 581/2, when Liederich de Buc, the first, legendary *forestarius* ('forester', or in Middle Dutch: *forestier*) of Flanders, was born, according to the manuscript. Tradition held that the foresters came before the historical counts of Flanders, and some of the later foresters might actually have been local counts in Harelbeke.⁵⁷ The other manuscripts do not mention the Trojan mythology and begin with the reign of this predecessor of the counts of Flanders. They spend sixteen to eighty-six lines of text (one to two percent of the chronicle) on Liederich de Buc's rule before moving on to his successors. Two of the manuscripts end with the rule of the Burgundian Duke Charles the Bold (1467-1477) as count of Flanders. As Ghent G.6181 is

⁵³ See note 8.

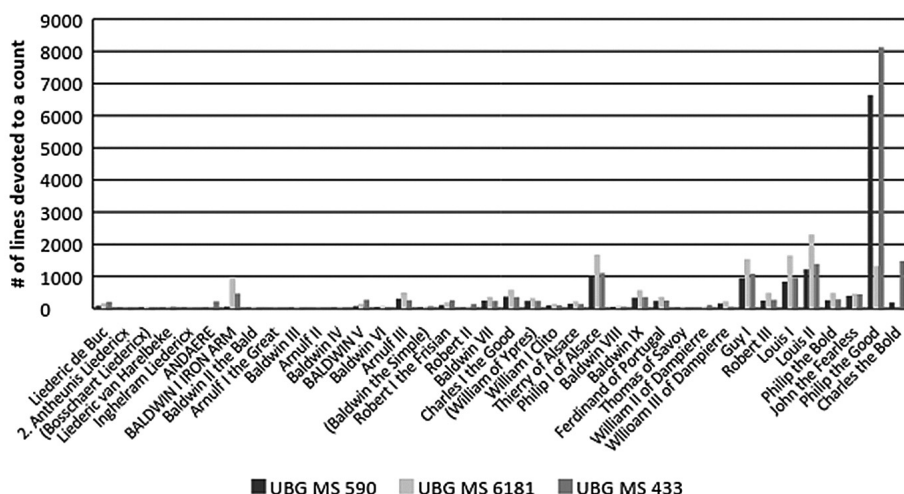
⁵⁴ For a more thorough description of these manuscripts, see the appendix.

⁵⁵ For a fuller examination of these issues, see a forthcoming contribution by Lisa De Mets.

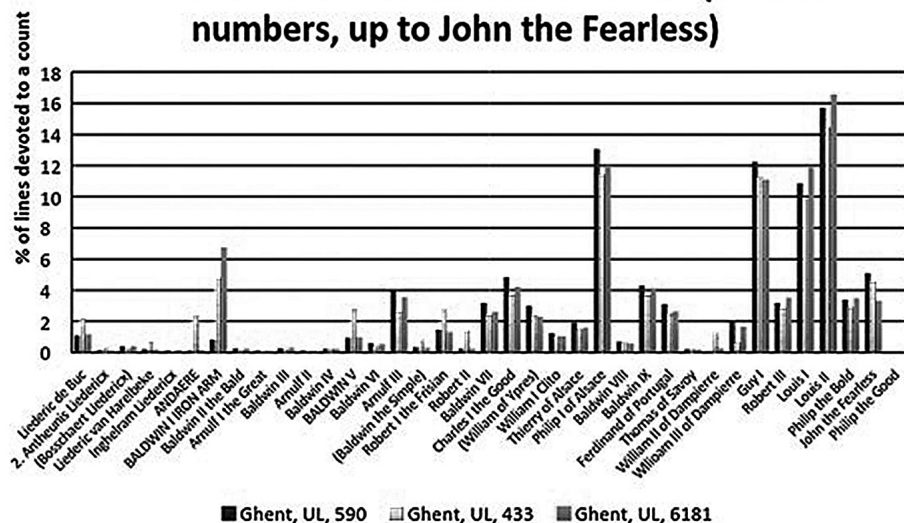
⁵⁶ Ghent, University Library, 433 f° 7r, 'Als die weerelt hadde ghestaen IIII^M jaer ende onder'. For allusions to Trojan myths of origins in the medieval Low Countries, see W. Keesman, *De eindeloze stad: Troje en Trojaanse oorsprongsmythen in de (laat)midleleeuwse en vroegmoderne Nederlanden*, PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2014.

⁵⁷ V. Lambert, 'Oorsprongsmythe en nationale identiteit. De forestiers van Vlaanderen', *De Leiegouw*, vol. 48, 2006, pp. 213-217 and vol. 49, 2007, pp. 163-181.

1a. Number of lines devoted to a count (absolute numbers)



1b. Number of lines devoted to a count (relative numbers, up to John the Fearless)



missing at least one quire at the end and stops abruptly in 1436, this manuscript may also have once continued to 1477.

In addition to being similar in scope, the three manuscripts divide their attention in the same manner. All the author-scribes were interested in Philip of Alsace (1168-1191) and the fourteenth-century Counts Guy of Dampierre (1278-1305), Louis of Nevers (1322-1346) and Louis of Male (1346-1384), as they devoted at least 10 percent of the chronicle to the reigns of each of these rulers. Ghent G.1681 does not cover the late fifteenth century, but both Ghent 433 and 590 devote 40 to 45 percent of the text to the reign of Philip the Good (1419-1467). In these manuscripts, the rule of Philip of Alsace, the fourteenth-century counts and Philip the Good occupies more than 80 percent of the *Excellent Chronicle*. Again, even though the manuscripts have in the past been analysed as stemming from different 'traditions', they are in fact quite similar in scope and focus on specific time periods and reigns.

Ghent University Library 590

Despite this similar scope, the chronicles do not recount exactly the same narrative. Ghent 590 is by far the most impersonal of the three manuscripts. It was most likely produced in the second half of the fifteenth century by a scribe with an interest in genealogy and factual history. This is beautifully epitomised by the title added to the codex on a loose slip of paper: 'This is the chronicle and genealogy of the principal foresters and counts of the forest of Buc, which nowadays is called Flanders'.⁵⁸ The scribe started his chronicle with an extensive listing of all the French kings, thus linking the manuscript to the French sphere of authority.⁵⁹ He continued in an almost annalistic vein, limiting himself to what could be described as 'the facts' from a fifteenth-century point of view. A dry read, the chronicle abounds in chronological enumerations of newly founded cities and abbeys, battles, marriages and births.

The material presentation of the manuscript matches the sobriety of the text. The scribe kept his manuscript plain, without noticeable initials or embellishments except for the frequent (and somewhat randomly applied) slashes of red ink that draw attention to words and punctuation signs.⁶⁰ The text is hard to read

⁵⁸ Ghent, University Library, 590 f° 8r ('Dit es de Cronike ende Genealogie vanden principalen forestiers ende Graven vanden foreeste van Buc. dWelke men nu ter tijd noumt Vlaendren').

⁵⁹ This was not at all unusual in this period, as the history of the entire Burgundian union was often conceptualized this way (see G. Small, *George Chastelain and the Shaping of Valois Burgundy: Political and Historical Culture at Court in the Fifteenth Century*, Woodbridge, 1997).

⁶⁰ The text is punctuated with the frequent use of an oblique or forward slash /. This stripe functions both as a full stop and as a way to indicate shorter pauses in the text (similar to a modern

because the writing is very condensed. The scribe kept the spaces between words relatively narrow, so that it can be hard to distinguish the different words in a sentence. This problem is exacerbated by the choice to place the writing lines very close together, so that the descenders from one line are competing for space with the ascenders from the next line. This decreases the legibility of the text to such an extent that it is very hard to imagine that this manuscript could every have been read aloud. As such, the manuscript was perhaps in the first place meant for private study. It is restrained, very traditional, and rather dull compared to the vivid displays and descriptions of events in other chronicles.

Ghent University Library 433

Whereas Ghent 590 is so general in its text and material presentation that it cannot be fruitfully linked to a specific audience, Ghent 433 was probably owned by one of Ghent's most illustrious patrician families. This manuscript bears the title 'The entire chronicle-like description of Flanders, written by an enthusiast of Netherlandish memories, 1572'.⁶¹ This title was clearly added to the manuscript by a different hand, most likely in 1572, a date that is much later than the main text of the manuscript. A watermark analysis has dated the paper at between 1473 and 1478. The paper was most likely produced in a mill near Ghent, with Bruges or Arnhem in Guelders as secondary options.⁶² Rather than opening with a list of French kings, this manuscript focuses the reader's attention on the history of Troy, starting with the death of King Laomedon at the hands of Jason and Hercules 'the pious'. Interest in Troy was, of course, not a coincidence. The history of Troy was widely popular during the high Middle Ages, as emerging monarchies attempted to forge links between Troy, which they considered to be their remote legendary past, and their own position as dynasties often in need of legitimacy. Many powerful families in this period attempted to establish that they descended from royal ancestors.⁶³ Desire for royal connections not only led

comma or semicolon). Each oblique is painted red. Also painted red are the beginning letters of each sentence and name, every number, as well as a smattering of seemingly random letters that the scribe thought worth emphasizing.

⁶¹ Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 6r ('De gheheele kronijckxsche beschrijvinsghe van vlaenderen. Gheschreven door eenen liefhebber der nederlantsche ghedenckenissen 1572').

⁶² G. Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Buchstabe P*, Stuttgart, 1983: abteilung XIII nr. 414 (f° 9r), from Arnhem 1473; G. Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Lilie*, Stuttgart, 1983: abteilung III nr. 1427/8 (f° 34), from Arnhem or Ghent, 1474; Piccard, *Lilie*: abteilung I nr. 686 (f° 122), from Xanten 1444; the last recognized watermark dates to 1478.

⁶³ J. Aurell, 'From Genealogies to Chronicles: The Power of the Form in Medieval Catalan Historiography', p. 241; G. Spiegel, 'Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative', *History and Theory*, vol. 22, 1983, pp. 43–53.

the Flemish counts to emphasise their links to the Carolingian dynasty, but also prompted the French and Burgundian dynasties to recount their imaginary connections to the Trojan prince Aeneas.⁶⁴ As a result, many copies of the French translation of the *Flandria Generosa* opened with a few folios of Trojan history. Ghent 433 emphasises that Flanders could be linked to Trojan history with as much ease as France, even though this Trojan element was actually rare in Flemish origin myths. According to Ghent 433, after the city of Troy fell, Aeneas sailed to the country of Italy. He founded the city of Venice there (and not Rome, as the Romans would have it). His companion Turkus or Turquatus sailed to Ephesus and founded Turkey; whereas Franco, Priamus and Antenor founded the country that would come to be known as France. One of their descendants was Lotharius II, 'and under him started the rule over the land of Buc, which is now called Flanders'.⁶⁵

In medieval Europe, royals were not the only families fascinated with the history of Troy. Many family chronicles also traced their origins back to the Trojan refugees, thus claiming a noble ancestry for the family. The dynasty that ruled the Duchy of Brabant, for example, sometimes gloried in its Trojan antecedents.⁶⁶ For this reason, the opening folios of this manuscript could reflect inspiration from another historiographical text, or they might have been a narrative ploy to ennoble a particular family or house through its distant Trojan ancestry. There are indications in the manuscript itself which point to the second option. In addition to presenting a very partisan view favouring Ghent, the scribe inserted references in nine places to the notable Borluut family from that city. These references, found on folios 95v, 96r, 98v and 100r, all feature the Borluut name at least once. In addition, a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century annotator underlined the name Borluut throughout the manuscript and added notes about members of the Borluut family in the margins (for example, 'Nicasio Borluuts ballista' on folio 58r, 'Jan Borluut' on folio 98v, and 'Simon Borluut delegatus ad bonum ductus' on folio 229v). These references do not appear in most other manuscripts of the *Excellent Chronicle*. Ghent 433 obviously had a special link to the Borluut family.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ R. van der Laarse, 'De ontdekking van de oudheid: Adellijke identiteitspolitiek in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse Nederlanden', *Virtus*, vol. 18, 2001, pp. 9-44.

⁶⁵ Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 8r ('Ende onder hem begonsten heerst de heerscapie van den lande van Buc dat nu Vlaendren heet').

⁶⁶ S. Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines gentium* and the Community of the Realm', *History*, vol. 68, 1983, pp. 375-390; C. Beaune, 'L'utilisation politique du mythe des origines troyennes en France à la fin du moyen âge', in: *Lectures médiévales de Virgile*, Rome, 1985, pp. 331-355.

⁶⁷ Brussels, Royal Library, IV 579 (which can also be dated to the fifteenth century and its content is close to the 'Ghent manuscripts') shows similar notes: f° 35r "Nicolais Borluut" f° 177v

The Borluuts were one of the main patrician lineages in Ghent from the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Jan Borluut was a member of the Ghent urban elite who was knighted in the wake of the Battle of Courtrai in 1302. He was one of the few important Ghent burghers to fight against the French troops who had occupied Flanders from 1297 to 1302, as he led a contingent of a few hundred fellow citizens in this famous battle while the majority of Flemish troops had come from Bruges, Ypres and other towns.⁶⁸ Jan Borluut died without issue, and although his family name was continued through a side branch, these later Borluuts were no longer considered noblemen by their contemporaries. One of these indirect descendants was Simon Borluut, who died in 1469 and is named on multiple occasions in Ghent 433. He sired a handful of sons, who became the first Borluuts who were again considered members of the nobility by their contemporaries. These social climbers worked hard to legitimise their newly won status. Gherem VI (d. 1506) spent a considerable portion of his income on coats of arms, a luxurious memorial tomb and similar displays that enhanced his noble status. Gherem also tried to cultivate the idea that Jan Borluut was his direct ancestor, even adopting the battle cry, ‘Groeninghevelt, Groeninghevelt’ (the precise location of the Battle of Courtrai), to strengthen the perception that Jan and he were directly linked. With this fiction he was attempting to raise his personal status to that of an ancient pillar of the Flemish nobility, an effort that resembled the strategy of linking a family to the house of Troy on a more modest scale.⁶⁹

Ghent 433 emphasizes the figure of Jan Borluut and his actions in 1302. As all manuscripts of the *Excellent Chronicle* recount and contemporary sources establish as well, the events that led to the Flemish victory at Courtrai in 1302 began with a revolt of Bruges artisans who massacred the French garrison occupying the city on 18 May 1302. Although other cities were infected by the Bruges revolt, Ghent continued to side with the French King, apart from radicals who fled the city or were exiled. Both Ghent 590 and G.6181 state the (totally ahistorical) claim that in the aftermath of the massacre, ‘in Ghent 2000 Walloons [i.e. ‘French’] were killed’.⁷⁰ Soon after the insurgencies culminated in the Battle

“Symoen Borluut equis dominus de Raveschot”. On the Borluuts, see most recently F. Buylaert, *Eeuwen van ambitie. De adel in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen*, Brussels, 2010, pp. 278-296 and Ph. Kervyn de Volckaersbeke, *Les Borluut du XVI^e siècle (importance des archives privées)*, Antwerp, 1851.

⁶⁸ See on the battle of Courtrai: J.-F. Verbruggen, *The Battle of the Golden Spurs (Courtrai, 11 July 1302): a Contribution to the History of Flanders’ War of Liberation, 1297-1305*, Woodbridge, 2002.

⁶⁹ Buylaert, *Eeuwen*, pp. 278-296 (as in note 57).

⁷⁰ Ghent, University Library, 6181, f^o 185v and Ghent, University Library, 590, f^o 71r.

of the Golden Spurs and its famous defeat of the French army. However, Ghent 433 stretches the narrative further by chauvinistically placing Ghent rather than Bruges at the centre of historical events. In contradiction to every contemporary source of 1302 revolt, this manuscript claimed that it was not the men of Bruges and Ypres, but Jan Borluut himself, who kindled the Flemish rage.

The manuscript describes how Jan Borluut, as the principal Flemish leader supporting the count in his war against France, personally led a revolt against Jacques of Saint-Pol, the French governor of Flanders, who had holed up in the Count's Keep ('Gravensteen') in Ghent. Even though Borluut almost lost his life, he refused to give in to the French. He is given a rare fragment of direct speech to verbalize his bravery:

'They would have struck Jan Borluut dead then and there, but his shield-bearer called "To arms!" When Jacques' delegates heard this, they advanced up to the Count's Keep, awaiting Jan Borluut's answer. When the people had consulted together, [Jan] asked them for their opinion, whether they consented to the requests made by the delegates. The people then asked his opinion. Jan Borluut said "I will not give in", whereupon the entire people cried: "Then we will not give in either!" When Jan Borluut heard this, he said: "Then follow me." And he went to the Count's Keep, and killed all of Jacques' men.'⁷¹

After this successful assault, citizens of Bruges massacred the garrison in their city, other cities followed suit, and the Battle of Courtrai was the result.

On top of this fictional account attributing a far more important role to Ghent in the 1302 revolt against the French than had actually been the case, Ghent 433 even credited Jan Borluut with the brilliant idea that produced the Flemish victory at Courtrai. Other Ghent versions of the *Excellent Chronicle* agree that Borluut led a contingent of 500 Ghent soldiers in the battle (a fact also attested by contemporary sources) and had them dig trenches on the battlefield to halt the French cavalry (a story grounded in a contemporary chronicle account of the battle but without any mention of Jan Borluut playing a role in this tactic).⁷²

⁷¹ Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 95v-6r (('...daer zo soude men Jan Borluut doot l ghesleghe hebben / maer zijn cnappe / die riep "In de wapene" / als dat hoorden Jacops ghedepiteerde / zo vertrocken zij toot up sgraven steen verbeydende de andwoorde van Jan Bourluut Tghemeene [te] gader ghesproken hebbende zo vraechde hij wat dat zij seyden of zij consenteerden In tgeent dat men begheerende was / doe vraechde dat ghemeene wat hij riede / doe zo seyde Jan bourluut "Ik en wille niet gheven" / doe riep al dat ghemeene "zo en willen wij ooc niet gheven" Jan bourluut dat hoorende seyde "zo volghet mij" Ende hij ghijnc ten sgraven steene waert Ende sloughen al Jacops volc doot.').

⁷² Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 98v; 6181, f° 186r; and 590, f° 71r; the main contemporary chronicles describing the battle and the events immediately preceding it are: H. Johnstone,

In Ghent 433, however, it is Jan personally who conceives the notion of covering the trenches with twigs and sand to deceive the French knights. The vanguard of the French army stumbles into the trenches, and the Flemish then lure the rest of the army into a trap by pretending to flee for their lives. These tactics resulted in the deaths of 5000 French noblemen ('Ende daer versmoorden bet dan .V^M. edele lieden').⁷³ After this ploy, troops from Ypres and other cities manage to defeat the rest of the French army within two folios. Jan Borluut is thus presented as one of the most important leaders of the Flemish cause.

Ghent 433 was produced between 1473 and 1478, when Gherem Borluut and his brothers had recently acquired their noble status and were busy legitimizing themselves in the eyes of their neighbours and fellow noblemen. It was written on paper that was probably produced in Ghent. The manuscript has been preserved in Ghent since at least the seventeenth century.⁷⁴ It explicitly lauds the deeds of Jan Borluut on behalf of the city of Ghent and the county of Flanders and mentions the Borluut family more often than do the other manuscripts. The Borluut name is underlined throughout the manuscript, while no other family names received similar treatment. Given that there are other examples of sixteenth-century Flemish elite families who inserted their names into the *Excellent Chronicle*, Ghent 433 was almost certainly produced at the order of members of the Borluut family and afterwards preserved by the family. We should therefore interpret this manuscript as a narrative aimed to increase the prestige and status of the Borluuts in the eyes of their fellow citizens. The manuscript provides evidence to support the hypothesis that there were small communities of literate urban nobles and politicians in sixteenth-century Flanders who inscribed themselves into historical narratives in order to support their claims to power and status.⁷⁵

ed., *Annals of Ghent*, London, 1951, pp.19-33 and W. Waterschoot, ed., *De Guldensporenslag: een fragment uit de Voortzetting van de Spiegel Historiae door Lodewijk van Velthem*, The Hague, 1979.

⁷³ Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 100r; see Verbruggen, *The Battle* (as in note 68), pp. 32-33, for the analysis of these sources and earlier historiographical discussions on this supposed 'ruse' of the Flemings.

⁷⁴ Ghent, University Library, 433, f° 6r: 'Desen boeck comt toe aen f. Franciscus Boschman Convent. Gand. ord. Pred. die den selven toegheeijsghent aen. Bibliotheke van t'selve Convent.' Franciscus Boschman was a friar at the Dominican Convent in Ghent between 1680 and 1794 (S. Arts, *De Predikheeren te Gent. 1228-1854*, Ghent, 1913, pp. 369, 374, 380). On April 4, 1691 a Franciscus Boschman was witness to the marriage of Isabella Matton and Franciscus Antonius Daneels.

⁷⁵ Buylaert e.a., 'Politics, Social Memory and Historiography', pp. 206-208.

Ghent University Library G.6181

Compared to the previous two manuscripts, the untitled manuscript Ghent G.6181 is noticeably smaller and likely written at a later date. The manuscript contains a number of different watermarks that were common between 1506-1519.⁷⁶ The manuscript is incomplete. The first folio of the first quire is numbered 18 recto, suggesting that there were originally two additional quires with folios 1-7 and 8-16 in the manuscript which were later detached from it. The text also ends abruptly on folio 319, in mid-sentence, while recounting the Bruges revolt of 1436-1438. This abrupt ending is not due to a single missing page, because the last codicological unit of the manuscript is completely intact; rather at least one quire is missing from the end of the codex. Yet, because the manuscript is already rather bulky, it probably did not continue for many more quires, and may have ended with the aftermath of the Bruges revolt of 1438. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the nineteenth-century edition of another manuscript, now lost, containing roughly the same text, ends in the year 1440.⁷⁷ Perhaps the Ghent manuscript originally ended in the year 1440 as well. If so, it would be the only surviving manuscript that de-emphasised late fifteenth-century Burgundian and Habsburg rule.

The manuscript takes obvious pleasure in narrating Flanders' early history as a period of undiluted heroic adventure, with evil giants attacking courageous knights and ninth-century crusader lords fighting Saladin and other semi-mythical Saracen leaders, while courtly ladies sniffed flowers and pined for their lovers. Whereas Ghent 590 tersely reports the cities and abbeys founded by Count Baldwin I Iron Arm, Ghent G.6181 has Baldwin go crusading against 'Saladin of Palermo' and his Saracens who are threatening Constantinople. The story is vivid, complete with ruses and passages of dialogue which echo the interest in chivalric culture so prevalent in late medieval urban society.⁷⁸

dat sij constantinoble saghen /
Doe seijde reynoud van sent
 truden / **Waric** nu mijn x^c
 te lande ic soude duer
 tsaudaens heer trecken in
 de stede / **doe** seijde boudin
 hoe soudij dat doen / **doe**

that they saw Constantinople /
 Then Reynoud of St.-
 Trond said: / "If I had my 1000 [men]
 on the ground I would go
 right through the sultans army into
 the city." / Then Baldwin said:
 "How would you do that?" / Then

⁷⁶ The watermark on f° 36 resembles G. Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Hand & Handschuh*, Stuttgart, 1997: abteilung I nr. 280 (Liège, 1506), others resemble abteilung I nr. 275 (Cologne, 1512), abteilung II nr. 394/5 (Xanten, 1519), and *Wasserzeichen Lilie*: abteilung III nr. 1796 (Arnhem, 1512).

⁷⁷ See the edition by De Smet mentioned in note 8.

⁷⁸ Ghent, University Library, 6181, f° 46v.

seyde **reynoud** / ic soude
doen maken twee wapen
rocx / **Den** eenen van **turquin**
des saudaens neve / **ende** die
ghinder leyt up tcasteel /
daer wacht hij de comste vanden
kerstenen / **die** salic an doen
ende ghij sult an doen den
wapen roc van saladin /
heer van palermo **die**
leyt up ghenen turre
die daer staet inde zee /

Reynoud said: / “**I** would
have two suits of armor made. /
The first one as **Turquin**
the sultan’s cousin, / who is
with his army at the castle over there /
waiting on the arrival of the
Christians. / **This** I will do.
And you will wear the
suit of armor of **Saladin**, /
Lord of Palermo, who
is guarding the tower
over there in the sea.

The passage above offers a sample of the writing style that is used in Ghent G.1681 to recount the lives of the *forestiers* and earlier counts.⁷⁹ Topoi and names of mythical figures, places and people, such as Saladin, Turquinus (the Turk), or Constantinople, were extensively deployed in this manuscript. Its explicitly Flemish focus shows in the opening genealogy, which does not begin with either the French kings or the Trojan refugees, but with the Flemish *forestiers* and counts. Romanticizing the early Middle Ages was fashionable in thirteenth-century Flanders, as it was elsewhere.⁸⁰ More significant was the fascination of the late fifteenth-century dukes of Burgundy with intertwining historiography and chivalric topoi, an obsession of the Burgundian court commonly known as the locus of *haut noble chevalerie*.⁸¹ Apparently, the widespread popularity of combining historiography and chivalric ideals found expression in Ghent G.6181, a manuscript that likely functioned within a local literary community that appreciated the traditions of medieval romance. Chivalric epic was certainly popular among the late medieval urban elites, and a large number of prose novels with knightly themes circulated in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century towns of the Netherlands.⁸²

It should be emphasized that the scribe who copied this particular version of the *Excellent Chronicle* did so as part of a specific communicative strategy. It is

⁷⁹ A. Kelders, ‘De kronieken van Vlaanderen: aspecten van de laat-middeleeuwse historiografie in de Flandria Generosa C’, MA thesis, Ghent University, 1990, pp. 12-20.

⁸⁰ In general see: G. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France*, Berkeley, 1993.

⁸¹ See E. Bousmar, ‘Jousting at the Court of Burgundy. The “Pas d’armes”: Shifts in Scenario, Location and Recruitment’, in: W. Blockmans, T-H. Borchert, N. Gabriels, J. Oosterman and A. van Oosterwijk, eds, *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, Turnhout, 2013, pp. 75-84, and on Burgundian historiography and court culture: Small, *George Chastelain* (as in note 59).

⁸² A. Faems, ‘Something Old, Something New: Middle Dutch Late Chivalric Romances’, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, vol. 130, 2011 (Sonderheft), pp. 155-166.

widely accepted that *authors* who decided to entrust a tale to paper (or parchment) had very concrete interests to do so. Brian Street famously argued in 1984 that the oral transmission of a tale was not necessarily inferior to its written counterpart. It was therefore never self-evident that an author should decide to write a tale down. Instead, he could decide to write something in order to achieve a specific communicative goal.⁸³ The same goes, of course, for the scribes who produced manuscripts. Like texts, manuscripts were created with a specific communicative goal in mind, and this is true even if the manuscript was just a copy of an older *exemplar*. The new copy could be intended to supersede its model, or to function in a different context of use – as an object of prestige, as a handy volume to take with you while traveling, as an aid to scholarly study or oral performances, and so on. This article focuses on the question why different scribes copied and re-wrote versions of the *Excellent Chronicle*, and for which intended audiences. From this perspective, it is intriguing to note that the very romantic version of Flemish history in Ghent G.6181 is given a material presentation that does not seem to fit with its subject matter, for the execution of this manuscript was not at all romantic or luxurious. It is small, its paper is of mediocre quality, and the scribe wrote in a hasty cursive. Ghent G.6181 definitely did not serve as an object of status. The only decoration in the codex is the clear, consistent marking of the punctuation in red ink. The scribe marked in red not only the full stops but also the breaks where a modern editor might insert a comma or semicolon. In the passage quoted above on the disguise ploy against Saladin, we have used bold text to indicate the red accents and slashes to mark the breaks. While detailing punctuation marks was not necessary for private study, this practice greatly increased the ease of reading the text aloud. It was an effective way to guide the reader on the placement of dramatic pauses and the need to pace himself while he was reading this thrilling passage.

The manuscript may have been used in an aural context, perhaps in literary circles of burghers, as described above, or as after-dinner entertainment in which burghers told and heard knightly stories combined with ‘true histories’. However, on folio 195v, the scribe diligently announced the end of a volume, stating that the story continued ‘in the other volume of the Flemish princes’.⁸⁴ This statement occurs in the middle of the 319-folio manuscript, even though it

⁸³ B.V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, 1984; and from a slightly different perspective B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton, 1983. Their view is usually summarized as the ‘ideological model of literacy’.

⁸⁴ Ghent, University Library, 6181, f° 195v (‘Dat ramanant es in dat ander volumen vanden vlaemschen princen’).

ostensibly indicates the end of one physical volume of the chronicle and refers the reader to a second volume that continues the text. In addition, the text immediately following the announcement recaps the events of the previous volume, a strategy that reinforces the idea that there were two physical volumes. Nevertheless, the scribe's statement appears in the middle of a quire, where it was physically impossible to split the manuscript into two volumes. Instead the scribe of Ghent G.6181 may have copied an entire older manuscript that was divided into two separate volumes, thoughtlessly including the now useless announcement about the end of the first volume. If Ghent G.6181 really was a copy of a two-volume manuscript, that was probably used in a very different context – it may have been a luxury volume, or one that was intended for an aural context. This hypothesis would solve the riddle of the recap in the middle of the chronicle and the extra punctuation marks, while also explaining why its pages have remained spotlessly clean. Whereas a codex used for reading aloud would likely bear marks from dirty fingers and nonchalantly turned leaves, such indications of use are missing from this manuscript. However, even though the manuscript was not intensively used, it may still have been designed and intended for use in oral performances.

Conclusion

We have analysed three different manuscript from at least two different 'textual traditions' of the nineteenth-century classification system. Manuscript Ghent 590 is the most businesslike of the three. The text is relatively free of embellishments – there are in this manuscript no giants or Saracen lords attacking knights, or members of the Borluut family saving the Flemish people. Its most noticeable feature is that it emphasises the French royal house, rather than the Flemish counts. A quantitative comparison of Ghent 590 and 433 shows that the two manuscripts divide text coverage in a very similar way, but Ghent 433 embellishes the narrative and inscribes the Borluut family into the story. It opens with the history of Troy and pays special attention to the role of the Borluut lineage. The last manuscript, Ghent G.6181, also presents largely the same text, but with an emphasis on chivalric heroism. Its frame of reference is explicitly Flemish, and it may have been copied from a two-part manuscript.

The first conclusion we should draw from this sample of *Excellent Chronicle* manuscripts is that even though a quantitative analysis of their textual contexts reveals similarities between these manuscripts, it was their context of use that distinguished them and turned them into very separate objects.

Nineteenth-century research into the *Excellent Chronicle* by Serrure, Blommaert and Lambin posited the existence of three distinct textual traditions, which

were based on assumptions about the original authors of the texts. In this article, however, informed by a vision of the manuscripts of this chronicle tradition as parts of a *mouvance* or ‘open text’, we have discussed patterns that point in a very different direction. First, quantitative analysis of the contents of our representative case-study show that in general all three manuscripts devoted roughly the same number of lines to the reigns of particular counts. Within this broader textual community, individual authors, scribes and readers were able to stress passages and make elaborations according to their own interests. Of course, the three manuscripts analysed here are all housed in Ghent archives, and at least one of them was probably produced in Ghent as well. However, as we do not know whether manuscripts 590 and G.6181 actually originated or were used in Ghent, this does not indicate that a homogeneous ‘Ghent interpretative community’ existed.⁸⁵ Rather, we have argued that the exclusive focus on the question of who wrote a certain chronicle should be replaced – or at least supplemented – by the question *for whom* a particular manuscript was written. Even when a scribe simply copied an existing text, he did this because he was of the opinion that this particular text could serve some purpose for a particular audience. If he thought that the original text was pitch perfect, he might work hard to make a *verbatim* copy of his exemplar. If it could be ameliorated in some way, he might subtly change the text or choose to make major revisions. Whatever his decision, he would always change the material presentation of the text so that the end result would best serve its intended audience. As a consequence, future research might benefit from focus on the materiality of manuscripts, investigation of the context in which they were used, the amount of intertextuality between various manuscript versions of the *Excellent Chronicle* and other works, their discourse and their composition.

The process of rewriting in a corpus such as the *Excellent Chronicle* of Flanders should always be considered within both the changing political context at the time of writing, as former events were restructured to serve contemporary ideological objectives, and the urban social environments, or even specific patrician families or urban noble lineages, in which these texts or compilations of texts were copied, circulated and consumed. This conclusion calls for a radically interdisciplinary approach combining codicology, discourse analysis and social network analysis to be applied to the other manuscript versions of the *Excellent*

⁸⁵ Nevertheless there are indications that during the early 15th century, there was a network of scribes, performers and a dedicated audience (and maybe even authors) in Ghent which can be rather precisely situated. See Brinkman, ‘Het Comburgse handschrift’ (as in n. 44).

Chronicle of Flanders in the future. Neglecting the issue of the intended audience and the extent of their expectations risks misunderstanding the nature of this historiographical tradition that intermingled elements from urban, literary and family-based traditions.

In contrast to the context of a religious institution or a princely court, these questions present more complex challenges in the context of Ghent, Bruges or another city. Trying to use the methods of material philology to interpret the material remains of what must have been a vibrant culture of urban historiographical aurality is more difficult than analysis of a manuscript produced in a court or cloister. A very labour-intensive combined methodology is necessary. Manuscripts are scattered rather than centrally preserved in a library that once belonged to a prince or is still part of a monastic institution. They were often written by more than one hand, and their proprietors did not always put their marks on them. It is often more difficult to recognise the ‘hands’, in both the literal and figurative senses, of the ‘author-scribes’ who played roles in the rewriting of a manuscript, and even when we know some names, lengthy network analysis is required to reconstruct the social context surrounding each name. Although there are no shortcuts, when this approach is systematically followed, it will certainly improve our knowledge about a major problem of late medieval urban culture and politics. The first empirical results of this research, published here, have already shown that it may lead to significant and surprising results.

Appendices: The sample of manuscripts of the Excellent Chronicle tradition used in this contribution

Ghent, University Library, 433

tradition

scribe Anonymous

edition –

date 1572-1578

description Paper, 327 folios

dimensions 285 × 205 mm., text in long lines (225 × 162 mm.)

watermarks Gerhard Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Buchstabe P*, Stuttgart, 1983: Abteilung XIII Nr. 414 (fol. 9^r), from Arnhem 1473; Gerhard Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Lilie*, Stuttgart, 1983: Abteilung III Nr. 1427/8 (fol. 34), from Arnhem or Ghent, 1474; Piccard, *Lilie*: Abteilung I Nr. 686 (fol. 122), from Xanten 1444; the last recognized watermark dates to 1478.

title	‘De gheheele kronijckxsche Beschrijvinsghe van vlaenderen. Gheschreven door eenen liefhebber der nederlantsche ghedencenissen 1572’
olim	fol. 6 ^r : ‘Desen boeck comt toe aen f. franciscus Boschman Convent. Gand. ord. Pred. die den selven toegheeijsghent aen. Bibliotheca van t’selve Convent.’ Franciscus Boschman was a friar at the Dominican Convent in Ghent between 1680 and 1794 (Arts, <i>De Predikheren te Gent. 1228-1854</i> (1913) p. 369, 374, 380). On April 4, 1691 a Franciscus Boschman was witness to the marriage of Isabella Matton and Franciscus Antonius Daneels.
quire formula	III ⁶ , XIII ³² , 3.VI ⁶⁸ , VII ⁸² , (5.VI) ¹⁴² , VII ¹⁵⁶ , (4.VI) ²⁰⁴ , (VII-1 between 217 and 218) ²²⁷ , (6.VI) ²⁸⁹ , VII ³⁰³ , (2.VI) ³²⁷
numbering	Modern foliation in Arabic numerals. Catchword on the verso of the last folio of each quire with the exception of 6v, 106v and 327v. Signatures in roman numerals on the first recto of the quires 2 to 11. In quire 13 fol. 169 ^r , the signature IX is given (instead of XIII). The same number is repeated on fol. 171 ^r .
decoration	Occasionally, chapter initials (which are two to three lines high) are colored in with red ink.
hands	1 hand, Gothic hybrida

Ghent, University Library, 590⁸⁶

tradition	Chronicle of Flanders
scribe	Anonymous
edition	C. R. Serrure and Ph. M. Blommaert, eds., <i>Kronyk van Vlaenderen van 580 tot 1467</i> , 2 vols, Ghent, 1839-1840.
date	Second half of the fifteenth century. The text covers the period up to 1467.
description	Paper, 215 folios
dimensions	280 × 198 mm., text in long lines (215 × 150 mm)
watermarks	Three different letters P (fols 10, 13, 16), two of which are similar to Briquet, <i>Les filigranes</i> nr. 8591 (1451-1465) and 8651 (1459?). Various letters Y that cannot be identified with certainty in Piccard or Briquet. ⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See J. Reynaert, *Catalogus van de Middelnederlandse handschriften in de Bibliotheek van de Universiteit van Gent: 1. De handschriften verworven voor 1852*, Wetteren, 1984-1996, pp. 124-125.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

title	“Kronyk van Vlaenderen” / “Dit es de Cronike ende Genealogie vanden principalen forestiers ende Graven vanden foreeste van but . dWelke men nu ter tijd noumt Vlaendren” (added on a loose slip of parchment)
olim	The manuscript used to belong to the library of Constant-Philippe Serrure (1805-1872), professor of medieval history at Ghent University
quire formula	(IV +3 ^{flyleaf} , 1, 7 –1 ^{between flyleaf and 1}) ⁷ , V ¹⁷ , (11.VI) ¹⁴⁹ , (VI + 1 ¹⁶² , which adds a paragraph to fol. 163r) ¹⁶² , (3.VI) ¹⁹⁸ , (VI-1) ²⁰⁹ , (IV-2) ²¹⁵ .
numbering	Modern foliation in Arabic numerals. Frequent signatures from c to j, followed by an Arabic number from 1 to 6 on fols 18 ^r -95 ^r .
decoration	Frequent use of red ink to indicate capital letters, numbers, punctuation signs, notable passages, and names in the text with the exception of fols 207 ^v -208 ^v . Penwork initial (blue and red) on fol. 8 ^r .
hands	a 1 ^r -6 ^v + 8 ^r -208 ^v (cursive Gothic bookhand) b 7 ^r (Gothic cursive, 16 th century) c 209 ^{r-v} (Gothic hybrida, could be the same as hand a) ⁸⁸

Ghent, University Library, G.6181

tradition	Pseudo-Jan van Dixmude
scribe	Anonymous
edition	J. De Smet, ed., ‘Laetste deel der Kronyk van Jan van Dixmude’, in: Id., <i>Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae</i> , Brussels, 1856, vol. 3, pp. 31-109.
date	Early sixteenth century
description	Paper, 319 folios
dimensions	199 × 139 mm., text in long lines (150 × 90 mm).
watermarks	The watermark on fol. 36 resembles Gerhard Piccard, <i>Wasserzeichen Hand & Handschuh</i> , Stuttgart, 1997: Abteilung I Nr. 280 (Liège, 1506), others resemble abteilung I nr. 275 (Cologne, 1512), Abteilung II Nr. 394/5 (Xanten, 1519), and <i>Wasserzeichen Lilie</i> : Abteilung III Nr. 1796 (Arnhem, 1512).
title	—

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

olim	“Walwein De Vos, 30 francos, 1812”; “ex libris Joannis-Jacobi Lambin, civitatis Yprensis archivarii – Nu, by wisseling, 4n December 1832, aan Lambin, archivist der regering van Ypre”
quire formula	(The first 17 folios are missing), (III-1 ²⁴) ²⁵ , (I-2 ^{26, 27}), 3.III ⁶³ , 2.IV ⁹⁵ , V ¹⁰⁵ , 17.VI ³⁰⁷ , (VI-1 ³²⁰) ³¹⁹ (at least one quire at the end of the codex is missing).
numbering	Late medieval foliation in Arabic numerals with gaps at missing leaves. The second quire is alphabetically numbered (25r: a, 28r: d, 29r: e, 30r: f, 31r: g, 32r: h, 33r: i, 34r: k, 35r: l) and a similar system, though not recognizably alphabetical or numerical, is used for the first quire.
decoration	Frequent use of red ink to indicate capital letters, numbers, punctuation signs, notable passages, and names in the text
hands	1 hand, Gothic cursive

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