

*Bonding or bridging social capital? The Evolution of Brabantine Fraternities during the late Medieval and the Early Modern Period*

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*Civil society, social capital and confraternities*

Social scientists have recently paid a great deal of attention to clubs, associations and societies. This is due to the growing interest in civil society and social capital. Both scientists and politicians believe that a vivid civil society, characterized by a large number of voluntary associations active in many aspects of social life, has several positive effects. According to this view, civil society promotes shared civic values and stimulates social cohesion. In other words: club life pulls down social boundaries. As a consequence, modern policy makers involve all kinds of voluntary associations in local, regional, national and international government, because they consider these associations as ideal intermediaries between citizens and government.<sup>1</sup>

This recent interest in associational life is significant for the study of fraternities, because fraternities were an important – probably the most important – form of associational life during the late medieval and early modern period.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, they constituted civil society. The question is: did fraternities contribute to social cohesion in late medieval and early modern society, or were the effects of these institutions rather limited? Were fraternities a source of social capital? The latter is a concept that refers to the social relations between the members of associations. Indeed, some sociologists claim that internal relations between members of associations promote social cohesion.<sup>3</sup> However, other social scientists have recently voiced more skepticism about this claim.<sup>4</sup> They distinguish two different forms of social capital, namely ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital. Bonding social capital refers to

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: <http://www.un.org/issues/civilsociety/>; [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_society/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_society/index_en.htm); <http://www.cjsm.vlaanderen.be/cultuurbeleid/kader/documenten/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See also: Dylan Reid, 'Measuring the Impact of Brotherhood: Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work and Confraternal Studies', *Confraternitas*, 14 (2003), 3-12.

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 121-36.

<sup>4</sup> Etzioni is one of the most important critics: Amitai Etzioni, 'Creating Good Communities and Good Societies', *Contemporary Sociology*, 29 (2000), 188-95; Amitai Etzioni, 'The Good Society', *Seattle Journal of Social Justice*, 1 (2002), 83-96.

networks between social peers. The benefits of this kind of social capital are rather small, because the members of these associations – including fraternities – already have social contacts or shared interests with their fellow members outside of their associational tie. In this view, associations that foster bonding social capital contribute little “added value” to society. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is completely different. Associations with bridging social capital create relations between people from various social backgrounds. Bridging capital crosses social boundaries and stimulates social cohesion.<sup>5</sup>

The general concepts of ‘social capital’ and ‘social networks’ are also problematic, because the nature of social relations can differ. Some are horizontal relations between equals, but others are rather hierarchical. Associations with people from a different social backgrounds even strengthen existing social boundaries, when the relations within the association are rather hierarchical.<sup>6</sup> These theoretical concepts are the starting point of this article, which tries to identify the nature of the social bonds in late medieval and early modern fraternities. Discussions about civil society and social capital have become more common in historical studies, and some political scientist and sociologists have also realized that modern social structures, civic values and human relations have undergone historical evolution. According to these points of view, long term developments in associational life were at the origin of modern social bonds and civil values. Indeed, the frequent contacts between members of associations are considered as a source of mutual trust and shared opinions. Moreover, communitarian thinkers argued that the frequent socialization in associations fostered the emergence of crucial civic values, such as democratic participation in government, mutual trust, tolerance, solidarity and public responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

Antony Black for instance points to the importance of guilds in Western Europe. He claims that medieval guilds contributed to the emergence of a republican political culture that dominated political practices in early modern Europe. According to Black, guilds lost their importance as a result of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Afterwards, liberal values and individualism replaced the old guild spirit in European society.<sup>8</sup> The American political scientist Robert Putnam also uses a historical model to explain contemporary political values in Western Europe. He argues in his book about civil traditions in Italy that lay fraternities in Northern Italy – like craft and shooting guilds elsewhere – lay at the origin

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<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Putnam, *Making democracy work*, pp. 121-27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 121-136.

<sup>8</sup> Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 237-39.

of democratic values and good economic performances. Unlike Black, Putnam does not find a crucial rupture around 1800, but stresses the continuity in western political values from the late medieval period. According to Putnam, western democracy has its roots in late medieval guilds and fraternities which were governed by elected committees. Moreover, Putnam claims that the European tradition of associational life contributed to social cohesion and shared values.<sup>9</sup> Katherine Lynch recently added a new contribution to this debate. She does not focus on political cultures and practices, but on social relations. Lynch aims to demonstrate that confraternities created a system of mutual assistance, welfare and a sense of community from the late medieval period. She argues that confraternities created ‘imagined communities’ in the sense meant by Benedict Anderson: that is, they generated symbolic relations and increased cohesion between members.<sup>10</sup>

[Map 1]

There are several problems with all these theories. They often lack empirical data, they contain contradictions, and they are extremely positive about the benefits of late medieval and early modern fraternities. Historians have been particularly critical. Some scholars argue that not every civil society generates positive effects such as social cohesion and democratic values.<sup>11</sup> Others note that all of these studies make use of a relatively small selection of existing literature, and that the authors hardly looked at archival sources. Robert Putnam’s explanatory model, for instance, combines extensive runs of contemporary survey data with a very small amount of historical data and almost no archival research. His book jumps from the fifteenth to the twentieth century without adequately examining the intermediate period between these two dates. This of course results in a very simplistic representation and interpretation of historical reality.<sup>12</sup>

The one-dimensional approach of these studies creates significant problems. How can we believe these scholars’ accounts of a so-called ‘social miracle’ of social cohesion in religious fraternities, if other historians posit that the social and cultural gap actually grew in Europe during the early modern period?<sup>13</sup> This article will address some of these questions by

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<sup>9</sup> Putnam, *Making democracy work*, pp. 121-36.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine A. Lynch, *Individuals, Families and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800: The Urban Foundations of Western Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 171-211.

<sup>11</sup> Etzioni, ‘Creating good communities’, 188-95; Etzioni, ‘The Good Society’, 83-96.

<sup>12</sup> Putnam, *Making democracy work*, pp. 134-50.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Catharine Lis, and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks: Harvester Press,

looking very closely at various sorts of fraternities in one particular area in the Southern Netherlands, namely the rural region around the city of Aarschot.

[Map 2]

Aarschot was a small town situated near the cities of Leuven, Mechelen and Antwerp in the duchy of Brabant (see map1). It was surrounded by 12 villages and some small hamlets (map 2). The entire region was under the control of the Duke of Aarschot with the exception of the village of Wezemaal, which nonetheless had intense contacts with the adjacent village of Rotselaar.<sup>14</sup> The borders between the two villages were very unclear and changed during the early modern period; Rotselaar had enclaves within the territory of Wezemaal and vice versa.<sup>15</sup>

The region had a rich associational life. Research shows that at least 60 fraternities existed in the Aarschot region. Shooting guilds and religious confraternities were established in all villages, and chambers of rhetoric and craft guilds were common in the city of Aarschot. Some villages had guilds of ship drawers from the middle ages, but other craft guilds were only found in larger towns and cities.<sup>16</sup> All these associations were organized as religious confraternities. This does not only imply that the members addressed each other as ‘brothers’, but that the groups had the same structure as those brotherhoods with a distinctly religious and spiritual focus. Shooting guild and chambers of rhetoric often described themselves as ‘confraternities’. The eighteenth-century statutes of the Shooting Guild in Testelt for instance defined the membership in this way: ‘all those who want to obtain the confraternity of this guild, have to pay three guilders and ten pennies for his entrance’.<sup>17</sup> Other texts also used the term ‘confraternity’ when referring to these groups. The Duke of Ursel, seigneur of Wezemaal, described the local Shooting Guild as ‘la confrerie en de l’arc à main’.<sup>18</sup> Even the ecclesiastical authorities recognized these shooting guilds as confraternities. The archbishop

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1979), pp. 71-82, 108-15; Robert Muchembled, *Culture Populaire Et Culture Des Élités Dans La France Moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Bart Minnen, and Jean-Marie Duvosquel, *Het Hertogdom Aarschot Onder Karel Van Croÿ (1595-1612). Kadasters En Gezichten* (Brussel: Gemeentekrediet, 1993), pp. 57-70.

<sup>15</sup> Eduard Van Ermen, *De Landelijke Bezittingen Van De Heren Van Wezemaal in De Middeleeuwen* (Leuven: Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis, 1982), I, pp. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Millet, *De Kronijk Van Aarschot Van Charles Millet (1597)*. trans. Willy Schroeven, *Bijdragen Tot De Geschiedenis Van Het Land Van Aarschot* (Aarschot: Hertogelijke Aarschotse Kring voor Heemkunde, 1983), 110-15.

<sup>17</sup> Archives of the Arenberg family in Leuven (Further AAL), nr. 347, f° 1r°.

<sup>18</sup> State Archives Anderlecht (further SAA), Council of Brabant, processes, nr. 113, letter of the Duke of Ursel, 17 August 1768, f° 1r°.

of Mechelen to refer to the shooting guilds with the phrase 'confraternitas manu sagittariorum'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, these fraternities were essentially confraternities with additional social activities, such as performing plays, shooting exercises or bee-keeping, added to the spiritual and devotional commitments that more explicitly 'religious' confraternities undertook. So, it would be a mistake to isolate the religious confraternities without making comparisons with the existing fraternities.<sup>20</sup>

The success of the Brabantine textile industry benefitted the region of Aarschot during the late medieval period, but economic prosperity slowly faded from the fifteenth century. Brabant remained the most successful region in the Low Countries until the middle of the sixteenth century, but the rise of the Antwerp economy had serious consequences for the social and economic situation in Aarschot. It could not profit from the enormous economic boom in the north of Brabant, because Aarschot was not within Antwerp's hinterland.<sup>21</sup> The civil war of the second half of the sixteenth century intensified the economic crisis. The intermingling of religious conflicts with social and political tensions that resulted in the Dutch Revolt (1566-1609) marked the end of a successful demographic and economic boom in the Duchy of Brabant. The region entered a period of de-urbanization that lasted until 1750.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Brabant still remained one of the most prosperous and densely populated regions in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

The demographic evolution of the Aarschot region mirrored the economic development of this area. The population was already declining in the fifteenth century, but the effects of the Dutch Revolt were disastrous and the number of inhabitants dropped to its lowest point at the end of the sixteenth century. The urban population of Aarschot even fell below 250 inhabitants (see graph 1). The population recovered slightly after 1600, but did not return to fifteenth century levels until the eighteenth century. In fact, the region of Aarschot never recovered from the crises of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was more a central place that provided some services to its surrounding hinterland, than a real urban centre, .

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<sup>19</sup> Archives of the archbishopric of Mechelen, Acta Vicariatus, VII, nr 5, pastoral letter from 1675, f° 22r°.

<sup>20</sup> Terpstra already pointed at the importance to study confraternities in the wider context of fraternities. See: Nicholas Terpstra, 'De-institutionalizing confraternity studies: fraternalism and social capital in cross-cultural contexts', in *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas. International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. by Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 264-83 (p. 264-65).

<sup>21</sup> Raymond van Uytven, 'In De Schaduwen Van De Antwerpse Groei: Het Hageland in De Zestiende Eeuw', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, 57 (1974), 171-88.

<sup>22</sup> Paul M.M. Klep, 'Urban Decline in Brabant: The Traditionalization of Investments and Labour (1374-1806)', in *The Rise and Decline of Urban Industries in Italy and in the Low Countries*, ed. by Herman van der Wee (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), pp. 261-86 (pp. 261-86).

<sup>23</sup> R.C. Allen, 'Progress and Poverty in Early Modern Europe', *Economic History Review*, 56 (2003), 403-43 (pp. 403-08).

because it lacked several characteristics of a real urban centre, such as an international merchant community, a printing press and a broad range of shops. In fact, Aarschot had the lowest centrality index of all urban centres in eighteenth-century Brabant.<sup>24</sup> Local administrators described the city in an eighteenth-century census as small and poor, even though they undoubtedly feared a fiscal use of this document.<sup>25</sup> A comparison with other parts of Brabant shows that Aarschot remained a peripheral region through the entire early modern period. While the population of Aarschot and its hinterland only rose by 20 percent, the population in the other parts of the duchy at least doubled during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup>

[Graph 1]

### *Spiritual kinship: a shared religious identity*

According to sociologists, religion is an essential factor in the development of a solid civil society. Some even hold the secularisation of western society responsible for the decline of community, civic values and social cohesion in Europe and North America.<sup>27</sup> These kinds of views certainly underestimate the importance of other developments in western societies, such as the growing social polarization during the early modern period, the rise of capitalism, or the emergence of modern individualism. Moreover, recent studies show that social cohesion was not necessarily undermined by religious discord. The catholic and protestant inhabitants of 's-Hertogenbosch lived peacefully together after the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, and succeeded in establishing a durable civil society.<sup>28</sup> It would be an oversimplification of reality to deny the regional differences within Europe, and David Garrioch showed that community life was more influenced by religious feelings and identities

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<sup>24</sup> Bruno Blondé, and Raymond van Uytven, 'De Smalle Steden En Het Brabantse Stedelijke Netwerk in De Late Middeleeuwen En De Nieuwe Tijd', *Lira Elegans*, 6 (1996), 129-81 (pp. 141, 168-173); Raymond van Uytven, 'Brabantse en Antwerpse centrale plaatsen (14<sup>de</sup>-19<sup>de</sup> eeuw)', in *Het stedelijk netwerk in België in historisch perspectief (1350-1850). Een statische en dynamische benadering* (Brussel: Gemeentekrediet, 1992), 29-79 (pp. 58-61).

<sup>25</sup> SAA, Office-Fiscale of Brabant, registers, nr. 388, f° 1r°.

<sup>26</sup> Paul M.M. Klep, 'Population Estimates of Belgium, by Province (1375-1831)', in *Historiens Et Populations. Liber Amicorum Étienne Hélin* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia, 1991), pp. 485-507 (table 15).

<sup>27</sup> Putnam, *Bowling alone*, pp. 65-78.

<sup>28</sup> Aart Vos, *Burgers, Broeders En Bazen. Het Maatschappelijk Middenveld Van 'S-Hertogenbosch in De Zeventiende En Achttiende Eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), pp. 250-375. See also: Benjamin J. Kaplan, 'A Clash of Values: The Survival of Utrecht's Confraternities after the Reformation and the Debate over Their Dissolution', *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, 16 (2000), 100-17 (pp. 100-17).

in Southern than in Northern Europe.<sup>29</sup> Yet this does not mean that religion was irrelevant in North European towns. On the contrary, Garrioch has argued that community life was deeply affected by religious institutions and organisations.<sup>30</sup>

Religion also shaped late medieval and early modern patterns of sociability in the region of Aarschot. All associations in the area can be described as fraternities and most of them had the same structure as religious confraternities. More purely secular associations only came into existence after the invasion of French revolutionary troops in the Low Countries. Before 1793, all associations including shooting guilds, chambers of rhetoric and confraternities shared a core of similar religious characteristics.<sup>31</sup> Yet even the establishment of the secular 'French club' in 1793 did not mark an absolute break with the fraternities of the late medieval and the early modern period. Two of the six founding members of this new club were in fact members of the old Confraternity of the Holy Rosary in Aarschot.<sup>32</sup> The first president of the French club was also a member the Fraternity of Saint Christopher, which was one of the three shooting guilds in the town of Aarschot.<sup>33</sup>

[Figure 1]

We can appreciate the central place of religion in the early modern sociability by examining the banners which these associations used in their processions. These objects usually contain several iconographic elements which stressed the specific character of each fraternity. The flag of the Shooting Guild of Betekom offers an excellent example of this religious identity (figure 1). Two figures are represented on the banner, namely Saint Sebastian and Saint Lawrence.<sup>34</sup> The image of Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of all archers who used a longbow, highlighted the activities of this fraternity. He is traditionally depicted shot through with many arrows at a tree. The image of Saint Lawrence, patron saint of the

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<sup>29</sup> David Garrioch, 'Sacred Neighborhoods and Secular Neighborhoods : Milan and Paris in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Urban History*, 27 (2001), 405-19 (pp. 405-19).

<sup>30</sup> David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790*, *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.149-66.

<sup>31</sup> Johan Breugelmans, 'De O.L.-Vrouwekerk Vanaf De Vestiging Van Het Franse Bewind', in *De Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk Van Aarschot*, ed. by Johan Breugelmans, Jozef Ceulemans and Chris Van Haesendonck (Westerlo: Sint Norbertus Drukkerij, 1987), pp. 105-207 (p. 108).

<sup>32</sup> Archives of the Church of Our Lady in Aarschot (further ACA), supplement, nr. 3-4/5, f° 6r°-15v°.

<sup>33</sup> L. Borremans, 'De Familie Daels Te Aarschot', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 10 (1975), 11-25, 55-80 (pp. 57-58).

<sup>34</sup> J. Claes, A. Claes, and K. Vincke, *Sanctus. Meer Dan 500 Heiligen Herkennen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), pp. 207-08, 218-19.

local parish church, highlighted the geographical character of the group.<sup>35</sup> Both Saint Sebastian and Saint Lawrence were used by several guilds, but the Betekom Shooting Guild was unique in bringing together both saints. Contemporary descriptions of processions prove that most associations made use of a similar religious vocabulary to define and represent their own identity.<sup>36</sup> Every member of the Confraternity of Our Lady in Rillaar carried in the annual processions a banner with an image of the Virgin. The other side of the banner contained a picture of the patron saint of the local parish, Saint Christopher.<sup>37</sup>

All these sorts of brotherhoods, from shooting guilds to chambers of rhetoric and religious confraternities organized religious activities. Members attended masses, walked together in processions and paid for the maintenance of an altar dedicated to their patron saint. A sample of 23 regulations of associations have survived and confirm that religious interests were at the heart of these fraternities' sociability throughout the entire late medieval and early modern period. A single chamber of rhetoric in Aarschot is the only group whose statutes have no explicitly religious regulations.<sup>38</sup> However, other sources indicate that this same association organized the same kinds of religious activities as other brotherhoods. As a sixteenth-century observer wrote: 'The members of this chamber of rhetoric dedicate every year a solemn mass to their patron saint and all members are obliged to be present'.<sup>39</sup>

The statutes of all these associations generally contained the obligation to be present at the annual procession and at a number of masses. The late medieval regulations of the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in Rotselaar (1427) stipulated that all members should walk in the procession on the feast of Corpus Domini. The members also had to make a gift to the altar of the patron saint of the village when they died.<sup>40</sup> The statutes of the Shooting Guild in the nearby parish of Testelt contained even more specific religious instructions. New regulations of 1503 required all members to accompany the coffin of a deceased brother. Beyond this, all members had to participate in a sung mass at the feast of Saint Sebastian.<sup>41</sup> The members of this guild did not change these religious stipulations when they renewed their statutes in 1753. The board of this association justified the reform and renewal of statutes by

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<sup>35</sup> T.J. Gerits, 'Kataloog Der Kunstvoorwerpen', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 4 (1969), 88-120 (p. 90).

<sup>36</sup> Millet, *De kronijk van Aarschot*, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Adrien Carpentier, and Charles Millet, *De Kronijk Door Adrien Carpentier En Charles Millet Van 1597 over Rillaar, Haterbeek En Ourodenberg in Het Hertogdom Aarschot* trans. Willy Schroeven, *Bijdragen Tot De Geschiedenis Van Het Land Van Aarschot* (Aarschot: Hertogelijke Aarschotse Kring voor Heemkunde, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> August Willems, 'Over De Rederijkerskamers Van Aarschot', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 16 (1981), 7-11, 56-68, 97-106 (pp. 60-61).

<sup>39</sup> Millet, *De kronijk van Aarschot*, p. 33-34.

<sup>40</sup> SAA, Council of Brabant, processes, nr. 96, f° 3r°-3v°, 5v°.

<sup>41</sup> T.J. Gerits, 'De Schuttersgilden Van Testelt', *Eigen Schoon en De Brabander*, 52 (1969), 444-55 (pp. 452-54).



claiming that ‘a lot of articles are no longer in use and should be omitted’, but leaving the religious rules intact showed that they were clearly not out of date at the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

The Shooting Guild of Wezemaal also changed its statutes during the early modern period. Remarkably, while most fines for offences against the statutes were doubled in 1662, those for violations of the religious rules increased fourfold.<sup>43</sup> While these harsh punishments showed a diminishing interest on the part of individual members in the religious activities of the confraternity, the group continued to assert that religion was a vital element of the association. Similarly, the new statutes of the Shooting Guild of Testelt explicitly mentioned that members were not allowed to leave the church before the end of the Eucharist, a rule which suggests that some members did the opposite.<sup>44</sup> Yet it would be an exaggeration to claim that interest in religious activities was declining. The accounts of several associations show that religion remained a core element of the chambers of rhetoric, the shooting guilds and the religious confraternities of the Aarschot region. Both the Fraternity of Saint George and the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity in Aarschot spent money on masses and requiem services aimed at ensuring salvation of departed members. These two associations attracted a very different public, but both of them paid money for the embellishment of an altar in the church of Our Lady. The amount of money spent depended on the number of members and their social status, but the nature of the expenses was the same in all confraternities. All the accounts contain payments for candles, altar ornaments, masses and material objects for processions.<sup>45</sup>

### *Confraternities and bridging social capital*

A spatial analysis of the membership lists for different brotherhoods shows that parish churches were at the centre of their associational life. A comparison of the names in these lists and the names in a census registers of 1796 makes it possible to investigate where the members of these brotherhoods lived.<sup>46</sup> In Aarschot, they were concentrated in the city centre, with most residing in big squares or broad streets (map 3). This is no coincidence because

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<sup>42</sup> AAL, nr. 347, f° 1r°.

<sup>43</sup> SAA, Council of Brabant, processes, nr. 113, f° 1r°; L. Van Meel, 'Caerte Van De Gulde Van Wesemael', *Tijdingen van het Beatrijsgezelschap*, 21 (1985-1986), 4-25 (p. 6).

<sup>44</sup> AAL, nr. 347, f° 1r°.

<sup>45</sup> State Archives Leuven (further SAL), Bench of aldermen Leuven, nr. 7204, f° 2r°-2v°; CAA, supplement, nr. 1/5, f° 5r°-5v°.

<sup>46</sup> *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Aarschot*, passim.

social scientists have already demonstrated that these kinds of shared public spaces stimulated the formation of vivid communities, but the high prices of houses in town centres – near to most public places – probably attracted people with a higher social status.<sup>47</sup> This social bias can also explain why most members of associations lived in the inner city. However, the fringes of urban society also participated in associational life. People in the poorer neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city joined the confraternities in the parish church of Aarschot. This was probably the result of the small scale of the town since Aarschot had only one parish. It is reasonable to assume that the small geographic distances in the city had consequences for the social heterogeneous composition of most associations. Social boundaries were rather small in a modest town such as Aarschot.

[Map 3]

Most villages surrounding Aarschot had one central church and their territory was not divided into different parishes. However, population density was lower and some hamlets were fairly remote from the parish church. Some people had to walk an hour before they could reach their parish priest. This situation caused several difficulties, especially in wintertime, when the rising water level of some rivers isolated remote places.<sup>48</sup> Yet while fraternities were more popular in the centre of the villages, these hinderances did not prevent people from joining fraternities in the central parish church. The Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration in Begijnendijk drew most of its members from the centre of the village, but people from many surrounding hamlets participated in this association at the end of the eighteenth century (map 4). In fact, the confraternity provided ‘bridging capital’ and brought together inhabitants from different corners of the village.<sup>49</sup> In the nearby parish of Wezemaal, participation rates were even higher in the more remote hamlets than in the middle of the village, notwithstanding the fact that the altar of the Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration was established in the Church of Saint Martin in the centre of the parish (map 5).<sup>50</sup> Both men and women joined these confraternities and they were not unwilling to participate in the associational life even if they lived at the boundaries of the parish, far from the central church.

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<sup>47</sup> David Garrioch, and Marc Peel, 'Introduction : The Social History of Urban Neighborhoods', *Journal of Urban History*, 32 (2006), 663-76 (p. 667).

<sup>48</sup> This was a regular complaint to the bisschops. For some examples, see: Morren, *Het Dekenaat*, pp. 79-86.

<sup>49</sup> These figures are based upon the list in : Geert Andries, *Begijnendijk Vóór 1796, Bijdrage Tot De Geschiedenis Van Het Land Van Aarschot* (Aarschot: Hertogelijke Aarschotse Kring voor Heemkunde, 1996), pp. 143-46.

<sup>50</sup> Archives of the Church of Wezemaal (further ACW), section B, nr. 5.

The accounts of the Confraternity of the Sweet Name of Jesus in Haacht prove that woman went to the annual feast of their association, even when they had no relatives who could accompany them.<sup>51</sup>

[Map 4 & Map 5]

Fraternities did not only recruit members within the parish where they maintained their altar. Several statutes explicitly mentioned that members were not obliged to live in the parish of the fraternity. Most members did indeed live in the parish, but the stipulations suggest that outsiders were also becoming members of these associations, or that members maintained their connection even if they moved beyond the parish bounds. The rules of the Fraternity of Saint Ambrose in Begijnendijk required all members to attend the annual mass on 4 April, but people from outside the village were allowed to send someone else in their place if they got permission from the board of the fraternity.<sup>52</sup> Their replacement was also authorized to vote for a new captain.<sup>53</sup> Other statutes contained similar passages. Members of the chamber of rhetoric *Het Tarwebloeijsel* in Aarschot could stay in the club when they moved outside the seigniorship of Aarschot. They only had to pay their contribution for the meals of the fraternity.<sup>54</sup>

These kinds of prescription were in fact very common: people were considered to be members when they contributed to the costs of the annual meal. This resulted in a very broad recruitment of members. The register of the Fraternity of Saint George in Rotselaar proves that some associations had members across the entire Duchy of Brabant.<sup>55</sup> People could even transfer from one fraternity to another without the compulsory oath of entrance if both associations had the same patron saint. When Guiliam Peters moved from Rotselaar to Booischoot in 1763, he asked to become a member of the local Fraternity of Saint Sebastian. The register of this association notes that Guiliam did not have to take a membership oath because he had already sworn a similar oath when becoming a member of the Fraternity of

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<sup>51</sup> SAL, Church Archives Brabant, nr. 22,010, f° 10r°

<sup>52</sup> According to Gervaise Rosser, this was different in most English towns. The presence at the annual dinner was an obligation for all members in most English confraternities. Gervaise Rosser, 'Solidarités Et Changement Social. Les Fraternités Urbaines Anglaises À La Fin Du Moyen Age', *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 48 (1993), 1127-43 (p. 1132).

<sup>53</sup> Archives of the University of Leuven (further AUL), statutes of the Confraternity of Saint Ambrose in Begijnendijk, article 1.

<sup>54</sup> Willems, 'Over de rederijerskamers', p. 68.

<sup>55</sup> A. Roeykens, 'Het Leden- En Rekeningboek Van De Sint-Jorisgilde Van Rotselaar', *Tijdingen van het Bedrijfsgezelschap*, 5 (1969-1970), 18-28 (pp. 23-27).

Saint Sebastian in Rotselaar.<sup>56</sup> By these arrangements, confraternities fostered feelings of shared interests and unity between similar organizations.

Map 6 shows that the membership of particular fraternities was not always committed to the local parish. Some fraternities attracted people from other cities and villages, especially confraternities devoted to miraculous statutes of saints or those situated in places of pilgrimage.<sup>57</sup> Next to this, fraternities did more than create connections between different parishes. They also acted as alternatives for traditional ties of kinship, becoming in this way an ideal instrument for new migrants.<sup>58</sup> These associations provided opportunities to integrate into the local community. A census of 1796, drawn up by order of the French invaders, offers a possibility of examining how quickly migrants became members of local associations. This census covers all parishes in the hinterland of Aarschot and contains valuable information about the influx of immigrants.

[Map 6]

A comparison of the names on the census lists and the names in fraternal registers allows us to investigate patterns of integration in the region of Aarschot. The results are remarkable: many newcomers became members of local fraternities. The proportion of migrants in the membership of the Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration in Wezemaal was quite low: only ten percent of members were new in the parish, even though fully one third of the village population consisted of newcomers. However, most of the migrants joined the Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration within a year of arriving in Wezemaal. It took newcomers more time to enter similar associations in the city of Aarschot, but the share of immigrants in the major confraternities of the town was fairly high. Twenty-two percent of the entire urban population was born outside of Aarschot, while only fifteen percent of the members of the confraternities were immigrants. On the other hand, the percentage of migrants found in the Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration in Begijnendijk exceeded the percentage found in the entire parish itself (see table 1).

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<sup>56</sup> Marcel Van der Auwera, 'De Schuttersgilden in Het Land Van Heist', *'t Zwaantje. Jaarboek voor het Land van Heist en omliggende*, 11 (1994), 56-176 (p. 155).

<sup>57</sup> See for instance: August Willems, 'Volksdevotie in Vroegere Tijden in Het Hageland. De Verering Van Sint-Marcoen in Kortrijk-Dutsel', *Oost-Brabant*, 13 (1976), 64-70.

<sup>58</sup> David Garrioch, 'Lay-Religious Associations, Urban Identities, and Urban Space in Eighteenth-Century Milan', *Journal of Religious History*, 28 (2004), 35-49 (p. 46).

[Tabel 1]

Although newcomers were not excluded from local associational life, the figures for Aarschot and especially for Wezemaal show that it was easier to get access to fraternities if you were born in the parish. However, some joined these associations the year that they arrived. Migrants' occupational status was an important factor in the process of integration. Occupations with a low social status – such as servants – did not enter the local confraternities in the countryside.<sup>59</sup> The town of Aarschot offered more opportunities for servants than the surrounding villages. Some of them – such as Maria Elisabeth Boonroij – entered local confraternities after they had lived several years in the city. These religious confraternities were open to all social layers, but the members with a lower social status were mostly born in Aarschot. The associations were in principle open to immigrants, but only newcomers with an honourable profession – such as merchants, members of the chapter and master crafts men – were easily integrated into local society and immediately entered the urban associations. Migrants in lower status occupations only entered a local confraternity after five years in the city.<sup>60</sup>

A concrete example can illuminate the important social role of fraternities. The Adnelle family arrived in Aarschot around 1713. The first member of the family in the region, Arnold Adnelle, joined the Fraternity of Saint George – a shooting guild – in 1716 and then joined the Confraternity of the Pious Souls three years later.<sup>61</sup> His son Theodore Adnelle occupied several functions in the urban welfare system and some years later was appointed an alderman in Aarschot.<sup>62</sup> Like his father, he joined the Confraternity of the Pious Souls and was even elected on to the brotherhood's board. Theodore's daughter Anna Barbara married Eustachius Van Cantelbeek, from a prominent Aarschot family, and it is certainly no coincidence that the young husband was also a member of the board of the Confraternity of the Pious Souls. He was also a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity, and was elected deacon of an urban shooting guild.<sup>63</sup> Associational life in Aarschot clearly offered the Adnelle family access to crucial social networks. After some years in Aarschot, the family had made marriage ties to the most important families in the town. Their social status rapidly

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<sup>59</sup> Andries, *Begijnendijk*, pp. 143-46; *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Aarschot*, village of Begijnendijk.

<sup>60</sup> ACA, I, nr. 286; ACA, I, nr. 287; ACA, I, nr. 316; ACA, supplement, nr. 1/5; ACA, supplement, nr. 2-3/7; *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Aarschot*, town of Aarschot.

<sup>61</sup> SAL, Bench of aldermen Leuven, nr. 7,204, f° 187r°-188v°; ACA, supplement, nr. 2-3/7, f° 9r°.

<sup>62</sup> S. Wollaert, 'Brusselse Afstammelingen Van "Spaanse" Aarschottenaars Vertelt ...', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 35 (2000), 17-25 (p. 20).

<sup>63</sup> CAA, supplement, nr. 2-3/7, f° 68v°.

increased through the following decades. Since they were already well off when they arrived in Aarschot it cannot be argued that the Adnelle family's steady social promotion was due only to their participation in local associational life. At the same time, they undoubtedly benefited from their confraternal social contacts,

The Adnelle family was not an exception. Several new families arrived in the region in the early modern period, especially during the years after the Dutch Revolt, and many of them became important members of local associations. Many leading figures in the fraternities of Haacht originated from outside the parish. Most came from other Brabantine regions, but some, like the Golfus' family, had their roots in Germany. Some newcomers entered the confraternities of the seventeenth-century Catholic Reform, such as the Confraternity of the Sweet Name of Jesus in Haacht.<sup>64</sup> Other immigrants to Haacht were even elected into the board of old and respectable associations, such as the fifteenth-century shooting guilds. Abraham Grietens was a member of such a new family in Haacht. Much like Arnold Adnelle in Aarschot, his membership in several fraternities aided his swift integration into local social life. He was later elected as an alderman and also became captain of the Fraternity of Saint George, one of the local shooting guilds. The family was proud of these achievements and noted on his tombstone that 'master Abraham Grietens was during his life surgeon, alderman of this parish of Haacht and captain of the Guild of Saint George'.<sup>65</sup> The available data seems to suggest that the high social status of these new families played a decisive role in their immediate admission to local fraternities. Indeed, Abraham Grietens bought a considerable amount of property immediately after his arrival in Haacht, and he married the only daughter of a rich local family; all of this occurred before he can be identified in the records as a member of the Shooting Guild.<sup>66</sup>

The geographical range from which fraternities recruited their members enlarged after 1600. The confraternities established in the wake of the Catholic Reform emphasized the collective identity of brotherhoods across the Roman-Catholic world. The accent shifted from local parish distinctiveness to a broader catholic, Tridentine, and global consciousness. New confraternities aimed to strengthen Catholic identity by emphasizing differences with other religions and similarities to other Catholic confraternities. Most of these confraternities were established by clerics or religious orders. The Order of the Holy Trinity for instance founded a typical Tridentine confraternity in the village of Testelt. The statutes of 1662 stressed that the

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<sup>64</sup> SAL, Church Archives Brabant, nr. 22,010, f° 19r°.

<sup>65</sup> J. Cools, 'De Haachtse Familie Grietens', *Eigen Schoon en De Brabander*, 46 (1863), 101-16 (pp. 102-05).

<sup>66</sup> J. Cools, 'De Haachtsche orgelmakers Golfus en Dekens en hun familie', *Eigen Schoon en De Brabander*, 15 (1940), 88-106 (p. 91).

aim of the members was ‘to save the Christian slaves, captured by the Turks and other barbarian nations’.<sup>67</sup> The later erection of an identical confraternity in Averbode was not an isolated phenomenon, but fitted into a general strategy. The Catholic Church emphasized shared Catholic experiences and depicted other religions as hostile. The Teselt and Averbode confraternities were dependent on the Order of the Holy Trinity, which had its headquarters in Paris and which established similar confraternities all over Europe. An other and older example can be found in the confraternities of the Holy Rosary. The Dominican Order had established these pious associations in order to promote devotional reform from the fifteenth century, but as the Catholic Reformation developed after the Council of Trent, their statutes more often explicitly mentioned that they were aimed against the protestant religion and the Turks.<sup>68</sup> Confraternities of the Holy Rosary were erected in several parishes in the Aarschot region around 1650, and became very successful during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>69</sup>

An even broader community of Catholic Christians was established in 1768. The archbishop of Mechelen decided in this year that every parish would get its own Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration of the Holy Sacrament to ensure that the Holy Sacrament was continuously adored in the diocese.<sup>70</sup> The clerical authorities drew up a calendar with a division of tasks between the different parishes in the diocese that laid out when each Confraternity of the Eternal Adoration had to pray to the Holy Sacrament. Such initiatives fostered the emergence of a shared Catholic identity between members of the different parishes within the diocese. The confraternity created an imagined community between faithful Christians which surpassed old local identities. This does not mean that the available social capital increased; these Tridentine fraternities had too many members to allow face-to-face relations between all members.

### *Pressures on traditional solidarities*

The discussion above suggests that fraternities were a source of bridging social capital during the late medieval and the early modern period. Indeed, these associations contributed to the

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T.J. Gerits, 'De Oprichting Van De Aartsbroederschap Van De H. Drievuldigheid in De Abdijkerk Van Averbode in 1662', *Eigen Schoon en De Brabander*, 45 (1962), 363-69 (pp. 363-65).

<sup>68</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Rassurer Et Protéger. Le Sentiment De Sécurité Dans L'occident D'autrefois* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), pp. 242-60; Luc Duerloo, 'Verering Van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Van De Rozenkrans', in *Albrecht & Isabella 1598-1621: Catalogus*, ed. by Luc Duerloo and Werner Thomas (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 251-52.

<sup>69</sup> SAL, Church Archives Brabant, abdijen, nr. 5,297, f° 1r°; CAW, section B, nr. 3; Church Archive Testelt, nr. 55; CAA, supplement, nr. 288, f° 3r°.

<sup>70</sup> CAA, Diest-Aarschot, nr. 316.

emergence of large social networks, regardless of neighbourhood ties and parishes boundaries. However, it still remains an open question if the various fraternities were also generating bridging social capital between people of different social and cultural backgrounds. In the case of medieval fraternities, most historians agree that they brought together people from different social layers. This was an explicit component of the Christian values which were at the heart of the fraternal movement of the late middle ages. Lay people gathered together in confraternities when they wanted to follow the example of Jesus Christ and his apostles. As a consequence, they considered each other as brothers and sisters.<sup>71</sup> Their deliberate goal of advancing peace and harmony across social divisions was what John Bossy referred to as a 'social miracle'.<sup>72</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate the presence or effectiveness of this social miracle in the Aarschot region, because the extant sources for the late medieval period do not include lists of members. However, the fifteenth-century statutes of several confraternities suggest that clerics, noblemen, and ordinary lay people all joined the same associations. This broad recruitment did not mean that all members were considered equal. Noblemen had a distinguished place in the annual processions, and the ordinary dress prescriptions of the fraternities did not apply to them.<sup>73</sup> Hard evidence is missing, but the disappearance of phrases emphasizing spiritual equality from later statutes suggests that noblemen gradually withdrew from these fraternities and their processions. Indeed, the kind of formulations emphasizing and implementing the 'social miracle' are absent from the statutes of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Associational life seems not to have escaped from the social polarization which increasingly characterized the early modern period.<sup>74</sup>

The course of events in the Low Countries strengthened this polarization in social relations, at least in the existing fraternities. The sources indicate that the Dutch Revolt reshaped almost all social relations and networks in the Low Countries. The late medieval fraternities were strongly affected by this long and devastating civil war. Some chronicles of the late sixteenth century describe a worsening state of affairs. Charles Millet for instance

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<sup>71</sup> Nicolas A. Eckstein, 'Words and Deeds, Stasis and Change: New Directions in Florentine Devotion around 1500', *Journal of Religious History*, 28 (2004), 1-18 (pp. 2-3).

<sup>72</sup> John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 4-5, 14, 33, 56; see also: Nicholas Terpstra, 'The Politics of Ritual Kinship', in *The Politics of Ritual Kinship. Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, ed. by Nicholas Terpstra (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-8.

<sup>73</sup> SAA, Council of Brabant, processes, nr. 96, f° 3r°-3v°; Jozef De Ras, *Historische Aanteekeningen over De Heeren En Het Land Van Rotselaar* (Leuven: Peeters, 1907), p. 71; Gust Vandegoor, 'Het Stichtingscharter Van De Werchterse St.-Sebastiaansgilde', *Haachts Oudheid- en Geschiedkundig Tijdschrift*, 12 (1997), 139-48 (p. 143).

<sup>74</sup> Lis and Soly, *Poverty*, pp. 71-82, 108-15.



wrote about the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament in Aarschot in 1597: 'Before this time, this confraternity was very fine and respectable. She had many members amongst the male and female citizens of the city of Aarschot. At this moment there are no members anymore, and all have died during the turbulent times'.<sup>75</sup> The Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament in Aarschot was not exceptional. Most fraternities lost their members during the Dutch Revolt, and only a few of them survived. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the Confraternity of Saint Anne in the village of Langdorp went from having many members to counting only four brothers and sisters.<sup>76</sup> The shooting guilds were apparently less affected by the civil war, though they still faced serious challenges. The membership of the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in Messelbroek declined from 42 archers before the Dutch Revolt to 27 brothers at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>77</sup> These associations had to cope with other problems. The house of the shooting guild in the village of Rillaar for instance was burned down by troops during the Dutch Revolt.<sup>78</sup> These material concerns were of course less problematic than the demographic crisis (see also graph 1), but they certainly disturbed normal social life.

While it is tempting to assume that the Dutch Revolt lay behind the major crises faced by fraternities in the Low Countries, similar transformations in associational life occurred elsewhere in Europe. The social relations within Italian confraternities also changed as they became more hierarchical and less open from around 1500.<sup>79</sup> The social bonds in confraternities were very strong during the late medieval period, because members considered each other as brothers and sisters. Fraternities deliberately aimed to create 'ritual kinship' between members.<sup>80</sup> These were formalized social connections between persons who did not have a direct blood relationship.<sup>81</sup> The membership ties within fraternities in the region of Aarschot during the late medieval period can surely be understood as a form of ritual kinship. The associations provided an alternative to the extended family. Their fifteenth- and sixteenth-century statutes contained several prescriptions about the social relations between members. They clearly tried to integrate the entire household of every single member into the

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<sup>75</sup> Millet, *De kronijk van Aarschot*, p. 32.

<sup>76</sup> Adrien Carpentier, and Charles Millet, *De Kronijk Door Adrien Carpentier En Charles Millet Van 1597 over Langdorp, Messelbroek En Testelt in Het Hertogdom Aarschot*. trans. August Willems, *Bijdragen Tot De Geschiedenis Van Het Land Van Aarschot* (Aarschot: Hertogelijke Aarschotse Kring voor Heemkunde, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, 78.

<sup>78</sup> Carpentier and Millet, *De kronijk door Adrien Carpentier en Charles Millet van 1597 over Rillaar*, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> C.F. Black, 'The Development of Confraternity Studies over the Past Thirty Years', in *The Politics*, ed. by Nicholas Terpstra, pp. 9-29 (p. 23); Eckstein, 'Words', p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Terpstra, 'The politics', pp. 1-8.

<sup>81</sup> Maurice Aymard, 'Vriendschap En Gezelschapsleven', in *De Gemeenschap, De Staat En Het Gezin, 1600-1800*, ed. by Rogier Chartier, Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès (Amsterdam: Agon, 1989), pp. 133-68 (p. 148).

confraternity. It was for instance a custom during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that a man about to marry bought a set of gloves for all his fellow members. In exchange, all members had to attend his wedding and they were obliged to wear the gloves they had been given. The newly married couple was also served by the members of the confraternity.<sup>82</sup> According to the statutes of 1518, members of the chamber of rhetoric *Het Tarwenbloeisel* in Aarschot even performed a play when one of their number got married. The groom also received the symbol of this fraternity as a gift, namely the shoot of a vineyard made of pewter.<sup>83</sup> Yet this custom went out of use at the end of the sixteenth century, and afterwards, the groom only had to buy a drink for his fellow members.<sup>84</sup>

Some fifteenth- and sixteenth century fraternal statutes also contained stipulations regarding the children of members. All brothers of the chamber of rhetoric *Het Tarwenbloeisel* in Aarschot had to accompany the body when the child of a fellow member died.<sup>85</sup> The charters of the Fraternity of Saint George in Aarschot and the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in Testelt – both shooting guilds – contained similar instructions.<sup>86</sup> However, these prescriptions began disappearing through the second half of the sixteenth century, suggesting that membership in fraternities was evolving into a more individual matter. It is certainly no coincidence that several associations started to stipulate in their regulations that only members were allowed at the meetings of the fraternity. The members of these associations were not even allowed to drink together with people who did not belong to the fraternity.<sup>87</sup> The practice of drinking together was reserved to members, because of the symbolic meaning of the gesture. Indeed, sharing a glass of beer was considered to be an important ritual that confirmed (or created) a social bond.<sup>88</sup> The prohibition against offering outsiders a drink highlights the conflict around social exclusivity within most fraternities.

The available sources suggest that all fraternities organized similar social activities aimed at consolidating group identity during fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A sixteenth-century description of the Confraternity of Our Lady in Rillaar can serve as an example.

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<sup>82</sup> J. Van Roost, 'St. Sebastiaan Contra St Joris', *Tijdingen van het Beatrijsgezelschap*, 2 (1966-1967), 2-7 (p. 5); Vandegoor, 'Het stichtingscharter', p. 145; P. De Fraine, 'De Schuttersgilden in Het Land Van Aarschot Tot De XVIde Eeuw', *De Brabantse Folklore* (1962), 262-89 (p. 287); Gerits, 'De schuttersgilden', p. 454.

<sup>83</sup> Willems, 'Over de rederijderskamers', p. 66.

<sup>84</sup> Carpentier and Millet, *De kronijk door Adrien Carpentier en Charles Millet van 1597 over Rillaar*, p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> Willems, 'Over de rederijderskamers', p. 66.

<sup>86</sup> De Fraine, 'De schuttersgilden', p. 282; Gerits, 'De schuttersgilden', p. 454.

<sup>87</sup> Adrien Coeck, 'Twee Documenten over De Handbooggilden Van Langdorp', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 16 (1981), 12-22 (pp. 20-21); T.J. Gerits, 'De "Caerte" Van De Kolveniersgilde Van Sint-Kristoffel Te Rillaar', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 21 (1986), 94-107 (p. 105).

<sup>88</sup> T. Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 118.

Adrien Carpentier and Charles Millet wrote about this association: ‘All members of the confraternity participate in the offering during the annual mass according to their status. After this mass, they organise a collective dinner’.<sup>89</sup> Many other fraternities also came together after an annual mass for a collective dinner.<sup>90</sup> Such meals certainly stimulated the social cohesion between the members of these associations, but they also had a religious meaning: the pairing of a mass and a collective dinner referred to the Eucharist and the Last Supper. As a consequence, these fraternal meals were meant as symbols of Christian love of one’s neighbour.<sup>91</sup>

### *The great divergence in associational life*

The combination of the Catholic Reformation and the Dutch Revolt reinforced the social tensions which were already emerging in sixteenth century associational life. Religious authorities tried to curtail certain customs after the Council of Trent. Ecclesiastical institutions and priests interfered more with fraternities after Trent. In fact, most seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries confraternities were established and controlled by clerics. Lay people were not totally sidelined, but they had to accommodate more control by ecclesiastical institutions. This was a radical break with the past because fraternities had been relatively autonomous during the late middle ages.<sup>92</sup>

The impact of this new attitude towards lay associations was clearly visible in the Aarschot region. One group that was ‘reformed’ in the seventeenth century was the Confraternity of Our Lady in Testelt. The Dominicans of the nearby city of Leuven gained control over the confraternity and changed the original statutes. Before 1600, the members of the Confraternity of Our Lady had gathered every week and also organized an annual fraternal dinner on All Saints Day.<sup>93</sup> However, the archbishop of Mechelen intervened in 1658. He complained about the ‘symposia indigne’ which were being held by the members, and in consequence supported the attempts of the Dominicans to change this Marian confraternity into a typical Tridentine Confraternity of the Rosary. As a result, the old social activities of

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<sup>89</sup> Carpentier and Millet, *De kronijk door Adrien Carpentier en Charles Millet van 1597 over Rillaar*, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Adrien Carpentier, and Charles Millet, *De Kronijk Door Adrien Carpentier En Charles Millet Van 1597 over Baal, Betekom En Gelrode in Het Hertogdom Aarschot*. trans. Frans Scheys, *Bijdragen Tot De Geschiedenis Van Het Land Van Aarschot* (Aarschot: Hertogelijke Aarschotse Kring voor Heemkunde, 1981), p. 32

<sup>91</sup> Gervaise Rosser, ‘Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 430-46 (p. 435).

<sup>92</sup> Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770, New Approaches to European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 202.

<sup>93</sup> Carpentier and Millet, *De kronijk door Adrien Carpentier en Charles Millet 1597 over Langdorp*, p. 93.

Teselt's brothers of Our Lady were abolished, and the confraternity evolved into a purely devotional association.<sup>94</sup>

The 'reform' of this confraternity was not an isolated case. Account books for a similar Confraternity of Our Lady in Wezemaal record annually the expenses for a collective dinner. The twenty-six members of this association paid their contribution for this meal in 1637, but the Dominicans intervened to end this custom, and after 1642, the sources contain no references to the dinner.<sup>95</sup> The same thing happened in Haacht, where the annual meals of the Confraternity of the Sweet Name of Jesus disappeared after 1642.<sup>96</sup> Religious authorities made determined attempts to reform the old fraternities, and this frequently entailed putting a stop to old forms of sociability like communal meals. The new confraternities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not offer alternatives for the abolished social activities, and indeed most of these confraternities lacked any form of sociability. The statutes of the Confraternity to Free Christian Slaves in Averbode – which was founded in 1662 by the Order of the Holy Trinity – mentioned that members only had to put their name in the register. Afterwards, they were not obliged to come back to the chapel of the confraternity or to maintain frequent relations with other members. The confraternity only advised its members to pray from time to time.<sup>97</sup> It is obvious that the social effects of such associations were minimal.

In spite of all these clerical efforts to get rid of the old traditions of lay sociability, several medieval fraternities were able to resist the new Tridentine rules. These were inevitably fraternities that retained lay organisation and avoided clerical control. A comparison of the activities of these associations before and after 1600 shows that some managed to stick to their traditional activities. A comparison of the sixteenth- and eighteenth-century statutes of the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in Testelt – which was in fact a shooting guild – offers a good example. New statutes of the eighteenth century statutes retained prescriptions about the annual meal and fines for members who failed to show up for meetings.<sup>98</sup> In fact, the social activities of this association roughly remained the same through the course of the early modern period.<sup>99</sup>

The sociability between members became even more important in some fraternities during the early modern period. The medieval statutes of the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in

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<sup>94</sup> SAL, Church Archives of Brabant, III, nr. 5,297, f° 1r°.

<sup>95</sup> ACW, section B, nr. 1b, account 1635-1640, f° 6r°-8r°; SAL, Church Archives of Brabant, nr. 5,297, f° 1r°.

<sup>96</sup> SAL, Church Archives of Brabant, supplement, nr. 22,010, f° 14r°-15r°.

<sup>97</sup> Gerits, 'De oprichting', p. 368.

<sup>98</sup> AAL, nr. 347.

<sup>99</sup> Gerits, 'De schuttersgilden', pp. 452-55.

Haacht had stipulated that all new members had to offer some wax candles to the patron saint of the village. This prescription remained in force until the end of the early modern period, but the conditions of entrance were extended during the eighteenth century, when new brothers were obliged to provide a half barrel of beer to their fellow members.<sup>100</sup> The accounts of some of these associations show the continuing importance of sociability during the eighteenth century. Bear and wine turned out to be the largest single expense of the Fraternity of Saint George in Aarschot (see table 2). This shooting guild also organized religious activities – such as masses – and paid for the decoration of their altar, but social meetings formed the most significant cost. The accounts of a similar organisation in Rotselaar reveal that dinners and drinks comprised a good 75 percent of all expenses. The first thing mentioned in the new register of this fraternity was not a solemn oath or an old privilege, but a contract with a local brewer.<sup>101</sup> The importance of social drinking is also stressed by the way that the Fraternity of Saint Christopher – also a Shooting Guild – in Aarschot ordered its beer. The officers of this fraternity annually went to several brewers to taste some samples of their beer. They only placed an order when they had checked the quality of the beer.<sup>102</sup>

[Table 2]

This divergence between fraternities with and without social activities coincides with another development, namely the already-mentioned tendency towards hierarchical and socially exclusive fraternities. The evolution began around 1500, but was reinforced during the seventeenth century. In fact, most medieval fraternities in the Aarschot region developed into associations of the elite and the middling sort of people. The statutes of the Fraternity of Saint Sebastian in Wezemaal – a shooting guild – was explicit about this change: although the charter of 1500 allowed all social groups into the fraternity, new statutes adopted in 1662 explicitly stipulated that poor people could not join the brotherhood.<sup>103</sup> This prescription was not written down as clearly in the rules of other fraternities, but some sources confirm that poor people were banned in practice from these associations. Several names were, for instance, stroked out in the register of members of the Fraternity of Saint George in Rotselaar, another example of a local shooting guild. The notes in the margin of this manuscript reveal

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<sup>100</sup> Jo Vandesande, 'Het 17<sup>de</sup>-Eeuwse *Keurboeck* Van De Haachtse Sint-Sebastiaansgilde', *Haachts Oudheid- en Geschiedkundig Tijdschrift*, 15-16 (2000-2001), 204-17, 6-13, 90-99 (15 (2000) pp. 211-12).

<sup>101</sup> Archives Arenberg Family in Edingen, accounts of the Confraternity of Saint George in Rotselaar, f<sup>o</sup> 1r<sup>o</sup>-5r<sup>o</sup>.

<sup>102</sup> See for instance: CAA, I, nr. 289, f<sup>o</sup> 76r<sup>o</sup>, 86r<sup>o</sup>, 104r<sup>o</sup>.

<sup>103</sup> Van Meel, 'Caerte', p. 6.

that these people were expelled from the fraternity because they received support from the local welfare institutions and so were considered a burden on the community.<sup>104</sup>

Contrary to the lay fraternities, which had been founded during the late middle ages, the new Tridentine confraternities did not exclude poor people. The statutes of these associations often explicitly mentioned that they were open to all social groups.<sup>105</sup> This was a significant difference with the old medieval confraternities and brotherhoods in the Aarschot region. People did not only have to pay to join the older fraternities, but all members also secretly voted about the admission of a new brother.<sup>106</sup> By contrast, members of the Tridentine confraternities usually did not have to pay an annual contribution to the confraternity, and entrance into these brotherhoods was totally free. This was also due to the influence of clerics, because the Catholic Reformation stressed the importance of co-operation between different social layers in confraternities. In this way, the Tridentine Church was promoting a return to the old values of the medieval fraternities and a rejection of social exclusiveness.<sup>107</sup> However, these associations did not organize social activities. As a result, despite being open socially, the new confraternities did not generate the forms of social capital that were an achievement of the old lay confraternities and brotherhoods. Neither the old nor the new confraternities developed much bridging social capital across class divides. The existing medieval brotherhoods became a source of bonding social capital, but only for socially distinct groups in society. The new Tridentine confraternities crossed social boundaries, but lacked the activities to create a real social bond between the various members.

### *Conclusion*

Insights and theoretical frameworks drawn from the work of social scientists on associational life can be very useful for historians. The concepts of ‘social capital’ and ‘civil society’ in particular offer some very interesting perspectives.<sup>108</sup> However, a critical historical reflection about the evolution of social capital and civil society is necessary. Some social scientists claim that these phenomena in contemporary civil society are determined by a long and

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<sup>104</sup> SAL, Confraternity of Saint George in Rotselaar, nr. 1, f° 2v°, 4v°.

<sup>105</sup> A. Aerts, 'Bijdrage Tot De Geschiedenis Van Wakkerzeel', *Haachts Oudheid- en Geschiedkundig Tijdschrift*, 11-13 (1996-1998), 25-41, 101-08, 202-12, 23-29, 163-70, 240-55, 34-50, 130-39, 255-67 (11 (1996) p. 33).

<sup>106</sup> CAA, supplement, nr. 1/29, f° 1v°; L. Heylen, 'Standregelen Van De Sint-Ambrosiusgilde (Van Het Broederschap Van Den H. Ambrosius) Te Langdorp', *Het Oude Land van Aarschot*, 12 (1977), 92-94 (p. 93); L. Rock, 'De St.-Ambrosiusgilde Van Rillaer', *Hagelandse Gedenkschriften*, 8 (1914), 63-73 (p. 66); Van Meel, 'Caerte', p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> Black, 'The development', p. 23.

<sup>108</sup> Reid, 'Measuring', pp. 3-12.

specific historical evolution, but their studies lack empirical evidence or much use of advanced historical methods. This article has taken these social models as a starting-point for an investigation of fraternities in a particular rural region in the Low Countries, in order to evaluate the merits and problems of current social theories.

Historians definitely need to refine their theoretical framework in order to evaluate properly these historical changes. They should certainly make a difference between bonding and bridging social capital. Medieval fraternities of various types produced bridging social capital in the Aarschot region. This means that the social activities of these associations stimulated social cohesion between members of different social backgrounds. However, the typical sociability of these lay fraternities of the late medieval period came under pressure around 1500. The available sources suggest that social divisions and boundaries were strengthened through the sixteenth century. From then on, social activities were less important and some fraternities became more exclusive.

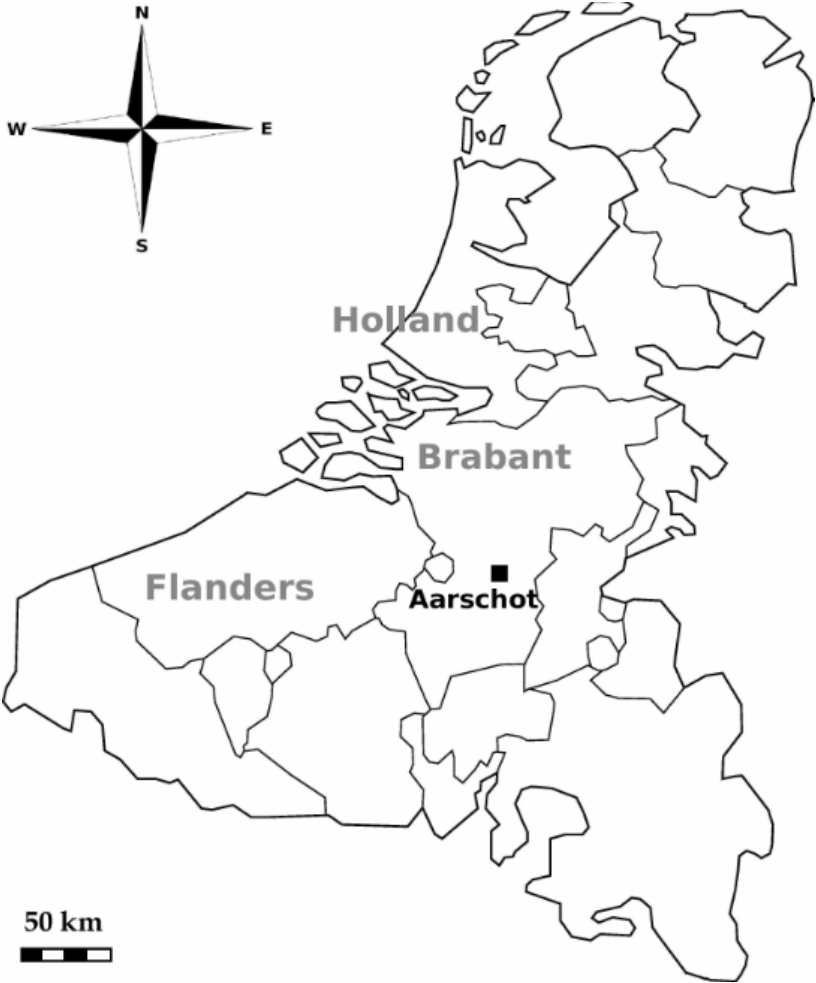
The Dutch Revolt reinforced this evolution, because social life was seriously disturbed by the devastating civil war of the second half of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Reformation also played a part, since after the Council of Trent, Catholic reformers tried to abolish typical social activities of late medieval confraternities like collective drinking and annual dinners. The new religious confraternities of the seventeenth century created forms of bonding social capital, because they recruited their members in all social layers. However, the effects of the accumulation of social capital were rather small, because these associations only produced weak social ties. In fact, associations only produce shared civic values if their members regularly come together and enforce their relations through sociability. The Catholic Reform promoted the formation of bridging social in confraternities, but civil society was not strengthened throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because of the lack of strong social ties. The formation of a vivid civil society needs the accumulation of bridging social capital and the presence of strong social ties.

Two forms of confraternities came into existence during the seventeenth century. The more socially-exclusive fraternities were run by lay people and were generally much older, with roots extending into the middle ages. They succeeded in resisting the attempts of the ecclesiastical authorities to reform their social activities. These fraternities formed a source of strong social ties and bonding social capital, because social activities strengthened the bonds between members through sociability. However, they did not admit poor people, and consequently were relatively homogenous socially. The newer Tridentine confraternities, which were either established or reformed by clerics during the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, were more open to all social layers, but lacked social activities. Although these new brotherhoods created a form of 'imagined community', they did not stimulate the formation of social networks or social cohesion as the more exclusive fraternities did. Indeed, an 'imagined community' creates a certain shared identity, but it does not result in a shared civic culture because of the lack of strong social ties. A vivid civil society needs both bonding social capital and strong social ties.



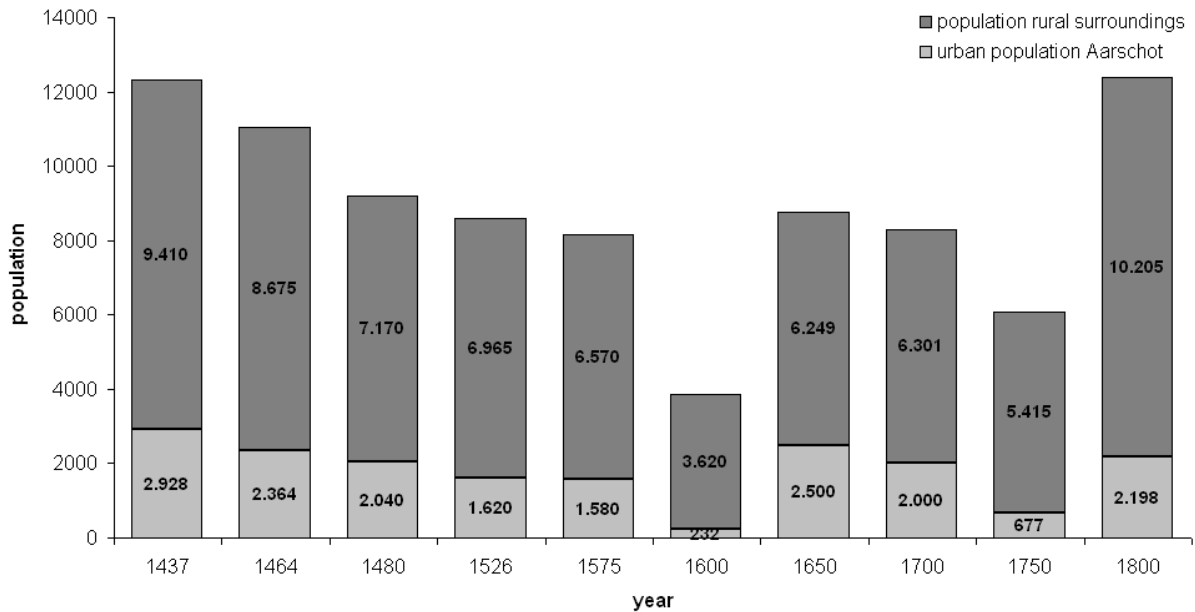
Map 1: Position of Aarschot in the Netherlands



Map 2: The city of Aarschot and its rural hinterland (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)



**Graph 1: Population estimates of the Aarschot region  
(15th-18th centuries)**



Sources: AAL, nr. 1222 ; State Archives Brussels, Estates of Brabant - supplement, nr. 800; Joseph Cuvelier, *Les dénombrements des foyers en Brabant, XIVe-XVIe siècle* (Brussels: Kiessling, 1912-1913) pp. 345, 432-35; Bart Minnen, 'Hoofdlijnen van de geschiedenis van Rotselaar. Van landbouwdorp tot residentiële gemeente', in: *Rotselaar* (Rotselaar: Haachts Geschied- en Oudheidkundig Genootschap, 1983), p. 30; Minnen and Duvosquel, *Het Hertogdom*, pp. 76, 93, 109, 115, 118, 339, 335, 371; Tony Morren, *Het Dekenaat Diest (1599-1700)*, *Belgisch Centrum Voor Landelijke Geschiedenis* (Leuven: Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis, 1993), pp. 419-427; *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Aarschot, Toegangen Genealogie En Demografie, Reeks II* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1988); *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Haacht, Toegangen Genealogie En Demografie, Reeks II* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1988); SAA, Registers Office-Fiscale, nr. 374; City Archives Leuven, *Bench of aldermen*, nr. 6340 B.

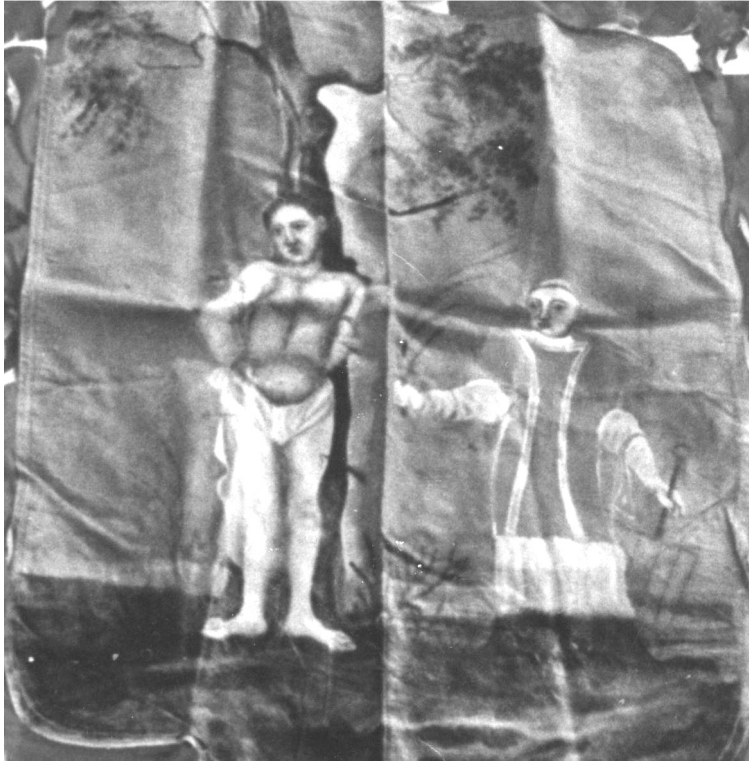
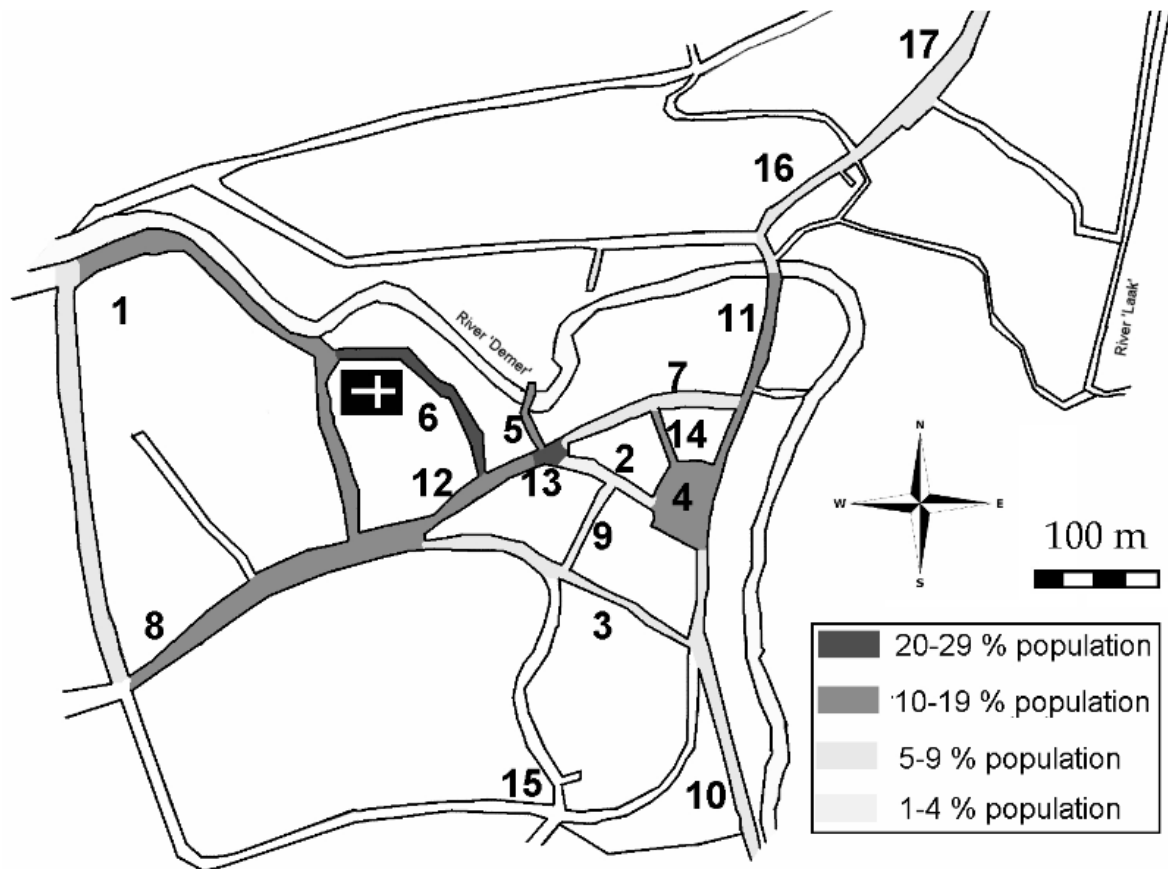


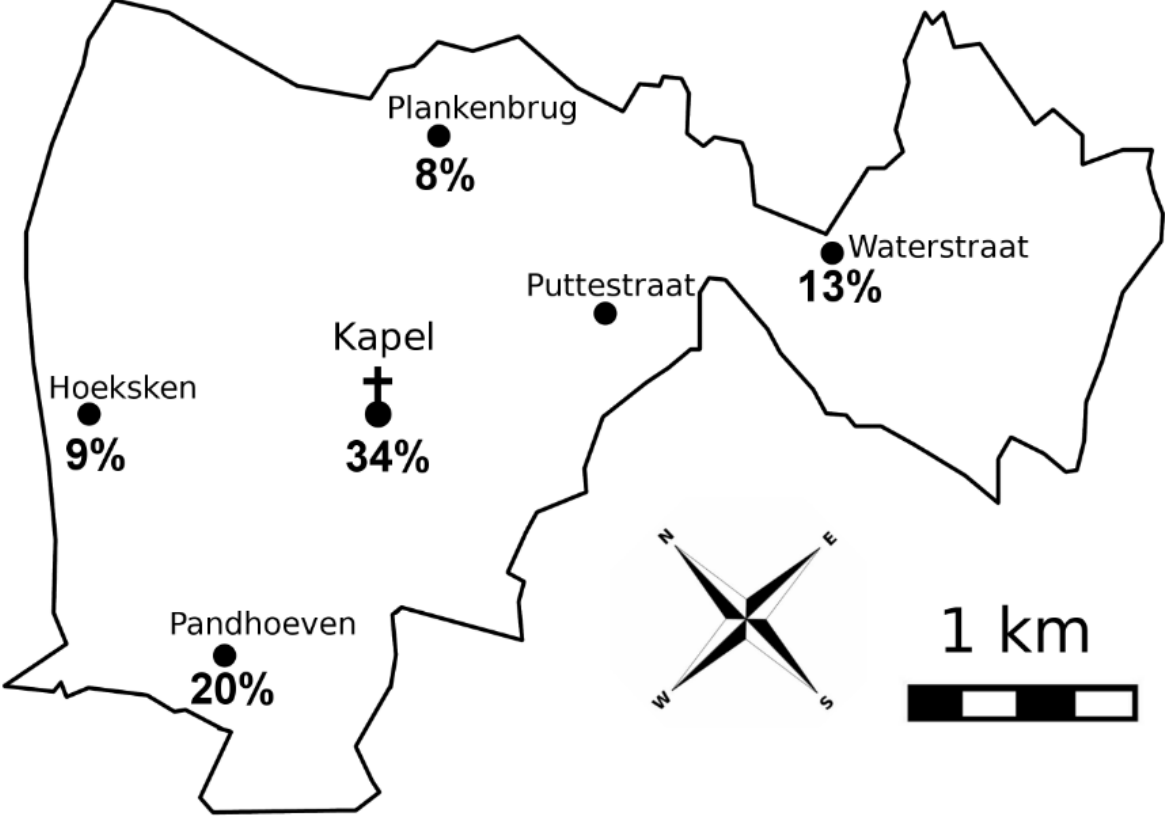
Figure 1: Flag of the Young Shooting Guild of Betekom, painted on leather, seventeenth century, private collection.



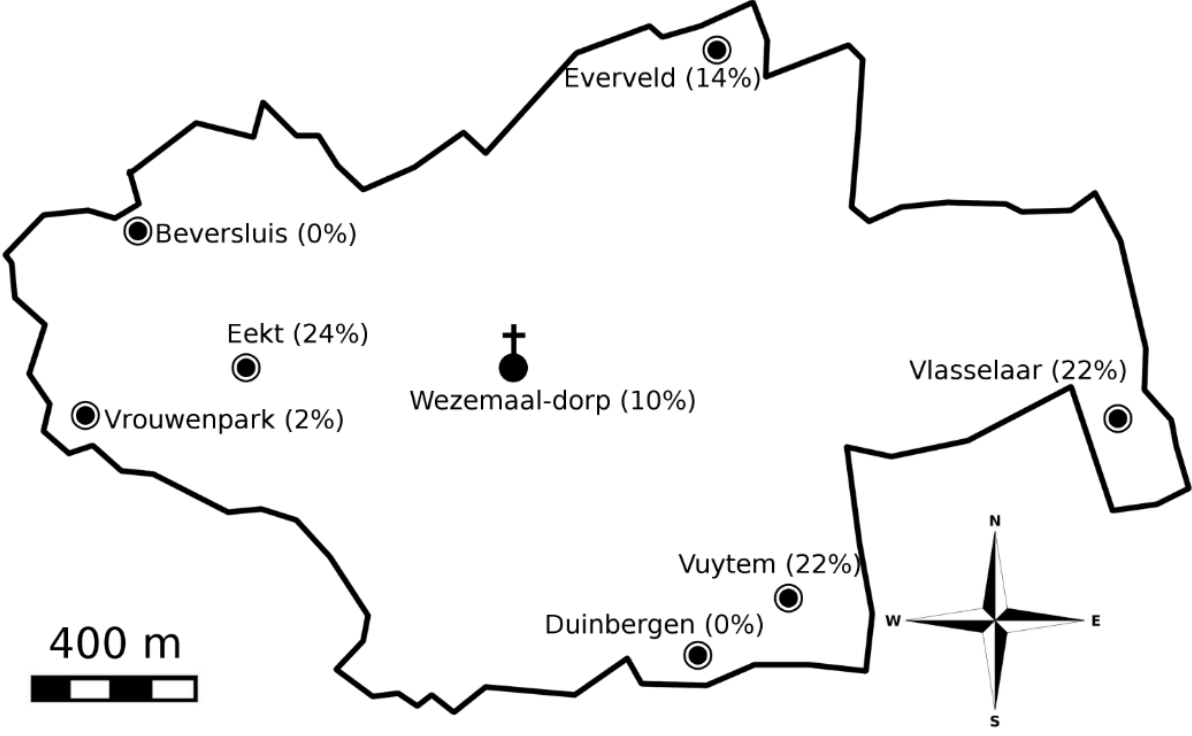
**Map 3: Share of population in confraternities in Aarschot (c. 1790)**

- |                     |                     |                      |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1) Beguinage        | 6) Kerkstraat       | 11) Neerstraat       | 16) Bogaardenstraat |
| 2) Cabaretstraat    | 7) Kortestraat      | 12) Peterseliestraat | 17) Gasthuisstraat  |
| 3) Grachten         | 8) Leuvensestraat   | 13) Cattle Market    |                     |
| 4) Central Market   | 9) Lombaardstraat   | 14) Zwaanstraat      |                     |
| 5) Kapucijnenstraat | 10) Molenbergstraat | 15) Brakkepoort      |                     |

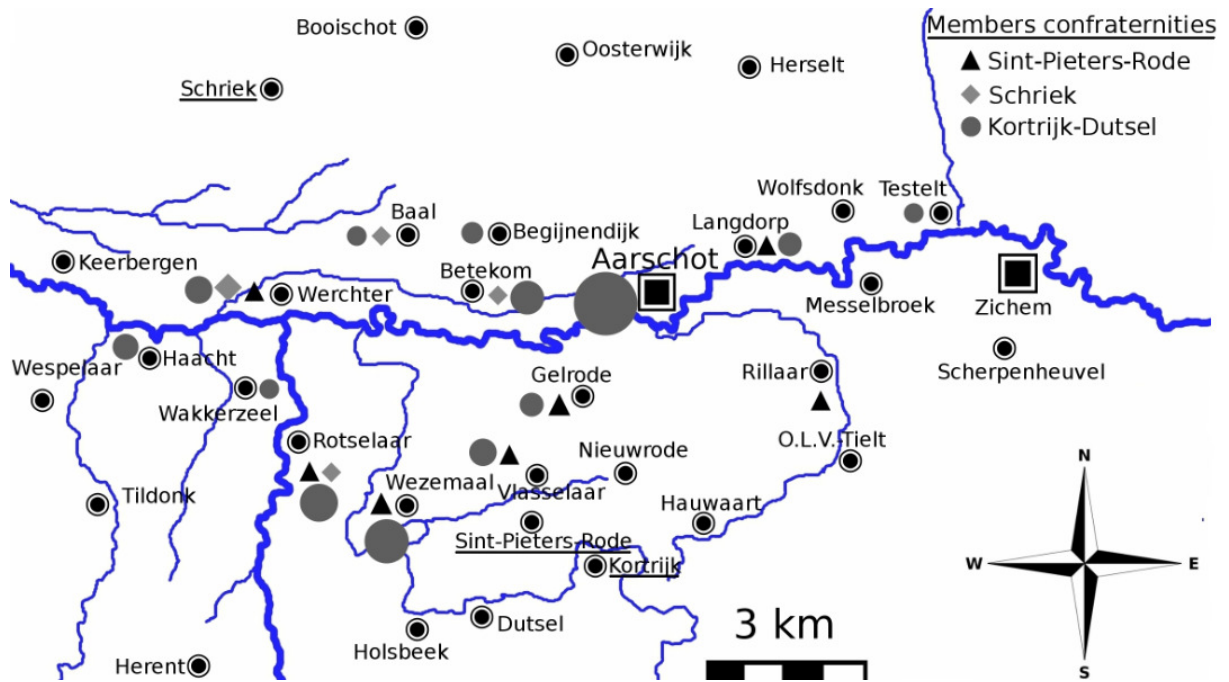
Map 4: Participation of Begijnendijk population in Confraternity of Eternal Adoration (c. 1790)



Map 5: Participation of different hamlets in Wezemaal in Confraternity of Eternal Adoration (c. 1796)



Map 6: Membership of confraternities outside the Aarschot region (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries)



Sources: L. Tallon, 'Bronnen Voor De Familiegesciedenis: Registers Van Broederschappen', *Vlaamse Stam*, 7 (1971), 157-64; Marcel Van der Auwera, 'De Broederschap Van Sint-Antonius Van Padua Te Schriek', *'t Zwaantje. Jaarboek voor het Land van Heist en omliggende*, 12 (1995), 187-234; Willems, 'Volksdevotie', pp. 64-70.



**Table 1: integration of immigrants in confraternities in the region of Aarschot during the nineties of the eighteenth century**

years of residence in place of confraternity	Aarschot: Confraternities of Eternal Adoration, Pious Souls, Rosary and Trinity		Begijnendijk: Confraternity of Eternal Adoration		Wezemaal: Confraternity of Eternal Adoration	
	confraternity	population	confraternity	population	confraternity	population
1 year	11%	15%	5%	4%	40%	7%
2-4 years	11%	18%	19%	10%	20%	14%
5-9 years	25%	19%	43%	28%	40%	18%
10-19 years	29%	22%	24%	46%	0%	24%
20-29 years	14%	12%	10%	8%	0%	17%
30-39 years	11%	11%	0%	2%	0%	11%
40-49 years	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	7%
50-59 years	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
% immigrants	15%	22%	57%	49%	12%	35%
n-number	189	2118	37	366	42	700

Sources: ACA, I, nr. 286 ; ACA, I, nr. 287 ; ACA, I, nr. 316 ; ACA, supplement, nr. 1/5 ; ACA, supplement, nr. 2-3/7 ; ACW, B, nr. 5 ; Andries, *Begijnendijk*, 143-146 ; *Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Aarschot ; Bevolkingstelling jaar IV (1796). Kanton Haacht.*

<b>Table 2: Expenses of the fraternity of Saint George in Aarschot (1683-1684)</b>		
categories	Pennies	Percentage
beer and wine	354	39%
administration	176	20%
maintenance	146	16%
religion	141	16%
meetings	80	9%
total	897	100%
Source: SAL, Bench of aldermen Leuven, nr. 7,204, f° 2r°-2v°.		