The town as a stage? Urban space and tournaments in late medieval Brussels

Damen, M.

Link to publication

The town as a stage? Urban space and tournaments in late medieval Brussels

MARIO DAMEN*

Universiteit van Amsterdam, Capaciteitsgroep Geschiedenis, Spuistraat 134 | 1012 VB Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT: This article discusses the material and spatial features of the tournaments on the Grote Markt, the central market square in Brussels, in the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century. It investigates how the tournament acquired meaning in the urban space where it was organized, and how the chivalric event in its turn altered that urban space. These Brussels tournaments, for which both archival, iconographical and narrative sources are available, show us the dynamics of an inherently courtly festival within an urban setting. Recent historiography has stressed that these tournaments, just like other urban festivals, for example joyous entries, demonstrate the submission of the town to the ruler. Indeed, the prince and his household used the public space of the Grote Markt and the facilities of the town hall to organize tournaments and festivities. However, they could not do this on their own. They needed the town government for the organization and logistics of the tournament and for its hospitality. Moreover, the town managed to put its own stamp on the architecture, both permanent and ephemeral, emphasizing the responsibilities that the duke had towards his town, as well as the long tradition of subservience and loyalty of the town to the duke.

Introduction

At the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century, in northern France and the southern Low Countries, a new chivalric event developed: the tournament. Typically, it took place in the countryside over an area of several square kilometres, with hundreds of knights and squires, grouped in two teams, performing mock battles against each other. The rise of the tournament in the principalities on the fringes of the Holy

---

Roman Empire and France is usually explained from a socio-political perspective. In these regions, royal power was weak, and princes tried to get a grip on aristocratic violence by adhering to the peace movement initiated by the church. Nobles organized tournaments in order to fulfil their promise not to use violence while at the same time practising for wartime.[1] It is no accident, however, that these same regions were also highly urbanized. Picardy, Hainault, Brabant and Flanders provided the most popular locations for tournament sites. The proximity of towns was a prerequisite for the organization of these early tournaments. The participants could stay there: the custom was that each team had its 'home town', and the site of the tournament was conveniently placed just in between.[2] These towns could also provide the knights and their retainers and family members with meals and, if necessary, horses and armour for the tournament.

However, the towns did not serve simply as convenient operating bases for tournaments. From an early stage, the main squares in the towns were also used for tourneying. One of the earliest references to a tournament in a town occurs in connection with the death of Count Henry III of Leuven during a joust in Tournai in 1095.[3] One of his successors, John I, duke of Brabant (r. 1267–94), a renowned fighter and tourneyer, died in 1294 during a joust in Bar-le-Duc where he was hit in his armpit. Before his death, he founded a tournament field next to Saint-Quentin in the county of Vermandois.[4] In the later Middle Ages, the town became the main stage for the tournament.

This article explores the material and spatial features of the tournaments on the Grote Markt, the central market square in Brussels, in the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century. It investigates not only the physical space used, but also the lived or 'representational' space, in the words of Henry Lefevbre. According to Lefevbre, space is not simply a scaffold for events but is 'produced' and constructed through the interactions of individuals and groups.[5] How did the tournament acquire meaning in the urban space where it was organized, and how did the chivalric event in its turn alter the urban space? Did the built environment and the ornamentation of the tournaments underline the legitimacy and the authority of ruler vis-à-vis his urban subjects? And how did the urban

---

[1] D. Crouch, *Tournament* (London, 2005), 6–7; M. Vale, *The Princely Court. Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe, 1270–1380* (Oxford, 2001), 188.

[2] Crouch, *Tournament*, 71–4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 3–4.

[4] J. van Boendale, *Les gestes des ducs de Brabant*, vol. I, ed. J.F. Willems (Brussels, 1839), 415–17.

[5] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991). A good introduction to the work of Lefebvre is offered by S. Elden, 'Space', in R. Kitchin and N. Thrift (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*, vol. X (Oxford, 2009), 262–7. See also P. Arnade, M. Howell and W. Simons, 'Fertile spaces. The productivity of urban space in Northern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32 (2002), 515–48 (at 517–18, 527, 541–2), and M. Boone and M. Howell, 'Introduction', in M. Boone and M. Howell (eds.), *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2013), 2–3.

elites manage to communicate their own message to the ruler through the use of the spatial settings of the tournament? Attention will be paid to social interaction during and after the tournament. To address these issues, the role of urban architecture, both permanent and ephemeral, and decoration in the tournament, will be at the centre of my analysis. Two specific locations in Brussels will be highlighted since they offered a unique framework for the tournaments: the Grote Markt and its main building, the town hall.

In the last decades, the 'spatial turn' has influenced urban historians of the late medieval Low Countries. Peter Arnade, Wim Blockmans, Marc Boone, Martha Howell and Peter Stabel in particular have published on urban space, giving special attention to the county of Flanders.[6] However, ceremonial space has been treated differently by specialists in the field. Early modern art historians such as Mark Meadow, Margit Thøfner and Stijn Bussels have treated the performativity of ceremonial space by using the elaborate (printed) descriptions of the Habsburg ceremonies, written by city-dwellers or household officers.[7] In contrast, these sources are lacking for the fifteenth-century ceremonies, for which more archival research was required. This area of research was primarily the domain of (medieval) historians who concentrated on the socio-political impact of the ceremonies.[8] This article seeks to combine both approaches, using iconographic, narrative and archival sources.

Tournaments in the duchy of Brabant have only recently been studied in detail.[9] The military contests that have received most attention from

---

[6] An excellent introduction is offered by Arnade, Howell and Simons, 'Fertile spaces'. See as well the volumes by M. Boone and P. Stabel (eds.), *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe* (Apeldoorn, 2000), and more recently Boone and Howell (eds.), *The Power of Space*, and finally by J. Dumolyn, K. Lichtert and M. Martens (eds.), *Portraits of the City. Representing Urban Space in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2014). See as well the relatively early article on this topic by W. Blockmans, 'Urban space in the Low Countries thirteenth to sixteenth centuries', in A. Grohmann (ed.), *Spazio urba no e organizzazione economica nell'Europa medioevale* (Perugia, 1994), 163–76.

[7] M.A. Meadow, 'Ritual and civic identity in Philip II's 1549 Antwerp Blijde Incompst', *Nederlandsch Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 49 (1999), 37–67; M. Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt* (Zwolle, 2007); S. Bussels, *Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp* (Amsterdam, 2012).

[8] P. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual. Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, 1996); *idem*, 'City, state, and public ritual in the late-medieval Burgundian Netherlands', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 39 (1997), 300–18; W. Blockmans and E. Donckers, 'Self-representation of court and city in Flanders and Brabant in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries', in A. Janse and W. Blockmans (eds.), *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 1999), 81–111; A. Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges c. 1300–1520* (Cambridge, 2011); E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies. Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout, 2004). See also the remarks made by A.-L. Van Bruaene, 'The Habsburg theatre state. Court, city and the performance of identity in the early modern southern Low Countries', in R. Stein and J. Pollmann (eds.), *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300–1650* (Leiden, 2010), 131–50 (at 132–4).

[9] A. Chevalier-de Gottal, *Les fêtes et les arts à la cour de Brabant à l'aube du XVe siècle* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 105–28; M. Damen, 'Tournament culture in the Low Countries and

Low Countries historians are on the one hand the annual urban jousts in Bruges[10] and Lille,[11] and on the other hand the nine *pas d'armes*, organized between 1443 and 1494.[12] The 'passage of arms' was a very specific chivalric encounter – strikingly enough not one of them took place in Brussels[13] – based on literary examples in which a knight defended a passage (a bridge or an arch, for example) against challengers.[14] Only seven of these *pas d'armes* took place between 1443 and 1470 during the reigns of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, but the events were recorded and described extensively by Burgundian court chroniclers. It is the main reason why these descriptions are often used to picture Burgundian tournament culture.

This article will demonstrate, however, that these tournaments cannot be simply framed as courtly festivals in an urban setting, although some contemporary chroniclers would have liked their audience to believe them to be so. In Brussels, the town government functioned as a co-organizer, sometimes even as the initiator, of tournaments. Furthermore, not all tourneyers were members of the duke's household; especially in the fifteenth century many nobles and members of the urban elites from Brabant participated in tournaments in Brussels. Finally, the spectators did not form a homogeneous social group. Patricians, craftsmen and labourers watched the tournament together, although everybody had his own place on the stands. In other words, the town was an important player in upholding Brussels' tournament culture, in terms of organization, participants and spectators.

England', in H. Skoda, P. Lantschner and R.L.J. Shaw (eds.), *Contact and Exchange in Later Medieval Europe. Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale* (Woodbridge, 2012), 247–66; M. Damen, 'The town, the duke, his courtiers and their tournament. A spectacle in Brussels, 4–7 May 1439', in W. Blockmans, A. van Oosterwijk *et al.* (eds.) *Staging the Court of Burgundy* (Turnhout and London, 2013), 85–95.

10   A. Brown, 'Urban jousts in the later Middle Ages: the White Bear of Bruges', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 78 (2000), 315–30; A. Van Den Abeele, *Het Ridderlijk Gezelschap van de Witte Beer. Steekspelen in Brugge tijdens de Late Middeleeuwen* (Brugge, 2000).

11   E. Van Den Neste, *Tournois, joutes, pas d'armes dans les villes de Flandre à la fin du moyen âge (1300–1486)* (Paris, 1996).

12   R. Barber and J.R.V. Barker, *Tournaments. Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1989), 109–24; E. Bousmar, 'Pasos de armas, justas y torneos en la corte de Borgoña (siglo XV y principios del XVI). Imaginario caballeresco, rituales e implicaciones socio-politicas', in K. De Jonge, B.J. García García and A. Esteban Estríngana (eds.), *El legado de Borgoña: fiesta y ceremonia cortesana en la Europa de los Austrias (1454–1648)* (Madrid, 2010), 561–606; E. Bousmar, 'Jousting at the court of Burgundy. The "pas d'armes": shifts in scenario, location, and recruitment', in Blockmans van Oosterwijk *et al.* (eds.) *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, 75–84; T. Hiltmann, 'Un état de noblesse et de chevalerie sans pareilles? Tournois et hérauts d'armes à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne', in W. Paravicini, T. Hiltmann and F. Viltart (eds.), *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe: le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel* (Ostfildern, 2013), 255–69; Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville*, 200–10.

13   J.M.B.C. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 'Joute de la dame inconnue à Bruxelles', *Compte rendu des séances de la Commission royale d'histoire,* 3rd ser., 11 (1870), 473–82; Hiltmann, 'Un état', 258.

14   S. Nadot, *Rompez les lances! Chevaliers et tournois au moyen âge* (Paris, 2010) 121–3; T.F. Ruiz, *A King Travels: Festive Traditions in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Princeton, 2012), 48.

Nevertheless, in modern historiography, these feats of arms are often coupled with other urban festivities such as princely weddings and joyous entries, and are framed within the concept of the Burgundian (and subsequent Habsburg) theatre-state. The central argument in the way many authors apply this anthropological concept, first established by Clifford Geertz in research on nineteenth-century Bali, is that the prince could strengthen his grip on his (urban) citizens by means of ceremonies and festivities. These medieval resources of mass communication could not only stimulate the loyalty of the citizens but also further the integration of the local elites into the sphere of influence of the prince and his entourage. Thus, they helped to enforce Burgundian state power.[15] Recently, critics, most notably Andrew Brown, have pointed out that applying the concept of the theatre-state to the exercise of power by princes in the late medieval Low Countries is debatable. This is not the place to discuss the concept of the theatre-state at length.[16] Most authors do agree on the fact that these urban spectacles, tournaments, *pas d'armes* and jousts included, were at least co-financed by the towns. In this way, the towns succeeded in putting their own mark on the festivities.

Brussels as a tournament site

The Castilian nobleman Pero Tafur, who visited Duke Philip the Good (r. 1430–67) in Brussels in 1438, was struck by the constant succession of 'feasts, jousts and tournaments and everything that makes for pleasure'.[17] The first question that has to be answered is how Brussels developed as a tournament site. It is striking that the town was an important tournament venue from an early stage,[18] in spite of the fact that neither Brussels nor any other Brabantine town hosted a jousting society, as was the case in Bruges (the White Bear) or Lille (the Épinette). Did this stimulate the popularity of Brussels as a tournament site for the dukes, since the presence of an urban 'competitor' would have been embarrassing? This is unlikely, since in the

---

[15] Arnade, *Realms*, 4–6; *idem*, 'City', 303–5; Blockmans and Donckers, 'Self-representation', 84–5, 89. Compare Van Bruaene, 'The Habsburg theatre state', 133, who remarks that the 'notion of a Burgundian theatre state that prioritized the public and dramatized communication with its subjects has been challenged in some minor aspects, but is now generally accepted', without citing the critical reviews of the concept by Brown. See A. Brown, 'Ritual and statebuilding. Ceremony in late medieval Bruges', in J. Van Leeuwen (ed.), *Symbolic Communication in Late Medieval Towns* (Leuven, 2006), 7–9, and A. Brown and G. Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries c. 1420–1530* (Manchester, 2007), 21–3, 28–33.

[16] See the valuable remarks of Brown, 'Ritual', 7–9, repeated and extended in Brown, *Civic Ceremony*, 26–8, and Brown and Small, *Court*, 21–3, 28–33. See also the comments of D. Nicholas, 'In the pit of the Burgundian theatre state. Urban traditions and princely ambitions in Ghent, 1360–1420', in B.A. Hanawalt and K.L. Reyerson (eds.), *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe* (Minneapolis, 1994), 271–95 (at 271–3).

[17] 'fiestas, justas é torneos é toda cosa de aver placer'. P. Tafur, *Andanças e viajes de un hidalgo español: Pero Tafur (1436–1439)*, ed. J. Vives Gatell, M. Jiménez de la Espada and F. López Estrada (Barcelona, 1982), 248.

[18] Vale, *The Princely Court*, 197–8.

Flemish towns tournaments were organized next to the yearly jousting competitions.[19]

Other factors may better account for Brussels' popularity as a tournament venue. The duchy of Brabant in the district of Brussels had the most knights, according to the available administrative sources.[20] Moreover, Brussels was a central location, not only within the duchy of Brabant, but also within the nascent Burgundian composite state, thanks to excellent communication lines with the major towns in other principalities. Although Leuven was considered the first town of Brabant, Brussels took over this role in around 1400. With the integration of Brabant into the Burgundian composite state, the Coudenberg Palace became one of the most popular residences for successive dukes. Facilities there evidently met their demanding needs, since the duke and his household stayed at the palace for relatively long periods. These facilities included the hunting grounds of the Soignies forest, just south of Brussels, where a favourite pastime of the duke and his courtiers could be indulged (Figure 1).[21]

However, Brussels' main asset was the availability of an international market of luxury goods (tapestries,[22] jewels,[23] etc.) in combination with a highly developed armour industry. It is no wonder that Ludovico Guicciardini (1521–89) in his description of Brussels only mentions two craft guilds, 'the most important and most profitable', by name: the tapestry weavers and the harness makers. He knows why harnesses from Brussels were so popular: 'they are very nicely made of a perfect alloy which can resist bullets'.[24] In other words, Brussels was (apart from Liège) *the* place for buying armour in the late medieval Low Countries. Until 1472, there were even separate craft guilds for helm makers, sword polishers, armourers, brigandine makers, polishers and mail makers.[25] The considerable growth in the number of armourers was mainly caused by the presence of the ducal household.[26] Indeed, all Brabantine dukes

[19] See the overview in Van Den Neste, *Tournois*, 213–332.

[20] M. Damen, 'Chivalry in and around Brussels in the fifteenth century', in preparation.

[21] K. De Jonge, 'Het hof in de stad', in V. Van de Kerckhof and H. Bussers (eds.), *Met Passer en Penseel. Brussel en het Oude Hertogdom Brabant in Beeld* (Brussels, 2000), 163–72 (at 168); R. Stein, *Politiek en Historiografie. Het Ontstaansmilieu van Brabantse Kronieken in de Eerste Helft van de Vijftiende Eeuw* (Leuven, 1994), 229–33; Chevalier-de Gottal, *Les fêtes*, 89–104. See also the new book on the Coudenberg Palace: V. Heymans, L. Cnockaert and F. Honoré (eds.), *Het Coudenbergpaleis te Brussel. Van middeleeuws kasteel tot archeologische site* (Brussels, 2014).

[22] M. Crick-Kuntziger, 'La tapisserie bruxelloise au XVe siècle', in Bonenfant and Martens (eds.), *Bruxelles au XVme siècle*, 85–102.

[23] A.-M. Bonenfant, 'L'orfèvrerie bruxelloise au XVe siècle', in Bonenfant and Martens (eds.), *Bruxelles au XVme siècle*, 53–72.

[24] L. Guicciardini, *Beschryvinghe van alle de Nederlanden, anderssins ghenoemt Neder-Dvytslandt*, trans. Cornelis Kiel and Petrus Montanus (Amsterdam, 1612), 54.

[25] J. Squilbeck, 'Le travail du métal à Bruxelles', in Bonenfant and Martens (eds.), *Bruxelles au XVme siècle*, 245–72 (at 248–52). It concerns 'helmslagers, zweertvagers, pansiermakers, brigandinemakers, polysters, malgienmakers'.

[26] J.-P. Sosson, 'L'artisanat Bruxellois du métal. Hierarchie sociale, salaires et puissance écomique (1360–1500)', *Cahiers Bruxellois*, 7 (1962), 225–58 (at 241–6). See also R. Stein, 'Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde: de stichting van het klooster Scheut',

Figure 1: (Colour online) View of the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels and the park where a jousting field with a barrier was created. The tower of the town hall occupies a central place within the town. Bernard van Orley, The month of March: departure for the hunt, *c.* 1531–33. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek PK-T-2047.

ordered harnesses, helmets and weapons from Brussels, both for private use (during wars and tournaments) and as gifts to members of their household and foreign kings and princes. To store all the harnesses and weapons, Duke Anthony of Burgundy (r. 1406–15) founded the arsenal in the Coudenberg Palace. All his successors increased the number of arms available there.[27] An inventory of the Coudenberg arsenal from 1510 confirms that Duke Philip the Fair (r. 1494–1506) possessed at least 25 jousting harnesses, 48 tournament swords, 35 tournament shields and 4 jousting saddles.[28] Thus, the presence of a semi-permanent court and

Millennium, 23 (2009), 12–37 (at 24–6), and W. Blockmans, 'Court and city, a tense relation in the Burgundian Netherlands', in J. Hirschbiegel, W. Paravicini and J. Wettlaufer (eds.), *Städtisches Bürgertum und Hofgesellschaft. Kulturen integrativer und konkurrierender Beziehungen in Residenz- und Hauptstädten vom 14. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern, 2012), 71–9, who stresses that the metal workers in particular benefited from the regular presence of the court in Brussels.

27 C. Gaier, *L'industrie et le commerce des armes dans les anciennes principautés belges du XIIIme à la fin de XVme siècle* (Paris, 1973), 303.

28 P. Terjanian, 'La armería de Felipe el Hermoso', in M.A. Zalama and P. Vandenbroeck (eds.), *Felipe I el Hermoso. La Belleza y la Locura* (Madrid, 2006), 143–64 (at 148–9, 157–60). Note the inventory numbers 113 (*ung charriot pour larmoierie couvert de cuyre)* and 114 (*sept*

numerous knights and nobles provided a substantial demand for armour and for chivalric games as well. Brussels was able to meet the needs of this high-profile clientele.

The town was aware of its unique selling points and helped the duke of Brabant time and again with subsidies to renovate the Coudenberg Palace. But the assistance provided by the town did not stop there. It also financially supported the construction of the houses of several high nobles and courtiers in the surroundings of the ducal palace on the Coudenberg, thus producing an important impact on urban space.[29] As far as the town administration was concerned, the benefits of these subsides in general, and the organization of tournaments in particular, outweighed the costs. In December 1503, for example, the town spent more than 445 pounds on the organization of a tournament. This seems an enormous sum: to earn a similar amount of money the town's master carpenter would have needed to work 2,225 days (that is almost nine labour years). However, this was only a fraction of the town's total expenditure of that year.[30] As a comparison: in 1439, Philip the Good spent almost 4,000 pounds on the tournament held that year in Brussels, of which a large part trickled down into the Brussels economy. Most of this money consisted of gifts for members of the ducal family and some high-ranking household officers, intended to help them pay for harnesses, clothes and caparisons for them and the members of their companies.[31]

The Grote Markt, the central market square of Brussels, was an ideal tournament field (Figure 2). The Spanish chronicler Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella (†1590), who accompanied the heir to the throne, Philip II (r. 1555–98), in his *grand tour* through the Low Countries in 1549, remarks succinctly: 'it is big, spacious and almost square'.[32] Of course, the Grote Markt – the term was only used from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards – was definitely not square but rectangular; nowadays it measures

trainneaulx) – a cart and seven carriages – available for the transport of weapons and armour. Four carriages were at the time of the making of the inventory in Ghent, three in Binche. This means that the Brussels arsenal functioned as a central depot.

29 De Jonge, 'Het hof', 68–9; K. De Jonge, 'Adellijke residenties in en buiten de stad', in K. De Jonge, P. Geleyns and M. Hörsch (eds.), *Gotiek in het Hertogdom Brabant* (Leuven, 2009), 63–100 (at 73–82); Stein, *Politiek,* 235–40.

30 Master Jan Vrancx, master carpenter, earned 4 *stuivers* a day, that is 4*s* in pounds consisting of 40 groats. To earn 1 pound he had to work five days. Brussels, Archives Générales du Royaume, Chambre des Comptes de Brabant (CCB) 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven gedaen ten steecspele dat onse genadigee heere gehouden heeft opte merct des sondaechs 17 decembri'. For the costs of the organization of the joust of the Épinette in Lille, see Van den Neste, *Tournois,* 332–60.

31 Lille, Archives départementales du Nord, Série B, 1966, fols. 199v, 311r–v. The real return for Brussels of the 1439 tournament is extensively treated in Damen, 'The town', 90–1. For a general discussion of the economic advantages of tournaments for a town, see Nadot, *Rompez,* 135–6; Ruiz, *King*, 232.

32 'Es la plaça grande y espaciosa y casi quadrada.' J.C. Calvete de Estrella, *El felicíssimo viaje del muy alto y muy poderoso príncipe don Phelippe,* ed. Paloma Cuenca Muñoz (Madrid, 2001) 135.

Figure 2: (Colour online) The Grote Markt in Brussels with the town hall at the left and the Broodhuis at the right. Painting by Theodoor van Heil, *Brand van het huis de Wolvin te Brussel in 1690.* © Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, nr 223.

111 × 56 metres.[33] It received its rectangular shape in the fourteenth century through the building of several (ducal) market halls, the houses of the craft guilds and, from the beginning of the fifteenth century, the building of the new town hall. It was only then that the urban elites of the town converted the most important economic space of the town into a political space. At the same time, it became the greatest single ceremonial space of the town.[34]

The town was at a disadvantage compared to the countryside when it came to the tournament ground: a paved surface was not ideal for galloping horses. Therefore, the pavement was usually covered with sand and dung.[35] For a tournament in December 1503, 633 cartloads of sand were taken from some fields just outside the town walls. Apparently, these fields belonged to the town since only the cart drivers were paid. Part of

---

[33] Measured on the cartographic site www.brugis.irisnet.be/brugis/framesetup.asp. I am grateful to Cecilia Paredes for this reference.

[34] B. Vannieuwenhuyze, 'Brussel, de Ontwikkeling van een Middeleeuwse Stedelijke Ruimte', unpublished Ph.D. Ghent thesis, 2008, 152–5; C. Deligne, 'Powers over space, spaces over powers. The constitution of town squares in the cities of the Low Countries (twelfth to fourteenth century)', in Boone and Howell (eds.), *The Power of Space*, 21–8 (at 27); P. Stabel, 'The market-place and civic identity in late medieval Flanders', in M. Boone and P. Stabel (eds.), *L'apparition d'une identité urbaine dans l'Europe du bas moyen âge* (Apeldoorn, 2000), 43–64 (at 54–6).

[35] Van Den Neste, *Tournois*, 73–4; Crouch, *Tournament*, 80.

the sand was delivered to the Coudenberg Palace 'in the big hall where our gracious lord [Philip the Fair] struck'.[36] Of course, the pile of sand had to be removed again after the tournament was over. Still, the costs for this operation sandstorm – paid for by the town administration – were no more than 30 pounds, a bargain when we consider the costs of the banquets in the town hall after the tournament, *c*. 100 pounds, and a coerced gift of 200 pounds for the organizer of the 1503 event, Antoine de Lalaing.[37]

The sand formed the base and a wooden fence demarcated the tournament field, known as the lists. In 1503, carpenters used no less than 6,412 feet of poplar-wood planks, which is a total length of *c*. 1,770 metres.[38] This seems to have been more than enough to construct a fence the height of a man 'with two crossbars, the one high and the other at knee- level', as René d'Anjou had stipulated in his tournament book from *c*. 1460.[39] The enormous quantity of wood could be sold again or used differently after the tournament was over. In Bruges and Lille, where in the fifteenth century jousting confraternities organized yearly jousting events, the wood was stocked for the next year's event.[40] In 1503, several workmen dug out pits to fix the posts of the fence. In 1549, nineteen of these posts were placed on both the long sides of the square, and seven on the short sides, demarcating a tournament field of about 84 by 30 metres. At the same time, every side had a wooden gate through which the participants could enter and exit. The gates bore the coat of arms of Charles V (r. 1515–55) next to that of the duchy of Brabant and that of the town of Brussels.[41]

In short, Brussels had an excellent infrastructure for the organization of tournaments. The most central square, important because of its economic and political functions, could easily be changed into an arena, where

---

[36] 'opt hof in de groote sale aldaer onse genedige heere stack'. CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'. There is more evidence on the *aula magna* of the Coudenberg as a jousting area. See, for example, J.A. Schmeller (ed.), *Des böhmischen herrn Leo's von Rožmital ritter-, hof- und pilgerreise durch die abendlande 1465–1467* (Stuttgart, 1844), 25–7, 101.

[37] He travelled as a chamberlain with Philip the Fair to Spain between 1501 and 1503. In 1503, he was still not dubbed a knight and in the accounts he is referred to as *joncheer* (squire). CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'; H. Cools, *Mannen met macht. Edellieden en de moderne staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse landen (1475–1530)* (Zutphen, 2001), 244; L.P. Gachard, *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*, vol. I (Brussels, 1876), 339–40. All the amounts of money are converted into pounds Flemish of 40 groats to facilitate comparisons. In the town accounts of Brussels, the pound Brabant of 160 groats is the normal money of account.

[38] The costs were *c*. 40 pounds. CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'. According to Vandewalle in the district of Brussels, 1 foot measured 0.27575 cm. P. Vandewalle, *Oude maten, gewichten en muntstelsels in Vlaanderen, Brabant en Limburg* (Ghent, 1984).

[39] E. Bennett, *King's René Tournament Book: A Modern English Translation* (online resource: www.princeton.edu/~ezb/rene/renehome.html, accessed on 6 Jan. 2014) (Princeton, 1997); S. Lefèvre, *Antoine de La Sale: la fabrique de l'œuvre et de l'écrivain, suivi de l'édition critique du traité des anciens et des nouveaux tournois* (Geneva, 2006), 336.

[40] Van Den Neste, *Tournois*, 72.

[41] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 135–6. The space between the posts was 16 feet. This means that the minimum measurements of the tournament field were $18 \times 16 = 288$ feet by $6 \times 16 = 96$ feet. However, each side had a gate measuring 14 feet, which makes a tournament field of 302×110 feet $= 84.3 \times 30.3$ metres.

knights on horses could perform their armorial skills. It was not a contested space since the urban elites worked in close collaboration with the princely court to stage the tournaments. This co-operation can also be detected in the ephemeral architecture built for the tournament.

The function of ephemeral architecture

The town administration had to make a relatively small effort to convert the Grote Markt into a tournament field. Nevertheless, these basic structures of wooden lists and sand did not suffice. Other temporary but equally essential buildings had to be added before a tournament could take place properly. In front of the town hall, next to the fountain on the Grote Markt just outside the lists, a wooden platform was erected for the judges of the tournament in 1549. The platform was equally ornamented with the heraldic devices of Brabant and Brussels next to the device of the emperor.[42] However, the most remarkable feature was the figure of the patron saint of Brussels, Saint Michael, standing on a gilded pillar. Moreover, on the cornice of the platform eight figures, two-and-a-half-feet high, were attached in bas-relief. They represented four dukes of Brabant[43] and four princesses.[44] All these princes and princesses formed crucial links between the Habsburg and the Burgundian dynasty.

The platform was perhaps intended to carry a political message, initially a statement of civic traditions of heavenly patronage. The figure of St Michael echoed the copper statue of the saint slaying the dragon that had crowned the tower of the town hall from 1455 as a wind vane.[45] The platform was to some extent therefore the miniature counterpart of the town hall.[46] It also made reference to civic traditions of earthly patronage, linked with the dukes of Brabant. Perhaps this reference would not have been quite recognizable to Charles, Mary and other spectators at a distance; but its purpose was clearly to connect the town with the Habsburg dynasty, and the dynasty with their Brabantine and Burgundian forebears.

[42] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 136; B.K. Frieder, *Chivalry and the Perfect Prince: Tournaments, Art, and Armor at the Spanish Habsburg Court* (Kirksville, 2008), 129.

[43] Charles the Bold (r. 1467–77), Maximilian of Habsburg (as regent r. 1482–94 and 1506–15), Philip the Fair (r. 1494–1506) and Charles V (r. 1515–55). Compare Frieder, *Chivalry*, 129, who identifies *Phelippe Rey de España* (Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 136) wrongly with Philip II.

[44] Mary of Burgundy (r. 1477–82), Mary of Hungary (governor of the Low Countries 1531–55), Isabella of Portugal (†1539, deceased wife of Charles V) and Beatrice of Portugal (†1538, sister of Isabella, mother of Emmanuel Philibert, duke of Savoy and member of Prince Philip´s team in the tournament (see Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 140).

[45] A. Henne and A. Wauters, *Histoire de la ville de Bruxelles*, vol. III (Brussels, 1845), 41. Strictly speaking, the tower was not a belfry. See R. Van Uytven, 'Flämische Belfriede und südniederländische Bauwerke im Mittelalter: Symbol und Mythos', in A. Haverkamp and E. Müller-Luckner, *Information, Kommunikation und Selbstdarstellung in Mittelalterlichen Gemeinden* (Munich, 1998), 125–60 (at 126–7).

[46] The small statues of the dukes of Brabant in the alcoves of the façade of the town hall were only placed there in the nineteenth century. K. De Jonge, 'Bouwen in de stad', in De Jonge Geleyns and Hörsch (eds.), *Gotiek*, 101–36 (at 121).

In 1503, a similar platform for the judges and heralds was erected in front of the town hall, painted red and white (the colours of Austria) and adorned with linen and cloth in equal colours. From the town accounts, we know that an orb (*appel*) was placed on top. On this symbol of princely power, the coat of arms of Duke Philip the Fair was painted on both sides.[47] This orb mirrored in its turn the gilded ball with a wind vane placed on the pinnacle of the tower on the corner of the town hall.[48] Moreover, a special house, painted all white, was constructed on the square where the jousters (*steeckers*) were lodged. This house was made of wood, clay and mortar. A stove and a chimney were installed to heat the house; it was December, not a usual tournament month but it coincided with Philip the Fair's return from Spain. The accounts state that the organizer of the *pas*, Antoine de Lalaing, was armed there.[49] This was a normal feature of tournament lists in the late Middle Ages. Special pavilions were erected within the enclosure next to the entrance gates where the jousters could prepare for combat and where they could retreat afterwards or be cared for in case of an injury.[50] There was also a special barrier, a tilt, constructed on the square, which served to separate the jousters and avoid a frontal collision.[51] This innovation on the tournament field was only introduced in the first decades of the fifteenth century in Iberia, and it soon became a feature of the tournament fields of Europe.[52]

The sources stress the display of the heraldic devices of the prince, the duchy and the town. But what about the tourneyers themselves? How did they demonstrate their presence in the town? René d'Anjou and Antoine de La Sale state in their tournament books that the tourneyers should exhibit their coats of arms in the windows of the inns where they were staying.[53] For the 1439 tournament, with some 235 participants divided over 37 companies, there is indeed evidence that the coats of arms of the tourneyers were fenestrated.[54] Moreover, one of the chroniclers of this tournament states that there was a helm show on the eve of the tournament where all participants had to show their banners, pennons, helms and crests.[55] A miniature of *c.* 1445 shows how the coats of arms of the bannerets of the tournament were exposed on the tribune of honour, in such a way that the spectators could clearly distinguish the two opposing

[47] CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven', and Gachard, *Collection*, 339: 'et touttes les dammes prénommées estoient à la maison de la ville; l'eschaffault où messieurs les juges estoient, estoit devant elles'.

[48] A. Maesschalck and J. Viaene, *Het Stadhuis van Brussel* (Kessel-Lo, 1960), 99. For a similar orb placed on the ephemeral architecture on the market square of Bruges during the *pas* of the Golden Tree in July 1468, see Brown and Small, *Court*, 70.

[49] CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'.

[50] N. Fallows, *Jousting in Medieval and Renaissance Iberia* (Woodbridge, 2010), 192.

[51] 'de lijsten daer men over stack'. CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'.

[52] Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, 194–6; Fallows, *Jousting*, 91–4.

[53] Bennett, *Tournament Book*; Lefèvre, *Antoine*, 308, 333.

[54] Brussels, Archives de la ville, Archives historiques (BAV, AH) 3357, fol. 168r, where it is stated that one of the tourneyers had his coat of arms fenestrated ('doen veijnsteren').

[55] A. Borgnet, *Chronique de Jean de Stavelot* (Brussels, 1861), 433.

teams (Figure 3). In 1503, barrels, painted red and white, were placed on the judges' platform to display the helmets of the tourneyers.[56] In 1549, the coats of arms of the four challengers were fixed to the balcony of the judges' platform.[57] Princely heralds, who acted as the masters of ceremonies of the tournaments, supervised and took care of a correct depiction of all these heraldic devices; in 1503, the town administration even paid them 20 pounds for the 'rights that they pretended to have on the lists, the platform of the judges . . . constructed on the Grote Markt, and the barrier . . . and the helms and the shields'.[58] Thus, both on and outside the tournament field, the tourneyers left their marks on urban space, converting Brussels into a tournament town.

In 1503, and probably on other occasions as well, the town was charged with the preparation of the lists and the construction of the temporary buildings on the square. The master carpenters and painters were instructed (and paid for) by the town administration. The recurring representations of urban coats of arms, next to imperial and ducal symbols, confirm that the tournament was not only a princely enterprise. It was a kind of joint venture between town and court: the prince could temporarily demonstrate the symbols of his authority in the most eminent urban public space, while the town could put its own stamp on the ephemeral architecture. Therefore, we should avoid interpreting these events as courtly ceremonies in which the prince was able to display his splendour and dazzle the town into submission.[59]

The tournament could only acquire significance with a public to watch it. Therefore, special stands were erected on the Grote Markt for the spectators. In July 1409, for the tournament during the wedding feast of Duke Anthony of Burgundy to Elisabeth of Görlitz, granddaughter of the Holy Roman Emperor and future duchess of Luxembourg, the preparations were described as follows:

On the Grote Markt, which was all covered with sand, an enclosure was constructed leaving only a narrow passage between the houses. Next to the enclosure, many stands were erected on which the people were seated and there were as many as blades of grass and grains of sand, and this is not a lie. Moreover at that time no empty window could be found around the market square.[60]

Calvete de Estrella describes the crowd in 1549 in similar terms: 'and there were so many people that they did not fit into the stands (*tablados*), nor in the windows or at the rooftops and even less from behind the fence (*balla*)'. Both chroniclers describe the audience with *topoi* and without many

[56] CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'.
[57] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 136; Frieder, *Chivalry*, 129.
[58] CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'. See on the role of the heralds during tournaments Lefèvre, *Antoine*, 335, 339–40, and Hiltmann, 'Un état', 273–6, with numerous references.
[59] Brown and Small, *Court*, 26. Compare Stabel, 'The market-place', 60–1.
[60] J.H. Bormans (ed.), *Les gestes des ducs de Brabant*, vol. III (Brussels, 1869), 93.

Figure 3: (Colour online) Noble ladies on the stands during a tournament. The two rows of coats of arms refer to the teams of the duke of Brabant and the king of England celebrating a tournament. Miniature from *Brabantsche Yeesten* by Jan van Boendale, *c.* 1445. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique (BRB), MS IV 684, fol. 43v.

details.[61] We should even doubt the words of the chronicler of the 1503 tournament who stresses the presence of women: 'one saw only ladies in the windows all over the market square which was crowded with people'.[62] He may have inserted this passage to give the proceedings a greater air of courtliness. The intended readership of the chronicle should not be bothered with details of spectators which would have downgraded the tournament to an urban event.

Evidence from tournaments in Arras and Bruges makes clear that the owners of the houses around the market square rented out their windows, to make some money out of the festivities.[63] Miniatures of tournaments on a town square confirm the size of the crowds watching these chivalric events (Figure 4).[64] The stands were two to three storeys high and there are indications that the town administration could also make some money renting out the 'seats'.[65] The scale of the event could form at the same time a threat to public order. In 1503, four guards were paid to control the two gates of the town hall during eight days;[66] in this way, the prominent guests could watch the tournament undisturbed and celebrate their after-parties without any uninvited guests.

The tournaments continued to be organized on the Grote Markt even after a tournament field was created in the gardens of the Coudenberg Palace (Figure 1). The relatively small jousting area field next to the ducal palace was, however, not really suitable for the massive *mêlée* tournaments. Moreover, as Teofilio F. Ruiz suggests, the tourneyers simply needed a crowd both for its approval (of the underlying social and political order) and its amazement (generated by the marvels of the spectacle).[67] Still, due to the scale of the event it was perhaps difficult for the spectators to see the tourneyers, or even identify them when they were able to 'read' the blazons. Even for those who had more privileged seats, it must have been difficult to understand what was going on. For spectators of the Brussels tournaments in the fifteenth century there was, however, a good chance of recognizing some of the tourneyers, given that many of the participants were local patricians: political office-holders who were part of the economic elite of the town and comprised landowners, cloth manufacturers and wholesalers.[68] In the 1439 tournament, 30 of the 235

---

[61] Compare for example the similar wordings of Olivier de la Marche describing the market place of Bruges in July 1468 during the *pas* of the Golden Tree: Brown and Small, *Court*, 69.

[62] Gachard, *Collection*, 339: 'on ne véoit que dammes as fenestres par tout le Marchiet, lequel estoit tout couvert de peuple'.

[63] Van den Neste, *Tournois*, 148–9; Brown and Small, *Court*, 227.

[64] Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville,* 202.

[65] In July 1468, the town administration of Bruges received more than 250 pounds for renting out the stages on the Grote Markt during the jousts on the occasion of the wedding of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York. Brown and Small, *Court*, 55 n. 74.

[66] They were paid 8 pounds. CCB 30949, chapter 'Andere uutgeven'.

[67] Ruiz, *King,* 232–3.

[68] For the terms 'urban nobility' and 'patriciate', see F. Buylaert, *Eeuwen van Ambitie. De Adel in Laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen* (Brussels, 2010), 259–66.

Figure 4: (Colour online) A joust on a town square. The wooden fence, the stands and the barrier are clearly visible. Miniature for the month of June from *Les heures de Notre-Dame/Hennesy*, *c*. 1500. BRB, MS II 158, fol. 6v.

tourneyers originated from Brussels.[69] This gave the spectators a chance to support their fellow citizens actively. The relationship between tourneyers and spectators is therefore complex; a simple juxtaposition of the two does not suffice. Of course, we should not overestimate the bond between spectators and tourneyers. In a town like Brussels, with some 35,000 inhabitants, social differences were great and time and again tensions between the different social categories came to the fore. Although these patricians saw themselves as representatives of the town, at the same time, they preferred to be associated with higher-ranking nobles present at the tournament rather than with the Brussels populace.

The town hall as grandstand for the prince

In the late medieval Low Countries, the town hall was the most prestigious urban building, often a focal point for competition between towns, as was the case between Brussels and Leuven. It was situated on the most important open space in the heart of the town. In Brussels, this was the central market place.[70] The façade of the town hall with its windows and balconies seems to have been expressly designed to allow events on the Grote Markt to be seen. This becomes clear from the descriptions of the tournaments in Brussels, for example the wedding of Anthony of Burgundy, duke of Brabant, to Elisabeth of Görlitz on 19 July 1409. The wedding ceremony took place in the church of Saint James next to the ducal palace of the Coudenberg. The couple and their high-ranking guests – several princes from neighbouring principalities were present – had a meal in the new hall of the Coudenberg Palace after the ceremony. After the meal, the bride rode to the Grote Markt 'in a precious white dress', according to a contemporary chronicler. He continues by saying that 'she sat honourably on the balcony (*voorpoy*) of the town hall and with her many women'. From there, she watched her new husband taking part in three jousts. After the last one, the duke took off his helmet and greeted his bride with a nod of the head, which was reciprocated in the same way.[71]

The chronicler makes it clear that the town hall functioned above all as the stand for the duke of Brabant and his company. Some 140 years later, Calvete de Estrella expresses this idea very clearly: 'the four windows of the tower were the old and usual place from which the princes watched the jousts, tournaments, games and celebrations on the

---

[69] On the participation of the Brussels patricians, see Damen, 'Tournament culture', 259–61, and Damen, 'The town', 89–90. This is not the place to examine the social profiles of the tourneyers and the active participation of patricians. I discuss this subject at greater length in 'Patricians, knights or nobles? Historiography and social status in late medieval Antwerp', *The Medieval Low Countries. An Annual Review*, 1 (2014).

[70] De Jonge, 'Bouwen', 114–19; Stabel, 'The market-place', 55.

[71] Chevalier-de Gottal, *Les fêtes*, 116–19; Bormans (ed.), *Les gestes*, 93–4.

square'.[72] Moreover, for the prince and the town this gallery had another, more political function. During a Joyous Entry, it was on this spot that the oath ceremony took place, in which the new duke and the town administration mutually promised protection and loyalty and to safeguard each other's rights and privileges.[73] The four windows formed part of the best-protected and fireproof room of the town hall where most probably the town privileges and other valuable documents were kept.[74] Among these were two beautifully illustrated (and therefore chained) copies of key texts of Brabantine history: the *Slag bij Woeringen*, written by Jan van Heellu and telling the story of the battle of Woeringen of 1288, in which Duke John I triumphed and added the duchy of Limburg to Brabant, and the *Brabantsche Yeesten*, comprising the history of the dukes of Brabant from Karloman to Philip the Good.[75] So the room was packed with documents symbolizing both urban autonomy and the network of attachments, reaching back to the Carolingian past, that linked the duke and his dynasty to the town. From the balcony of this room, exactly beneath the statue of Saint Michael on the tower, the duke of Brabant and his closest family members could watch the tournament.

Calvete de Estrella discerns a social hierarchy in the way the other spectators were occupying their own spaces on the gallery of the town hall outside. He describes the gallery at both sides of the tower with 'seats placed as in a theatre with space for many people'. Sun blinds made of yellow, white and coloured cloth protected the spectators from the sun. The balustrade of the gallery was equally adorned with coloured cloth (Figure 5). The gallery to the right of the tower was divided into two parts: one for the ladies of the household and one for the ladies from Brussels; the gallery to the left of the tower was divided into three: one space for the ambassadors, one for the gentlemen of the household and the last one for the officers of the town administration and the town's *gentileshombres*.[76] Everybody had his or her own separate space, the women to the left and the men to the right, at the same time separating the urban elites from the

[72] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 137. Again, Calvete de Estrella seems to make a small mistake, claiming that the four windows of the tower were 'in the middle of the façade'. The façade was asymmetrical since the right wing – which was constructed between 1444 and 1449 – was shorter than the left wing, constructed between 1401 and 1405: Maesschalck and Viaene, *Het stadhuis*, 168–9. See also Henne and Wauters, *Histoire*, 42, who call this room the *chambre princière*.

[73] Arnade, *Realms*, 128–9; Blockmans and Donckers, 'Self-representation', 85; H. Soly, 'Plechtige intochten in de steden van de zuidelijke Nederlanden tijdens de overgang van middeleeuwen naar nieuwe tijd: communicatie, propaganda, spektakel', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 97 (1984), 341–61 (at 342–5). For the relatively short description of the oath ceremony in 1549 in Brussels, see Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 172.

[74] Maesschalck and Viaene, *Het Stadhuis*, 119–21.

[75] Stein, *Politiek,* 38, 149, 153–8; R. Sleiderink, 'Grootse Ambities. Culturele initiatieven van de stad Brussel ten tijde van Filips de Goede', in J. Janssens (ed.), *De Macht van het Schone Woord. Literatuur in Brussel van de 14de tot de 18de Eeuw* (Leuven, 2003), 107–23 (112–22).

[76] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 137. Frieder misinterpreted this passage suggesting that these 'remaining galleries' were as well built 'around the stockade for the more important spectators', Frieder, *Chivalry*, 129.
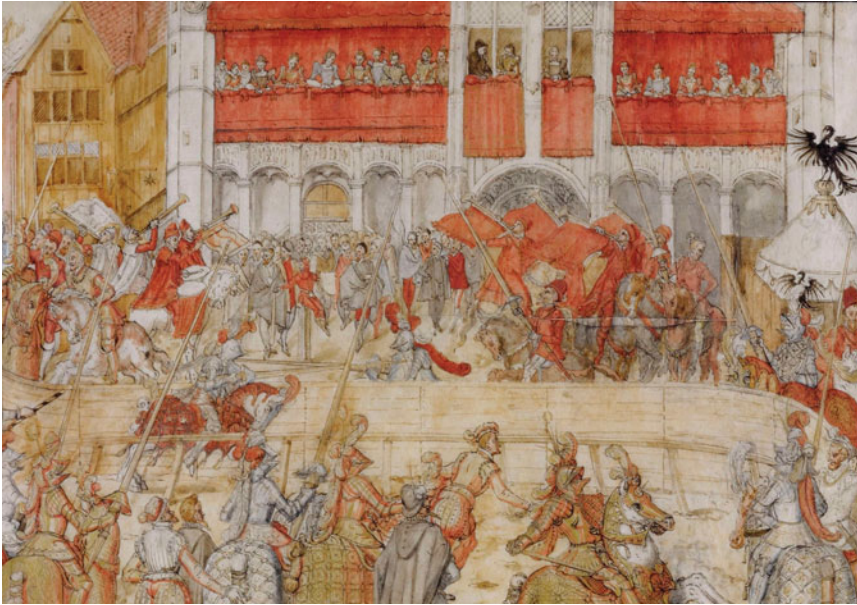
Figure 5: (Colour online) Gallery of the town hall of Brussels with spectators. Anonymous, *Pourtraict de lentree devant la jouste faicte au Grande Marchie de la ville de Bruxelles*, after 1565. Warschau, Bibliotheka Uniwersytecka, ZB. Król. Wol. 755, fol. 10.

prince's household and guests. That the hierarchy was strictly observed can be deduced from a remark of Calvete de Estrella that 'the ladies and the knights went to the galleries and they sat down on the seats indicated for each one of them'.[77]

Of course, the windows and the gallery did not only serve as viewpoints for the prince and his family. It worked the other way around as well: the people in the square and on the stands could observe their prince and other members of his dynasty. In 1409, Duke Anthony presented his newlywed wife to the public from the gallery, and in 1439, Philip the Good took his six-year-old son Charles (r. 1467–77) to a tournament on the Grote Markt.[78] In 1549, Emperor Charles V, together with his sisters Mary of Hungary, then governor of the Low Countries, Eleanor of Austria and his niece Christina of Denmark, watched his son Philip II participate in the tournament. These were the scarce moments of contact between princes and their subjects. The tournament was the occasion *par excellence* for an urban audience to catch a glimpse of the duke whether as a knight in full action in the lists, or as a spectator watching the chivalric event from the gallery in the town hall

[77] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 138.
[78] Damen, 'The town', 85–6.

with his closest relatives. The magnificent town hall of Brussels, symbol of urban autonomy, was essential for the tournament and conferred its splendour upon it. The urban political elites did not simply render the building to the prince but shared it with him. Of course, they were keen to be seen with him and his courtiers and the windows and balconies of the town hall facilitated this. Once they were inside the building, interaction with the prince could be continued in a more informal way.

The town hall as a party hall

Tournaments usually lasted several days, during which different tournament forms were displayed, alternating the collective *mêlée* with more individual styles, such as the joust.[79] After the tournament was over, the public space of the Grote Markt was left behind; the crowds stayed outside whereas the festival continued in a more private setting.[80] The town hall changed into a party hall where banquets and dances were organized by the town administration. The Brussels town hall was deliberately well equipped for these kinds of festivities, since it housed several spacious rooms that were only used during special occasions.[81]

Calvete de Estrella describes how in 1549 from an interior gallery 'the ladies of the town could look, at their pleasure' at the emperor and his company having their dinner in the big hall (*sala grande*), where the assemblies of the Estates of Brabant were normally held.[82] This hall was politically symbolic as the meeting place for the representatives of the clergy, nobility and towns of the duchy. The town administration offered this highly political space to the prince for private use. What is more, the ladies of the town (and the lords) did not have their dinner in the same room as the royal company. They were seated at large tables, in the other *camaras grandes* of the town hall, for example in the council hall (*sala del consejo*) where the famous justice paintings of Rogier van der Weyden were situated.[83] So the urban elites were again separated from the prince and his household, just as they were at the galleries of the town hall from where they watched the tournament. Everybody had his or her own space according to the social and professional hierarchy. It seems as if interaction between town and court was not the ultimate goal of the tournament and the banquets.

[79] See on the four days of the 1439 tournament, *ibid.*, 87.
[80] Ruiz, *King*, 233.
[81] S. Köhl, 'Princely architecture. Town halls in the Burgundian Netherlands', in Blockmans van Oosterwijk, *et al.* (eds.) *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, 191–200 (at 197).
[82] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 138. See on this *grande sale*, Henne and Wauters, *Histoire*, 41–2.
[83] Calvete de Estrella, *Viaje*, 138. Calvete describes the justice paintings of Rogier van der Weyden in detail further on in his account (172–6). The council hall was called the *Heeren raedtkamer*. Henne and Wauters, *Histoire*, 42. See on the paintings, Sleiderink, 'Grootse Ambities', 110–12.

However, there is other evidence that does point at social interaction, especially after dinner when it was time for music and dance. The chronicler Enguerrand de Monstrelet gives a vivid description of the after parties of the 1428 tournament in Brussels: 'A large number of dances and banquets was organized there. There were many dames and damsels, dressed up richly according to the fashion of their country. And concerning the masquerades, both of men and women, there were lots of them.'[84] Then the princely family, the household and the local elites could get together in an informal setting and this could further the mutual understanding and relationships. In this sense, tournaments provided a meeting space for the noble and urban elites where business could be done: political contacts were made and marriage arrangements could be concluded.[85] The presence of enough women was a precondition for a successful court festivity like this. In February 1377, the ducal couple even had letters sent to *damoiselles* and 'any others who are good-looking' in Mons and Maubeuge in Hainault with a request to attend a tournament in Brussels. All costs incurred would be paid for.[86]

In the town hall, the prince and his guests could find more than food and drinks. In the hall of the Estates of Brabant, they could admire a stained glass window with the heraldic devices of the duke of Brabant and 19 of his bannerets, the highest in rank among the Brabantine nobility.[87] The stained glass was installed sometime in the first two decades of the fifteenth century and it was even copied in the new town hall of Leuven (Figure 6).[88] Bannerets were military leaders both on the battlefield and during tournaments. In the 1439 tournament, for example, several Brabantine bannerets were the heads of companies. They opposed Duke Philip the Good, who was the leader of the other team, consisting mainly of household officers.[89] The window was not the only heraldic element in the town hall. Presumably around 1494, the coats of arms of Archduke Maximilian, Charles V's grandfather, and 20 knights and squires were

---

[84] L. Douët-D'Arcq, *La chronique d'Enguerran de Monstrelet en 2 livres avec pièces justificatives, 1400–1444*, vol. IV (Paris, 1860), 307.

[85] A. Janse, 'Tourneyers and spectators: the Shrovetide tournament at The Hague, 1391', in A. Janse and S. Gunn (eds.), *The Court as a Stage. England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), 39–52 (at 41); Brown and Small, *Court*, 23–5; T. Zotz, 'Adel, Bürgertum und Turniere in Deutschen Städten', in J. Fleckenstein (ed.), *Das Ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter: Beiträge zu einer vergleichende Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums* (Göttingen, 1985), 450–99 (at 483–4, 499).

[86] Vale, *The Princely Court*, 198.

[87] M. Damen, 'Heren met banieren. De baanrotsen van Brabant in de vijftiende eeuw', in M. Damen and L. Sicking (eds.), *Bourgondië voorbij. De Nederlanden 1250–1650. Liber alumnorum Wim Blockmans* (Hilversum, 2010), 139–58 (at 153–6).

[88] Only a coloured drawing of the glass in an armorial has survived: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique (BRB), MS 6563, fol. 91r. On this armorial and its contents, see C. Van Den Bergen-Pantens, 'L'armorial dit de Gorrevod: deux compilations, deux méthodes', *Revue du Nord*, 88 (2006), 805–24 (at 811). Copy in Leuven: G.E. Van Even, *Louvain dans le passé et dans le présent: formation de la ville, événements mémorables, territoire, topographie, institutions, monuments, oeuvres d'art* (Leuven, 1895), 266.

[89] Damen, 'Tournament culture', 254–8.

Figure 6: (Colour online) Drawing of the coats of arms of the bannerets of Brabant in a stained glass window in the town hall of Brussels. Armorial *Gorrevod*, *c.* 1450. BRB, MS II 6563, fol. 91r.

painted in the room before the hall of the Estates of Brabant 'as a reminder of a solemn combat and tournament' held in the town (Figure 7).[90] The commemoration may have taken the form of stained glass, like that of the bannerets, but a wall painting is possible as well. Thus, the ceremonial space of the Grote Markt was memorialized in the town hall.

This evidence proves that the town hall was full of heraldic devices that demonstrated the connections between the town and the duke and nobles from Brabant and beyond. The town administration admitted, or even ordered, the installation of these memorials, thus underscoring the importance for the town of both the Grote Markt as a ceremonial space and the chivalric encounters. Visitors of the town hall were reminded of famous tournaments from the past, celebrated in the same square, while attending another chivalric event, sometimes even viewing the descendants of those memorialized in the town hall with their coats of arms.

Conclusion

The Grote Markt in Brussels provided a natural architectural environment for tournaments. It was a practical arena with outstanding facilities, both for tourneyers and spectators. With very simple means (sand and wood) and at a relatively low cost, this public urban space was converted into a playground for knights and horses. Tourneyers and judges benefited from temporary structures built on the Grote Markt and enjoyed after-parties at the town hall. Spectators could enjoy the festival either from the stands on the Grote Markt, the windows from the houses on the square or from the galleries of the town hall. The three types of stands reflected the social hierarchy among the spectators.

The duke of Brabant and his household were firmly rooted in Brussels, maintaining a major residence and taking advantage of everything the available international market had to offer. The prince and his household used the public space of the Grote Markt and the facilities of the town hall to stage tournaments and festivities, but they could not do this on their own. They needed the town government for the organization and logistics of the tournament and for its hospitality. They were even given the use of the town hall, the symbol of urban autonomy, as a grandstand and as a place where sumptuous banquets and balls could be celebrated. The aldermen agreed to a strict physical separation between the royal guests and themselves, through which social and political hierarchies were made visible.

Yet despite the apparent submission of town to ruler, the evidence does not point to a take-over of urban space by the prince. The town and its population were not simply audiences of princely display. Both

---

[90] 'en mémoire d'ung combat et tournoij solemnel tenu en ladicte ville'. BAV, AH 3357, fol. 99v.

Figure 7: (Colour online) Drawing of the coats of arms of Maximilian and 20 tourneyers 'en memoire d'ung combat et tournoij solemnel tenu en ladicte ville'. J. van Becberghe, *Echevins de Bruxelles et tournoys*, 1582. BAV, AH 3357, fol. 99v.

permanent and ephemeral architecture stressed the close association of
the town with the duke and the duchy of Brabant. The town intended
to emphasize the responsibilities that the duke had towards his town, as
well as the long tradition of subversience and loyalty of the town to the
duke. Moreover, in the fifteenth century the political elites of the town
participated enthusiastically in tournaments. As knighted patricians, they
formed part of the nobility of the duchy. Although tournaments became
more exclusive in the first half of the sixteenth century, this did not change
the active role of the town administration concerning the organization of
chivalric events. The close association between the town and the nobility
was memorialized through all types of heraldic devices in the town hall.
The town was eager to please the nobles from Brabant and from other
parts of the Burgundian and Habsburg territories who established their
residences in what was to become the administrative capital of the Low
Countries.