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The Counts of Nassau and the Performance of Lordship in Late Medieval Brabant*

On Sunday 22 September 1499, Engelbrecht II van Nassau (1451-1504), made his Joyous Entry into the Brabantine town of Diest. On an illuminated stage in the town's market square he was solemnly inaugurated as the new lord, in the presence of a dense crowd. The acquisition of Diest, together with the town and castle of Zichem, formed the final step in the establishment of the Nassau dynasty as powerful lords in the duchy of Brabant and in the heart of the Netherlands. This process had started in 1403, when Engelbrecht's grandfather – Engelbrecht I, count of Nassau (c. 1370-1442) – acquired another urban lordship, that of Breda with the surrounding villages, through his marriage to Johanna van Polanen (1392-1445), daughter and heiress of the last lord of Breda, Jan III van Polanen (c. 1360-1394). The seigneuries of both Breda and Diest were so-called banneret lordships, which were held in fief from the duke of Brabant. They brought their owners considerable prestige, since they entailed high jurisdiction – the right to impose and execute the death penalty on the subjects in a specific jurisdiction – generated a large income and included a considerable number of subfiefs (Damen, 2010: 144-148). Moreover, Breda and Diest were urban lordships, containing fortified residences, symbols of seigniorial power which formed the administrative and financial centres from which the lords or their lieutenants could administer justice, and from where they could influence urban politics by appointing the benches of aldermen. Finally, urban lordships were easy cash cows, since nobles could borrow considerable sums of money for themselves or family members from the towns to support their costly lifestyle. The towns in their turn had to finance these loans by selling life annuities, in return for which they could

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lease out certain seigniorial domain revenues (tolls, mills etc.) (Peeters, 1980: 100-110).

Historians have paid some attention to the Nassaus and their integration into the nobility of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands (e.g. Jansen, 1979; De Win, 1991; Cools, 2001). The rise of Nassau – and other nobles like Guillaume de Croÿ (1458-1521) and Jan III van Glimes (1452-1532), who also accumulated lordships in Brabant with possessions in other principalities – led Raymond Van Uytven (in 1979) to conclude that by the end of the fifteenth century a noble regime (*adelsregime*) had become established in Brabant. The cities that controlled much of the political dynamics in the fourteenth century had given way to the nobles, who eventually also succeeded in dominating the Estates, the assembly of representatives of the clergy, nobility, and cities. Successive princes and regents of the Burgundian and Habsburg dynasty could not rule Brabant or other principalities of the Netherlands without the nobles' loyal service and noble prestige (Van Uytven, 1979: 113-118). Following up on these conclusions, other historians have framed the nobles' role in the administrative – and especially the military – apparatus, in the context of the process of state formation in the Netherlands, concluding that 'noble interests [were] broadly congruent with those of the prince and war a prime opportunity to exercise those interests' (Gunn – Grummit – Cools, 2007: 332).

This article sets out to analyse how the Nassaus acquired seigniorial power in fifteenth-century Brabant, what this seigniorial power meant in political and socio-economic terms, and how they articulated their seigniorial status vis-à-vis the prince, their peers, and their subjects. First, it zooms in on their own strategies when building up a power base in the Netherlands, based on (urban) lordships which provided them with a solid economic foundation, political influence, military power, and noble prestige. Then, it considers the Nassaus both as fiefholders of the duke of Brabant and as feudal lords in their own right, in order to evaluate the power relationships in relation to the prince on the one hand, and their subjects and subfiefholders (the 'men of the men' in the words of Hoppenbrouwers, 2010) on the other. Finally, a detailed examination of the Joyous Entry into Diest in 1499 will demonstrate how the Nassaus dealt with their subjects in the lordships, and how these subjects in turn had to accommodate their lord. The aim of the article is thus to deepen the perspective on the Nassaus, showing their multi-layered role in the society of the Netherlands and providing a glimpse of the somewhat neglected area of their direct dialogue with their 'own subjects'. Moreover, the article wishes to contribute to the historiographical discussion on the communicative character of the Joyous Entry, which for the Netherlands has hitherto mainly been studied in the context of princely inaugurations (Damen – Overlaet, 2019).

Marriages and seigniorial power

How did the Nassaus eventually become feudal lords in the duchy of Brabant? Their strategic marriage alliances explain most of their success in this respect. Originally, the marriages pursued by the family were mainly focused on strengthening their position in the Meuse-Rhine area, especially around their county of Nassau-Dillenburg. The expansion towards the west to the heartland of the Netherlands was initiated by Johan I van Nassau (1339-1416), and fitted well in this matrimonial policy, certainly if we consider Johan I as the initiator of the marriage of his son Engelbrecht I to Johanna van Polanen. But it was not without reason that Nassau turned to Brabant. In fact the family had Brabantine roots: Johann I's grandmother was Johanna van Leuven-Gaasbeek (1238-1291), who in turn was a granddaughter of Duke Hendrik I of Brabant (r. 1183-1235).

Engelbrecht I was born around 1370 and was probably named after Engelbrecht von Berg, also known as 'der Heilige' (1186-1225), archbishop of Cologne, renowned for his expansionary policies in the Rhineland (Ficker, 1853). In August 1403 he married Johanna van Polanen, only eleven years old, but heiress of Jan III, lord of Breda and Lek, two important lordships in Brabant and Holland, who had died in 1394. The house of Polanen was closely associated with the ducal house: witness Jan II's first marriage to Mathilde, a bastard daughter of Duke Jan III of Brabant (1320-1355) (Croenen, 2015: 22). Immediately after Polanen's death, a conflict arose about the guardianship of Polanen's children. The conflict was set aside at the special request of Duchess Johanna van Brabant (1322-1406), during several meetings of the Estates of Brabant. In the end, it took the guardians assigned, Hendrik van der Lek and Odilia van Salm, Polanen's second wife, and mother to Johanna, another eight years to find her a suitable husband. Van der Lek himself might even have had an eye on the inheritance (Kappelhof, 2013; Uyttebrouck, 1975: 706-707, 826-827). This demonstrates that in the lordship of Breda the succession was not only a family affair, but also attracted the interest of the ducal authorities, the nobles, and the towns of Brabant.

However, it was probably through Odilia's family connections in the lands of Outremeuse (which were part of Brabant but physically separated from it by the prince-bishopric of Liege) that contacts were established with the Nassaus. Engelbrecht I van Nassau was a good match from her point of view, since he originated from a princely family which was far removed from factional struggles among the nobility of Brabant and Holland. From the point of view of the Nassaus, the marriage might be considered beneath their princely standing, although the Polanens did stem from the prestigious noble lineage of Duivenvoorde-Wassenaar and occupied important positions in the household of the counts of Holland and Zeeland. This was already pointed out in 1979 by H.P.H. Jansen, who nevertheless concluded that both the enormous wealth of Johanna's inheritance and the prospect of a future inheritance of other Brabantine possessions (see below) were sufficient reason to contract the marriage. Moreover, the Nassaus were in desperate need of an heir for their entire *patrimonium*; initially, Engelbrecht I

was heading for an ecclesiastical career, but since his two elder brothers did not have any legitimate children, he resigned as provost of the cathedral chapter of Cologne, an office previously held by his patron saint and namesake, to continue the comital dynasty (Jansen, 1979: 13-16). All this fitted well within a normal strategy to avoid fragmentation of the inheritance and ensure the continuity of the line: for sons of a noble or princely family, the church offered a 'comfortable life, and the potential opportunities to exercise lordship offered by an imperial bishopric', but at the same time returning to the 'world' was a viable option when this was in the family's interest (Spieß, 2017). The young age of the heiress must have been attractive, since it increased the likelihood of her producing a large number of children, the aim of any noble family. Apparently, Engelbrecht was so eager to produce offspring that the marriage with the adolescent Johanna was consummated immediately on 1 August 1403, at least according to a chronicler (Piot, 1879: 69).¹ Engelbrecht was also well prepared for the administrative side of his new existence. As Jansen stressed, Engelbrecht's training as a *clericus* at the University of Cologne had fitted him to perform all kinds of administrative tasks, both for his newly acquired lordships, and, as councillor, in the service of the dukes of Brabant.

Perfectly suited as lord and ducal vassal, Engelbrecht made his Joyous Entry into Breda in August 1404 (Uyttebrouck, 1975: 715, 722). Nevertheless, the formal heir of the lordship of Breda was his wife, Johanna van Polanen, who had been enfeoffed with the land of Breda in 1400-1401.² Only in 1406 did the bench of aldermen of Breda formally recognize Engelbrecht as the *momber* of his thirteen-year-old wife concerning the jurisdiction in the land of Breda. Even in October 1430, upon the accession of Philip the Good (1396-1467) as duke of Brabant, Philip enfeoffed Johanna, with Engelbrecht, her 'lawful husband and acting guardian' (*wittigen man ende mombour*), with Breda, all 'according to certain letters given by her father Jan van Polanen, lord of Lek and Breda.' Thereafter, both Johanna and Engelbrecht paid homage and swore fealty to the new duke, who received Engelbrecht *in onser manscap*, that is as one of his vassals (Cerutti, 1972: nos 318, 402). This goes to show that although formally the lordship belonged to the heiress, the feudal obligations of *auxilium et concilium* connected to the lordship were part of the husband's job, a form of power-sharing between husband and wife that Elena Woodacre refers to as 'his way' (Woodacre, 2013: 44).

Breda and the marriage alliance with Polanen were stepping stones to the acquisition of other lordships in the duchy. In 1411 Engelbrecht I acquired the

1 'Anno 1400 ende 3 op Sinte Peeters dach ad Vincule, quam grave Enghelbert van Nassouwen int lant ende besliep joncfrouwe Johanna, dochter des voerseyt heer Jan van der Leck, opten selven nacht'.

See also the same quotation in Kappelhof, 2013. It should be stressed that both in princely and noble families, sexual activity normally started at the age of fifteen (Bartlett, 2020: 54).

2 ARA, CCB: no. 17145 fol. 53v, account ending on 24 June 1404, where it is stated that she had already paid the *heergewede* – the sum of money paid to a lord by a vassal when he or she is enfeoffed – 'three or four years before'.

right from Elisabeth von Sponheim (1365-1417) to act as her *obersten amptman* in her lordships of Corroy-le-Château, in the district of Walloon Brabant, and Grimbergen in the district of Brussels (HHStAW: inv. no. 3036, KHA inv. A 2 no. 171). They were related, sharing the same great-grandfather, Philippe II, count of Vianden. In 1417, shortly before Elisabeth's death, Engelbrecht acquired both Brabantine lordships as recompense for money he had loaned her which she was not able to repay (NA, ND: nos 871.1043, 871.1059).³ Within the span of fourteen years, Engelbrecht I had acquired several lordships across the duchy, including important fortified residences. This powerbase enabled him to play a seminal political and military role in the duchy. He continued the marriage policy of his father, but it was now more clearly focused on the connection between Brabant and the area of the Rhine and Meuse: three of Engelbrecht's children married the offspring of high-ranking princes and nobles, like the counts of Virneburg and Sayn and the lord of Heinsberg, who, like Engelbrecht himself, were active as councillors of the duke of Brabant, and who had territorial interests in the duchy of Limburg and the lands of Outremeuse, especially (Jansen, 1979: 41).

In 1440, Engelbrecht's eldest son, Jan IV van Nassau (1410-1475), married Maria van Loon-Heinsberg (1424-1502, see Illustration X.1), whose great-grandfather Jan I was the brother-in-law of the before-mentioned Johanna van Leuven-Gaasbeek (Uyttebrouck, 1975: nos 126, 178, 227, 256; Jansen, 1979: 30-31). Through this marriage Jan IV obtained important rights regarding the lordships of Diest and Zichem, which were owned by Maria's brother Jan III van Loon-Heinsberg through his marriage to Johanna van Diest. The dowry owed to Jan IV by Jan III van Loon-Heinsberg was 18,000 Rhenish guilders, an amount so high that both in 1440 and 1448 annual rents were established on the lands of Diest and Zichem as a security for the payment (NA, ND: nos 920.1414, 921.1554). It was only in September 1499 that Engelbrecht II obtained the lordship of Diest and Zichem from Duke Willem IV of Jülich (1455-1511) in exchange for the lordship of Millen, Gangelt and Waldfeucht, situated some 80 kms to the East in Outremeuse and bordering with the duchy of Jülich. Jan IV focused the search for marriage partners for his children more within the German lands, rather than within the nascent Burgundian composite state. Probably this was due to his preference for children stemming from comital or ducal lineages. The choice for the houses of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, Waldeck, Hanau-Münzeberg, Baden and Hessen-Marburg to strike marriage alliances was thus aimed at finding partners of the same social level, befitting Jan IV's princely aspirations (Jansen, 1979: 41-42).

³ At least Corroy entailed 'les forteresse, terres (...) avec les seigneuries haulte, moyenne et basse, terres, prez, bois, eauwes, poissonneries, cens, rentes, moulins a eauwe et a vent, fourfais et hommaiges, maisnies et tous autres leurs appartenances'. Interestingly, it is added in one of the *denombrements* that Engelbrecht I had the right to mint in the castle of Corroy 'as was done by his predecessors' as lords (ARA, CCB: no. 548 fol. 65r, no. 555 fol. 577r-v).



Illustration X.1 Bernard van Orley, Drawing of Jan IV van Nassau and his wife Maria van Loon on horseback, c. 1528-1530. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, nr. 97.GG.24
 Source: <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/146524> (public domain).

The most important political activities of the Nassaus, however, were related to their possession of some of the most prestigious lordships in Brabant: Breda, Grimbergen and Diest-Zichem. These three lordships can be qualified as banneret lordships, of which some nineteen existed in fifteenth-century Brabant. Traditionally, bannerets (*baanrotsen* in Dutch) played a prominent military and political role in the duchy of Brabant. Special square banners that were carried on the battlefield and during tournaments symbolised the bannerets' military leadership (Damen, 2010). In Duke Anthony's household (r. 1406-1415), this distinction was even more tangible: bannerets were provided with twice as many horses and servants as knights had (Kauch, 1945: 192). In administrative sources the Nassaus were normally identified not by their personal name but by the name of their lordship, a symbol both of their high status and of the special character of these lordships. However, both Engelbrecht I and Jan IV were normally named *jonker* (in Dutch), *damoiseau* (in French), or *greve/conte* of Nassau, referring to the county, which of course had even more prestige than a simple lordship (see e.g., VRA, CF: no. 581-210obis, fol. 3r; PCB: id. no. 0565). They did not care about the knightly title, since they were German princes in their own right. The consequence was

that they could not be admitted to the Order of the Golden Fleece, the exclusively knightly order in which the Burgundian dukes united the 'flower of chivalry' in their lands. Thus, the Nassaus maintained their relative independent position in relation to the Burgundian duke, avoiding the hierarchical relationship that would have been entailed by the accolade or a membership of the Golden Fleece. It was Engelbrecht II who was admitted to the prestigious order in 1473, only because he had received the accolade from Charles the Bold (1433-1477) five years earlier, at the siege and occupation of Liège, by virtue of the 'great labour and deeds of arms' he performed (Janse, 1997: 327).

The centre of the lordship of Breda was a mid-sized town with a noble residence which was continuously renovated and embellished. The fact that all three of the Nassaus under consideration in this article were buried in a crypt beneath a magnificent effigy in the church of Our Lady in Breda (Illustration X.2), together with the former lords of the Polanen lineage, testifies not only to their close attachment to this town, but also to their eagerness to place themselves in the direct line of the possessors of this lordship, thus confirming their dynastic self-awareness (Paquay, 1987). The choice for Breda – and at that stage not so much for their Brussels residence – is also a manifestation of their independent line of action.

Seigneuries and vassals

What exactly did these lordships entail for the Nassau dynasty? How could they derive revenues from these extensive feudal possessions? It is important to note that two of the lordships were in essence 'urban', meaning that they were centred in and around one or two towns. The towns of Breda, Steenberg, Diest and Zichem were formally recognised as 'steden' in the Duchy of Brabant and are included in the list of twenty-six walled towns in Brabant compiled around 1565 by Ludovico Guiccardini (Guicciardini, 1612: 48; Van Uytven, 1982: 6-7). Whereas Breda and Steenberg were situated in the margraviate of Antwerp, Diest and Zichem formed part of the district of Leuven and were of strategic military importance since they were situated near the border with Guelders. All four were fully accepted members of the duchy's polity, witness the invitations they received for the meetings of the Estates of Brabant. This is also apparent from the fact they are all mentioned in the subscriptions of nine of the eleven charters, dated between 1312 and 1422, that testify to some of the crucial moments in the political history of the duchy. In most cases, Diest and Zichem are mentioned together, and before the seigniorial towns of Breda and Steenberg (Damen, 2018). The downside was that the seigniorial towns, like the other ducal towns of Brabant, had to contribute to the subsidies or *beden* granted to the duke by the Estates (Peeters, 1980: 112-118). Although the inhabitants of the lordships were only obliged to pay a subsidy to their lord on special occasions, e.g., his inauguration, marriage, accolade or ransom (see below), in the sixteenth century



Illustration X.2 Tomb effigy with Engelbrecht I and his wife Johanna van Polanen (left), and their son Jan IV and his wife Maria van Loon (right), portrayed with their respective patron saints, kneeling before the Virgin Mary with the child. In the crypt under the tomb the four depicted people were buried, next to Engelbrecht II and his wife Cimburga van Baden. Breda, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe kerk

Photo: author.

the *bede* was converted in a more regular annual tax, since the sums requested were spread out over a number of years (Cerutti, 1976: 107, 220).⁴ In short, fiscal pressure on the subjects of these lordships came from two sides.

Willem IV of Jülich stated in 1484 that he possessed the town and lordship of Diest as his own property (*pueren eygndom*) except for the toll which he held in fief from the duke of Brabant. Indeed, the successive lords of Diest considered the town as an *allodium*, in that it was formally not held in fief from the duke of Brabant, in contrast to its 'partner town' of Zichem. In the second half of the twelfth century, Arnold II, lord of Diest (c. 1140-1202), had transferred his lordship, which he held as an *allodium*, to the archbishop of Cologne. In return, he

⁴ For the parallel with the subsidies owed to the duke of Brabant in the fifteenth century see Stein, 2014: 242-271.

received the lordship in fief from the archbishop as a so-called *fief de reprise* (De Sturler, 1937: 163, 180-185). However, there is no evidence that this particular feudal relationship was still in place in the fifteenth century, so the Duke of Jülich could claim without any hindrance that Diest was like an allodial property for him. The allodial status of Diest enhanced the status of the lord, since no homage or military service was required vis-à-vis a higher feudal authority. The land of Breda comprised two towns and some fifteen villages. Everywhere, the lord had the right to appoint the reeve (*schout*, the officer charged with enforcing law and order), the *drossaard* (juridical officer), and the benches of aldermen (*schepenen*). Justice would be carried out in the name of the lord, and a court of appeal (*hootbancke*) was formed by the seven aldermen and vassals of Breda. This meant that within the boundaries of his lordship the lord of Breda was the highest judge, and appeal was only possible with higher sovereign courts of justice, such as the Council of Brabant, although in 1554 even this possibility was restricted, making the land of Breda juridically autonomous (Coopmans, 1988: 8-9; Kappelhof, 2005).

The lord's main sources of income belonged to the *seigneurie banale*, since they were derived from the *bannus*, in origin the princely right to command (Hoppenbrouwers, 1992: 589-590; idem, 2002: 101-103; Janse 2001: 147-150). The most important source of income for the lordship of Diest, for example, was the lease of the 'tolls and other rights', which provided almost half of the lord's resources in 1435. These tolls were in fact a conglomerate of no fewer than nineteen levies on the consumption and production of commodities such as beer, wine (there were excellent vineyards in Diest), cloth, and corn, and on the weighing of goods (*waag*). Another important source of revenue was mills: in Diest, the lease of mills was almost a fifth of the lord's total income in 1435 (Peeters, 1995: 100-101). Indeed, one of the most lucrative seigniorial rights was that of building mills, including the obligation on the subjects to grind the grain in these seigniorial mills, and the imposition of fines if they did not comply with this obligation. A mill was an expensive investment and implied high maintenance costs. For a lord it was therefore crucial to enforce this seigniorial right to ensure that the mill remained profitable (Van Uytven, 1988: 184; Peeters, 1995: 134). A third important source of income in Diest (12.5% in 1435) was the so-called annual subsidy (*jaarbede*), which had to be paid by the town as a compensation for the use of the commons (*woeste gronden*).

In addition to the rights of the *seigneurie banale*, the lord also enjoyed income from the *seigneurie foncière*. This mainly took the form of rents (*cijnzen*), that is six-monthly or annual payments in money or kind, made by land owners and house owners for the use of their properties, whether in the town or the countryside. Although the rents accounted for only a relatively small proportion of the seigniorial income (9 per cent in 1435), they were important as the prime recognition of the lord as formal owner of the land (Coopmans, 1988: 4-5; Hoppenbrouwers, 1992: 577-578; Brekelmans, 1977: 92-93; Peeters, 1995: 102-104).

Where the medieval lordship of Breda is concerned, we cannot make an assessment of the relative value of the different components of the annual income of the lord derived from his lordly rights, since no accounts are available. As in Diest, the mills can be assumed to have been profitable in Breda as well: in around 1500, the land of Breda numbered eleven watermills, twenty-two windmills, and a further ten to twenty horse mills. Most of these mills were leased out (in full or in part), with the lease being paid to the lord in grain (Leenders, 1976 and 1978). Engelbrecht II planned to include a watermill in one of the medieval roundels of the castle in Breda, which must have reinforced the image of his seigniorial lordship (although he had already died before the plan was executed from 1508 onwards) (Van den Eynde – Brinkhof, 2016). For the lord of Breda the *gruutgeld* must also have been important. This was originally a tax on the selling of herbs needed for the production of beer, such as bog myrtle, rosemary, and hop. In the fifteenth century, however, *gruutgeld* evolved into a general excise on the production of beer; in 1422 fifteen brewers of Breda had to pay excise on the production of 3,366.5 barrels of beer (c. 437,645 liters)⁵ and private citizens produced a further 842 barrels for their own consumption, which were also taxed. Upon his Joyous Entry into Breda in 1446, Jan IV van Nassau exempted the citizens from the payment of *gruutgeld* on beer they had produced themselves (Cerutti, 1976: 226). This was apparently a tax that mattered to both the lord and his subjects. The production of beer called for the grinding of large quantities of corn and malt, which may explain the large number of mills in Breda.

The exact monetary value of the lordships is difficult to assess. In 1440, the revenues of Diest and Zichem were estimated at approximately 1,600 pounds or 40 groats, although these revenues were heavily burdened with several life and survivor annuities (NA, ND.: no 919). The nett income of Diest alone in 1435 has been calculated at c. 183 pounds (Peeters, 1995: 136).⁶ Concerning Breda, the best information available is that in 1474 the gross annual income from Breda was estimated at some 4,400 pounds of 40 groats (ARA, CCB: no. 550 fol. 330v). For the sake of comparison, a master mason in the nearby Land of Heusden – where Jan IV van Nassau had appointed his illegitimate son Jan as his substitute castellan⁷ – would have had to work 17,600 days to earn this amount of money (Hoppenbrouwers, 1992: 13, 498). There were of course also high costs attached to the upkeep of the lordship. On the basis of seigniorial revenues in Flanders, Frederik Buylaert calculated that around the middle of the fifteenth century a ‘mid-tier nobleman’ needed some 500 pounds of 40 groats for the upkeep of his noble estate (Buylaert, 2012: 1122). A lordship such as Breda produced almost nine times this noble benchmark. In 1474, Jan IV claimed that he had 1,100

⁵ A barrel contained approximately 130 liters. On the problem of estimating the exact contents of a barrel of beer see Alberts, 2010.

⁶ That is 274 pounds Brabants.

⁷ On 29 April 1485, Jan IV's son Engelbrecht II would sell his half-brother the lordship of Corroy (ARA, CCB: no. 555 fol. 577r).

pounds deductible expenses for the land of Breda, which is exactly twenty-five per cent of his annual revenue.⁸ Nevertheless, he should be considered one of the two richest fiefholders in Brabant. When we add up his annual income from Grimbergen (468 pounds) and Corroy (129 pounds) – relatively small amounts compared to Breda – the gross income in 1474, from his lordships in Brabant alone, was c. 5,000 pounds. In short, the lord of Breda's income may have come close to that of the richest fiefholder of Brabant, Jan III van Glimes, lord of Bergen op Zoom, a lordship which, in that same year, rendered an income of almost 5,700 pounds or 40 groats (ARA, CCB: no. 550 fol. 178r, no. 24,648, fol. 4v, 7r).

However, there was more to the lordship than a more or less stable income, since it also included a large number of sub-fiefs, and hence sub-vassals. In the land of Breda, for example, there were 979 subfiefs, which in 1474 were estimated to have a total annual revenue of c. 5,000 pounds, more than the lord of Breda himself received (Kappelhof, 1977: 99; VRA, CF: no. 581-210obis). Interestingly, in 1440 Jan IV van Nassau declared that he had only 150 *manscape*, of 'small fiefs', in the land of Breda (Cerutti, 1972: no. 469). As lord of Breda, Nassau even had two dependent lordships with high jurisdiction: Dongen and Oostmalle. Dongen, containing the 'house, village and goods', had a further twelve subfiefs, whereas Oostmalle was held as a *condominium* by two noble ladies, on whom a further 200 fiefs depended (VRA, CF: no. 581-2100 fol. 7r-8v; ARA, CCB: no. 550 fol. 334v-336v; Kappelhof, 1977: 99).⁹ This meant that hundreds of other men and women, only a few of them nobles, were attached with feudal bonds to the Nassau dynasty. Obviously, the lord of Breda could summon them for military activities which were undertaken by the duke of Brabant, although not all his subvassals will have had the means to actively engage in combat. This provided them with a substantial military power which made them invaluable assets for as well as possible threats to ducal power (Hoppenbrouwers, 2010). We know, for example, that the Estates of Brabant complained in 1407 that several lords who held lordships with high jurisdiction, and especially the lord of Breda, summoned their subjects on many occasions 'without any necessity' for musters. The duke decided that future musters should only take place at his command, and that on these occasions anyone who was able to 'hold a weapon or a horse', would be obliged to come (Stein, 1996: 431; Uyttebrouck, 1975: 486).¹⁰ Between 1410 and 1418, Engelbrecht I van Nassau was regularly compensated for the costs of his men on horseback who accompanied him on military enterprises undertaken by the duke of Brabant. On these occasions, the starting point of the expedition was

⁸ It goes without saying that one should be careful with the interpretation of the data obtained from these feudal inventories, since fiefholders were inclined to make a low estimate of their revenues and list a large number of deductible items because of their fiefs. See Janse, 1998: 168-174, 188-190.

⁹ Kappelhof wrongly states 400 Rhenish guilders as the annual income for the lordship of Dongen; the *denombrement* states 350 Rhenish guilders gross, and 210 Rijnsgulden nett income. See VRA, CF: no. 581-2100 fol. 7r; Cerutti, 1972: no. 785.

¹⁰ The text speaks of the 'poor people within his lordship', which seems to point to a broader category than simply the vassals of the lord of Breda.

mostly Breda, and the size of his company ranged from 50 to 120 horses (Juten, 1933; ARA, CCB: nos 15718, 15719). This shows that the land of Breda was an important recruitment base for military operations in which the Nassaus were involved.

It goes without saying that the lordships of Grimbergen and Diest-Zichem also had hundreds of subfiefs (and subvassals).¹¹ Moreover, both lordships contained a *burggraafschap* (viscounty), the right to appoint a *burggraaf*, a viscount or castellan. These castellans were originally ducal officeholders who were entrusted with the guardianship of a castle for the defence of nearby towns or villages. In the course of time, the duke had assigned the castellans some pieces of land, judicial rights and/or seigniorial rights as a financial compensation for the fulfilment of their tasks. Together with the office of *burggraaf*, these were converted into ducal fiefs (Davidts, 1958: 439-440; Opsommer, 1995: 236-238). Normally, the most important component of the fief was the fortified residence or castle of the castellan. For Grimbergen, for example, the viscount even had two *maisons* in fief from the lord of Nassau: Schiplaken, which in 1474 is characterised as a *sloete* (castle), and Ter Tommen which contained a *torre ende huysinge* (tower and house). Moreover, both residences were situated in an area of 47 and 41 *bunder* land, respectively, some 60 and 53 hectares (ARA, CCB: no. 549 fol. 38v; idem: no. 551 fol. 12v). In 1474, this particular viscounty with the two houses was held in fief from the lord of Grimbergen by Jean d'Enghien, lord of Kestergat, a ducal courtier and councillor and a powerful broker in the town of Brussels and its surroundings (Damen – Stein, 2012; PCB: id. no. 1588).

The situation in Diest was different, since the lordship included the viscounty of the Antwerp fortress (*burcht*); this was situated some 70 kilometres to the north-west of Diest, in a different administrative district, the margraviate of Antwerp. Interestingly, in 1440 the then lord of Diest, Jan II van Heinsberg (1367-1438), did not know exactly what the *burggraafschap* entailed. In any case he did not find any information among his papers, probably due to the fact that in the second half of the fourteenth century Antwerp was in the hands of the count of Flanders. However, in an 'old roll' Jan did find the names of the fiefholders of the lord of Diest in Antwerp. In any case the rights of the viscount were very obscure (*zeere verdonckert*) and he needed the help of the duke's officers to shed light in the darkness (NA, ND: no. 919). This obscurity, however, did not prevent Willem van Oranje (1533-1584), as count of Nassau and lord of Diest, from reviving the title to justify his governorship of the town during the Dutch Revolt (Van Gelder, 1933). Perhaps Engelbrecht II's donation of a stained-glass window to the church of Our Lady in Antwerp in 1503 should also be considered in this context. In this window, the artist, Klaas Rombouts, depicted the Last Supper and included the kneeling donor, with his sixteen quarters, the coats of arms of his great-great-grandparents (Roobaert, 2011: 2, 12). It reminded the church-goers of

11 See for an overview the books of fiefholders of Diest and Zichem in LRA, HSD: nos 63-70.

the town's links with the Nassau dynasty and encouraged them to pray for the remission of the sins of the donor and his relatives. In short, although the economic profit of the viscounties may not have been very clear, they enhanced the prestige of the lordships, adding fortified residences and establishing or re-establishing bonds with local power brokers and ordinary citizens across the duchy.

The Joyous Entry of Engelbrecht II van Nassau into Diest in 1499

It is in general very difficult to investigate the nature of the relationship between a local lord and the subjects of this seigneurie. However, a detailed report of Engelbrecht II van Nassau's (Illustration X.3) Joyous Entry into Diest in September 1499 – partly a memoir, partly an instruction of the town's magistrate – sheds a unique light on the way late medieval lords engaged with their (urban) subjects, and how these subjects in turn dealt with seigniorial power. This exceptional record – now preserved in the depot of the Nassaus in the National Archives in The Hague and in a partial copy in the archive of the town and lord of Diest in Leuven – was probably drawn up by an urban scribe, or even the town's pensionary Jan van der Capellen.¹² The report, entitled *Introitus dominus de Nassau in Diest*, is mostly written in Middle Dutch and contains a description of the events between 18 August and 28 September 1499. Furthermore, copies of some letters are fully integrated into the report as well as the texts of the mutual oaths, the regulation of the contest of the *tableaux vivants*, and detailed summaries of the meetings of the town administration and the leaders of the craft guilds.

The Joyous Entry, in the report consistently labelled as *Blijde Incompste*, was carefully prepared for almost a month, not by Nassau's own officers but by princely officers. This demonstrates that the ducal authorities were seriously involved with the transfer of power in the urban lordship. Already on 18 August 1499, the reeve and margrave of Antwerp, the knight Jan van Lier, informed the town administration of the exchange between Nassau and Jülich (see above). Some representatives of the town, among them the reeve, three aldermen and the pensionary, were to come with him to Sittard where the formal exchange was to take place. They returned on 29 August. The following day the margrave inspected the *borch*, the most visible sign of the lord's power. From the end of the eleventh century there was a motte-and-bailey-castle in Diest which became the residence of the lords of Diest. However, at the end of the fifteenth century the castle was

12 The following is based on NA, ND: no. 924. I want to thank Bente Marschall for making a transcription of this document of eleven unnumbered folios (r-v). See for the various separate documents related to this entry LRA, HSD: nos 2888-2893. Van der Eycken, 1985 gives a short summary of the entry.



Illustration X.3 Portrait of Engelbert II, made c. 1480-1490, wearing a black cap and doublet, and the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece. A hooded hawk contributes to the expression of his noble status. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, nr. SK-A-3140
Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.9538> (public domain).

falling apart and probably that was why inspection was required.¹³ On Sunday 1 September, the margrave, together with a delegation from the town, went to Leuven where Nassau was attending the renowned procession of the *ommegang* in honour of Our Lady. On behalf of the new lord, Van Lier had temporarily extended the appointments of all officers working in the lordship of Diest, as otherwise the subjects would be *sonder justicie* (without justice) until the formal inauguration of the new lord, which was scheduled for later that month.

This was not simply a formal procedure, since there was an inflammable political situation in the town. The report states that ‘very terrible words and threats are uttered day and night’. Most probably this refers to the years 1495-1496, when there was a great deal of political turmoil in the town. According to a local chronicle, a man named Arnold van Bakel, together with other rioters (*seditionosi*), had illegally appropriated the town’s receipt and administration of excises and other sources of income, hence *incedendo crimen lese majestatis*. Understandably, Willem IV of Jülich was angry about this breach of his lordly privileges and came to the town with a great display of power, with 250 men on horseback and many foot soldiers, early in the morning of 1 October 1496. Four men were thrown into prison and were decapitated at four o’clock that very day in the market square, before the town hall (*ante domum magistratus in publico foro*). The town administration, in its turn, was annoyed that the duke had bypassed them in pursuing justice, and informed the overlord, the duke of Brabant. Philip the Fair intervened immediately and sent Engelbrecht van Nassau to the town as his *nuncium et commissarium*. Despite the supposed allodial character of the lordship, Philip temporarily transferred it to Nassau, who dismissed all the duke of Jülich’s officers, and at the same time summoned 140 citizens of Diest for a princely tribunal in Breda, which dragged on for a very long time. It was not until October 1497 that seigniorial power was transferred back to the duke of Jülich (Raymaekers, 1861: 429-430). This all goes to show that the juridical power of the lord was not without limits: citizens of Diest had to be judged by the bench of aldermen and not by the lord, and this privilege was closely observed both by the local authorities and by the prince. At the same time, the above makes clear that an absentee lord needed trustees and close collaborators in his lordship to ensure correct administration and a functioning juridical apparatus.

The town’s financial situation was indeed precarious, but this was not caused by Van Bakel and his ‘accomplices’. What is more, Van Bakel, juror of the guild of the mercers, had since 1494 been one of the two formal recipients of the excises on beer and the milling rights in the town – one of the most important sources of income of the lord –, appointed by aldermen and burgomasters. However, he was severely obstructed by horse merchants, some aldermen and even the sub-reeve of the town. Since the duke of Jülich was not willing to help him, Van Bakel appealed to the Council of Brabant, which supported him in his efforts to collect the taxes

¹³ In 1514 the castle was completely demolished and substituted by a park (*warande*) and a smaller residence (Deneef – Van de Ven – Wijnant, 2018).

until he was violently stopped by the duke himself... (Stallaert, 1865: 112-120; Peeters, 1980: 492-498). Thus, what was behind the definitive transfer of Diest and Zichem from Jülich to Nassau in 1499 was most probably a princely strategy aimed at political and financial stability in the towns, especially those situated in border areas.

Both the political tensions and the precarious financial situation of the town became painfully clear when the magistrate gathered to discuss the welcome gifts for Nassau. The custom was that the new lord would receive wine in the evening and a 'morning gift' (*morghen gave*) the following day. The term refers to the medieval custom of a husband giving gifts to his newly wed wife on the morning after the wedding night. In the late medieval mindset, this strengthened the notion of the confirmation of a legal contract between the town and the new lord (see below). The town's pensionary Jan van der Capellen did his research in the town's archive and concluded that Johan II van Nassau-Saarbrücken (1423-1472) had received two silver pitchers, one silver bowl for confectionery, and a silver water jug consisting of exactly 14 marks, 11.5 ounces of silver, on his accession to the lordship in 1457, which he achieved by virtue of his marriage to Johanna van Loon-Heinsberg, heiress of Jan III (Stallaert, 1876: 282-284).¹⁴ The pensionary argued that Engelbrecht II van Nassau should receive not less but more, since this lord was 'not of a lesser but a higher nature' than his predecessor. The butchers, the most prominent guild, agreed, although the representatives of the other craft guilds wanted to consult their colleagues. In the end, they all agreed on one condition: when the new lord came to the town they wanted to prostrate themselves, asking him to uphold the charters and privileges of the town and requesting that they could be 'all as the children of one mother, as it lawfully should be, since discord (*twistinghe*) has reigned here for a long time'. A proper gift called for a counter-gift. The aldermen hastened to declare that they themselves had also thought of that. They agreed to the craft guilds' request to see the new lord, but stipulated that this could only be with a small number and the most notable among them, 'since the new lord did not wish to be visited by a large crowd'. Understandably, Nassau might have considered the confrontation with members of all twenty-two craft guilds slightly overwhelming. The guilds evidently wanted to push harder for the town's interests, since they and their rank and file had to foot the bill.

It soon became clear that the town did not even have enough money to buy the silver needed for the three pitchers the town administration intended to give. At the Antwerp market, envoys of the town heard they needed to supply eighteen marks of silver for the making of the silverware. Since they could not borrow for more than twelve or thirteen marks, they made a strong appeal to the Diest citizens, who came up with sixteen silver dishes, most of them weighing four to six

¹⁴ Indeed in the chronicle of Diest it is stated that he was given 'in vasis argentis quatuordecim marche et sex uncie cum dimidia' (Raymaekers, 1861: 422-423).

ounces. In this way, the morning gift indeed turned out to be a collective gift from the Diest citizenry.¹⁵

Meanwhile the preparations for the entry started. All the streets and squares had to be cleaned of 'dung, and all rubbish, stone and wood pushed aside'. As with princely entries, this not only ensured that the town would look bright and clean, but also minimised the danger of fire, given that the cortege accompanying the new lord carried torches (Coomans, 2019; Lecuppre-Desjardin, 2004: 104-106). Everybody should adorn his or her house with nice cloth and green *meye* (blooming branches of birches, beeches, or pine trees, used especially for festive occasions) and should strew the streets with 'grasses and odoriferous herbs (...) everybody to the best of his ability', indicating the involvement of all social classes. On Saturday 21 September a special mass and subsequent procession, in which both ecclesiastical and worldly authorities participated, were organised 'to pray to God for the wealth (*welvaart*) of our lord, and that his entry may bring us peace, quiet and concord, prosperity and all blissfulness (*voirspoot ende alle salicheit*)'. From the end of the fifteenth century, similar urban processions were encouraged by the central government to stimulate subjects' sympathy with and the loyalty to the ruling Habsburg dynasty (Soly, 1980: 349). In Diest, the objective of the town administration was certainly to enhance unity and solidarity among citizens. Obviously, the town expected that the new lord would bring change, but that the direction of that change depended on the success of the entry. This was the moment *par excellence* to establish a good relationship with the new lord which would benefit the town in the future.

That also becomes apparent when we analyse the entry proper on Sunday 22 September. At three o'clock in the afternoon, a delegation of the beguines, begards, friars minor, and the priests of the various parochial churches, as well as all urban and lordly officers, marched out of the Schaffense gate towards Nassau. There at the border of the town and lordship (expressed by the word *zuwe*, which means something like a ditch) the *borghers*, aldermen, councillors and clerks made a threefold prostration before the lord, both parties remaining on either side of the border. There Nassau solemnly declared that he had come to establish concord. Since it had started to rain, the ceremony was kept short and the town's pensionary handed over the keys of the Schaffense gate 'as if all the keys [of the other gates of the town MD] had been there' to Nassau 'as lord of Diest'. The procession went back to the town through the Schaffense gate, with the new lord of Diest escorted on either side by two burgomasters, towards the *refugium* of the nearby Premonstratensian abbey of Averbode, where Nassau would stay since the seigneurial residence in Diest was no longer habitable (see above). A double row was formed by the members of the diverse shooting guilds dressed up in their armour, with their 'bows and guns', and the members of the other guilds ranked according to their place during normal processions, the butchers and blacksmiths

¹⁵ This may explain why the gift of silverware does not appear in the town accounts and hence is not mentioned by Adriaens – Cools, 2016.

first. A competition was initiated to stage *personagiën* or *tableaux vivants*, and prizes were put up (wethers of different shapes and sizes) for the most 'beautiful, honourable and intelligible' ones. In the end, seven tableaux were staged, two by the local chamber of rhetoricians, called *De Lelie* – especially instructed by the town administration to prepare 'something special' (*wat propers*) in honour of the new lord (LRA, HSD: no. 2890) – and the rest by other 'neighbours'. But eventually the first prize was won by the 'young priests' of Saint Sulpice, the main church of Diest. Although we do not know the exact themes of the *tableaux*, it is striking that even a relatively small town like Diest had the means and imagination to communicate with its new lord in a performative way. A universal theme in the *tableaux* staged during princely Joyous Entries was 'just administration', with *exempla* from Antiquity, the Bible, and imperial or dynastic (Brabantine) history (Damen – Overlaet, 2019). But equally, local religious or even seigniorial topics may have been an inspiration for the Diest citizens.

The next step of the entry was the church of Saint Sulpice, which was 'decorated in a princely manner'. There Nassau prayed before the main altar and was administered the oath on the Bible by Van der Capellen, the pensionary, promising to righteously uphold God's laws and the Holy Church. Remarkably, Nassau 'with his nobles' left the church only halfway through the *Te Deum laudamus*. They rode to the staircase of the city hall 'between the two lions', where a scaffold had been built, draped all over with tapestries, illuminated with torches, and adorned with three coats of arms complete with their crests: in the middle that of Nassau, with the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece (Illustration X.4); on the right-hand side that of the lord of Diest, *or* two bars *sable*, no longer in use since the death of Thomas van Diest (+1432); and on the left-hand side that of the town of Diest, *argent* two bars *sable*. Nassau was thus heraldically connected both with the older, extinct seigniorial lineage of the lords of Diest and with the town, although he would never incorporate the arms of Diest into his own coat of arms; his forefathers had similarly not incorporated the arms of the ancient lords and town of Breda. In this setting Van der Capellen explained to the crowd the interchange of lordships which had taken place between the duke of Jülich and the count of Nassau. He then asked Nassau to affirm that he was willing to uphold the charters and privileges which the lords of Diest and the dukes and duchesses of Brabant had granted the town 'insofar as they are devout, reasonable and appropriate for your honour'. Nassau promised this with an oath on the Bible and on all the saints. At that point it was the turn of the citizens, who were asked to raise their finger and take the oath of loyalty to the new lord and 'to do everything that a good, loyal subject is obliged to do for his rightful lord'. Subsequently, Nassau retired to the Averbode residence.



Illustration X.4 Coat of arms of Engelbrecht II van Nassau, adorned with a crest and the collar of the Golden Fleece. The quartered arms represent the counties of Nassau ([I] and [IV]: azure billetty a lion rampant or) and Vianden ([II] and [III]: gules a fess argent). *Wapenboek Nassau-Vianden*, c. 1490, The Hague, National Library, KB 1900 A 016, fol. 2r

Source: <https://www.kb.nl/nassauvianden> (public domain).

Gift exchange and seigniorial subsidies

The exchange of oaths was clearly the central part of any Joyous Entry, by which both the lord and the subjects agreed a legal contract. The particular ritual of homage had feudal roots and consisted of 'a mutual promise of protection on one hand and fidelity and support on the other' (Arnade, 1996: 129-130; Blockmans – Donckers, 1999: 85). The feudal nature of the entry was reinforced by the gift-giving afterwards. In the evening, representatives of the town donated five and a half *aam* of Rhenish wine (c. 850 liters): an enormous quantity, which could be used for redistribution and which is indicative of the grandeur of Nassau's household and following. Although this gift surpassed the wine gift offered to duke Philip the Good in 1431 (four *aam* Rhinewine), it could not match that for Charles the Bold in 1467, who received the same four *aam*, but also another three *aam* of red wine from Beaune (*Belnensis*) (Raymaekers, 1861: 417, 424). We do not know whether there was a joint dinner that evening in the town hall, as was the custom during princely entries. In any case, the next day, Monday 23 September, the much-debated morning gift was presented to Nassau. Needless to say that the coats of arms of the town were engraved on the three silver pitchers with gilded borders, to remind the recipient of the giver. In that respect, the gifts of silverware also functioned as an important means of urban self-representation (Groebner, 2002: 32).

After mid-day, the butchers presented Nassau with a 'very big and high ox', together with twelve rams. The fact that the butchers were the only craftsmen who offered a separate gift underlines their status as the most important and probably the wealthiest guild of the town. Still, an ox was a customary entry gift for towns to present to princes in the later Middle Ages (Smit, 1995: 334). This shows that the gifts offered to Nassau fitted into the normal late medieval gift pattern during Joyous Entries and were meant to establish a political relationship between the subjects and the new lord. Whereas consumable gifts can be linked to the princely right of lodging in places he passed on his itinerary, the more luxurious gifts refer to tokens of honour offered by the host. The silverware represented the generosity and the (ostensible) prosperity of the town; together with the wine, this indicates the importance of ritual drinking in the context of political negotiations (Smit, 1995: 331-342; Schenk, 2003: 392; Lecuppre-Desjardin, 2004: 126).

Later that same week, the villages of the lordship offered separate gifts 'as was the custom' to subaltern officers of Nassau: his chamberlain, secretary, cook, groom, cupbearer, messenger and seven others received one to twenty Rhenish guilders, totalling 104 Rhenish guilders. Others, who had requested a gift later, were refused (these included the local reeve, the steward, another chamberlain, the herald and doorkeepers). Parallel to what happened at Joyous Entries of princes, the tradition of entry gifts for a new lord trickled down to lower levels in the official hierarchy. Brokers who could provide access (court officials) and produce or transport information (scribes, messengers), especially, were crucial for an urban elite who wanted to gain access to the new lord. Heralds and

musicians could perform similar services; as 'sign bearers', they represented a direct link to the lord (Groebner, 2002: 37-38, 142-143). For this reason, they could count on a gift not only for a specific service or performance, but also on the occasion of an entry. With a new lord, the networks of officers in his service changed. For the urban elites, these officers were the face of local lordship, since the new lord was normally absent. It was important for the town, therefore, to establish a good relationship with these officers. The offering of hospitality, and gifts of money and wine was the starting point for this relationship.

All these gifts can be characterised as personalised items in a broader process of give-and-take, of which by far the most important were the negotiations on subsidies for the new lord in exchange for privileges for the town, or the confirmation of existing privileges (Damen, 2007). The staging of the *tableaux vivants* should also be considered in this light: they undoubtedly communicated the message of a new lord as the saviour of a town in decline and discord, hoping to recover economic growth and political stability. This petition for help came from the notion of the legal contract that the lord had with his subjects. Thus, material gifts were only a supplement to a political message that the town wanted to communicate to its ruler. Of course, Diest's bargaining position was not very good, given the period of political turmoil in the past – of which Nassau was very well aware – and given that the new lord had acquired the lordship not by inheritance, but by paying for it.

It was only on 24 September that the actual negotiations began in the city hall. Nassau's benevolent approach towards the town did not come cheap. He – or rather his officers and some high-ranking princely officers – demanded a special tax of 15,000 Rhenish guilders from Diest, Zichem and all the villages pertaining to his lordship, which was 'an old custom and privilege that one used to help a new lord upon his joyous entry'. It was the equivalent of 60,000 daily wages of the master mason mentioned above. Traditionally, a prince in the Netherlands could demand a subsidy from his subjects for a specific reason, for example when he was knighted, on the occasion of his wedding, or for the payment of a ransom, the so-called *cas féodaux*. However, every principality had its own tradition in this respect, and within a principality differences existed between the privileges of the towns (Stein, 2014: 246-251). As a comparison: in 1494, Jan III van Glimes requested (and received) from the town of Bergen op Zoom 18,000 Rhenish guilders, to be paid over a period of nine years (Van Ham, 1988: 103). In 1502, Nassau equally asked Breda for 15,000 Rhenish guilders, to be paid within five years, although the exact reason for this subsidy is unknown (Cerutti, 1976: 220). It shows that occasional lordly subsidies, like their princely equivalent, were converted into more regular taxes around the turn of the century.

The terminology used by Nassau is revealing, since he frames the subsidy as a special help (*hulpe*) for his inauguration. The sum of money demanded is not large, the nobleman points out, taking into consideration the 100,000 Rhenish guilders he had spent on the exchange of lordships with the duke of Julich and his imprisonment in France. This is an important point, since the payment of

ransoms was one of the acknowledged *cas féodaux* for petitioning subjects for a subsidy.¹⁶ Although the ransoms Nassau had to pay for his twofold imprisonment were undoubtedly important for the justification of the special subsidy, the scribe of the report was not so certain of when this had happened. The original text read that this was '6 or 7 years' ago, but it was struck out and corrected to '16 years'. In fact, Nassau was imprisoned in Strasbourg after the battle of Nancy in 1477. The ransom, normally established according to the status and the income of the prisoner (Ambühl, 2013: 129-130), was set at 50,000 Rhenish guilders. He raised the money by levying annuities on some of his lands in the lordship of Breda. In 1488 he was imprisoned again during the battle of Béthune, and this time he had to pay much more for his ransom, some 112,000 Rhenish guilders. Again, he levied annuities on his lands and even pawned his lordship of Vianden to his brother Jan V van Nassau in order to pay the King of France (De Win, 1991: 90-91; Vosters, 1993: 25-26). Apart from his ransom, Nassau made it clear that he had noted that there was discord in the town, which was bad for the town's welfare and caused him some concern since the town had briefly belonged to his forebears. This was an allusion not only to his mother, Maria van Loon, who contracted her marriage to Jan IV in Diest (Paquay, 1990: 138), but probably also to Johan II van Nassau-Saarbrücken. Therefore, he considered it a primary task to establish concord (*eendrachticheit*) in the town and to return to a good administrative policy (*goeden politiën*) for the benefit of the urban economy. He certainly aimed to be a good lord for his town and to put an end to the instable political situation, but evidently that help came at a cost.

Negotiations were carried out by a delegation of heavyweights in the ducal administration: the *meier* of Leuven, the aforementioned margrave of Antwerp, the *drossaard* of Brabant, and two members of the Council of Brabant. To put pressure on the urban representatives, they demanded a quick answer (*cort antworde*). Zichem and the villages agreed immediately, although they asked to pay the total amount in five terms of one year rather than in three, as proposed by Nassau. Interestingly, the representatives of Diest insisted that they wanted to consult the citizens (*gemeynte*) and convened the twenty-two craft guilds in the convent of the friars minor at two o'clock that same afternoon. In the end, two representatives of each craft guild brought the affirmative answer to the town hall. In the report, all the names of the craftsmen are mentioned – except for three of which *nemo venit* – to show the general consensus on the new tax. The craft guilds were clearly not in a position to refuse to pay the subsidy; the more or less 'democratic' procedures on which they insisted were probably intended to create public support for the new taxes. Diest eventually agreed to pay two-thirds of the required sum of 15,000 Rhenish guilders, to be paid in five annual terms and financed in large part through the sale of survivor annuities (Peeters, 1980:

¹⁶ In 1369, the town of Diest had paid almost a third of the ransom needed by Hendrik van Diest, the then lord of Diest, to be released from captivity in Holland. However, the town recovered the money by withholding an annual sum from the rents due to the lord (Peeters, 1980: 106).

398-399). Needless to say, this imposed a heavy financial burden on the town for years to come. Hence, the political dialogue took place on different levels: on the one hand between the new lord and the urban elites, and on the other hand between the urban elites and the 'ordinary citizens', who would actually have to pay the taxes. In that sense, the form and function of a seigniorial and princely entry were quite similar.

Conclusion

The creation of a seigniorial complex under the dynasty of the Nassaus in the fifteenth century can mainly be attributed to a well-executed matrimonial policy, and the availability of male heirs for continuity. The combination of strategy and biological coincidence was crucial in this respect. When Engelbrecht II died without legitimate heirs in 1504 – of *treponematosi* (syphilis), as physical-anthropological research has demonstrated (Maat – Mastwijk, 1997: 44) – his lordships in the Netherlands were inherited by Hendrik III van Nassau (1483-1538), the son of his brother Jan V. This secured the presence of the Nassau dynasty in Diest, Breda and Grimbergen. The Nassaus were loyal servants of the Burgundian and Habsburg princes, and the state machinery will certainly have helped them now and then – as the inauguration in Diest has showed – but the acquisition of these lordships was entirely their own merit. It was only in the sixteenth century that the Nassaus contracted marriages in the francophone area of the Habsburg state. Their preference in the fifteenth century for brides from the Dutch- and German-speaking areas and the Rhine and Meuse area was motivated by finding partners of equal social status who could preserve or even extend their interests in the county of Nassau and its immediate surroundings, although the language issue may also have played a role.

The significance of the lordships of Breda, Grimbergen and Diest for the Nassaus was political, social, economic and symbolic. The high status of these banneret lordships meant influence at the princely court, since the bannerets were important political advisors and crucial for the mobilisation of the ducal army. It is hard to evaluate the economic importance of these feudal possessions, but the annual revenues were substantial and these lordships can be ranked among the most profitable of the Netherlands. The range of seigniorial rights, together with high jurisdiction, not only meant a regular income, but also confirmed these high-ranking noblemen in their status as bannerets for thousands of subjects. Furthermore, hundreds of subvassals, some of them exercising high jurisdiction themselves, were dependent on the Nassaus as banneret lords. All this gave the Nassaus a strong position in the lordships and vis-à-vis the dukes of Brabant, their liege lords. Since, because of Nassau, they were already counts in their own right, it was not necessary to increase the status of their lordships as happened with other banneret lordships like Aarschot (1518: margraveship), Hoogstraten

(1518: county) and Bergen op Zoom (1533: margraveship) (Van Uytven, 1976: 111-112).

The link with the urban centres of their lordships becomes apparent when we analyse the ceremonial entry of Engelbrecht II van Nassau into Diest in 1499. The Joyous Entry of a noble lord into a town was characterised by a complex process of political negotiations, gift-giving and feudal rituals. The town was concerned for its honour and reputation and offered the new lord hospitality, public space, an oath of allegiance, and gifts in exchange for the lord's physical presence, confirmation of local privileges, and an oath to protect the town's interests. At first sight, there was something approximating balanced reciprocity; of course the new lord could act as the town's personal broker at the princely court, but the newly conceded subsidies were far more than the town could afford. In that sense, but also in many other ways, a seigniorial entry shows many similarities with that of a new prince. During the physical encounter, the aspired political position of the new lord on the one hand, and the urban elite and the craft guilds on the other, were presented, represented and recorded in several ways. There were public events, like the handing over of the keys of the town, the procession into the town, the staging of *tableaux vivants*, the visit to the local church, and a ceremony in the main square, in which mutual oaths of loyalty were exchanged. But the memorial aspect of the event was important: all was set down for eternity in charters, accounts and chronicles. The audiences of the public events and the written evidence overlapped and differed at the same time. In this way, the nature of seigniorial lordship was recorded and served as a source of inspiration for future lords.

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