

Revolt and the Manipulation of Sacral and Private Space in 12th-Century Laon and Bruges

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the highly original testimony of the Benedictine abbot Guibert of Nogent and the cleric Galbert of Bruges we are well informed about the communal revolt in Laon in 1112, where bishop Gaudry was killed, and on the brutal events in Flanders after the murder of count Charles the Good in the church of St Donatian in Bruges in 1127. In this chapter I analyse some aspects of the way in which the urban space was ‘manipulated’ and ‘consumed’ in the course of these bloody 12th-century uprisings. I will focus on two recurrent patterns in the dynamics of urban spatiality in Laon and Bruges: firstly, the phenomenon of assassinations in or close to sacral buildings, which, from the sources, appears almost as a ritual transgression, pregnant with symbolic meaning, and then, the practice of destroying and burning private houses, which seems to be, at first sight, an example of rather blind and unreasonable action in a spiral of violence. Yet both these interpretations need serious qualification.

Samenvatting

Dankzij de hoogst originele getuigenissen van de benedictijner abt Guibert van Nogent en van de clericus Galbert van Brugge zijn we bijzonder goed geïnformeerd over de communale revolte in Laon uit 1112 tijdens de welke bisschop Gauderic werd vermoord en over de gebeurtenissen in Vlaanderen na de moord op Karel de Goede in de kerk van St.-Donatiaan in Brugge in 1127. In deze bijdrage wordt ingegaan op enkele aspecten die deel uitmaken van de wijze waarop de stedelijke ruimte in dergelijke bloedige opstanden uit de vroege twaalfde eeuw werd ‘gemanipuleerd’ en ‘geconsumeerd’. De focus ligt hierbij op twee terugkerende patronen uit de dynamiek van de ruimtelijkheid in Laon en Brugge: het fenomeen van politieke moorden in of nabij sacrale gebouwen dat in de bronnen haast als een vorm van rituele transgressie wordt beschreven, beladen met symbolische betekenis, en de praktijk van het vernielen en verbranden van private woningen, hetgeen op het eerste gezicht een voorbeeld lijkt te zijn van blinde en onredelijke woede binnen een spiraal van

geweld. Deze beide interpretaties, die ons door onze middeleeuwse getuigen worden voorgeschoteld, dienen echter ernstig te worden genuanceerd.

The rise of towns constitutes one of the most important spatial and empowering developments of the Western Middle Ages. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's neo-marxist insights, the American medievalist Martha Howell rightly states that the medieval city was "not just a creation in space but a creation of space" and that this space should be considered therefore "a social production"¹. Indeed, the medieval city not only gradually distinguished itself architecturally as a fortified island, surrounded by city walls, in the feudal countryside². It was also becoming the locus for the rise of merchant capitalism, of renewed definitions of personal freedom and of the earliest articulations of sovereignty of the people in the West³. Urban development went hand in hand with the development of completely new daily practices and group identities⁴. While from the 10th century onwards, the first examples surfaced in north-west Europe of rebellions by sworn associations of *ministeriales* of town lords, especially in old episcopal towns like Liege or Cambrai, we can notice how, in the late 11th century, several examples are known, between the Loire and the Rhine, of confederacies of merchants and craftsmen, who gradually managed to extort real town privileges – often called Peaces – from their feudal lords⁵. According to several borough charters, this new kind of freedom was often granted to every individual who had stayed within the town for one year and a day: new citizens were then finally liberated from all of the economic and legal constraints that pertained to the status of serfs on the feudal demesne. In north-west Europe, this principle emerged from several charters from the middle of the 12th century onwards⁶. Hence, and especially according to a rather romanticised view, cities seemed to become not only the cradles of the revival of commerce and entrepreneurship, but also islands of relative peace in a society dominated by legal uncertainty and feudal violence⁷.

The struggle for urban freedom during the so-called 'communal' era of the second half of the 11th and the first half of the 12th centuries, however, was often realised through conflict and violence, typical of the warrior mentality by which the whole society was still impregnated⁸. During these events, the urban space was often subjected to unusual forms of appropriation, two of which are treated in this chapter. Several examples are known from that period of urban revolts, a few of them even involving cases of important political assassinations of representatives of the old feudal power. These acts of brutal and shocking violence inspired the writing of two of the most personal texts from the 12th century, the *Monodiae* or *De vita sua* by Guibert of Nogent and the *De multro, traditione, et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriae* by Galbert of Bruges, which are today among the classics of 12th century writing⁹. The *Monodiae* – literally 'solitary songs' – were written by the rather conservative Benedictine abbot Guibert of Nogent shortly after an important communal revolt in the northern French city of Laon in 1112, where, among others, the bishop of the town had been assassinated. In order to

come to a good understanding and explanation of the events in Laon, Guibert not only described the revolt itself in detail; in his analysis of the failed ecclesiastical leadership of his time, he also included his own personal life history, preceding his account with one of the oldest known autobiographies of the Middle Ages, written after the example of Augustine's late-antique *Confessiones*¹⁰. The *De multro*, on the other hand, was written by Galbert of Bruges after the unexpected murder of the Flemish count Charles the Good on 2 March 1127 in the Bruges church of St. Donation. For two months after the murder, Galbert, a cleric in the count's fiscal administration, kept a kind of 'journal' – now lost – of the confusing events he was witnessing in the aftermath of the murder. In the summer and autumn of 1127, he reworked his daily notes, added some extra chapters and prefaced his text by a prologue. After the outbreak of civil war in Flanders in 1128, due to a succession crisis after the murder, Galbert resumed his work to record the new developments on a regular basis until the installation, in the summer of 1128, of the new count, Thierry of Alsace¹¹.

Though evidently influenced by the ecclesiastical backgrounds of their authors – a Benedictine monk with rural, aristocratic roots and a cleric living in an urban context respectively – the texts of Guibert and Galbert offer a very real insight into the chronology and the nature of these events and, more specifically, into the role played by the urban space during these moments of violence¹². Therefore, their texts allow also to proceed with what Michel Foucault in 1967 called a "reading" of spaces¹³. In particular, I will analyse some aspects of the way in which the urban space was 'manipulated' and 'consumed', i.e. how its ordinary functions were changed and how it became the arena for a redefinition of the existing power relations in the course of these bloody 12th century uprisings¹⁴. The focus of this chapter – which is not more than a sketch – will be on two recurrent patterns in the dynamics of urban spatiality in Laon and Bruges. Firstly, I will briefly explore the phenomenon of assassinations in or close to sacral buildings, which, from the sources, appears almost as a ritual transgression, pregnant with symbolic meaning. Then I will have a closer look at the practice of destroying and burning private houses, which seems, at first sight, to be an example of rather blind and unreasonable actions in a spiral of violence. Although I will make use of ample excerpts from my two main sources, it is not my aim simply to describe these practices as they are perceived through the eyes of Guibert and by Galbert, but also to try to assess their actual meaning within the social dynamics of the early 12th century. However, in order to offer sufficient contextual background, I need to start with a brief outline of the historical developments.

STRUGGLING FOR FREEDOM IN LAON AND BRUGES

The events in both Laon and Bruges were typical of the 11th and 12th century context of social mobility, rising commercial interests, urbanisation and the difficult intercourse

between the new groups of townsmen struggling for personal freedom and the representatives of the old feudal authority. In Laon, an old royal episcopal town, tensions were growing between at least four different parties: the varied citizen groups – of free and non-free men –, the regional nobility, the ecclesiastical authorities headed by the bishop, and the French royal authorities¹⁵. After the difficult election of the new bishop Gaudry in 1106, an avaricious man with strong ties to the English crown, Laon became gradually more violent and less secure. Tired of this atmosphere which caused a lot of harm to their commercial activities and during an absence of bishop Gaudry, the citizens finally managed to install a ‘commune’, which was accepted by the local religious elites, as the latter hoped to make increased profits out of the agreement. Guibert of Nogent’s definition of this commune has become very famous among medieval historians, despite the fact that it is coloured by his strong moral denunciation of the novelty of this emancipating social institution:

Commune: a new and evil name for an arrangement for them all to pay the customary head tax, which they owe their lords as a servile due, in a lump sum once a year, and if anyone commits a crime, he shall pay a fine set by law, and all other financial exactions which are customarily imposed on serfs are completely abolished¹⁶.

The agreement implied a sworn oath between the citizens and the town rulers. However, on his return, the bishop understood that, in the long term, this new situation would cause him to lose power and income. Hence, after promising him a bribe higher than that of the citizens, he convinced the king of France, Louis VI, to abolish the commune. Then, in April 1112, a real revolt broke out, in which Gaudry and a few other notable men were lynched. The cathedral and the bishop’s palace were set on fire and the quarters of the episcopal canons were destroyed. The situation was normalised only after three years of troubles and in 1128, Laon received a royal charter of peace¹⁷.

The troubles in Bruges and Flanders took yet another turn and became even more complicated¹⁸. There, the feudal monarch, Charles, count of Flanders, was supported by the majority of his subjects, as he had succeeded in limiting the needless use of violence in the county and in bringing internal peace. However, in 1091, nearly thirty years before Charles came to power, the direction of the county’s demesnes and fiscal collections had fallen into the hands of a certain Bertulf, provost of the count’s chapter of St. Donatian and, in that position, chancellor of the county administration. Bertulf belonged to the clan of the Erembalds, a family of former non-free men, who had taken advantage of the possibilities of moving up socially and who had managed to dominate all kinds of important secular and ecclesiastical functions in the county. Charles hoped to break their power and return them to serfdom, but the Erembalds were very well aware of the count’s threat. At the instigation of Bertulf and his nephew Borsiard, they conspired against Charles and killed him in March 1127. However, after the murder of Charles, the Erembald clan quickly lost control of the situation. Some of the murderers and traitors, among them the provost Bertulf, succeeded in escaping from Bruges, but they were

later captured and executed. Others held out under siege for a month and a half, but were finally captured as well. Because Charles had no children of his own and never had named a successor, central authority broke down in a chaos of lawlessness and looting. However, despite the existence of several candidates, the same Louis VI, who had also been implicated in the earlier events in Laon, succeeded in having a new count elected within just a few weeks. It looked as if the unproblematic election of this new count, William Clito, and the final punishment of the traitors had resolved the political impasse in Flanders rather quickly. Yet William became more and more compromised as he refused to respect the privileges that he had accorded to the Flemish towns, and his dispute with king Henry I of England threatened the good economic relations between England and Flanders. In 1128, civil war broke out. Among the several challengers to William, one pretender moved to the fore: Thierry of Alsace, another blood relative of the murdered Charles. Supported by a coalition of townsmen and some nobles, he ended up, at the end of July 1128, as William's successor, after the latter's sudden death on the battlefield.

ASSASSINATIONS IN SANCTUARIES

The events on which we are so richly informed by Guibert of Nogent and Galbert of Bruges show several remarkable similarities. Both texts offer testimonies of uprisings which took place within an interval of only fifteen years and at only some 200 kilometres from each other. In the case of Laon as well as of Bruges we are confronted with political murders of important representatives of the old feudal power, a bishop and a count. It turns out moreover that in these two cases the actual killings were carried out under the direction of men of non-free origin who had been able to climb upwards socially. Bishop Gaudry of Laon was murdered after having been discovered in his hide-out by a certain Thiégaud, a serf of the abbey of St Vincent who had enriched himself as toll collector and who had committed himself to the commune¹⁹. In Bruges, it was one of the Erembalds, namely Borsiard, who, with his men, had slaughtered count Charles the Good²⁰. Yet the most striking parallel, which is also highly significant for the issue of spatiality, is the fact that in Guibert's work as well as in Galbert's, we are dealing with murder scenarios which had occurred in or near important churches: in Laon, the cathedral of Notre Dame, in Bruges the important count's church of St. Donatian. Both in Laon and in Bruges, people were confronted, in other words, with a double desecration. Princes were being killed who were considered representatives of the divine power and these ignominies had also occurred in public sacred places, which were symbols of God's presence on earth. This combination of brutality and desecration seems to have shocked a lot of contemporaries, not the least the authors of our sources, Guibert and Galbert, who have given a great deal of detailed attention to the description of precisely these violent acts and to the interpretation of their meaning.

In Laon, the assassination of bishop Gaudry constituted the culminating point of a spiral of violence which had started in 1111, when Gaudry himself had ordered his men to kill, during his own absence, a certain Gérard of Quierzy, a royal castellan, with whom he was embroiled, in the cathedral of Laon. This murder would finally also seal Gaudry's own fate. It was hence described in detail by Guibert who judged it the consequence of a highly sacrilegious oath:

Dressed in this mantle over a robe of Tyrian purple, he [Gérard] went on horseback with some of his knights to the church. After entering, he stopped before the image of the crucified Lord, his followers dispersed here and there among various altars to the saints, and the servants of the conspirators kept an eye on them. Word was then sent to the household of the bishop in the episcopal palace that Gérard of Quierzy – as he was called, since he was lord of that castle – had come to the church to pray. Carrying their swords under their cloaks, the bishop's brother Rorigon and others went through the vaulted ambulatory to the place where he was praying. He was stationed at the foot of a column, called a pillar, a few columns away from the pulpit, at about the middle of the church. While the morning was still dark and there were few people to be seen in the great church, they seized the man from behind as he prayed. He was praying with the fastening of his cloak thrown behind and his hands clasped on his breast. Seizing the cloak from behind, one of them held him in it like a sack so that he could not easily move his hands. When the bishop's steward had seized him in this fashion, he said, "You are taken". With his usual fierceness, Gérard turned his eye round on him (for he had only one) and looking at him said, "Get out of here, you dirty lecher!" But the steward said to Rorigon, "Strike!" and, drawing his sword with his left hand, he wounded him between the nose and the brow. Knowing he was done for, Gérard said, "Take me wherever you want". Then as they stabbed at him repeatedly and pressed him hard, in desperation he cried out with all his strength, "Holy Mary, aid me!" Saying this, he fell in extreme suffering²¹.

When one year later, Gaudry had himself become the victim of the violence which he had primed, Guibert focuses on a striking parallel. The attack on Gaudry on 25 April 1112 was brought about after a furious crowd of citizens had accessed the episcopal palace "through the nave of the cathedral of Notre-Dame and through the very door by which Gérard's killers had come and gone"²². After having fought back for a while, Gaudry – who in the eyes of Guibert was anything but a hero! – escaped to the storage cellar of the cathedral where he hid himself in a container. Being discovered there by the above mentioned Thiégaud, he was dragged outside the building and cruelly slaughtered in a narrow lane.

In Galbert of Bruges' report of the carefully planned assassination of count Charles the Good, we recognise easily the scenario which had also been followed in the murder of Gérard of Quierzy, in which the conspirators wanted to surprise their victim in the early morning in the church:

Therefore when day had dawned, so dark and foggy that you could not distinguish anything a spear's length away, Borsiard secretly sent several serfs out into courtyard of the count to

watch for his entrance into the church. The count had arisen very early and had made offerings to the poor in his own house, as he was accustomed to do, and so was on his way to church. [...] And when he had set out on his way toward the church of Saint Donatian, the serfs who had been watching for his exit ran back and told the traitors that the count had gone up into the gallery of the church with a few companions. Then that raging Borsiard and his knights and servants, all with drawn swords beneath their cloaks, followed the count into the same gallery, dividing into two groups so that not one of those whom they wished to kill could escape from the gallery by either way, and behold! they saw the count prostrate before the altar, on a low stool, where he was chanting psalms to God and at the same time devoutly offering prayers and giving out pennies to the poor²³.

However, from a passage a little later on in his account, in which he depicts the dying count, we can deduce how Galbert turned the sacral setting of this murder into an excellent opportunity to portray Charles the Good as a true and Christlike martyr for justice:

The office of the first hour was completed and also the response of the third hour, when Paternoster is said, and when the count, according to custom, was praying, reading aloud obligingly; then at last, after so many plans and oaths and pacts among themselves, those wretched traitors, already murderers at heart, slew the count, who was struck down with swords and run through again and again, while he was praying devoutly and giving alms, humbly kneeling before the Divine Majesty. And so God gave the palm of the martyrs to the count, the course of whose good life was washed clean in the rivulets of his blood and brought to an end in good works. In the final moment of his life and at the onset of death, he most nobly had lifted his countenance and his royal hands to heaven, as well as he could amid so many blows and thrusts of the swordsmen; and so he surrendered his spirit to the Lord of all and offered himself as a morning sacrifice to God²⁴.

Galbert was moreover not the only author who immediately tried to sanctify the assassinated count. In the same month as Galbert's text, a truly hagiographical account of Charles's *passio* was also written, commissioned by no less a person than John of Warneton, bishop of Thérouanne²⁵.

If we return to our comparison between Guibert and Galbert, it is especially noticeable that both authors developed very similar interpretations of the political murders which they experienced, considering them highly symbolical events. Both searched for an explanation in the distant past, in which God's anger was aroused. For Guibert, the murder of Gaudry and the tragedy of Laon constituted a punishment for the support by bishop Adalbéron of Laon for king Hugh Capet, who, in 987, had wrongfully wrested power from the old Carolingian dynasty. Galbert, on the other hand, considered the murder of Charles and the fate of the Erembald clan as a divine settlement of a hereditary debt dating from the 1070s, when Robert the Frisian, Charles's grandfather, had seized power illegally and when the Erembalds had begun their social promotion after the murder, by the old Erembald, of the castellan of Bruges.

It is striking that, over a short period of time historically speaking, several political murders took place in or around churches, which were functioning at the same time as *lieux de mémoire* for the most famous assassination in the history of Christianity, the passion of Christ. Some of these medieval murders even resulted in successful canonisations. The most famous example of such a martyr is that of Thomas Becket who was killed in Canterbury in 1170. Yet it is noticeable too that Charles the Good's own father, king Canute IV of Denmark, was also killed in 1086 in St. Alban's church in Odense by rebellious nobles and that he was soon considered as the 'protomartyr' of recently Christianised Scandinavia. Can these examples, with their very specific spatial context, reinforce a rather ritualistic approach to the phenomenon of medieval political assassination²⁶? While one could be tempted to consider murders in sanctuaries as deliberate attempts to desacralise those settings or to show that the violence was legitimised by God, I think we should also keep in mind some very down-to-earth reasons. From ancient times, churches and other religious buildings had constituted public spaces where violence was to be banned, where asylum could be found and where a potential, unarmed victim should normally find himself protected by the sacred setting²⁷. However, from the Early Middle Ages onwards, violation of church asylum constituted a highly efficient act in private warfare. Sacred services in sanctuaries, moreover, were usually organised following a strict timetable, which allowed the planning of a murder very carefully, especially in the medieval context when clocks were introduced in the civic life only from the thirteenth century onwards²⁸. Yet, while political murders in sanctuaries were inspired often by practical motives rather than by an aspiration to ritual murder, it is of course noticeable that the double demystification they brought about – murder and desecration – introduced a very strong tension into the narration and catharsis of these shocking events. It is, in other words, the 'poetics' rather than the 'politics' of transgression that attempt the ritualisation of the events²⁹. The original character of both the works of Guibert and of Galbert proves how such a purging of emotions was frequently realised in a very innovative way³⁰.

DESTROYING HOUSES

A second particular expression of the consumption of space in the development of rebellion in Laon and Flanders, and which was also a recurrent pattern in medieval situations of feudmaking, is the repeated demolition and burning of private houses in and outside the town. While we noticed that authors like Guibert and Galbert were strongly inclined to interpret their cases of murder in a sanctuary as pregnant with divine meaning, it turns out that these same clerical witnesses were much less insistent on uncovering symbolically important scenarios in their reports of the destruction of houses. This is particularly the case for Guibert of Nogent, for whom the burning of houses was but part of a logic of blind violence, retaliation or spontaneous plundering. His appreciation of these practices was still in line with the spirit which can be found

in the Peace of God movement of the late 10th and the early 11th centuries, through which the Church tried to regulate feudal violence to its own advantage. In Beauvais in 1023, for instance, such a peace oath had been formulated by bishop Warin and proposed to king Louis the Pious, in which, among other things, the burning and destroying of houses was prohibited unless there was an enemy horseman or thief within it³¹. Guibert sighs, for example, when he is speaking of the violent feudmaking between Enguerrand of Boves, lord of Coucy near Laon, and the latter's kinsman, count Godfrey of Namur, who were competing for the same woman: "who can tell of the looting and burning that broke out on both sides and the other things that such a storm usually brings forth?"³². And while describing the citizens of Laon who had fled from the town, he remarks, full of aversion: "those who had fled from it had pillaged and burned the houses of the clergy and nobles whom they hated, but now the remaining nobles seized all the property and equipment of the refugees, even down to the locks and bolts"³³.

In this last description, Guibert points to a clear causal connection between the destructive behaviour of the inhabitants of Laon, both citizens as well as nobles, and the feelings of hate between them. In the last ten to fifteen years, however, pathbreaking research has been done into the role emotions played in medieval conflict management³⁴. Historians such as Barbara Rosenwein, Stephen White and Paul Hyams have managed to correct in particular the old representation of the Middle Ages as a period in which uncontrolled emotions were supposed to have functioned as the catalysts for completely immature behaviour and irrational violence. On the contrary, based upon recent insights from cultural anthropology as well as from cognitive psychology and neurosciences, they maintain that emotions like rancour, anger or shame played an important role in the creation and reproduction of identities, social relations etc., and that they should not at all be considered as indicators of anarchist or uncontrolled social behaviour³⁵.

Yet the practice of destroying or burning houses can also be approached from the point of view of legal history, which teaches us that in certain cases it had nothing to do with spontaneous disorder. The so-called *destructio* or *incendio* had its origin in the common law of several West Germanic peoples. From the Early Middle Ages onwards, it was considered a kind of ceremonial legal measure to purge the community from the house and hearth of its criminals, who were thus degraded to "peaceless men" and exiles³⁶. In the *Capitulare Saxonicum* of 798, for example, Charlemagne forbade the burning of houses in the context of private acts of revenge, but he stipulated that the *incendio* was a legal means to punish criminals who refused to subject themselves to the law, on the condition that the punishment be adopted unanimously by the whole community³⁷. This customary law continued to be effective during the High Middle Ages. It was hence most likely that this old, customary practice was applied in the case of Galbert of Bruges' description of how the chamberlain Isaac, one of the main Erembald conspirators, fled on 9 March 1127 from his house just outside the *suburbium* of Bruges:

Isaac, because he knew that he was accessory to the crime and damned himself for it, and was driven by fear of death, took to flight with only his squire, and so did his wife and serfs, men and women, and all his household; and wherever they happened to find themselves in that difficult flight by night, there they hid. The house and manor and more valuable equipment, and other things they had once held in freedom and power, they now abandoned heedlessly and left as plunder for the enemy. On hearing this, at early dawn, the castellan of Ghent and Ivan rushed out from the siege with a crowd, seizing everything useful they found that could be carried off. Finally, by placing burning torches under the roofs they set fire to the house and farm buildings, and whatever they found there that could be destroyed by fire³⁸.

In the development of criminal law during the High Middle Ages, it was princes who, in the first place, reserved for themselves the right to apply the *destructio* in order to punish serious crimes and to destroy those who managed to escape from their justice. Raoul Van Caenegem has clearly shown, for example, how the Flemish counts carried out the destruction of private fortresses in order to neutralise robber knights who were terrorising their surroundings³⁹. Galbert of Bruges, who seems to have been very experienced in legal matters, was completely convinced of the legitimacy of the *destructio* as a means of princely power. That becomes clear from his account of the way in which Charles the Good, in February 1127, ordered the complete destruction of the house of Erembald Borsiard, a knight who was reputed to be a dangerous robber and who would become Charles's assassin a few weeks later:

After listening solemnly to the complaints of those appealing to him, the count summoned his counsellors, and even many who were related to the provost, asking them by what punishment and with what degree of severity justice should deal with this crime. They advised him to burn down Borsiard's house without delay because he had plundered the peasants of the count; and therefore strongly urged him to destroy that house because as long as it stood, so long would Borsiard indulge in fighting and pillaging and even killing, and would continue to lay waste the region. And so the count, acting on this advice, went and burned the house and destroyed the place to its foundations⁴⁰.

Also in the episcopal town of Laon, it appears that the highest, royal power was able to impose similar punishments. Guibert does not say that in so many words, but from his account of how the royal representatives in Laon had reacted after the murder of Gérard of Quierzy, it can be deduced that the burning of houses was related to some kind of punishment and banishment:

At this the royal *prévôt*, a very capable man named Ivo, summoned the king's man and the burghers of the abbey of Saint-Jean, of which Gérard had been the guardian. They attacked the houses of those who had taken the oath to the conspiracy, plundering and burning and driving them out of the city⁴¹.

However, not only princes relied on these means during the High Middle Ages, as we already noted in the case of the demolition of the house of Borsiard. From the medieval borough charters of several towns in north-west Europe it appears that the *destructio*

was also adopted, from the early 12th century onwards, by several urban communities, with the approval of their princes, as an important instrument in the local criminal law⁴². In the vernacular, this privilege was often called the *droit d'abattis* or the *droit de faire arsin*. In the charter of Saint-Omer of 14 April 1127, issued by Charles the Good's immediate successor William Clito, an article is included, for example, in which the right of the citizens to demolish inimical buildings outside the town is specified. In the next article of this same document, count William even issues a pardon to all those who had been implied in the lynching, one week earlier, of a certain Eustace of Steenvoorde, one of the traitors of the murdered count Charles⁴³. We are actually given precise details of the way in which Eustace was punished in Galbert of Bruges' account of the events of 7 April:

On the same day, Eustace of Steenvoorde, seized earlier by the citizens in Saint-Omer and later thrown into the conflagration of the house where he had fled, was burned to ashes; being marked with the stigma of the treachery, he deserved to suffer such a death⁴⁴.

Here we notice at the same time the beginning of a tradition of punishment and cleansing which was going to persist in several towns, according to which houses had played a role in the execution of a crime – in the case of Eustace, the house which had offered him a hideout – should be destroyed⁴⁵.

As the burning of town houses was not without risk due to multiple wooden constructions in medieval cities, the actual application of this measure was rather exceptional⁴⁶. Yet the *droit d'abattis* remained one of the important representations of what Marc Boone has described as the “burghers' right to judge the private use of space within the city”, which was “one of the cornerstones of the commune's spatial expression”⁴⁷. Indeed, though several communal uprisings of the High Middle Ages seem at first sight to have been failures, especially seen through the eyes of ecclesiastical authors like Guibert of Nogent, they offered a basis for the development of a new lay urban identity which was going to confirm itself gradually, not only through administrative and legal institutions, but also through the shaping of the communal space. It was this evolution which also led to the development of a typical spatial communal infrastructure, with both practical and symbolic importance, of which market places, town gates, halls and belfries were going to become the main expressions. However, in the Late Middle Ages, in the context of growing state formation, the practice of the *destructio* was picked up again with much greater vigour by kings and great princes, such as the dukes of Burgundy, in their attempts to monopolise military and legal authority to the detriment of the urban centres of power. Yet, while this punishment had been limited until then to the demolition of individual, private buildings, we notice that, from the 1430s onwards, princes did not hesitate to humiliate complete towns by destroying the most important symbolic buildings of the local power, when urban populations were revolting too overtly against their centralising ambitions⁴⁸.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this short chapter I would like to argue that when we are trying to read the manipulation and the consumption of space during episodes of revolt, we should preferably not come too easily to interpretations in terms of symbolic transgression or popular spontaneity. If we rely too much on the discourses of our medieval witnesses, we run the risk of just simply copying their medieval ‘native anthropology’⁴⁹. I hope to have made clear, however, that there is always a tension to be discovered between historical discourse and historical event. The texts of Guibert of Nogent and of Galbert of Bruges are good examples of immensely rich sources, which, nevertheless, were not only conveyors of meaning but also and foremost creators of meaning. By comparing the way in which sacred and private space were manipulated during the revolts in Laon and Flanders in the first third of the 12th century, we should notice how our authors – with their different ideologies of a rural monk and an urban cleric respectively – were displaying very different attitudes. In their understanding of political assassination in sanctuaries they were mainly tending to embroider the divine meaning of this act of transgression. But, as we have seen, churches also offered interesting practical advantages for people with murderous plans. Even in our own times, these motivations have led to several political assassinations in or close to temples. We can think for example of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero from El Salvador, closely tied to the movement of liberation theology, who was killed on 24 March 1980 while celebrating a mass in a hospital of one of San Salvador’s outskirts and who is moreover also still standing a chance of being canonised one day by the Catholic Church⁵⁰. On the other hand, as to the practice of destroying private houses, our authors – and especially Guibert of Nogent – turned out to be far less explicit in expressing the symbolic meaning and effectiveness of these punishments. That the practice of house demolition actually does have both a symbolic significance and a strong societal effect, was even proved very recently in the occupied Palestinian territories. During the first intifada, and again between 2001 and 2005, Israel considered the destruction of the houses of Palestinians, known or suspected of attacks against Israelis, an important aspect of its policy of deterrence⁵¹. Only on 17 February 2005, Israel’s Minister of Defense announced a cessation of punitive house demolitions⁵².

NOTES

¹ M.C. Howell, *The Spaces of Late Medieval Urbanity*, in M. Boone, P. Stabel (eds.), *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe. L'apparition d'une identité urbaine dans l'Europe du bas Moyen Âge*, Studies in Urban, Economic and Political History of the Medieval and Early Modern Low Countries, 11, Leuven – Apeldoorn 2000, p. 3. See also H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris 1974; B.A. Hanawalt, M. Kobialka (eds.), *Medieval Practices of Space*, Minneapolis – London 2000. For an excellent overview of this research topic and its theoretical foundations: P. Arnade, M.C. Howell, W. Simons, *Fertile Spaces: The Productivity of Urban Space in Northern Europe*, in “Journal of Interdisciplinary History”, 2002, 32, pp. 515-548.

- ² See e.g. A. Derville, *Les villes de Flandre et d'Artois (900-1500)*, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2002; A. Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe*, Cambridge 1999.
- ³ See also, for the Late Middle Ages, M. Boone – H. Porfyriou, *Markets, Squares, Streets: Urban Space, a Tool for Cultural Exchange*, in D. Calabi, S.T. Christensen (eds.), *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400-1700*, Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, 2, Cambridge 2007, pp. 227-253.
- ⁴ See e.g. A. Saint-Denis, *L'apparition d'une identité urbaine dans les villes de commune de France du Nord aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, in Boone, Stabel (eds.), *Shaping Urban Identity cit.*, pp. 65-87.
- ⁵ For an overview, see D. Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City. From Late Antiquity to the Early Fourteenth Century*, London – New York 1997, pp. 146-152.
- ⁶ R.C. Van Caenegem, *Galbert of Bruges on Serfdom, Prosecution of Crime, and Constitutionalism (1127-1128)*, in B.S. Bachrach, D. Nicholas (eds.), *Law, Custom, and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe*, Kalamazoo 1990, pp. 97-98.
- ⁷ See e.g. the liberal view of P. Viollet, *Les communes françaises du Moyen Age*, Mémoires de l'Académie des belles-lettres, 36, Paris 1900 and the already early formulated critical notes on this approach by E. Durkheim, *Les communes françaises du Moyen Age*, in "Année sociologique", 1903, 6, pp. 338-341.
- ⁸ See A. Vermeesch, *Essai sur les origines et la signification de la commune dans le nord de la France (XIe et XIIe siècles)*, Heule 1966 and more recently K. Schultz, "Den sie lieben die Freiheit sehr..." *Kommunale Aufstände und Entstehung des Europäischen Bürgertums im Hochmittelalter*, Darmstadt 1995.
- ⁹ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and transl. E. Labande, Paris 1981; Galbertus notarius Brugensis, *De multro, traditione, et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriae*, ed. J. Rider, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 131, Turnhout 1994.
- ¹⁰ See, on the particular character of Guibert's work: T. Lemmers, *Guibert van Nogens Monodiae. Een twaalfde-eeuwse visie op kerkelijk leiderschap*, Hilversum 1998.
- ¹¹ See J. Rider, *God's Scribe. The Historiographical Art of Galbert of Bruges*, Washington 2001, pp. 29-49.
- ¹² See, especially on Guibert: L. Milis, *Monks, Canons, and the City: A Barren Relationship?*, in "Journal of Interdisciplinary History", 2002, 32, pp. 677-680.
- ¹³ M. Foucault, *Des espaces autres*, in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988. Vol. II. 1976-1988*, Paris 2001, p. 1575.
- ¹⁴ See also, though for a later period in which the urban landscape had changed already considerably: M. Boone, *Urban Space and Political Conflict in Late Medieval Flanders*, in "Journal of Interdisciplinary History", 2002, 32, pp. 621-640. In the present chapter, I summarize some thoughts – in particular on the meaning of murders in sanctuaries – formulated in J. Deploige, *Political Assassination and Sanctification. Transforming Discursive Customs after the Murder of the Flemish Count Charles the Good (1127)*, in J. Deploige, G. Deneckere (eds.), *Mystifying the Monarch. Studies on Discourse, Power, and History*, Amsterdam 2006, pp. 35-54, 238-244. Jeff Rider of Wesleyan University is currently developing this theme in a more thorough and nuanced way as in his guest lecture "Like Lambs to the Slaughter: Improvising Murder in the Twelfth Century", given 7 May 2007, Ghent University.
- ¹⁵ For an excellent analysis, see A. Saint-Denis, *Apogée d'une cité. Laon et le Laonnais aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Nancy 1994, pp. 63-146.
- ¹⁶ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie cit.*, p. 320: "Communio autem – novum ac pessimum nomen – sic se habet: ut (100) capite censi omnes solitum servitutis debitum dominis semel in anno solvant, et si quid contra jura deliquerint, pensione legali emendent, caeterae censuum exactiones, quae servis infligi solent, omnimodis vacent." English translation: J.F. Benton, *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent (1064-c 1125)*, New York 1970, p. 167.
- ¹⁷ For the text of the charter: *Recueil des actes de Louis VI, roi de France (1108-1137)*. Tome II. 1126-1137 et appendices, ed. J. Dufour, Paris 1992, pp. 88-96 (n. 277).

- ¹⁸ On these events, see among others J. Dhondt, *Les 'solidarités' médiévales. Une société en transition: La Flandre en 1127-1128*, in "Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations" 1957, 12, pp. 529-60; Van Caenegem, *Galbert of Bruges* cit.; Rider, *God's Scribe* cit.; Deplouge, *Political Assassination* cit., pp. 36-37.
- ¹⁹ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., pp. 340-342.
- ²⁰ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., pp. 29-31.
- ²¹ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., pp. 300-302: "Cum hac igitur, veste Tyria superindutus, lacerna cum aliquot equitatibus ad ecclesiam praedictam eques venit. Qui ingressus, cum ante crucifixi Domini imaginem substitisset, comitibus suis hac illac per diversas sanctorum aras euntibus, ministris conjuratorum aucupantibus, episcopi familiae in episcopio nuntiatur Girardum Carisiacensem – sic enim agnominabatur, quia Dominus ipsius erat castrum – oratum ad Ecclesiam devenisse. Arreptis ergo subclamidibus gladiis, Rorigo frater episcopi, per cryptam quae basilicae caput ambit [uno cum comite] perveniunt ad locum in quo ille orabat. Erat autem columnae appodiatus cuidam, quam pilare vocant, interpositis aliquibus columnis a pulpito ad medium fere templi. Cumque adhuc esset mane coecum, et in vasta ecclesia rari viderentur, hominem orantem a tergo corripunt. Orabat sane mastigia clamidis a tergo rejecta, junctis a pectore inter orandum palmis. Constricta itaque a posteriori parte lacerna, alter eorum ita eum insuit, ut facile manus movere non posset: quem cum sic subito ille episcopi dispensator tenuisset, dixit ei: 'Captus es!' Quem cum illa solita ferocitate retorto oculo, – erat enim monoculus, – attendisset, 'Vade hinc', inquit, 'obscuere leccator!' At ille ad Rorigonem: 'Percute', inquit et ducto ille sinistrorsum gladio, inter ipsa eum nasi frontisque confinia vulneravit. Qui sentiens se percussus, 'Ducite', ait, 'me quo vultis.' Mox illi repetitis ictibus confodientes hominem, cum urgere coepissent, ipse, de suis desperans viribus, inclamitat: 'Sancta Maria, adjuva!' His dictis sub extrema patientia ruit." English translation: Benton, *Self and Society* cit., pp. 159-160.
- ²² Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., p. 336: "Tum quoque per mediam Beatae Mariae basilicam, et per eam qua occisores Gerardi introirant exierantque januam." English translation: Benton, *Self and Society* cit., p. 174.
- ²³ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., pp. 29-31: "Igitur cum dies obvenisset obscura valde et nebulosa, ita ut hastae longitudine nullus a se discernere posset rem aliquam, clanculo servos aliquos misit Borsiardus in curtem comitis praecavere exitum ejus ad ecclesiam. Surrexerat quidem comes multo mane et distribuerat pauperibus, sicut consueverat, in propria domo et sic ad ecclesiam ibat. [...] Cum que in itinere versus ecclesiam sancti Donatiani processisset, servi qui ejus exitum praecavebant recurrentes, denuntiaverunt traditoribus consulem in solarium ecclesiae conscendisse cum paucis. Tunc ille furibundus Borsiardus et milites et servientes ejus, simul acceptis gladiis nudis sub palliis, persequerentur comitem in eodem solarium, dividentes se in duas partes ita ut ex utraque via solarium nullus eorum aufugeret quos tradere voluissent. Et ecce comitem prostratum suo more juxta altare in humili scabello viderunt, ubi Deo psalmos decantabat et orationes devotas simul et pauperibus denarios erogabat." English translation: J.B. Ross, *Galbert of Bruges. The Murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders. A Contemporary Record of Revolutionary Change in 12th Century Flanders*, New York 1967, pp. 111-112.
- ²⁴ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., p. 37: "Primae horae quoque obsequium finitum erat et de tertia hora responsum finitum, quando *Pater noster* oratum est, quando comes more suo officiose et aperte legendo orabat. Tunc tandem post tot consilia et juramenta et securitates inter se factas, primum in corde homicidae et traditores pessimi comitem devote orantem et eleemosynas dantem, divinae majestati suppliciter prostratum, gladiis confossum et saepius transverberatum, mortuum dimisere. At sui sanguinis rivulus a peccatis abluto et in operibus bonis vitae cursu terminato, martyrum palma comitem Deus donavit. In supremo ergo articulo vitae et mortis accessu vultum dignissime atque regales ad coelum manus inter tot verbera et ictus gladiatorum, quantum potuit, converterat, sic que suum Domino universorum spiritum tradidit et se ipsum Deo obtulit sacrificium matutinum." English translation: Ross, *Galbert of Bruges* cit., p. 119.

- ²⁵ Walter archidiaconus Tervanensis, *Vita Karoli comitis Flandriae*, ed. J. Rider, in *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* 217, Turnhout 2006, pp. 1-79.
- ²⁶ See e.g. R. Jacob, *Le meurtre du seigneur dans la société féodale. La mémoire, le rite, la fonction*, in "Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations", 1990, 45, pp. 247-63 and the critical remarks of D. Van Meter, *Eschatology and the Sanctification of the Prince in Twelfth-Century Flanders: The Case of Walter of Théroutanne's Vita Karoli Comitis Flandriae*, in "Sacris Erudiri", 1995, 35, p. 135.
- ²⁷ See e.g. R. Meens, *De kracht van het altaar. Het recht van asiel in kerken bij Gregorius van Tours*, in "Utrechtse historische cahiers", 2001, 22, 97-105.
- ²⁸ J. Le Goff, *Le temps du travail dans la "crise" du XIVe siècle: du temps médiéval au temps moderne*, in "Le Moyen Age", 1963, 69, pp. 597-613.
- ²⁹ I am making an allusion here to the Bakhtinian inspired essay of P. Stalybrass, A. White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, London 1986.
- ³⁰ See my earlier formulation of these ideas in Deploige, *Political Assassination* cit., pp. 48-49.
- ³¹ Th. Head, R.A. Landes (eds.), *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, Ithaca 1992, pp. 332-334.
- ³² Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., p. 278: "Quis praedas, quis incendia hinc et inde facta enunciet et caetera quae parere hujusmodi tempestas solet, quae tanta fuere, ut mutos faciant referre volentes?" English translation: Benton, *Self and Society* cit., p. 150.
- ³³ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., p. 370: "Hi qui ab urbe profugerant, domos clericorum et procerum quos oderant diripuerant atque incenderant: at modo residui proceres, profugorum domos usque ad confos, seras et pessulos omni substantia atque utensilibus addemabant." English translation: Benton, *Self and Society* cit., p. 187.
- ³⁴ For an overview: J. Deploige, *Studying Emotions. The Medievalist As Human Scientist?*, in E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, A.-L. Van Bruaene (eds.), *Emotions in the Heart of the City (14th-16th Century)*, Studies in European Urban History (1100-1800), 5, Turnhout 2005, pp. 3-24.
- ³⁵ B. Rosenwein, *Worrying about Emotions in History*, in "American Historical Review", 2002, 107, pp. 821-845; S.D. White, *The Politics of Anger*, in B. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca 1998, pp. 127-152; P.R. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England*, Ithaca 2003. See also J. Deploige, *Meurtre politique, émotions collectives et catharsis littéraire Guibert de Nogent et Galbert de Bruges faces aux révoltes urbaines de Laon (1111-1112) et de Bruges (1127-1128)*, in D. Boquet, P. Nagy (eds.), *La politique des émotions*, Paris, forthcoming.
- ³⁶ R. Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht in Vlaanderen van de XIe tot de XIVe eeuw*, Brussels 1954, pp. 177-179. See also E. Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung als strafrechtliche Massnahme im Deutschen Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1957.
- ³⁷ *Capitulare Saxonicum*, ed. A. Boretius, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Leges. Capitularia regum Francorum*, 1, Hannover 1883, p. 72 (art. 8).
- ³⁸ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., p. 73: "Nocte igitur praeterita ejusdem feriae quintae, quia Isaac se conscium sceleris sciebat et damnabat, urgebat enim eum timor mortis, cum solo armigero suo aufugit, simul et uxor ejus et servi et pedisseque universa que familia ipsius, et ubi contigit eos manere in tam arto noctis aufugio, latuerunt; domum quidem et curtem et majorem supellectilem, reliquas etiam res quas hactenus potenter et libere possederant, desertas et sine consilio in praedam hostibus reliquerunt. Quo audito, summo mane, castellanus ex Gend et Iwan cum multitudine obsidionis irruerant, diripientes omnia quae usui suo ad asportandum invenerant. Tandem faculis igneis tectis suppositis incenderunt domus et curtes et quaecumque igne consumi poterant ibidem reperta, quae quam citissime omnia conflatione et ventorum fomentis et insania tempestatis ignis destructa sunt, omnium admiratione

- testificatum est, scilicet nihil tanti aedificii et lignorum tam celerem passum fuisse adnihilationem.” English translation: Ross, *Galbert of Bruges* cit., p. 157.
- ³⁹ Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht* cit., pp. 179-180.
- ⁴⁰ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., p. 23-25: “Quas proclamorum conquestiones comes graviter ferens, convocavit consiliatores suos et plures etiam qui de cognatione praepositi fuere, perquirens ab eis qua vindicta et quo rigore justitiae hoc facinus justificaret. At illi consilium dederunt ut sine dilatione domum Borsiardus incendio destrueret eo quod rapinam in rusticos comitis exercuisset. Atque ideo maxime consiliati sunt domum praefatam destrui quia quamdiu staret tamdiu lites et rapinas Borsiardus insuper et homicidia perageret, et sic viciniam illam prorsus vastaret. Descendit ergo consultus super hoc consul et incendit domum et funditus mansionem ejus destruxit.” English translation: Ross, *Galbert of Bruges* cit., pp. 105-106.
- ⁴¹ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie* cit., p. 304: “Praepositus ergo regius, Yvo nomine, vir admodum solers, citatis hominibus regiis et abbatiae Sancti Joannis, cujus ille advocatus fuerat, Burgensibus, domos eorum qui conjuraverant obsedit, diripuit ac incendit, ex urbe etiam eos pepulit.” English translation: Benton, *Self and Society* cit., p. 160.
- ⁴² Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht* cit., pp. 180-181.
- ⁴³ *Le privilège de Saint-Omer de 1127*, ed. G. Espinas, in “Revue du Nord”, 1947, 29, pp. 47-48 (art. 20-21). See also R.C. Van Caenegem, *The Borough Charter of Saint-Omer*, in R.C. Van Caenegem (ed.), *Legal History. A European Perspective*, London – Rio Grande 1991, p. 65.
- ⁴⁴ Galbertus Brugensis, *De multro* cit., p. 107: “Eodem die Eustachius ex Stenvorda in Sancto Audomaro prius interemptus a civibus et postea in conflagrationem illius domus qua suffugerat injectus, in cineres combustus est.” English translation: Ross, *Galbert of Bruges* cit., p. 207.
- ⁴⁵ Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis van het strafrecht* cit., p. 183.
- ⁴⁶ See, for a famous example in fourteenth century Ghent: M. Boone, M.C. Lalement, D. Lievois, *Van Simon sRijkensteen tot Hof van Rijnbove. Van erfachtige lieden tot dienaren van de centrale Bourgondische staat*, in “Handelingen van de Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent”, 1990, 44, pp. 47-86. See also, on the situation in the Northern Netherlands: C. Glaudemans, *Met viere ende met brande. Het woesten van ballingen in laatmiddeleeuws Holland en Zeeland*, in “Madoc: Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen”, 2005, 19, pp. 93-101.
- ⁴⁷ Boone, *Urban Space* cit., p. 627.
- ⁴⁸ See e.g. M. Boone, *Destroying and Reconstructing the City. The Inculcation and Arrogation of Princely Power in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands (14th-16th Centuries)*, in M. Gosman, A. Vanderjagt, J. Veenstra (eds.), *The Propagation of Power in the Medieval West*. Selected Proceedings of the International Conference, Groningen 20-23 November 1996, Mediaevalia Groningiana, 23, Groningen 1997, pp. 1-33.
- ⁴⁹ On the tension between text and reality in the study of ‘ritual’, see also the highly critical essay of Ph. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory*, Princeton 2001 and the at least as critical answer by G. Koziol, *The dangers of polemic: is ritual still an interesting topic of historical study?*, in “Early Medieval Europe”, 2002, 11, pp. 367-388.
- ⁵⁰ See e.g. T.L. Schubeck, *Salvadoran Martyrs: A Love that Does Justice*, in “Horizons”, 2001, 28, pp. 7-29.
- ⁵¹ See the report *Israel and the Occupied Territories Under the Rubble: House Demolition and Destruction of Land and Property*, in “Amnesty International”, 18 May 2004, Index number MDE 15/033/2004, pp. 10-13 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/033/2004/en/dom-MDE150332004en.pdf>, accessed on 18 June 2008).

⁵² *Israel Limits House Demolitions*, in “BBC News”, 17 February 2005 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/4274977.stm, accessed on 18 June 2008).

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