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« Autour de la Toison d'or.
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aux XIV^e-XVI^e siècles »

Actes publiés sous la direction
d'Alain MARCHANDISSE
et Gilles DOCQUIER
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Bertrand SCHNERB

**BEFORE THE GOLDEN FLEECE.
NOBLE ASSOCIATIONS IN HOLLAND AND ZEELAND AROUND 1400**

The executors of the testament of Jacqueline of Bavaria entrusted one of her long-time confidants, Floris van Haamstede, to return her golden collar of the Order of St. Anthony to Havré in Hainaut¹. The former Countess of Holland, Zeeland and Hainaut had passed away at the castle of Teylingen, in Holland, in 1436, only three years after relinquishing her rights to her cousin, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy². The last documented traces of this so-called Order of St. Anthony coincide with Jacqueline's death; a heraldic manuscript containing the coats of arms of the order's members suggests that no members were accepted after 1438³. By that time, the new, ambitious Duke had instituted the Order of the Golden Fleece, membership of which was awarded to the most prominent nobles from his various principalities in the Low Countries and to other European princes⁴.

The Order of the Golden Fleece has attracted considerable historiographical attention for obvious reasons: the order still exists today and its well-documented splendid meetings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries still speak to the imagination⁵. In general, the decades preceding the Burgundian power grab in the northern Low Countries have been relatively under-studied when it comes to political conflicts and the nobility, even though a vibrant court culture characterised the fourteenth-century Low Countries⁶, and several noble and knightly associations

¹ *Rekening van de testamentoren van wijlen Jacoba van Beieren, 1444*, THE HAGUE, Nationaal Archief, Grafelijkheidsrekenkamer, Rekeningen (= NA, GREK), no. 132, fol. 6r, also printed in *Codex diplomaticus neerlandicus. Verzameling van oorkonden, betrekkelijk de vaderlandsche geschiedenis*, vol. 1, Utrecht, 1852, p. 174.

² R. STEIN, *Magnanimous Dukes and Rising States. The Unification of the Burgundian Netherlands, 1380-1480*, Oxford, 2017, p. 40.

³ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11; and a copy can be found in BRUSSELS, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (= KBR), Fonds Goethals, ms. 707.

⁴ R. VAUGHAN, *Philip the Good. The Apogee of Burgundy*, 2nd ed., Woodbridge, 2002, p. 160-162.

⁵ M. G. A. VALE, *War and Chivalry. Warfare and Aristocratic Culture in England, France and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages*, London, 1981; D'A. J. D. BOULTON, The Order of the Golden Fleece and the Creation of Burgundian National Identity, in *The Ideology of Burgundy. The Promotion of National Consciousness, 1364-1565*, dir. ID., J. R. VEENSTRA, Leiden, 2006, p. 21-97.

⁶ M. G. A. VALE, *The Princely Court. Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe, 1270-1380*, Oxford-New York, 2001; F. P. VAN OOSTROM, *Court and Culture. Dutch Literature, 1350-*

preceded the Order of the Golden Fleece. This contribution aims to assess the activities of these noble associations in the counties of Holland and Zeeland from the late fourteenth century to the start of Burgundian rule in the 1420s. This was a period of recurrent political strife, marred by dynastic and noble conflicts, which raises the question to what extent these noble associations served political ends as instruments to create new bonds. But before turning to this key question, the characteristics of medieval voluntary associations will be discussed in order to better understand the various manifestations of noble associations.

1. Princely Orders as Corporate Bodies

The Order of St. Anthony and the Order of the Golden Fleece are both referred to as “orders” in contemporary sources. The word “order”, however, conceals the historical variety in the array of knightly and noble lay associations covered by it⁷. The Latin word *ordo* is used interchangeably with words such as *corpus*, *collegium* or *universitas* in medieval sources to denote a voluntary association of individuals who pursued a common goal⁸, meaning that noble and knightly orders can be regarded as a manifestation of a typical medieval institution: the corporate body or sworn association⁹. Such corporations, as guilds, confraternities or universities, proliferated in Europe from the twelfth century onwards, as they provided individuals the opportunity to forge new ties, which could become a social resource to pursue common goals or to provide security. These horizontal bonds were often juxtaposed with the vertical ties of vassalage or lordship. The oldest statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, for example, speak of the creation of *ung ordre et fraternité de chevalerie ou amiable compaignie de certain nombre de chevalliers* – an order, fraternity or friendly company – even though the noble vassals chosen as knights were certainly not on par with the Order’s *chief et souverain*, the Burgundian dukes and their successors¹⁰.

Apart from its multiple meanings, the word “order” refers to both secular and religious associations. Following from his understanding of the twelfth-century knight as “an essentially secular figure” in his magnificent study *Chivalry*, Maurice Keen emphasises the “secular origins” of the late medieval chivalric orders, thereby

1450, Berkeley, 1992.

⁷ The Latin word *ordo* had a variety of (religious) meanings, and it was applied to groups of different aggregation levels, e.g. the orders of society, monastic orders, et cetera. In this sense it signified the rank or status of a relatively closed group of people, who distinguished themselves through their way of life, internal discipline and performance of societal obligations, within a larger hierarchical whole. G. DUBY, *Les trois ordres ou l’imaginaire du féodalisme*, Paris, 1996, p. 95-98.

⁸ G. CONSTABLE, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 175.

⁹ O. G. OEXLE, *Friede durch Verschwörung, in Träger und Instrumentarien des Friedens im Hohen und Späten Mittelalter*, dir. J. FRIED, Sigmaringen, 1996, p. 115-150; S. REYNOLDS, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, 2nd ed., Oxford-New York, 1997, p. 67-78.

¹⁰ *Die Protokollbücher des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies*, ed. S. DÜNNEBEIL, vol. 1, *Herzog Philipp der Gute 1430-1467*, Stuttgart, 2002, p. 197.

arguing that these orders were closer to lay confraternities than to the military orders of the crusading era¹¹. He rightly views chivalric orders as associations but exaggerates their distinctiveness from the older crusading orders. There were certainly significant differences in their objectives and organisation, but a clear institutional affinity existed between them. In fact, the crusading orders found their origins in devotional confraternities: for instance, the Order of St. John developed from a confraternity linked to a hospital that was established around 1070 in Jerusalem by merchants from Amalfi¹². Moreover, making a rigid distinction between religious and secular orders disregards the religious ideology of medieval chivalry¹³, as well as the important devotional activities of the chivalric orders. The latter is evident, for example, in the importance of mass celebrations and liturgical observances to the ceremonial chapters of the Order of the Golden Fleece during the fifteenth century¹⁴, about which Johan Huizinga has observed: “church attendance and the Mass occupy a dominant position within the entire ritual of the order: the knights sit on the seats of the lords of the cathedral, the memorial services for members who have passed away are conducted in the strictest ecclesiastical style¹⁵”.

While the religious crusading orders and the secular chivalric orders belonged to the same institutional family, the latter still covered a wide array of noble and knightly associations that first appear in late thirteenth-century German sources¹⁶. The differences that emerged between, for example, noble confraternities, knightly touring societies or princely orders, were gradual in nature, and they are difficult to classify on the basis of their objectives, functioning and organisation. The best attempt to classify these various associations has been made by D’Arcy Boulton in his survey of late medieval monarchical orders of knighthood, in which he initially distinguished four types of “true orders” (votive, fraternal, confraternal and monarchical, each having statutes and a corporative organisation) and two types of “pseudo orders” (honorific and cliental, without these features). In the second edition of his study, he offers a “revised system of taxonomy” of nobiliary bodies, whose complexity and multi-layeredness testifies to the variety in noble and knightly associations¹⁷. Although Boulton’s classification system is useful in

¹¹ M. KEEN, *Chivalry*, New Haven, 1984, p. 43, 180-181.

¹² R. HIESTAND, Die Anfänge der Johanniter, in *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, dir. J. FLECKENSTEIN, M. HELLMANN, Sigmaringen, 1980, p. 31-80.

¹³ See, for the interplay and tension between the chivalric ideals of piety and violence, R. W. KAEUPER, *Holy Warriors. The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*, Philadelphia, 2009.

¹⁴ B. H. HAGGH, Between Council and Crusade. The Ceremonial of the Order of the Golden Fleece in the Fifteenth Century, in *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, ed. A. VAN OOSTERWIJK, W. BLOCKMANS, T.-H. BORCHERT, N. GABRIËLS, J. OOSTERMAN, Turnhout, 2011, p. 51-58.

¹⁵ J. HUIZINGA, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Chicago, 1996, p. 93.

¹⁶ A. RANFT, *Adelsgesellschaften. Gruppenbildung und Genossenschaft im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, Sigmaringen, 1994, p. 12-23.

¹⁷ D’A. J. D. BOULTON, *The Knights of the Crown. The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe, 1325-1520*, 2nd ed., Woodbridge, 2000, p. 541-546; RANFT, *Adelsgesellschaften*, p. 12-23.

characterising and ordering these associations, however, it is less fruitful in making this endeavour an end in itself. Associations changed in character over time or had a distinctive combination of organisation and purpose, making rigid classification schemes pointless.

The religious military orders of the later Middle Ages were under the authority of the Church, and their core aims were to pray, care for pilgrims and protect the boundaries of the Christian world. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries their presence was visible in the Low Countries through their commanderies and the attached chapels and convents, which were established for devotional purposes, recruitment and fund-raising¹⁸. In contrast to the Order of St. John (the Knights Hospitaller), the Teutonic Order also organised regular crusades against the “pagans” in the Baltic region that enjoyed popularity among the nobility of the Low Countries in the second half of the fourteenth century¹⁹. Overall, the attraction of military orders was low in the later Middle Ages, exemplified by the fact that only 77 knight-brethren from the Low Countries joined the ranks of the Teutonic Order between 1237 and 1562, of whom the majority came from knightly ministerial families from the eastern regions²⁰. But although the appeal of these orders appears to have been limited, they likely played a role in the diffusion of chivalric norms and practices in the medieval Low Countries.

Before the last quarter of the fourteenth century, there are no documentary traces of noble or knightly associations in the Low Countries. Apparently, nobles either did not feel an urge or have the opportunity to organise themselves into corporate bodies. This is striking because medieval tournament culture found its origins in the border region between northern France and the southern Low Countries during the twelfth century, as knights organised into “nations” led by regional princes trained their men in the use of arms²¹. Yet, in the following centuries no tourneying societies or other knight associations are recorded in Flanders, Brabant, Hainaut and Picardy, despite the continued flourishing of tournament culture in this core region between the Holy Roman Empire, France and England²². The close connection between princely household membership and participation in

¹⁸ J. A. MOL, *Vechten, bidden en verplegen. Opstellen over de ridderorden in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, Hilversum, 2011, p. 9-12. When the Templars were abolished in 1312, the order held only two houses in the area of the present Netherlands, but they had a stronger presence in the Southern Low Countries. In the Northern Low Countries, the Order of St. John had 21 foundations and the Teutonic Order seventeen houses.

¹⁹ See, for the so-called “Preußenreisen”, W. PARAVICINI, *Die Preussenreisen des europäischen Adels*, Sigmaringen, 1989.

²⁰ MOL, *Vechten, bidden en verplegen*, p. 170-177, 186-187.

²¹ D. CROUCH, *Tournament*, London-New York, 2006, p. 72-73, 109. The thirteenth-century tourneying nations were organised on a geographical or political basis; their members wore colours derived from their lord's coat of arms.

²² VALE, *The Princely Court*, p. 186-200.

war and tournaments (*mêlées* in particular), due to the relatively strong position of regional princes, might provide an explanation. In contrast, in the German lands no fewer than 92 knightly and noble associations have been identified for the period from 1331 to 1517²³. Commonly, these sometimes temporal “Gesellschaften” were horizontally assembled groups of nobles or knights, in contrast to the vertical relationships between a lord and his men in the case of princely orders. Some of these associations were founded in the Lower Rhine region, such as the county/duchy of Cleves²⁴. The greater dependency of nobles on princes in the Low Countries, and the sharper distinctions between status groups in the German lands, which required knights and nobles to organise themselves into protective bodies²⁵, probably accounts for the lack of knightly and noble associations in the Low Countries during the late Middle Ages.

In the fourteenth century, the first princely or monarchical orders of knighthood were founded; they differed from earlier associations in that they were founded by princes who acted as head or sovereign, a position to which they were succeeded by their heirs. Charles I of Hungary (1301-1342) was the first founder of such an order, with the Order of St. George in 1326, an example followed four years later by Alfonso XI of Castile (1312-1350), who founded the Order of the Band²⁶. The English Order of the Garter was founded in 1348 by Edward III (1327-1377) after his victory at Crécy, but this built on an initiative he took at Windsor four years earlier, when he created a confraternity with the aim of reviving the Arthurian society of the Round Table²⁷. This was typical for princely or monarchical orders: they drew on biblical, classical and courtly narratives to elevate their status; they were dedicated to carefully chosen patron saints; and their activities were legitimised and motivated by appealing to the crusading ideal. Headed by a sovereign prince and his hereditary successors, these orders (with a limited number of member knights) met regularly at chapters, as was stipulated by their statutes. Invariably, the orders adhered to the chivalric ideals, and members were called upon to embody the virtues of honour, service and valour, and required to be of high noble birth, knighted, and of impeccable reputation. Membership was exclusive and offered princes and nobles a way to display their social distinction.

²³ H. KRUSE, W. PARAVICINI, A. RANFT, *Ritterorden und Adelsgesellschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschland. Ein systematisches Verzeichnis*, Frankfurt am Main, 1991.

²⁴ RANFT, *Adelsgesellschaften*, p. 28-34; G. NIJSTEN, *In the Shadow of Burgundy. The Court of Guelders in the Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge-New York, 2004, p. 401-402.

²⁵ KEEN, *Chivalry*, p. 186-187. See, in general, J. MORSEL, Die Erfindung des Adels. Zur Soziogenese des Adels am Ende des Mittelalters. Das Beispiel Frankens, in *Nobilitas. Funktion und Repräsentation des Adels*, dir. O. G. OEXLE, W. PARAVICINI, Göttingen, 1997, p. 312-375.

²⁶ BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 27, 46.

²⁷ J. MUNBY, R. BARBER, R. BROWN, *Edward III's Round Table at Windsor. The House of the Round Table and the Windsor Festival of 1344*, Woodbridge-Rochester, 2008, p. 140-142; H. E. L. COLLINS, *The Order of the Garter, 1348-1461. Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval England*, Oxford, 2000, p. 6-33.

The princely orders gave expression to late medieval chivalric culture and played an essential role in the dissemination and appropriation of the values, ideas and norms of conduct that shaped noble identity and habitus²⁸.

The oldest statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, founded by the ambitious Burgundian Duke Philip the Good (1419-1467) on the occasion of this marriage to Isabella of Portugal in 1430 in Bruges, explain the Duke's considerations when establishing this association:

Pour la tres grande et parfaite amour que avons au noble estat et ordre de chevallerie dont, de tresardant[e] et singuliere affection, desirons l'onneur et accroissement, par quoy la vraye foi catholique, l'estat de nostre mere sainte Eglise et la tranquillité et prosperité de la chose publique soyent, comme estre pevent, deffendues, gardees et maintenues, nous, a la gloire et loenge du Tout Puissant, nostre createur et redempteur; en reverence de sa glorieuse mere et en l'onneur de monseigneur saint Andrieu, glorieux appostre et martir; a l'exaltacion de la foy et de sainte Eglise et excitacion de vertus et bonnes meurs²⁹.

Philip the Good founded the Order of the Golden Fleece out of love for nobility and knighthood, the Church and the public good, as well as his desire to foster virtuosity and good morals.

In practice, the chapters of the Order of the Golden Fleece were held in cities across the Low Countries – on average, every 7,5 years – during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in which initially the Duke and twenty-four of the most renowned nobles from his territories participated (membership was increased to 31 in 1433 and to 50 in 1516)³⁰. The four-day chapters adhered to a strict ceremonial, with religious services held every day, during which masses were said in honour of the patron saint, St. Andrew, and for the souls of the deceased members. At their meetings, the knights critically assessed each other's conduct (and took appropriate

²⁸ A. RANFT, Adlige Identitätsbestimmung. Adelsorden und Adelsgesellschaften, in "Das kommt mir spanisch vor." *Eigenes und Fremdes in den deutsch-spanischen Beziehungen des späten Mittelalters*, dir. K. HERBERS, N. JASPERT, Münster, 2004, p. 291-311.

²⁹ *Die Protokollbücher*, t. 1, p. 196-197. See, for an analysis of the statutes, BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 364-396.

³⁰ The literature on the Order of the Golden Fleece is extensive. Apart from the recent work of Sonja Dünnebeil, who edits the Order's *Protokollbücher* (4 volumes have been published) and compiled, with Corinna Pilcher, a *Bibliographie zur Geschichte des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies*; URL https://www.oew.ac.at/fileadmin/Institute/imafo/pdf/Online_Ressourcen/orden_vom_goldenen_vlies.pdf (accessed 03.01.2019), see F. DE REIFFENBERG, *Histoire de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or depuis son institution jusqu'à la cessation des chapitres généraux*, Bruxelles, 1830; *Les Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or au XVI^e siècle*, dir. R. DE SMEDT, Frankfurt am Main, 1994; F. DE GRUBEN, *Les chapitres de la Toison d'or à l'époque bourguignonne (1430-1477)*, Leuven, 1997; *L'ordre de la Toison d'or, de Philippe le Bon à Philippe le Beau (1430-1505): idéal ou reflet d'une société?*, dir. P. COCKSHAW, C. VAN DEN BERGEN-PANTENS, Turnhout, 1996; J. PAVIOT, Du nouveau sur la création de l'ordre de la Toison d'or, in *Journal des Savants*, 2002, p. 279-298.

punitive measures if necessary), elected new members, and discussed important public affairs with the prince. These activities were accompanied by festivities, banquets and tournaments to which the urban public contributed financially and in which they sometimes participated³¹.

2. Noble Associations in the Low Countries

It was evident to Johan Huizinga that “among the princely circles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was a feeling that many regarded these artfully contrived new knightly orders as empty pastimes³²”. Was this not the reason why the chroniclers at the Burgundian court felt an urge to endlessly glorify the ideals of the Order of the Golden Fleece? This rhetorical question has met with a negative answer from Malcolm Vale, who argues in *War and Chivalry* (1981) that the Golden Fleece “could not be anything other than a political institution” – a view that is still widely accepted today³³. Contrary to Huizinga’s belief, the Order of the Golden Fleece offered nobles an opportunity to put their chivalric values and ideals into practice. In addition to the princely court, the Order offered the Burgundian dukes an instrument to demand personal loyalty and service from the most powerful nobles in their newly acquired territories, to create cohesion among these noble families, and to discipline the member knights by addressing their behaviour at the Order’s chapters³⁴.

This emphasis on the political meaning of the Order of the Golden Fleece has been refined in the past decades. Princely orders are no longer understood as a means to domesticate the nobility, in Norbert Elias’s sense of the term, because the powerplay between prince and nobles was not necessarily dominated by the former, while the latter were not merely will-less subjects. In fact, the efforts by the Burgundian and Habsburg princes to create more cohesion among the most powerful nobles in their territories, and ensure their personal loyalty and political support, could turn against them, as became clear during the Flemish revolts against Archduke Maximilian of Austria (1459-1519), who acted as regent of his son Philip (1478-1506) between 1478 and 1494³⁵. The political influence that the prince could exercise through the Order was mostly indirect, as was also the case for the English king as sovereign of the Order of the Garter: “In seeking to consolidate royal authority by tying prominent and distinguished members of the

³¹ A. BROWN, G. SMALL, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420-1530*, Manchester-New York, 2007, p. 130-164.

³² HUIZINGA, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, p. 93-94.

³³ VALE, *War and Chivalry*, p. 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33-52. See also C. A. J. ARMSTRONG, Had the Burgundian Government a Policy for the Nobility?, in *England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century. Collected Studies*, dir. ID., London, 1983, p. 213-236; BOULTON, The Order of the Golden Fleece.

³⁵ H. COOLS, *Mannen met macht. Edellieden en de moderne staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse landen (1475-1530)*, Zutphen, 2001, p. 40-43; STEIN, *Magnanimous Dukes and Rising States*, p. 125-127.

nobility into a fraternal relationship with the sovereign, the Garter depended upon its desirability as a source of honorific distinction to gain the willing co-operation of the knightly classes³⁶.”

Furthermore, the focus on the political meaning of princely orders obscures the social and religious functions of these medieval institutions and underestimates the social meaning of membership for those elected knights. Moreover, the functions of orders could evolve over time, as the interests of the members were not static; in fact, changes were sometimes formally laid down in new statutes, and orders also copied rules from each other³⁷.

In comparison to knightly orders whose continuity was tied to that of princely dynasties, noble or knightly associations that operated outside the princely court often had a temporal character from the outset or changed their objectives as time passed. The flexibility and adaptability of these associations were institutional features that explain their prevalence in late medieval Europe, but also imply that the rationale for their existence was rooted in specific historical circumstances.

The institution found its expression in two societies of noble character that existed in the Low Countries in the decades before and after the turn of the fourteenth century, before the Burgundian dukes made their full appearance: the earlier mentioned Order of St. Anthony and the Order of the Garden of Holland (*Hollandse tuin*)³⁸. The former is best understood as a noble confraternity, while the

³⁶ COLLINS, *The Order of the Garter*, p. 282-284.

³⁷ BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 449-450. After the crisis of 1477, the Order of the Golden Fleece kept its statutes unaltered; S. DÜNNEBEIL, *The Order of the Golden Fleece in the Year 1478 – Continuity or Re commencement?*, in *Staging the Court of Burgundy*, p. 59-66.

³⁸ Contrary to what Keen cautiously suggests, Floris V (1254-1296), Count of Holland, did not found a tourneying society at the end of thirteenth century, even though sources from the sixteenth century onwards make this claim. Various historians have already refuted this story; there is no reason to repeat the discussion: KEEN, *Chivalry*, p. 181; A. VAN STEENSEL, *Vorstelijke ridderorden en adellijke distinctie in de laatmiddeleeuwse Nederlanden*, in *Huis en habitus. Over kastelen, buitenplaatsen en notabele levensvormen*, dir. C. GIETMAN, J. MOES, D. REWIJK, H. RONNES, J. N. BREMMER, T. SPEK, Hilversum, 2017, p. 206. However, it is interesting to note that the oldest known mention of this so-called Order of St. Jacob comes from a chronicle from sixteenth-century Zeeland: *Dese voorghenoemde [Zeeland nobles] waren dye principaelste heeren up die tijt in Zeelandt, die de oorden des graven droeghen, dwelcke doen ter tijt was eenen gulden halsbande met Sinte Jacobs schelpen, daer onder Sint Jacob hangende*. JOHAN REYGERSBERGEN, *Dye cronijcke van Zeelandt*, Antwerp, Vve Heyndrick Peetersen van Middelburch, 1551, ch. XIX. The author, probably invented this story, as it is not yet mentioned in his main source, the fifteenth-century *Gouds kroniekje*; P. SCRIVERIUS, *Het oude Goutsche chronycxken van Hollandt, Zeelandt, Vrieslandt en Utrecht*, Amsterdam, Ian Hendricksz Boom-loost Pluymer-Casparus Commelij, 1663, p. 71-72. Van Reigersberg probably took the Castilian military order of St. James of Compostela (*Santiago del Espada*) as an example. He was familiar with this order because one of its knights, Jan Hannart, who is also mentioned as a commander of this Order, acquired seigneurial possessions in the County of Zeeland in 1526 through his marriage with Margaretha Vilain. MIDDELBURG, Zeeuws Archief, Archief van de Zeeuwse Rekenkamer, Bourgondisch-Oostenrijks Tijdperk, no. 1747i, fol. 13v.

latter was instead a political alliance or agreement between friends – a *coniuratio* in the medieval sense of the word. The origins of the Order of the Garden of Holland are relatively obscure, but D. van Tol has identified 88 recipients of the order's decoration – a golden, gold-gilded or silver collar in the form of an enclosed garden³⁹ – in the comital accounts. These honours were bestowed by William of Oostervant, the later Count William IV (1365-1417) of Holland, Hainaut and Zeeland, and his daughter and heir Jacqueline (1401-1436), between 1387 and 1418⁴⁰. Already before the death of his father, Albrecht, Duke of Bavaria (1336-1404), William had forged ties with (foreign) nobles, courtiers and officials by giving them the collars of his Order. He probably did so to solicit support in a conflict with his father (1391-1394), which spilled over into the party strife between the Hooks and the Cods that flared up in the last decade of the fourteenth century. In this conflict, William sought to secure the loyalty of the nobility; an effort he made again in 1416 when the most prominent nobles of his counties promised to recognise his daughter Jacqueline as his heir and successor⁴¹.

Apart from political objectives, the Order of the Garden of Holland served military and diplomatic purposes. During the Frisian Wars (1398) and the Arkel Wars (1405), for instance, William rewarded several noblemen for their service with the decorations of his Order. Furthermore, the count awarded this honour to clerics, urban magistrates, and foreign noblemen and their servants – sometimes following an *ad hoc* decision, as the nobles at the court were forced to relinquish their decorations to high-ranking foreign visitors on several occasions⁴². In the accounts, the Order of the Garden of Holland is described as an *oerdenē*⁴³, but there

A. PINCHART, *Inventaire des archives des chambres des comptes, précédé d'une notice historique sur ces anciennes institutions*, vol. 4, Brussels, 1865, p. 239, 316; L. P. WRIGHT, *The Military Orders in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Society. The Institutional Embodiment of a Historical Tradition*, in *Past & Present*, vol. 43, 1969, p. 34-70.

³⁹ A garden shielded by an angel is also depicted on a rare gold coin (*thuyne d'or*) struck during William VI's reign. A. L. FRIEDBERG, I. S. FRIEDBERG, R. FRIEDBERG, *Gold Coins of the World. From Ancient Times to the Present*, 9th ed, Williston, 2017, p. 145, no. 260.

⁴⁰ D. VAN TOL, *De Orde van de Hollandsche Tuin. De oudste ridderorde van Holland, 1387-1418*, in *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, vol. 114, 1997, p. 6-34.

⁴¹ A. JANSE, *Toernooicultuur en adelscultuur in middeleeuws Holland*, in *Holland: regionaal-historisch Tijdschrift*, vol. 34/3, 2002, p. 161-162; *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis der dagvaarten van de Staten van Zeeland, 1318-1572. Inleiding, lijsten en teksten, 1318-1478*, dir. J. G. SMIT, J. W. J. BURGERS, E. T. VAN DER VLIST, vol. 1, The Hague, 2011, p. 82; V. FLAMMANG, *Partis en Hainaut? La place de la noblesse hainuyère dans la lutte entre Jacqueline de Bavière et Jean IV de Brabant (1424-1428)*, in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 123/4, 2008, p. 541-563.

⁴² VAN TOL, *De Orde van de Hollandsche Tuin*, p. 9.

⁴³ In some case, the records suggest a practice of mere gift-giving, as the decorations were handed out without refence to the order. See, for instance, one of the last recorded gifts made by Countess Jacqueline to an English royal messenger in 1418: *Item uitgegeven ende betaillt Wouter Koevoet van Poelgeest van enen silveren tuun die mijn genedige vrouwe him dede nemen ende voirt gegeven enen van tsoncinx sendebode voirs. 4 gouden engelse nobelen*; THE HAGUE, NA, GREK, no. 107, fol. 26r.

is no trace of formal statutes or sources that point towards ceremonial or devotional gatherings. Clearly, the number of members was not limited, nor were either a noble birth or knightly title required for admittance to the Order. This association can therefore hardly be characterised as a princely order⁴⁴; it was, rather, an alliance of nobles and non-nobles whose political support William thought worthwhile.

Such a political alliance was not unique in this period. The Burgundian Duke Philip the Fearless (1362-1404) created a similar network by bestowing on sixty men from his following the decorations (clasps adorned with a golden tree standing between an eagle and a lion, with the motto *En loyauté*), or livery badge, of the Order of the Golden Tree on 1 January 1403. According to Carol Chattaway, the Duke formed this alliance with a specific purpose during a period of turmoil in France: to strategically muster political and military support for the Burgundians in their strife with the Armagnac faction led by Louis, Duke of Orléans⁴⁵. About fifteen years older than the Golden Tree, the origins of the Order of the Garden in Holland were similar, although its longevity was greater, and its purpose became less specific over time. Ultimately, William IV and his daughter Jacqueline felt no need to transform the political alliance into a princely order.

The second supposed princely order in the fourteenth-century Low Countries was in fact a knightly devotional association. Although better documented, the origins of the Order of St. Anthony are even more obscure. The lay confraternity had the chapel of Saint-Antoine-en-Barbefosse in the vicinity of Havré in Hainaut, which was already a pilgrimage destination, in particular visited by sufferers of ergotism. The confraternity was founded in the second half of the fourteenth century, or the early fifteenth century at the latest; the extant sources do not provide a definite answer⁴⁶. The confraternity, including male and female members, may have started as a society of knights led by the Hainaut noble Gérard d'Enghien,

⁴⁴ William of Oostervant was familiar with the phenomenon of princely orders, as he was admitted as a knight into the Order of the Garter during his participation in a tournament in England in 1390; COLLINS, *The Order of the Garter*, p. 166-168. This was after he gave his wife a golden garden-collar in 1386-1387 – the only known female recipient of this honour. In the same year, he participated in an expedition to Prussia, indicating a penchant for chivalric glory; PARAVICINI, *Die Preussenreisen des europäischen Adels*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ C. M. CHATTAWAY, *The Order of the Golden Tree. The Gift-Giving Objectives of Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy*, Turnhout, 2006, p. 20-28, 113.

⁴⁶ See, for the statutes note 3 above. The statutes and the Mons armorial have been (uncritically and error-ridden) edited in *L'ordre des chevaliers de Saint-Antoine en Hainaut (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)*, dir. C. CHAUSSIER, G. VAN INNIS, Brussels, 1994. Older editions in F. HACHEZ, *Complément aux notices publiées sur les chevaliers de Saint-Antoine en Barbefosse, en Havré*, in *Annales de l'Académie royale d'Archéologie de Belgique*, vol. 5, 1903, p. 93-124; P. NOORDELOOS, *Enige gegevens over broederschappen van St. Antonius*, in *Publications de la Société historique et archéologique dans le Limbourg*, vol. 85, 1949, p. 477-499.

Lord of Enghien and Havré, and his son of the same name⁴⁷. The devotional association met for religious services and social activities, as well as held memorial services for the souls of deceased fellow-members. Membership was the exclusive preserve of wealthy and irreproachable individuals who were of noble birth – and, more precisely, knights, squires, ladies, and ladies-in-waiting – or *doctor in famosa universitate factus et ordinatus*. As members of this confraternity, they promised to protect widows, orphans and the poor, as well as to be loyal to each other and to uphold noble honour⁴⁸.

Until now, historians have assumed that Duke Albrecht of Bavaria acted as patron of the confraternity of St. Anthony, even though strong documentary evidence is lacking⁴⁹. There are several arguments that suggest otherwise; in fact, it is more likely that his granddaughter Jacqueline of Bavaria and her second husband, John IV (1403-1427), Duke of Brabant, were the first to patronise the noble confraternity that by then had existed for several decades. The Countess donated a sum of more than 192 *francs tournois* when she joined the *confrérie de monseigneur Saint Anthone de Barbefosse* in early 1418⁵⁰. Moreover, the confraternity's armorial, in which new entries were made until 1438, opens with the coats of arms of Margaret of Burgundy and her daughter Jacqueline as the first two of the 49 members who enrolled in 1415-1416. Furthermore, Jacqueline and her husband are mentioned as sister and brother in the revised statutes of 1420⁵¹. The enrolment of Jacqueline into the confraternity also coincided with the last recorded bestowment of the decorations of the Order of the Garden of Holland, which confirms the hypothesis that the strong connection between the House of Wittelsbach and the confraternity of St. Anthony might have only started with the enrolment of Jacqueline of Bavaria. Her involvement was ultimately short-lived, because of the political challenges the Countess faced from her husband, uncle, cousin and

⁴⁷ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 40r: *Noble et puissant seigneur messire Gérard d'Enghien, seigneur de Havrech, fondateur de l'ordre de St. Antoine en Barbefosse. Il eult deulx femmes, sçavoir la dame Jenne de Séraing, mère de Gérard, aussy fondateur.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 15v (undated statutes). The first dated and more elaborated statutes from 1402 no longer mention the possibility of membership on the basis of nobility by virtue: *L'ordre des chevaliers de Saint-Antoine*, p. 140-141.

⁴⁹ See, for a review of the available sources: A. MARCHANDISSE, *L'Ordre de Saint-Antoine en Hainaut et L'Homme à l'œillet* de la Gemäldegalerie de Berlin. Quelques prolégomènes provisoires, in *Album amicorum Raphaël de Smedt*, dir. J. PAVIOT, A. TOURNEUX, J. VANDER AUWERA, vol. 2, Leuven, 2001, p. 121-125. After his son, Albrecht of Bavaria was elected knight of the Order of the Garter in 1397, while his granddaughter Jacqueline of Bavaria was admitted to the ladies of the Garter in 1421; COLLINS, *The Order of the Garter*, p. 167, 170.

⁵⁰ L. DEVILLERS, *Cartulaire des comtes de Hainaut de l'avènement de Guillaume II à la mort de Jacqueline de Bavière [1337-1436]*, vol. 1, Brussels, 1881, p. 47 (8 January 1418). This substantial sum was partly intended for the renovation of the confraternity's chapel.

⁵¹ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 4r. The article of the statute stipulates that a shield with the coat of arms of a member would only be installed in the chapel if all financial commitments were fulfilled. John of Brabant himself joined the confraternity in 1418 according to the armorial (fol. 24r).

subjects⁵². Her membership ended formally in 1437, when her confidant Floris van Haamstede returned her collar to the confraternity's chapel in Barbefosse.

Despite the involvement of the Countess and her second husband (and perhaps also her mother, Margaret of Burgundy, and paternal uncle, John of Bavaria)⁵³, the confraternity of St. Anthony did not evolve into a monarchical order in Boulton's definition⁵⁴. Its statutes use both the word *confrarie* and *ordene*, but the Wittelsbachs did not act as the confraternity's sovereign or *roi*; its membership was not restricted, and included both *confrères* and *consœurs*, who met on their own initiative. The renewed statutes of 1420 reinforced the requirement that prospective members should be *gentilhomme ou gentil femme de nom et d'armes de par son pere et de bonne et ancienne estration sans reproche de nul villains cas*⁵⁵. The presence of 420 names in the confraternity's armorial confirms that members were indeed of high birth, as they mostly belonged to established noble families from Hainaut, Holland and Zeeland. Although the noble association disappears from the sources after the death of Jacqueline of Bavaria, its demise cannot be directly blamed on the foundation of the Order of the Golden Fleece by Philip the Good, since most of the brothers of St. Antony would never have qualified to be elected knight⁵⁶.

In general, the survival of noble associations, whether confraternities or orders, was highly dependent on the continuity of the supporting dynasties. This was also true for the princely orders that were founded in the eastern Low Countries during the fifteenth century, where the Burgundians only gradually gained a foothold,

⁵² A. JANSE, *Een pion voor een dame. Jacoba van Beieren, 1401-1436*, Amsterdam, 2009; É. BOUSMAR, Jacqueline de Bavière, trois comtés, quatre maris (1401-1436): l'inévitable excès d'une femme au pouvoir?, in *Femmes de pouvoir, femmes politiques durant les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge et au cours de la première Renaissance*, dir. É. BOUSMAR, J. DUMONT, A. MARCHANDISSE, B. SCHNERB, Brussels, 2012, p. 385-455.

⁵³ MARCHANDISSE, *L'ordre de Saint-Antoine*, p. 127-128. John of Bavaria, as bishop-elect of Liege (1389-1418), might either have had ties with the confraternity or tried to gain influence over its members during the conflict with his niece. A copy of an undated document in one of the manuscripts suggests that his involvement was linked to a possible crusade against the Turks. MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 5v. Margaret of Burgundy was the first member to be enrolled, according to the confraternity's armorial.

⁵⁴ BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 566-567.

⁵⁵ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 1v, 2v. The entry fees differentiated between a *double banneres*, a *banneret*, a *chevalier a compaignon*, a *chevalier bachelier*, a *escuyer*, *dames* and *damoiselles*. See, for the banneret, M. DAMEN, Heren met banieren: de baanrotsen van Brabant in de vijftiende eeuw, in *Bourgondië voorbij: de Nederlanden 1250-1650. Liber alumnorum Wim Blockmans*, dir. M. DAMEN, L. SICKING, Hilversum, 2010, p. 139-158.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, Dirk Schoenaers observed that images of individuals – certainly not members – wearing the symbol of the confraternity of St. Anthony, a collar with a tau-shaped pendant and a little clock, appear in a Middle Dutch translation of Froissart's chronicle, which might be explained by the preferences of a commissioner from Holland. D. SCHOENAERS, *Getranslateerd uten Franssoyse. Translation from the French into Dutch in Holland in the 15th Century. The Case of Gerard Potter's Middle Dutch Translation of Froissart's Chroniques*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2010, p. 231-236.

even though they had close relations with the local princes and wielded political, socio-economic and cultural influence. Adolph (1373-1448), Count of Cleves and of Mark, founded a confraternity or order devoted to St. Anthony between 1430 and 1435, perhaps with older antecedents. From what is known about its functioning, the order was more of a noble confraternity than a princely order. Membership, for example, was open to both sexes, although candidates had to be approved by the Count. The association appears to have been dissolved shortly after 1483 by Adolph's grandson John⁵⁷. In the same period, in 1444, the Order of St. Hubertus was founded by Gerard, Duke of Jülich and Berg (1437-1475), of which two armorials have been preserved. This order functioned until 1511, and the various versions of its statutes suggest that the association held a place somewhere between a princely order and a noble association⁵⁸.

Finally, Adolph of Egmond, who deposed his father as Duke of Guelders in 1465 with the support of Philip the Good, established a knightly order devoted to Our Lady in 1468, after defeating his uncle John, Duke of Cleves, at the Battle of Straelen. Adolph was already elected member of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1461, but he fell out of favour with Charles the Bold, who reinstated his father, Arnold, in 1471. The first thirteen knights to be elected received their insignia in 1469, which on the event of death had to be returned to the monastery that was moved to Straelen, in the vicinity of the order's chapel of Mariasande. The knights belonged to the nobility of the Guelders court, but unlike the Order of the Golden Fleece they were not required to have the title of knight, nor was the order's membership limited. It is not clear how the order functioned after the capture of Adolph in 1471; it was still mentioned in a letter from 1501, but thereafter died a silent death⁵⁹. Of these smaller curial associations, the Order of Our Lady was probably the most exclusive, while the older two functioned more as noble confraternities. D'Arcy Boulton and Gerard Nijsten argue that these orders were inspired by and modelled after the Order of the Golden Fleece, but their characteristics point towards a stronger connection with German "Adelsgesellschaften". In all cases, the evolution of the orders was cut short by the misfortune of the founding princely dynasty.

⁵⁷ KRUSE, PARAVICINI, RANFT, *Ritterorden und Adelsgesellschaften*, p. 258-266; BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 577-581.

⁵⁸ KRUSE, PARAVICINI, RANFT, *Ritterorden und Adelsgesellschaften*, p. 352-376; BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 503-511. See, for the armorials: *Heroldsbuch des Jülichischen St. Hubertusordens*, KRAKOW, Biblioteka Jagiellonska berol. ms. germ. quart. 1479; and the *Bruderschaftsbuch des jülich-bergischen Hubertusordens*, MUNICH, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, Cod. icon. 318; H. VON SEGGERN, Hermann von Brüninghausen. Wappenkönig der Ruwierien, in *Menschenbilder – Menschenbildner. Individuum und Gruppe im Blick des Historikers*, dir. S. SELZER, U. C. EWERT, Berlin, 2002, p. 112-114; L. NESSELRODE, *Die Chorfenster von Ehrenstein. Bertram von Nesselrode und Margarethe von Burscheid, Stifter an der Schwelle zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Cologne, 2008, p. 290-310.

⁵⁹ KRUSE, PARAVICINI, RANFT, *Ritterorden und Adelsgesellschaften*, p. 21-24, 404-406; BOULTON, *The Knights*, p. 631-632; NIJSTEN, *In the Shadow of Burgundy*, p. 335-336, 401-402.

3. Noble Associations and Political Conflict

Whereas the Order of the Garden of Holland had political and diplomatic objectives, especially in the first years of its existence, when William of Oostervant was embroiled in a conflict with his father, it is less clear whether his daughter Jacqueline had similar political motives in becoming involved with the Order of St. Anthony. The confraternity's armorial offers an opportunity to test the assumption that membership of the association gained political meaning during the turbulent years between Jacqueline's succession of her father in 1417 and the Treaty of Delft she concluded with Philip the Good in 1428.

To start with, the two versions of the armorial raise several questions of interpretation. First, both copies contain transcripts of sources relating to the origins of the confraternity – both, for example, contain the revised statutes from 1420. Since no new evidence has come to light, the possible historical scenarios based on the contradictory information in the sources are sufficiently dealt with in the existing literature, except for the point that the ties between the confraternity and the Wittelsbach became closer around 1418⁶⁰. The copy from Mons seems to originate from a source close to the confraternity, although the manuscript was produced in the second half of the fifteenth century (at least, after 1438). It contains the 416 coats of arms (some with crowns, helmets and the order's decoration), of which 260 are completed in colour, of male and female members who enrolled between 1415 and 1438. A number of partly drawn coats are not identified by the name of the owner, or these names are illegible due to damage to the manuscript. The copy from Brussels appears to be from the sixteenth century; it has fewer members, and fewer coats of arms are fully coloured. Moreover, not all mentioned names correspond to those in the Mons manuscript⁶¹.

Since both manuscripts were produced after the demise of the confraternity, the Brussels version could be based on the Mons version, or both may have had a common third source. In any case, the author most likely came from Hainaut, as he was not too familiar with the noble families from Holland and Zeeland. These two aspects might explain some of the inconsistencies in the information provided by the armorial. For example, according to the armorial, Jacqueline of Bavaria became a member in 1415-1416, at least a year before she assumed her comital titles. This would have meant that her entrance fee was paid about two years later, in January 1418, after the death of her father and her first husband, which is possible but

⁶⁰ See, in particular MARCHANDISSE, *L'ordre de Saint-Antoine*. A third manuscript containing rules regarding enrolment in the confraternity can be found in BESANÇON, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. Chifflet 84, fol. 12r-23r.

⁶¹ A comparison of the armorials can be found in *L'ordre des chevaliers de Saint-Antoine*. However, they do not provide a proper prosopographical analysis; in fact, quite a number of nobles from Holland and Zeeland are misidentified. Further analysis of the manuscripts could probably shed more light on the precise dating.

appears unlikely⁶². A second example is the coat of arms of *Floris van Borssele, Count of Oostervant*, who would have enrolled in the same year as Jacqueline. However, Floris van Borssele (d. 1422) did not bear the title of count of Oostervant – this title was only conferred on his son Frank in 1434. Perhaps Frank’s name was confused with his father’s, as the former was already a visitor to the comital court in 1415, and he wears the order’s collar in a painting from the late fifteenth century⁶³. Finally, the armorial mentions a *messire Floris de la Vere*: the weapon in fact belongs to the lord of Veere, but he never went by the name *Floris*. In fact, the Wolfert van Borssele, Lord of Veere, died in 1409, whereas his son Hendrik was not yet of age in 1415. The title seems to be incorrectly linked to the name of Floris van Borssele, Lord of Souburg, leaving the question open who actually enrolled in the confraternity in 1416 (most likely, the Lord of Souburg), because another *seigneur de la Vere* (most likely, Hendrik van Borssele) became a member in 1426⁶⁴.

The majority of the names in the armorial belong to noblemen and women from Hainaut, which confirms the local character of the confraternity. This raises the question why nobles from Holland and Zeeland became members, especially after 1428, when Jacqueline had effectively ceded her rights to Philip of Burgundy. The early membership of the Van Borsseles is explained by their presence at the court and their role in government, even though they later sided with Jacqueline’s opponents: her uncle and her cousin. If they were admitted out of political considerations, the effort to ensure their loyalty obviously failed. More remarkable is the absence of the family of Van Haamstede among the confraternity’s members. The Lord of Haamstede was a staunch supporter of Jacqueline, but only Floris van Haamstede van Moermond (not to be confused with the Countess’ confidant with the same name) enrolled in the 1430s. This seems to be a pattern: only a few of Jacqueline’s key supporters from Holland and Zeeland were admitted as members in the decade between 1417 and 1428. A comparison of the names of the known supporters of the Cods and Hooks with names in the armorial shows that nobles

⁶² MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 20v, and see note 51 above. A caption in different handwriting mentions her four marriages, which signals the late compilation or editing of the armorial. This is not the case in the Brussels copy, but she is consistently identified as *Jacques de Bavieres et de Hainau, daulphine de Viennois* and *Jacque de Hainau, dauphine de Viennois* in both manuscripts; BRUSSELS, KBR, Fonds Goethals, ms. 707, fol. 39v, suggesting that she did in fact enrol during her marriage to John, Duke of Touraine, who died in 1417. The first page of the armorial displays the coat of arms of Margaret of Burgundy, who raised her daughter Jacqueline at the castle of Quesnoy.

⁶³ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 22r, while BRUSSELS, KBR, Fonds Goethals, ms. 707, fol. 42r has no name written below the Van Borssele coat of arms. For the first meeting of Jacqueline and her later husband Frank: JANSE, *Een pion voor een dame*, p. 80. See, for the painting, M. BASS, Anonymous, Portrait of Frank van Borselen (c. 1390-1470), Lord of Sint Maartensdijk, Northern Netherlands, after c. 1480, in *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, ed. J. P. FILEDT KOK, online coll. cat. Amsterdam, 2010: URL hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.6830 (accessed 03.01.2019).

⁶⁴ MONS, Bibliothèque universitaire, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 24v, 39v; BRUSSELS, KBR, Fonds Goethals, ms. 707, fol. 45r, 54v.

from both sides joined the confraternity after 1427⁶⁵. Members inclined towards the Cod party, which supported John of Bavaria and Philip the Good, were, for example, Jan, Lieven and Jacob van Kats, Klaas van Reimerswaal and Willem van Oostende, while Alsten and Pieter van Botland, Jan de bastaard van Blois and Jan van Heemstede represented the Hooks. Although a tradition of party strife was alien to Hainaut, the confraternity's members from this county were also to be found on both sides of the conflict that existed between Jacqueline of Bavaria and her uncle John⁶⁶.

Until about 1428, then, it is clear that new members of the Order of St. Anthony from Holland and Zeeland were not recruited by Jacqueline of Bavaria because of their political allegiance as the names of her obvious supporters are missing in the armorial; instead, the confraternity appears to have been a social network that excluded nobles who openly supported the Countess (assuming that they would have been interested in enrolling)⁶⁷. It was only after her loss of power that nobles of different political colours joined the confraternity, but by that time the Order of St. Anthony was already losing its social attraction and certainly its potential function as a political network.

4. Concluding Remarks

Princes and nobles in the late medieval Low Countries were not an exception in forming associations in the pursuit of their collective goals. In Holland and Zeeland, the orders of the Garden and of St. Anthony, functioning primarily as a political alliance and a religious brotherhood respectively, fulfilled the various needs of their founders and members. Consequently, the former was more curial in nature but less organised, while the activities of the latter became more institutionalised due to the involvement of the Wittelsbachs. The context-specific history of these associations precludes interpretations that view them as precursors of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece, and as such as a weak reflection of the proper princely order of knighthood.

The medieval corporation was an institutional form and resource that shaped late medieval political, economic, social and cultural interactions, in many ways due to its flexibility and adaptability. It offered nobles in the Low Countries, as

⁶⁵ A. JANSE, *Ridderschap in Holland. Portret van een adellijke elite in de late middeleeuwen*, Hilversum, 2001, p. 411; A. VAN STEENSEL, *Edelen in Zeeland. Macht, rijkdom en status in een laatmiddeleeuwse samenleving*, Hilversum, 2010, p. 204; M. J. VAN GENT, *Vijftien mannen achter Jacoba van Beieren*, in *Holland*, vol. 29, 1997, p. 127-142.

⁶⁶ FLAMMANG, *Partis en Hainaut?*, p. 560-562.

⁶⁷ Candidates for membership were vetted by the sovereign of the order, seven knights and two squires. MONS, *Bibliothèque universitaire*, Fonds Puissant, ms. 11, fol. 1v. New members were admitted each year between 1415 and 1438.

elsewhere in Europe, an opportunity to collectively claim and display social distinction, practise devotional activities and socialise with others. On their part, princes pragmatically used associations to command loyalty and cohesion by granting membership to specific nobles. By joining an association, nobles could distinguish themselves from their peers through competition for social status. Social recognition and a fitting lifestyle were essential prerequisites of noble status in the later Middle Ages, meaning that nobles always sought new symbols and practices that affirmed their social dominance⁶⁸. Membership of an exclusive noble or knightly society fit that bill perfectly. Even if it meant life-long service to the prince or confirmed an already established reputation, members sometimes proudly bore honorary titles and publicly showed off their insignia and robes during the ceremonial chapters. In the case of the Order of the Golden Fleece, these chapters were held in towns, where the coats of arms of the participating knights remained permanently displayed in the local church. Hence, the relatives of Louis of Bruges and Adolph of Cleves resisted the proposed removal of the coats or arms of these nobles, who had supported the Flemish Revolt against Maximilian of Habsburg in the last quarter of the fifteenth century – their removal would have been an inefaceable stain on the blazon of the families⁶⁹.

In contrast to the devotional and social considerations to be taken into account when establishing or joining a noble association, the political motives of both princes and nobles are less obvious to pinpoint. William of Oostervant and Jacqueline of Bavaria granted the insignia of the Order of the Garden of Holland as a way to forge new relations and retain potential supporters, but there is little evidence that the alliance yielded effective political support. In the case of the Order of St. Anthony, the argue membership comprised nobles of different political colours, making it difficult to argue that Jacqueline of Bavaria and her advisers had a clear political strategy in mind when they patronised the confraternity during the turbulent decade from 1418 to 1428. The political function of the Order of the Golden Fleece is less disputed⁷⁰, but the objectives of the sovereign and knights as members were not restricted to the political sphere.

⁶⁸ H. KAMINSKY, Estate, Nobility, and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages, in *Speculum*, vol. 68/3, 1993, p. 684-709; P. BOURDIEU, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, 1979, p. 258, 278-279: “la ‘distinction’ ou, mieux, la ‘classe’, manifestation légitime, c’est-à-dire transfigurée et méconnaissable, de la classe sociale, n’existe que par les luttes pour l’appropriation exclusive des signes distinctifs qui font la ‘distinction naturelle’.”

⁶⁹ REIFFENBERG, *Histoire de l’Ordre de la Toison d’or*, p. 180, 197-198, 233, 236. The case was shelved by the Order due to the death of the two lords. However, the coat of arms of the Zeeland noble Wolfert van Borssele was removed from the St. Rumbold’s church in Mechelen in 1491.

⁷⁰ S. DÜNNEBEIL, Der Orden vom Goldenen Vlies und die Beherrschung des Adels. Karl als Herr oder Ordensbruder?, in *Karl der Kühne von Burgund. Fürst zwischen europäischem Adel und der Eidgenossenschaft*, dir. K. OSHEMA, R. C. SCHWINGES, Zürich, 2010, p. 171-184; VAUGHAN, *Philip the Good*, p. 162-163.

Finally, the chances of joining a noble or knightly society were slim in the later Middle Ages: only a tiny minority of the nobility were admitted to the Order of the Golden Fleece. In this period, however, nobles of higher and lesser status joined various other, often civic, associations in the Low Countries, or participated in their activities, thereby transcending and reinforcing social boundaries. The first example are tournaments organised by urban jousters, such as the society of the White Bear in Bruges, or by the princely court in conjunction with the urban elites, as well as the shooting competitions of the urban militia⁷¹. The second is the noblemen and women enrolled in urban devotional associations. For example, the confraternity of Our Lady, based in the Westmonster church in Middelburg, counted several nobles amongst its members, as did the confraternity of St. Anne in Ghent⁷². Finally, some nobles with literary aspirations joined chambers of rhetoric in Holland and Zeeland, associations typically associated with urban cultural practices, although several were situated in villages⁷³. The scope of these socio-cultural interactions has yet to be determined, but the examples illustrate how noble societies in fifteenth-century Holland and Zeeland were part of a broader associational landscape.

⁷¹ A. BROWN, Urban Jousts in het Later Middle Ages. The White Bear of Bruges, in *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, vol. 78/2, 2000, p. 315-330; M. DAMEN, The Town as a Stage? Urban Space and Tournaments in Late Medieval Brussels, in *Urban History*, vol. 43/1, 2016, p. 47-71.

⁷² VAN STEENSEL, *Edelen in Zeeland*, p. 313; P. TRIO, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving. De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen*, Leuven, 1993, p. 215.

⁷³ VAN STEENSEL, *Edelen in Zeeland*, p. 406-407; A. VAN DIXHOORN, New Institutions and the Dynamics of Civic Culture. Chambers of Rhetoric in the Early Modern (Northern) Netherlands, in *Konstruktion der Gegenwart und Zukunft*, dir. R. SUNTRUP, J. R. VEENSTRA, Frankfurt am Main, 2008, p. 139-141.