

A Capital of Fashion
Luxuries, guilds and economic change
in late medieval Bruges

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A prince goes shopping

Luxuries, the duke and the city

In the course of the late middle ages, Bruges had gradually become the central market for luxury items in the Low Countries, which were so coveted by the Dukes of Burgundy and their noble and bourgeois surroundings. Its role in northwest Europe as a central place for international commercial and financial exchange attracted Italian merchants -and among the multitude of textiles in demand by the court, the Italian (mostly Luccese and Florentine) velvets, brocades and gold cloth were most prominent-, Hanseatic suppliers of furs and, of course Flemish and Brabantine *marchands drapiers*, tapestry entrepreneurs from Brussels, Arras and Tournai, and last but not least jewellers and goldsmiths from all over the Low Countries. In order to acquire what was needed, the ducal financial officers were easily able to meet the demand at this most central of markets in the duke's dominion.¹

The duke's expenditure on these luxury goods in 1468, the year of the wedding ceremony and the chapter of the Golden Fleece in Bruges, is well documented in the accounts of the ducal *argentier*. This financial officer, whose function was reinstated by Charles the Bold in 1467,² had become the chief responsible for most of the personal expenditure of the duke. Only the daily expenses on food and wine and the daily maintenance of the duke's surroundings were not channelled through the *argentier* in this period, but were the responsibility of the ducal

¹ On the role of Bruges as a market for commodities and information, we refer to chapters 3 and 4.

² Boone (1995) **-**, Bautier and Sornay (2001) **-**.

hotel (whose administrator was the *maître de la chambre aux deniers*).³ Although the accounts do not reveal all spending at court, they are a very reliable source to measure at least one specific kind of expenditure, the purchase of luxury goods, which were registered in the chapter on purchases of gold cloth (*achats de draps d'or*), compiling all expenditure on textiles, dress, tapestries, etc. on the one hand, and in the chapter on purchases of jewellery and hollowware (*achats de joiaux, vaisselle d'or et d'argent*) with all expenditure on jewellery and gold and silver objects.⁴

The first years of the *argentier*, 1468 and 1469, however, may be atypical for the rest of Charles's reign, though. The accounts inform us about his beginning as a duke and a lot of specific events linked to princely entries disturb the normal patterns of spending. The expenses for these events were indeed enormous, in particular the purchase of expensive silk and brocaded textiles. Almost all of these luxury fabrics were supplied by the factor of the Medici firm in Bruges, Tommaso Portinari. They account for more than half of all expenditure on luxury goods. It is certainly not a coincidence that Portinari profited from the occasion. He could, of course, easily deliver such expensive fabrics from Italy. But Portinari was in many ways close to the duke and his surroundings as a counsellor and financier.⁵

Table 1: ducal expenditure in the accounts of the *argentier* 1468-1469

| N: £97,238 | £ of 40gr.Fl. | |
|--|---------------|----------|
| market purchases | 19,1% | £ 18,559 |
| deliveries and services by court officials | 17,9% | £ 17,410 |

³ The accounts of the ducal household have only been preserved in a fragmentary way. For a general survey, see Bautier and Sornay (2001) 86-102 and Paravicini (1988) 67-74.

⁴ The accounts the *argentier* have been published recently: Greve and Lebailly (2001) and (2002); the 1470 account is in press and has not been included in this analysis.

⁵ Boone (1999) 31-54 and Stabel (2006) 101-117.

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------|----------|
| court suppliers | 7,4% | £ 7,224 |
| deliveries by Portinari | 55,6% | £ 54,045 |

The expenditure by the *argentier* was distributed through three different channels. 1° Appointed court suppliers, who were called merchants who follow the court (*marchands suivant la cour*), delivered mostly textiles such as Low Countries woollens. 2° There were deliveries and services rendered by court officials (feudal court functions like the *sommelier* or *chambellan*, but also ducal counsellors) and servants (*valets de chambre*). The latter were usually specialist craftsmen like tailors, shoemakers, embroiderers, saddle makers, manufacturers of spurs, but sometimes they were also highly valued and esteemed artists (painters, embroiderers, jewellers and goldsmiths). Many of them followed the duke and his court all the time and served as the duke's personal tailors (*tailleurs de robes* and *couturiers*), fur makers (*fouriers*) and shoemakers (*cordouaniers*). Some of them were mainly active in one of the many places where the duke resided and attended the court on a less regular basis. They were craftsmen in their own right with a business of their own and they appeared less frequently in the accounts. The most famous of these *valets* in the reign of Charles's father, Philip the Good, had undoubtedly been Jan Van Eyck himself. Finally 3° the largest group of court suppliers were not regulars at all: 19% of all expenditure (and in fact 75% if Portinari's deliveries are included) were market purchases or services by specialist craftsmen in various places, who wore neither the title of appointed merchant, nor that of ducal servant.

Most court expenditure in the accounts of the *argentier* concerned textiles: woollens, velvets, silks, brocades, silk damasks and linen. The share of textiles is indeed overwhelming, though largely due to Portinari's deliveries (66%). Court suppliers of textiles were important in supplying textiles at a more regular basis. The merchant Haquinet de Langle, originating from

Lille and already active as court supplier in the final years of Philip the Good, delivered woollen cloth and velvets almost on a monthly basis for a total value of £4,898 (68% of all deliveries made by appointed merchants). Dress and embroidery (7.4%) followed a different trajectory.⁶ Here the dominance of the ducal *valets* is outspoken: this is the demesne of the personal tailors and embroiderers. The duke trusted these specialists and many were always present in his proximity. Embroiderer and *valet* Jean Marchant received in these two years eight commissions, worth no less than £3,750, for work on dresses, sleeves, and other decorated pieces of clothing. He probably worked from his Brussels workshop. Other servants were organised differently. Shoemaker Guillaume Rondel probably followed the court and received £185 for 21 commissions, almost one each month, to make shoes for the duke and his household. Direct market purchase for fashion items is less frequent (9.3%). Trusted tailors and other *valets* were probably seen as more reliable. The only exception was furs, which were usually bought directly from fur dealers, mostly in Bruges.

Commissions of jewellery (11% of the expenditure) and art (3.4%) were also predominantly given to court servants.⁷ In particular *valet* Gerard Loyet, whose splendid votive statuette with the duke offering saintly relics to the collegial church of Liège is symbolic for Charles's bid for power in his triumphal first years as duke of Burgundy, received the bulk of all commissions for jewellery: in two years he got commissions worth over £6,000.⁸ Court painters Jean Hennequart and Pierre Coustain had a similar position for the painting of jousting shields and banners. More specialist art, like illuminated manuscripts, were commissioned to workshops of private entrepreneurs in Bruges, Brussels and Antwerp.⁹ The

⁶ On the role of clothing at the Burgundian court: Abraham-Thisse (1993) 27–70, Caron (1997a) 51–64 and (1997b) 157–172; Jolivet (1997) 5–35.

⁷ On the organisation of the Burgundian court and the ducal *valets*: Paravicini (1977) 127-182, id. (1991) 69-102, and Blockmans et al. (1998) 7-28.

⁸ Van der Velden (2000).

⁹ Stabel (2006) **, Blockmans et al. (1998) 7-18.

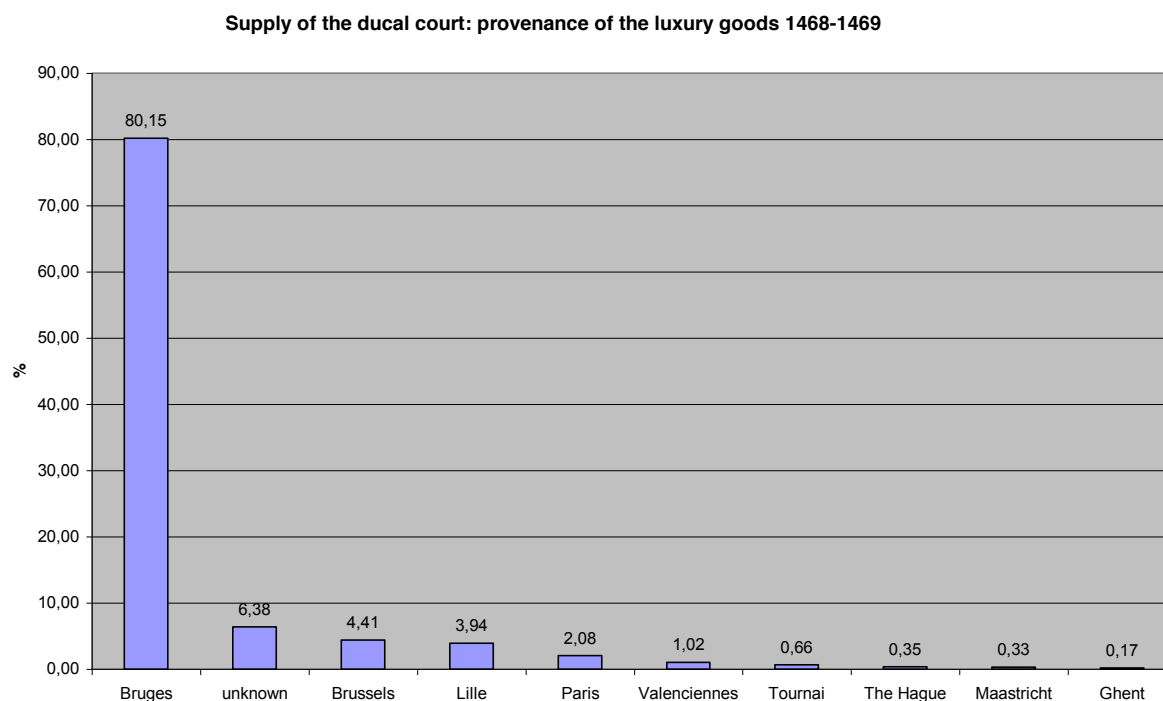
purchase of horses, horse gear, food and various other consumables was done to a large extent on the urban markets, that of arms and armour almost exclusively.

If we include the deliveries by Portinari, market purchases are responsible for about 75% of the *argentier*'s spending. The itinerant court of Burgundy relied heavily in the urbanised and commercialised economy of the Low Countries on local and regional supply networks when travelling around, but clear patterns of concentration can be acknowledged, which do not necessarily correlate with the actual place of residence. It is not surprising that Bruges is leading the ducal market hierarchy (80% of all expenditure with the Portinari textiles), closely followed by Brussels and Lille. These were not only preferred residential cities of the ducal household;¹⁰ these cities also constituted the main commercial arteries in the Low Countries. Paris was still the fourth market, but this high rank depended on only one purchase of jewellery from a Parisian goldsmith, Jean le Breton, in 1469: a gift to the cardinal of Angers for services rendered (*pour aucuns agreables services quil luy a par cy devant faiz*).¹¹

Figure 1

¹⁰ Paravicini (1991) 207-263.

¹¹ Greve and Le Bailly **



Some markets seem to follow the duke's residential pattern: the presence of towns in Holland (Leiden, Haarlem) and Zeeland (Middelburg, Veere) can be explained by the duke's tour through his principalities. It also accounts for the high ranking of The Hague, the residential capital of Holland, where Charles the Bold spent a lot of time in these years. Other markets, however, do not fit at all in the pattern of the itinerant court. Some cities, where the duke resided a lot, were very low in the ducal market hierarchy. The *argentier* spent nothing in Hesdin in Artois, since the days of Philip the Bold one of the favourite ducal residences. Most of expenditure for the court in Walloon-Flanders and Artois was concentrated in the city of Lille. Very surprisingly, only very small amounts were spent in Ghent (a marginal £124 on candles and horse gear). The city of Ghent was the largest and politically most influential city in the Low Countries (in 1469 Charles stayed no less than 56 days in his prestigious Ghent urban palace the *Prinsenhof*). Apparently, the Ghent market was squeezed between Bruges and Brussels and it could not profit from advantages of scale the two other cities could offer.

But spending was also very modest in Saint-Omer (Artois), Le Quesnoy (Walloon-Flanders) and Péronne (Hainaut), traditional residential places where the duke stayed in these years.

Other markets were used more intensively though, even if the duke was hardly present at all. Some peripheral towns were also popular residences and could probably profit from existing networks of supply. This is the case for Mons (the leading city in the county of Hainaut), where the *argentier* paid for the services of three goldsmiths. In other towns, it was clearly local expertise, which was sought and there was no direct link with the residential pattern. In the episcopal city of Tournai, Philippe le Sellier, a Tournaisien merchant delivered a whole range of goods for the “maintenance of the court” in 1469. Although he is not described as an appointed supplier of the court, this could be the case of a merchant with longstanding relations with the court. The permanent presence of a powerful and wealthy bishop and the presence of the manufacture of prestigious tapestries has certainly boosted the importance of Tournai as a centre for luxury commodities as well. In Valenciennes, the second city in Hainaut, it is the local expertise of the manufacture of weapons and armour, which attracted ducal spending.¹²

What caused the ducal officers to choose between markets? The analysis of the type of goods and the market where they were bought reveals part of the answer. For textiles Bruges was the single most important market, mostly because of the presence of Tommaso Portinari. His luxurious Italian fabrics dominate ducal expenditure. But other merchants were also involved in supplying the court with silks and exotic fabrics. One of these suppliers was also Italian merchant (Ambrosio Ruphin), the others were local mercers and cloth dealers. Bruges was without any competition the most important textile market in Northern Europe and the

¹² Weapon industry in Low Countries **

traditional outlet of the tradable surplus of the Low Countries industries. Lille, the second market for textiles was completely different. Unlike Bruges suppliers who dealt in expensive Italian textiles, Lille cloth merchants sold predominantly woollens, which were manufactured by Flemish producers themselves. The bulk of all cloth and black velvets were supplied by an appointed court merchant, who probably had his roots in Lille as well. Earlier research has demonstrated that Lille had become a hub for the finishing of woollens manufacture in the western parts of the county of Flanders (the so-called cloth manufacturing centres of the River Lys) and in Walloon-Flanders.¹³

For market purchases of dress and fashion items, Bruges was clearly the dominant market. Bruges and Brussels craftsmen were relied on for leather and metal objects (purses, dagger sheets, locks, tent covers etc.). Bruges and Brussels, and to a lesser extent Valenciennes and Lille, were also important markets for armour. Food (sugar and Mediterranean fruit, spices, drugs against pestilence) was mostly purchased in Brussels and occasionally also in the other residences (The Hague). They seem to be more directly linked to the actual place of residence. The items related to food (1.3% of the total expenditure), however, are likely to be very misleading. Expenditure on banquets and festivities (for example the famous banquet after the wedding of Charles and Margaret of York discussed in chapter **) and on the duke's daily consumption was channelled through other accounts, the accounts of the ducal *hotel* and those of more local or regional ducal financial officers (*recette de Flandre*, etc.). Moreover, the duke relied often on his own domanial officers to make deliveries, in particular in his country residences.¹⁴ Local networks of merchants and artisans were, however, also crucial. It had not been a coincidence that, for example the famous *banquet du faisan* was organized in Lille by

¹³ Stabel (1995) **.

¹⁴ The financial organisation of the Burgundian finances is particularly well studied for the first dukes (Van Nieuwenhuysen ** and **). For the local administrations see Soens (**) and Jean (1992)

Charles's father Philip the Good in 1453, a large city with the necessary infrastructure to stage the event and not too far away from the crucial market of Bruges.¹⁵

Spending on art and jewellery is considered as most typical for Burgundian court splendour, although it was clearly surpassed in the level of investment by textiles and fashion.¹⁶ Paris had lost its role as the regular market that it had during the reign of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless. Again Brussels and Bruges dominate the ducal market hierarchy in the early years of the reign of Charles the Bold. In Brussels, five goldsmiths managed to sell jewellery and other objects; Hubrecht Boudvis was clearly the most important one among them worth no less than £759. In Bruges, more artisans were involved, but they got smaller commissions. Other jewellers were craftsmen from The Hague and from towns where the duke passed through when he wanted to give a silver or gold plate to someone (Kortrijk).¹⁷ Art commissions followed a similar pattern, although in this case Bruges is significantly more important than other centres of production. Obviously the production of illustrated manuscripts in Bruges is the reason for this concentration. Such manuscripts were an integral part of the Duke of Burgundy's material culture. Both Loyset Liédet and Willem Vrelant, two of the leading workshops in Bruges, got commissions in 1468 and 1469.¹⁸ This is also the only sector where the rising commercial city of Antwerp appears in the supply off the court: a commission to Lieven van Laethem, at the time active in Antwerp, for illustrations in a couple of prayer books (*livrets des oroisons*).¹⁹ For the rest, the Scheldt Metropolis of the 16th century is still very much absent from the supply system of the Burgundian court.

¹⁵ Caron (1996) 269–88.

¹⁶ Smith (1989) 123–8.

¹⁷ Lit. gift giving at the Burgundian court **

¹⁸ Smeyers **, Vrelant **

¹⁹ Van Laethem **

In the reign of Charles the Bold, Bruges (with its Italian business community), followed at a great distance by other important ducal residences like Brussels and Lille, was, therefore, able to attract the bulk of ducal consumption of luxury goods. All of these cities boasted important industries for the manufacture of various textiles, arms and armoury, leather and fashion, while at the same time urban building entrepreneurs must also have profited from large ducal investments.²⁰ They were also quite able to meet the requirements of infrastructure and supply on the occasion meetings of big festive occasions like the Golden Fleece and other events of the Burgundian ritual calendar.²¹ But surprisingly, other cities of equal economic importance were almost completely absent from the ducal supply lines, even if some had strategic political and residential functions. Ghent, the largest city in the Low Countries, was a well-frequented residential city of the Counts of Flanders and later of the Dukes of Burgundy. It had its own *Prinsenhof* and it accommodated the all-important Council of Flanders. Mechelen did not yet take up its role as residential town it would have half a century later, but the town nonetheless enjoyed a strategic location so that it was able to attract the central juridical institution of the Low Countries, the Parliament or Great Council of the Burgundian Low Countries. Antwerp was the rising commercial city in the second half of the 15th century, yet the Scheldt city could, despite its international vocation, not achieve an important place in the court supply of luxury goods. The centrality of some cities, and above all of Bruges, seems to have generated a system of court supply that fitted into a particular urban network that was both politically and economically inspired. Yet this system was not static. It changed over time.

The lure of Parisian luxuries from 1384 to 1419

²⁰ Sosson (1977) ; Gaier (1973).

²¹ Greve (forthcoming). Other infrastructure was also available in large cities, prostitution for example: Dupont (1996).

The reign of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless witnessed a fundamental change in the administrative traditions in the county of Flanders. Instead of a count who was likely to reside in one of his many rural castles and urban residences in Flanders, Mechelen, Artois and in the second half of the 14th century also the region of Antwerp in Brabant, the first Burgundian dukes of the house of Valois were much more preoccupied with their political interests at the royal court of France, and they tended to reside mostly in Paris and, when in Burgundy, in Dijon, Beaune and Auxerre rather than in their northern principalities. And even when they were in Flanders and Artois, they rarely stayed for longer periods in the large Flemish cities, Ghent, Bruges and Lille, and preferred to reside in Saint-Omer and Arras closer to their political hotspot of Paris.²² This residential pattern clearly influenced the structure of ducal spending on luxury goods in these years. Paris was almost until the murder of John the Fearless on the bridge of Montereau by far the preferred market of luxuries for the ducal financial officers.

In order to identify ducal spending on luxury goods, the accounts of the ducal hotel and those from the close relatives in the ducal family do not reveal much²³. Spending is registered at a daily basis, but expenditure on food and wine and on daily items which the household needed, is hardly specified. The financial officers provided the duke and his close relatives with enough money to keep up their status as a prince and nobleman (*pour avoir leur estat*).²⁴ Only occasionally luxury expenditure is registered in the household accounts. This is the case for the household of Margaret of Bavaria, the widow of Duke John the Fearless, in the period

²² Vaughan (1979a) and id. (1979b). The itineraries of the first dukes are published in Gachard ** and Van der Linden **. On the role of Ghent: Boone and De Hemptinne (1997) 279-304.

²³ Paradoxically the accounts of the ducal household are better preserved for this early period of the Valois dukes than for the heyday of Burgundian and early Habsburg power in the 15th century; see the survey of accounts in Bautier and Sornay (2001), **-**.

²⁴ For the reign of John the Fearless, see ADCO, B1568, 1578, 1581 and 1589. The expenditure of the *maître de la chambre aux deniers* (duc al household) is settled with the general receiver (*recette générale de toutes les finances*) and the household accounts only rarely mention the purchase of luxury commodities. Only in the *dépense commune* some purchases were registered, in this early period usually made in Paris.

1422-24, when she resided in the duchy of Burgundy. Among the host of purchases of woollen and silk cloth, armoury and others, various luxury commodities of the Low Countries appear: red woollen cloth from Mechelen, Liège styled shoes etc. But nothing specific from the Bruges fashion crafts seem to be present. The goods were, without exception either sold by merchants and craftsmen from Dijon and Auxonne, or they came directly from Luccese merchants in Paris, by then controlled by the English, the allies of Duke Philip the Good.²⁵

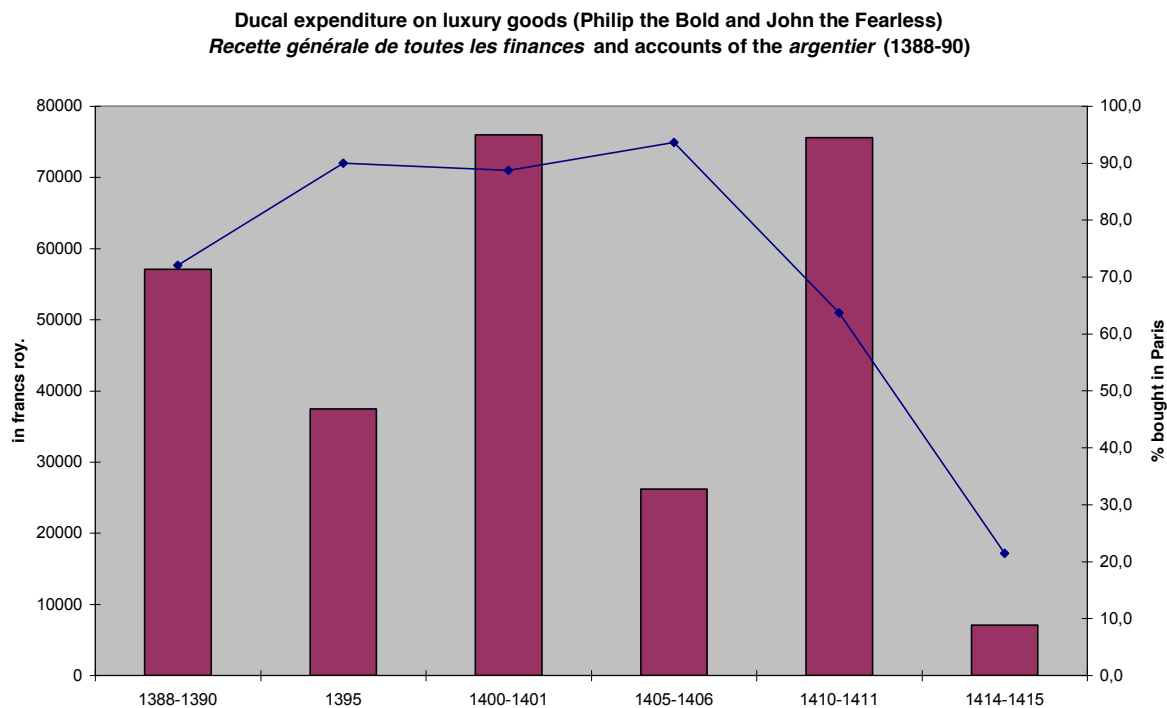
If the *maître aux deniers* provided the duke and his household with his daily allowances for food, consumables and gifts, the luxury goods items were usually bought through the offices of the general receiver.²⁶

Figure 2²⁷

²⁵ ADCO, B 1623bis.

²⁶ On the ducal household and its complex financial organisation, see Van Nieuwenhuysen (1984) and (199*).

²⁷ For the reign of Philip the Bold the following accounts of the *recette générale de toutes les finances* have been included in the analysis: ADCO B1503 (26th January 1395 – 31st December 1395, when the duke resided mostly in Paris, Dijon and for a short period in Avignon) and B1519 (1st February 1400-31st December 1401 when he resided in Paris, Dijon and**). The preceding period is covered by the accounts of the ducal argentier for 1388-1390 (ADCO B1476) when Philip the Bold spent a lot of time in his northern principalities. The reign of John the Fearless is represented by the accounts of the *recette générale de toutes les finances* for 5th November 1405- 19th November 1406 when the duke was mostly in Paris and ** (ADCO B1543 and ADN B1878), 1st February 1410-31st January 1411 when the duke resided mostly in ** (ADCO B1560) and finally 19th March 1414 – 18th April 1415, when the duke was ousted from Paris by the Armagnac party and spent his days in his northern principalities in his residences of Lille, Arras, Hesdin, Ghent and Bruges and in the duchy of Burgundy in Dijon and Beaune (AND B1903).

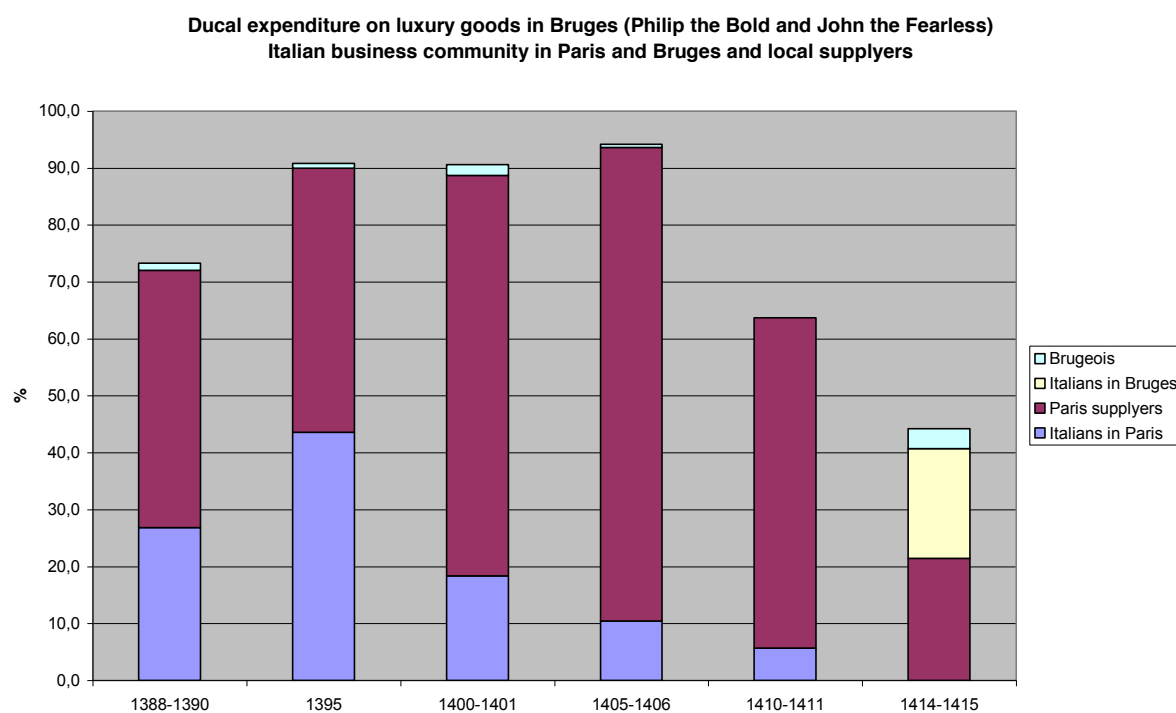


The purchase of textiles, fashion items, tapestries and jewellery in the accounts of Philip the Bold clearly reveals the centrality of the capital of the Kings of France. For a long time, Philip was warden to his nephew, the occasionally insane king Charles VI, and as such he spent most of his days in his Parisian *hotel*. The Italian business community in Paris profited from ducal spending and supplied him with jewellery and luxury fabrics, mostly Italian-made gold cloth, silks, velvets and brocades. In particular Genoese merchants (jewellery), traders from Lucca (silks) and occasionally also Lombard and Florentine merchants intervened in these transactions. There was no single Italian merchant who could monopolise the ducal supply – as would later be the case by Portinari–, although Luccese traders Dino Rapondi and Michele *Marche* and the Lombard merchant Michele *Marcaty* were able to attract important markets for luxury fabrics, and Genoese traders Niccolo *Dawoultre* and Jacopo *De Sermyne* for jewellery.²⁸ Dino Rapondi, the leading Luccese merchant and financier, who was active both

²⁸ Caron et al. (1998) 31-41.

in Bruges and in Paris, had the closest ties with the Burgundian court.²⁹ But as a whole Parisian suppliers were more important in supplying the Burgundian court than Paris based Italians and the range of luxury goods they provided was broader, as they were able to make deliveries of not only northern luxury goods (cloth from Flanders, Brabant and Normandy, linens from Holland and Germany etc.), but also of typical “Italian” luxury commodities like silks, velvets and brocades.

Figure 3



Paris was not only the main distribution point for textiles and jewellery. Also the ducal purchase of tapestries, which were in great majority in this period manufactured in Arras, the capital of the duke’s own duchy of Artois, were traded through the French capital.³⁰ The fairs

²⁹ Lambert (**). Lit. Italianen in Parijs nog na te kijken**

³⁰ Van Nieuwenhuysen (1984) 397-398.

of Troyes in Champagne and craftsmen and merchants of the duke's Burgundian capital of Dijon were his other main suppliers.

Table 2 Provenance of the luxury goods in the ducal accounts (*argentier* 1388-90 and *recette générale de toutes les finances*)

| | duc al | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|--------|-------|---------|-------|----------|
| | Paris | servants | Arras | Bruges | Dijon | Tournai | Lille | Brussels |
| 1388-1390 | 72.1% | 18.3% | 0.6% | 1.2% | 4.1% | 2.4% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| 1395 | 90.0% | 3.9% | 0.0% | 0.8% | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 1400-1401 | 88.7% | 7.2% | 2.2% | 1.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 1405-1406 | 93.6% | 4.6% | 1.0% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.2% | 0.0% |
| 1410-1411 | 63.7% | 33.5% | 1.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.3% | 0.1% |
| 1414-1415 | 21.4% | 37.0% | 11.1% | 22.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 6.2% | 0.0% |

Only occasionally the large Flemish cities in his newly acquired northern territories could profit from ducal investments. In particular in Philip's first years as count of Flanders (he became count after the death of his father in law Louis de Male in 1384), the accounts of the *Recette de Flandre* mention purchases of furs, woollen cloth and silks amounting to no less than £7,118 in the account of 1386-87.³¹ Most of these orders were placed in Arras, Lille and Bruges. But gradually all spending on luxury items disappears from the *recette de Flandre*. From 1386 onwards the accounts of the ducal *argentier* and from 1392 onwards those of the general receiver *de toutes les finances* increasingly centralised luxury spending.³² The Bruges market sometimes supplied the ducal household with spices and Mediterranean fruit (oranges,

³¹ ADN B4075. See also Van Nieuwenhuysen (1984), 393, n. 49.

³² Van Nieuwenhuysen (1984) 392-395.

raisins from Alexandria and Damascus etc.), but the main staple of Bruges in the ducal supply was fur, imported by Hanseatic merchants and sold by Bruges wholesalers to the ducal officers.³³ Ghent and Lille hardly come into the ducal supply system. It is Arras, which stands out in the northern principalities for its woollens and tapestries, and occasionally even Brussels appears. The presence of Brussels can easily be linked to the Philip the Bold's policy in the duchy of Brabant. As successor to Louis de Male, Philip inherited the former count's strategy of getting a foothold in Brabantine politics, a strategy that would lead to a short-lived independent Burgundian dynasty in the duchy (with Philip's son Antony) and, eventually, to the incorporation of the duchy in the Burgundian possessions in 1430 during the reign of Philip's grandson, Philip the Good.³⁴

After Philip's death things start to change slowly. Certainly, Paris and Dijon remain the leading markets for the ducal household. John the Fearless was, as his father before him, very much involved in French royal politics. His bloody feud with the Orléans and Armagnac faction is, of course, well known. In order to safeguard the all-important loyalty of Paris and to defend his influence at the royal court, John was required to reside often in his Hotel d'Artois on the right bank of the Seine, close to the Parisian *Halles*.³⁵ This French policy helps to explain the tenacity of the Parisian market in the ducal supply lines, but gradually John's Flemish and Artesian principalities come into play as well. John resided more often than his father in the North (in particular in the 1410s) and also favoured, unlike Philip the Bold's preference for Arras and Saint-Omer, the largest cities of the county of Flanders, Bruges, Ghent and Lille.³⁶

³³ Van Nieuwenhuysen (1984) 397-399 and Delort (1978, vol. 2) 682.

³⁴ On the growing impact of Burgundy on the duchy of Brabant: Uyttebrouck, (1975) 1, 476-490.

³⁵ Vaughan (1979b) **, Blockmans and Prevenier (1999) 37-44.

³⁶ Cauchies **Itinéraires**.

Parisian merchants remain, however, dominant in supplying luxury goods to the Burgundian court in John's first years as duke of Burgundy. In 1410 a great amount of textiles, both woollens and silks, were still bought at the Parisian market from Luccese and local merchants. But slowly the emphasis starts to shift. Luccese and Genoese merchants gradually lost their prominent role in Burgundian supply in Paris. Dino Rapondi, although still very much present, clearly had to cut back his turnover at the ducal court and no other Luccese merchant really took over his prominent place. Hence, at first instance, it is Parisian traders that gain importance in Duke John's early years. But, more importantly, from the 1410s onwards John's northern principalities come to the forefront and Parisian dominance is falling back in favour of the commercial arbitration of noblemen and clergymen in the immediate vicinity of the duke and of ducal officers and counsellors, who were responsible for one third of ducal expenditure. For the moment, the cities of the north could not yet profit. Flemish and Artesian traders only deliver smaller amounts of woollen cloth (expensive scarlet and black woollen cloth from Ypres by merchant-drapers from Lille, like Josart de la Barre and Josart Struvaert), and tapestries from Arras. Embroidery, furs, jewellery and gold and silver objects were, however, all still bought from Parisian merchants and artisans, or from followers of the ducal court.³⁷

But inevitably the tide turned, and the main cause for change in Burgundian court supply was political. In April and May 1413 John the Fearless overplayed his hand in Paris. Support for the Burgundian cause was undermined by fear of the popular revolt of the *Cabochiens*, supporters of the *Bourguignon* party. The dauphin and the *Armagnac* party seized the opportunity and forced the Burgundians to retreat from their Parisian stronghold. On 23 August John left the city, only to return much later and in completely changed circumstances

³⁷ ADCO B 1560, f. 133 ff.

in 1418.³⁸ Although the duke continued to focus his policy on Paris in the coming years, and he was able to gradually regain his power just before and in the aftermath of the battle of Agincourt in October 1415, he was never again able to control Paris as he had done before. The result for the supply lines of the Burgundian court can be noticed straight away. The cities of Flanders and Artois, and above all Bruges (and its Italian community), profited from a new and continuous demand for luxuries. For the Italian merchants this change was even not that fundamental. Their trading houses had agents in both Paris and Bruges, but for the others the change was indeed abrupt.

Although expenditure in 1414 -the accounts of the *recette générale* for 1415 have not been preserved- was relatively low compared with the very high investments of the Burgundians in luxuries at their Parisian court in the years before, the trend had clearly altered. Paris lost its prominence as the main market for luxuries in the Burgundian accounts, and the only Parisian trader to retain great importance as a court supplier was the goldsmith and jeweller *Ghuldequin Happart*, already a reliable supplier in the duke's Parisian period.³⁹ As before more than a third of all expenditure was channelled through noblemen, clergymen and ducal officials. Instead of Paris, the duke's officers turned mostly to new suppliers in his Flemish and Artesian cities. Arrageois tapestries were now bought from the entrepreneurs and traders in Arras itself (11% of all expenditure on luxury goods). Lille became the leading market for woollen cloth from Flanders (6%) and Bruges was able to attract the bulk of all other purchases of luxury goods (almost 23%). The Luccese business community in Bruges was quick to tune in to this new development.⁴⁰ They would henceforth dominate the supply of

³⁸ Vaughan (1973) 97-102.

³⁹ ADN B1903, f. 134ff.

⁴⁰ It had not always been so in Bruges. In the 1360s the city offered the countess of Flanders and her daughter Margaret, the duchess of Burgundy (later to become countess) gold cloth and silkes. In the city account of 1361-1362 these were bought from two Lombard traders, *sire Pierre Cape* and *Pieter Scandalioene* (Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Estaple*, 1, 247-248).

Italian luxury fabrics. But in contrast to what had happened in Paris, where a significant number of Luccese merchants were able to get access to the ducal supply, in Bruges, deliveries of silks, brocades, velvets and gold cloth were mostly monopolised by just one trader. In 1410, Bartolomeo Bettini sold fabrics (silks, damasks, figured satins and velvets, etc.) for a total amount of 1,368 gold *ecu* (a staggering 80% of all the expenditure in Bruges combined). The other purchases in Bruges were done with local tradesmen who sold furs -the furriers Christiaen and Jacob de Ba(c)kere would start a real dynasty of court suppliers in Bruges-, textiles (both woollens and silks) and embroidery.

A growing market for luxuries for a true itinerant prince: Philip the Good and Bruges

The shift in policy was hastened by the murder of John the Fearless on the bridge of Montereau in 1419. Philip the Good turned away from direct involvement in French politics, leaving the kingdom to his English allies and concentrated on the piecemeal expansion of his northern principalities. In 1429 he bought the county of Namur. In 1430 the last Valois duke of Brabant, Philip of Saint Pol died without heirs and Brabant was added to his Flemish-Artesian territories. The counties of Holland-Zeeland and Hainaut followed suit in 1433 after a forced agreement with countess Jacqueline of Bavaria. Finally in 1451 Philip also became duke of Luxemburg. At the same time, he achieved control over the episcopal principalities in Liège, Utrecht, Cambrai and Tournai by having appointed bishops he could trust, some of them being his own illegitimate children. All the while Philip tried to optimize administration by standardising the bodies of government in each principality and finally by organising supraregional political institutions (great council, estates-general etc.). Philip the Good became the “great duke of the West”, a new political factor in European politics.⁴¹

⁴¹ Vaughan (1970) 29ff., Blockmans and Prevenier (1999) 72ff. and Recetly Stein (2013).

In order to underpin his newly acquired status, Philip paid, like his father and grandfather had done before him, a lot of attention to the organisation of his itinerant court. He built or improved the ducal residences both in the main cities (Ghent, Bruges, Lille, Brussels, The Hague etc.) and in the countryside (Hesdin, La Motte aux Bois, Tervuren etc.).⁴² He founded the knightly order of the Golden Fleece already in 1430, before the great expansion even began, and the Burgundian court of the *grand duc de l'Occident* became the example to be followed for other princes and royals all over Europe.

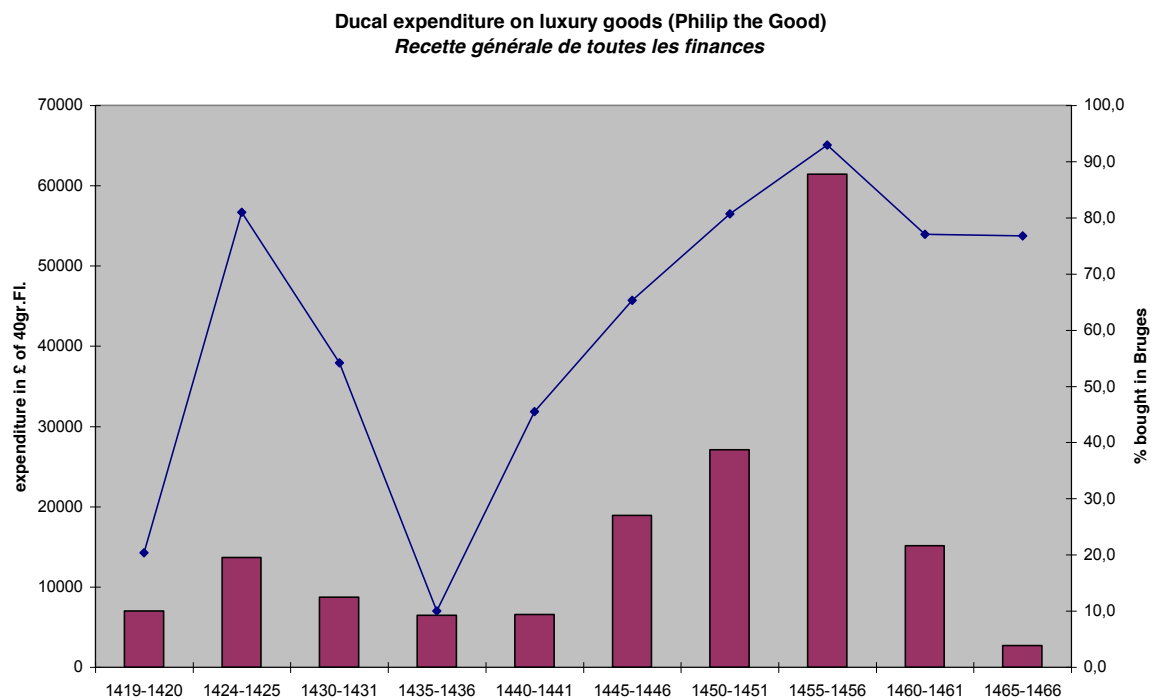
The expenditure involved in maintaining and increasing Burgundian status is also reflected in the purchase of luxury commodities, as they appear in the ducal *recette générale de toutes les finances*. Expenditure on luxury commodities followed very closely the political cycle. In the same way as under Philip the Bold and John the Fearless, who used the daily splendour of the court and above all big festive occasions to smooth political relations, Philip the Good's luxury expenditure could rise very suddenly, reaching enormously high peaks when for example a chapter of the Golden Fleece took place, when diplomatic relations with England, France or the Empire were at the centre of Burgundian political ambitions, when the big festive joyous entries in his cities took place or when celebrations of peace, military victory, birth of the duke's children, marriage and state funerals were organised. The five-yearly sample of expenditure is very revealing for this feverish cycle. In 1455, the duke bought luxury goods for no less than £61,500 of 40 groat Flemish.⁴³ It was a year of intense diplomatic contacts as Philip tried to turn his crusading plans, so eloquently expressed in his

⁴² On the increasing role of Brussels as the chief residence of Philip the Good: Stabel (1997) **-**. See also De Jonge (1994) 107–25, Smolar- Meynart and Vanrie (1991) 15–90 and more general remarks in Paravicini (1980) 298–314.

⁴³ While the currency most used in Burgundian central accounts was the French *franc* or gold *ecu* in the reign of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless (Van Nieuwenhuysen **), from 1419 onwards the accounts of the general receiver switched gradually to the currency used in the accounts of the *recette générale de Flandre*, the £ Flemish of 40 gr. (1/6th of the £ Flemish groat). The first decade this switch was made only partially. For his purchases in Burgundy and elsewhere in France, French royal currencies were still used. The ratios between the currencies is in this very chaotic monetary period not always clear.

“vow of the pheasant” in 1453, into a real expedition to free Constantinople.⁴⁴ But in 1465-66, just before Philip died, the expenditure fell to only one twentieth of that amount, £2,700 (see figure 4 and annex **). Such big differences and short term fluctuations cannot but have influenced strongly the organisation of the court’s supply system.

Figure 4⁴⁵



⁴⁴ Vaughan (1970) 358-360 and Paviot **.

⁴⁵ The data are based on the accounts of the *recette générale de toutes les finances* of the years 3 October 1419 – 2 October 1420 (ADN B1920 and ADCO B1605), when the duke resided in Lille and Arras and was on campaign in the region of Melun and Troyes; 3 October 1424-2 October 1425 (ADN B1931 and AGR CC46952), when the duke resided in Dijon, Paris, Bruges, Lille, Douai and Ghent and he also made a tour in his attempt to ease the conflict with Jacqueline of Bavaria to The Hague in Holland, 1 January – 31 December 1431 (ADN B1942) when the duke resided in Brussels, Lille, Saint-Omer and Antwerp, 1 January – 31 December 1435 (ADN B1954) when he was in Dijon, Paris, Brussels, Lille and Arras, 1 January – 31 December 1440 (ADN B1969 and AGR CC46956) when he resided most of the year in Bruges, 1 April 1445 – 31 March 1446 (ADN B1988) when he was in Ghent, Bruges, Namur, Zeeland and Lille, 1 January – 31 December 1450 (ADN B2004), when he resided in Mechelen, Brussels, Mons and Lille; 1 January – 31 December 1455 (ADN B2020) when he was in Dijon, Lille, Bruges, Leuven and Brussels, 1 October 1460 – 30 September 1461 (ADN B2040) when he resided in Brussels, Ghent, Bruges, Saint Omer and Lille, and finally 1 October 1465 – 30 September 1466 (ADN B2058), when he resided all year in Brussels.

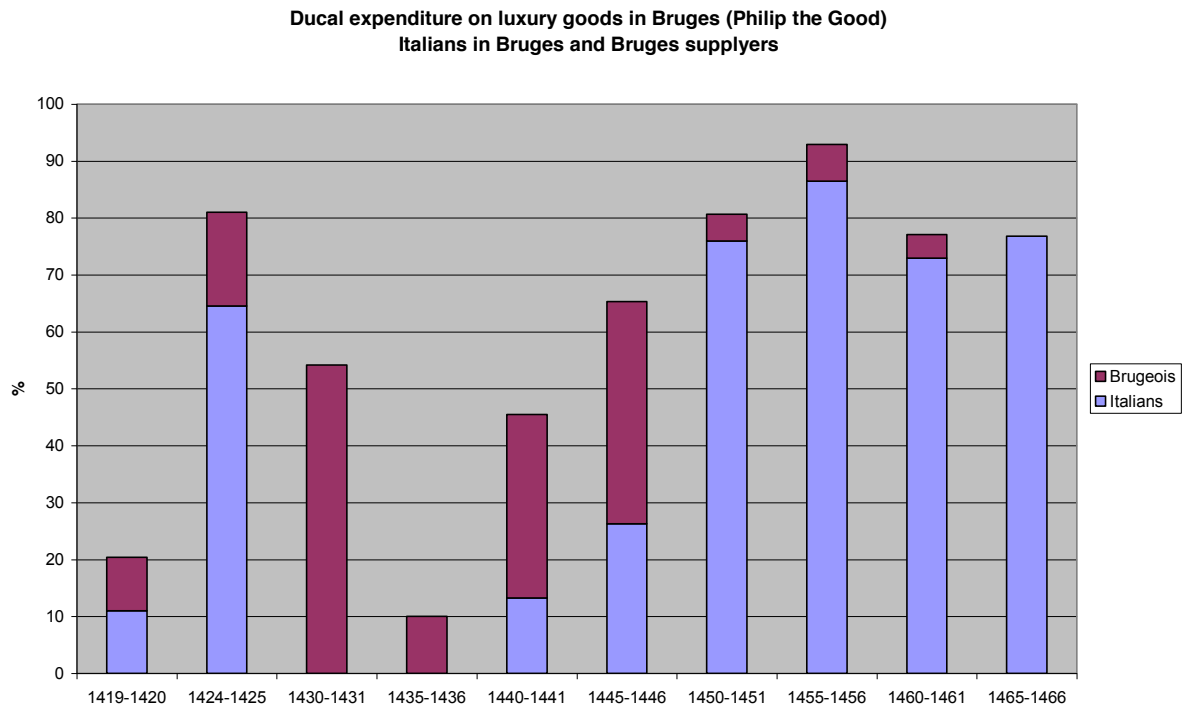
The five-yearly sample of accounts makes clear that any sudden rise of expenditure was easily met by the flexible supply system that the ducal financial officers used. In general, expenditure on luxury goods was decided by two mechanisms. The first was that normal requirements were met by a complex and layered system of supply. Both ducal officers (court servants or *valets*, noblemen and counsellors) and regular traders, usually cloth merchants from Lille, tapestry entrepreneurs from Arras or Tournai and fur dealers from Bruges were filling the needs of such normal expenditure. The first group included craftsmen –tailors and fashion designers, furriers, shoemakers, jewellers and goldsmiths- with almost full time employment at the court, the latter were not yet called appointed suppliers, as they would be in the last quarter of the 15th century (*marchands suivant la cour*), but they could develop long-term relations with the court. Specialist traders in or close to the places where the duke happened to reside supplied the court occasionally. But clearly not all cities or places of residence could fulfil these requirements or were, for one reason or another, not asked to. Hence suppliers from Bruges and Lille in Flanders, Arras in Artois, Brussels in Brabant, The Hague in Holland and Mons in Hainaut were prominent in this system, but merchants from very large cities where the duke resided often, such as Ghent and Douai in Flanders, Mechelen, Leuven and Antwerp in Brabant, were remarkably absent, although because of their size and industrial and commercial infrastructure, these cities must have been able to supply very easily such specialised goods to the court.

Figure 4 also points at the flexibility of the system. Any sudden rise in expenditure on luxuries, however important, could be met by the Bruges market. In contrast with the periodicity of that other nucleus of important international trade, the Brabant fairs of Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom, which was completely absent from the horizon of the Burgundian financial officers, the permanence of the Bruges market, with its relatively sedentary business

community of both Italian and Bruges merchants, and its focus on luxury goods was able to adapt to any sudden swing in luxury expenditure of the Burgundian state.

Communication lines with the Italians were particularly good, more so because Burgundian court demand was met by a very small group of trusted merchants, offering both a steady and reliable supply of mostly luxury fabrics. In most years it was even one trader, who was able to attract all ducal orders: in 1419 this was Bartolomeo Bettini from Lucca, in 1424-25 Marco Guiccidoni from Lucca and in 1440 it was Carlo *Gilles (Gilli)* who supplied the ducal court for more than £1,040 worth of gold and silver cloth and velvets. In 1445 Giovanni Arnolfini again from Lucca, came to the forefront of Luccese merchants and he returned as single supplier in 1450, 1455 and 1460-61. In 1465 Tommaso Portinari, representative of the Medici firm from Florence broke the Luccese hold on deliveries of silks, brocades and velvets. Only in 1424 Marco Guiccidoni was sharing ducal orders with what must have been a very young Giovanni Arnolfini at the time and in 1440 Giovanni Arnolfini did the same with Paulo *Melian*, also from Lucca. It is striking that only in 1430-31 and 1435 no Italian traders appear in the ducal accounts, and the limited ducal need for Italian fabrics in these years was met by local cloth merchants. The sudden rise of court expenditure on luxuries was, therefore, linked to the court's occasional hunger for fancy dress made from Italian silk fabrics, which supplemented a continuous, but much more limited demand for rich and heavy woollen cloth and lighter fabrics, such as linen and says, that stemmed from the industrial entrepreneurs of the Low Countries itself. Only sporadically were Low Countries suppliers able to break the Luccese (and Florentine) monopoly.

Figure 5



There is little doubt that Bruges was in the reign of Philip the Good by far the leading market for Low Countries cloth. The Hanseatic merchants, the most important customers for the Flemish and Brabantine cloth entrepreneurs, were very keen on defending the Bruges monopoly, forbidding Flemish entrepreneurs from the secondary cloth towns in Interior Flanders in the middle of the 15th century even to use the market of Antwerp to export their manufactured goods.⁴⁶ Bruges was also an important centre of cloth finishing, in the same way as Antwerp would be a century later. So it is not surprising that Bruges cloth merchants figure among the list of suppliers of the ducal court. But still the ducal supply system of woollen cloth ran not through Bruges –or it did so only occasionally–, but through another of the duke’s preferred residences, Lille in Walloon-Flanders. Bruges drapers only sold small amounts of woollens and their involvement seems to be linked with the presence of the court in the city, the only exception in the sample being Simon De Conte, who in 1450 sold scarlets and black woollens to the court officials for about £250. The importance of Lille as a cloth

⁴⁶ Stabel (1995) **.**. and id. **.

centre for the ducal officers may come as a surprise. The city of Lille was certainly significant as a cloth town and as a centre of finishing industries, and it was capital to a region that boasted a lot of semi-urban production centres for cheaper fabrics,⁴⁷ but the size of its cloth trade was certainly not comparable to Bruges, nor the quality of its products. Although the origin of bought woollens is only sparsely mentioned in the ducal accounts, mention is made of Ypres and Mechelen cloth, so it is unclear from the accounts how supply lines of the Lille drapers in the duke's supply really ran. For Arras (and Tournai) this is much easier. The ducal suppliers of tapestries in the first part of Philip's reign came mostly from these production centres, and there is little doubt about the provenance of the tapestries. Bruges merchants could only once in a while attract markets for tapestries. In 1445 Bruges merchant Michiel Loetin sold various tapestry work for over £1,300. In the second part of Philip's reign, the supply of tapestries gets blurred. Arras no longer appears prominently in the ducal supply. The volume of trade declined from 25-63% of all purchases to almost nothing, and Arras was substituted in the ducal supply of tapestries by its old competitor Tournai and increasingly by the ambitious newcomer, Brussels.⁴⁸

Table 3. Provenance of the luxury goods in the ducal accounts (*recette générale de toutes les finances*)

| % | duc al | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|
| | Bruges | servants | Lille | Arras | Paris | Tournai | Dijon | Brussels |
| 1419-1420 | 20,4 | 4,2 | 1,5 | 63,3 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 |
| 1424-1425 | 81,0 | 0,7 | 0,6 | 0,1 | 17,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 |
| 1430-1431 | 54,2 | 1,8 | 27,1 | 0,0 | 1,7 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 |
| 1435-1436 | 10,0 | 18,4 | 2,4 | 25,3 | 2,5 | 0,0 | 16,8 | 6,9 |

⁴⁷ Stabel (1995) and id. (1997) **, Hacquette **

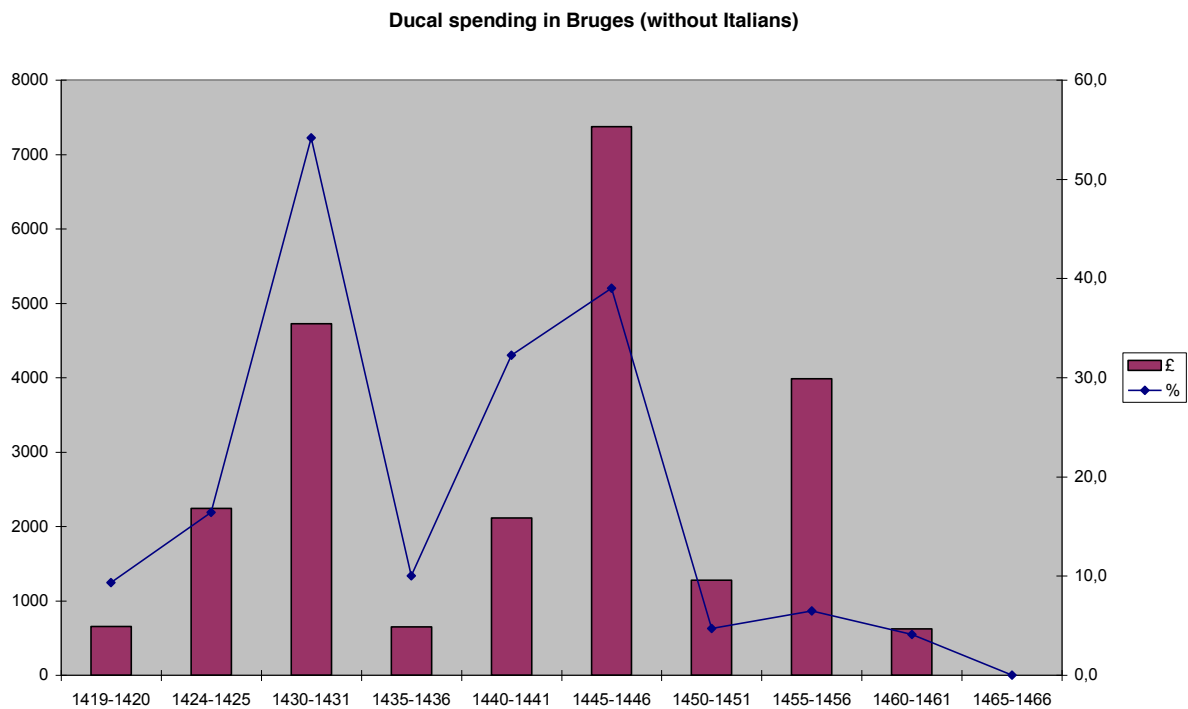
⁴⁸

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| 1440-1441 | 45,5 | 39,5 | 6,5 | 0,1 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,4 |
| 1445-1446 | 65,3 | 17,0 | 0,7 | 0,7 | 4,8 | 0,4 | 0,0 | 1,0 |
| 1450-1451 | 80,7 | 2,5 | 6,5 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 4,4 | 0,4 | 0,8 |
| 1455-1456 | 92,9 | 0,3 | 4,2 | 0,0 | 0,1 | 0,9 | 1,0 | 0,3 |
| 1460-1461 | 77,1 | 0,4 | 5,0 | 0,0 | 1,4 | 11,1 | 0,0 | 2,5 |
| 1465-1466 | 76,8 | 12,1 | 4,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 0,0 | 7,1 |

It is much more difficult to explain the pattern of how Bruges tradesmen, without the Italian business community, entered in the ducal supply of luxuries. Bruges was, even without its Italian traders, the most important “shopping” centre for the duke’s financial officers. In particular furs, which constituted, after Italian fabrics and jewellery, the most important investments for the court, were bought at the Bruges market. Fur dealers were without exception also Bruges tradesmen. No direct purchases from hanseatic merchants can be acknowledged in the sampled accounts. Although fur dealers never achieved the kind of monopoly on ducal supply of some of the Luccese (and Florentine) traders, some dealers could attract substantial trade volumes as court suppliers. The dynasty of the De Ba(c?)kere family already appears in the reign of John the Fearless. In 1419 Lodewijk De Bakere appears for the first time, but he continuously returns in the following years: in 1424 he sells furs for no less than £1,580. But other traders were involved as well in long-term relations with the court. In the 1450s and 1460s Gerard and Everaert De Grote continuously supplied hundreds of Baltic furs to the court. In 1450 Gerard delivered furs for more than £700 furs and his trade volume remained high in the following decade. The patterns behind the deliveries of fur cannot be compared, however, with those for Italian fabrics. Although there is a tendency towards monopoly of these fur dealers, the De Grote and De Backere never could completely

control ducal supply for a long period and other dealers intervened as well for considerable amounts in the supply of the court. In 1431 Jan de Lantsheere sold various kinds of fur for almost £800, while other Bruges dealers like Floris Vaillant, Cornelis De Grave, and Jacquemart Le Sort could also attract considerable orders in particular in the 1430s and 1440s.

Figure 6



Jewellers and goldsmiths were other traders for which the ducal officers relied heavily on Bruges. But for jewellery, although it concerned higher investments, Bruges was never as dominant as for the fur trade. Although Bruges goldsmiths could acquire 50% of all ducal investment in jewels, precious stones, gold crosses, rosaries and gold or silver plates and cups in 1431 and 1445, years when ducal purchases on this type of luxury goods were extremely high with resp. more than £6,000 and more than £10,000, the more regular yearly flow of jewellery and gold and silver objects (averaging between £1,000 and £3,000) was spread more evenly across the different supply mechanisms and places of the duke, with a particular

importance for the ducal *valets* and occasional purchases from high noblemen and ducal councillors. Besides Bruges, objects in precious metals were supplied by goldsmiths, moneychangers and merchants from Paris, Dijon and Arras in the first part of Philip's reign. It is striking that Parisian merchants could hang on so long to supplying the duke of Burgundy with jewellery. From the 1430s onwards more and more goldsmiths and *marchands de joiaux* from Lille and Brussels came to the forefront together with their Bruges colleagues. In Bruges itself, some goldsmiths (*orfevres*) could achieve high volumes of trade in the supply of the ducal court. In particular Jehan Pentin was prominent for several decades from 1424 to 1450. No other goldsmith in Bruges could gain orders of the same magnitude. Other goldsmiths and financiers were able to attract only occasionally commissions for great sums of money like Colard Le Fevere in 1431 and Nicolas de Pinge in 1445. The rest of the goldsmiths fit in the regular pattern of supply and were usually relied on when the duke was in the neighbourhood of Bruges. Some of these suppliers, like Colard Le Fevere could even achieve afterwards a splendid career in the ducal administration.⁴⁹

Table 4. Ducal purchases in Bruges of jewellery and gold/silver plates and vessels

| | Bruges | | Total | |
|------|---------|------|---------|--|
| | £ 40gr. | % | £ 40gr. | |
| 1419 | 0 | 0,0 | 555 | |
| 1424 | 510 | 19,8 | 2577 | Jehan Pentin |
| 1431 | 3574 | 59,5 | 6003 | Jehan Pentin, Colard le Fevere, Coenraad van Melre |
| 1435 | 648 | 15,8 | 4102 | Jehan Pentin |
| 1440 | 108 | 4,6 | 2364 | Jehan Pentin |
| 1445 | 4901 | 47,8 | 10249 | Jehan Le Cat, Jehan le Buus, Nicolas de Pinge |

⁴⁹ **carrière Le Fevere

| | | | | |
|------|-----|------|------|--|
| | | | | Jehan Pentin, Nicolas de Leau, Baudouin Henry, |
| 1450 | 399 | 18,2 | 2188 | Guillaume Verleurs |
| 1455 | 464 | 10,5 | 4406 | Jehan de le Tole |
| 1460 | 369 | 14,1 | 2623 | Antoine le Tournement, Baudouin Leurs |

Furs, jewellery and gold or silver plates and cups were not the only items purchased in Bruges. In particular linen was often bought at the Bruges market. Women were particularly involved in the Bruges linen trade –they occupied most of the linen stalls in the old hall of Bruges–,⁵⁰ so it comes as no surprise that also in dealing with the court linen merchants were often women. Yet when volumes increased and the quality of the linen involved was higher, men took over. So, important orders for in total £610 of fine linen in combination with a *chambre de tapisserie* went to linen merchant Rijckaert Dans, rather than to one of his woman competitors, who appeared in the ducal accounts.

Specialist craftsmen were also partners for the ducal court. These craftsmen could, as in other places, be integrated in the regular ducal supply. Some were even appointed *valets*, the best known being, of course, Jan Van Eyck.⁵¹ Some craftsmen were paid at regular intervals without acquiring the status of ducal servant. But most craftsmen appeared only once or twice, in order to supplement the work of the habitual ducal tailors, shoemakers and others. In 1419, at the beginning of Philip's reign, the financial officers contracted for example the Bruges tailors Sevelin Becquaert, Pieter de Hollander, Clemens Le Borgue en Colin Hurtereel, the hat maker Simon Martel and the painters Colart Canon, Colart Le Gay, Colart Van der Plancken, Foris van Bergen, Hannekin van Brugge en Guy de Frelens. Other

⁵⁰ Stabel **

⁵¹ **

craftsmen or merchants sold table linen, pewter vessels, two unnamed carpenters delivered wooden shields etc.⁵²

Bruges in the autumn: ducal spending after 1477

From the second part of the reign of Charles the Bold, our knowledge of the role of Bruges in Burgundian court supply becomes less detailed. Until the death of Charles, ducal spending on luxuries was supervised by the *argentier*, but his accounts have been lost after 1469. In 1477, when Mary of Burgundy, the only child of Charles, was forced to recognize the “Great Privilege” after the violent death of her father at Nancy. The cities demanded that the Burgundian financial administration returned to its earlier organisation and court supply returns to the *recette générale de toutes les finances*.⁵³ This did, however, not last long. The *argentier* was already reinstated in the 1480s⁵⁴ and all detailed information disappears, this time for good, from the accounts of the general receiver. Sadly, only one account of the ducal *argentier* in the last quarter of the 15th century has been preserved, that of 1488.⁵⁵

It is, therefore, very difficult to assess ducal spending in this period, generally acknowledged to be a period of economic decline for Bruges, more so because the city was involved in chronic warfare with Maximilian of Austria for political supremacy in the county.⁵⁶ At first glance, in the early years, just after Charles the Bold’s death, nothing much seems to have changed. In 1480 Mary and Maximilian were mostly occupied in making a tour across the Low Countries. They resided mostly in Brussels, but were also in The Hague, Bruges, Namur, Luxemburg and finally in Ghent in order to establish their authority in the various

⁵² Mollat et al. (**), **_**.

⁵³ Haemers (2009) **, Blockmans (**) **. For the accounts of the general receiver: Bautier and Sornay (2001) 46-47.

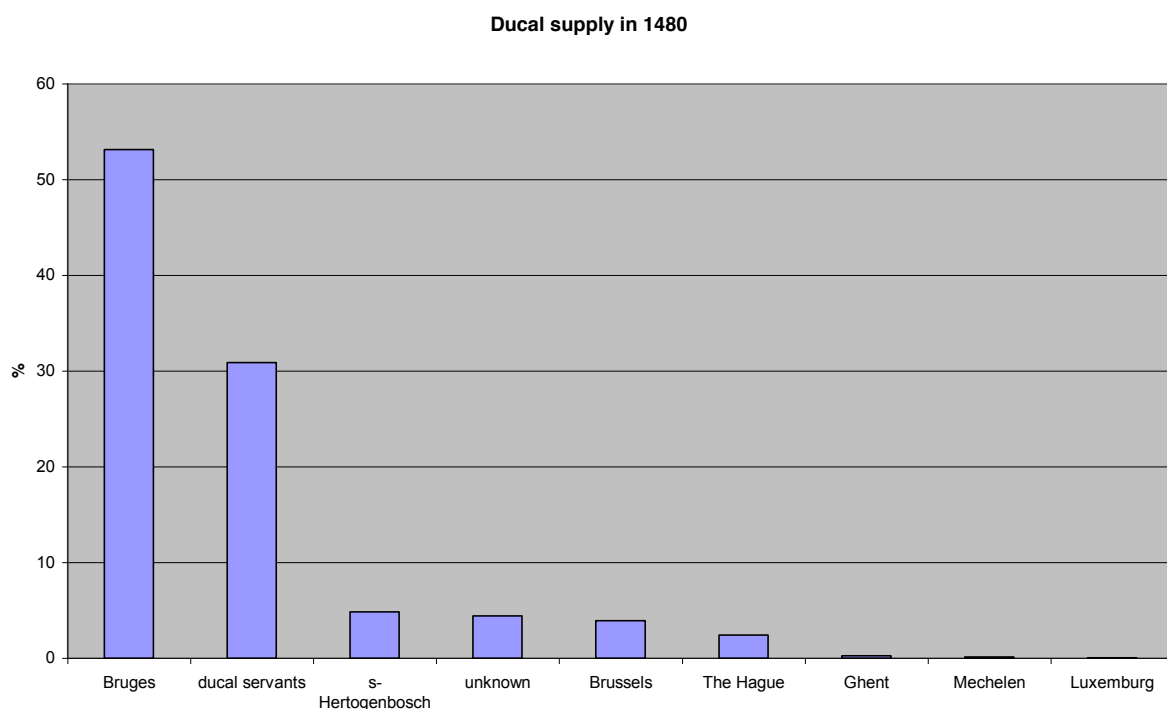
⁵⁴ **OPZOEKEN IN** Boone (1995)**

⁵⁵ It is the sixth account of *argentier* Hue Dumont (Bautier and Sornay (2001) 47 n.2).

⁵⁶ Haemers (2009) **

principalities. The *recette générale* records a total expenditure for luxury commodities of £7,650.⁵⁷ But most likely this is not the complete expenditure. Instead of, what had become a tradition since the reign of Philip the Bold, a careful presentation of the expenses in thematic chapters (tapestries, jewellery, cloth, silks etc.), expenses were now registered almost chronologically on a monthly basis and, in particular, expenditure on jewellery was no longer recorded. From other sources we know that Maximilian relied heavily on his possession of gold, silver and precious stones to get substantial loans from Flemish and Italian financiers in order to finance his war effort, so it is highly unlikely that no jewellery or objects in precious metals were bought in this year, more so because the distribution of these objects as gifts to the noble and urban elites was an integrated part of Burgundian politics.⁵⁸

Figure 7



⁵⁷ ADN B 2121.

⁵⁸ Haemers and Stabel (2006) 21-38, Haemers (2008) **, Blockmans and Janse (**), Boone (**), Dumolyn (**).

The data in the account of 1480, therefore, need to be treated with some caution. But it is clear that Bruges could still command a central position in ducal supply. Despite their wandering through the Low Countries, half of all purchases were still done in Bruges, while the other cities only seem to profit from the short or long periods Maximilian and Mary were residing. Compared with the early years of Charles the Bold, the centrality of Bruges seems even to have increased. Brussels, preferred residence in the Low Countries of both Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, seems to have declined as a market for ducal supply. Moreover, the still preponderant role of Bruges in 1480 has been achieved without any important orders for the Italian business community. No Arnolfini or Portinari-like merchants appear in the account and the still substantial deliveries of silks and brocades in this year are trusted to the Bruges merchant Jehan Mynart (*Minnaert?), *marchand de draps de soye*, who sold Italian fabrics for more than £2,900, and his Bruges colleagues Boudewijn Van Hellinghe, who also sold woollen cloth, Colaert de Labbeye and Zegher Noppe. Together they sold woollens, gold cloth and silks for no less than £3,800, almost 93% of all expenditure in Bruges, the rest consisting of repair work by various goldsmiths and the delivery of new state seals by goldsmith Pieter de Coninck (*Pierre le Roy*).

Then next snapshot of 15th-century court consumption in the Low Countries dates from 1488. For this year the accounts of the ducal *argentier* are preserved.⁵⁹ 1488 is, however a very difficult year to assess ducal spending. He struggle between the Flemish cities and Maximilian of Austria for the guardianship of Philip the Fair, Maximilian's son had resurfaced after a difficult compromise in 1485. In order to cool down the emerging revolt, Maximilian had moved to Bruges in January, only to find himself imprisoned in the city. He was held for four months only to be released after recognizing the terms of the Estates-

⁵⁹ AGR, CC 1926 (sixth account of Hues Du Mont from 1 January to 31 December 1488)

General in May. But very quickly the conflict started again. At this stage the cities of Flanders, joined by some Brabantine cities like Brussels, were still very much in control. Only in 1489 the tide of war turned and German and Brabantine troops reconquered a lot of the lost territory. Ghent and Bruges, however, held on until 1492. In order to punish the rebellious Flemish cities, Maximilian had ordered all foreign merchants to leave Bruges and settle in the more loyal city of Antwerp on ****date**** 1488, a date that symbolically marked the transfer of commercial activity from Bruges to the new metropolis on the River Scheldt. 1488 can, therefore, hardly present us with a reliable picture of court supply. In the first months, Maximilian was in Bruges, but he was very much a prisoner of the revolt. Later in the year he was with mixed success on military campaign in Flanders, Brabant and Zeeland (Middelburg, Vlissingen, Antwerp, Hulst etc.) or he stayed in Mechelen, seat of the Great Council, but as the year moved on he left the struggle against the revolt to his trusted generals (Albert of Saxony would become “stadtholder”) and he returned to Austria.

Table 5

**Market hierarchy and the expenditure on luxury goods
in the argentier’s account of 1488**

| | £40gr. | % |
|----------------------|--------|------|
| Bruges | 3266 | 27,1 |
| Mechelen | 2427 | 20,2 |
| Brussels | 885 | 7,3 |
| Antwerp | 771 | 6,4 |
| Middelburg (Zeeland) | 251 | 2,1 |
| Unknown | 4444 | 36,9 |

Most expenditure in the 1488 argentier's account is, therefore, scattered. Supply mostly went through the hands of trusted officers (the argentier himself or écuyers present in the surroundings of Maximilian) or through valets, who got *carte blanche* in this period. Hence it is very difficult to identify the places where textiles, jewellery, dress, armour etc. were bought. Nonetheless, more than 60% of all purchases in the monthly surveys could be identified with some precision.⁶⁰ Bruges is still leading the ranking of cities, but this surely is a false impression. Purchases of silks, velvets and brocades (from Florentine merchant Pietro Bandini) account for 86% of all expenditure in Bruges, while Bruges jeweller Jan Wijck also made a substantial delivery. But all of these purchases were done in the time of Maximilian's imprisonment in the rebellious city. Once free, the Habsburg prince did not look back to the supply system that once catered for his Burgundian predecessors. Instead his commissions were distributed among his Brabantine cities. Mechelen got most of these. Especially woollen cloth was bought there (as such Mechelen's still active cloth manufacture replaced the expensive Flemish woollens from Ypres and Lille). Brussels was third in the ranking, although Maximilian did not reside there in this year. Unlike Antwerp and Mechelen, Brussels had joined the Flemish rebellion for a while, although with less enthusiasm than Ghent and Bruges. Nonetheless a substantial order for armour was placed with armourer Franck Stroo in the city. If the presence of Mechelen, where Maximilian stayed for a while, and Brussels, the favourite residence of the Burgundians, seems quite normal, it is the strong appearance of Antwerp that stands out. Antwerp had never been, despite its commercial success, an important player in ducal supply. When Maximilian ordered the foreign merchants to turn to the Brabantine city rather than stay in Bruges in exactly the same year, it seems that the tide had turned for court supply as well. Antwerp dealers appear in the argentier's accounts as suppliers of spices, sugar, raisins etc. to the Burgundian *épicerie*, of cloth and

⁶⁰ Some expenditure was registered as purchases done in Bruges and Mechelen or as in Antwerp and Mechelen.

silks to the Burgundian wardrobe and even shoes start to come from the Scheldt metropolis. And it is not only Antwerp craftsmen and merchants, but also Florentines like Gerolamo Frescobaldi, who is called in the accounts a *marchant florentin resident a Anvers*. Bruges had met a fierce competitor.

The Habsburgs in the Low Countries: a capital city effect from Bruges to Brussels?

If court consumption is difficult to trace in the final decades of the fifteenth century, our knowledge about the princely supply system is again improving around 1500, when the general receiver stops listing only the general payments to the *argentier*, but again registers all expenditure on luxury goods in his own accounts.⁶¹ In order to trace the developments of the supply systems the accounts of 1501, 1510 and 1520 have been analysed (which corresponds more or less with the final years of Philip the Fair and the youth of the later Charles V, when his aunt Margaret of Austria was taking charge of the administration of the Habsburg Low Countries from her court in Mechelen.⁶²

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Bruges luxuries and ducal supply

Although sources probably do not show the complete picture –a careful analysis of all Burgundian accounts and their complex interference is well beyond the scope of this analysis and, even then, the sparingly preserved accounts of the ducal household (*maître aux deniers*) give disappointingly few details about the actual consumption of both food and durable consumables–, some conclusions can be drawn. Burgundian court supply seems to follow a layered system of fixed suppliers, of court officers and servants, and of urban markets. The

⁶¹ The accounts of the general receiver for the sixteenth century were kept by the Chambre des Comptes at Lille and are now preserved in the B series of the Archives départementales du Nord in Lille (France).

⁶² A general survey of the first two decades of Charles's reign can be found in Blockmans **. The importance of Margaret of Austria and her court is discussed in Eichberger **.

logic in supplying the court is from the last years of John the Fearless onwards clearly one of hierarchical merchant cities and specialist centres, rather than one of one primate capital city, like Paris for the supply of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless before 1414. Although the role of Brussels as a service centre became important during the reign of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, it could never threaten the leading role in ducal supply of the main commercial gateway city in the Low Countries, which was Bruges. The fortuitous location of court itself was only of secondary importance. The centrality of the market is clearly more crucial if one considers direct economic return. Therefore, it is the presence of strongly developed urban economies, which dictated the consumption patterns of the court. Whatever the location of the court, the smaller markets were only left with the crumbs of ducal spending and only very specialised niche markets (tapestries, armour) could turn things around..

Court consumption, therefore, followed as such the traditional market hierarchy, and tended to strengthen the lead of the larger cities in the urban system, in first instance the *gateway* to the urban system (Paris before 1414, Bruges after 1414). This phenomenon operated independently from the actual place of residence of the duke itself. In essence court consumption follows the mechanisms suggested by traditional central place theory and the von Thünen economic model, that states that because of transportation and transaction costs the location of industries and services decreases according to the distance to the market, in much the same way as consumer's behaviour changes with increasing distance. Late medieval itinerant courts were not able yet to boost economics of scale that were able to transform these economic networks. The demand generated by the ducal courts, considered by most political historians as centre piece to ducal policy and identity, was in the end too marginal to cause profound changes in the system, and the costs of transportation were in a commercially developed region as the Low Countries relatively low, so a limited number of supplying cities

remained the practical solution. Hence they followed a similar pattern of supply that has already been established in historical research for larger noble and ecclesiastical households. In “multipurpose trips” these used mainly the markets of large cities in the region, rather than smaller towns in their neighbourhood. Even for goods that could have been easily purchased in nearby smaller markets (grain, cattle, horses), larger markets seemed to have exercised greater attraction.⁶³

A second conclusion is that one has to be very careful in attributing to court spending a significant and direct role in economic shifts towards luxury industries, even in cities that profited most from princely demand. The model that late medieval urban economies in the Low Countries were able to resist the general crisis of their cloth industries thanks to specialisation of textile production and the dynamic growth of luxury industries is widely accepted.⁶⁴ Also widely accepted is that the Burgundian dukes have played a crucial role in setting the example for a kind of conspicuous consumption, that generated a more permanent demand by the urban middle classes, by the regional nobility and the landowning elites and, of course, by the foreign merchants and their connection to the European economy (which in their turn supplied princely and royal courts all over Europe anxious to follow the Valois court model). Court life was, as stated by amongst others Wim Blockmans, undoubtedly an essential element in the creation of fashion and taste, and, therefore, in the construction of patterns of demand by other classes. The duke was in such views a catalyst for the “creative environment” in the Low Countries cities.⁶⁵ However, it seems that Raymond Van Uytven’s very cautious doubts about the consequences of Burgundian splendour, are much closer to the

⁶³ Stabel (1992) 341-364. For England Dyer **.

⁶⁴ Van der Wee (1988) 321-336.

⁶⁵ Blockmans **, Swidler (1986) 273-286. On the Burgundian court: Armstrong (1977) 55-75 and Van Uytven (1983) 11-31.

real impact of court demand on the urban economies of the Low Countries, and on Bruges in particular.⁶⁶

The sudden and compulsory, but also very successful switch during the last years of the reign of John the Fearless from Paris to Bruges as central market for the duke's needs for luxuries, clearly points at the fact that Bruges was already, well before the duke turned to its capacity to deliver Italian fabrics, Hanseatic furs, Flemish cloth, Arras and Tournai tapestries and jewellery of all kinds, an important market for these goods and it was able to absorb very easily the specialised ducal demand. Paris could, therefore, quickly be abandoned and the trusted Parisian suppliers disappear almost all at once, without causing fundamental changes in ducal consumption.

Furthermore, the structure of ducal supply on the Bruges market also points to the fact that ducal demand was only of relative importance for the Bruges market. The huge volumes of silks, brocades, gold and silver cloth and velvets required by the Burgundians were, as a rule, delivered by one single merchant. Luccese traders Bartolomeo Bettini, Marco Guiccidoni and Giovanni Arnolfini and the Florentine financier Tommaso Portinari were certainly no small fish in the Bruges commercial networks and they very often combined their role as supplier to the court with political influence in the Burgundian administration (as financiers, counsellors or even state officials). They were undoubtedly among the wealthiest and most active traders in Bruges, but they were not alone in this. There were dozens of Luccese and Florentine traders active in Bruges, and certainly the first group consisted of many specialists of luxury textiles.⁶⁷ Silk, satin and velvet made the pride of the Tuscan urban textile industries.⁶⁸

Although the enormous deliveries by Arnolfini and Portinari in the accounts, could easily hide

⁶⁶ Van Uytven (1992) 101-24.

⁶⁷ Stabel **, Lazzareschi **, Lambert **

⁶⁸ Melis **, Meek **, Molà ** etc.

a cluster of joined Luccese and Florentine business interests, it is highly doubtful that ducal demand absorbed more than a fraction of the total volume of these textiles. Bruges catered for more than just the Burgundian dukes, and Italian traders aimed at supplying the whole of western, northern and eastern European markets through their presence in Bruges.⁶⁹

But it would be hazardous to put ducal demand too much in perspective. The duke's entourage consisted also of many noblemen and counsellors, who tried to fit in the ducal ostentatious display by investing in the same kind of material and symbolic goods. Although sources do not permit us to make a thorough analysis of the consumption patterns of the nobility and the civil servants, there are many indications that these quite closely followed the ducal pattern.⁷⁰ The cumulative effects may probably not have been able to fundamentally change the Bruges market, it was, however, probably sufficient to create or stimulate particular niche markets for luxury goods. In the long run this may have been very important in lowering the threshold for specialisation and economic change and changing opportunity costs for artisans and merchants alike.

The history of late medieval Bruges provides us indeed with an intriguing paradox. The city had developed from an active commercial city in the high middle ages to a gateway city for Low Countries textiles and international merchant communities in the course of the late 13th and 14th centuries. It is generally assumed that, because of this change, Bruges developed a much more diversified economy than its Flemish and Brabantine counterparts Ghent and Ypres, Mechelen, Brussels and Leuven which remained for a long time predominantly textile cities.⁷¹ But if we look at the output of the visual arts in Bruges (panel painting, illuminated

⁶⁹ Bolton and Bruscoli **, etc.

⁷⁰ For the nobility: Denhaene ** for Philip of Cleves, Martens et al. (**) for Louis of Gruuthuuse etc. The Burgundian civil servants are dealt with by Dumolyn (2003) and Dumolyn and Arnaut (**).

⁷¹ Prevenier (1983) **-**, Stabel (1997) **-** and Stabel (2007) **-**.

manuscripts, statues etc.) –associated by historians and art historians alike with this economic change-, it is striking that Bruges, although already a centre of art production in the late 14th century, does not stand out yet at this stage in comparison with the other urban centres of Flanders and Brabant. It is only from the 1430s onwards that Bruges becomes the art centre *par excellence*. It is as if the arrival of Jan Van Eyck in Bruges, traditionally situated in 1425 after the death of John of Bavaria, count of Holland, started off this expansion of the *ars nova*. After Van Eyck, Bruges is able to attract painters, illuminators, sculptors, etc. from all over the Low Countries and beyond. Van Eyck was, when he arrived in Bruges, court painter of Philip the Good. In the accounts he is mentioned as *valet*. He probably settled in Bruges to be near potential customers. He was very successful in finding them in the international business community and among the local urban elites and clergy, who tried to emulate the ducal example by hiring the duke's own painter. It is tempting to consider the success of the *ars nova*, not only in the light of wealthy commissioners in a trading city, but also in the light of the “creative environment” stimulated by aristocratic demand: in other words an Italian-like courtly Renaissance introduced and adapted to a bourgeois milieu. In order to assess the impact of such developments, we need, however, to carefully assess the chronology of economic change in late medieval Bruges.