




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bruges as a multilingual contact zone: book production and multilingual literary networks in fifteenth-century Bruges

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Abstract

Medieval Bruges was an important international economic hub in the late Middle Ages. Similar to other luxury goods, manuscripts produced in Bruges were intended for both local and international audiences. This article scrutinizes the specific urban context of Bruges as a multilingual contact zone focusing on quantitative data of extant manuscripts and case-studies of professional and non-professional book production. The dominance of francophone manuscripts in a Dutch-speaking town is noteworthy and called for an actively bilingual community of book professionals. Furthermore, the social competition of locally embedded social groups (court, merchants, craft guilds) influenced language choice as well. Both ‘official’ production of books for trade by professional writers and librarians, and the ‘private’ multilingual literary accomplishments of Bruges city-dwellers, illustrate the multilingual dynamics of urban contacts in Bruges.

Introduction

In 1371, an unknown writer, probably a schoolmaster in Bruges, wrote a French–Dutch bilingual text, the so-called *Bouc vanden ambachten* or *Livre des mestiers* (‘book of the craft guilds’).¹ The manual was probably used to educate the sons and daughters of the Bruges mercantile elite in Picard French, or to teach Dutch to francophone merchants. In a similar way to language classes today, the text includes true-to-life characters and includes examples of realistic dialogues, offering a lively insight into multilingual day-to-day life, social customs and commerce in late medieval Bruges.² Several crafts mentioned in the manual point to the economic shift towards a new luxury industry at the end of the fourteenth century.

¹Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), ms. néerl. 16. See also the edition J. Gessler (ed.), *Het Brugsche Livre des Mestiers en zijn navolgingen. Vier aloude conversatieboekjes om Fransch te leeren* (Bruges, 1931).

²F. Cotman, ‘De didactische methode van de laatmiddeleeuwse conversatieboekjes en hun navolgingen’, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde*, 58 (2004), 55–66; L. Cooper, ‘Urban utterances: merchants, artisans, and the alphabet in Caxton’s dialogues in French and English’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 7 (2005), 127–62.

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Characters such as Isabel of Roeselare the parchment dealer and Georges the 'librarian' (*librariër*, bookseller or stationer) reflect the emergence of the Bruges book business which developed as an international industry in the fifteenth century.

Bruges – strategically located on the Zwin Estuary – expanded as an international trade centre in the late thirteenth century. The city connected the North Sea trade area and the southern trading routes with the Italian city-states and the Black Sea.³ Having increased its wealth through the export of Flemish luxury cloth, by the early fifteenth century the port city of the County of Flanders had established itself as a commercial hub by specializing in the production of, and trade in, luxury goods such as jewellery, spices and art. In 1995, Wim Blockmans analysed the function of and incentives for art production in fifteenth-century Bruges, questioning the relationship between economy and culture.⁴ He defined Bruges as a 'creative environment' by pointing towards the competition between wealthy, but still quite divergent, social groups – courtiers and patricians on one side, and wealthy craftsmen and merchants on the other – for both productive and symbolic capital.⁵ In this urban 'contact zone', the social and geographical distance between nobility and the professional class was small, resulting in a need to highlight their individual positions.⁶ As a result, Bruges emerged as a breeding ground for well-known artists such as Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling. But how was this social competition within the urban sphere reflected in the languages of manuscripts, another luxury art, produced and used in late medieval Bruges?

Local and international research has pointed to the importance of book production, mainly book illumination, as a luxury craft in Bruges. Hanno Wijsman highlighted the exceptional position of Bruges as a leading city of book illumination in the fifteenth-century Low Countries: around 29 per cent of the total corpus of illuminated manuscripts from the vast region, and more than 57 per cent of the Flemish-made corpus was produced in Bruges, an overwhelming proportion.⁷

Though Paris had been the centre of manuscript illumination in the fourteenth century, Bruges had taken over this role by the middle of the fifteenth century. Like Paris and London, Bruges had an independent librarians' guild, the St Bartholomew and St John Guild of the 'Librarians' (*librariërs*), a social, economic and cultural association of stationers, bookbinders, illuminators, miniaturists, parchment dealers and eventually also printers.⁸ In addition to the larger shops working for the political elite and international market, it should be stressed that many illuminators,

³On the history of Bruges, see A. Brown and J. Dumolyn (eds.), *Medieval Bruges: c. 850–1550* (Cambridge, 2018).

⁴W. Blockmans, 'The creative environment: incentives to and functions of Bruges art production', in M.W. Ainsworth (ed.), *Petrus Christus in Renaissance Bruges* (Turnhout, 1995), 11–20.

⁵The dominant narrative of 'creativity' in cities has recently been challenged by I. Van Damme, B. De Munck and A. Miles, *Cities and Creativity from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York, 2018).

⁶F. Buylaert and J. Dumolyn, 'De wereld van Jan van Eyck: hofcultuur, luxeproductie, elitepatronage en sociale distinctie binnen een stedelijk netwerk', in M. Martens (ed.), *Van Eyck: een optische revolutie* (Veurne, 2020), 114.

⁷H. Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1550)* (Turnhout, 2010), 62.

⁸A. Vandewalle, 'Het librariërgilde te Brugge in zijn vroege periode', in *Vlaamse kunst op perkament. Handschriften en miniaturen te Brugge* (Bruges, 1981), 39–43; A. Dewitte, 'Het Brugse Sint-Jans- en Sint-Lucasgilde der librariërs, 1457–1469', *Biekorf*, 96 (1996), 334–40.

scribes and book producers worked on a smaller and more local scale in Bruges.⁹ Furthermore, manuscripts were also produced in a non-economic context within private social networks, literary societies or religious confraternities and institutions.

Manuscripts produced in Bruges, like other luxury goods, were intended for both local and international audiences. This article, therefore, focuses on the role of multilingualism in this 'creative environment' by scrutinizing Bruges' book production, not only on a local, but also on a transregional scale. In doing so, it shows how Bruges' role as an international commercial centre was reflected in the languages of professional and non-professional bookmaking by drawing on the concept of the multilingual contact zone. Mary Louise Pratt defined a multilingual contact zone – the social or even physical site of interaction between two or more languages – as a space of clashes and struggles between languages, related to the cultural and/or political hegemony of one dominant group.¹⁰ Since Pratt's influential conceptualization, researchers increasingly define the multilingual contact zone in a 'positive' light: as a place or space where different languages interact in an enriching way, stimulating social exchange. Literary scholar Jonathan Hsy, for example, relates the 'multilingual contact zone' to an urban context, defining it as 'any venue (such as a city) that facilitates ongoing interactions between people and exchange among languages'.¹¹ Examining the interaction between multilingualism, travel and trade in late medieval London, he argues that commerce in medieval contact zones, particularly in cities and coastal environments, profoundly influenced the use of language in literary texts.

Central to this article are the socio-economic writing contexts, and more specifically, it focuses upon the way in which multilingual social and economic networks influenced reading and book culture in Bruges. Here, I scrutinize how the close proximity of various social groups influenced the languages of literary patronage in the city. As Ardis Butterfield has shown for London, cities, and in particular large commercial centres, were contact zones where literary language choice and the context provided by trade for professional language use overlapped.¹² Many vernaculars were 'competing' both orally and textually for space alongside Latin. Indeed, Bruges had a Dutch-speaking community, but the language of the city was Dutch in a multilingual vernacular setting. As the case of the *Livre des mestiers* illustrates, on the one side, Picard French functioned as an important *lingua franca* for the nobility, comital administration, urban elite and commercial society.¹³

⁹Wijman, *Luxury Bound*, 67; M. Martens, 'Some aspects of the origins of the art market in fifteenth-century Bruges', in M. North and D. Ormrod (eds.), *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800* (Aldershot, 1998), 26.

¹⁰M.L. Pratt, 'Arts of the contact zone', *Profession*, 91 (1991), 33–40.

¹¹J. Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature* (Columbus, 2013), 4.

¹²A. Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2009), 201.

¹³C.A.J. Armstrong, 'The language question in the Low Countries: the use of French and Dutch by the dukes of Burgundy and their administration', in J. Hale, J. Highfield and B. Smalley (eds.), *Europe in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965), 386–409; M. Boone, 'Langue, pouvoirs et dialogue. Aspects linguistiques de la communication entre les ducs de Bourgogne et leurs sujets flamands (1385–1505)', *Revue du Nord*, 91 (2009), 9–34; S. Lusignan, 'French language in contact with English: social context and linguistic change (mid-13th–14th centuries)', in J. Wogan-Browne, C. Collette, M. Kowaleski, L. Mooney, A. Putter and

Interestingly, on the other side, Picard was also a vernacular language in late medieval Flanders, in particular in the francophone south of the county.¹⁴ Bruges, as an international metropole, attracted craftsmen and merchants from these southern regions. Nevertheless, the urban context of Bruges was even more multilingual: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English and Hanseatic merchants were operating in the city and left traces in its literary culture.¹⁵ The multilingual diversity of a commercial city such as Bruges included all people living and working there, not only those registered as citizens or represented in the bureaucracy of official civic documents.¹⁶ As I will illustrate, analysing the socio-economic and linguistic contexts of production and consumption of manuscripts in cities helps to detect the ‘hidden’ multilingual contexts of monolingual manuscripts.

For this purpose, a broad definition of multilingualism will be applied: ‘multilingual’ in this contribution points to the basic co-existence of languages within the urban space.¹⁷ For instance, both the concurrence and circulation of monolingual Latin, Dutch and French books, as well as ‘actual multilingual manuscripts’ – i.e., manuscripts including texts written in different languages or, on a smaller scale, containing ownership inscriptions, rubrics or marginal notes in another language than the main text – are all considered as aspects that define Bruges as a multilingual contact zone. I focus on two different writing milieus: first, the ‘official’ production of books for trade led by professional writers and librarians, and second, the ‘private’ multilingual literary exploits of Bruges city-dwellers. Urban culture, and especially that of medieval cities, was shaped by both an outward-looking business community and a more local core (often looking with suspicion at outsiders).¹⁸ Bruges citizens invested in vernacular multilingualism – ‘linguistic capital’ according to Lisa Cooper – to engage in commercial circuits, but this influenced urban literary culture as well.¹⁹ Before turning to specific case-studies illustrating both perspectives of multilingual urban contacts in Bruges, including the literary accomplishments of the Bruges librarian Jan de Clerc on the one hand, and the socio-

D. Trotter (eds.), *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100–c. 1500* (Woodbridge, 2009), 27.

¹⁴S. Lusignan, ‘L’aire du Picard au moyen âge: espace géographique ou espace politique?’, in B. Fagard, S. Prévost, B. Combettes and O. Bertrand (eds.), *Evolutions en français: études de linguistique diachronique* (Bern, 2008), 269–83.

¹⁵Though the importance of the English and Italian market for Bruges books will be addressed on a quantitative level in this article, individual case-studies are well documented in historical research. For instance, the import of music manuscripts (*chansonnières*) from Bruges in Italian cities (such as the Lucca choirbook, copied by a Bruges scribe named ‘Waghe’) is discussed in R. Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985), 120–36. In particular, the English interest in Flemish manuscripts and the Anglo-Flemish literary connections were recently revalued by S. Levelt and A. Putter (eds.), *North Sea Crossings: The Literary Heritage of Anglo-Dutch Relations 1066–1688* (Oxford, 2021).

¹⁶Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, 209.

¹⁷Hsy, *Trading Tongues*, 4.

¹⁸Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, 206.

¹⁹Cooper, ‘Urban utterances’, 138. In 1586, the Italian merchant and historian Lodovico Guicciardini noted the excellent language skills of city-dwellers in the Low Countries: ‘For there are many who, although they have never been abroad can speak foreign languages in addition to their maternal tongue, particularly French, which is very common among them; many speak German, English, Italian and other foreign languages.’ See H. De Ridder-Symoens, ‘Education and literacy in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands’, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 16 (1995), 6.

cultural networks of the so-called Flemish Boethius manuscript on the other,²⁰ this article offers a quantitative overview of manuscript production in late medieval Bruges and its implications for language.

Book production in late medieval Bruges: a quantitative analysis

'The Multilingual Dynamics of the Literary Culture in Medieval Flanders (ca. 1200–ca. 1500)' project established a database of manuscripts produced in the County of Flanders or owned by a Flemish person, roughly dating from 1200 to 1500.²¹ This dataset includes metadata of around 2,500 manuscripts including 'literary' texts, such as romances, chronicles, Books of Hours and also legal treatises and theological works. Working with extant medieval manuscripts carries some risk: the presence of medieval manuscripts in large heritage collections today is heavily influenced by the difference in preservation contexts of institutional and private ownership. Manuscripts are simply more likely to survive in institutions. However, it is important to note that the destruction of large ecclesiastical institutions in the successive religious wars of the sixteenth century and during the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, and the impacts of two world wars, has influenced survival as well.²² A second factor influencing survival rate is material value: illuminated parchment manuscripts have always been considered more valuable and consequently better preserved.²³ This case-study uses manuscripts produced in Bruges, but does not include manuscripts owned by Bruges inhabitants but produced elsewhere in or outside Flanders.

Taking these considerations into account, interesting observations can still be made. Of the 2,500 Flemish manuscripts in the 'Multilingual Dynamics' dataset, 801 books seem to have been produced in Bruges between 1200 and 1500 (Table 1). This makes Bruges by far the largest book production centre in late medieval Flanders, leaving other major writing centres like Ghent (289) and Lille (204)

²⁰Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. 1335.

²¹We used metadata from the most important Flemish collections: the Public Library in Bruges, Ghent University Library, the Royal Library (KBR) in Brussels, the Royal Library in the Hague, the Bibliothèque d'Agglomération de Saint-Omer, the Bibliothèque municipale de Douai, the Médiathèque Jean Lévy in Lille, the British Library (BL) in London, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. There are limits to relying on metadata from library catalogues as not all libraries offer systematic data on language and provenance. For instance, information on marginal notes in different languages is often not included in the metadata. To avoid discussions on provenance, we only included manuscripts that could be attributed with a (relative) certainty to a Flemish production or user context. For this purpose, more detailed metadata were also sourced from large digital database collections such as BNM-I, TELMA and JONAS.

²²Uwe Neddermeyer calculated a survival rate of around 7% for medieval manuscripts in the Holy Roman Empire; see his *Von der Handschrift zum gedruckten Buch. Schriftlichkeit und Leseinteresse im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Quantitative und qualitative Aspekte* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 53–4, 85–7.

²³C. Bozzolo and E. Ornato, 'L'étude quantitative du manuscrit médiéval: aspects méthodologiques et perspectives de recherche', in H. Härtel, W. Milde and J. Pirozynski (eds.), *Probleme der Bearbeitung mittelalterlicher Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 233–9. More recently, on the quantitative analysis of manuscripts, see M. Sargent, 'What do the numbers mean? A textual critic's observations on some patterns of Middle English manuscript transmission', in M. Connolly and L.R. Mooney (eds.), *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England* (York, 2008), 207.

Table 1. Languages of literary manuscripts produced in Bruges from 1200 to 1500 (n=801)

| | Thirteenth century | Fourteenth century | Fifteenth century |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Dutch | 2 | 1 | 31 |
| French | 0 | 4 | 309 |
| Latin | 30 | 12 | 271 |
| Multilingual | 2 | 4 | 112 |
| <i>Dutch-Latin</i> | 1 | 1 | 54 |
| <i>French-Latin</i> | 0 | 0 | 43 |
| <i>Dutch-French</i> | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| <i>Dutch-French-Latin</i> | 1 | 0 | 12 |
| Other (English, Low German, Spanish, Italian) | 0 | 1 | 22 |
| <i>Monolingual</i> | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| <i>Multilingual</i> | 0 | 1 | 18 |
| | 34 | 22 | 745 |

far behind.²⁴ The largest subdivision, 745 of those 801 manuscripts, was written in the fifteenth century. In the thirteenth century, book production in Bruges was generally limited to the larger monastic and ecclesiastical institutes, such as St Donatian's Church, one of the largest secular chapters in the Low Countries.²⁵ The dataset includes 34 manuscripts written in thirteenth-century Bruges (out of 444 Flemish thirteenth-century manuscripts). Latin was obviously the dominant language. The few Middle Dutch cases all date from the last quarter of the thirteenth century.²⁶ Remarkably, not a single francophone manuscript in our thirteenth-century dataset could be attributed with certainty to Bruges. At the time, francophone book production in Flanders was still concentrated in the southern towns such as Douai and Lille.²⁷

The economic and political instability of the fourteenth century resulted in an overall decline in manuscript production and preservation in the County of Flanders which resonated in the city of Bruges. The dataset lists only 21 Bruges manuscripts from the fourteenth century (out of 371 in total for Flanders). In the Low Countries and in France, manuscript preservation apparently suffered more from the political and economic crises of the fourteenth century than it did in the Holy Roman Empire or England.²⁸ Although the Bruges data is fragmentary, the proportion of vernacular texts grew. All fourteenth-century multilingual

²⁴Not all manuscripts can be attributed to one specific city. For instance, in the 1490s, a particular illumination style in both Ghent and Bruges (the so-called Ghent-Bruges style) makes a distinction between both cities challenging. Therefore, such manuscripts are calculated in the datasets of both towns. See also Wijsman, *Luxury Bound*.

²⁵K. Carlvant-Boysen, 'Some modest psalters from thirteenth-century Flanders', *Scriptorium*, 40 (1986), 88–95. St Donatian's church had a close connection with the Bruges book business: as early as 1381, librarians were mentioned in the church accounts. See Vandewalle, 'Het librariërs-gilde', 39.

²⁶E.g. Detmold, *Lippische Landesbibliothek*, LLB ms. 70.

²⁷L. Demets, 'French literature in mono- and multilingual social contexts. The production and reception of French literary manuscripts in thirteenth-century Flanders', *Queeste*, 28 (2021), 246–76.

²⁸Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift*, 217–54; K. Murchison, 'French literature of the British Isles after the Norman Conquest: a digital data-driven investigation', *French Studies* (forthcoming, 2023).

manuscripts include at least one text in Dutch. As a rising literary language, Dutch was apparently often combined with other languages. The inclusion of Dutch alongside French or Latin in a multilingual manuscript could indicate both a high or low level of multilingualism: either the book owner read in multiple languages with facility, or the reader's French or Latin was insufficient to understand the text without instructions in Dutch.

Vernacular combinations of French and Middle Dutch texts in the same manuscript are rare in Bruges, and in the Flemish dataset in general.²⁹ Comparable conclusions have been made for late medieval England.³⁰ In her recent research on the position of French in manuscripts written in late medieval England, Krista Murchison has arrived at similar conclusions: French and English texts are rarely found in the same manuscript.³¹ Indeed, medieval manuscripts combining vernacular texts are more often mediated by interactions with a third language (often Latin).³² This of course does not imply that Flemish readers did not read or own both French and Middle Dutch texts, but simply that these texts were generally not combined in a single manuscript.³³ The genres of those few vernacular bilingual manuscripts in the fifteenth century are of a particularly historical use: chronicle miscellanies or memory books.³⁴ The fourteenth-century French–Dutch manuscripts, on the contrary, were related to the *artes liberales* and bilingual schooling, such as the abovementioned *Livre des mestiers* or *Bouc vanden ambachten* or the *Leere van hoveschede*.³⁵

The drop in manuscript production in the fourteenth century makes the expansion from the early fifteenth century onwards all the more impressive. As mentioned, 745 manuscripts of our dataset were produced in fifteenth-century Bruges (of a total of 1,632 Flemish fifteenth-century manuscripts). The majority, 42 per cent (309 manuscripts), are French monolingual manuscripts, followed by Latin (36 per cent or 271 manuscripts), various multilingual combinations (15 per cent or 112 manuscripts), and Dutch (only 4 per cent or 31 manuscripts). A small number of other languages appear, mainly English, Spanish, Low German and Italian, almost all in a multilingual combination with Latin (3 per cent or 22 manuscripts).³⁶ There is a difference in materiality between manuscripts in different languages. Francophone manuscripts tend to be quite a bit larger (average height of 372mm) than Dutch (247mm) or Latin books (193mm). This is of course

²⁹B. Besamusca and J. Janzen, 'Multilingual manuscripts in medieval Flanders', in N. Stam (ed.), *Medieval Multilingual Manuscripts: Texts, Scribes, and Patrons* (Dublin, forthcoming).

³⁰A. Putter, 'The organisation of multilingual miscellanies: the contrasting fortunes of Middle English lyrics and romance', in M. Connolly and R.L. Radulescu (eds.), *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2015), 89–90.

³¹Murchison, 'French literature', 28.

³²Hsy, *Trading Tongues*, 4.

³³M. Hoogvliet, 'Religious reading in French and Middle Dutch in the Southern Low Countries and northern France (c. 1400 – c. 1520)', in N. Morato and D. Schoenaers (eds.), *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture outside France* (Turnhout, 2018), 323–47.

³⁴For instance, the French–Dutch memory book of the De Baenst family; see A.-L. Van Bruaene, *De Gentse memorieboeken als spiegel van stedelijk historisch bewustzijn (14de tot 16de eeuw)* (Ghent, 1998), 76–9.

³⁵Brussels, KBR, ms. 21362.

³⁶The majority of these manuscripts are Books of Hours with later added prayers and notes.

related to genre: Latin Books of Hours tend to be smaller for practical use, whereas French romances were written in luxuriously illuminated large formats for public reading.³⁷ French and Latin manuscripts, often richly illuminated, were mostly written on parchment whereas the most common writing support of Dutch manuscripts was paper: for instance, almost all manuscripts of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*, a Flemish chronicle written in Bruges in the late fifteenth century, were written on paper.³⁸ The reason why Dutch manuscripts were more often written on paper is not always clear, though there could be a link with the urban administration.

Although it is often hard to exactly date a specific manuscript, especially to a certain decade, interesting conclusions can be made from the manuscript fluctuation per decade (Figure 1).³⁹ First, shortly before and after the murder of Duke John the Fearless in 1419, book production in Bruges stagnated due to socio-economic perils. A second increase in manuscript production correlates quite remarkably with the crisis years 1431–40, including the Bruges revolt of 1436–38, crop failures and an outbreak of plague. This was, however, also the most important period for luxury art production (it was the heyday of Jan Van Eyck, for instance). Furthermore, Bruges book production spectacularly boomed after 1450. From 1460 onwards, there was a transition to cheaper products made for the free market, rather than on commission.⁴⁰ This enhanced production may have also caused a decrease in prices leading in turn to increased demand for works of art.⁴¹ This heightened demand/production corresponds with two trends. First, from 1454 onwards, the Bruges librarians' guild professionalized and invested in a more sophisticated administration holding a yearly account of their members, including donations, fees and apprentices' enrolments.⁴² Second, as shown by Figure 1, the dominance of French in manuscript production was a growing phenomenon of the second half of the fifteenth century. Before 1440, the fourteenth-century trend continued: Dutch was far more common as a literary language than French, but most often in a multilingual combination with Latin.⁴³

The rise to prominence of French as a literary language in Bruges in the second half of the fifteenth century relates to two specific factors. First and foremost, the largest contributor to the French dataset are the library collections of the Burgundian dukes (Philip the Good, Charles the Bold and his wife Margaret of

³⁷W. Blockmans, 'Manuscript acquisition by the Burgundian court and market for books in the fifteenth-century Netherlands', in North and Ormrod (eds.), *Art Markets*, 7–18.

³⁸L. Demets, 'The late medieval manuscript transmission of the "Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen" in urban Flanders', *The Medieval Low Countries*, 3 (2016), 123–73. Although there had been a paper mill in Houplines near Lille since 1389, most paper used in Bruges was imported. M. Arnould, 'Quand sont apparus les premiers moulins à papier dans les anciens Pays-Bas', in *Villes d'imprimerie et moulins à papier du XIVe au XVIe siècle* (Brussels, 1976), 271; P. Santy, "'Papier hier": de introductie van het papier in Vlaenderen (13de–14de eeuw)', Ghent University Master's thesis, 2002, 118.

³⁹Manuscripts are attributed per decade based on the TELMA database.

⁴⁰Martens, 'Some aspects', 22.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 23.

⁴²Bruges, Stadsarchief (SAB), 384 (*Gildeboek van de librariërs*). See Dewitte, 'Het Brugse Sint-Jans- en Sint-Lucasgilde', 335.

⁴³F. Winkler, *Die flämische Buchmalerei des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts: Künstler und Werke von den Brüdern van Eyck bis zu Simon Bening* (Amsterdam, 1978), 387.

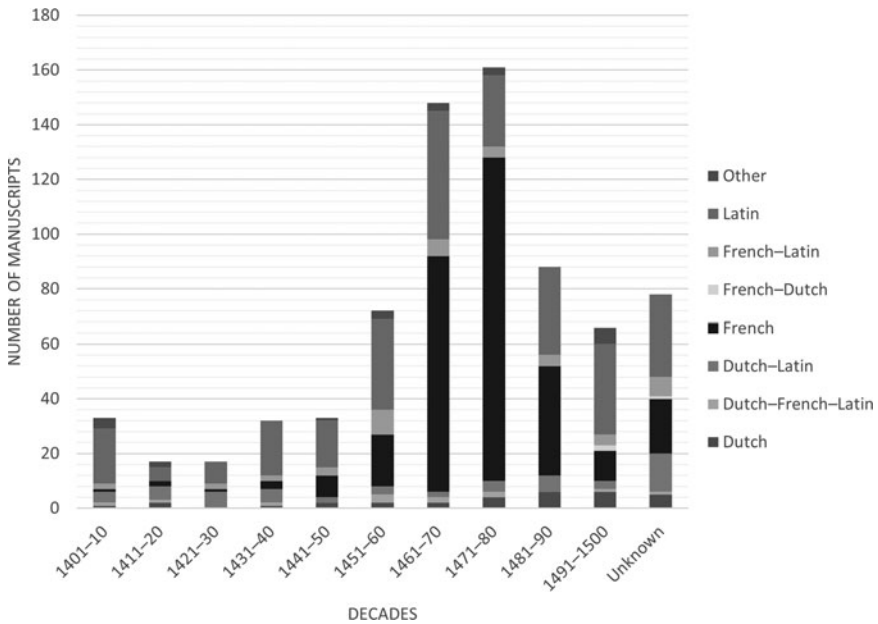


Figure 1. Languages of manuscripts produced in fifteenth-century Bruges per decade (n=745).

York) and, of course, the Bruges nobleman and bibliophile Louis of Gruuthuse (see 'Court' category, Table 2). Between 1440 and 1480, the status of Bruges as a centre of artistic production was magnified by commissions by the Burgundian dukes. In about 1445, Philip the Good began his active artistic patronage, concentrating on manuscripts, tapestries, jewellery and silverware.⁴⁴ Second, and closely related to the two aforementioned literary patrons, is the increasing demand for French luxury manuscripts for export to England, in particular spurred by the Burgundian Duchess Margaret of York and her brother, the English King Edward IV, who resided in the palace of Louis of Gruuthuse in Bruges during his exile of 1470–71.⁴⁵ Members of the English nobility were given luxuriously illuminated Flemish manuscripts or followed Margaret's or Edward's example of commissioning bespoke manuscripts.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the majority of manuscripts leaving Bruges for England were not produced on commission.

⁴⁴M. Martens, 'Artistic patronage in Bruges institutions, ca. 1440–1482', Santa Barbara University of California Ph.D. thesis, 1992, 3.

⁴⁵A. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Choosing a book in late fifteenth-century England and Burgundy', in C. Barron and N. Saul (eds.), *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1995), 84–6. Margaret of York was an important literary patron. The influence of the duchess and Flemish illuminators in her entourage such as David Aubert on William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* has been scrutinized by L. Hellinga, 'Reading an engraving: William Caxton's dedication to Margaret of York, duchess of Burgundy', in S. Roach (ed.), *Across the Narrow Seas: Studies in the History and Bibliography of Britain and the Low Countries: Presented to Anna E.C. Simoni* (London, 1991), 1–15.

⁴⁶See for instance the well-documented case of Sir John Donne: J. Backhouse, 'Sir John Donne's Flemish manuscripts', in P. Monks and D. Owen (eds.), *Medieval Codicology, Iconography, Literature, and Translation: Studies for Keith Val Sinclair* (Leiden, 1994), 48–57.

Table 2. Languages of urban and court audiences of literary manuscripts produced in Bruges (1401–1500)

| | Court | City |
|---|-----------|----------|
| Dutch | 2 (1%) | 13 (11%) |
| French | 234 (80%) | 7 (6%) |
| Latin | 31 (11%) | 52 (45%) |
| Multilingual (French–Latin, Dutch–Latin, French–Dutch) | 18 (6%) | 34 (30%) |
| Other | 7 (2%) | 9 (8%) |

Looking more closely at the main target audiences and social user milieus of manuscripts produced in Bruges, as expected, the largest sales market of the luxuriously illuminated books were court and noble circles (42 per cent).⁴⁷ However, there was a significant urban audience (18 per cent) as well. This urban audience was more multilingual than the court environment. The court and nobility commissioned almost exclusively francophone monolingual manuscripts (80 per cent) in Bruges, besides a small number of Latin (11 per cent), multilingual (mostly French–Latin and one Dutch–Latin manuscript, 6 per cent), other multilingual manuscripts (2 per cent) and Dutch manuscripts (1 per cent). The few court manuscripts including Dutch were all produced for Flemish use, and most of them were commissioned by the Bruges polyglot courtier Louis of Gruuthuse.⁴⁸ The data for urban manuscripts is much more diverse. Most manuscripts used by city-dwellers were written in Latin (45 per cent), which is related to the popularity of Books of Hours in fifteenth-century urban lay communities in the Low Countries.⁴⁹ Middle Dutch manuscripts (11 per cent) had a more prominent place than those in French (6 per cent). The high number of multilingual manuscripts (30 per cent) is also associated with Books of Hours, including specific vernacular prayers (such as those by Geert de Grote or Christine de Pizan) or rubrics in Dutch or French to guide lay people with a limited knowledge of Latin. Multilingualism is a primary feature of Books of Hours as these manuscripts were products of many hands: scribes, artists, booksellers, devotional writers and, above all, lay patrons and owners.⁵⁰ The books' contents were primarily conventional, often monolingual Latin, but owners altered and personalized their (inherited) books adding vernacular prayers to local patron saints.

Returning to my earlier question, did the competition between social groups influence manuscript production? And in what ways can we relate this to fluctuations in language? Although the proportion of unknown first owners is relatively high, if we examine the social milieus of urban manuscript owners by decade,

⁴⁷'Court' includes princes and lords both inside and outside of Flanders, as well as other nobility, courtiers, diplomats and court functionaries. 'City' includes all Flemings and non-Flemings residing in a town.

⁴⁸Louis of Gruuthuse was a Bruges nobleman. He was a knight of the Golden Fleece, chamberlain of the Burgundian dukes and owned an impressive library including mostly French, but also some Latin and Middle Dutch works. See M. Martens and P. De Gryse, *Lodewijk van Gruuthuse: mecenas en Europees diplomaat, ca. 1427–1492* (Bruges, 1992).

⁴⁹T. Lente, 'Prayer books', in F.-J. Arlinghaus, M. Ostermann, O. Plessow and G. Tschepel (eds.), *Transforming the Medieval World: Uses of Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages* (Turnout, 2006), 239–58.

⁵⁰V. Reinburg, *French Books of Hours* (Cambridge, 2012), 2.

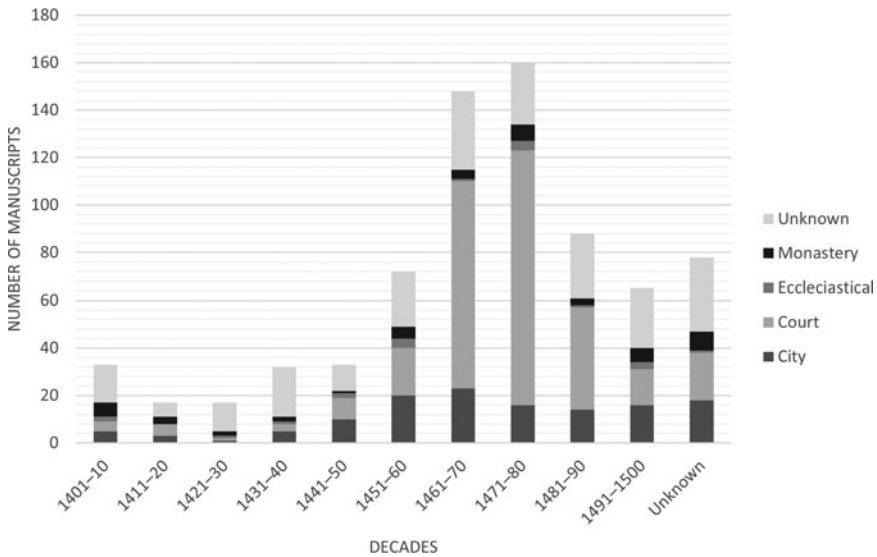


Figure 2. First ownership milieus of manuscripts produced in fifteenth-century Bruges per decade (n=745).

they show less fluctuation than court commissions during the various political, economic and social crises in the fifteenth century (Figure 2). For instance, in the early fifteenth century and again in the crisis years of 1431–40, more urban than noble patrons of Bruges manuscripts can be identified. During the Flemish revolt of 1482–92 against the regency of the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian of Austria, the decline in manuscripts commissioned in Bruges from court and noble environments is far more prominent. Indeed, overall, from the 1450s, the proportions of urban audiences remained stable.

Even more remarkably, until 1460 and again after 1490, the number of books owned by urban readers almost equals those owned by the nobility. After 1470, there was a huge economic crisis in Bruges: there was an enormous tax burden and food prices rose to an unprecedented height, while wages remained low, which resulted in a decline in the standard of living.⁵¹ And yet, noble manuscript owners seem to have been more affected by these crises than urban manuscript owners. However, if we compare Figures 1 and 2, the increase in manuscripts commissioned by urban communities in the 1450s and 1460s does not coincide with an expected increase in manuscripts written in Dutch: urban audiences preferred religious Latin or multilingual manuscripts, and only a smaller number also owned Dutch or French manuscripts. If indeed art production was stimulated during economic crises, this seems to relate to the literary exploits of the urban communities and not the court.⁵² Moreover, and rather strikingly, neither Dutch nor French was prominent in a monolingual manuscript context before 1450,

⁵¹Martens, 'Some aspects', 22.

⁵²On the relationship between art and economy, see R. Lopez, 'Hard times and investment in culture', in W.K. Ferguson (ed.), *The Renaissance: Six Essays* (New York, 1962), 29–54. For its criticism, see Blockmans,

but mostly appeared in multilingual manuscript combinations. Only in the crisis years of the 1480s did Dutch become more important in monolingual manuscript culture. In such political contexts, the presence of different interacting social milieus in Bruges influenced the language of book production.

Bilingual librarians: French as the language of the Bruges international book market

Scholarship on manuscript production in Bruges has predominantly concentrated on the importance of export for the Bruges book market.⁵³ In the second half of the fifteenth century, the quantity of works produced for the open market, not commissioned by any specific patron, but for unknown potential buyers steadily increased.⁵⁴ In our dataset, 209 manuscripts (28 per cent) are known to have been commissioned by a non-Flemish buyer. At the same time, our data adds nuance to the image of Bruges illuminators and librarians working exclusively for an export market: more manuscripts were commissioned by or intended for Flemish use (342, around 46 per cent).⁵⁵ The Burgundian dukes are included in these numbers, but even without them, 255 of the 745 manuscripts have known medieval Flemish users. Concerning trade abroad, export manuscripts were most commonly written in Latin (45 per cent) and French (37.5 per cent). Trade in manuscripts in fifteenth-century Bruges was, apart from luxurious and high-quality Latin Books of Hours, clearly concentrated on francophone manuscripts. Even manuscripts leaving Bruges and Flanders for other Dutch-speaking regions, such as the nearby Duchy of Brabant or other principalities in the Northern Low Countries, still mostly contained French texts. This points to the fact that it was primarily the wealthy francophone elite who could afford luxuriously illuminated manuscripts from Bruges. Furthermore, while French was omnipresent in Bruges and other northern cities such as Ghent, Dutch manuscripts, on the contrary, were virtually absent in the francophone southern towns such as Lille.⁵⁶

England was the most important market for Bruges manuscripts (Figure 3), in particular for Latin Books of Hours and literary texts in French. This major investment from the English market is noteworthy, as London itself was an important centre of book production with its own stationers' guild since 1403 or earlier.⁵⁷ The dependence of the English market on imported books is illustrated by the anti-alien legislation of 1484. This act passed by the English parliament restrained the rights of foreign merchants (in particular Italians) to carry out trade in England,

'The creative environment'; M. Boone, 'De Bourgondische Nederlanden. Terres de promission en/of creative environments?', in B. Bousmanne (ed.), *Vlaamse miniaturen* (Ghent, 2011), 50.

⁵³Wijsman, *Luxury Bound*, 40.

⁵⁴Martens, 'Some aspects', 22.

⁵⁵It is undetermined whether 194 manuscripts (26%) were intended for export or not.

⁵⁶Research on booklists did point to some (scarce) Dutch readership in southern Flanders. Hoogvliet, 'Religious reading'; M. Hoogvliet, 'Mez puy que je le enten, je suy conten: bilingual cities of readers in the Southern Low Countries and northern France (c. 1400 – c. 1550)', in M. Selig and S. Ehrich (eds.), *Mittelalterliche Stadtsprachen* (Regensburg, 2016), 45–61.

⁵⁷P. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London (1501–1557)* (Cambridge, 2013), 1–67.

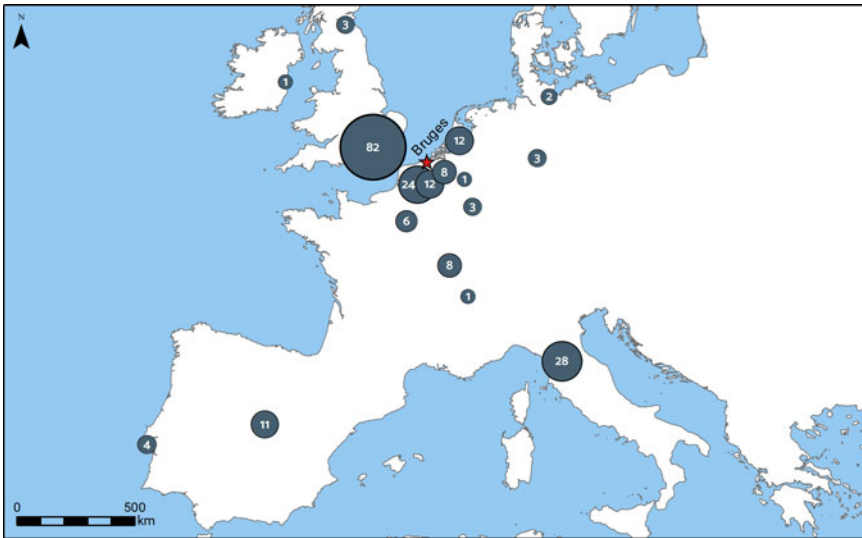


Figure 3. Absolute number of known fifteenth-century manuscripts (n=209) in the dataset exported from Bruges.

| Export region | Manuscripts |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Brabant | 8 |
| Burgundy | 8 |
| England | 82 |
| France | 6 |
| Hanseatic (Lübeck) | 2 |
| Germany | 3 |
| Hainaut | 12 |
| Northern Netherlands | 12 |
| Ireland | 1 |
| Northern Italy | 28 |
| Luxembourg | 3 |
| Portugal | 4 |
| Scotland | 3 |
| Spain | 11 |
| Northern France | 24 |
| Swiss Confederacy | 1 |
| Liège | 1 |
| Total | 209 |

but specifically exempted the book trade.⁵⁸ Clearly, the English book market relied heavily on the import of continental francophone manuscripts. Recent research by Krista Murchison indicates the waning presence of French literary manuscripts made in England in favour of Latin and English in the late Middle Ages.⁵⁹ Scholarship has already widely focused on this phenomenon, in particular on the

⁵⁸J. Loewenstein, *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago, 2002), 64.

⁵⁹Murchison, 'French literature', 34.

influence of ‘continental French’ on the French of England from the fourteenth century.⁶⁰

In our export dataset, England is followed by Italy, another important trading partner for luxury goods, and northern France (Picardy and Artois). Remarkably, very few manuscripts were intended for another important trading partner: the Hanseatic League. Language could be a stumbling block here. The Hanseatic confederates preferred Low German literature, a demand to which the Bruges librarians seem to have been unable to respond. Language, however, is not the only explanation. There was also generally little interest in Latin illuminated Books of Hours in the Hanseatic towns.⁶¹ Some well-known cases of Bruges manuscripts written in German dialects, such as a particular translation of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* illuminated by the Gold Scrolls Group,⁶² mostly date back to the first half of the fifteenth century.⁶³

The quantitative data point to a large number of French books written in fifteenth-century Bruges, an essentially Dutch-speaking town. The proportion of people who were actually able to fluently read or speak French is hard to evaluate. Of course, those involved in the comital and later Burgundian administration were francophone or bilingual. A class of Dutch native-speaking nobility and administrators actively invested in bilingualism, for instance by sending their children to the southern part of Flanders or to other francophone regions such as Tournai, Picardy and Artois.⁶⁴ Moreover, the aforementioned *Livre des mestiers* points to the existence of a skilled bilingual mercantile elite. But what about stationers and professional scribes?

In 1341, the Bruges city accounts mention the occupation of a ‘librarian’ for the first time.⁶⁵ ‘Librarians’ or stationers were first and foremost booksellers: most ran a bookshop with a small collection of exemplary manuscripts, and sold all kinds of equipment necessary to copy a manuscript. They also produced manuscripts (and later, prints) on demand, or functioned as intermediaries between clients and professional scribes, illuminators and printers. The first official document dates from 1403, concerning an early example of their many quarrels with the craft guild of the Bruges painters.⁶⁶ Certainly from some point in 1454–57, the date of the first register, but most probably long before that period, Bruges had an independent librarians’ guild.

The ability to accurately copy manuscripts in different languages required a high level of language proficiency from a small group of professional writers. Among the

⁶⁰As Jocelyn Wogan-Brown stated, there was even a sort of dichotomy between ‘Anglo-Norman’ (up to 1300) and ‘Anglo-French’ (up to 1500), the latter heavily influenced by literary interaction and exchange with the continent. J. Wogan-Brown, ‘What’s in a name: the “French” of “England”’, in Wogan-Browne et al. (eds.), *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, 3.

⁶¹Lübeck was the most important writing centre of the Hanseatic area; see E. Buringh, *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2011), 315–95.

⁶²Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliothek, GKS 79 2°.

⁶³B. Cardon, *Manuscripts of the Speculum humanae salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c. 1410 – c. 1470)* (Leuven, 1996), 389–91; B. Kramer, *Een lekenboek in woord en beeld: de Spiegel der minschliken zalicheid* (Hilversum, 2013), 81–207.

⁶⁴Boone, ‘Langue’.

⁶⁵Vandewalle, ‘Het librariërs-gilde’, 39.

⁶⁶On 2 March 1403, the Bruges aldermen decided that illumination was not a privilege of the painters’ guild. Vandewalle, ‘Het librariërs-gilde’, 40.

Royal collection at the British Library, one fifteenth-century manuscript transmits a French translation of Goswin of Metz's *Imago Mundi*, a verse encyclopaedia about Creation and the universe dating from the middle of the thirteenth century. In the manuscript's colophon, we read that the book was copied by 'le comandement' of the *librarian* Jan de Clerc, a librarian in Bruges: 'en la ville de bruges en 1464 par le comandement de Johan le Clerc, librier et bourgeois dicelle ville de Bruges'.⁶⁷ An almost identical exemplar now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore is dated to 1489 and holds a similar colophon.⁶⁸ These colophons imply the manuscripts were not copied by De Clerc himself, but under his supervision. De Clerc was one of the most productive Bruges librarians from the fifteenth century and a contemporary of another famous Bruges librarian and incunable printer, Colard Mansion.⁶⁹ Probably descended from a wealthy family of local brokers and *merseniers* (mercers), De Clerc enrolled in the librarians' guild in 1455.⁷⁰ He was named dean of the guild at the age of about 33 in 1468 and held this office until 1470.⁷¹ Over the period of 1465 to 1490, De Clerc enrolled seven apprentices in the guild: six boys and a girl, Barbara Tant, daughter of the Bruges burgher and candlemaker Jan Tant.⁷² De Clerc died in 1496. His widow continued the shop and company after his death.⁷³

Notably, some apprentices were deliberately recruited from the southern francophone part of the County of Flanders or other nearby francophone regions, such as Quinten Poulet, who originated from Lille, and Guillaume Buirette, born in Cambrai. They show that Jan de Clerc invested in a multilingual workshop of scribes including native speakers of both vernaculars. De Clerc is known to have been a native Dutch speaker on the basis not only of his Bruges background, but of his Dutch entries in the records and accounts of the librarians' guild.⁷⁴ However, he was also quite fluent in Picard French: apart from the famous francophone printer Colard Mansion, De Clerc is the only dean of the librarians who occasionally closed the accounts of the guild with several formulae in Picard French.⁷⁵ Although De Clerc was proficient in written French, he preferred to engage native-speaking scribes in the writing process of his francophone manuscripts which improved the accuracy and thus the value of his final products. Most likely, however, De Clerc primarily worked for commissions from the English market. This can be illustrated not only by the assumed influence of the *Image du Monde* manuscript on William Caxton's print, but also by the subsequent career of one of his former apprentices. Quinten Poulet was eventually appointed

⁶⁷London, BL, Royal MS 19 A IX, fol. 4v.

⁶⁸Baltimore, WAG, ms. W.199.

⁶⁹E. Hauwaerts, E. De Wilde, L. Vandamme and R. Adam (eds.), *Colard Mansion: Incunabula, Prints and Manuscripts in Medieval Bruges* (Ghent, 2018).

⁷⁰Several members of the De Clerc family were involved in the guild government of the Bruges brokers; see SAB, 114 (*Wetsvernieuwingen ambachtsbesturen*).

⁷¹E. Segers, 'Het profiel van de deken. Een sociaaleconomische benadering van de dekens van de librariërgilde te Brugge ca. 1450–1500: een prosopografische benadering', Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Ph.D. thesis, 2018, 86.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 141; SAB, 208–9 (*Wezenregister*), Sint-Donaas, Book 5, 1467–1516, fol. 120r.

⁷³Segers, 'Het profiel van de deken', 174.

⁷⁴SAB, 384, fol. 56r.

⁷⁵SAB, 384, fol. 59v.

keeper of the Royal Library of the English King Henry VII in 1492.⁷⁶ As such, Jan de Clerc's bookshop was a micro-contact zone between French and Dutch native-speaking scribes, both from Bruges (such as Barbara Tant) and from the franco-phone south of Flanders (Quinten Poulet).

For public or private use? Non-professional writers and literary social networks

The professional mobility of writers between the francophone south of Flanders and the Dutch-speaking north illustrates the position of Bruges as an urban contact zone not only on an international, but also on a 'Flemish' level. The opportunities of international commerce in the metropole attracted Picard native speakers from the south. The question remains of how this was reflected in local social milieus or non-professional literary networks in urban society. Did these polyglot contexts interact with the literary interests of the urban community in Bruges? Private writing contexts and non-professional writers are as important as professional ones in late medieval towns. Indeed, the large proportion of manuscripts intended for Flemish users shows not only the significance of the Flemish market for the Bruges librarians, but also that manuscript writing was not strictly limited to these professional networks. The importance of private social networks for literary book production in Bruges is here scrutinized through the case-study of the so-called 'Flemish Boethius'. This manuscript transmits a Middle Dutch verse translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* (The consolation of philosophy). Partially based on the Latin 'original', but mostly on the pseudo-Jean de Meung French version, it was translated by the Bruges goldsmith Jacob Vilt between 1462 and 1466.⁷⁷

Originally written by the Roman statesman in the sixth century shortly before his execution, *De consolatione philosophiae* was one of the most important philosophical works of the Middle Ages. The text was translated into several vernaculars multiple times and thus read in various social milieus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Three Middle Dutch versions were written in Flanders in the second half of the fifteenth century. The one by Vilt is the version with the oldest extant manuscript witness.⁷⁸ The second version is known from the 1485 work of the Ghent printer Arend de Keyser containing both a Latin version and a Middle Dutch translation, with a Middle Dutch commentary on the text; this version is known as the Ghent Boethius.⁷⁹ This was probably based on an older translation made between the years 1455 and 1456 by an anonymous *Gentenaar*, probably a canon of the St Pharaïldis chapter. Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* also

⁷⁶J. Backhouse, 'Founders of the Royal Library: Edward IV and Henry VII as collectors of illuminated manuscripts', in D. Williams (ed.), *England in the Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1987), 32–3.

⁷⁷C. de Vooy, 'De Middelnederlandse Boethius-vertaling van Jacob Vilt', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 60 (1941), 1–25; T. Mertens, 'Consolation in late medieval Dutch literature', in M. Hoenen and L. Nauta (eds.), *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolatio philosophiae* (Leiden, 1997), 107–20.

⁷⁸M. Goris and W. Wissink, 'The medieval Dutch tradition of Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*', in M. Hoenen and L. Nauta (eds.), *Boethius in the Middle Ages*, 121–65.

⁷⁹M. Goris, *Boethius in het Nederlands* (Hilversum, 2000), 30.

circulated in French in Bruges in both prose and verse. Louis of Gruuthuse for instance owned two French versions, one French–Latin and one Dutch version of the text: on 16 March 1492, Jan van Kriekenborch completed a richly illuminated manuscript version of the Ghent Boethius for the Bruges nobleman.⁸⁰ In 1477, Colard Mansion published a French translation of the Latin text in Bruges.⁸¹

On 14 June 1470, the Boethius manuscript was finished by the scribe ‘A. Drubbel’.⁸² Both author and scribe were based in Bruges, and only four years separate Vilt’s translation and adaptation of the text and Drubbel’s copy. This could imply that Drubbel and Vilt belonged to a shared social, political or economic network in Bruges. Jacob Vilt is identified as a goldsmith in the Boethius manuscript, and, indeed, in a charter of 2 December 1454, he is mentioned as one of the noble members of the goldsmiths’ guild.⁸³ Goldsmiths were highly educated and skilled artisans, and the craft guild was dominated by a small number of very rich and influential families.⁸⁴ Not exclusively aimed at international clientele, some Bruges goldsmiths frequently received commissions from the Burgundian court.⁸⁵ Skilled artisans and merchants invested in ‘linguistic capital’ through education and school manuals to successfully engage in trade.⁸⁶ Indeed, most Bruges goldsmiths were practically bilingual. Jacob had at least two sons: Jacob the younger, his apprentice, and Jan, who became a priest at the city’s St James Church and was a prominent musician there.⁸⁷ Moreover, the Vilt family was engaged in various luxury crafts: a Jan Vilt, perhaps a brother or other relative of Jacob, belonged to the librarians’ guild.⁸⁸ A Michiel Vilt was enlisted in both the smiths’ guild and the painters’ guild: he specialized in decorating horse harnesses.⁸⁹

In September 1461, the Bruges accounts noted a substantial financial deficit, resulting in the appointment of six financial commissioners to restore the city’s financial health.⁹⁰ These commissioners remained in office until 1466. This is the exact timeframe in which Vilt made his Middle Dutch *Consolatio* translation.

⁸⁰Paris, BnF, ms. néerl. 1. See Goris, *Boethius*, 146. See also E. Hauwaerts, ‘De consolatio philosophiae van Boethius in middeleeuws Brugge’, in L. Vandamme (ed.), *Boeken uit Brugge. Studies over Brugse boekgeschiedenis* (Bruges, 2021), 9–17.

⁸¹Goris, *Boethius*, 119; Hauwaerts, ‘De consolatio philosophiae’, 12.

⁸²Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. 1335.

⁸³Bruges, Rijksarchief (RAB), Guild of the gold- and silversmiths, 191 (64), charter of 2 Dec. 1454. S. Muylaert, ‘De Brugse goud- en zilversmeden in de late middeleeuwen: een prosopografische studie’, Ghent University Ph.D. thesis, 2012, 543; S. Muylaert, ‘The accessibility of the late medieval goldsmith guild of Bruges’, *Journal of Social and Economic History*, 16 (2019), 47–70.

⁸⁴Muylaert, ‘De Brugse goud- en zilversmeden’, 98.

⁸⁵Buylaert and Dumolyn, ‘De wereld van Jan van Eyck’, 115.

⁸⁶Cooper, ‘Urban utterances’, 138.

⁸⁷J. Oosterman, *De gratie van het gebed: Middelnederlandse berijmde gebeden: overlevering en functie: met bijzondere aandacht voor produktie en receptie in Brugge (1380–1450)* (Amsterdam, 1995), 191–2; A. Dewitte, ‘Zangmeesters, organisten en schoolmeesters’, *Biekorf*, 71 (1971), 336.

⁸⁸Sir Jan Vilt was a member of the librarians’ guild for a period of seven years since 1465/67. SAB, 384, fols. 4v, 30r, 51r, 93r and 98v.

⁸⁹SAB, 114 (*Wetsvernieuwingen*), Smiths 1363–1793, 2 Sep. 1440: ‘michiel vilt, lormier’; SAB, 314 (*Obituarium beeldenmakers*), fol. 17r: ‘michiel vilt, zadelaere’.

⁹⁰L. Gilliodts-Van Severen, *Inventaire des chartes de la ville de Bruges*, 6 vols. (Bruges, 1871–85), vol. V, 438.

In his prologue, Vilt explains his motivations.⁹¹ First, he describes how he wrote for those who knew neither Latin nor French, so that they too could become acquainted with the text's valuable content. His other rationale is that through this book he wanted to offer comfort (following Boethius, of course) to people who were unhappy. The latter motivation might refer to the precarious economic climate in the city at the time. Furthermore, the text itself refers to the status and meaning of 'worldly possessions' with metaphors and examples a goldsmith could relate to. However, they construct at the same time a paradox for the translator, who made his living by making and selling jewellery: Lady Philosophy explains on various occasions how the value of gold, silver and jewels never belongs to their owner, but to the objects themselves, which can only result in distress.⁹²

Not only was the translation context of the Flemish Boethius text multilingual, but the extant manuscript is itself a multilingual codex. Although the largest part of the text is written in Dutch, there are Latin and French quotes pointing to both source texts. Much less is known about the socio-economic profile of the rather mysterious A. Drubbel. The name of this scribe is not only explicitly mentioned in the colophon of the Boethius manuscript, but also in a small word game (*rebus*) at the beginning of the manuscript which resonates with the work of the Chambers of Rhetoric.⁹³ Furthermore, this was not the scribe's first literary endeavour. On 18 October 1434, one A. Drubbel completed a manuscript including a Middle Dutch translation and adaptation of the *Ludus Scaccorum*, the *Scaecspel*, originally translated around 1400 by an anonymous writer, Franconis.⁹⁴ This manuscript does not mention a particular *locus* of writing.

Although burghers named Drubbel were active in fifteenth-century Bruges, A. Drubbel could very well have been an immigrant. In 1443, a certain Adriaan Drubbel, son of Pieter, born in Dordrecht, bought his burghership in Bruges to 'be engaged in small burgher business' ('omme cleene poortersneeringhe te doene').⁹⁵ *Poortersneeringhe* was the selling of trinkets closely related to the *meersenier* (mercier) shops, and all matters that were not strictly linked to a specific craft guild.⁹⁶ Although Adriaan Drubbel officially became a Bruges citizen only nine years after A. Drubbel wrote the *Scaecspel*, most city-dwellers paid their burghership fee to enrol in a craft guild or confraternity and presumably had already been living in the city for some time.⁹⁷ In any case, the immigrant from

⁹¹P. Wackers, 'Troost van een goudsmid (over Hs. 1335)', in M. van Egmond, B. Jaski and H. Mulder, *Bijzonder onderzoek: een ontdekkingsreis door de Bijzondere Collecties van de Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht* (Utrecht, 2009), 226.

⁹²E.g. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. 1335, fol. 72r.

⁹³Chambers of Rhetoric are (often urban) literary societies organized as a guild, a typical phenomenon in the Low Countries: see A.-L. Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille: rederijkerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam, 2008).

⁹⁴Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Germ. 20; G. van Schaick Avelingh, *Dat Scaecspel* (Leiden, 1912); J. van Herwaarden, 'Dat Scaecspel: a profane-ethical exploration', *Journal of Medieval History*, 25 (1999), 309–37.

⁹⁵SAB, 130 (*Poortersboeken*), 1418–1794, 1434–50, fol. 54r.

⁹⁶E. Bonduel, 'Nieuwe poorters in Brugge: migratie als indicator voor socio-professionele diversiteit en veranderend sociaaleconomisch beleid in laatmiddeleeuws Brugge (ca. 1350–1450)', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, 158 (2021), 297.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 284–5.

Dordrecht engaged in various social and religious activities in his new city and perhaps these new social contacts inspired him to start his new literary endeavour. In 1467, shortly before he finished the Boethius manuscript, Adriaan Drubbel became a member of the newly founded Our Lady of the Snow religious confraternity.⁹⁸ This confraternity had close relations with the Three Female Saints Chamber of Rhetoric. We do not know if Adriaan wrote this manuscript for personal use or perhaps for shared use in such a literary community.

The Flemish Boethius manuscript not only illustrates the polyglot urban context in Bruges, but it also shows how multilingual professional and semi-professional writing networks overlapped. Adriaan Drubbel probably ordered three miniatures on parchment from the workshop of the francophone illuminator Loyset Liédet, who originally came from Hesdin but was active in Bruges between 1469 and 1479 as a member of the Bruges librarians' guild.⁹⁹ As noted above, at the same time, a Jan Vilt was a librarian. Thus, did Drubbel borrow a copy of the Flemish Boethius text from Jan Vilt to use as the source for his manuscript? The compelling case of the Flemish Boethius demonstrates that Bruges functioned as a contact zone on multiple levels in several multilingual urban networks: between professional librarians and their workshops, and non-professional scribes and authors; between French-speaking illuminators, bilingual translators and Middle Dutch authors and scribes; and between established Bruges citizens and newcomers to the vibrant metropolis.

Conclusion

The complex social, economic and political factors of multilingual book production in fifteenth-century Bruges were not only influenced by the demands of export, but also by the particularities of Bruges as an urban contact zone. This article illustrates how Bruges operated as a multilingual contact zone on an inter-regional, a regional and a local scale. First, the quantitative analysis illuminates the booming industry of book production that resulted in the circulation of multiple languages in Bruges as a literary space. In the second half of the fifteenth century, French became increasingly important and was clearly linked to dominant Flemish consumers, such as the Burgundian dukes and Louis of Gruuthuse, but also the increasing demand for exports from the English market. Although the court was the most important commissioner, there are ample examples of Bruges manuscripts written for an urban audience. Moreover, these city-dwellers tended to be more multilingual, which is mainly demonstrated by the popularity of multilingual Books of Hours used for local expressions of lay devotion.

At first glance, book production in the city appears to have been affected by the creative environment of upwardly striving social groups hungry for luxury goods. Competition between languages reflects the complex social stratification in cities. Nevertheless, the linguistic situation in multilingual cities such as Bruges fluctuated and changed over time partially influenced by the economic trends in the

⁹⁸RAB, 1531 (Onze Lieve Vrouw van de Sneeuw), fols. 1r–16v. His wife became a member in 1470. He died between 1476 and 1479 (fols. 177r–192v).

⁹⁹Wackers, 'Troost van een goudsmid', 231.

metropole. Court commissioners were far more influenced by the political and economic crises of the fifteenth century than were urban readers. Although francophone manuscripts were omnipresent in Bruges in the second half of the fifteenth century, French texts seldom interacted with Dutch literary works in a physical way: vernacular Dutch–French multilingual manuscripts are rare in late medieval Bruges, apart from chronicle miscellanies and memory books. Similar conclusions can be made for the entire Flemish corpus and are comparable with findings from another trilingual environment, England.

The quantitative dominance of monolingual manuscripts actually hides the polyglot urban context.¹⁰⁰ For instance, the omnipresence of francophone manuscripts in a Dutch-speaking town is rather striking and requires an actively bilingual community of scribes. Additionally, professional librarians invested in ‘native speakers’, writers with significant language skills, who came from the southern francophone part of the County of Flanders and its surroundings. The Bruges book industry profited from its position as a ‘gateway’ between French and Dutch, and its ability to attract both a francophone literate elite and professionals to supply the francophone book market. This perfectly illustrates the interaction between language and social mobility and medieval manuscript production: the international metropole also operated as a Flemish ‘contact zone’ defined by the interaction between north and south, as embodied by the apprentices of Jan de Clerc, but also by local contacts within the social networks of luxury craft guilds, illustrated by the Vilt family’s activities as goldsmiths and librarians (among other crafts). The Flemish Boethius manuscript shows how professional and non-professional networks overlapped in fifteenth-century Bruges. The literary language, both on a local and professional scale, was influenced by the specific polyglot contexts provided by the city’s trade networks. This was particularly the case for the social networks of the luxury craft guilds which were also multilingual ‘creative environments’ defined less by *striving* social groups than by *interacting* social groups within the urban sphere. Multilingual interfaces are often ‘hidden’ in the dynamics of monolingual manuscripts such as the *Image du Monde* copied within Jan de Clerc’s multilingual workshop. For this reason, it is necessary to take the multilingual urban socio-economic contexts of monolingual manuscripts into account. In the cases of multilingual manuscripts such as the Flemish Boethius, however, the lively exchange that played out in the literary networks of medieval Bruges are more openly reflected.

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¹⁰⁰As Ann Coldiron argued for London printers: monolingual ‘Englished’ prints (like Caxton’s work) were influenced and shaped by their polyglot literary and socio-economic contexts: see A. Coldiron, *Printers without Borders. Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2015), 18.

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