The spatial strategies of the urban elites in mediaeval Nijmegen: combining territories with networks

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Introduction: medieval urban elites and development theory

The Middle Ages is used in many theories on social development as the prelude to modernity.¹ These narratives focus on the contradictions between rural feudalism and urban autonomy. The subsequent development of territorial states is seen as key component in the transformation of these fragmented traditional societies and as the starting point of their modernisation. Development is traditionally conceived as the development of separate states, which all travel along the same path towards modernisation, although with different starting points and with varying speeds.² There is a wide variety of explanations of the differences in development between states. Some focus differences in natural resources, others on class-structure, political history or cultural characteristics. These differences hide a basic agreement that neatly bounded states are the units of analysis to study social and economic development. The current mosaic of separate nation-states is the dominant framework from which social change is studied. Even many alternatives to modernisation theory, still fall into the territorial trap of studying development within the fixed territorial containers of entire nation-states³. They fall into what Saskia Sassen calls the endogeneity trap of limiting the analyses to the subject studied⁴. “(W)e cannot understand the x - in this case globalization - by confining our study to the characteristics of the x itself - i.e., global processes and institutions.”⁵ Analyses of globalisation should thus not be limited to the burgeoning worldwide trade, new communication technologies, the emerging global institutions, the growth of transnational corporations, and the decline of the nation-state since the 1980s. The local scale and a longer timeframe are necessary to better understand globalisation. To avoid the endogeneity trap one must look beyond simple dualities of scale and time. Studying the different relations between the local and many other scales avoids the scale duality between the national and the global. Studying the period before, during and after the golden age of the nation-state, avoids the time duality which contrasts the period of the nation-state with the current period of globalisation.⁶ Analysing earlier periods gives a much more nuanced and complex picture than “models of current social change,
which are typically geared toward isolating key variables to create order where none is seen. (...) Looking at this earlier phase is a way of raising the level of complexity in the inquiry about current transformations.”

Other recent alternative perspectives on global development also look further than the current time and space of the nation-state to study global development. Sandra Halperin’s recent book ‘Re-envisioning global development’ is based on the rejection of state focussed narratives of global development. Her alternative explanation of global development is based on the translocal relations of urban elites. Global development is not explained “by processes centred on empires and nation states, but by trans-local structures of social power; and by interactions and connections involving, not whole societies, but interdependent centres of elite accumulation across the world. It is not nation states, but cities and urban-based export centres that fuelled the expansion, and became integrated into the domain of capital.” Territories are in this alternative narrative not the undisputed units of analysis with which the analysis of development starts, but a possible outcome of this process. Only in the nineteenth century started local elites to support the formation of nation-states as a collective solution to their common vulnerability. They pursued other strategies in other periods.

This partially builds on Michael Mann’s work who also denies the existence of societies as bounded unitary totalities which follow evolutionary paths. States are according to him not a useful unit of analysis, but are just one of several power networks. “Societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power.” Others like Fernand Braudel, Hendrik Spruyt, David Nicholas and Julia Adams also stress the importance of only partially overlapping many different economic, social, and political networks. Instead of focussing on the history of distinct state territories and the evolution of their society, they stress the importance of studying how elites used multiple networks to promote their interests in medieval and early modern Europe.

This paper links up with these general historical accounts of the development in medieval Europe based on the importance of different elite networks. However, these authors focus on the importance of these networks in general on a European scale and how these shaped in the nation-states with which we are now familiar. Contrary to this general top-down perspective, our paper adopts a bottom-up perspective and studies how the elite of a single medieval city used different networks and territories at different scales to protect their interests. This enables us to make more detailed analyses of how actors combine horizontal and vertical power relations to promote their economic interests. Our paper examines how urban elites use different networks and link up with different territories, which are on their part embedded in horizontal territorial relations across borders and vertical relation between territories of different scales. This more bottom-up perspective can help to nuance well engrained conceptualisations of the state formation focussing on the development towards nation-states and their subsequent globalisation. Focussing on translocal elites like for instance stressed by Sandra Halperin helps to avoid the territorial trap of reducing complex spatial configurations to separate territorial containers like nation-states, whose development is subsequently studied and compared with other territories.

This paper is based on the confrontation and dialogue between the medieval historical and human geographical disciplinary perspectives of its authors. This was the result of our participation in the Cuius Regio project of the European Science Foundation which studied the long-term evolution of European historical regions from the Middle Ages onward. We hope that our paper can help to better understand the general relations
between networks and territories by using these contemporary concepts to analyse the strategies of a medieval urban elite.

1 The medieval city of Nijmegen

We analyse in this paper the multi-level spatial strategies of the urban elites of mediaeval Nijmegen, a river town in the east of the Netherlands (See figure 1). Nijmegen has now about 165,000 inhabitants and is a mid-sized Dutch city. It is one of the oldest cities in the Netherlands, dating back to Roman times. In the early Middle Ages Nijmegen gained significance as a Palts, one of the temporary seats of power the Holy Roman Emperor held at his disposal throughout his realm. Several members of the Carolingian dynasty, including Charlemagne, held court at Nijmegen during the eighth and ninth century and the ties of the town with the Emperors continued during the rest of the Middle Ages, albeit with varying intensity. By the thirteenth century Nijmegen had developed into the largest and economically most important town between Utrecht and Cologne with about 5,000 inhabitants. It would hold that position during the late Middle Ages: with an estimated 10,000 inhabitants around 1450 Nijmegen was one of the largest towns in the Rhine-Meuse basin.14

In the subsequent sections we discuss the different relations and territories used by the elite in Nijmegen to protect their economic interests. We discuss these different spatial strategies starting from small scale personal relations and ending with the interstate territorial politics in Europe. This unfolding of relations and territorial scales developed over time, but does not follow a strict chronological order. Before we start discussing their spatial strategies, we introduce in the next section some basic characteristics of the elite of Nijmegen and their commercial interests.

Figure 1 Nijmegen in its medieval spatial context

The elite in Nijmegen dominated by wine merchants

Nijmegen is a river port whose merchants participated in the Rhine trade. Already in Roman times some wine was shipped along the Rhine to the British Isles.15 In the Middle Ages this wine trade was crucial for the local economy. It was a transit trade: wine was not produced in the immediate surroundings of the town, but imported from wine producing areas much further to the south, especially from the Rhineland and Mosel (see Figure 1). Wine merchants made up a large part of Nijmegen’s financial and political elite, but the high society of the town was not a uniform and clearly demarcated group, as it never was in any medieval city. Some members of the upper strata of the urban society belonged to the lower nobility and depended more on income from their positions in the local or ducal administrations. However, there is no clear separation of non-noble mercantile activity and noble administrative activities in the service of the duke. Among the more important wine traders were several members of families with noble status. Although most members of the elite were natives of Nijmegen, some moved to Nijmegen after being appointed by the duke or in pursuit of their commercial interests. However, despite these differences, there were
no fundamental conflicts of interests within the elite of Nijmegen. Especially the importance of the merchant trade interests was generally accepted. This was the most important source of wealth for the urban population and an important source of revenue for the local and ducal administration. The wealth of a significant part of the urban elite depended on their involvement in the wine trade. Besides the full-time merchants, others occasionally shipped wine. In addition, a large part of the non-merchant elite in Nijmegen had indirect links with the wine trade as a financier or through family ties.\textsuperscript{16} About a quarter of the urban population worked in trade and shipping. The wine merchants had their own fraternity and the bargemen had their own guild. The urban taxes collected on wine accounted for almost a third of the budget of the city in the fifteenth century. Although the sources are quite fragmentary, about a third of the urban population belonged to the upper stratum, a third to the middle stratum, and a third to the bottom stratum of society. The importance of the well to do upper stratum appears to be greater in Nijmegen in the fifteenth century than other medieval European cities.\textsuperscript{17}

The Collert family exemplifies how merchant and administrative interests of the elite in Nijmegen were integrated through family ties. Many members of the Collert family participated in the wine trade. In the years after 1394 Peter Collert was the most important wine merchant of Nijmegen who transported and accompanied several large wine shipments a year. His father or uncle Gader Collert, started as a wine merchant, but later worked for the duke William I of Guelders as toll collector. Until the start of the sixteenth century most of the ducal toll collectors were not appointed because of their skills as professional administrators, but because of their first-hand experience as toll paying river merchants. Other members of the Collert family were also employed by the duchy of Guelders. The urban elite in Nijmegen had strong ties outside Nijmegen. Not only with the duke, but also with other trading cities along the Rhine. For example Jan, Lodewijk and Dirk Tybus were important Rhine merchants in the late fourteenth century. Although they were part of a leading family in Duisburg, they acquired citizenship of Nijmegen in 1393.\textsuperscript{18} Table 1 shows the share of the merchants from Nijmegen in the wine trade along the river Rhine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Share Nijmegen</th>
<th>Volume Nijmegen (In voeders of about 875 litres)</th>
<th>Total volume (In voeders of about 875 litres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1388/89</td>
<td>35,2%</td>
<td>850,0</td>
<td>2411,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1390</td>
<td>45,8%</td>
<td>799,5</td>
<td>1745,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1393/94</td>
<td>48,7%</td>
<td>874,0</td>
<td>1793,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1394/95</td>
<td>46,0%</td>
<td>893,5</td>
<td>1940,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1395/96</td>
<td>28,8%</td>
<td>662,0</td>
<td>2297,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1396/97</td>
<td>33,6%</td>
<td>845,0</td>
<td>2513,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1397/98</td>
<td>24,8%</td>
<td>1064,0</td>
<td>4285,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1398/99</td>
<td>39,0%</td>
<td>1496,0</td>
<td>3832,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1438/39</td>
<td>26,0%</td>
<td>506,0</td>
<td>1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1439/40</td>
<td>29,2%</td>
<td>811,5</td>
<td>2776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [author deleted for review, 72, 78, 141]

\textbf{2 Urban autonomy and administrating the urban hinterland}

Nijmegen and its immediate rural hinterland within about a 10 km radius (see Figure 1) on the south bank of the Rhine (known as \textit{Rijk van Nijmegen}) fell initially under the direct
jurisdiction of the German kings. Nijmegen therefore received its town charter in 1230 directly from king Henry VII. In 1247 the German king gave Nijmegen in pawn to Otto II, count of Guelders. This transaction was meant to be temporary, but proved to be lasting. Nijmegen became integrated into the territorial framework of Guelders, and as a consequence, the town became more involved with that territory, which was in 1339 elevated from county, to the status of duchy. Nijmegen retained its urban autonomy and the administration of its rural hinterland (Rijk van Nijmegen). In addition it became eventually the capital of one of the four administrative districts into which Guelders was subdivided. This district, known as Kwartier van Nijmegen, covers the area between the Rhine in the North and the Meuse in the South, up till the border with Holland in the West, some 50 kilometres away. The role of Nijmegen and its city council was still important in this province within Guelders, but it became more indirect in the further away areas. There, the role of the local nobility with their own links to the duke was more important.19

The urban franchise of 1230, which gave the urban elite a considerable amount of self-government, confirmed more than initiated Nijmegen’s autonomous position, which was primarily based on its economic strength. Still, the rulers of Guelders kept a close watch on the town’s administrative affairs. They used for instance their power to influence the composition of the board of aldermen, a body that was responsible for public administration, legislation and justice. A number of these representatives were of noble or ministerial origin. The board of aldermen was presided by the burggraaf (viscount) or richter (judge) of Nijmegen, which were both offices in the service of the count. The town’s non-noble citizens organized themselves into a communitas, consisting of prominent men, among whom merchants probably had a strong position. The communitas elected the board of councillors and the burgomasters. These played an important political role next to and alongside the aldermen in governing the town.20

In the surrounding countryside, the inhabitants of Nijmegen as well as the religious institutions from the town had important landed property.21 The board of aldermen, whose jurisdiction extended over the nearby rural area of the ‘Rijk van Nijmegen’ was an important, but not the only political instruments they used to protect their urban interests. The urban administration also nurtured good relations with the higher and lower nobility in the more distant regions of the Betuwe and Land van Maas en Waal further downstream from Nijmegen. They for instance included them as buitenburgers (citizens from outside) into the privileged urban community. This is likely to have given them better access to market privileges. They may also have benefited, like the buitenburgers in Cologne, from an annual rent from the town.22 Some of these regional noblemen even took up residence in Nijmegen.

The urban and the regional elites in this area cooperated to protect their landed properties and mercantile interest against both internal and external enemies. This enhanced the regional cohesion of this area, which was eventually institutionalised as the Kwartier van Nijmegen, (Quarter of Nijmegen), one of the four administrative territories or provinces of Guelders.23

3 Organising relations with merchants in other cities: trade and family strategy

This section outlines the merchant network in which the elite of Nijmegen participated. The characteristics of the trade on the Lower Rhine and its Dutch branches Waal, Beneden-Rijn
and IJssel were remarkably constant throughout the late Middle Ages. Apart from some minor variations, the composition of the flow of goods hardly changed from the first extant records in the late thirteenth century until well into the sixteenth century. Downstream shipments mainly consisted of wine from the Rhine area, and to a lesser extent wood, charcoal, steel and iron, earthenware, various types of building stone and – mostly during times of dearth in Holland and Flanders – shipments of wheat from Berg and Jülich. Salt, cheese and different sorts of fish were the main commodities transported upstream from the coastal regions of the Netherlands.\(^{24}\)

Nijmegen established itself in the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century as the unofficial in-between market between Cologne and Dordrecht. This despite the staple privileges of the latter two towns, which in a strict interpretation implied that everyone engaged in the river trade had to first sail to either Dordrecht or Cologne before traveling on to their final destination. Of course this system was not watertight: there were always merchants trying to evade it. For instance wine transports to Utrecht were carried out along the direct route from Cologne, without transshipment at Dordrecht.\(^{25}\) The transit trade along the Rhine was very important for Nijmegen. The trade network of the merchants from Nijmegen extended from at least the German hinterland around Cologne to Brabant, Flanders and the Dutch coast. Some wine was even forwarded to the British Isles and Scandinavia. Nijmegen dominated the downstream wine trade and the upstream trade in salt and fish. Merchants and skippers from Nijmegen accounted for between 25 – 50 % of the wine trade along the river Rhine in the fourteenth century, and for more than half of the upriver salt trade.\(^{26}\)

Most of the urban elite in Nijmegen profited directly or indirectly from this trade. Wine traders were an important part of the urban elite, but also members of the administrative and noble elites regularly invested in the wine trade and at times also traded in wine themselves.\(^{27}\) The merchants from Nijmegen traded in many direct and indirect ways. Some bought and transported the products (especially wine) in person. Others organised their trade from their home in Nijmegen and therefore depended more on their contacts with merchants in other cities.

One way to strengthen, organise and control these commercial relations was through family ties. Having family members in many other cities along the Rhine not only facilitated the conclusion of contracts, but also reduced toll duties. It was a common strategy of merchant families to send family members to other Rhine towns and to let them acquire local citizenship through which their family trade could be exempted from the tolls of that city. Marrying into merchant families living in other cities along the Rhine is another way to expand the family network. The in Nijmegen prominent families of Collert, Neve, Biell and Groenwout all had family members in other Rhine towns.\(^{28}\) The shipments of a merchant family with members in different Rhine cities could thus circumvent various toll levies. The same strategy can be discerned in other parts of late medieval Northwest Europe as well.\(^{29}\)

### 4 Bilateral relations between Rhine cities: from toll freedom to network formation

The elite of Nijmegen also used the political relations of their city council with other city councils to obtain commercial privileges and toll reductions for its citizens. Just like other towns along the Rhine, Nijmegen entered into many bilateral agreements: for instance in
1266 with Emmerich and Wesel in the duchy of Cleves, with Cologne in 1278 and with Mainz in 1316. This toll freedom strategy helped the merchants from Nijmegen to more or less drive the merchants from Dordrecht out of the Rhine trade in the course of the fourteenth century. These bilateral agreements stimulated not only the river trade and its profitability, but formed in combination with the family and trade relations of the urban elites a political-economic network, dominated by Cologne and with Duisburg, Wesel, Emmerich, Nijmegen, Deventer and Kampen as other important cities. This informal urban network did not develop institutions like the German Hansa, but could be mobilised to protect the collective interests of its participants when these were threatened by outside intervention. For instance, when the town of Dordrecht, a crucial staple market at the mouth of the Rhine and the Meuse, raised in 1441 the tariffs on upriver goods, the council of Nijmegen cooperated with the other affected commercial towns in Guelders, Cleves and the Rhineland to collectively oppose this. Their spatial strategy not only focussed on cooperation within their network, but they also successfully turned to their territorial rulers like Arnold van Egmont, the duke of Guelders, and duke Adolf IV of Cleves, to persuade Philip the Good, count of Holland, to take action against his subjects in Dordrecht. This strategy of combining a horizontal political urban network with the vertical political relations with their territorial rulers, which subsequently used their horizontal ‘interstate’ relations with the ruler of Dordrecht to reign in his subjects, proved to be successful. The next section discusses in more detail how the urban elite of Nijmegen developed their relations with the territorial rulers of the duchy of Guelders to promote their merchant interests.

5 Protecting urban merchant interests by developing the territorial shield of Guelders

Being part of the duchy of Guelders increasingly dominated the political strategies of the elite of Nijmegen during the Middle Ages. Its position in the duchy of Guelders helped Nijmegen to control its surrounding countryside (see above section 4), it strengthened Nijmegen’s position in its urban networks (see above section 6 and below section 8) and it shielded Nijmegen from the emerging European great powers - first Burgundy and later Habsburgs (see below section 9). This section focusses on the growing role of Nijmegen in the ‘internal’ politics of the duchy of Guelders.

Already during the thirteenth century Nijmegen, like other Guelders towns, had been consulted by the ruler of Guelders on a voluntary basis in certain political matters, such as taxation or warfare. His rising expenditures, mainly to finance his wars, forced him to turn to his subjects for support. In return for this fiscal support, the nobility and towns gradually acquired a crucial position in the rule of the duchy. Nijmegen’s elite together with those of the other cities in Guelders increasingly attached themselves to the fate of Guelders as a territory. Nijmegen was instrumental in the formation of an at first informal network of cities of Guelders in order to protect their common interests in their relations with the ruler and to defend the territorial unity of the duchy. Already in 1316 Nijmegen cooperated with the smaller cities Zutphen, Doesburg and Emmerich to vehemently oppose the pawning by duke Reinald I of the southern part of Guelders to the duchy of Jülich. They pledged instead allegiance to his son in order to restore the territorial unity of Guelders. In 1343 20 towns organised themselves more formally in an urban league, with Nijmegen as the leading town. Their purpose was to secure the succession of Reinald II by his underage sun Reinald III and
to oppose competing claims to the throne by outsiders. They stated to cooperate to the benefit of the new duke, the 20 cooperating towns and the land as a whole. The elite of Nijmegen and the other towns thus claimed responsibility for the territory of Guelders.\textsuperscript{35}

The importance the elite of Nijmegen attached to the duchy of Guelders as a territorial shield to protect their interests is exemplified by their reaction to the destructive wars of ducal succession in Guelders in 1343 and 1371 which invoked and deepened the strife between two parties of noblemen and towns, gathered around the noble families of the Bronkhorsten and the Heekerens. These succession struggles showed an instability of the ducal reign that was clearly at odds with the concern of Nijmegen’s elite (and those of other towns) for peace and administrative stability. It compelled Nijmegen to participate in the gradually evolving Estates of Guelders that had grown out the earlier ducal consultation of his most important subjects, consisting of the most important towns and noblemen.\textsuperscript{36} The Estates thus developed into the institution where the most important stakeholders of Guelders promoted their interests. In practice the dukes of Guelders could hardly rule without the backing of at least a large part of the Estates. The political support for Guelders as a territorial state gradually shifted from the dynastical ruler to the urban elites. The Estates, and especially the towns within the Estates, became in the fourteenth century the prime bearers of a sense of the ‘common good’ of the land, partly in opposition to the dukes of Guelders whose concern with the land was still mainly based on their personal interests.\textsuperscript{37}

6 \textit{German Hansa: the reciprocity between network and territorial strategies}

The elite of Nijmegen became not only increasingly involved with the territory of Guelders, but also with the network of the German Hansa. Nijmegen’s position in the German Hansa was based on the interaction between the territorial and network strategies of its elite. The German Hansa was an association of trading towns from the north and west of the German empire aimed at obtaining commercial privileges from rulers of foreign territories, such as the king of England, the Scandinavian kings or the count of Flanders. In bargaining for their privileges the cooperating towns took advantage of their strength in numbers and the scope of their network. Based on their privileges, the Hanseatic towns had established during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a dominant trading network in an area stretching from Novgorod in the east to Bergen (Norway) in the north, to Bruges and London in the west.\textsuperscript{38} This network was of particular interest for the merchants of Nijmegen because it could provide the sort of privileged access to the markets of Flanders and England that they might not have obtained on their own.\textsuperscript{39} Nijmegen’s position in the territorial framework of the duchy of Guelders was important for its position in the German Hansa. The formal admittance of Nijmegen into the German Hansa in 1402 was the result of a bargaining process that had already begun in 1387. Although Nijmegen rightfully claimed that its citizens belonged to the privileged Hanseatic community earlier in the fourteenth century, the formalization of its membership was speeded up considerably when Reinald IV, the duke of Guelders, wrote a letter of recommendation to Lübeck and the other Hanseatic towns.\textsuperscript{40} This served not only the translocal commercial interests of Nijmegen, but also indirectly the fiscal interest of the dukes – approximately one third of the annual ducal income came from river toll revenues at the end of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{41}
During the fifteenth century, faced with the rising power of emerging states in Northern and Western Europe, the German Hansa gradually tried to transform itself from a rather loosely-built interest community into a more formal territorial organisation. Regional subdivisions based on existing political territories were part of this reorganisation. Nijmegen’s role within the German Hansa changed accordingly: it became one of the formal capital cities of the Cologne Quarter together with Münster, Deventer, Wesel en Paderborn. This change was not only induced by the commercial importance of Nijmegen within the German Hansa, but was also based on its political importance within the duchy of Guelders. The organisational structure of the extra-territorial commercial network thus intermingled with intra-territorial political and institutional structures. These developing networks and territories did not supersede the older smaller scale family and interurban relations, but they reinforced each other and were given greater emphasis, depending on what given the circumstances, was the most effective way to oppose threats and profit from opportunities.  

7 The urban elite as guardian of the independence of Guelders

When in 1402 duke William of Guelders was on his deathbed, the cities of Guelders convened in Nijmegen to negotiate a peace treaty with the county of Holland “in the interest of the country”. This coalescing of the merchant urban interests with the Guelders territorial interests became even stronger when after another succession crisis, the Burgundian dynasty occupied Guelders from 1473 to 1477 and from 1481 to 1492. This occupation was met by a fierce opposition headed by the elite of Nijmegen. In 1492, the pro-Gueldrian independence party succeeded in ousting the Burgundians and installing their own candidate, Charles of Egmond. He not only fought off the external threats which now came from the Habsburg armies, but he was also able to extend his authority from Guelders to Oversticht, Drenthe, Groningen en Ommelanden and Westerlauwers Frisia. 

The choice for Charles of Egmond proved to be a mixed blessing. Although he battled vigorously to ward off the Habsburg armies, his military actions and the related fiscal demands were a constant source of friction with his subjects. The towns and nobility constantly complained about the duke’s autocratic actions, resulting in violence, insecurity and the infringements on long-standing privileges. In the case of Nijmegen, the duke tried to curtail the town’s jurisdictional rights in the surrounding Rijk van Nijmegen and to interfere in its internal affairs and its magistrates. This brought Nijmegen and the duke on the brink of war, but they were appeased in 1530. When seven years later the duke, who was heirless, intended to sign a treaty with the French king Charles VIII, naming him heir to the duchy, the Guelders Estates deposed Charles of Egmond. The city council of Nijmegen legitimised this by stating that the French were no better than the Burgundians or the Habsburgs; instead they “wanted to live and die as Guelders”. In the interest of the population of Guelders, the towns and nobility chose William II, duke of Cleves, Jülich and Berg and count of Mark and Ravensberg, as Charles of Egmonds successor in 1538. Guelders joined this conglomerate of territories to be in a stronger position against the mounting Habsburg threat. However, in 1543 the Habsburg emperor Charles V defeated Duke William II in a show of force and subsequently had to be accepted by the Guelders Estates as their new overlord. Interestingly, the Guelders towns successfully defended their hanseatic status in the Treaty of Venlo that sealed the incorporation of Guelders into the Habsburg domain.
They demanded that the change of lordship should not affect their rights as hanseatic towns and this wish was granted. 47

After the defeat of their strategy to defend the regional territory against external threats, the elite in Nijmegen shifted to a spatial strategy to protect their autonomy against centralising powers. This not only resulted in the participation of Guelders and Nijmegen in the Dutch revolt and its incorporation as a province in the Netherlands, but also in the further institutionalisation of its Kwartier van Nijmegen as an administrative region within this Dutch province. 48

Nijmegen and the interests of its merchant elite however suffered severely from the Dutch revolt. Nijmegen changed hands several times. Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, took Nijmegen in 1585 for the Spanish-catholic party, yet Nijmegen was recaptured by Dutch forces in 1591. The consequences of warfare in the Rijk van Nijmegen, the countryside surrounding Nijmegen, were severe: crop failure and devastation by the military forces led to an enormous decline in agrarian production on which the urban population depended. During the decade between 1590 and 1600 most of the urban institutions of Nijmegen (such as religious institutions and secular institutions for the poor) derived hardly any income from their landed properties in the countryside. 49 From the 1590’s onwards Nijmegen was transformed into a garrison town which defended the Dutch Republic and its wealthy core in Holland, but hindered the river trade in this eastern peripheral border area. 50 This encroachment of the Dutch Republic on local urban mercantile interests led to some fierce but unsuccessful protests of those towns in Holland and Guelders that were heavily dependent on river trade - particularly Nijmegen and Dordrecht. 51 Thus while at the turn to the seventeenth century the trade of the Dutch Republic expanded as it became hegemonic in the emerging world-system, the trade in Rhine wine was decimated and Nijmegen declined. 52

8 Conclusion: Nijmegen and the end of medieval Europe

Our analysis of the multitude of different spatial strategies used by the elite in medieval Nijmegen to promote their interests showed that network and territorial strategies are interconnected and frequently reinforce each other. Our study demonstrated the importance of translocal elite relations, but also showed that the development of their networks was inextricably bound up with their relations with territories at different scales. We showed that the urban elite of Nijmegen were even the driving force behind the development of Guelders into a territorial state. They legitimised this by referring to the national interest of Guelders which was threatened by the Habsburg Empire. The horizontal translocal relations of urban elites were thus intertwined with the vertical relations with different territories at different scale levels.

The multi-level spatial strategies of the elite of Nijmegen were based on aligning their trade based interests with various landed interests and territorial powers at several scalar levels in many different ways. Already on the individual and family level, the merchant and landed interests were linked. The city council of Nijmegen consisted of both local merchants and ducal appointees. The urban elites used the dominant role of Nijmegen in the surrounding territories to protect their individual landed interests and to defend their collective urban autonomy. The urban elites in Nijmegen used their political power in a widening circle of territories to promote their economic interests in different ways. They increasingly focused their political strategies on the duchy of Guelders, which they
strengthened in collaboration with other cities in order to defend their merchant interests, not only within the territory of the Duchy, but also by using the political power of the duke towards other territorial rulers to settle for instance disputes with further away cities. Their position in the duchy of Guelders also strengthened their position in the German Hansa. Focussing on Guelders not only helped the local and international position of Nijmegen, but its fortunes became increasingly intertwined with that of Guelders as a political territory. When the duchy of Guelders lost its independence the merchants from Nijmegen suffered severely.

Our case study of the urban elite in a single medieval city gives additional detail to more general analysis of medieval Europe. Specifying the multitude of related multi-level horizontal and vertical spatial strategies of the urban elite in Nijmegen can be linked to more general analyses of medieval Europe. The importance of family based networks is important for the functioning of trade in the Middle Ages throughout Europe is widely recognised. Extended family ties increased the reliability of trade relations between cities, and were at the basis of many commercial firms in Europe. Family ties were also important to link up the rural and urban elites; bridging the merchant-noble divide. Especially in the part of Northern Europe around Guelders, the intermingling of nobility and merchants was strongest and it was quite common for the nobility to have town houses as was the case in Nijmegen.53 These family ties also played an important political role. Familial networks were one way to create stable pacts between members of the elite linked to political institutions. With the strengthening of horizontal bonds came the possibility of pooling and managing vertical patronage relations.54 Through these political relations merchants were able to create profitable monopolies. This was according to Braudel the basis of capitalism.55 This is mostly studied in relation to important cities like Venice, Genoa and Amsterdam. However, our analysis of Nijmegen showed that the prosperity of the merchants in Nijmegen depended too on their political ability to align with other Rhine cities and act through the emerging state of Guelders. They were for a long time quite successful in using their territorial state to promote their interests. These bottom-up pressures were to a lesser extent also important in the formation of other states in the Low Countries at that time.56 Later the incorporation of the duchy of Guelders by Habsburg and the Dutch revolt severely limited the ability of the elite of Nijmegen to play with networks and territories. This is a general phenomenon: “the dynamism of early feudal Europe, the original base of capitalist development, lay in intensive, local power relations. We can now chart a second phase in the development of this dynamic, an increase in extensive power, in which the state was deeply involved.”57 The elites in Nijmegen lost out first to the new territorial rulers of the Habsburgers and later to the Dutch Republic. This Republic was still based on family based networks of urban elites.58 The elites in Nijmegen were however hard pressed to link their much smaller economic and political networks to the larger scale networks of urban elites focussing on Amsterdam. The spatial political strategies of the Nijmegen’s elite were no longer adequate in the new linkages between economic and political power in early modern Europe. The power balance in Europe shifted from urban based commercial networks to larger scale territorial powers.59 This severely limited the ability of the elite of Nijmegen to play with networks and territories.

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Figure 1  Nijmegen in its medieval spatial context