

# THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS AND SAINTS NAZARIUS AND CELSIUS

## Craft Guild poems from fifteenth century Ghent as representations of guild and civic values<sup>1</sup>

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The political and economic power of the craft guilds of late medieval Flanders has long been established. As shown in recent work, particularly the works of Dumolyn and Stable, guilds in Flanders enjoyed a far greater degree of political representation than those elsewhere and could shape the social structure, and even the life-cycle of guild-brothers.<sup>2</sup> Guild society, guild charity and guild piety have all begun to receive more attention in the last two decades,<sup>3</sup> yet the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> J. Dumolyn, 'Guild politics and political guilds in fourteenth-century Flanders', in J. Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, Turnhout, 2014, pp. 15-48; *ibid.*, 'Economic development, social space and political power in Bruges, c. 1127-1302,' in H. Skoda, P. Lantschner and R.L.J. Shaw (eds.), *Contact and Exchange in Later Medieval Europe Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale*, Woodbridge, 2012, pp. 33-58; *ibid.*, 'Urban ideologies in later medieval Flanders: towards an analytical framework', in J.-P. Genet and A. Gamberini (eds.), *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th-17th centuries*, Milan, 2011, pp. 69-96; *ibid.*, 'De Brugse ambachtsbesturen tijdens de late middeleeuwen: enkele institutionele en rechtshistorische aspecten', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, 147/2 (2010), pp. 309-327; P. Stabel, 'Labour time, guild time? Working hours in the cloth industry of medieval Flanders and Artois (thirteenth and fourteen centuries)', *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis*, 11 (2014), pp. 27-53; *ibid.*, 'Personal and collective identity: forename-giving in a guild milieu: Bruges in the 15th and early 16th century,' in C. Rolker (ed.), *Konkurrierende zugehörigkeit(en): praktiken der namengebung im europäischen vergleich*, Konstanz, 2011, pp. 109-130; *ibid.* 'Guilds in the late medieval Low Countries: myth and reality of guild life in an export-oriented environment', *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), pp. 187-212.

<sup>3</sup> A.K.L. Thijs, 'Religions and social structure: religions rituals in pre-industrial trade associations in the Low Countries' and S. Bos, 'A tradition of giving and receiving: mutual aid within the guild system' both in M. Prak, C. Lis, J. Lucssen and H.Holy (eds.), *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries, Work, Power and Representation*, Aldershot, 2006, pp. 157-174-193; M. Boone and I. Schoups, 'Jan, Johan en alleman: voornaamgeving bij de Gentse ambachtslieden, 14de-15de eeuw: symptoom van een groepsbewustzijn?' in J. de Zutter, L. Charles and A. Capiteyn (eds.), *Qui valet ingenio: Liber amicorum aangeboden aan dr. Johan Decavele ter gelegenheid van zijn 25-jarig ambtsjubileum als stadsarchivaris van Gent*, Gent, 1996, pp. 39-62; K. Goudriaan, 'Gilden en broederschappen in de Middeleeuwen,' in his *De Gilden in Gouda*, Gouda, 1996, pp. 21-63.

influence of the guilds has received far less attention. Indeed, in a recent study of 'political poems' Dumolyn and Haemers have shown that scholars in German and Britain have paid far more attention to the intersections between politics and literary production than specialists of Dutch Literature.<sup>4</sup> Late medieval craft guilds should be considered as producers of literary texts. Indeed the potential of guild literature to shed new light onto their ideology and guilds' perceptions and even construction of their own identity will be shown in the following article through an analysis of two forgotten poems dating from the fifteenth century. The texts, saints' lives written by a guild chaplain for the masons' guild, are worth reconsidering as they offer a unique insight into the discursive and ideological world of the Ghent craft guilds.

Historians and literary scholars have long recognised the value of urban plays, performances and poems for an understanding of late medieval culture and perceptions. In both England and the Low Countries, such texts have been analysed for the perspectives they offer on the identity, communal values and even ideology of the individuals or groups who staged them, as well as the larger corporate authorities who sponsored them. Though, of course, scholars must always be careful to note that that surviving texts represent only a fraction of what once existed. For the analysis of guild culture, 'bourgeois values', and even the civic body politic, the English guild records are particularly valuable, with saints' lives and, most famously, the Mystery plays of late medieval York.<sup>5</sup> York was not unique in staging the events, but is unique in full texts of surviving plays, though the process by which they were copied into the civic records continues to provoke debate. The forty-eight plays forming the impressive Corpus Christi play cycles were staged by the different craft guilds of the city and told the story of sacred history, from creation to the final judgement. Each play was performed by a guild, or 'mystery' often with a connection between the subject matter of the pageant and the profession of the performers, so the Shipwrights built the Ark while the Fishermen took over for the Flood. Among the most interesting of the texts for understanding guild attitudes or guild culture is the (mis)use of tools in the Pinners' Play of the Crucifixion. The play begins as a

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<sup>4</sup> J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Political poems and subversive songs. The circulation of 'public Poetry' in the late medieval Low Countries', *Journal of Dutch Literature*, 5 (2014), pp. 1-22.

<sup>5</sup> S. Rees Jones, 'Cities and their Saints in England, c. 1150-1300: the development of bourgeois values in the cults of St William of York and St Kenelm of Winchcombe', in C. Goodson, A.E. Lester and C. Symes (eds.), *Cities, Texts and Social Networks 400-1500: Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space*, Aldershot, 2010, pp. 192-213; D. Mills, 'Who are our customers? The audience for Chester's plays,' *Medieval English Theatre*, 20 (1998), pp. 104-117; G.A. Runnalls, 'Medieval trade guilds and the Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages', *Medium Ævum*, 39 (1970), pp. 257-287.

comedy of poor workmanship, in which crass soldiers joke as they nail an unseen figure to the cross, cursing their tools and the shifting wood on which they are working. The play switches suddenly from comedy to revelation as the cross is raised to reveal the crucified Christ who then speaks to the crowd. The pinners' text has been well studied for its use of guild tools and the possible prism into guild values, as well as the effect evoked in using comedy to humanise Christ and his killers. With the cross raised Christ, presumably played by a leading pinner, calls out to the crowd to 'Behold mine head, mine hands and my feet' before calling on God the Father to 'Forgive these men that do me pine'. Rather than the biblical 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34), imply forgiveness for all mankind, the Mystery Play has Jesus call on God the Father to forgive those who have *pinned* him to the cross, as well as evoking the visceral nature of his sufferings in head, hands and feet. The potential of these literary texts to offer lenses through which to question guild relations, gender questions, or uses of the past have been understood by medievalist for generations, and form a central part of any study of late medieval York.<sup>6</sup>

Few texts written by or for craft guilds from the Low Countries have been studied in the same way. Part of the explanation for this lacuna is certainly the lack of sources, for no collection comparable to the York Mystery plays survives in guild literature from the Low Countries. Yet guild literature did exist, for instance Pleij has analysed the poem *van de plaesteraers* written in Brussels by one Jan Dingelsche. The text was written around 1410, presumably for or in connection with the Brussels craft guild, but the corporate context of the text has not been analysed in its own right, rather Pleij uses it as part of an excellent analysis of wider literary communication in towns.<sup>7</sup> The huge range of surviving texts from the fourteenth century have recently been studied by Van Oostrom, in an impressively thorough study of texts on genres including history and morality, comparing the chivalric romances of other parts of Europe to those of the Low Countries. As his introduction makes clear, the growth of literature in the four-

<sup>6</sup> R.B. Dobson 'Craft Guilds and the City: The Historical origins of the York Mystery Plays reassessed', in A.E. Knight (ed.), *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 91-105; S.K. Christie, 'Bridging the Jurisdictional Divide: The Masons and the York Corpus Christi Play', in M. Rogerson (ed.), *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City*, York, 2011, pp. 53-73; J.E. Marshal, 'Redeeming the medieval spirit: Christus mercator in the York Cycle', *Medieval Perspectives*, 20 (2011), pp. 56-66; A. Boboc, 'Lay performances of work and salvation in the York Cycle', *Comparative Drama*, 43 (2009), pp. 247-271; G.P.J. Epp, 'Noah's wife. The shaming of the "Trew"', in G. Donavin and M.L. Price (eds.), *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, Gainesville, 2002, pp. 223-241; P.M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the worship of the city*, Woodbridge, 2006; The pinners' quote comes from R. Beadle and P.M. King, *York Mystery Plays, A Selection in Modern Spelling*, Oxford, 1984, pp. 211-221.

<sup>7</sup> H. Pleij, 'Inleiding: op belofte van profijt', in H. Pleij et al., *Op Belofte van profijt. Stadsliteratuur en burgermoraal in de Nederlandse letterkunde van de middeleeuwen*, Amsterdam, 1991, pp. 19-21.

teenth century must be understood in the context of the growth of towns (stedelijke opmars) of the thirteenth century, and as a result the developing voice of the cities.<sup>8</sup> His points on urban self-awareness for civic culture as a whole can also be applied on a smaller scale to guild self-awareness as shown through literature written for the guild voice. Indeed the growing power of the Ghent guilds in the fourteenth century may be compared to the civic growth of the thirteenth century which van Oostrom sets out, with a guild voice shown through literature.

One group of institution that has furnished studies of medieval urban literature from the Low Countries are the Chambers of Rhetoric. These were urban groups dedicated to writing and performing dramatic plays, some of them moral, some comedic and others tragic. The chambers, like the shooting guilds before them, held regional competitions in which members were able to promote unity within their group and across the region, as well as competing for honour. The chambers of rhetoric dominated urban drama, and the study of medieval urban drama, leaving many late medieval texts. Such texts have been used to analyse urban priorities, emotions, comedy and attitudes toward central authority.<sup>9</sup> The chambers are the most famous urban performers and producers of literature and, as studies of these groups have shown in their actions and in their words they promoted harmony, even when disputes arose within competitions.

The purpose of the present article however, is not to interrogate the numerous existing studies of urban literature, rather to present two forgotten poems written within the masons' guild in fifteenth-century Ghent, and to use these to begin to analyse craft guild values and place them within wider urban concerns. The analysis presented here will draw on the methodology developed in the study of comparable English texts, and applying them to Flemish literature, to offer a new perspective on guild ideology, indeed on civic values more broadly. After briefly introducing the masons of Ghent, and the poems within their

<sup>8</sup> F. Van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden*, Amsterdam, 2013, especially pp. 23-28.

<sup>9</sup> A.-L. Van Bruaene, 'The Chambers of Rhetoric in the (Southern) Low Countries; A Flemish-Dutch project on literary confraternities', *Confraternitas*, 16 (2005), pp. 3-14; A.-L. Van Bruaene, *Om Beters Wille. Rederijerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400-1650)*, Amsterdam, 2008; A.-L. Van Bruaene, 'Harmonie et honneur en jeu: les compétitions dramatiques et symboliques entre les villes flamandes et brabançonnaises aux quinzième et seizième siècles', in M. Boone, E. Lecuppre-Desjardin et J.-P. Sossons (eds.), *Le Verbe, l'image et les représentations de la société urbaine au Moyen Âge*, Antwerpen, 2002, pp. 227-278; H. Liebrecht, *Les Chambres de Rhétorique*, Bruxelles, 1948; S. Speakman Sutch, 'Dichter van de stad. De Brusselse rederijers en hun verhouding tot de Franstalige hofliteratuur en het geleerde humanisme (1475-1522)', in J. Janssens en R. Sleiderink (eds.), *De macht van het schone woord. Literatuur in Brussels van de 14de tot de 18de eeuw*, Leuven, 2003, pp. 141-160.

manuscript context, some suggestions about the poems as windows into guild values and concerns will follow.

The texts in question are two poetic martyrologies: firstly of the Four Crowned Martyrs and secondly of Saints Nazarius and Celsius. The texts have been published, half a century ago in underused local history journals, but beyond this narrow readership, the texts do not seem to have been studied, or even noticed. Elslander and Daem published editions of both texts in 1951, with only a short introduction and a note on the links between the texts and the Golden Legend and Spieghel Historiae.<sup>10</sup> Sixteen years later Rogghé published a full transcription of the first of the texts, the Four Crowned Martyrs, as well as a seventeenth-century image of the saints from another of the masons' guild books. If Rogghé knew of the earlier work he does not show it; his independent transcription is clear and prefaced by an equally short introduction looking at the chaplain-author, Leivein Kindekin, and the cult of the Four Crowned Martyrs in the Low Countries.<sup>11</sup> The poems cannot be described as unedited, but they remain unstudied and are not analysed with other urban sources, probably as few scholars are aware of the poems and their significance.

The variation in the approaches adopted for the study of English and Dutch literature are striking and, as Dumolyn and Haemers noted in studying political poems, can learn from each other. Recent years have seen an impressive growth in studies of urban writers from the Low Countries, like Antonius de Roover and Cornelis Everaert. Other studies, have engaged with comedies and the development of theatre and drama on the linguistic borders of Dutch and French, especially texts written within Chambers of Rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> Literature produced by and for craft guilds of the medieval Low Countries warrants careful analysis from both historians and literary critics. In England, as noted, studies of urban drama, especially Mystery Plays, have highlighted the relationship between guilds and

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<sup>10</sup> A. Van Elslander en A. Daem, 'Twee Middelnederlandse Legenden. De Vier Gekroonden, patroonheiligen van de Gentse Nering der Metselaars', *Oostvlaamsche Zanten*, 26 (1951), pp. 125-139.

<sup>11</sup> P. Rogghé, 'De Gentse "Vier Gekroonden" of "Quatuor Coronati": een XVe-eeuws gedicht over de beschermheiligen van metselaars en steenhouders', *Appeltjes van het Meetjesland*, 18 (1967), pp. 5-15.

<sup>12</sup> J. Oosterman, 'De Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen en Anthonis de Roovere', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal en letterkunde*, 118 (2002); J. Oosterman (ed.), *Stad van koopmanschap en vrede Literatuur in Brugge tussen Middeleeuwen en Rederijkerstijd*, Leuven, 2005; J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, "Let Each man carry on with his trade and remain silent": Middle-Class ideology in the urban Literature of the late medieval Low Countries,' *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), pp. 169-189; S. Mareel, 'Urban Literary Propaganda on the Battle of Pavia. Cornelis Everaert's *Tspel van den Hooghen Wynt ende Zoeten Reyn*', *Queest, Tijdschrift over middeleeuwse letterkunde in de Nederlanden*, 13 (2006), pp. 97-108; W. Hüskén, "Dead as a Doornail?" Allegory in the plays of Cornelis Everaert', *European Medieval Drama*, 5 (2001), pp. 165-174; K. Lavéant, *Un Théâtre des frontières. La Culture dramatique dans les provinces du Nord aux XVe et XVIe siècles*, Orléans, 2011; K. Lavéant, 'Back to the Source: Repositioning the archive in Medieval French drama studies', *ROMARD – Research on Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, 51 (2013), pp. 61-67.

their performances, as well as guilds' attachment to their plays, and even relations between guilds, drama and civic governance or even control.<sup>13</sup> For example, Fitzgerald has used York's and Chester's Noah plays to analyse masculinity and relationships between masters and their men, while older studies took the body of texts as a whole to analyse methods of control and manipulation on the part of the civic governors who ordered the texts to be copied out in their registers.<sup>14</sup> Two texts from one guild cannot provide the same breadth for Ghent, but it is hoped the present work will contribute to an understanding of craft-guild values and ongoing work on the language of guilds and of brotherhood.<sup>15</sup>

The poems of the Crowned Martyrs and of Saints Nazarius and Celsius must be understood in the context of guilds within fifteenth-century Ghent. Following the 1302 rebellion and change in administrative structures in Ghent, all craft guilds had a role in civic governance, maintained in a changing format into the sixteenth century. The two largest guilds, the weavers and the fullers, had the most influence in electing officials while the other 59 smaller guilds elected the remaining aldermen and councillors.<sup>16</sup> The masons were an integral part of Ghent's success, employed by the town itself, princes, religious institutions and wealthy individuals to build numerous works in and beyond late medieval Ghent.<sup>17</sup> Among the craft guilds, masons are an interesting and not entirely typical guild, on average master masons earned slightly more than other construc-

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<sup>13</sup> P. Granger, *The N-Town Play: Drama and Liturgy in Medieval East Anglia*, Woodbridge, 2009; C. Sponler, 'The Culture of the spectator: Conformity and resistance to medieval performances,' *Theatre Journal*, 44 (1992), pp. 15-29; H. Swanson, 'The Illusion of economic structure: craft Guilds in Late Medieval English towns', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), pp. 29-48; P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Performing the word of God – Corpus Christi Drama in the Northern Province', in D. Wood (ed.), *Life and Thought in the Northern Church c.1100-c.1700*, Woodbridge, 1999, pp. 145-70; P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Craft Guilds, the Corpus Christi Play and Civic Government', in S. Rees Jones (ed.), *The Government of Medieval York. Essays in Commemoration of the 1396 Royal Charter*, York, 1997; A.D. Justice, 'Trade symbolism in the York Cycle', *Theatre Journal*, 31 (1979), pp. 47-58; K. Carassons, 'The Challenges of social unity: the *Last Judgement* pageant and guild relations in York', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37 (2007), pp. 305-334.

<sup>14</sup> C.M. Fitzgerald, 'Manning the Ark in York and Chester', *Exemplaria*, 15 (2003), pp. 351-384; Dobson, 'Craft guilds and the city', pp. 91-105

<sup>15</sup> J. Dumolyn, 'I thought of it at work in Oostende' (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> D. Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City, Ghent in the age of the Artevelde, 1302-1390*, Nebraska, 1987, pp. 1-16; D. Nicholas, 'The Population of Fourteenth-Century Ghent', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 24 (1970), pp. 97-111; W.P. Blockmans, 'Het Wisselingsproces van de Gentse schepenen tijdens de 15de eeuw', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 41 (1987), pp. 75-96.

<sup>17</sup> T. Van Gassen, *De ambachten van de metselaars en timmerlieden in laatmiddeleeuws Gent* (Masterscriptie voorgedragen tot het behalen van de graad van Master in de Geschiedenis, Universiteit Gent, 2012), partly published as 'Sociale mobiliteit binnen de ambachten van de metselaars en timmerlieden in het 15de-eeuwse Gent', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 66 (2012), pp. 3-60.

tion trades, though they were smaller in size, and so produced fewer civic officials, than others such as the carpenters' guild.<sup>18</sup> There are of course similarities in guild ethos and civic values, but many guilds, like tanners or smiths, worked on a small scale, with a master and an apprentice. Masons, by virtue of undertaking great building projects and the complexity of mastering their trade, worked in large groups where trust and hierarchy were of great importance. In his study of early modern guilds, Dambruyne has shown that the masons guild had few masters but proportionally far more journeymen (*knechten*) than other construction trades, meaning that masons might be inclined to emphasize obedience and mutual support more than other guilds, and that the poems' idealisation of obedience and unity might hold specific messages for a guild audience especially the many non-masters among the guild-brothers.<sup>19</sup>

The masons' guild, like other urban communities, was dedicated to its patron saints. Patron saints were ubiquitous in late medieval towns, with every urban group dedicated to a particular holy figure, emphasising and promoting an element of their identity. Craft guilds across Europe were often dedicated to specific saints, such as Saint Luke for painters' guilds or Saint Arnold for brewers. Despite the standardisation of saintly patronage, the choices were not unconsidered and demonstrated a wish for unity and show what sorts of values the guild officials aspired to uphold. As several studies in and beyond Flanders have emphasised, the choice of a patron saint was a demonstration of devotion, an expression of spiritual desires and an indication of identity.<sup>20</sup> The link between craft and saint is clear in great number of late medieval images such as Mérode Altarpiece by the Master of Flémalle. Here, Saint Joseph is depicted as a detailed fifteenth-century carpenter, at his bench and using the tools of his trade, just as the pinners' play uses the tools of their trade.<sup>21</sup> The link between the everyday and the sacred helped to unify guilds by encouraging their members to think of themselves as part of a community that included their sacred protector. The saint as craftsman images also allowed the guild-brothers to see the inherent

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas, *Metamorphosis*, 132-4, pp. 280-286.

<sup>19</sup> J. Dambruyne, *Corporatieve middengroepen. Aspiraties, relaties en transformaties in de 16de-eeuwse Gentse ambachtswereld*, Gent, 2002, especially pp. 715-8.

<sup>20</sup> M. Boone, 'Réseaux urbaines', in W. Prevenier, (ed.), *Le Prince et le peuple: images de la société du temps des Ducs de Bourgogne, 1384-1530*, Antwerpen, 1998, pp. 233-247; P. Trio, 'The Emergence of New Devotions in Late Medieval Urban Flanders (thirteenth-fifteenth Centuries). Struggle and cooperation between Church/Clergy and urban government/Bourgeoisie', in S. Ehrlich en J. Obserste (eds.), *Städtische kulte im mittelalter*, Regensburg, 2010; A. Vauchez, 'Saint Homebon (†1197), patron des marchands et artisans drapiers à la fin du Moyen Age et à l'époque moderne', *Académie royale de Belgique. Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* (ser. 6), 15 (2004), pp. 47-56.

<sup>21</sup> M. Bolger Foster, *The iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish art, 1400-1550*, PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 1978.

virtue in their profession, and might even encourage a more virtuous outlook. The masons' texts builds on the same idea; as we shall see it is very clear that all of the Crowned Martyrs are masons, they are builders and they are as active in their mystery as they are in their sanctity.

For the masons of Ghent, as for other building craft guilds across Europe, their patron saints were the Four Crowned Martyrs, Roman craftsmen and the subject of the first of their poems.<sup>22</sup> The masons maintained a chapel to their patrons in Saint Nicholas's church, as well as composing poems to them. No medieval images to the martyrs have survived, but the early modern guild restored their chapel with care and added a wonderful image of the saints to their early seventeenth century guild book, demonstrating the longevity of their holy association. The location of the guild's chapel to the Crowned Martyrs within Saint Nicholas is important, as the church was probably the richest of Ghent's four central parishes, located on the corn market. The church was home to many of the richest groups in Ghent, including merchants connected to the food supply, and to the prestigious Saint George Crossbow Guild.<sup>23</sup> The masons' chapel was a demonstration of their place within Ghent, a demonstration of their piety and attachment to the Four Crowned Martyrs, and a space to emphasise guild community and guild ideals. The masons' guild-hall was also very close by, located opposite Saint Nicholas's church on Cataloniëstraat. The masons, according to Van Doorne, had taken over a thirteenth-century building and made changes in the fifteenth century, though most of the current building is from the early sixteenth century. Despite the prominence of their guild-hall, Nicholas has argued that few masons lived in the area.<sup>24</sup>

Information about the masons and their work can be drawn from civic registers and town accounts. For the internal guild working the masons' own register provides great insight into guild priorities and in particular the prominence of apprenticeship for the guild. The context in which the poems have survived must also be analysed, partly to suggest new avenues of investigation, but also to attempt to explain the place of the poem within guild strategies of remembrance

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<sup>22</sup> J. Dubois, 'Hagiographie historique (saint Fiacre, ermite en Brie. Les Quatre couronnés sculpteurs et martyrs)', *Annuaire de l'Ecole pratique des hautes-études – IVe Section*, 104 (1972), pp. 503-510.

<sup>23</sup> L. Milis, 'The Medieval city', in H. Balthazar, M. Boone, J. Decavele et al. (eds.), *Ghent: in Defence of a Rebellious City; History, Art, Culture*, Antwerpen, 1989, pp. 75-79; A.-L. Van Bruaene en M. Bauwens, 'De Sint-Jacobskerk te Gent: een onderzoek naar de betekenis van de stedelijke parochiekerk in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 65 (2012), pp. 103-125; D. Lievois, 'Kapellen, huisjes, fruit en bloemen bij de westgevel van de Sint-Niklaaskerk in Gent', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 59 (2005), pp. 71-86.

<sup>24</sup> Dambryne, *Corporatieve middengroepen*, pp. 756-757, Nicholas, *Metamorphosis*, p. 77.



and record keeping. The 61 folios of the 'bouc van de neeringhe van der metsers' (book of the craft of the masons) is mostly concerned with apprenticeship agreements, regulations, and objects owned by the guild, but within the register the text of two poems is also preserved.<sup>25</sup> The book is on parchment, carefully written and well-spaced, with few marginal additions or evidence of being edited or changed as it was used. Most guilds would have had at least once such book; many of them have survived from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, highlighting the growing literacy and growing concern to record both names and documents seen as important for guild values and guild prowess. Larger guilds, like the butchers, had several books, with separate volumes for names and for rights and privileges, but guilds with smaller membership often copied out membership lists and privileges into the same registers.

The masons' book has plain leather binding which is later than the parchment folios. The book may have had a different medieval binding, but was likely to have been unbound for much of its life. The first and last folios are faded and show significant signs of wear, while the rest are very clear and well-maintained. The book begins with the inventory of objects in the guilds' chapel, including precious items, such as a silver ampulla, three large candle-holders (*kandeleers*), as well as a large amount of textiles, especially altar cloths, and a missal book 'for the whole year'. Some, though by no means all, of these items are recorded as having been given by a named guild-brother, once again emphasising the attachment the guild as a community and guild-brothers as individuals felt for their chapel and for their saints. The majority of these items are in the same hand, likely to date from 1420 when the rest of the book begins.

Folios 2-12v are taken up with the annually elected officials, and apprenticeship agreements. Compared to other surviving craft guild registers, the masons took an unusual care in documenting apprenticeship arrangements, instead of simply listing names of apprentices, the master-apprentice relationship is emphasised. Each year, between 1420 and 1461, the period covering the poems production, apprenticeship arrangements are set out in the guild book, with each folio containing 3-4 such arrangements. Each year the guild officials, the dean and his four sworn assistants (*ghesworne ghesellen*), are named, then the apprentices who entered that year set out chronologically. The hands are clear and neat, using few abbreviations and the writing is well-spaced and clear; each contract sets out the year then the calendar date, the apprentices' full name, usually in the diminutive (*Copkin* rather than *Jacob*). For each apprentice the same formula is

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<sup>25</sup> Gent Stadsarchief, Oud Archief, Charters, ser. 177, no. 1.

followed, setting out two individuals, almost always the apprentice's parents, who swear an oath that apprentice is their son, or that they know whose son he is, (occasionally a bastard son) and his exact age, in years and days (with the apprentices usually between 13 and 15). The standard contract then states that he has been entrusted to a named master, with parents giving a silver scale. Each of these entries is 3-5 lines long, clearly written and well-spaced in the book. Other guilds simply name their apprentices, the mason emphasise the ritual of apprenticeship and the role that the master-apprentice relationship would play for both parties

In some years there is only one entrance, in other years there are four or five entrances. In the guild-book, new financial years do not take new folios but each entrance is recorded entirely on one folio, none run from one folio to the next. Such care implies that this book was made to be seen, that this is not simply a legal contract for the guild officials to keep track of but a planned memory project to be displayed. Unlike membership lists in other craft guild-books, no later additions are made to the lists; in other guilds' registers, names are scored out when a guild-brother died and other annotations or descriptions added as the registers are used. The masons did not make any additions, and though their book was constantly in use for close to two centuries, the degree of precision and attention does not change. The first 12 folios show every sign of having been carefully planned and painstakingly set out, recording entrances and integration into the guild community. Learning any craft was, as recent studies have shown, a social and cultural process as well as an economic one, with apprenticeships associated with multiple forms of identities.<sup>26</sup> For masons, apprenticeship would be particularly important, learning to build was a dangerous task and masons, perhaps more so than other crafts, had to work together on very large projects. This emphasis on unity and the need to trust and to rely on one another is clear in the guild's poetic texts and in the folio in which they survive.

Something of a switch occurs after these first neat 12 folios, and folio 13 is written with less care, and contains the only set of medieval annual accounts for the guild. Income comes from members and rents, and outgoings include religious services and a play (*spel*) performed in the street but frustratingly not described in any detail. It is of course tempting to imagine that one of the poems had been used as a play or simply performed outside the guildhall, but no

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<sup>26</sup> As shown by all of the contributors, but perhaps especially the introduction, in B. de Munck, S.L. Kaplan and H. Soly (eds.), *Learning on the Shop Floor. Historical Perspectives on Apprenticeship*, New York-Oxford, 2007.

evidence survives to prove this. Apprenticeship agreements resume on f. 13 v., but in a different form, with just names of apprentices given for 1464-8, rather than the details set out previously. From 1469-79 the book lists only the guild's annually elected officials, with no apprentices, though a longer than usual list of apprentices in 1479 is likely to include many who entered the guild in this decade. From folio 15, the year 1480, the previous pattern returns with named officials and apprentices each year; for this period many apprentices enter with their brothers, and many are much younger than those named before 1464, some are even infants. There seems to have been a change in the guild around 1460, with more masters' sons and less 'outsiders' entering the guild, and a little less care and attention given to preserving the ritual and significance of the apprenticeship as a process, though a fuller analysis of this lies outside the parameters of this article.

From f. 24, the book changes, transcribing important documents that presumably existed separately, as charters on paper or parchment or within older, now lost, registers. These include an inventory of 1466, which has much in common with the earlier inventory includes with more textile items including what seem to be personal items left by members, even very personal items such as bed-sheets. From f. 32 the ordinances and privileges of the guild are recorded, including agreements made with a priest to perform services in the guild chapel, followed by a full charter of 1526 setting out clearly all privileges and rights, with a short and only partially dated sixteenth-century membership lists.

None of this is particularly unusual, with many guilds keeping records of members and privileges in the same register. What is unusual about the masons' book are the poems that appear on f. 40-43v. Their location here, within the book and among charters and important documents, implies that the guild viewed them as part of their tradition, just as central to their identity and status as the agreements about the chapel and the membership lists. The context indicates that the poems were almost certainly copied out in the early sixteenth century, and existed in another, unrecorded form earlier. The first text, at least, is explicitly dated as having been created in 1427, though it may be that the version we have is not precisely the version that was first written or first performed in 1427. However, such transmission issues are not particularly unusual nor should they raise major issues in analysing the texts. In York, for instance, the texts of the York Mystery Plays survive only from versions copied into a civic register between 1463 and 1477, though the performances are at least a century older.<sup>27</sup> The Ghent masons' texts share the same values and the

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<sup>27</sup> Beadle and King, 'Introduction', *York Mystery Plays, a Selection in Modern Spelling*, p. XIV.

same aims as the rest of the registers, like apprenticeship arrangements they emphasise integration and obedience and like the privileges and ordinances they emphasize unity and strong bonds of brotherhood. The remainder of the book, up to f. 64, contains membership lists up to 1614, placing the poem as a bridge between regulations and the guild-brothers themselves.

The masons were, then, a prestigious guild within Ghent and a community in which working in a very large group would have been the norm, a guild in which hierarchy and unity would have been of particular significance. The guild book reflects the values that the masons placed upon integration, with apprentices brought into guild life through unity and obedience. The two poems are placed significantly in the centre of the guild-book. The texts of the poem are carefully set out, with two columns per page. The majority of the text is in the same dark ink as the rest of the book, but a few names are added in red to draw attention to them. As with the apprentice records, the texts are very clearly written, using only minimal abbreviations; within the guild book, most of the writing is in black ink, in the apprenticeship agreements the first letter of the first word is highlighted in red, and the name of the master underlined in red. The poems include more red than the rest of the book, with the full titles of both underlined in red, the first letter of each page, and the first letter of the names of the saints highlighted in red. This means that the poems, like the apprenticeship agreements, are easy to read. There are no marks in the margin to indicate the text being changed nor is the page marked to make it easier to find for any reader. It seems the poems were set here as they were seen as being worthy of being recorded, as worthy as the charters and chapel inventory. Equally no tools have been added for the benefit of readers to make the poems easier to find and no commentary is needed to allow the reader to understand the text. The second poem does not begin on a new folio, rather follows on after just a small space from the previous, indicating that by the time they were entered into the book the poems were not seen as separate pieces, if they ever had been, but as a single demonstration of guild values and identity. After the last poem 'Amen' is added, with red in the A and the remainder of the page left blank. Both the two texts, and their two titles, have large red capitulae to their left, further drawing attention to the texts. Thought not an illuminated text, such small details within a guild book are important and show a great deal of care was taken in adding the poems into the register and to ensure they would be noticeable within the guild-book.

The poems are unique in that they survive, but the masons are very unlikely to have been unique among the craft guilds of Ghent in having dramatic or literary pieces produced. Every guild took care to record their members and their

rights, though no other guild for whom records have survived recorded a literary text. Hints elsewhere at performance can be traced, for example the hosiers paid for a 'spel' in 1468 and virtually all guilds performed spectacles, often tableaux vivants, for ducal entrances and other special occasions.<sup>28</sup> Guilds were, of course, far more than economic units, with all groups having concerns for feasting and for piety to build bonds and to enhance community; the poems show these values and so need to be understood within this urban context.

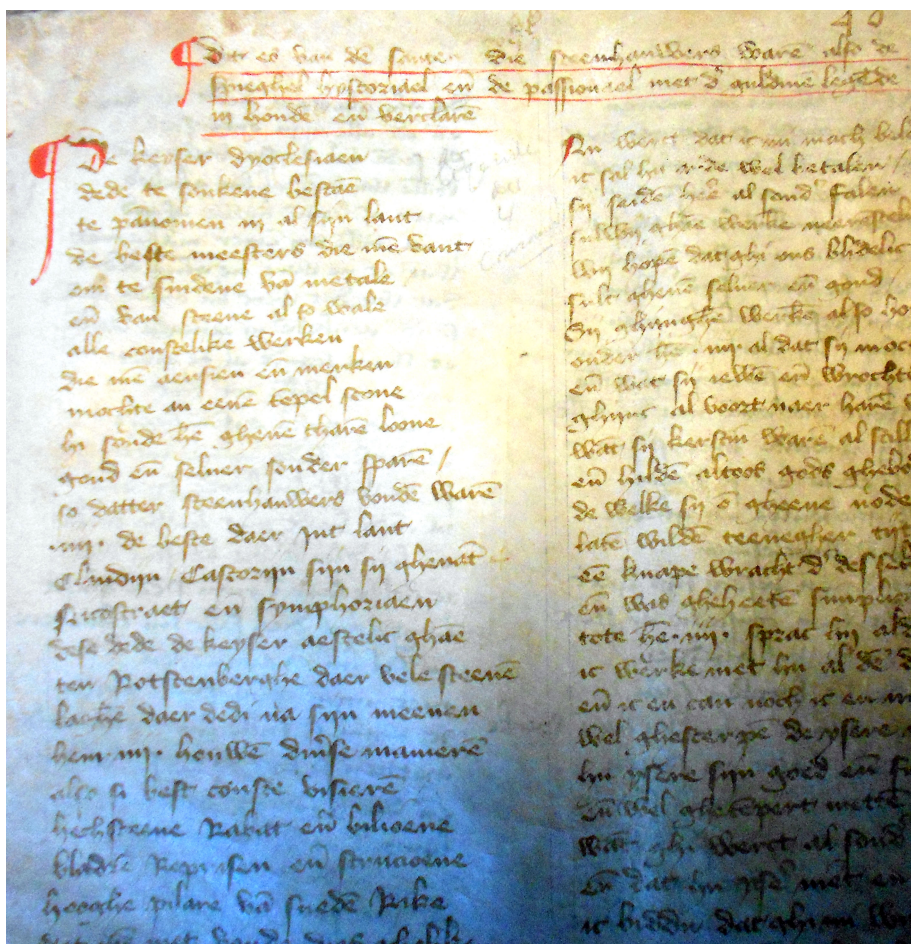


Illustration 1: Fragment of 'The Four Crowned Martyrs' (Stadsarchief Gent, Oud Archief, Charters, Ser. 177, n° 1)

<sup>28</sup> Gent Stadsarchief, Oud Archief, Charters, ser. 165, no. 1, f. 80 v.; A. Brown and G. Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420-1530*, Manchester, 2007, pp. 165-208.

The first poem details the lives, deaths and rediscovery of the ‘Four Crowned Martyrs’, patron saints of the guild, and for masons across Europe. The second text describes the lives and deaths of Saints Nazarius and Celsius. The first text was ‘taken out of the Latin’ by the masons’ chaplain, Lievein Kindekin, in 1427. Lievein was the guild priest, and included on a list of ‘vrije metsers’ in 1420, his name is the 7<sup>th</sup> on the list implying he was part of the guild, not just a parish priest paid to perform services for the guild as needed. His close bond with the guild meant that he understood the values that underlay the community being created by the masons; he performed the masses and funerals that helped to unite the guild-brothers and is perhaps natural that he writes text to further bind the brother together in a community around their saints.

Lievein does not claim originality for his poems; rather he makes clear they are based on narratives in the *Spiegel Historiae* and the *Golden Legend*. The *Spiegel* refers to the many versions of Jacob van Maerlant’s universal vernacular history, which itself draws on Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum historiale*. Both works which contain numerous saints’ lives alongside secular texts like the deeds of Charlemagne and King Arthur, proving an account of past glories and past heroes from which medieval figures could draw to consider their own identities. The *Golden Legend* was a thirteenth-century compilation of saints’ lives begun by Jacob de Voragine, but with many later additions and variants.<sup>29</sup> The *Legends* are generally in Latin, perhaps adding weight to their accounts of often ancient saints, but again provided a fertile hunting ground for late medieval authors keen to find holy figures around which to form their own perceptions of behaviour, even masculinity. Despite Lievein’s claim that the texts were ‘taken out of the Latin’, the two Ghent poems are original creations, presenting far longer and fuller versions of both tales than either earlier sources does, the reference to older texts here is probably to add authenticity to Lievein’s version, and to set the masons within a European wide tradition. There are numerous other versions of both the lives of Nazarius and Celsius and the Four Crowned Martyrs, with prose versions more common. So far none have been found that emphasise community as the Ghent version of the four crowned martyrs does not do nor that portrays the relationship between Nazarius and Celsius in the same sort of

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<sup>29</sup> I.E. Biesheuvel, ‘A medieval encyclopaedist. The life and work of Jacob van Maerlant’, *The Low Countries*, 18 (2010), pp. 126-133; B. Besamusca and F. Brandsma, ‘Jacob van Maerlant, traducteur vigilant, et la valeur didactique de son Graal-Merlijn’, in J.C. Faucon, A. Labbé and D. Quéruel (eds.), *Miscellanea Mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, Paris, 1998, pp. 121-131; F. Coste, ‘Textes et contextes de la Légende Dorée de Jacques de Voragine’, *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 14 (2007), pp. 245-258; B. Flieth and F. Morenzoni (eds.), *De La Sainteté à l’hagiographie: Genèse et usage de la Légende Dorée*, Genève, 2001.

relationship. Lievein is creating something new using old materials; he is incorporating the ancient holy past into his account of masons to provide inspirational, but relatable, role models.

The first poem is 232 lines long, and has a simple ABABCDCD...rhyme scheme. The second text is undated, but follows on in the same column, so may be of the same date, and is 228 lines long. The language of both texts is, on the whole, simple and the lived vernacular language of fifteenth century Ghent, using the same sort of terms as guild and civic ordinances. There is some interestingly precise guild language in the texts, including the masons' specific stone-cutting skills ('hechsteene rabat en bilioene/ bladre, reprisen ende strucioene) and the use of terms like 'barrel' which would be recognisable to masons as a unit of measurement. These words imply that the text would have been performed to a guild audience, but the values in the plays would resonate with many, and their subject matter, with some gruesome descriptions, would attract much attention.

The Four Crowned Martyrs is not simply a translation; Lievein Kindekin rebuilds a traditional text to fit the values of his guild. The poem recounts the lives of the guild's patrons at some length, the text begins with Emperor Diocletian (d. 311) and his plan to build a new temple, and so he wishes to find the best masons from his empire. Claudijn, Castorijn, Nicostraet and Symphoriaen, are brought to him and ordered to make a temple, which they do, and an idol, which they do.<sup>30</sup> The temple is described in great detail; the masons create pillars so fine that no one had ever seen the like, with works seen by all as a great example of the mystery of stone-cutting. While constructing the temple another mason, Simplicius, asks the martyrs why their work is so fine, and why their tools do not break. Claudijn introduced him to Christ's teachings, and blesses his tools so they no longer break, with this Simplicius is converted and his work become just as fine, he has become one of the community. After building both temple and idol, the masons are ordered to sacrifice to the idol, and of course refuse. A judge, Lampadius, orders them to be stripped and beaten 'so that men will hear the bodies tear', they are worked on with their own tools, and the torture detailed. The masons are in agony and seem on the point of death when they receive an unlikely reprieve; the devil passes by and grabs their judge, Lampadius, and kills him. Lampadius's wife blames the masons for her husband's death and appeals to the emperor for them to be executed. Diocletian has them placed into lead barrels, and thrown into the river. After 52 days a

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<sup>30</sup> Flemish version of the names in the Golden Legend, Claudis, Castorius, Nichostratus and Symphorianus.

good Christian recovered their bodies, and reburies them as well as he can afford. This is the end of the masons but not of the story; Saint Ambrose discovers the bodies and makes them the centre of a new cult in Milan.

The poem gives great insight into how the masons thought of themselves, and the civic values they strove to maintain. In describing their craft, the text employs some very precise language, for example in describing the skills of the masons, emphasising the trade of the martyrs and that they are masons, just as images of saints from the fifteenth-century show them at work as contemporary craftsmen. In doing so the text humanizes the martyrs, making the holy figures relatable for the masons in the audience, and just as significantly the martyrs at work elevates the work of the masons, and more generally guild labour, to an almost divine standing. The text sets out values that would have been crucial for the masons guild, obedience, brotherhood and piety. Obedience is central to the texts; though they are Christians, the masons follow Diocletian's orders for as long as they can, building his temple and idol, only when ordered to sacrifice to Asclepius do they disobey. Obedience was vital for any town in the fifteenth-century, and for a town as large as Ghent emphasising obedience linked the masons to civic ideals, making clear they should be good brothers not just to their guild but to their town. Within the guild, obedience to a master was just as important, as noted apprenticeship regulations form an important part of the guild book and were the main way for new masons to be brought into the guild, emphasising hierarchy and respect.

Brotherhood and unity are similarly emphasised throughout the poem. The martyrs always act together, they do not compete with each and all praise is for their collective work, never individually; they work as a unit and are better as a result. When Simplisius questions them, Claudijn patiently explains to him the value of their piety and, once he has converted, he is accepted as a brother. When ordered to make a sacrifice, Claudijn tells Diocletian that '*we* want to follow your command, but *we* do not wish to make an offering to the idol. That what *we* have made with *our* hands should be worshipped is a disgrace to *us* and *we* would rather die'. Later '*we* wish to acknowledge that *we* work in His name'. The masons are a unit; in contrast Diocletian is always singular, with 'I command you' being common and significantly the references are to 'my fine temple', with no indication the temple could have been used for a community or for the good of the (unspecified) town in which it was built. The Mason-martyrs act as guild brothers are expected to, working together upholding unity and equality among the master masons. That the text emphasises piety is clear and needs little explanation. On joining the masons a new member had to take an



oath in the chapel and to provide a donation, some of which would go to the alms and chapel of the guild. The guild chaplain, as well as writing this text, performed annual masses for guild-brothers and funerals; he may have been keen to emphasise piety and encourage good behaviour. The Four Crowned Martyrs are, then, not just saintly exemplars but perfect guild-brothers, proving clear guidance to the masons on how to interact with each other and with civic society at large.

The second text recounts the lives of Saints Nazarius and Saint Celsius, starting in Rome, and set in the more distant past, in the reign of Nero (d. 68). The poem follows Nazarius, son of a Jewish father, Africanus, and a Christina mother, Perpetua, Nazarius's mother had been baptised by Saint Peter, and Nazarius himself by Pope Linus (d. 76/79) as an adult, his parents having allowed him to choose his own faith. With persecutions in Rome, Nazarius's father feared for his safety, so sent him to Milan, there he gives to the poor and visited prisoners, including the twin brothers Saints Gervase and Protasius. He was so well-thought of that a goodly matron had him baptise her young son, Celsius, who became Nazarius's helper. Both were arrested and imprisoned, they believed they were about to be killed, but were banished instead and eventually arrived in Trier. There Nazarius, with Celsius's help, preached and baptised many new converts; they founded, indeed may have built, Trier's first church, an oratory and an alms house, but later a judge, Cornelis, brought this preaching to Nero's attention, and both Nazarius and Celsius were brought back to judgement, beaten and ordered to sacrifice to idols. When they refused Nero ordered them to be thrown into the sea. They escaped this fate, miraculously calming a storm, but were taken back to Milan and beheaded. Centuries later, Saint Ambrose discovered their bodies, finding first Nazarius's uncorrupted and still bleeding head, and established their cult. Like the first poem, the account of Nazarius and Celsius draws on older texts, but is creating something new; in the Golden Legend the focus of these tales are the twin Saints Gervase and Porthase, sons of Saints Vitale and Valerien, whose bodies were also discovered by Ambrose.<sup>31</sup> In the Ghent text the author, presumably also Lievein Kindekin, has melded together venerable tradition with guild values and urban ideals to depict a guild community in practice, and in particular a perfect apprenticeship and the power of good governance.

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<sup>31</sup> An English translation of his letter about the discovery is available online, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/ambrose-letter22.asp>, accessed 06/03/2015.

We have seen that apprenticeship arrangements were important to the masons, occupying an extremely prominent and important place within their guild-book. Their ordinances emphasised that that apprentices must be loyal, and that masters must teach and care for them, teaching the adolescents entrusted to them not just the skills necessary to be a good mason, but the skills necessary to be a good man in civic society.<sup>32</sup> The same relationship is clear between Nazarius and Celsius, with Celsius becoming Nazarius's 'helper' in all things and they do 'virtuous works'. While in Trier Nazarius preaches and baptises, he founded the first church with Celsius serving him. Unlike the four crowned martyrs, who are master masons, Nazarius and Celsius are not equals, and Nazarius has the far more important role, Celsius is obedient but has little agency. The language of the poems is again significant here; the Four Crowned Martyrs are all masons, and are described collectively; in this poem it is Nazarius who preaches, builds and converts, indeed it is Nazarius who Nero orders to worship idols and Nazarius that sailors call out to when threatened by a storm. The saints are only described collectively during their final torture and death, but Nazarius's body is discovered first by Saint Ambrose. Celsius helps and obeys, and is as a result canonised, he learns and follows Nazarius as a good apprentice should. Again, piety is important, Nazarius enacts works of mercy in Milan, visiting prisoners and caring for the poor, as well as establishing an alms house and a church in Trier. This care for the poor is linked to the masons' own charitable concerns and to Ghent's civic priorities, with many ordinances from civic magistrates and guilds for regulating charity.<sup>33</sup> The saints are, again, being linked with guild and with civic values; significantly the guild also have a chapel and an alms house, linking saint and guild again.

As a model for good governance, it is interesting to consider Nazarius's care for Trier and the geography of both poems. The setting for the four crowned martyrs is (probably deliberately) vague, they are from Pannonia but the setting of the temple is not given, as they are discovered in Milan it is likely that the river they were thrown into is the Po, but this is not stated in the text. For Nazarius and Celsius, geography is clear; Nazarius starts in Rome, a corrupt city ruled by an evil emperor, he goes briefly to Milan, visiting prisoners and trying to help the poor but is driven out and goes to Trier. These are the locations in

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<sup>32</sup> Drawing on P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Masters and Men in Later Medieval England', in D.M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, pp. 56-70 and R.M. Karras, 'Masters and Men', in R.M. Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 109-150.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas, *Metamorphosis*, pp. 41-66.

the Golden Legend version, but their precision is interesting. In Trier, a city where Christianity was previously unknown, Nazarius is not building the town, but he is recasting and redesigning it, just as the masons are, in the fifteenth century, redesigning several of Ghent's great buildings. He acts as a father figure, caring for a new converted town, emphasising the importance of caring for the community as a whole, acting for the 'common good' as well as being a good Christian. As such Nazarius is not just a good mason, but he could be considered as a good guild-dean or even a good alderman, standing up to a bad ruler of a large geographical area. It is tempting to see dissatisfaction with the Burgundian Dukes, or, given the date at which they were copied down, Emperor Charles V, behind the descriptions of Diocletian and Nero, though this may be over-reading the poems. What is clear is Nazarius's ability to act as a good master and Celsius's ability to enact the perfect model of obedient apprentice, with both caring for a town and embodying civic and guild virtues.

The two poems written for the masons of fifteenth-century Ghent are unusual in surviving and allowing for interpretations of guild identity and even ideology to be attempted, but they are unlikely to be unique in having been commissioned. The poems are important not just for literary scholars, to gain insight into the prevalence of urban texts, but for historians of late medieval towns as they can be used to highlight the non-economic side of guild life and the values held and valued by guilds and workers in a late medieval town. Together, the two poems provide a prism through which to try to see and to analyse guild values and guild norms, emphasising obedience, unity, piety, hierarchy and the importance of good governance. Far more can, and should, be said about the linguistic, symbolic and moral language of the texts and their relationship to other sources and to ideas of popular piety and civic identity. The purpose of this short overview has been to raise awareness of Flemish guild dramas as literary and historical sources and the potential they present for analysing late medieval culture, especially guild values and even civic ideology.