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History Writing and Property Listing by the Brussels Seven Sorrows Confraternity, c. 1685*

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Introduction

As early as the seventeenth century, the English urban middle classes developed a keen interest in history.¹ This evolution was connected with the broadening intellectual and cultural horizon of the middling sort, with changes in consumption and material culture,² and with the rise of the public sphere.³ By the turn of the eighteenth century, for most lay readers, history had become the single most important literary genre next to fiction and religious works. Reading and discussing history became a popular pastime and even served a number of social purposes, *e.g.* social promotion or marking respectability.⁴

In late seventeenth-century Brussels, the ‘court capital’ and leading cultural centre of the Southern Low Countries, recreational reading was growing in importance as well, and the share of history books in private collections increased.⁵ In the eighteenth century, history made up twenty-five per cent of the subject themes in private libraries and was

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1 F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 38-43; Denys Hay, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1977), p. 133.

2 Daniel R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 79-167.

3 Jonathan Barry, ‘Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort’, in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. by Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 1994), pp. 84-112; Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

4 Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1981), pp. 144-45, 219-57; Woolf, *Reading History*, pp. 79-167.

5 Hubert Meeus, “‘Dienstich ende ghenuchelijck tyt-verdryf voor siecken, om ghesont te worden, en voor ghesonde om niet sieck te zijn’. Ontspanningslectuur in de zeventiende eeuw’, in *Gheprint Antwerpen. Het boek in Antwerpen van de vijftiende tot de twintigste eeuw*, ed. by Jan Pauwels (Kapellen: Pelckmans, 2004), pp. 77-89; Alfons K. L. Thijs, ‘Recreatie, educatie, devotie en informatie: functies van populaire lectuur (17de-19de eeuw)’, *Volkskunde*, 105 (2004), 147-79.

outnumbered by religion and theology only.⁶ The growth of reading for leisure coincided with the growing commercialization of the reading culture in Brussels, exemplified by a rising number of booksellers and printers, the emergence of newspapers from the 1650s onwards, and the establishment of commercial libraries or ‘reading rooms’ (*leeskabinetten*) in the eighteenth century.⁷ Learned societies and various types of other associations contributed to the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century interest in science, culture, history, and archaeology.⁸

While the interest in reading history has been well-documented, less is known about the ways in which early modern citizens approached the history of their own social environment, not only by acquiring knowledge of the past but also with regard to the very act of history writing. In scholarly literature, most attention has been devoted to history writing by individual ‘professional’ historians specialized in specific genres such as chronicles, annals, *memorieboeken* (memory books), national histories, etc.⁹ The study of history writing has been barely undertaken from the perspective of early modern associations such as guilds and confraternities. As has been argued by some scholars, the historical consciousness of Netherlandish guilds and confraternities grew in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, on the eve of the Brabant Revolution (1789-90). Worried by rumours about their abolition, guilds and confraternities inquired into their history in order to defend their privileges and public status.¹⁰ However, already well before the end of the old regime, associations studied their own history. We might wonder what motives they had to devote attention to the past.

In this chapter, we investigate how the members of the Brussels’ Seven Sorrows confraternity dealt with the history of their association by combining a ‘genre approach’ (based on a specific historical document) with an ‘association’s approach’ (history writing by a confraternity). Our main source is a seventeenth-century manuscript entitled *Philippus van Oostenrijk fondateur der Seven Wee-en gebroeders gefondeert int jaer 1498* (‘Philip

6 Claude Bruneel, ‘La diffusion du livre dans la société bruxelloise (1750-1796)’, *Archief- en bibliotheekwezen in België*, 54 (1983), 29-46; Bernard Desmaele, ‘Coup d’oeil sur quelques bibliothèques privées bruxelloises du XVIII^e siècle’, *Études sur le XVIII^e siècle*, 14 (1987), 101-24. On material culture in Brussels in general, see Veerle De Laet, *Brussel binnenskamers. Kunst- en luxebezit in het spanningsveld tussen hof en stad, 1600-1735* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

7 Elly Cockx-Indestege and Anne Rouzet, ‘Drukkers en boekverkopers in Brussel van de 15de tot de 17de eeuw’, *Het culturele leven in de Brabantse steden van de 15de tot de 18de eeuw. Verslag Vijfde Colloquium De Brabantse Stad 25-26 november 1977* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Provinciaal genootschap, 1978), pp. 311-15.

8 *Het culturele leven in onze provincies: Oostenrijkse Nederlanden, prinsbisdom Luik en hertogdom Bouillon in de 18de eeuw* (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1983); *Oostenrijks België, 1713-1794: De Zuidelijke Nederlanden onder de Oostenrijkse Habsburgers*, ed. by Hervé Hasquin (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1987), especially the essays by Michèle Mat, Jozef Smeyers, and Annette Félix. There were certainly many more clubs and societies in Brussels than are presently known, but no systematic research on this topic has been done. Consider for example: Geneviève Steenebruggen, ‘La Société Royale Linnéenne et de Flore de Bruxelles, 1660-1990. Une Bruxelloise d’un âge respectable’, *Brabant tourisme* (September 1990), 38-43 for evidence of a horticultural society founded in 1660; Edmond Vander Straeten, *La musique aux Pays-Bas avant le XIX^e siècle. Documents inédits et annotés*, 7 vols (Brussels: C. Muquardt, 1867-85), I (1867), pp. 18-20, which mentions an *académie* of music lovers probably founded in the 1660s; Leuven, City Archives/Stadsarchief Leuven, no. 351, fols 475-77, which refers to a Brussels’ association of musicians and dancers in 1731.

9 Tom Verschaffel, *De hoed en de hond. Geschiedschrijving in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1715-1794* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), especially ch. 1-3. Issues of gender in the study of historiography are apparent as well. See among others: Megan Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

10 Marc Jacobs, ‘Zonder twijfel dat waarschijnlijk... Ambachtelijke geschiedenissen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden aan het einde van het ‘oude regime’’, in *Werelden van verschil. Ambachtsgilden in de Lage Landen*, ed. by Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly (Brussels: VUB Press, 1997), pp. 246-47, 273; Jette Janssen, *De deugd van broederschap. Sociaal kapitaal van gildebroeders in de Noord-Brabantse schuttersgilden, 1600-2000* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, 2009), p. 190; Yvan Vanden Berghe, *Jacobijnen en Traditionalisten. De reacties van de Bruggelingen in de Revolutietijd (1780-1794)*, 2 vols (Brussels: Pro Civitate, 1972), I, pp. 165-66 and 170-72.

of Austria, founder of the Seven Sorrows confrères, founded in the year 1498').¹¹ The manuscript takes the form of a property inventory, preceded by an introduction relating the confraternity's history. It offers a detailed overview of the goods and title-deeds the confraternity acquired over time: charters, jewellery, liturgical ornaments, real estate, annuities, and foundations. The various acquisitions are situated in time and described within their historical context by providing metadata, including physical descriptions of the objects, dates of acquisition, the names of donor(s), artists/producers (in the case of artistic or luxury objects), and the confraternity's members involved, references to official charters, property deeds, and the spatial, religious, and social contexts. In other words, through the inventory, the history of the Seven Sorrows confraternity becomes tangible.

This kind of source is generally considered to be a gold mine for historians, since such inventories contain a unique set of historical facts and data that, in other cases, can only be compiled after a long quest in the archives. As Otto Oexle has argued, however, these documents are not merely containers of historical evidence. They have to be understood likewise as historical constructions themselves, produced within a given context and with a specific intention.¹² To apply this theory to the Brussels Seven Sorrows inventory, we will first devote attention to the physical characteristics of the document and briefly present its content. Based on internal and external evidence, we will then develop a hypothesis about the author's identity and try to date the source as precisely as possible. On this basis, it will be possible to gain more insight into the ways in which the confraternity looked back at its own history, unravel the author's motives for including metadata and historical details, identify the targeted audience, and to situate the inventory within the wider context of history writing among associations in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Low Countries.

Description and Content of the Seven Sorrows Inventory

Authorship and Dating

The inventory is kept in the Brussels' City Archives and belongs to the so-called Historical Archives, Register 1499.¹³ The document has the shape of a rather small handwritten register (15.5 × 20 cm) and counts 165 paper leafs, on which most pages have been written. The register is well preserved, although the ink has become faint in some instances. The inventory includes two seventeenth-century hands, which are clearly recognizable and easy to read. Most parts of the text have been written by the main hand, which appears

11 Archives of the City of Brussels/Archief van de Stad Brussel, Historical Archives/Historisch Archief (hereafter ASB, HA), Register 1499, p. 2. The confraternity was founded in March 1499 (n.s.), but in Brussels the new year started on Easter, which explains the use of the date 1498 (o.s.).

12 Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Liturgische Memoria und historische Erinnerung. Zur Frage nach dem Gruppenbewußtsein und dem Wissen der eigenen Geschichte in den mittelalterlichen Gilden', in *Tradition als historische Kraft. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters*, ed. by Norbert Kamp and Joachim Wollasch (Berlin-New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1982), p. 324.

13 Charles Pergameni, *Les archives historiques de la Ville de Bruxelles* (Brussels Wauthoz-Legrand, 1943), p. 209. For a full codicological description and an edition of the inventory, see Brecht Dewilde and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze, 'De zeventiende-eeuwse inventaris van de broederschap van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van de Zeven Weeën in Brussel', *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis*, in press.

alternately four times with a second one.¹⁴ The reason for these alternations is hard to determine, especially since this even happens once in the middle of a sentence. The scribes are impossible to identify by the manuscript alone, since they did not leave any direct indications in the text. Regardless of their identity, the confraternity probably did not hire a clerk. Luckily, a comparison with a handwriting appearing in the *Liber authenticus*, the confraternity's membership register, makes it possible to identify the main hand as that of Judocus Wouwerms.¹⁵ Wouwerms graduated from the University of Leuven in 1682 and had joined the confraternity of the Seven Sorrows upon his return to Brussels.¹⁶ He was elected a provost (or officer) of the confraternity in 1684 and hereditary provost in 1696.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the identity of the second scribe of the inventory remains unknown. Possibly another provost occasionally took over the pencil.

The attribution of the main handwriting to Judocus Wouwerms brings us to the dating of the manuscript. The uniform and clear layout and handwriting – though occasionally alternated by the second hand – seem to point to a rather short and systematic editing process. The manuscript itself is not dated, but it includes many dates of which the most recent is 28 February 1685.¹⁸ The manuscript may have then been written during the year 1685, which corresponds with Wouwerms' term as provost of the confraternity. The text further refers to persons holding positions in the city council at the time of its redaction. Among them, Adam de Blicck, 'current mayor on behalf of the craft guild nations and head of the Garland chamber' is mentioned several times.¹⁹ De Blicck held the office of city mayor elected by the craft guild nations during the years 1683-84 and 1684-85.²⁰ In the inventory he is also mentioned as the city's treasurer,²¹ a position he occupied for the periods of 1685-86 and 1686-87.²² These references could possibly indicate that the manuscript was written during the lapse of time in which Adam de Blicck changed his position as mayor to that of treasurer. In Brussels, the change of the magistracy generally took place on 24 June, although the treasurer took up office as late as 1 October. In brief, it seems that the manuscript was written in the course of the year 1685, perhaps during the month June.

Layout and Structure

The manuscript's layout is not conducive to everyday use: it does not include a summary or an index. Moreover, the compilers did not paginate the manuscript, but pagination

¹⁴ The second hand appears from p. 13 above until the middle of p. 21; from p. 63 above until p. 64 below; on p. 69; from the middle of p. 131 until the top of p. 135.

¹⁵ In the *Liber authenticus*, Wouwerms copied a contract between Peeter van Cutsem (acting as a spokesperson for the priest and churchwardens of St Gorik) and Jacques de Condé (acting as a spokesperson for the provosts of the confraternity) (ASB, HA, Register 3413, fols 9^v-10^v – information provided by Susie Speakman Sutch).

¹⁶ Judocus Wouwerms, *De sponsalibus et matrimonio* (Leuven: typis Martini Hullegerde antè Academiam, 1682).

¹⁷ ASB, HA, Register 3413, fols 332^v and 334^v.

¹⁸ ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 59. The year 1685 is also mentioned on p. 68.

¹⁹ 'Adam de Blicck, tegen woordigen borgemeester uijt de natie ende hooftman van de Crans camere' (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 62); 'monsieur Adam de Blicck, borgemeester deser stadt Brussel ende hooftman deser Cranskamere' (p. 88); 'monsieur Adam de Blicck, borgemeester deser stadt Brussel' (p. 106); 'monsieur Adam de Blicck, borgemeester deser stadt Brussel' (p. 128); 'monsieur Adam de Blicck, borgemeester deser stadt Brussele' (p. 147).

²⁰ Alexandre Henne and Alphonse Wauters, *Histoire de la ville de Bruxelles*, 4 vols (Brussels: Perichon, 1845; repr. 1975), II, pp. 552-53.

²¹ 'Monsieur Adam de Blicck, rentmeester deser stadt Brussele' (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 67).

²² Henne and Wauters, *Histoire de Bruxelles*, II, p. 553.

was added in pencil afterwards, at least up to page 75. Further on the pagination appears irregularly, and after page 89, it disappears totally. Despite the lack of index and pagination, navigation in the manuscript was possible by means of chapter titles, which indicate the base structure of the text. Although the authors further structured the text by using full stops and page breaks, it is still awkward to look up properties, objects or facts recorded in the document. In brief, the inventory seems very impractical to use as a manual. Illustrations, rubrics, and page decorations are completely lacking.

Although not apparent at first sight, the text can be divided into four different parts. The first part recounts the roots, genesis, and history of the confraternity (pp. 3-24). It includes, amongst others, the foundation of St Gorik's church and the chapel of Our Lady (p. 3), the gift of the chapel to the rhetoricians of the Lily and the institution of the Seven Sorrows devotion (pp. 4-5), the alleged foundation of the confraternity by Philip the Fair (p. 6), the confirmation of the confraternity and the grant of indulgences by different popes and church leaders (pp. 7-15), the names of the first chapel masters or provosts (p. 15), the occurrence of a miracle during the first year (p. 16), the organization of the procession and its finances (pp. 16-18), the appointment of provosts among the rhetoricians of The Garland of Mary from 1585 onwards (pp. 18-19), the patronage by the Emperor Maximilian and the Archdukes Albert and Isabella (pp. 19-21), and, finally, the building of the sacristy in the churchyard of St Gorik (pp. 21-24).

The second part of the manuscript contains the 'Generaelen inventaris van de meubelen van Onse Live Vrouwe van Seven Wee'en' (General inventory of the movables of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows), as the chapter title reads (pp. 25-48). It starts with the description of the statue of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows and a series of paintings by Wensel Cobergher (p. 25). The inventory continues with all of the items owned by the confraternity: the wooden altarpiece (p. 26), the silver (pp. 27-31), the copper work (pp. 32-33), the gilded woodwork (p. 34), the skirts of Our Lady (pp. 35-36), her cloaks (p. 37), her veils (p. 38), the copes and chasubles (pp. 39-40), the awnings (pp. 41-42), the frontals (p. 42), the linen (p. 43), some other movables from the chapel (p. 44), the paintings (p. 46), and, finally, the woodwork (pp. 47-48). Most objects are described, and in some cases, details on the use, location, artists, expenses, and date of acquisition are added.

The following part of the document relates to the genesis and 'antiquity' of the houses of the confraternity (pp. 49-68). First, the author elaborates on the acquisition of a yard and a stable, located in the place called *Holland* in front of St Gorik's church, in order to store the *tableaux vivants* that were carried during the confraternity's annual procession (pp. 49-51). In 1553, Emperor Charles V allowed the confraternity to buy a parcel of land with two houses, located on the 'ditch of the White Ladies' (*Wittevrouwengracht*, today the Old Grain market), where a stone shed was built, which was reconstructed as the 'Big house of Our Lady also called the Chamber of the Garland' (*Groot huijs van Onse Lieve Vrouw van Seven Wee'en gesijt die Crans kamere*) in 1624 (pp. 51-58). In 1677, the confraternity also bought the house between its 'Big house' and the yard of the hand-bow guild (pp. 60-68). This so-called 'Small house of Our Lady below the Chamber of the Garland' (*Het Klijn Lieve Vrouwen huijs onder de Crans kamere*) was rented to a private person (p. 59). This part ends with a list of redeemed mortgages (pp. 69-74).

Finally, the last and largest part of the manuscript enumerates all the interest to be paid to or by the confraternity (pp. 75-155). Because the list contains such detailed

information extending back many decades, it must have been based largely on the confraternity's archives, containing an annotated register and the vouchers, which were kept in a chest. In all cases, additional details are given on the date of acquisition, the amount of the interest, the pledges, the generous donors, the current payers, and the paydays. In some cases the author also mentioned for what purpose(s) the money was intended.

Forms and Functions of History Writing by Associations

History Writing and Historical Culture

Histories produced by associations tend to be rather short. At best, guilds and confraternities devoted a few pages to their past, but generally a few lines recording the collective memories about the origins and most important events of the association sufficed. That does not mean, however, that the associations' interest in the past was not genuine or only limited. On the contrary: history writing among guilds and confraternities was part of a broader and much more varied historical culture. Associations did not limit history production to written texts. Historical narratives were inserted in a complex visual culture while historical consciousness was present in daily practices. References to the past are apparent in art, theatre, rituals, and other cultural expressions, in record keeping and archival practices, in the care for the association's material heritage and time-honoured traditions, and in the commemoration of deceased guild members or important events (*e.g.* jubilees, centenaries).²³

The Bruges confraternity of Our Lady of the Dry Tree provides a fine example of the connection between history and visual culture. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, two former provosts conducted research into the origins of their association, for which they consulted the archives of the Order of Friars Minor convent (host of the confraternity's chapel) and interviewed some elder members. The results of their investigation were not written down, however, but were communicated through a painting depicting the Virgin Mary standing in a withered tree, along with Jason and the fleece as a reference to the alleged founder of the confraternity, the duke of Burgundy Philip the Good.²⁴

The Brussels Seven Sorrows confraternity merged history and visual culture in a similar way. According to the inventory, there was a painting hanging in the chapel

23 Oexle, 'Liturgische Memoria und historische Erinnerung', pp. 323-40; Paul Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving: de broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), pp. 171-72; Geoffrey Crossick, 'Past Masters: In Search of the Artisan in European History', in *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900*, ed. by Geoffrey Crossick (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), p. 2; Verschaffel, *De hoed en de hond*, pp. 254-56; Llewellyn Bogaers, 'Broederschappen in laatmiddeleeuws Utrecht op het snijpunt van religie, werk, vriendschap en politiek', *Trajecta*, 8 (1999), 97-119 (pp. 111-12); Maarten Van Dijk, *Confrérieën in het Land van Aarschot, Rotselaar en Wezemaal (17de-18de eeuw). Een historische etnologie van Aarschot en omstreken* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Leuven, 2002), passim; Bert De Munck, 'Erfgoed is van alle tijden. Ambachten en hun beeldcultuur in het Ancien Régime', in *Ten Wapen! Heraldiek, teken van gezag en identiteit*, ed. by André Vandewalle (Brugge: Stad Brugge, 2004), pp. 29-45; Janssen, *De deugd van broederschap*, pp. 185-92; Peter Burke, 'Co-memorations. Performing the Past', in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. by Karin Tilmans and others (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 107-09; Brecht Dewilde, 'Corporaties en confrerieën in conflict: Leuven 1600-1750' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leuven, 2012), pp. 267-71, 357-58; Jasmine Kilburn-Toppin, 'Material Memories of the Guildsmen: Crafting Identities in Early Modern London', in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Erika Kuipers and others (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 165-81.

24 W. H. James Weale, 'Peintres Brugeois. Les Claeissins (1500-1656)', *Annales de la Société d'Émulation de Bruges*, 61 (1911), 26-76 (pp. 57-60).

commemorating the foundation of the confraternity.²⁵ The register further lists two carved angels holding a series of genealogical emblems relating to the alleged founders of the confraternity: Philip the Fair, Margaret of Austria, and Emperor Maximilian.²⁶ Visual culture and history might also have been merged during the confraternity procession or in the theatre plays staged by the rhetoric chamber of The Garland of Mary. In the following, however, we focus on history *writing*.

Arrangement of Information

There are various ways to structure a historical account. According to Tom Verschaffel, chronology was the most common organizing principle in eighteenth-century religious, local and regional histories.²⁷ Facts and events were arranged according to their succession in time, although there were numerous ways to divide that time (years, centuries, dynasties, *aetates*, etc.). Chronology turned out to be a convenient solution to unify isolated facts into a coherent narrative, but it had the side effect that related events could be separated out in time, which made the story appear like a loose collection of data.

Unlike this dominant way of arranging information, the content of the Seven Sorrows inventory is arranged by topic. True, chronology has its part in the Seven Sorrows inventory, but it is not its *leitmotiv*. The leading principle here is the thematic division into history and property. Both themes are separated by the chapter titles: the history section (pp. 2-24) is announced by the caption *Instelling van het broederschap* ('Foundation of the confraternity'), while the property section (pp. 25-157) starts with the heading *Generaelen inventaris van de meubelen* ('General inventory of the movables'). At first sight, this is how the register is structured. However, if we take a closer look, we discover that history and property are not clear-cut categories at all, but that they are heavily intertwined in both sections. The history section includes an expanded overview of the confraternity's indulgences and how and when they were obtained, running from 1494 up to 1667,²⁸ and an account of the acquisition history of the confraternity chapel and the building of the sacristy in the churchyard of St Gorik.²⁹ The property section contains an inventory of the confraternity's actual belongings, but this 'property list' is combined with a historical view of the context of the acquisition of the goods.

The lack of clear-cut categories makes the Seven Sorrows inventory an interesting example of the intertwining of history writing and property listing. The confraternity's history is not hung up on chronology – as was the case in many other contemporary histories – but on its possessions. The author reconstructed the history of the association on the basis of property. At the same time, the addition of historical data to the inventoried effects evokes the idea of a clearly defined historical patrimony. This idea is all the more apparent when the author writes about lost, damaged, or stolen property. In his eyes, they undoubtedly belonged to the confraternity's patrimony. While listing the garments of the statue of the Virgin and the infant Jesus, for instance, the author inserted a quick note that one robe

25 ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 46.

26 ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 47.

27 Verschaffel, *De hoed en de bond*, pp. 273-81.

28 ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 7-15.

29 ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 21-24.

was stolen.³⁰ He did not hesitate, however, to quote the lost skirt among the garments that still hung in the confraternity's wardrobe. In a similar vein, effects already sold or foregone profits were listed as if they still made up the confraternity's actual assets.³¹ In other words, looking back from 1685, the author gave the impression that the possessions constituted a unity, which existed through time and in that way reflected the confraternity's history.

Sources and Selection Mechanisms

To recount the history of the Seven Sorrows confraternity, the author extensively made use of what Marc Jacobs has called 'powerful texts' (*krachtige teksten*): recognized and authoritative records with evidential value that surpass oral testimonies, memories, and indirect proof.³² Most of the author's information is summarized from such powerful texts: indulgences, privileges, ordinances, charters, title-deeds, accounts, etc. The practical reasons for this are evident, but at the same time it is remarkable that the author actually identified his sources as if he understood the concept of powerful texts, given the precise information and type of document to which he referred. On page 10, for instance, the author reported that the confraternity obtained an indulgence for those attending the Seven Sorrows procession in 1532. However, he did not end with this statement but continued to support his claim by referring his readers to a bull of Pope Clement VII, which was confirmed by Cardinal Laurentius (Lorenzo Campeggio) in Brussels on 12 January 1532.³³ The acquisition of the indulgence seemed almost secondary to the very possession of the papal bull. Similar examples of statements supported by references to official records are found throughout the register. Each time, the author specified the type of document (*e.g.* bull, account, title-deed) and gave a precise dating (day, month, year, *gesta*), named the place of publication, and identified the people involved (dignitaries in particular). He explicitly added whether his sources were still present in the archives of the confraternity. Clearly, the express reference to these important documents was an excuse for demonstrating social capital rather than being inspired by methodological concerns.

In addition, the Seven Sorrows inventory may be compared with the cartularies that were produced during the High Middle Ages. According to Patrick Geary, such collections of charters are considered to have served both administrative and commemorative purposes. These combined functions 'greatly affected the form of these collections, as

30 'Item, eenen witten geblomden silveren moiren rock geboort met vier goude kanten. Hier van is het rockken vant kindeken gestolen' (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 35).

31 The author mentions, for instance, the mortgage interest offered by lord Willem Borreman in his legacy from 1504, which was amortized the same year (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 99).

32 Jacobs, 'Zonder twijfel dat waarschijnlijk', p. 249. See as well: Maïka De Keyzer, 'Opportunisme, corporatisme en progressiviteit. Conflicten en vertogen van corporatieve belangengroepen in het stedelijk milieu van het achttiende-eeuwse Mechelen', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 7 (2010), 3-26 (pp. 13-16).

33 'Het voorschreven broederschap is desgelijckx geconfirmereert bij den cardinael Laurentius, als blijktt in de bulle daer af sijnde gegeven binnen Brussel in date pridie idus januarii in het jaer vijftien hondert twee en dertigh, in het negenste jaer des pausdoms Clemens den Sevensten, in de welcke hij is seven jaeren ende seven quarantenen aflaets verleenende aen alle de ghene die de processie van Onse Lieve Vrouwe van Seven Weeen sullen accompagneren, hun in staet van gratie gestelt hebbende, ende de kapelle van Seven Weeen besoeckende, hunnen Vader Onsen ende Weest Gegroet Maria lesende ende Seven Weeen mediterende. Ende aen alle die gene die alle vrijdagen in de maent van meert oft op den Goeden Vrijdagh kommen besoecken de capelle van Onse Lieve Vrouwe van Seven Weeen, is verleenende hondert daegen aflaet als blijktt in de voorschreve bulle' (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 10).

well as the principles of inclusion and exclusion of their contents.³⁴ The reproduction of original records in the cartularies is subject to selection, suppression, manipulation and interpolation, which ‘determined what access to the past would be available to future generations.’³⁵ The compiler of the Seven Sorrows inventory applied similar techniques. Consider, for example, the transaction between the churchwardens of St Gorik and the provost of the Seven Sorrows confraternity, dated 28 June 1660. According to the inventory, the churchwardens of St Gorik endowed the confraternity with a parcel in the churchyard to build a sacristy there, the donation of which attested to the success of the devotion to the Lady of Sorrows and to the confraternity’s ‘high esteem’ (*grootte estime*).³⁶ The author of the inventory clearly interpreted the transaction as a donation. The text of the contract has been copied in full in the confraternity’s member registry, the *Liber authenticus*, which allows us to verify the information presented in the inventory.³⁷ In reality, the churchwardens only granted the usufruct of the parcel with permission to build a sacristy. The contract states that the churchwardens retained their title to the church space and the churchyard, which meant that the confraternity was not allowed to build an extra entrance to the sacristy from the churchyard. Furthermore, the use of the sacristy was restricted to religious services and could not be used for other purposes.³⁸ This example shows that the compiler of the Seven Sorrows inventory did not literally copy the powerful texts he employed. Instead, he outlined their content in a schematic or brief way, which allowed him to leave information aside or to slightly modify the information for the benefit of his narrative.

The history of the Seven Sorrows confraternity is conceived as a series of highlights. Important events and acquisition of properties or privileges are carefully listed and described at length. Losses, outstanding debts, or negative occurrences, on the contrary, remain unmentioned or are only mentioned in passing. Discharged annuities are explicitly inventoried to avoid the perception that the confraternity is not able to fulfil its financial obligations.³⁹ Annuities for which the author ‘could not find any voucher’ are conveniently ‘considered as settled.’⁴⁰ As mentioned above, his purpose was to reinforce the idea of the unity of the historical patrimony. However, an exception is made when loans are contracted or when properties are sold for the purpose of acquiring more, new, or better goods.⁴¹ Here, the idea of accumulation is more important. The author stressed the expansion

34 Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 81-107, quotation on p. 84.

35 Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, p. 86. See as well: Georges Declercq, ‘Originals and Cartularies: The Organisation of Archival Memory (Ninth-Eleventh Centuries)’, in *Charters and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Society*, ed. by Karl Heidecker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 147, 149, 155.

36 ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 21-23.

37 ASB, HA, Register 3413, fols 9^v-10^v.

38 ‘Sonder dat de voorseide ontfangeren, ofte hunne naercommelinghen op het voorseide kerckhoff sullen vermoegen te maecken eene deure, tsij om te hebben acces oft entree tot het voorseide kerckhoff, oft andersints ende dat sij ontfangeren de voorseide sacristeije niet voordere oft andersints en sullen gebruijcken dan op den voet ende maniere gelijk sij tot heden de voorseide cappelle van onse L. Vre. hebben gebruijckt, ende den dinst is gedaen geweest ende vervolgens, dat de voorseide constituanten, ende ontfangeren sullen blijven in hunne oude gerechticheden, ende privilegien’ (ASB, HA, Register 3413, fol. 10^v).

39 ‘Dese notie wort alhier gestelt op dat wie voorders eenigh neerstigher ondersoek soude willen doen, niet en souden dencken datter eenighen last ofte obligatie daer toe staet en niet volbracht en soude worden’ (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 69).

40 ‘Van de welcke men gene brieven is vindende, ergo wort geoordeelt te sijn gequeten’ (ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 73-74).

41 ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 51, 88.

of the confraternity's collection to add to its already impressive status. As a result, the history of the confraternity, written on the basis of its properties, should be understood as a (hi)story of progress.

Of course, this positive account must not be understood as an objective representation of the confraternity's history. The author made little or no effort to mark interruptions and breaks or to show evolutions. Though changes in the Seven Sorrows confraternity between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are not evident or manifest in the inventory, a closer look at the dates mentioned in the manuscript yields some interesting trends with regard to the variations over time. Figure 1 presents the frequency of entries in the inventory, rearranged per decade. It makes clear that some periods stand out: the foundation period in the late fifteenth century, the period of Catholic reform starting with the reign of Albert and Isabella, and the decades before the inventory was written. The high frequency in the last decades of the seventeenth century probably reveals the author's interest in the recent history of the confraternity and/or that he had recourse to oral testimonies by the confraternity's members and his former colleagues, who evidently knew much more about their own involvement. It is no surprise that he occasionally mentioned people who were in charge at the time, like Adam de Blicck.

Most striking is the lack of references to the position of the Seven Sorrows confraternity during the Calvinist reign in Brussels (1581-85). Many guilds and confraternities – in Brussels as well as in other towns – suffered material losses and a decline in membership numbers during that period, which forced them to suspend their activities or to go underground.⁴² The Brussels archery guilds, for instance, were abrogated in 1580. The confraternity of St Barbara stopped its activities and administration in 1578 and brought its silverware and other valuables to safety, only to resume after the liberation of the city by Farnese in 1585.⁴³ Catholic services and ritual expressions of Catholic faith were contested and subsequently abandoned from 1577 to 1585.⁴⁴ At the same time, Brussels' churches were sacked and appropriated for use for Protestant services. In 1581, Catholic services were prohibited altogether.⁴⁵

The Seven Sorrows inventory does not provide details about this episode, but it is very likely that the confraternity experienced the same difficulties as the other associations did. The registration of new members and officers in the *Liber authenticus* stopped after 1555 (except for the registration of a monastic community in 1569), and restarted only in 1586.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Figure 1 reveals that the frequency of activities was low during the 1570s and 80s. Compared to the first three quarters of the sixteenth century and to the seventeenth century, barely any deed, event, or acquisition is listed for the period 1570-85.

42 Jan de Pottre, *Dagboek van Jan de Pottre 1549-1602*, ed. by B. de St. Genois (Ghent: C. Annoot-Braeckman, 1861), p. 113.

43 Jean Théodore De Raadt, 'Le registre de la confrérie de Sainte Barbe en l'église Sainte Gudule à Bruxelles', *Messenger des sciences historiques de Belgique* (1893), 286-310 (pp. 297-98, 309-10).

44 De Pottre, *Dagboek*, pp. 34, 37, 43, 63, 80-81, 94.

45 Guido Marnef, 'Het protestantisme te Brussel, c. 1567-1585', *Tijdschrift voor Brusselse geschiedenis*, 1 (1984), 57-82; Guido Marnef, 'Het protestantisme te Brussel onder de "Calvinistische Republiek", c. 1577-1585', in *État et religion aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles. Staat en religie in de 15e en 16e eeuw (Actes du colloque à Bruxelles du 9 au 12 octobre 1984. Handelingen van het colloquium te Brussel van 9 tot 12 oktober 1984)*, ed. by Willem Pieter Blockmans and Herman Van Nuffel (Brussels: Van Nuffel, 1986), pp. 231-99; Emile M. Braekman, 'Le protestantisme bruxellois sous la République calviniste', in *État et religion*, ed. by Blockmans and Van Nuffel, pp. 301-18; Johan Decavele, 'Reformatie en Contrareformatie', in *Brussel. Groei van een hoofdstad*, ed. by Jean Stengers (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1979), pp. 93-115; Emile M. Braekman, *Het protestantisme te Brussel: van de oorsprong tot aan het overlijden van Leopold I* (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 1980).

46 ASB, HA, Register 3413, fols 283^v, 284^{rv}, and 288^r.

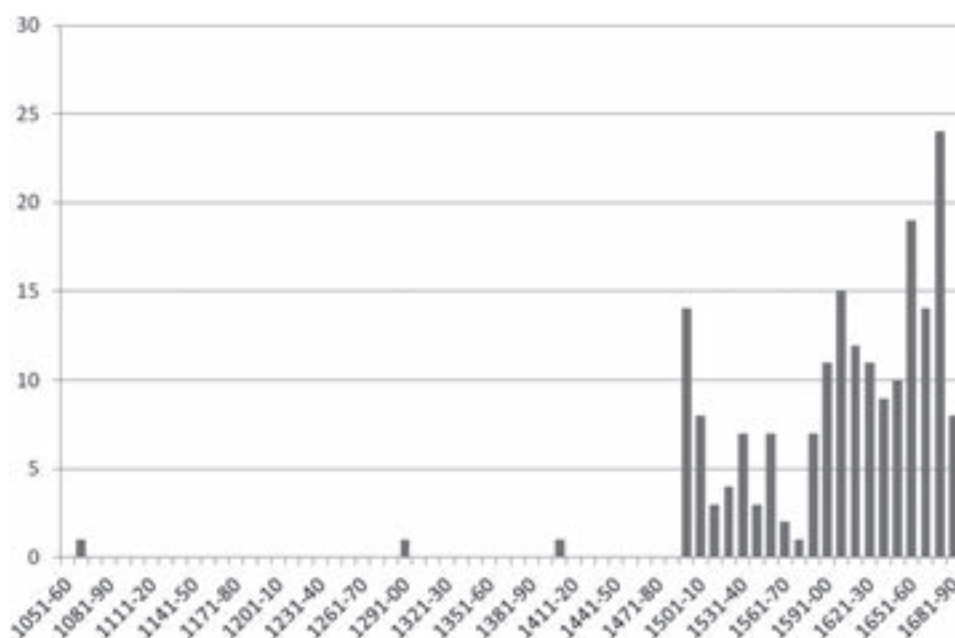


FIGURE 1: Frequency of entries in the inventory of the Seven Sorrows confraternity, arranged per decade (1051–1690). Source: ASB, HA, Register 1499.

The lack of inventoried objects with a (demonstrable) fifteenth- or sixteenth-century origin indicates that the confraternity presumably suffered material losses as well. On the other hand, the profusion of entries related to the year of Reconciliation and the following years, and the large investments in art, furniture, and chapel decorations during the first decades of the seventeenth century point to a new start during the reign of Albert and Isabella.

In short, through his selection of facts the author produced a linear history of the confraternity, a story of continuity and progress. He conveyed the idea that things got better, larger, and bigger. Above all it is a story of accumulation – of splendour, wealth, and networks – in which there was no space for crisis, decline, or any other incident.

Processing of Information

Guilds and confraternities were obsessive in their concern about origins and age, since these defined their position in the social pecking order and their access to privileges. There are numerous examples of guilds that pushed their foundation back in time, to the building of a city, the emergence of trade as the governing principle of human interaction, and even to the time of Solomon's temple, Noah's ark, or the creation of man.⁴⁷ Here as well, the history of the Seven Sorrows confraternity starts well before its formal institution. In the opening lines of the inventory, the author mentioned the foundation of St Gorik's church

⁴⁷ Jacobs, 'Zonder twijfel dat waarschijnlijk', pp. 248, 258-65. Similar concerns about the ancient origins of the association are apparent in the choice of patron saints: Frederik Verleynsen, 'Het hemelse festijn. Religieuze cultuur, sociabiliteit en sociale relaties in de corporatieve wereld van Antwerpen, Brussel en Gent (c. 1585-c. 1795)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Brussels, 2005), pp. 146-51.

by Count Lambert the Stammerer, who died on the battlefield in 1063 (sic), followed by the construction of the chapel of Our Lady at the end of the thirteenth century, and the institutionalization of the devotion to the Virgin Mary through the grant of an indulgence in 1401.⁴⁸ These three ‘historical facts’ selected by the author provided evidence for the ancient roots of the Seven Sorrows devotion, and attested to the association’s historical importance and its prestige.

At the same time, this ‘narrative trick’ inserts the history of the confraternity into both the history of St Gorik’s church and the ecclesiastical history of the town. However, a striking ‘mistake’ in the Seven Sorrows inventory is the confusion between the Count of Leuven Lambert I (d. 1015, on the battlefield of Florennes), his son the Count of Leuven Lambert II called *Balderik* (d. 1062-1063), and Lambert ‘the Stammerer’, a twelfth-century priest and reformer from Liège. It is not known who was responsible for this confusion, but it is probably due to the merging of two traditions which explain the foundation of St Gorik’s church. The episode is based, firstly, on the foundation tradition established by Hennen van Merchtenen in his *Cornicke van Brabant*, written in 1414.⁴⁹ Van Merchtenen himself had already mixed up two foundation stories, mentioned separately in Jan van Boendale’s *Brabantsche Yeesten* from the first half of the fourteenth century: on the one hand, the foundation of the canonical chapters of Brussels and Leuven by the Count of Leuven Lambert II called *Balderik* in the middle of the eleventh century; on the other hand the construction of a residence and a chapel on the isle of St Gorik by the Duke of Lorraine Charles of France during the tenth century.⁵⁰ The second source for the foundation story in the Seven Sorrows inventory is an alternative tradition that existed in St Gorik’s church, which attributed the foundation of the church to the Count of Leuven Lambert I, as is explained by the phrase *Lambertus comes fundator hujus ecclesie* (‘Count Lambert founder of this church’) written on a church pillar.⁵¹ By creatively merging both traditions, the author of the inventory shows that the history of the confraternity was inextricably bound up with that of St Gorik’s church and with the early ecclesiastical history of the city itself.

Another remarkable feature of the Seven Sorrows inventory is the author’s tendency to provide metadata about the properties listed: physical descriptions of the objects, dates of acquisition, cost price or exchange value in the case of gifts, the names of donor(s), the artists or craftsmen in the case of artistic or high-value items, and the confraternity’s members involved in the commission. The author mentions, for instance, that the wooden structure of the confraternity altar was ordered and paid by the noblewoman Philippina van Busleiden in 1655. The sculpted frame of the Seven Sorrows statue and a pair of confessionals were partly financed by the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, and the construction of the frame lasted from 1615 until 1616 and was carried out by cabinetmaker

48 ASB, HA, Register 1499, pp. 3-4.

49 The text of Hennen van Merchtenen’s chronicle reads: ‘Ende des grave Lambrecht waest die de canesie stecht Sente Peters, te Lovene, in stede, ende te Bruessel, Sente Goedelen mede. Ende hij woende te Bruessel binnen tusschen .ii. erm van der Sennen, daer hij .i. capelle dede’ (*Hennen van Merchtenen’s Cornicke van Brabant* (1414), ed. by Guido Gezelle (Ghent: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde, 1896), l. 1392-98).

50 Bram Vannieuwenhuyze, ‘L’histoire des origines et du développement de Bruxelles, est-elle née au Moyen Âge?’, in *Ab urbe condita... Fonder et refonder la ville: récits et représentations (second Moyen Âge-premier XVI^e siècle). Actes du colloque international de Pau (14-15-16 mai 2009)*, ed. by Véronique Lamazou-Duplan (Pau: Presses Universitaires de Pau, 2011), pp. 382-84.

51 Henne and Wauters, *Histoire de Bruxelles*, I, pp. 22-23.

Francois Cosijns for the sum of 850 guilders.⁵² The Seven Sorrows inventory thus provides far more than a trivial list of possessions and properties. It reconstructs the context of acquisition and in so doing it reveals a rich culture of patronage and gift-giving. The author does not calculate an overall estimate of the confraternity's means, but by providing a number of specific, suggestive details, he evokes at least the impression of splendour and wealth. At the same time, he maps the confraternity's network of patrons among the Brussels' elite.

A similar 'network approach' can be found in property inventories of other associations across Europe,⁵³ such as the guild of Our Lady of the Dry Tree in Bruges or the confraternity of the Miraculous Sacrament in Leuven.⁵⁴ In the latter case, the donors' motives for gift-giving are recorded as well.⁵⁵ Behind these metadata (the dates in particular) there is a further act of appropriation. The confraternity's aggregated property clearly possesses historical roots. However, given that the objects described are still part of the confraternity's actual belongings, they constitute a direct link between present and past. In this way, the author of the Seven Sorrows inventory creates a subtle sense of dynamics in his – for the rest – rather rigid historical account.

Author's Intentions and Readers' Experience

This last section compares the Seven Sorrows inventory with other histories produced by associations in order to reveal the intentions of the author and the audience targeted. Some historical accounts were intended for publication. Many confraternities printed small-sized volumes containing a few pages on the foundation history and development of the association, in addition to regulations, model prayers, instructions for a devout way of life, surveys of benefits connected to membership, and so forth. Other histories were not duplicated by the printing press, but were nonetheless generally available since they were written down in splendid books accessible to the public in the confraternity's chapels or other places.⁵⁶ Still other histories were produced *ad hoc*, in communication with the authorities, for instance, or in court documents and were not intended to be distributed at all.⁵⁷ The Bruges guild of the butchers even integrated a history of its most memorable actions in its printed New Year's greetings for the year 1788.⁵⁸

52 'Item, het houtwerck van den autær, het welck heeft doen maken de edele jouffrouwe Philippina van Buselijden ende bekostight in het jaer seshien hondert vijf en vijftigh. Item, het schrijn houte wercke waer in de Seven Weenen gesneden met twee bichtstoelen, welck maken van die schrijn werck ten deele heeft bekostight den hertogh Albertus ende Isabella, sijne huijsvrouw, saeliger memorie, waer in hunne wapenen gestelt sijn, welcke van sneijden hebben gecost met negen Bourgonsche cruijcen drij en twintigh guldens. Het voorseijde schrijn werck is gemackt ofte begonst in het jaer een duijsent ses hondert en vijftien ende voleijndt in het jaer een duijsent ses hondert seshien door Francois Cosijns schrijnwercker ende heeft gekost volgens accoort acht hondert vijftigh guldens, sonder daer onder begrepen de bichtstoelen ofte gesneden werck' (ASB, HA, Register 1499, p. 26).

53 Kilburn-Toppin, 'Material Memories of the Guildsmen', p. 169.

54 Maximiliaan P. J. Martens, 'Artistic Patronage in Bruges Institutions, c. 1440-1482' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1992), p. 310; Jos Wils, *Le Sacrement de Miracle de Louvain (1374-1905). Monographie Historique et Religieuse* (Leuven: Wils, 1905).

55 Leuven, State Archive/Rijksarchief Leuven, Archive of the church of St James / Archief Sint-Jacobskerk, no. 719 (*Liber confraternitatis Sanctissimi Miraculosi apud P.P. Augustinianos Lovanii*), fols 85ff (1618-1817) and fols 113ff (1558-1773).

56 The ancient registers of the confraternity of Our Lady in St Peter's church in Leuven, for instance, could still be admired in the sacristy of Our Lady (Martinus-Geldolphus Vander Buecken, *Wonderen Bystandt van de Alder-Heylighste Maeght ende Moeder Godis Maria, Bethoont aen Haere Getrouwe Dienaers in de vermaerde collegiaele ende parochiaele Hooft-Kercke van den Heyligen Petrus binnen Loven, Hooft-Stadt van Brabant. Met den List der H.H. Reliquien Berustende in de voorsz. Kercke* (Leuven: Theod. C.J. De Zangré, 1757), p. 46).

57 Jacobs, 'Zonder twijfel dat waarschijnlijk', pp. 231-74; Brecht Dewilde, 'In de ban van hertog Jan. Schuttersgilde en kleinhandelsrevolutie in Leuven, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw', *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek*, 29 (2012), 99-119.

58 Vanden Bergh, *Jacobijnen en Traditionalisten*, I, pp. 170-71.

Recently, Susie Speakman Sutch and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene demonstrated how the Habsburg dynasty promoted the devotion to the Lady of Sorrows in order to create ‘a large spiritual and emotional community that identified with the Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty and its ideology of peace and territorial unity.’⁵⁹ Key to the promotion of the Seven Sorrows devotion was a network of confraternities in the major cities of Flanders, Brabant, Holland and Zeeland. In 1517, the young future Emperor Charles V ordered Jan van Coudenberghe to redact a volume that retraced the foundation history of this confraternity network.⁶⁰ The resulting volume, written in Latin and printed in 1519, was translated into Dutch by the Jesuit Jacob Stratius in 1622.⁶¹ At the request of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, another book was published in 1615, in both French and Dutch. It contains a brief introduction to the foundation history of the Brussels confraternity, besides a series of spiritual exercises and meditations on the sorrows of the Virgin.⁶²

Both printed volumes and their translations were primarily aimed at the promotion of the Seven Sorrows devotion and the confraternity network. The 1519 volume by Van Coudenberghe highlighted the role of Philip the Fair and the pious motives of the Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty. Great efforts were made to explain the miracles that led to the institution of the various confraternity chapters and to defend the theological accuracy of the Seven Sorrows cult. It was the opinion of the court that in the period of civil war and social unrest following the death of Mary of Burgundy, contemplation of the Sorrows of the Virgin might bring peace to the people and free the country of fear and terror.⁶³ According to Van Coudenberghe, the cult of the Seven Sorrows flourished precisely because it was a joint project of the Burgundian-Habsburg rulers and the ordinary people. Speakman Sutch and Van Bruaene situate the writings of Van Coudenberghe in what they call the ‘Habsburg theatre state’. The same imaginations, identifications, and religious sensitivities were recuperated by Albert and Isabella in the early seventeenth century in order to support the Catholic Reformation.⁶⁴ In both cases, the printed histories of the Seven Sorrows confraternity(-ies) served a public goal: the promotion of the cult and membership of the confraternity.⁶⁵

The Seven Sorrow inventory – to return to our source – serves different goals and perhaps also targets another audience. The audience and goals are not manifest in the preparation of the manuscript, but we will propose a possible intention below. The register

59 Susie Speakman Sutch and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, ‘The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary: Devotional Communication and Politics in the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries, c. 1490-1520’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61 (2010), p. 254.

60 Jan van Coudenberghe, *Ortus progressus et impedimenta fraternitatis beatissimae virginis Mariae de passione quae dicitur de septem doloribus* (Antwerp: Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraten, 1519).

61 Jacob Stratius, *Onse L. Vrouwe der seven weeen met de mirakelen, getyden, ende misse der selver: insgelycx den oorspronck, ende voortganck der broederschap* (Antwerp: Guiliam Lesteens, 1622).

62 *Briefve relation de la confrairie des Sept Douleurs de Notre Dame instituée par le serenissime prince Philippe de haute mémoire, Archiducq d’Autrice, Duc de Bourgogne, de Brabant etc., en l’an de Notre Seigneur 1498 en l’église de S. Géry en Bruxelles* (Brussels: Hubert Anthoine, 1615); *Cort verhael van het broederschap vande Seve[n] Weeden van Onser Lieve Vrouwe. Inghestelt by den doorluchtichsten Prince hoogher memorie Philippus Eertzhertoch van Oostenrijk, Hertoch van Bourgognen, van Brabant, etc. int jaer ons Heeren 1498. binnen der kercke van S. Guericx tot Brussel. Ghededicert aen den Magistraet der selver stadt [...] Overgheset uyt het françois, door F.I.V.A.M. (Brussels: Huybrecht Anthoon, 1615). This book was translated into Spanish as well; see Annick Delfosse, *La ‘Protectrice du Pais-Bas’: Stratégies politiques et figures de la Vierge dans les Pays-Bas espagnols* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), p. 139.*

63 Stratius, *Onse L. Vrouwe der seven weeen*, pp. 188-94.

64 Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, ‘The Habsburg Theatre State: Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries’, in *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, ed. by Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 131-49.

65 *Cort verhael van het broederschap*, pp. 13-14; Stratius, *Onse L. Vrouwe der Seven Weeen*, preface ‘Aenden devoten Leser’.

bears no visible user traces, nor signs of wear. Its size and layout are modest, since the manuscript does not contain any illuminations, rubrications, or page decorations. Although the handwriting is neat and there are barely any cross-outs or alterations, the manuscript gives a rather sloppy impression. Hence, it seems doubtful that the register was ever used as a showpiece, to be displayed on the altar in the confraternity chapel for public inspection and admiration. Nor could it be interpreted as the rough copy of a text destined for publication, for its structure and content do not correspond to that of other confraternity booklets.

The Seven Sorrows register does, however, possess clear similarities to the register of the Leuven hand-bow guild of St Sebastian, which was begun in 1638.⁶⁶ In this volume the *overkoningstabel* (superintendent) and lord of Lovenjoel Ferdinand van Spoelberch (1596-1675) thematically classified all knowledge and memories about the history, traditions, achievements, and privileges of his beloved guild. Although the content is neatly arranged and presented in a pleasant handwriting, illustrations and decorations are completely lacking. As is the case with the Seven Sorrows inventory, the St Sebastian register only contains a plain text, which indicates that it was not meant for public display. In the preface and dedication, Spoelberch made abundantly clear that the register was intended for the inner circle of guild members. He argued that many guild traditions had fallen into disuse, were corrupted by time or were simply forgotten. He explained the causes for this decline in an allegorical way, as a severe winter and a biting northern wind, which allude to the period of the Dutch Revolt when many associations were no longer functioning or were losing legitimacy as cornerstones of the urban fabric. A 'return to the past', as Spoelberch proposed, would help his fellow guild members to arm themselves against outside mockery and would be effective to regain their lost pride.

A steady position requires firm roots. For Spoelberch and the archers of the St Sebastian guild, history and tradition were of major importance for creating a collective identity. Their aim was not so much to present a comprehensive, well-structured account of the foundation and further development of the association, but to picture – or imagine – a continuity between the present and the (idealized) past. In this case, the guild was 'calling in the past to redress the balance of the present', as Lawrence Stone put it.⁶⁷ It was gazing back to remove that awkward feeling that things were not what they used to be.

The same mechanism seems to apply to the Brussels confraternity of the Seven Sorrows. Though a direct reason for the compilation of the inventory has not surfaced, it might be inspired by a similar concern to increase internal cohesion and corporate identity by taking up the past. In the wake of the Catholic Reform, the Seven Sorrows confraternity regained its prominent position with the support of Albert and Isabella. The archdukes recognized the importance of guilds and confraternities for state formation and confessionalization, which resulted in a rich culture of patronage.⁶⁸ By 1650, however, the dynamics

⁶⁶ Brussels, Collection of Philippe d'Arschot: *Antiquiteyten ende privilegien der oude, groete, ende edele hand-boge-gulde binnen dese vermaerde boot-stadt van Loven*, c. 1638, with additions up to 1795. For a copy of this manuscript, see: Leuven, University Archives/Universiteitsarchief Leuven, P98: *Archives of the Family Spoelberch de Lovenjoel/Archief van de familie Spoelberch de Lovenjoel*, Annex.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 751 – quoted in Verleysen, 'Het hemelse festijn', p. 210.

⁶⁸ Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 67; *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621. Essays*, ed. by Werner Thomas and Luc Duerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998); Luc Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 212-13.

of the Catholic Reform were waning.⁶⁹ It is not yet clear to what extent the Seven Sorrows confraternity suffered from this development and whether or not it could uphold its position as a cornerstone of the Brussels urban and religious fabric. The inventory demonstrates that a need was felt to collect the memories and the available information about the history and the artefacts of the confraternity. Yet whether this was inspired by a feeling of discomfort with the present functioning of the association or whether this fitted within a new emerging interest in history among broad layers of the Brussels society is difficult to establish.

Conclusion: A Tangible History

Until now, not much research has been done on history writing by early modern associations. This article argues that the treatment of the past might vary within a single association, depending on which goal was achieved and which audience was targeted. Our analysis suggests that the Seven Sorrows inventory was destined for the inner circle of confraternity members or at least for a subgroup of board members and affiliates. The internal history was probably used to forge a collective identity. Such a strategy is not unusual, as it is easy to draw a parallel with monastery and abbey histories from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for instance.⁷⁰

Interesting, however, is that the author of the Seven Sorrows inventory wrote or compiled a history on the basis of objects or privileges supported by official documents. The author codified the history of the Seven Sorrows confraternity as if there had been no changes or decline through time. On the contrary, readers received a story of continuity, unity, and progress, based on the subtle selection of what to describe and what to leave aside. Such narrative procedure conveys the impression of a prestigious confraternity with a considerable supply of economic and social capital.

But the inventory does more: it makes the confraternity's history *tangible*. The objects in the confraternity's possession are presented as a tangible history, as souvenirs of the past. By looking at the objects described in the inventory, by touching them or by participating in the activities amidst them, the confraternity members might *experience* the history of their association. The Seven Sorrows inventory, then, is much more than a mere account of the confraternity's history; it serves as a manual for a historic sensation and evokes the great days of the association by means of a guided tour along the confraternity's patrimony. Precisely this experience-oriented approach of the Seven Sorrows inventory is one that differs from the approach of the printed confraternity booklets, whose main goal was to produce propaganda and to inspire new members. In any case, the confraternity's use of the past to pursue multiple objectives reflects the growing importance of and interest in history in Brussels' culture and society.

⁶⁹ Alfons K. L. Thijs, 'Religion and Social Structure: Religious Rituals in Pre-Industrial Trade Associations in the Low Countries', in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation*, ed. by Maarten Prak and others (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 168, 169, 172.

⁷⁰ Verschaffel, *De boed en de bond*, pp. 29-34.