



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indoor public spaces and the mobility of religious knowledge in late medieval Deventer and Amiens

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Abstract

This article will address the transfer of religious knowledge in two north-western European cities from a spatial perspective. Our starting point will be the thesis that immobile knowledge in closed places of knowledge (*lieux de savoir*) does not exist: (religious) knowledge only becomes functional in the dynamic encounter with users and it is disseminated through social networks. This approach, which involves the movement from closed spaces to processes and practices, also entails a questioning of outdoor and indoor spaces; of private and public spaces. The article will take its start from several case-studies of indoor public spaces, the transmission of religious knowledge and social networks, based on documentation from Deventer in the northern Low Countries and Amiens on the border of the southern Low Countries and France.

Introduction

During the late Middle Ages, transfer of religious knowledge was increasingly located in spaces outside those of the institutional church. Religious knowledge was available for consultation and transmission by all who were interested in open-access urban spaces which also offered the possibility of discussing religious topics and for exchanges, sometimes even about hotly debated topics such as the Immaculate Conception.¹ As this article will argue, the materiality of indoor urban spaces, in this case architecture opening to the street, as well as the presence of material objects and books, were important factors facilitating a wide dissemination of religious knowledge, often in forms of peer-to-peer and horizontal instruction, which co-existed with more traditional top-down processes of instruction along hierarchical and clerical lines.

The argument will be based on case-studies from two north-western European cities, Deventer and Amiens, during the late medieval period. These two cities were

¹M. Hoogvliet, ‘Metaphorical images of the sacred workshop: the confrérie du Puy Notre-Dame in Amiens as a “hybrid forum”’, *Church History and Religious Culture*, 99 (2019), 387–411.

selected for several reasons: firstly, because of the extraordinarily rich late medieval archival documentation preserved in both cities; secondly, because both Deventer and Amiens were larger mid-sized regional cities and a focus on these lesser-studied examples will enrich and broaden research that has generally been focused upon larger and internationally renowned urban centres; and, thirdly, these two examples make it possible to take into consideration a large geographical area and diverse linguistic influences. Fifteenth-century Deventer was an important commercial hub and its inhabitants actively participated in exchanges between the Netherlands, the Empire and northern Europe.² For most of the fifteenth century, Amiens was part of the Burgundian Low Countries; later, it became a northern border town of the French kingdom. The local vernacular language in Amiens was Picard-French, but commercially and culturally the city remained predominantly oriented towards the Middle Dutch-speaking Low Countries.³ As a consequence, the analysis of late medieval sources from these two cities will also uncover broader and widely shared material, social and religious urban practices.⁴

The materiality of religious knowledge transfer will also be approached from a spatial perspective. It will take its start from the thesis that ‘static’ knowledge in closed and enclosed places of knowledge (*lieux de savoir*)⁵ does not exist: knowledge, including religious knowledge, only becomes functional when it is appropriated and transformed by users and disseminated through social and spatial networks. People walking through the streets of late medieval cities encountered multiple sites where they could freely access religious knowledge, while several among them had mobile media (portable books, notebooks, memorized texts) fastened to their bodies while moving through urban space.⁶ Following this line of thought, we propose to look at religious knowledge transfer through historical urban space from the perspective of the actors and their movements in the material manifestations of public space.⁷ This approach, which is shifting away from closed and immobile spaces to privilege open access, processes, movement and practices instead, also entails an examination of the porosity of the walls of urban private spaces, as well as addressing indoor spaces that could function as public space for urban societies.

In order to create a framework to situate this analysis, we will start with reflections on the particularities of the public–private divide during the late Middle Ages and on

²H. Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer*, Part I: Oorsprong en Middeleeuwen (Zutphen, 2006).

³M. Hoogvliet, ‘Producing and reproducing local maps: the example of Amiens’, *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture*, 6 (2018), 78–104.

⁴M. Hoogvliet, M.F. Fernández Chaves and R.M. Pérez García (eds.), *Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation (1400–1600)* (Turnhout, 2023).

⁵For the discussion of the concept ‘lieu de savoir’, see C. Jacob, *Qu’est-ce qu’un lieu de savoir?* (Marseille, 2014), <https://books.openedition.org/oep/423?lang=en>, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4000/books.oep.423>. See also C. Jacob, ‘Lieux de savoir: places and spaces in the history of knowledge’, *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge*, 1 (2017), 85–102, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1086/692293>.

⁶A. Jansson and J. Falkheimer, ‘Towards a geography of communication’, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication: The Spatial Turn in Media Studies* (Göteborg, 2006), 9–25; P.C. Adams, *Geographies of Media and Communication: A Critical Introduction* (Chichester, 2009); P.C. Adams et al. (eds.), *Communications/Media/Geographies* (New York, 2016); P.C. Adams and B. Warf (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Media Geographies* (Abingdon, 2022).

⁷S. Rau, ‘Writing spatial relations and dynamics: movements in urban space (Barcelona, 16th–19th century)’, in S. Rau and E. Schönherr (eds.), *Mapping Spatial Relations, Their Perceptions and Dynamics: The City Today and in the Past* (Heidelberg and New York, 2014), 139–56.

the material and architectural specificities of freely accessible public spaces that could stretch to indoor sites, especially in the cooler climate of northern Europe during this period. We will proceed by discussing cases of late medieval indoor public spaces within an urban context, spaces that were freely accessible to a broad range of local city dwellers and foreign visitors, where exchange of religious information took place and where religious knowledge was stored, discussed, studied and disseminated. We will first address these mobility and transfer processes in the urban 'institutional' houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer in the Netherlands, as well as in informal, private and yet public spaces in the homes of some Deventer burghers. In the second part of the article we will consider urban inns and taverns as indoor public spaces of religious knowledge transfer in Deventer and in the francophone city Amiens.

Understanding indoor public space

The approach selected for this article, which in the first instance implies a transition from the conceptualization of closed and immobile spaces to that of open access, processes, movement and practices, also entails a questioning of the porosity of private and public spaces, as well as of outdoor and indoor spaces. The definition of public and private space varies considerably according to the culture and historical period in question. Recent research has shown that public and private were conceptualized and used in a specific manner during the late Middle Ages: private houses, for example, usually had a 'public dimension',⁸ while the boundaries were at once 'fluid' and 'fragile'.⁹ As for religious observances such as devotions and other faith-related practices carried out in a domestic setting that involved reading and knowledge transfer, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin note that these were 'often simultaneously personal, familial and communal'.¹⁰ Echoing Mary Douglas, they state that 'the house is a space and a community: it is a repository of memory, a place where each individual is expected to invest in the collective good, somewhere with an aesthetic and moral dimension'.¹¹ This characteristic points to one fundamental aspect of domestic devotions: 'spiritual ties expand outwards from the domestic

⁸P. Hohti, 'Domestic space and identity: artisans, shopkeepers and traders in sixteenth-century Siena', *Urban History*, 37 (2010), 372–85. See further on public and private during this period: D. Austin, 'Private and public: an archaeological consideration of things', in H. Kühnel *et al.* (eds.), *Die Vielfalt der Dinge: Neue Wege zur Analyse mittelalterlicher Sachkultur* (Vienna, 1998), 163–205; F. Kaspar, 'Das mittelalterliche Haus als öffentlicher und privater Raum', in Kühnel *et al.* (eds.), *Die Vielfalt der Dinge*, 207–35; C. Emmelius *et al.* (eds.), *Offen und Verborgen: Vorstellungen und Praktiken des Öffentlichen und Privaten in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2004); B. Saint-Jean Vitus, 'Galeries de circulation dans les maisons bourguignonnes (XIIe–XVIe siècle)', in D. Alexandre-Bidon *et al.* (eds.), *Cadre de vie et manières d'habiter (XIIe–XVIe s.)* (Caen, 2006), 91–101; A. Querrien, 'L'espace de la maison: le jeu des intérêts publics et privés (XIIe–XVe siècle)', in Alexandre-Bidon *et al.* (eds.), *Cadre de vie et manières d'habiter*, 313–24; M. Green, L.C. Nørgaard and M. Birkedal Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches* (Leiden, 2021); N. De Raedt, 'Belonging to the individual or the collective? The urban residence as a public/private building in Renaissance Italy (1300–1500)', *Privacy Studies Journal*, 2 (2023), 35–50, <https://doi.org/10.7146/psj.v2i.132278>.

⁹M. Faini and A. Meneghin, 'Introduction', in A. Meneghin, M. Faini and M. Corry (eds.), *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden, 2018), 1–30, at 2.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 2.

sphere, enmeshing the whole community in a network of social relationships that had a religious dimension'.¹²

During the fifteenth century, in the area that currently encompasses the Netherlands, Flanders and northern France, external factors may have been at play in drawing public activities away from urban streets and squares and into indoor spaces. There is historical evidence documenting an increased occurrence of harsh winters and a cooling of the climate in north-western Europe, most notably perceptible after the 1430s, the so-called Spörer Solar Minimum.¹³ The colder winters during this period probably impacted local features in houses and workshops, as well as the architectural approach to institutional buildings throughout north-western Europe, given that more heating was needed, and indoor activities required daylight to penetrate window openings. When travelling through Germany, the Low Countries and France during the years 1517 to 1518, the Italian Antonio de Beatis observed the presence of two- or three-sided bow windows constructed with glass in Germany that facilitated the mutual visibility of both indoor spaces and the street. Proceeding further through the regions situated to the north and to the west of Cologne, de Beatis, moreover, noted the widespread presence of fireplaces in rooms, as well as much larger window openings than in his home area, Puglia in southern Italy.¹⁴

These particularities in house construction which the Italian traveller observed can equally be found in surviving architectural remnants from the fifteenth century throughout the Low Countries where fireplaces with chimneys probably had become more commonplace as of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁵ Houses typically had tall and narrow window openings, with leaded glass panes comprising small discs, squares, or lozenges covering the upper parts, while the lower parts were open or covered with a screen.¹⁶ Shutters were attached in order to close off the lower

¹²*Ibid.*, 9.

¹³J.A. Eddy, 'The Maunder Minimum', *Science*, 192/4245 (1976), 1189–202, esp. 1196–9; E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire humaine et comparée du climat*, vol. I: *Canicules et glaciers (XIIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 2004), 17–155 (cooling had already started c. 1300); C. Camenisch, K. Keller *et al.*, 'The early Spörer Minimum – a period of extraordinary climate and socio-economic changes in Western and Central Europe', *Climate of the Past: Discussions* (2016), 1–33; C. Camenisch, 'Endless cold: a seasonal reconstruction of temperature and precipitation in the Burgundian Low Countries during the 15th century based on documentary evidence', *Climate of the Past*, 11 (2015), 1049–66.

¹⁴J.R. Hale (ed.), *The Travel Journal of Antonio de Beatis: Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, France and Italy, 1517–1518* (London, 1979), 81. See also R. Meischke, H.J. Zantkuijl and P.T.E.E. Rosenberg, *Huizen in Nederland. Utrecht, Noord-Brabant en de oostelijke provincies* (Zwolle, 1993), 71–2.

¹⁵Meischke, Zantkuijl and Rosenberg, *Huizen in Nederland*, 11, 18, 27–9.

¹⁶J. Grootaers, 'Het laatmiddeleeuwse huis met houten gevel. Constructieve aspecten van stedelijke Vlaamse houtbouw', in L. Bessemans *et al.* (eds.), *Leven te Leuven in de late Middeleeuwen* (Leuven, 1998), 49–60, at 59; R. Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages* (London, 1993), 92–102; P. Garrigou Grandchamp, 'Vitrage, vitrail, volets. La clôture des fenêtres dans l'architecture civile médiévale en France, du XIIe au début du XVe siècle', in K. Boulanger (ed.), *Le vitrail dans la demeure des origines à nos jours: vitrer et orner la fenêtre* (Ghent, 2018), 12–29; D. Bontemps and M. Héroid, 'La "fenêtre", son vitrage, son décor en France à la fin du Moyen Âge. Exemples et hypothèses de recherches', in Boulanger (ed.), *Le vitrail*, 30–55; M. Héroid, 'Windows in domestic settings in France in the late Middle Ages: enclosure and decoration in the social living space', in E. Carson Pastan and B. Kurmann-Schwarz (eds.), *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass: Materials, Methods, and Expressions* (Leiden, 2019), 132–42; J.-P. Legay, 'La fenêtre, signe extérieur de richesse, instrument de travail, poste d'observation et de propagation du "bruyct" dans les villes françaises au Moyen Âge', in C. Connouchie-Bourgne (ed.), *Par la fenestre: études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales* (Aix-en-Provence, 2003), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pup.2172>.

parts of the window openings if necessary, either from the inside or the outside. Visual documentation reveals that the wooden shutters on the street level were usually open during daytime and working hours (Figure 1). Many urban houses combined a workplace with a retail shop on the ground floor, situated directly on the street level. Wooden shutters, often foldable, were used to close off these workplaces during non-working hours. During regulated working hours they were opened so that merchandise could be displayed and to ensure enough daylight for artisanal work (Figure 2). Furthermore, de Beatis reported that artisans in Paris could be seen working when he passed by in the street.¹⁷ These first-hand observations confirm Jean-Pierre Legay's findings in guild rules which often prescribed that artisans should engage in their daily work while being visible to the public, with shutters, windows and doors all opened. In due course, the urban and domestic window across north-western Europe was to become a place for sociability and social exchange.¹⁸

The presence of relatively large surfaces of clear translucent glass, in combination with shutters and doors that were usually open during daytime activities, demonstrate that the walls of most urban buildings were 'porous' and that 'indoors' and 'outdoors' were strongly connected, even interpenetrating each other. In addition to these fluid boundaries between the public and private spheres as discussed earlier, the specific material characteristics of urban architecture in the Low Countries and northern France strongly suggest that 'public spaces' not only consisted of streets, squares and markets, but that interior spaces of an otherwise industrial, commercial, religious or domestic nature were to a certain extent also treated as public spaces and were perceived as such. Hence, these indoor spaces should be studied as what we would term in this context as 'indoor public space'.

The workshop of the Amiens-based tanner Nicolas Dupuis serves as an illustrative example of indoor and yet public text-based religious knowledge transfer.¹⁹ The objects found in his home and workshop are listed one by one in an inventory compiled shortly after his death in 1517. This document mentions a panel featuring the teachings of Cato (*les enseignements Cathon*) that was found hanging on one of the walls in his workshop. During the Middle Ages, this text was presented as the work of a Roman philosopher. The text was interpolated with moralizing Christian doctrine and it was widely used as a schoolbook for literacy training and teaching correct moral behaviour.²⁰ This panel in Dupuis' workshop probably reproduced memorable aphorisms of Classical-inspired Christian morality. The panel's specific location within the workshop is highly suggestive of its intended audience: Dupuis' own family, his apprentices, co-workers and clients. In light of the fact that his workshop with its open shutters was an indoor public space during the daytime, Cato's text must equally have been aimed at passers-by in the street, the rue des Tanneurs near the busy river port and the main market square.

¹⁷Hale (ed.), *The Travel Journal of Antonio de Beatis*, 116.

¹⁸Legay, 'La fenêtre'; J. De Groot, *At Home in Renaissance Bruges: Connecting Spaces, Objects, People and Domestic Spaces in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Leuven, 2022), 45–78.

¹⁹Amiens, Archives communales, FF 160/24.

²⁰R. Hazelton, 'The Christianization of Cato: the *Disticha Catonis* in the light of late mediaeval commentaries', *Mediaeval Studies*, 19 (1957), 157–73; E. Schulze-Busacker, 'Littérature didactique à l'usage des laïcs aux XIIIe et XIIIe siècles', in P. Boglioni et al. (eds.), *Le petit peuple dans l'Occident médiéval: terminologies, perceptions, réalités* (Paris, 2002), 633–45.



Figure 1. Master of Alkmaar, *Polyptych with the Seven Works of Charity*, 1504 (detail). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-A-2815.

Spaces such as Nicolas Dupuis' workshop were open spaces which could potentially foster the transfer of religious knowledge, but can they truly be considered as public spaces? Jürgen Habermas' conceptualization of *Öffentlichkeit* typically links the idea of the 'public sphere' to the emergence of the capitalist and bourgeois society of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Over recent years, historians of the medieval and early modern periods have questioned Habermas' generalization of



Figure 2. Master of Alkmaar, *Polyptych with the Seven Works of Charity*, 1504 (detail). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-A-2815.

historical processes into a binary ‘before and after’, for example by pinpointing numerous ‘important continuities and overlaps’.²¹ In a similar vein, Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerdhoff have crafted a new definition of public spaces (*öffentliche Räume*) in the late medieval and early modern period:

As public [space], we would like to define spaces that were, in principle, accessible to people from different regional and social backgrounds, as well as to either gender. Furthermore, such spaces should be contoured in such a way as to ensure communication and interactivity and be of relevance to late-medieval and early modern societies. Places where people from diverse backgrounds could enter into complex social exchange relationships, where opinion-forming processes were championed, where conflicts were resolved and decisions made, in short: where a public sphere was produced.²²

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the materiality of late medieval indoor public spaces within an urban context, spaces that were freely accessible to a broad

²¹D. Garrioch, ‘From religious to secular sociability: confraternities and freemasonry in eighteenth-century Paris’, in N. Eckstein and N. Terpstra (eds.), *Sociability and Its Discontents: Civil Society, Social Capital, and Their Alternatives in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2010), 313–26, at 317; M. Rospocher (ed.), *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe* (Bologna and Berlin, 2012); B. Cowan, ‘Rethinking Habermas, gender and sociability in early modern French and British historiography’, in A. Vanhaelen and J.P. Ward (eds.), *Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Geography, Performance, Privacy* (New York, 2013), 41–53; K. Giles, ‘Public buildings in early modern Europe’, in C. Richardson, T. Hamling and D. Gaimster (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2017), 98–114, at 99–101.

²²S. Rau and G. Schwerdhoff, ‘Öffentliche Räume in der frühen Neuzeit. Überlegungen zu Leitbegriffen und Themen eines Forschungsfeldes’, in S. Rau and G. Schwerdhoff (eds.), *Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne: Öffentliche Räume in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Cologne and Vienna, 2004), 11–52, at 48.

range of city dwellers and visitors, where religious knowledge was stored, discussed, studied and, most importantly, where it was shared and disseminated. A first example of processes of mobility and transfer of religious knowledge can be found in the urban ‘institutional’ houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer in the Netherlands, as well as in informal, private and yet public spaces in the homes of some Deventer burghers.

Indoor public religious knowledge transfer: religion in the household

The houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer are one of the most striking manifestations of Modern Devotion, the religious movement that is traditionally connected to Geert Grote and his activities in fourteenth-century Deventer (Figure 3).²³ Indeed, the very process of founding and transforming these communities demonstrates a process of transferring private ownership to the organization of religious communities, in which traditional monastic rules were rejected and replaced by internal regulations (drafted initially by Grote himself) in agreement with city councils and with their active involvement. In the case of Deventer city council, this practice was not limited to the earliest stages of founding the communities, for the city councils had to take responsibility for ‘controlling’ such houses and watch over them and their members, their daily activities and their financial management. Firmly in line with the ideals espoused by Modern Devotion, the fulcrum for communities of the Sisters of the Common Life was to lead a life *int ghemeyn*, i.e. of sharing a common space, pooling financial resources and organizing collective daily activities. Inspired by the earliest Christian communities as described in the Acts of the Apostles, their members were linked by a deep communal yearning to combine not only religious but also daily activities, which were needed to form financially sustainable communities. Community members were not permitted to beg for alms; they were expected to generate and exploit commercial activities and manual labour: weaving and spinning in the case of the Sisters, and the copying and binding of books, as well as educational activities, for the Brothers.²⁴ The emphasis placed on work and on the joint administration of incomes, which had to be shared with the entire community, also implied that prospective members were not selected on the basis of their affluence or lack thereof, or for their capacity to contribute to the

²³Literature on Modern Devotion, the most significant religious movement in the late medieval Low Countries, is particularly extensive. For an overview of the Modern Devout movement, see J. van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2008). See also S. Corbellini, M. Hoogvliet and P. Boonstra, ‘Navigating places of knowledge. The Modern Devotion and religious experience in late medieval Deventer’, in F. Nevola, D. Rosenthal and N. Terpstra (eds.), *Hidden Cities: Urban Space, Geolocated Apps and Public History in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon and New York, 2022), 103–24. On Deventer as centre of the Modern Devotion, see also Koen Goudriaan (ed.), *Vernieuwde innigheid. Over de Moderne Devotie, Geert Grote en Deventer* (Nieuwegein, 2008).

²⁴According to the statutes of the Brothers of the Common Life: ‘Of the various kinds of manual labor, those are particularly recommended that seem to have a greater likeness to things spiritual, such as the work of copying, as the blessed Bernard says, “The serious and prudent soul adjusts itself to its labor” and so on.’ See J. van Engen, ‘A customary for Brothers’, in J. van Engen (ed.), *Devotio Moderna. Basic Writings* (New York, 1988), 158.

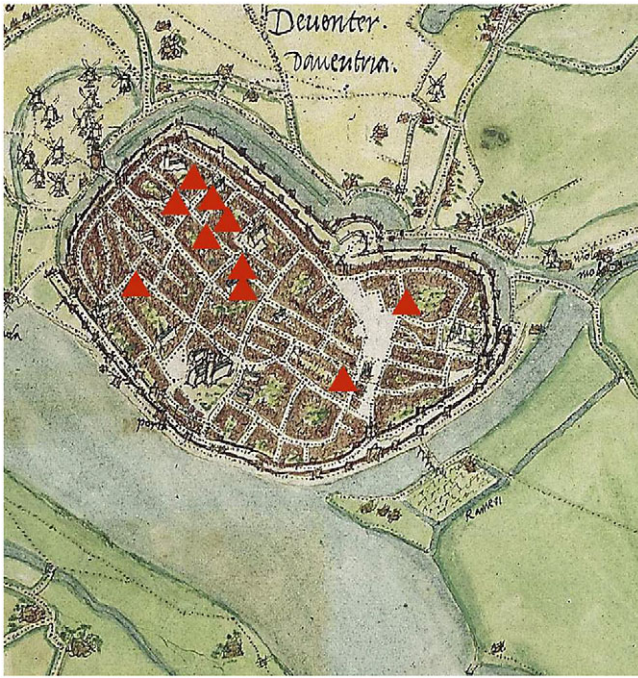


Figure 3. Jacob van Deventer, map of Deventer (detail), 1545. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Res/200. Highlighted: formal and informal meeting houses of the Modern Devout.

community's wealth, or their possession of moveable and immoveable goods.²⁵ Compared with 'traditional' religious communities, the communities of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life were thus open to broader strata of the urban populace. By virtue of their active stance and their pursuit of commercial activities, they were strongly involved in the social fabric of urban life.²⁶ Thanks to such familial, personal and commercial relations, their houses could equally fulfil the function of public indoor spaces for disseminating religious knowledge and texts.

The strong ties between these communities and their urban environment, which constitute the basis for the transmission of religious knowledge localized in the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, are evident when one considers how these institutions were founded. Individual citizens took the initiative, bequeathing their

²⁵This point is also stressed in the Sister Book of the Meester Geertshuis, the community founded by Geert Grote himself, which contrasts the poverty of income with affluence in virtues. See Dirk De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusteren* (The Hague, 1919), 3; and MS Deventer, Athenaeumbibliotheek, 101 F 25 KL, fol. 3r–v.

²⁶This interconnectedness with civic commercial life is of course also problematic, at points. The problematic relation between the Sisters of the Meester Geertshuis and the city council, as described in the sisterbook of the community exemplifies this tension. Due to the political turmoil of 1425–26, the Sisters were forbidden by the city council to leave their houses, to receive visits from other city dwellers, to sell their goods and to practise any kind of commercial activities. These decisions testify of course to the actual situation in the city, in which the Sisters were clearly visible and active in the urban environment. See De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten*, 67–87, and MS Deventer, Athenaeumbibliotheek, 101 F 25 KL, fols. 35v–50r.

own houses or dwellings to a new-born community, or assumed the responsibility of opening up their homes to men or women willing to share a life of work and prayer, thus creating new religious 'sites of knowledge'.²⁷

From the very outset of Modern Devotion, this process assumed a pattern: Geert Grote, for instance, donated his parents' house (1374) 'to behoef der arme luden die Gode dyenen willen nu ende hierna' (for the need of poor people wishing to serve God now and in the future).²⁸ This community of unmarried women and widows – known as the Meester Geerthuis – was under the jurisdiction of the city council, and was initially without any specific religious character and not affiliated to any religious order. Two Deventer aldermen acted as *provisores* and were also responsible for confirming the selection of the *maters*, the communities' female leaders. Such an initiative needs to be situated in the long tradition of the foundation of houses for less affluent urban dwellers, as exemplified by the Stappenhuis funded by Henricus Stappe, *vicarius* of the Lebuinus Church in 1342 which offered refuge to 16 poverty-stricken unmarried women, as well as to poor travellers to Deventer. Coincidentally, the newly founded Meester Geertshuis was located close to the older Stappenhuis, thus creating a religious cluster within Deventer's city walls. Geert Grote's example was followed by his fellow Deventer burghers and neighbours, Johannes Kersteken and Gerrit Brandes, who owned houses next to each other and close to the Meester Geerthuis and the Stappenhuis. This spatial concentration of houses of the Sisters of the Common Life within the city walls but in a less urbanized part of Deventer which was therefore available for establishing new communities is of particular interest: it draws attention to the closely knit spatial aspect of late medieval religious movements and their establishment within the urban fabric, thus allowing for the transformation from lay to religious and sacred space and for creating networks for the exchange of religious material. Such close proximity could also have contributed to the 'visibility' of the communities' houses which, although religious in essence, were still identified by the name of their lay founders and to some extent maintained their original domestic features and links with the urban community. Two other houses of the Sisters of the Common Life point to a slightly different practice in terms of their foundation. In both the Lamme van Diesehuis and the Buiskenhuis, women played a pivotal role in creating a community. The widow Lamme van Dies assembled women in her home and transformed her domestic space into a religious community. Subsequently, the number of participating women grew, and the community came to occupy two neighbouring premises (1388–90). The Buiskenhuis was established at the request of Reinier Buiskens, who donated his house to one of the Sisters affiliated with the Meester Geertshuis on condition that she would establish a religious house, and that his own daughter, Alijt, would also be granted access to the community.²⁹ This house was created in order that women could live together and earn their subsistence by dint of their sewing, weaving and spinning activities, and also to care for boarders, mostly elderly women. These details illustrate certain

²⁷Jacob, 'Lieux de savoir: places and spaces in the history of knowledge'.

²⁸For an overview of those communities founded during Modern Devotion's first phase in Deventer, see Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer*, 284–90. See also S. Krauss, *Die Devotio Moderna in Deventer. Anatomie eines Zentrum der Reformbewegung* (Berlin, 2007).

²⁹On the process for founding the houses of the Sisters of the Common Life, see A. Bollmann, *Frauenleben und Frauenliteratur in der Devotio moderna. Volkssprachige Schwesternbuecher in literarhistorischer Perspektive* (Groningen, 2004).

salient aspects of the houses of the Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer, notably their close links with their urban environment, both from a spatial and a social standpoint. They played a key role in the religious connectivity which characterized late medieval cities.³⁰ The connection between the ‘houses’ and the urban population continued, moreover, also after the first phase of the communities, through donations in kind and practical help in the refurbishment of the premises. A case in point is the donation of linen and towels by the Deventer widow Alijt Hillebrandes to the Sisters of the Brandeshuis, registered after Alijt’s death in 1455.³¹

The public character of these communities, which has not been afforded sufficient attention in traditional historical research, becomes visible on account of the strong ties with the civic government and its aldermen, from the combination of religious and charitable activities and from the organization of religious activities *for* and *with* the lay population. Moreover, the Sisters were sharing official sacred spaces with their fellow city dwellers, at least until the end of the fifteenth century.³² At once visible and recognizable, the Sisters were living proof of the religious transformation Modern Devotion had brought about. Practices such as preaching and organizing monthly colloquies for the urban populace came to characterize the houses of the Brothers of the Common Life and will be discussed in greater detail below. The female communities, for their part, engaged in public works in addition to their participation in daily and commercial activities, through their involvement in the transmission of textual knowledge: ultimately, these houses were to become repositories of religious knowledge at the disposal of local communities, which, in turn, participated in these communities’ religious dynamism.

The core idea of ‘sharing’ and ‘communing with others’ as a voluntary choice, which animated the new communities and constituted the backbone of their organization, also becomes apparent through the exchange of books between religious communities and lay people. Recent research on manuscripts and early printed texts has demonstrated that those communities influenced by Modern Devotion fervently participated in exchanges of textual materials: whenever laypeople donated manuscripts or incunables to the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, they were effectively willing to renege on private ownership and share with a larger community, thus contributing to a process of public religious education.³³ The library attached to

³⁰The concept of ‘religious connectivity’ has been introduced by S. Folkerts (ed.), *Religious Connectivity in Urban Communities (1400–1450). Reading, Worshipping, and Connecting through the Continuum of Sacred and Secular* (Turnhout, 2021).

³¹Historisch Centrum Overijssel, Stadsarchief Deventer, 0722 Rechterlijk archief Deventer, 57. The sisterbook of the Meester Geertshuis refers for example to the contribution of the Deventer citizen Hermen van Delden to the construction of a ‘koehuys’, a barn. As father of two members of the community, he was willing to share his affluence with the Sisters. The background of the donation is described in De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten*, 71.

³²The political turmoil in 1425–26 that prevented the Sisters of the Meester Geertshuis from leaving the house also prevented them from attending religious functions.

³³This process also characterized the creation of the first late medieval and early modern public libraries. See S. Corbellini and M. Hoogvliet, ‘Late medieval urban libraries as a social practice: miscellanies, common profit books, and libraries (France, Italy, the Low Countries)’, in A. Speer and L. Reuke (eds.), *Die Bibliothek – The Library – La bibliothèque: Denkräume und Wissensordnung* (Berlin, 2020), 379–98. On the sharing of manuscripts between laypeople and religious communities, see Johanneke Uphoff, ‘Dit boec heft gegeven. Book donation as indicator of a shared culture of devotion in the late medieval Low Countries’, in Folkerts (ed.), *Religious Connectivity*, 99–124. See also T. Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender,*

the Heer-Florenshuis, one of the earliest communities of the Brothers of the Common Life in Deventer, housed a number of manuscripts and incunables donated by Deventer citizens, whose donation was registered in the colophons.³⁴ In some cases, the books donated to these communities were actually used in enacting forms of public literacy. Katharina van Arkel, one of the Sisters at the Meester Geertshuis, for example, would read from her books with those people she was interacting with during business transactions on behalf of the convent or while she was staying at taverns during her travels.³⁵ Books formed a continuum, interlinking lay and religious domains, public and private spheres and indoor and outdoor spaces.³⁶

Furthermore, the houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life established a vital connection between domestic and religious space: the Sisters became sources of inspiration for other women, who were willing to transform their own private space into an open space so as to perform religious practices. Although research on these informal communities is still lacking, an examination of the last wishes of Katharina Kerstkens, an affluent late fifteenth-century Deventer widow, reveals that establishing small religious communities in domestic space was commonplace.³⁷ Kerstkens laid down that after her death she wished that one of her houses ‘bewoent worden met .iiiiij. (4) of .v. (5) personen diet om gods wille begeren’, should be used by four or five people willing to fulfil God’s wish, i.e. who were willing to pursue a religious life. Kerstkens herself might have been living in a house together with three ‘spiritual sisters’, probably kindred spirits participating in her daily and religious activities.³⁸

Kerstkens and her spiritual sisters were probably performing their devotional activities, making use of those objects that have been reconstructed through a scrutiny of Deventer household inventories. Deventer citizens routinely possessed holy water stoups, sacred paintings, printed religious images, paternosters, *Agnus Dei* and small foldable chairs which they used during sermons.³⁹ Each of these religious objects serves as a reminder of just how domesticity and religiosity had consolidated, a process which was propagated by late medieval treatises for the laity. The fifteenth-century treatise in the Middle Dutch vernacular, *De Spieghel ofte reghel der kerstenghelove*, a mirror for lay believers, specifies, for example, that both family and other household members should attend mass every feast day and go to communion at least four times a year. While in church they were asked to listen to the word of God and discuss it together at home in the evenings. They were also requested to read every

Patronage, and Spiritual Authority (Philadelphia, 2014), 103–25. For printed texts, see A. Dlabacova and P. Stoop, ‘Incunabula in communities of Canonesses Regular and Tertiaries related to the *Devotio Moderna*. Towards an “inclusive” approach of late medieval book ownership in the Low Countries’, *Quaerendo*, 51 (2021), 219–48.

³⁴S. Corbellini, ‘Lezers, kopiisten en boekverkopers in de middeleeuwse stad’, in *Verlichte geesten. De IJsselstreek als internationaal religieus-cultureel centrum in de late middeleeuwen* (2012), 41–53.

³⁵M. van Dijk, ‘1350–1500. Nieuwe en nieuwe doelgroepen’, in S. Folkerts and G. Verhoeven (eds.), *Deventer Boekenstad: Twaalf eeuwen boekcultuur aan de IJssel* (Amsterdam, 2020), 41.

³⁶Uphoff, ‘*Dit boec heft gegeven*. Book donation as indicator of a shared culture of devotion’.

³⁷Katharina Kerstkens’ testaments have been discussed in Corbellini, Hoogvliet and Boonstra, ‘Navigating places of knowledge’, 120–1.

³⁸Both Katharina Kerstkens’ testaments are preserved in Collectie Overijssel, Stadsarchief Deventer, nr. 722, inv. 25 and inv. 26q.

³⁹Information about the presence of religious objects in the Deventer household is based on R. Meischke, B. Dubbe et al., *Thuis in de late middeleeuwen* (Zwolle, 1980), 77–8.

evening a chapter from a religious book and the Seven Hours of our Lady, either in Latin or in Middle Dutch.⁴⁰ This reference to their communal discussions on passages from the Gospels is particularly relevant as it underscores how domestic space had been transformed into sacred space.

Such use of domestic space was not restricted to members of the household; people from outside could also participate in certain forms of religious services and devotional reading activities. A typical example is an anonymous Bruges lady, who happened to be the recipient of a set of letters and a religious treatise written by a Franciscan c. 1480 and now kept in Leuven, Maurits Sabbebibliotheek.⁴¹ In one of these letters, the Franciscan refers to activities taking place at her Bruges residence: he describes how he had been organizing religious meetings in her domestic space with a group of people willing to discuss with him topics such as temptation, venial and mortal sins. Given that she had to leave on other business during one of these meetings, he noted down the focal points of their discussions and shared with her the highlights of the programme of religious education which was taking place in her house. Two points need to be stressed in this unique first-hand description of religious domestic life in the late medieval Netherlands: the fact that the lady was hosting religious meetings in her house and, perhaps most importantly, that her own domestic space was open to those who were participating in communal religious instruction activities.

This lady's religious education programme is, moreover, as Pieter Boonstra states, even more articulated. The spiritual guidance offered by the anonymous friar entails both conversations and exchange of texts. In addition to the series of letters, the manuscript contains several sermons, four of which seem to be *reportationes* drawn up by the friar minor after listening to the sermons himself – a rather unique example of Middle Dutch sermons preached in public being recorded by a member of the congregation and successively transformed in reading texts for lay users.⁴² As in the case of the programme of religious education performed in a domestic space, the transposition of sermons into reading texts for use in a personal or collective use in an indoor space testifies to the transformation of domestic spaces into sites of religious education.

***In taberna*: urban taverns and inns as indoor public spaces of religious knowledge transfer**

Like the drinking song *In taberna quando sumus*, part of the *Carmina Burana*, medieval sources often depict venues such as inns, taverns and wine houses as sinful

⁴⁰P. Bange, *Een handvol wijsheden. Eenvoudig geloof in de vijftiende eeuw: Spieghel ofte reghel der kersten ghelove* (Nijmegen, 2000), 87–8. See also A. Dlabacova, 'Printed pages, perfect souls? Ideals and instructions for the devout home in the first books printed in Dutch', *Religions* (2020), 11–45, DOI:10.3390/rel11010045.

⁴¹This manuscript containing a collection of religious texts, letters and sermons is now kept as Leuven, Maurits Sabbebibliotheek, MS 74 Y 5. On this manuscript, see Th. Mertens, 'The Middle Dutch mystical Whitsun sermons from 1492 mediating Johannes Gerson', in U. Hascher-Burger, A. den Hollander and W. Janse (eds.), *Between Lay Piety and Academic Theology. Studies Presented to Christoph Burger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Leiden, 2010), 79–98; Pieter Boonstra, 'Reading by example. the communication of religious knowledge in the Collationes of the Brothers of the Common Life', University of Groningen Ph.D. thesis, 2021, 182–3.

⁴²Boonstra, 'Reading by example', 182–3.

places of debauchery, leading inevitably to alcohol abuse, drunkenness, prostitution and gambling.⁴³ Despite such negative connotations, Beat Kümin has demonstrated convincingly the existence of a religious aspect to taverns and inns during the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: ‘some public houses acquired “sacral” attributes of their own’, such as the presence of a chapel, the preaching of sermons, and in other cases it was the religious institutions that received visitors and served alcoholic beverages’.⁴⁴ There are, however, medieval antecedents that predate the religious connotations of post-Reformation taverns studied by Kümin, and these will be analysed in this section as examples of late medieval indoor public spaces where the material context (such as architecture, objects and books) in combination with specific embodied events of sociability gave rise to religious activities, for example a free and open exchange of religious knowledge.

Kümin also demonstrated that during the post-Reformation period taverns and inns were open and accessible public spaces that could function as sites of information exchange and ‘newsrooms’ of early modern society.⁴⁵ This was, however, not a new development, but rather a centuries-old practice of taverns and inns functioning as information hotspots for local people and connecting them to the wider world.⁴⁶ Visitors came from near and far and included foreign travellers such as merchants, political and ecclesiastic officials and pilgrims.⁴⁷ Local people frequented these venues too, for wedding feasts, as well as for collective wine drinking events and banquets organized by members of local guilds, confraternities and other associations.

⁴³‘In taberna quando sumus’; A. Hilka and O. Schumann (eds.), *Carmina Burana. I. Band: Text. 3. Die Trink- und Spielerlieder – Die geistlichen Dramen* (Heidelberg, 1970), 35–7. Medieval terminology and daily practice were both vague and highly variable. Broadly speaking, inns, taverns and wine houses were public venues where visitors of all ranks and fortunes could enter for food, wine, beer, company and a place to sleep if necessary. For inns and taverns in France and the Netherlands, see M. Incent-Cassy, ‘Les habitués des tavernes parisiennes à la fin du Moyen Âge ou les plaisirs partagés’, in C. Gauvard and J.-L. Robert (eds.), *Être Parisien* (Paris, 2004), <http://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/1431>; N. Coulet, ‘Propriétaires et exploitants d’auberges dans la France du Midi au bas Moyen Âge’, in H.C. Peyer and E. Müller-Luckner (eds.), *Gastfreundschaft, Taverne und Gasthaus im Mittelalter, Gastfreundschaft, Taverne und Gasthaus im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1983), 119–36; Ph. Woff, ‘Les hôtelleries toulousaines au Moyen Âge’, in *Regards sur le Midi médiéval* (Toulouse, 1978), 93–106; M. Hell, *De Amsterdamse herberg 1450–1800: geestrijk centrum van het openbare leven* (Nijmegen, 2017).

⁴⁴B. Kümin, ‘Sacred church and worldly tavern: reassessing an early modern divide’, in W. Coster and A. Spce (eds.), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), 17–38, at 23–4.

⁴⁵B. Kümin, ‘Useful to have, but difficult to govern. Inns and taverns in early modern Bern and Vaud’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 3 (1999), 153–75, at 163.

⁴⁶K.L. Reyerson, *The Art of the Deal: Intermediaries of Trade in Medieval Montpellier* (Leiden, 2002), 84–91, 167–75; D. Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in the Age of the Artevelde, 1302–1390* (Lincoln, NB, 1987), 142–4; F. de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007), 88–117; R. Salzberg, ‘Little worlds in motion: mobility and space in the osterie of early modern Venice’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 25 (2021), 96–117.

⁴⁷Clerical travellers such as Antonio de Beatis and his patron, Cardinal Luigi of Aragon, mainly stayed overnight in inns and ate their meals in public venues. Richer pilgrims also favoured inns and taverns: see Reyerson, *The Art of the Deal*, 88, and for the pilgrim’s account by Jean de Tournai (1488–89), see F. Blanchet-Broekaert (ed.), *Transcription du manuscrit de Jean de Tournai*, <http://lodel.irevues.inist.fr/saintjacquesinfo/index.php?id=1566>; F. Blanchet-Broekaert, *Le voyage de Jean de Tournai. De Valenciennes à Rome, Jérusalem et Compostelle (1488–1489)* (Cahors, 2012).

These venues had a clearly public character, due not least to their open material structure, as can be inferred from contemporary paintings (Figure 4), which show the open door of the inn or tavern, connecting the indoor space to the street's outdoor spaces. The way in which taverns were built to connect indoor space to life on the streets, making indoor events visible, audible and accessible to passers-by, combined with the intensive exchanges of commercial, political and religious information which took place inside them, makes a powerful argument for considering them as indoor public spaces. Throughout the following analysis, we will focus on the materiality of late medieval urban taverns and inns as indoor public spaces of sociability with strong religious connotations where exchanges of religious knowledge took place. These historical processes can be traced through the materiality of the architectural environment and of the objects present, especially when reinforced by the spiritual connotations provided by textual cultures and fraternal practices of embodied sociability and charitable actions.

Late medieval sociability in voluntary associations such as guilds, confraternities and chambers of rhetoric,⁴⁸ as well as gatherings in freely accessible indoor spaces such as taverns, inns and wine houses,⁴⁹ often fostered group discussions and the exchange of information covering a broad range of issues, from business advice to religious topics. For example, a unique medieval membership list of the merchants' confraternity (*fraternitatem dictam Coepmannerghilde*) is preserved in Deventer.⁵⁰ Its membership included not only wealthy merchants from the urban upper classes, aldermen, magistrates, knights, clerics (such as monks, priests and canons), but surprisingly also artisans and middle-class burghers, such as shoemakers, bakers, tailors, fish mongers, stone masons and even a few farmers.⁵¹ While the Deventer

⁴⁸C. Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, NY, 2018), 127–82; A. van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten. Rederijkers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden (1480–1650)* (Amsterdam, 2009), 209–26.

⁴⁹Kümin, 'Sacred church and worldly tavern', 36–7. For a general introduction to the topic, see B. Kümin and B.A. Tlusty (eds.), *The World of the Tavern* (Aldershot, 2002); R. Salzberg, 'Spaces of unrest? Policing hospitality sites in early modern Venice', in M. van Gelder and C. Judde de Larivière (eds.), *Popular Politics in an Aristocratic Republic: Political Conflict and Social Contestation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Venice* (London, 2020), 105–28.

⁵⁰Historisch Centrum Overijssel, Stadsarchief Deventer, Inv. nr. 99666: 19 (scroll with membership of the merchant's confraternity, 1249–1387); Inv. nr. 202128: 20 (charter with statutes, 13 Jan. 1300); and Inv. nr. 202128: 27 (book of the drapers' guild ('wantsniderghilde') with list of members, 1418–1764). Digitalizations consultable online via <https://collectieoverijssel.nl>. See also H.R. van Ommeren (ed.), *De Koopmansgilderol van Deventer 1249–1387* (The Hague, 1978), with an edition of the scroll with membership list and the charter from 1300, quotation on 154; J. Benders, *Bestuursstructuur en schriftcultuur: Een analyse van de bestuurlijke verschriftelijking in Deventer tot het eind van de 15e eeuw* (Kampen, 2004). There is some discussion whether this *fraternitatem dictam Coepmannerghilde* was a drapers' guild or a confraternity (or a drapers' guild that had morphed into a confraternity). However, both types of medieval associations were inspired by similar ideals of fraternity and charity, and it is often difficult to draw clear distinctions; see P. Trio and A.-J. Bijsterveld, 'Van Gebedsverbroedering naar broederschap. De evolutie van het fraternitas-begrip in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in de volle Middeleeuwen (II)', *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis*, 9 (2006), 7–46, at 28–34. For medieval confraternities, see further: C. Vincent, *Les confréries médiévales dans le royaume de France: XIIIe–XVe siècle* (Paris, 1994); P. Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving: de broederschappen te Gent in de late Middeleeuwen* (Leuven, 1993).

⁵¹Van Ommeren (ed.), *De Koopmansgilderol*, 12, 60–79, where the author insists on the membership from the societal upper classes. However, medieval confraternities often included members from different social backgrounds; see Hoogvliet, 'Metaphorical images'.



Figure 4. Master of the Catholic Kings (probably a Flemish master active in Spain), *Marriage at Cana*, 1495/97. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1952.5.42. (www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.41655.html).

confraternity's rules are concise, they do nevertheless show that the organization was based on the Christian ideals of fraternity and charity as espoused by the Gospels: members promised each other assistance at markets in faraway places and in case of



Figure 5. Cornelis Anthonisz, *Banquet of the Crossbow Confraternity St Joris*, in Amsterdam, 1533. Amsterdam, Amsterdams Historisch Museum, SA 7279. (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.38424>). With two costly wine glasses for ceremonial drinking displayed on the table.

income loss.⁵² New members (typically sons of sitting members, including illegitimate sons) were initiated at a collective drinking event of the brethren (*fratribus congregatis et eorum gilde bibentibus*) that took place each year around the first day of February.⁵³ This would have taken place most plausibly at a public venue with sufficient seating space and serving wine, such as an inn or tavern. On these occasions, members would sit together rubbing shoulders, sharing wine and food. Given that the confraternity included clerics and lay people alike, it is likely that not only business information was exchanged, but also religious guidance was offered, and that the brethren also discussed religious topics.

Religious knowledge was also communicated and shared through embodied religious practice. For example, the annual banquet and collective wine drinking organized by the Deventer *Coepmannergilde*, as well as by most other medieval confraternities, guilds and associations, also implied a confirmation of the mutual bond linking individual members, as depicted for example in the painting *Banquet of the Crossbow Confraternity St Joris* in Amsterdam from 1533 (Figure 5). Banquets such as these represented a vital expression of the spirit of *convivium*, as well as an embodiment of values espoused by the Gospels such as charity, fraternity and love.⁵⁴

⁵²Van Ommeren (ed.), *De Koopmansgilderol*, 103–4.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 25. For similar examples from Ghent, see Trio, *Volksreligie*, 307–12. For English examples, see P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200–1830* (London, 1983), 27–8.

⁵⁴J.F. Benders, 'Nachbarn und Behörde: Formen und Funktionen von Vierteln und Nachbarschaften in spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Städten im Osten und Norden der Niederlande anhand der Fälle Zutphen und Groningen', in A.J. Brand and S. Rabeler (eds.), *Gelebte Normen im urbanen Raum. Zur sozial- und kulturgeschichtlichen Analyse rechtlicher Quellen in Städten des Hanseraums (13. bis 16. Jahrhunderts)*

As David Garrioch observes, these collective events also strongly resembled Christ's Last Supper and its re-enactment during the liturgy of the Eucharist: 'Traditionally, too, confraternal sociability extended the spiritual communion of the Eucharist into feasting and drinking on the major feast days or sometimes following the admission of new members.'⁵⁵

In addition to partaking in the Eucharist, the medieval tradition of communal drinking 'church wine' or 'church ale' in parish churches was a social and religious event that bore a deep resemblance to the confraternities' wine drinking gatherings in taverns. Most confraternity members would have been familiar with how wine or ale, sometimes accompanied by bread, was shared by parishioners in their parish churches after mass on important Christian feasts. Medieval administrative sources regularly feature charitable donations by laypeople of wine, chalices and bread to their parishes destined for such events. A very early example dating from the year 1288, among many others that could be quoted here, is the donation of five *sous tournois* by Nicholes Vilains au Poc, husband of Marien and living in Tournai/Doornik, for wine to be distributed among parishioners of Our Lady's parish at Easter, Whitsun and Christmas.⁵⁶ Examples such as these testify to the fact that collective wine drinking as a parallel to the Eucharist was a deeply engrained tradition and a widely shared practice.

The examples discussed here also show that collective wine drinking and banqueting in the potentially sinful environment of a tavern or an inn could acquire a powerful spiritual meaning. Participation in these events also resulted in the dissemination of religious knowledge amongst members, for example, by means of the embodied enactment of fraternal love and charity, or by means of a recollection of the marriage at Cana, the Last Supper and the Eucharist.⁵⁷ Conversely, paintings depicting these episodes from the Gospels sometimes situate them in late medieval taverns or inns, as was the case with a late fifteenth-century panel by a Flemish–Castilian artist representing the marriage at Cana, which once again underlines the potential sacral and religious connotations of these spaces (Figure 4).

Material objects present in taverns and inns could also contribute to strengthening the religious connotations of these spaces. An illustrative example is the inventory of the objects present in the house with the sign board of the *Plat d'étain* (Tin Plate) in Amiens, compiled in August 1518 after the death of the owner, Jean Matissard.⁵⁸ The

(Hilversum, 2014), 129–48, at 132; C. Goldstein, *Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party* (Farnham, 2013), 3–4.

⁵⁵ Garrioch, 'From religious to secular sociability', 317; Kümin, 'Useful to have', 161.

⁵⁶ A. de La Grange, 'Religieux de testaments tournaisiens antérieurs au XVII^e siècle', *Annales de la Société historique et archéologique de Tournai*, n.s. 2 (1897), 5–365, at 31–2: 'Je donne v. s. de tournois pour acater vin et donner à boire à le paroisse à Nostre-Dame as boines gens ki recheveront Nostre-Seigneur, à trois ataux en l'an, à le Paske, à le Pentecouste et au Noël.' These donations occur frequently in wills made in Tournai/Doornik. The practice of donating church wine was not limited to Tournai/Doornik: for example, a woman from Tours donated wine and bread to be distributed among the laity of Saint-Clément's parish at Whitsun, the Assumption of the Virgin, All Saints and Christmas (Tours, Archives Départementales, G 1024, fol. 140; quoted in B. Chevalier, 'Ville de Tours et la Société Tourangelle 1356–1520, vol. II', Université de Paris IV Ph.D. thesis, 1971, 347 n. 140). For church ale in England, see Clark, *The English Alehouse*, 27.

⁵⁷ T.J. Tomasik and J.M. Vitullo, 'At the table. Metaphorical and material cultures of food in medieval and early modern Europe', in T.J. Tomasik and J.M. Vitullo (eds.), *At the Table. Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout 2007), xi–xx, at xx.

⁵⁸ Amiens, Archives communales, FF 161/17.

inventory refers to Matissard as a merchant, but his house was certainly a tavern, as attested to by the sign board's allusion, the large number of tables and seats mentioned in the inventory and the presence of a *cabaret*: a wooden construction where typically food and drink were served.⁵⁹

In 1482, Matissard was elected *maître* of a local confraternity called le Puy Notre-Dame, whose members composed religious poetry, performed theatre plays and attended the church services for other members' marriages and funerals.⁶⁰ The annual election of a new *maître* for the Puy Notre-Dame was invariably accompanied by a banquet and a competition for the best poem celebrating the Virgin, using a predetermined refrain of a metaphoric nature. Just as with the Deventer confraternity, the surviving list of *maîtres* reveals that membership of the Puy Notre-Dame of Amiens included clerics (the bishop, canons, priests, monks, the schoolmaster of the Latin school) and urban lay people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ranging from local noblemen to artisans as a silver smith, a pastry baker and a purse maker.⁶¹

Matissard's involvement with the confraternity's literary activities is also vouched for by the presence in his house of a small panel painting of the Virgin together with its accompanying poem.⁶² Moreover, it can be surmised that the annual banquet and other festive gatherings of the *maîtres* and *maîtresses* of the Puy Notre-Dame occasionally took place in his tavern. Just as with the Deventer *Coepmannerghilde*, the banquets organized by the Amiens confraternity were acts of Christian charity and reminiscent of the Last Supper. Yet, it should be noted that the membership's specific focus on composing and reciting religious poetry indicates that the transfer of religious knowledge was at the heart of their activities. Most notably, the annual competitions' winning poems testify to the fact that biblical and theological knowledge, sometimes of a quite complicated nature, was disseminated in vernacular (Picard-)French.⁶³

Furthermore, the *Plat d'étain*'s inventory reveals that some of its public rooms were filled with paintings depicting religious iconography and with books containing biblical and sacred texts. The above-mentioned painting of the Virgin with a poem was surrounded by several other objects featuring religious iconography in the same room on the ground level to which the guests most likely would have had access: a painting of Saint Veronica, an image of Our Lady of Pity, a crucifix, Saint Jacob with a gilded Virgin and a painting of Our Lady. Furthermore, Matissard kept three copies of the Book of Hours in that room, strongly suggesting that he read his prayers surrounded by these paintings. Another collection of books, most of them religious

⁵⁹See the entry *cabaret* in the online *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, <http://zeus.atilf.fr/dmf/>. See also L. Douchet (ed.), *Manuscrits de Pagès, marchand d'Amiens, écrits à la fin du 17e et au début du 18e siècle*, vol. II (Amiens, 1857), 150–5.

⁶⁰For further references, see Hoogvliet, 'Metaphorical images'. It is remarkable that one of the poems in praise of the Virgin produced by Puy of Rouen used a tavern as a metaphorical image for religious ideas; see D. Hüe, 'Une ville et son Puy: Rouen au début du XVIe siècle', in H. Legros and F. Neveux (eds.), *Paris et les villes normandes* (Caen, 2000), 175–95, at 192.

⁶¹Hoogvliet, 'Metaphorical images'; C. Chattellain, 'Poésie, théâtre, fête, piété mariale et société à Amiens au XVIe siècle. Étude prosopographique des cent premiers maîtres du Puy Notre-Dame d'Amiens (1389–1489)', *Revue du Nord*, 436 (2020), 551–601.

⁶²Amiens, Archives communales, FF 161/17: 'Item i petit tableau de bois ou est emprainct une sainte Vierge, prisee avec la balade.'

⁶³The prize-winning *chants royaux* are preserved in MS fr. 145 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Hoogvliet, 'Metaphorical images', 406.

texts such as the Passion of Christ in French, was stored in a wooden box in an upstairs room.

Even more significant from the perspective of indoor public space and the public transfer of religious knowledge are some objects present in a downstairs room opening to the street. This was one of the public seating areas of the tavern, open to the street with its windows and shutters – and consequently visible to passers-by. In this public indoor space, a printed bible in a red leather binding was present, as well as a gilded image of the Virgin. This material context and the *Plat d'étain's* sacral attributes – religious images, prayer books, bibles and other religious texts – are a clear indication of this space's potential religious connotations, while the books and images were also instrumental in sharing religious knowledge and practices.

The presence of religious books and religious iconography can also be attested to in other inns and taverns in Amiens, including an inn named the House of the Rose and a wine house with cellars named *le Mouton noir* (the Black Sheep), both situated in Amiens on the busy square in front of the cathedral.⁶⁴ Sacral attributes of taverns and inns can also be found elsewhere throughout the Low Countries: for example, the Wilde Man inn at Leuven where an altarpiece adorned the dining room and where most bedrooms featured an altarpiece or a painting depicting religious subjects such as the Annunciation or the Man of Sorrows.⁶⁵ Travellers must have also carried religious books in their luggage. Documentation of this kind is very scarce, but a well-documented example is the case of Jamet Biguet, a merchant from the hamlet Sévéric near Nantes who is reported to have had a printed Latin Breviary with him while on a business trip to Tours in 1498.⁶⁶

In some instances, we encounter the reverse situation: abbeys, convents and other religious houses running taverns and serving wine. The aldermen from Amiens regularly expressed exasperation on account of the fact that Dominicans and Augustinians were operating public venues within their urban convents, because being religious orders, they were exempt from having to pay taxes to the city council. In 1458, for example, the aldermen complained that the Dominicans were selling wine publicly at a tavern situated within their convent and that they were behaving as lay people and merchants, while neglecting their vows of obedience, chastity and poverty:

Ils tenoient publique taverne, asseoient buveurz et gens de tous estas, les servoient a leurs tables, livroient pain, vin et vyande, rechevoient les escus et comptoient l'argent, comme marchans et tavernierz.⁶⁷

They ran a public tavern, seated drunkards and people of all ranks, waited at tables, served bread, wine and meat, handled cash and counted coins, just like merchants and innkeepers.

⁶⁴Amiens, Archives communales, FF 154/2, 166/26, 155/1, 159/1. Rooms in the House of the Rose had religious names: *Sainte-Barbe, Notre-Dame, Saint-Christofle*.

⁶⁵E. Van Even, 'Monographie de l'ancienne école de peinture de Louvain', *Messenger des sciences historiques* (1867), 439–97, at 446 n. 1. The inventory dates from 1489.

⁶⁶Tours, AD 37, 3E1/5 (19 Nov. 1498): Guillemete Houssayre, widow of Jamet Biguet who died during a business trip to Tours, seeks to regain possession of his printed Breviary after its use in the diocese of Nantes, and two fur-lined overcoats, kept as payment by Monseigneur Mathurin Bodin, chaplain of Tours Cathedral for her husband's medical treatment.

⁶⁷Amiens, Archives communales, BB 8, fol. 109r (1458). See also BB 2, fol. 110r (1417), BB 7, fol. 87r (1452), BB 8, fol. 21r (1456), fols. 130v, 134r (1458).

While those taverns and wine houses run by religious orders might have been organized in such a way so as to avoid taxation, the Dominican and Augustinian friars in Amiens could also have been exploiting ‘the pastoral potential of public houses’.⁶⁸ Members of both orders were actively preaching to the public in Amiens and reports from the aldermen’s meetings contain references to crowds of people walking to the Augustinian convent just east of the cathedral on a daily basis in order to partake in devotions.⁶⁹

Conclusion: connecting threads

It becomes evident from the examination of Deventer and Amiens houses and taverns that preaching activities function perfectly as a connecting thread in our discussion and afford us the opportunity to review further evidence of how indoor spaces were used for public activities related to the transmission of religious knowledge and the correlation between domestic, religious and public space that has been explored in this article.

The small wooden stools used during sermons, which were privileged occasions and spaces for religious knowledge transfer, exemplify this correlation. As mentioned in the third section, Deventer household inventories refer to the presence of *pre-kestoelen*, small portable chairs, which churchgoers used when attending sermons or other public addresses of a religious nature.⁷⁰ Similar portable stools used ‘for going to the sermon’ can be regularly found in the possession of lay people in the Amiens estate inventories as well. The tanner Nicolas Dupuis from Amiens, mentioned in the introduction, for example, had two *caielles a aller au sermon* in his workshop. These portable stools came in a variety of shapes: some of them were foldable, while iconographical sources also depict a tripod with a backrest, as in Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s panoramic painting *The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (Figure 6), in which some individuals in a crowd of people veiled in a so-called *huik*⁷¹ can be seen exiting the church carrying these stools. The collection of the Rijksmuseum Twente in the Netherlands features a similar original fifteenth-century stool (Figure 7).

These material objects link indoor and outdoor activities and clearly testify to how domestic and public religious spaces had converged. Furthermore, they constitute material evidence of one of the core activities organized by the Brothers of the Common Life in Deventer: the practice of the *collatio*. As the house regulations lay out, the Brothers were requested to organize ‘mutual collations’ in their own House during which passages from Scripture would be read aloud and later discussed as part of a process of communal education and edification. The Brothers were also urged to open up these discussions to ‘schoolboys and other men of goodwill who come... for instruction, so that [they] may get to know them [the Brothers] better and prove more diligent towards those who seem to be of good hope’.⁷² These same schoolboys and ‘good men of good will’ were invited on feast days after vespers to ‘come to the...

⁶⁸Kümin, ‘Sacred church and wordly tavern’, 21–3, 32.

⁶⁹Amiens, Archives communales, BB 15, fol. 53v (1486).

⁷⁰Meischke, Dubbe *et al.*, *Thuis in de late middeleeuwen*, 28–9, 113, 127.

⁷¹Possibly from the Arabic *haik*; A. van Dongen, ‘Hooded histories’, online essay: <https://thehoodie.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/hooded-histories-alexandra-van-dongen>.

⁷²This topic has been discussed at length by Boonstra, ‘Reading by example’. The text of the regulations of the Brothers has been translated by van Engen (ed.), *Devotio Moderna. Basic Writings*, 155–75.



Figure 6. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (detail), 1559. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, 1016. ©KHM-Museumsverband. (www.khm.at/de/object/320722549d/).

house for spiritual instruction'. During this collation, passages from Scripture in Dutch, dealing with a broad range of theological issues such as 'vices, the virtues, contempt for the world, fear of God', were read aloud for the listening public. After this public reading, 'each [of the Brothers] strives to speak with several of them, addressing them on the same subject in edifying words'. This educational process could also be completed by a face to face meeting in one of the Brothers' rooms. It was particularly important 'not to keep them long, certainly no longer than a half hour' and not to 'make conversation about the nonsense and rumours circulating in the world but rather on matters necessary for the salvation of souls. [They] should instruct them with urgency, exhorting them in particular to become open about disclosing their temptations and passions as well as ready and willing to acquiesce in good counsel.'⁷³ As Pieter Boonstra has recently indicated, these instructions were put into practice in Deventer and in other cities in which communities of Modern Devout had been founded; the Brethrens' houses were thus to function as hubs for the exchange of religious knowledge.

Just as in Deventer, late medieval Amiens boasted of a considerable number of convents run by mendicant and preaching orders, all active in disseminating religious knowledge among the laity, by means of public reading from books and through sermons. Reports of the aldermen's discussions contain several references to the Augustinians, as mentioned above, notably concerning the large number of people

⁷³Van Engen (ed.), *Devotio Moderna. Basic Writings*, 160–1. It is important to stress that the same themes were discussed during the meetings held in the private home of the Bruges lady discussed above.



Figure 7. Small portable chair used for attending sermons (*driepootstael*), fifteenth century. Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twente, Inv. nr. 0259.

frequenting their convent, as well as the friars' request for a donation that would enable them to build a more spacious meeting hall that could accommodate the crowds that came to listen to their sermons and to perform devotional exercises.⁷⁴

The examples of indoor public spaces in Deventer and Amiens, together with material objects discussed in this article, demonstrate the importance of approaching religious knowledge in terms of exchange, connectivity, porosity and mobility. The houses of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life were simultaneously religious and domestic spaces, at once open and visible *to* and *for* the lay world, and accessible in order to create and exchange religious contents. Though governed by rules and a series of formalized practices, these houses did not differ in essence from domestic

⁷⁴Amiens, Archives communales, BB 15, fol. 38v (1486).

spaces, which could, in turn, develop into sites of knowledge *for* and *beyond* immediate family members. Inns, taverns and wine houses were publicly accessible venues where alcohol was consumed, and yet they were material spaces for religious practice and observance, as testified to by the widespread presence of sacral objects such as books with biblical references and devotional texts, altarpieces and paintings with religious themes. The presence of all these objects was neither without significance nor accidental, or even a cover-up for sinful activities. Rather, they were instruments in the sharing of religious knowledge and enablers of its wider dissemination. Furthermore, these inns and taverns were also social spaces for religion: they functioned as public meeting points for clergy and laity alike, most notably but not uniquely for the confraternity meetings which entailed the communal sharing of food and wine. Such exchanges between clergy and laity undoubtedly resulted in discussions of religious topics and thus contributed to the emergence of a late medieval public sphere.

The importance of these indoor public spaces for the reconstruction of religious knowledge in late medieval Europe cannot be underestimated. This approach opens up new avenues for research and allows a better understanding of social and cultural transformations, challenging traditional patterns of separation between private and public, indoor and outdoor and lay and religious.

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