Introduction

On 3 May 1475, the day of the Bruges Holy Blood procession, Reynoud Willems, dean of the plumbers' guild, came to the place appointed for the gathering of his craft near the Franciscan friary.[1] The deans of six other guilds who were grouped with the plumbers on this day[2] noticed that he was not wearing the required red silk sash around his shoulders over a black livery. Ordered by the town magistrates to make his peace with the other deans and appear correctly attired at the next Corpus Christi day procession, Reynoud defiantly clothed his guild's torch-bearers in outfits of *meschante* green. The civic authorities evidently did not regard his behaviour as a trifling sartorial faux pas: they had him banished from Flanders for fifty years. But the *parlement* at Mechelen, before which the case came in 1483, considered the penalty a touch draconian. It ordered the town to restore Reynoud's good name and pay him a substantial sum in compensation. The civic authorities appealed. The town of Bruges, they said, was notable, large and full of people, one of the *bonnes villes* that the prince held in his *pays*. In the town were many craft guilds, each with its own dean who was under oath to maintain the welfare and rules of his craft and do everything required of a good and loyal dean. Also in the town there were certain general and solemn processions, amongst them the Holy Blood procession and one on Corpus Christi day, at which the guild deans and their torch-carriers were accustomed to wearing liveries. The 'proud and haughty' Reynoud Willems had disobeyed these 'ancient' and 'laudable' customs.

Quite why Reynoud chose to defy civic authority is hard to say. No reason is given beyond his reported statement before the town council that he had not wanted to remain dean of his guild and guild master in

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[1] For the following, see SBB, Hs. 437, fos. 364r–v; W. Vorsterman (ed.), *Dits die excellente cronike van Vlaenderen* (Antwerp, 1531), fo. 172v; and SAB, 157, *Civiele sententiën vierschaar* (*Register van de vonissen in burgerlijk zaken door of tegen de stad aangelegend bij de raad van Vlaanderen*, 1461–1519), fos. 144v–147r.

[2] The masons, carpenters, tilers, thatchers, plasterers and sawyers: see Appendix 1.

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the town.[3] He may have had material reasons for refusing office. There was prestige and influence attached to the deanship of a guild, but it could be personally costly and time-consuming; guild affairs or duties as a town master could take up time that might be spent more profitably elsewhere.[4] Reynoud had evidently been exploiting market opportunities: he had been in receipt of regular and rewarding sums for his work on the *prinsenhof*, the duke's residence in Bruges.[5]

That Reynoud should have chosen to defy civic authority on Holy Blood day is also puzzling. He must have expected punishment, even if not one so severe. He must have been familiar with Bruges customs and sensibilities regarding honour and hierarchy. He had himself been elected member of the prestigious crossbow guild of St George – which flanked the Holy Blood relic during the annual procession.[6] Reynoud's public defiance at a religious ceremony was a calculated act, but it is an unusual case, and in the end the full reasons for his behaviour will never be known.

Reasons for the extreme reaction of the town magistrates are not self-evident either. Other cases of disturbance on Holy Blood day had occurred, but punishment of them had not been so harsh.[7] Particular circumstances may have played a part: conditions in the 1470s, as we shall see, may have made those in authority more edgy about any act of rebellion. Yet there were deeper reasons for their reaction. The episode is suggestive about the place occupied by certain ceremonies in civic society. The ability to mount processions like the Holy Blood was

[3] SBB, Hs. 437, fo. 364r. He had been elected dean of his guild in September 1474 (SAB, 114 *Wetsvernieuwingen*, 1468–1501, fo. 55r). Next to his name appears a note to the effect that he had been replaced following his banishment. His name does not appear among the officers of the guild before this date, nor, less surprisingly, afterwards.

[4] For rules of the plumbers' guild and obligations on deans in 1444, see RAB, BN, 8249; FA, 1, fos. 67r–70r. On the government of Bruges' guilds, see J. Dumolyn, 'De bevoegdheden van de middeleeuwse Brugse ambachtsbesturen (1363–1501)', *Handelingen van het Genootschap*, forthcoming (2011).

[5] Throughout the 1460s and early 1470s, Reynoud's name appears regularly in the accounts of the ducal receivers: in 1462 (for work on the 'great tower': ADN, B4107, fo. 95r), 1464 (*ibid.*, B4109, fo. 108r), 1465 (*ibid.*, B4110, fo. 109v), 1467 (when he was paid £80 2s: *ibid.*, B4111, fo. 127v), 1471 (for work in Bruges and the castle at Male: AGR, CC 27394, fo. 30r), and 1474 (for work on a window in a gallery showing the arms of the duke, on the garden and on the duchess' lodging: ADN, B4113, fo. 52v; B4116, fo. 66r). In 1475, the year of his banishment, his wife Agnes Daneels was paid 'in the absence of her husband' (*ibid.*, B4117, fo. 75r). Connections at court may explain why he was able to bring his case before the *parlement*.

[6] 'Reynoud de Lootghieter' paid 10s for entry into the crossbow guild in 1471/2 (SAB, 385, rekeningen, fo. 182r). He was also paid for work on the guild house (*ibid.*, fo. 183v).

[7] A cooper, Jan Iooris, was accused in 1458 of not appearing properly attired with this guild on Holy Blood day and Corpus Christi day, when he also insulted the guild deans with *meer wonderlike worden*, but his punishment appears to have been dealt with at a guild level: SAB, 336, *Kuipers, inschrijvingsregister*, fos. 95v–96v.

part of what it meant to be a 'large and notable town'. The control that the municipal government exercised over these processions was a touchstone of its wider authority in the town. The connections between ceremonial order and civic order were deemed to be close: Reynoud's symbolic defiance was more than a matter of symbols.

This book is about the public religious practices in Bruges, a town 'notable' not just in Flanders but also in late medieval Europe. It deals with three main themes. The first considers these practices as aspects of 'civic religion'. Though problematic, the term directs attention to the social dimension of religion: to the links that might be made between religion and urban society, religious practices and civic government. The second related theme looks more specifically at the role of ceremony in urban society. Processions such as the Holy Blood were evidently implicated in the exercise of municipal authority, but how directly the one served the other is not obvious. The third main theme concerns the relationship at a ceremonial level between the citizens of Bruges and their rulers, the counts of Flanders. The growth in princely power and magnificence, especially under the Burgundian dukes, had a direct impact on the town: much of modern historiography on the subject has stressed the advance of 'state' power over civic liberties, and its encroachment on all aspects of urban life. The *prinsenhof* (which Reynoud Willems helped to aggrandise) was one of the many ways in which the ruler's magnificence was made manifest. But the impact of princely power on civic ceremony and religion is less clear: the limitations of ceremony as a means to express or bolster authority are less often studied; and it requires a thorough exploration of the urban context.

Civic space and time: Bruges *c*. 1300

By the late thirteenth century, Bruges was already acquiring a level of wealth that was to make it one of the most prosperous towns in Northern Europe. Its population was perhaps already touching 40,000 inhabitants.[8] Trade in textiles still underpinned the local economy, but access to the sea along the Zwin had allowed a great expansion in long-distance trade, bringing in foreign merchants and a still wider range of goods. The increasing commercial activity was reflected in the burgeoning amount of regulation managing this trade, in agreements with foreign merchants like the Hanse and in the organisation of craft guilds within the town.[9]

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[8] See J. Dumolyn, 'Population et structures professionelles à Bruges aux XIVe et XVe siècles', *Revue du nord* 329 (1999), 43–64, and references cited there.

[9] The earliest references to their rules date from 1252. See generally C. Wyffels, *De oorsprong der ambachten in Vlaanderen en Brabant* (Brussels, 1951).

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Communal government had also been expanding.[10] In the early twelfth century a strong impression of a collective will already emerges from the pen of Galbert of Bruges: burghers expected counts to swear to a charter of 'liberties'.[11] The volume of civic regulation by the thirteenth century demonstrates the widening scope of municipal authority. Craft-guild rules show that the town magistracy had established its right to oversee guild affairs and to appoint guild deans and searchers.

The control that the town's governing body began to exercise over public life was a control, as it were, over space and time within the town. Civic space – administrative and legal – was being more tightly regulated, albeit not quite on the scale apparent in some north Italian towns during the same period.[12] In Bruges, the municipal authorities bought large areas of land in 1246 and 1275 to the north and east of the main urban settlement: this allowed them to establish their jurisdiction over an expanding population that had begun to spill over the boundaries set by the twelfth-century walls. They began to fix clearer administrative structures for the purposes of taxation, and perhaps social order.[13] Public works on the town infrastructure – roads, canals, bridges, market places – absorbed an increasing proportion of an expanding civic budget.[14] A newly reconstructed civic space was enclosed in 1297 by ramparts, walls and gates that all but encircled the town (see Map I.1). The initiative for this venture was not fully municipal in origin: the

[10] A. Saint-Denis, 'L'Apparition d'une identité urbaine dans les villes de commune de France du Nord aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles', in M. Boone and P. Stabel (eds.), *Shaping Urban Identity* (Leuven, 2000), pp. 65–87.

[11] Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*, ed. J. B. Ross (New York, 1959), p. 203.

[12] P. Stabel, 'The Market-Place and Civic Identity in Late Medieval Flanders', in Boone and Stabel, *Shaping Urban Identity*, pp. 43–64. For the production of 'representations' of space (as a process based on market forces): H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991). For recent comment on the historiography of 'space', see P. Arnade, M. C. Howells and W. Simons, 'Fertile Spaces: The Productivity of Urban Space in Northern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32 (2002), 515–48.

[13] The division of the city into its six administrative units (*zestendeelen*) headed by *hooftmannen* is apparent from the 1280s. See E. I. Strubbe, 'Van de erste naar de tweede omwalling van Brugge', *ASEB* 100 (1963), 271–300; T. A. Boogaart, II, *An Ethnogeography of Late Medieval Bruges: Evolution of the Corporate Milieu 1280–1349* (Lewiston, 2004), pp. 300–3.

[14] For this and the following, see M. Ryckaert, *Brugge: Historische stedenatlas van Belgie* (Brussels, 1991), pp. 160, 167–8; J. M. Murray, *Bruges, Cradle of Capitalism 1280–1390* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 55–61, 63–7; Boogaart, *Ethnogeography*, pp. 305–17. For the expanding communal debt in this period, see J.-P. Sosson, 'Finances communales et dette publique: Le Cas de Bruges à la fin du XIIIe siècle', in J.-M. Dusvosquel and E. Thoen (eds.), *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe: Studies in Honorem Adriaan Verhulst* (Ghent, 1995), pp. 239–57.
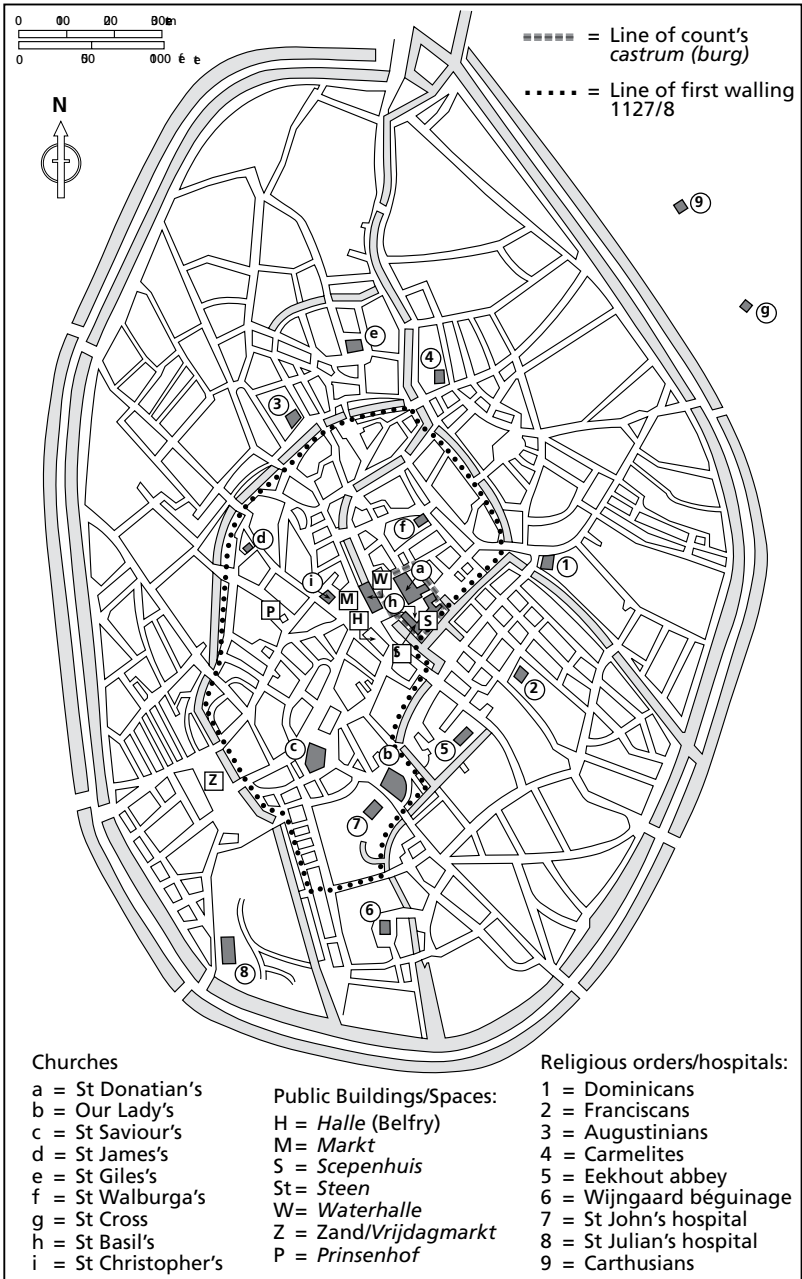
Map I.1 Bruges churches.

order had come from the king of France. But the rapid way in which the walls were thrown up and the vast expenditure on them testifies to the strength of civic will.

Control of civic space reached upwards as well as outwards. New municipal buildings were being erected, giving material expression to a sense of civic pride. The New Hall (*Waterhalle*) was built at great expense between 1284 and 1295 on the main market place to serve as the nodal point of the town's commercial network. On the same square, attached to the old cloth-hall, stood the Belfry (*Halle*), the supreme symbol of civic authority in the late thirteenth century. It served as an alarm bell to alert citizens to danger, probably as a venue for the proclamation of civic decrees, and as a vault for the town's charters of privileges – thus as a veritable *lieu de mémoire*.[15] Following fire damage in 1280, it continued to fulfil these functions, but the town aldermen moved their judicial business into the *ghiselhuus* which lay in the *burg*.[16] Although this was the site of the count of Flanders' castle, municipal affairs were increasingly conducted from this area, and other buildings within it were taken over for municipal use.[17] (See Figure I.1).

The area occupied by urban settlement had been filled by religious as well as secular or civic buildings. Since the tenth century, the urban skyline had been dominated by the two collegiate churches, St Donatian's and Our Lady's, and the parish church of St Saviour. All three were rebuilt in the twelfth century.[18] The Eekhout priory of Augustinian canons was established by the 1140s. The thirteenth century saw a great expansion in the number of religious buildings, in particular the foundation of four new parishes[19] and six mendicant houses.[20] Pastoral concern with the problems presented by a rapidly

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[15] See M. Boone, 'Brugge: Het Belfort. De macht en de rijkdom van de middeleeuwse steden', in J. Tollebeek, G. Deneckere, G. Buelens, C. Kesteloot and S. De Schaepdrijver (eds.), *België: Een parcours van herinnering. 1: Plaatsen van geschiedenis en expansie* (Amsterdam, 2008), pp. 41–51.

[16] Ryckaert, *Stedenatlas*, pp. 167–8.

[17] In 1299 the town acquired privileges from the French king to take over the *Steen*, the count's prison. City scribes and other functionaries also began to occupy the *Love*, where the count's officials, the *baljuw* (bailiff) and *schout* (sheriff), resided. The *ghiselhuus* was to be rebuilt as the main town hall (*scepenhuis* or *stadhuis*) from the 1370s.

[18] For an overview of the religious foundations in Bruges, see Ryckaert, *Stedenatlas*, pp. 50–3, 82–9, 165–6, 206, 208, 210–15.

[19] Between 1239 and 1241 St Walburga's was elevated from chapel to parish; St James' and St Giles' churches were built.

[20] This was an exceptional number of houses even for a large Flemish town. Between 1230 and 1286 the Franciscans were set up in Bruges (by Hendrik Ram), the Dominicans (by Countess Joanna), the Carmelites (by the Order itself), the Augustinians (by Jan II, lord of Ghistele). Houses for the Pied Friars and Friars of the Sack were also built, but did not survive into the fourteenth century. The other important foundation was that of the Wijngarde béguinage (by the sister of Countess Joanna in 1245).

Figure I.1 Bruges town centre, from a map by Marcus Gerards
(1562).

Key: 1 = St Donatian's; 2 = East gate of *burg* (*oostburch poort*);
3 = Townhouse (*scepenhuis*); 4 = St Basil's chapel; 5 = *Steen* and *Doncker
camer* (Dark Room prison); 6 = Belfry (*Halle*); 7 = New Hall (*Waterhalle*);
8 = St Christopher's chapel; 9 = St Peter's chapel

expanding population, much of it immigrant, was among the reasons
for the building effort.

The initiative behind this effort was not entirely municipal. The main
founders of new houses were usually not citizens. But civic involvement
even in the foundations of great lords is likely.[21] One facet of the control
that the town government increasingly exercised over public life was
an interest in religious matters. Donations to mendicant houses and
parish churches that appear in the first extant civic accounts from 1281
show that the municipal government considered the upkeep of religious
buildings to be a civic responsibility.

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[21] See W. Simons, *Bedelordekloosters in het graafschap Vlaanderen: Chronologie en
topographie van de bedelordenverspreiding voor 1350* (Bruges, 1987), esp. pp. 45–53;
W. Simons, *Stad en apostolaat: De vestingen van de bedelorden in het graafschap Vlaanderen*
(Brussels, 1987), esp. pp. 176–84. In Bruges, the civic authorities exchanged prop-
erty with the Franciscans in the 1230s and in 1245 to allow them a more favourable
site.

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More keenly felt was a civic responsibility towards the town's poor and disadvantaged – *pauperibus nostris* as they are already referred to in 1236.[22] The town authorities had run St John's hospital and smaller foundations from the late twelfth century. A lepers' hospital was founded under civic auspices by 1227. Town magistrates were heavily involved in the restructuring of charitable provision in the late thirteenth century. Arguably, this was part of a social concern with the problems of order within a fast-expanding town. It included the refoundation of the Potterie hospital in 1276 (and its fusion with the Holy Ghost house in the early 1300s), the expansion of St John's hospital from 1280 and the assumption of control over orphans' inheritances in 1287.[23] In the early 1300s we can detect the beginnings of parish 'poor tables', soon to become the town's main sources of charitable provision. The town magistrates formally became their overguardians.[24]

The activities of the town's growing number of religious institutions had increasingly fallen under the purview of civic government. Moreover, buildings erected by the governing body were also acquiring their own religious attributes. The town paid for decorations of saints' images on town walls, gates and Belfry. The niche above the balcony from which civic proclamations were made was occupied by an image of the Virgin Mary (by 1345 at the latest).[25] The cult of the Virgin had been important in the town at an early date, and it was one of the cults that became civic-wide in the later Middle Ages.

It was the cult of the Holy Blood, however, that the municipal government adopted most closely as the town's own. The relic itself was believed to be the true blood of Christ collected from the Cross. It was probably one of several such relics brought back to the West from Constantinople by looting crusaders in 1204 – notwithstanding a tradition, first recorded in the fourteenth century, that the relic came to Bruges from Jerusalem thanks to Count Thierry of Alsace (d. 1168).[26]

[22] For the following see G. Maréchal, *De sociale en politieke gebondenheid van het Brugse hospitaalwezen in de middeleeuwen*, Standen en Landen 73 (Kortrijk: UGA, 1978).

[23] See also: the foundation of St Nicholas' guesthouse (for pilgrims) in 1290, and the fusion of the *Filles de Dieu* house with St Julian's hospital in the early 1300s. For orphans (and the communal debt), see J. Maréchal, 'Het wezengeld in de Brugsche stadfinanciën van de middeleeuwen', *ASEB* 82 (1939), 1–41.

[24] See M. T. Galvin, 'The Poor Tables in Bruges 1270–1477', unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Columbia, 1998).

[25] Certain 'images' had been placed on the Belfry in 1285: Boogaart, *Ethnogeography*, p. 315.

[26] Thierry's brother-in-law King Baldwin III had purportedly been given the relic by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. See N. Huyghebaert, 'Iperius et la translation de la relique du Saint Sang à Bruges', *ASEB* 100 (1963), 110–87.

The earliest documented reference to the relic in Bruges occurs in 1256, when two citizens were required to take an oath on the relic in St Basil's chapel.[27] Perhaps the relic was not at this point fully under civic auspices: the oath was one made before the bishop of Tournai. But St Basil's chapel, which had once exclusively served the count's household (and been rebuilt by Thierry's son Philip of Alsace in the 1180s), seems gradually to have become treated as the town's own, like other buildings within the *burg*. By the end of the thirteenth century, the town aldermen regarded the relic as an object strongly connected with the defence of civic liberties: their letter in 1297 to King Philip the Fair of France, whose army seemed poised to invade Flanders, asked assurance that he would not remove the relic from Bruges, to which 'multitudes' were now accustomed to flock.[28]

By this time, the relic had also become the focus of an annual procession involving the craft guilds. The first reference to the procession occurs in the rules of the guild of the St John bridge-loaders in 1291, which stipulate that guild members were required to attend the *ommeganc* of the Holy Blood on 3 May.[29] The procession began to receive official funding from the town treasury in 1303. Was this to commemorate the Flemish victory at Courtrai, or the Matins uprising in Bruges against French authority in 1302? Possibly.[30] Whatever the case, the procession was clearly designed as a civic-wide festivity. It must already have involved many craft guilds. The route in 1303, perhaps for the first time, completed a circuit of the new town walls. The encircling of civic space by the Holy Blood relic reinforced at a spiritual level the protection offered by the walls and gates.

Management of civic space was bound up with management of time. Markets and crafts had to be regulated as to when, as well as where, they were held. Daily time was punctuated with the peal of bells. Bells and trumpeters in the Belfry by 1297 marked the beginning of the working day, lunch-break and closing. The yearly calendar was punctuated by feast and market days. The May fair was already well established, backed by a comital charter granted in 1200.[31] The synchronising of Bruges' most important fair with the beginnings of its main procession was no accident.[32] The choice of 3 May as the processional day was

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27 A. Viaene, 'Zweren ten Heleghen Bloede: Oudste getuignis van verering der reliek in de St Baseliskerk te Brugge', *Biekorf* 64 (1963), 176–80.
28 SAB, 96, 2 (*Rudenboek*), fos. 29r–v.
29 E. Huys, *Duizend jaar mutualiteit bij de vlaamse gilden* (Kortrijk, 1926), p. 150.
30 For the following, see below, Chapter 1.   31 GVS, Vol. II, p. 18.
32 The three days before 3 May were fixed as the period when merchants could inspect goods before the market opened: *ibid*., p. 67.

fixed before any association of the Holy Blood with the events of 1302. Even so, the procession may have acquired a commemorative function too. Civic regulation of time, past and present, became increasingly pronounced – though whether a sense of time other than the sacred ever developed is debateable. The Belfry bells marking the working day followed the celebration of daily hours announced by the bells of St Donatian's; no record of 'civic' memories ever reached the scale and complexity of liturgical memory stored in the *planaria* of the town's main churches (see Chapter 3).

What town regulation also sought to control was the movement of citizens through civic time and space. Civic legislation pronounced on when and where citizens were permitted to carry out their business. The establishment of new market places and town buildings regulated access to key civic spaces. All goods had to pass through the town's tolls and be brought before the proper toll offices.[33] The right to enter the town hall was a mark of citizenship.[34] Craft regulations established conditions under which members were to ply their trade – where they might go to set up stalls, what might be sold and when. The movement of more marginal groups within the town was also subject to municipal decree. Concern with the poor, and their potentially subversive proclivities, was reflected in the increasing attention to hospitals. The establishment of St Nicholas' guesthouse for pilgrims in 1292 may have reflected unease at the presence of immigrants.

Regulation of movement was expressed in its most ceremonial form in processions like that of the Holy Blood. At this event a sense of civic space and time was displayed in its most concentrated and ritualised form. Churchmen, craft guilds, aldermen and other citizens were brought together annually to participate. As we shall see, the processional route taken by the processors encircled the town, and also linked points within it. Movement between urban centre and town walls, and around the perimeter, marked out and generated a sense of civic space. Urban memory might attach itself to certain buildings and spaces, but it was movement between these that strengthened or reaffirmed memory. *Lieux de mémoire* in towns – the civic halls, market places and, to an extent, churches – became fixed as repositories of an urban sense of identity. But it was by being linked dynamically through repetition of processions that the fixing took place. The importance of processions in this regard is one reason why they are treated in detail in this book.

[33] GVS, Vol. II, p. 249; *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 21–4; Boogaart, *Ethnogeography*, p. 324.
[34] M. C. Howell, 'The Spaces of Late Medieval Urbanity', in Boone and Stabel, *Shaping Urban Identity*, pp. 3–23.