Guilds, Towns,
and Cultural Transmission
in the North, 1300–1500

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# Late Medieval Urban Civilization and its North European Variant

*Lars Boje Mortensen & Lars Bisgaard*

Guilds were an essential feature of urban life in its decisive late medieval phase in Europe. The present volume focuses on guilds and towns in the Nordic and Baltic region c. 1300-1500 (with a glance at England) and more specifically on the cultural transmission that was operative between the rich towns of Germany and the Low Countries and their smaller, but also dynamic, counterparts in the North.

One ambition of the book is to promote a regional rather than a national view of the urban culture in the North. In that endeavour we have been supported intellectually and financially by the Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies which sought to integrate scholars and research topics from the entire Nordic region. In this particular instance the Religion Team and the Culture Team of the Nordic Centre co-operated to bring specialists together at the annual medieval symposium at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense in November 2009.[1]

The presentations at the Symposium – with a few additional contributions – are edited and brought together here under four headings: 1. The material conditions for cultural exchange in terms of travel (Poulsen) and communication (Braunmüller); 2. The presence of national sentiments, identities, and conflicts in the medieval record (Opsahl, Lamberg) and in the modern historiography on late medieval towns (Gustafsson); 3. Guilds and performances, exemplified by the rich English material (Pettitt) and by the surviving Low German and Danish/Swedish *Fastnachtspiele* (Søndergaard); 4. The social and religious functions of guilds as exemplified in Bergen (Haugland), Lübeck (Jahnke) and Tallinn (Mänd, Kala).

Before assessing the impact of these studies on our understanding of guilds in the North and their cultural role, we would like to raise a few more general questions about urban life and its importance in the region in

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1   The Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies was operative 2005-2010 and was supported by NOS-H.

the late medieval centuries. For it is our hope that the book will also help to shift the emphasis not only from a national to a regional perspective, but also from an often negative to a more nuanced evaluation of the cities' role in the history of the medieval North.

As most institutionalized research since the nineteenth century has been based on the boundaries, viewpoints, and archives of modern nations, it is no coincidence that the fluctuations in the states' (and their unions') strengths and weaknesses have underpinned the narratives of the period.[2] When one adds to this the fact that the growth of towns and trade was often introduced, led, or at least significantly inspired by visiting traders of German origin, it is clear that urban growth and its consequences in the region could become only a subtheme, and mainly cultivated in histories of individual towns. Finally the historiographical cult of the Reformation powerfully framed late medieval culture in general as one of decline and in need of 'reform'.

This situation contrasts with research practices and attitudes towards the urban centres of Northern France, England, the Low Countries, Germany and Northern Italy – the centres that were responsible for the main thrust of the late medieval commercial revolution and which have been allowed to take centre stage in a greater European narrative. The difference is not only the result of town sizes and economic volume but is also connected to the often more fragmented (or semi-independent) political narratives of which these major urban centres form part. Even if the Baltic and North Sea towns were peripheral in the European system and orientated themselves mainly towards one major urban centre, i.e. Lübeck, their growth and relative importance should also be seen as an expansion and adjustment of that system in both economic and cultural terms. Equally, the new cultural patterns of the late medieval period that are so richly documented in, for instance, the towns of Germany, Italy, and the Low Countries, should by way of comparison be allowed to form a background for a deeper, even if tentative, understanding of urban life in the North.

## The Nordic and Baltic Region

From the time of the crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, western expansion overseas took place by means of ships, weapons and religious calling. Crusades continued in the later Middle Ages, to a minor degree

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2    Large and long-lived unions to the north and south of the Baltic Sea were established at the end of the fourteenth century. The Polish–Lithuanian Union (1386) was a personal union and so was the Kalmar Union (1397), see below.

against Finland, but especially towards the hinterlands beyond the established urban strongholds in present-day Estonia, Livonia and Lithuania, at that time controlled by the Teutonic Order.[3] Whereas Gotland was a meeting point for merchants from east and west in the high Middle Ages, it gradually lost this position, partly because possibilities arose for direct trading, partly because the Black Death had a devastating effect.[4] In the beginning of the fourteenth century the previously strong kingdoms of Scandinavia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, were all troubled by internal strife, lack of money and failed policies. In the years between 1250 and 1350 the Danish St. Canute guilds, in which the King played a vital role, gradually lost their dominance in trade affairs to merchants from the Hanseatic League, established during the second half of the thirteenth century.[5] The arrival of the Black Death 1349-1350 and its successive incursions further weakened the position of the Nordic kingdoms.[6] The subsequent Nordic Union between the kingdoms, established in the Swedish town of Kalmar in 1397, has often been described as a strengthening of a state power in Scandinavia meant to diminish German aristocratic and Hanseatic influence.[7] The nationalistic overtones in the assessment are obvious and seen in a regional perspective it would be more fruitful to stress that the union never established a centralized government in any capital as was the case in the monarchical states of Denmark–Norway and Sweden that followed in the 1520s and 1530s.[8] Thus one may argue that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a relatively open period with good opportunities for trading activities and cultural trends to take root from "below" – at the level of the towns themselves – in the Nordic sphere.

## "Culture"

As the present collection focuses on "cultural transmission", a few conceptual reminders may be useful. It should be apparent from the above four

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3　The Order of the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary's Hospital in Jerusalem was established in 1190. For new studies in crusades into the Baltics, see among many contributions: Lehtonen, Jensen et al. 2005, Lind, Jensen, Jensen & Bysted 2004, Jensen 2011.

4　Yrwing 1986. Gotland was conquered by the Danish King Valdemar IV in 1361. In older historiography Visby's decline was often explained by the coming of a new, not Swedish, sovereign.

5　Jahnke 2000, Hammel-Kiesow 2000.

6　Cf. Bisgaard & Søndergaard 2009.

7　Lönnroth 1934. For a critical opposition, see among others Bøgh 2003, 15f.

8　Gustafsson 2000.

clusters of themes that "cultural" in our title (as would be expected at least from an intuitive reading) points to the exclusion of economic and quantitative social investigations of late medieval towns and to an emphasis on performances and rituals, and on religious, literary, and legal practices in line with New Cultural History as this has been cultivated in the last three decades or more.[9]

"Culture", however, is notoriously difficult to define and presently runs the risk especially of being too inclusive with the effect that cultural history and social history (or even simply "history") become indistinguishable. This is partly due to dominant sociological conceptual frameworks (like those of Geertz or Bourdieu), which invariably stress that it is vital to understand the elements of human exchange which are symbolic or create meaning by way of distinctive features – thus providing an opening for 'readings' of social groups, dynamics, formations, and practices that are not reducible or directly translatable into simple old-fashioned factors of economics or power. While these tendencies have been met with criticism by both "traditional" empiricists and social historians looking beyond New Cultural History,[10] the dominance of "cultural" approaches – however vaguely defined but at least having ambitions of holistic conceptions of societies and their development – is not likely to abate, although they may find new terminological centres of gravity. It is partly in this inclusive sense we are talking of cultural transmission here – encompassing as it does routes and modes of travel, imported goods, and communication within and among languages.

Other more restrictive understandings of "culture" should be mentioned. Although New Cultural History is no longer all that new, it is still recent enough not to have completely obliterated older connotations of the key concept which, in this way, are still operative in spite of the currently dominant usage. This meaning hails back to the time before mainstream discussions of "popular culture" when "culture" was perceived as elite *Geistesleben* within art, music, literature, and learning – including their religious aspects. In this book literature is the subject of a contribution on medieval plays, and the reader will easily see there why it is now also considered difficult to draw the line between literary history and cultural history.[11]

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9    Cf. BURKE 2004, 49, 90-94.
10   BURKE 2004, 112-116.
11   For this discussion see especially GRABES 2001. An exciting new view of European urban literary history in the period is the multivolume project by David Wallace: *Europe: a Literary History, 1348-1418*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press; it also contributes to crossing the borders between regions and the disciplines of trading history, urban

The overlap between the history of religion and cultural history is perhaps even more striking, as will be apparent from the contributions that deal with the organization and the festivities of the guilds (Haugland, Jahnke, Kala, Mänd, Pettitt). But before discussing the guilds more closely, we would like to offer one more concept in relation to which "culture" can be delimited and which may also help to put the idea of transmission into a larger perspective.

Whereas the concept of culture is at present often completely diluted to mean nothing more than 'habits' (as in "oral culture", "gay culture", "holiday culture"), it also still connotes (and substitutes for) the much more controversial "civilization" (as in "classical culture", "western culture"). The reason why "civilization" is more charged and difficult than "culture" is no doubt that it implies progress and that some societies and some peoples are consequently characterized as more civilized than others. But aspirations of partaking in or promoting more civilized ways cannot be wished away – and even if controversial today are constantly being deployed as a strong argument for all kinds of policies; in the Middle Ages people were still so "uncivilized" (to us) that aristocrats' and townspeople's statements about being more civilized than peasants and nomads were put quite bluntly.

If we follow the analysis of Johann Arnason (2003), "civilization" has distinct but mutually enriching meanings in the singular and in the plural. In the singular it leads us to think of the progress and achievements of mankind in very general terms of technologies, urbanization, wealth, amenities, civilized behaviour, good manners and certain life-styles. In the plural it implies separate historical constellations of culture and power which succeed or compete with each other. Although one finds considerable reluctance in using the concept of civilizations and a predilection for the similar but defused "cultures",[12] modern political discourses and even a number of historical sociologists now pull in the other direction – of whom Arnason is himself a distinguished example.[13]

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history, and literary history. From the Baltic area, Lübeck, Gdansk, Vadstena, Turku, and Novgorod are represented. An outline is given at the project website.

12  The rich and highly recommendable comparative collection edited by M. H. HANSEN 2000, *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures,* illustrates the point: city-state culture is defined both in cultural (linguistic, religious, material) and political terms; for the old world specimens 'civilization' is sometimes used, but not for the medieval or more recent ones. Another example would be the fine book on the medieval Baltic edited by Alan Murray 2009 which is called nothing less than the *Clash of Cultures* – a title which at the same time reminds us of the civilizational debate and defuses it with the neutral 'cultures'.

13  For linking this discourse more concretely to medieval attitudes see the excellent ar-

It is worth asking whether the urban "culture" of late medieval Europe can be regarded as a new "civilization" (or a crucial part of one). If this perspective is seriously considered, we should, as a consequence, be able to view the Baltic and North Sea urbanization c. 1300-1500 as the spread of a civilization, a much more important phenomenon than just "German influence" on Nordic kingdoms (cf. Gustafsson's analysis below), conflicts with the Hanse, or urban wealth playing a part in state formation and warfare (the privileged subjects of national historiography). Even if this suggestion does not work all the way, it could perhaps help the historical imagination on a path to a truly regional appreciation of urban life and of its impacts beyond the development of individual towns and their economic growth.[14]

If one wants to speak of a new civilization in this period, the Renaissance will have been the first candidate for most historically interested readers and scholars since the nineteenth century. Through the "Revolt of the Medievalists" beginning with Haskins's *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927) one or more of the characteristics of the Italian Renaissance has been appropriated for the preceding centuries. In classic books such as Colin Morris's *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (1972), Alexander Murray's *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (1978), and Stephen Jaeger's *The Envy of Angels – Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (1994), more territory was claimed by the medievalists. While this battle was to a significant extent fought on the premises laid down by Renaissance scholars (classicism, individualism, rationalism) and often limited itself to intellectual history, it is in this context more interesting that the two sides were both describing urban phenomena (or at least institutions and attitudes facilitated by towns), although the medieval schools and universities – in terms of explicit ideologies – seemed to stand in a sharp a contrast to the notary culture and private academies of Renaissance Italy.[15]

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ticles by Gillingham 2001 & 2002.

14  A recent survey of medieval towns by Lilley 2002 points to the undertheorized state of the field, 251: "Urban histories of the Middle Ages are invariably empirical, in both substance and outlook [...] The case can thus be made to think both critically and theoretically about medieval urbanism [...] One way of theorising is to adopt a comparative, anthropological approach"; civilizational questions could be one way of opening theoretical perspectives.

15  In passing it can be noted that the 'Renaissance' of the twelfth-century cathedral schools, the thirteenth- to fifteenth-century university textual culture, and fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian humanism, were all to a high degree directed towards intellectual kindred spirits in the ancient urban world (Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle etc); and the differences are being toned down in some recent scholarship (Black 2001).

What is agreed, it seems, is that many developments not only within learning, the arts etc – culture in its old sense – but on a much wider scale, contributed to creating a new Europe; the disagreement is rather about where to put the emphasis, in the high or late medieval period. Without committing oneself to the twelfth rather than the thirteenth or fourteenth century as a turning point, it is still possible to see the urbanization beginning in some areas around the turn of the millenium as a new civilization spreading throughout Europe. As Arnason points out, the possibility of a civilizational break within a premodern region could be seen as one very important difference between Europe and China.[16] Such a view necessarily presupposes that one has not defined civilization uniquely through religion or other factors that preclude radical change within one region (such as are integral to Samuel Huntington's definition, in which modernization cannot change the core of a civilization).[17] The religious issues in our context will be discussed briefly below when we focus on the role of ecclesiastical institutions.

## Late Medieval Urban Civilization – at the Centre and on the Northern Periphery

What would be some of the important elements in this new urban civilization? First of all a number of technological inventions, improvements, or imports from the East (often improved in Europe) which would not have been possible without the work of and the exchanges between craftsmen in towns.[18] The burgeoning cloth industry relied on the spinning wheel from the thirteenth century (and its improvement in the fifteenth century) and the horizontal loom (from the eleventh century); for food production the windmill (twelfth century, northern European) and better ploughshares (and other iron tools) were prominent acquisitions, as were new ship types (like the cog, thirteenth century) for high volume transport. In general, developments in metallurgy, especially the blast oven which produced cleaner and stronger iron (from around 1350, also from northern Europe), had a profound impact on a number of new technologies in warfare, transport and agriculture. Improvements in mechanics likewise had many uses and became very visible in town life through the great public clocks appearing

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16   ARNASON 2003, 307; cf. 309: "... we have seen that reconstructions of the Western European background to the modern breakthrough can easily lead to visions of new beginnings in the High Middle Ages, more important than any other landmarks".

17   Cf. ARNASON 2003, 11–13.

18   Most of the following derives from EPSTEIN 2009, 190-222.

in cities all over Europe (from around 1300); the two great advances in the technology of the written word – paper (superior European production from the thirteenth century onward) and moveable type printing (c. 1450) – were both conditioned by refinements in metallurgy and on the market forces of learning in university and merchant environments.[19]

These improvements and inventions affected all spheres of medieval life, also outside the towns, and made those living on the land more dependent on crafts and trade. This is not the place to review complex changes through new forms of organizations (more on guilds below), but just mentioning a few will easily make it clear how different late medieval European civilization was from its early medieval predecessor.

Urban wealth reached such a volume from the thirteenth century that it became a serious object for taxation by kings and other lords, mainly to support warfare. But this could not be continued in the long term without some measure of political participation on the part of the merchants who generated the wealth – hence the medieval parliaments with representatives from the third estate.

The Nordic development followed suit, but with important differences. Extra taxes were levied on the towns in times of warfare, for instance during the years around 1300 which saw an expansive Danish royal policy towards the north German towns.  On the other hand, the third estate never gained any political influence that could match that seen in the English and French parliaments. Swedish political practice in the fifteenth century suggests that the commoners' opinion was heard at the "ting" before decisions were taken by the privy council (*Rigsrådet*), whereas similar concessions were less common in an increasingly aristocracy-dominated Denmark.[20] And apart from Visby on Gotland, cities in the North never gained a position of their own. In general, the King stayed in control of the towns in his land and regular taxation is found all over Scandinavia from the time of the Union.

The rights of foreign merchants were another matter.  The Norwegian king tried to impose new taxes on foreign merchants in Bergen in the 1280s, but he lost the struggle and the Hanseatic grip on the important stock fish

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19  Cf. Martin 1994, 182–232. The use of paper in the Nordic region appears to have been significant only from around 1400, whereas printing enjoyed a quicker reception in the North. The first printed book in Denmark appeared in 1482, published by an immigrant German printer and it focused on the general European theme, namely fear of the Turks.

20  Gustafsson 2000.

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trade was strengthened.[21] In Denmark similar conflicts with the north German towns are found concerning trade with herrings sold at the important Skanør market in the fourteenth century. In the alliance brought together in 1368-69 by Lübeck, the Hanseatic towns succeeded in bringing the king to his knees and at the peace in Stralsund 1370 they were given two thirds of the annual income of royal taxes from the market.[22] So this was another way of giving the generators of urban wealth an important say in its taxation.[23]

The universities developed their own type of organization together with their host towns, and for the North it is particularly important that from the end of the fourteenth century intellectuals could be trained within the eastern and northern region of the German-speaking areas.[24] Expertise in all the major fields of university scholarship and science became a much less scarce commodity. This is part of the story that Alexander Murray tells of how "rational" practices conquer more spheres of society in the high and late Middle Ages (systematic scholastic inquiry, legal distinctions, co-operative and administrative procedures); another part of this story is the rationalization of trade organizations in the form of banking instruments, arab numeracy, accountancy, monetary systems etc. In the words of a recent survey of global history: "What happened may be described as creeping digitalization, as Europeans imposed an arithmetical filter upon ordinary sense experience. These innovations had the remarkable effect of increasing the accuracy of communication – expressing time, place, pitch, profit, and other meanings more exactly than before."[25]

A third development – which to some degree bridges the divide between the learned and the merchant communities – is the Europe-wide emergence of vernacular writing and much broader diffusion of a "literate mentality".[26] Although experiments had been undertaken since the early Middle Ages, the diffusion and volume of writing in the vernacular underwent a truly explosive development in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[27] It enabled science and learning to become visible outside the

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21  Wubs-Mrozewitz 2008, 37–40.
22  Hybel & Poulsen 2007, *Ribe Bys historie*, vol. 1, 2010.
23  Cf. Erik of Pommern's town privileges of 1422. *Danmarks gamle Købstadslovgivning*, vol. 5, 75.
24  The founding of the Rostock University in 1431 had a considerable impact on the region. Scandinavian universities were founded in Sweden in 1477 and in Denmark in 1479.
25  McNeill & McNeill 2003, 145.
26  Cf. Mostert & Adamska 2004.
27  For the dynamics and importance of vernacular writing in the North up to c. 1250,

universities and monasteries and it made it possible to have more efficient education of merchants (and other lay people, including a significant number of women)[28] in literacy and numeracy through non-ecclesiastical schools – of which there are also traces in the North in the fifteenth century and in Lübeck already from the thirteenth century.[29]

Rich burghers, rational accounting and records in the vernacular were not unfamiliar in the North. Rich patrician families with international contacts are documented in Ripen (Ribe) in Denmark already around 1300.[30] The decline in trade after the Black Death also affected the many, but small Danish towns, as the plague certainly also did the less urbanized parts of the rest of Scandinavia. It may be regarded as a clear sign of recovery that Danish townsmen in the 1480s for the first time instituted more masses in churches and religious houses than did aristocratic families.[31] Arabic numerals are known from the later part of the thirteenth century, but it is noteworthy that they did not succeed in replacing Roman numerals in account books until after 1500.[32] (Account books from the thirteenth century onwards have been preserved.) Guilds and craft guilds organized trade and production, and their laws and statutes were no longer written in Latin but in Low German or in Scandinavian languages.

The fact that primarily raw materials, and not commodities, were transported from the North to other parts of Europe has caused many scholars to see the region as a pure and underdeveloped periphery. This assessment, well-known in modern trading histories, has much older roots and was already formulated in the fifteenth century by pope Pius II "Scots, Danes, Swedes and Norwegians all live at the end of the world" he wrote in *De Europa* in 1458. On the relationship between Lübeck and the Kalmar Union king he stated: "Close to the Ocean [the Baltic Sea] you will find great and spectacular cities. Lübeck surpasses them all with her high buildings and magnificent churches. The town is so mighty and rich that the three great Realms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway usually inaugurate and dethrone their kings after her will."[33]

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see Mortensen 2006. For the period after 1250 in the countryside, see Poulsen 2010, 429–448.

28   Cf. Green 2007.
29   Cordes 2006.
30   *Ribe Bys historie*, vol. 1, 2010.
31   Poulsen 2004, Bisgaard & Søndergaard 2009, 96.
32   'Talsystem' in: *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*, 18, 115–121.
33   Cotta-Schønberg 2007, 92, 96. The last citation is from Pius II's work *De Germania* 1457.

The Stralsund Peace Treaty of 1370 (see p. 15) was celebrated in similar tones in older German historiography. After 1945 the dominating point of view was superseded by the opinion that the relationship between Lübeck and the Nordic Union king could be characterized as a permanent political rivalry. Recently this description has been turned upside down with the argument that trade affairs with the Scandinavian countries, and especially with Denmark, were economically so important for Lübeck that it willingly accepted participation in embargos imposed by the Union king, for instance on Sweden.[34] The present book aligns itself with such a regional view and emphasizes the cultural transmission that followed in the wake of the cogs.

On a deeper level the general European urban development led to important changes in social practices and attitudes; again the merchants and craftsmen were at the front, and the changes affected all of society. Martha Howell analyzes some of the more important social and legal implications of the commercial revolution in her rich new book *Commerce before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (2010). Her research is based mainly on towns of the Low Countries and northern France, but her findings are certainly relevant for the Nordic region as well: "...wherever commerce took hold, it affected ideas about property, marriage, and exchange, and it forced alterations in associated social practices." Urban wealth meant moveable wealth in contrast to that based on land, and this had profound implications both for the institution of marriage and in general for the perception of value as something exchangeable and hence abstract (cf. Murray 1978 above). Land as a basis for marriage and for the provision of inheritance was not only more concrete and tangible but also much more secure in the long term than merchant wealth – one could say that land was perceived as an essential part of the person and the family line, almost contiguous with their body. The new kind of wealth unsettled these securities and new types of marriage contracts evolved with much fewer material resources to transport into the new marriage or to the children of a previous marriage. According to Howell, the well-documented rise in the discourse of romantic love in late medieval literature and other documents must be seen as one attempt to construct something solid instead of rather than brought about by the emergence of a private sphere in contrast to a public one.[35] Such an analysis serves as a good example of how changes in resources bring about lasting changes in social attitudes.

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34 ENEMARK 1988.
35 On wedding contracts in Iceland, see ARNÓRSDÓTTÍR 2010.

A similar process of abstraction was brought about by the increasing complexity of merchant networks and the number of foreigners involved in the craftsmanship and trading needed to make commerce on this scale work. This dependency on people you had never seen opened a significant gap – in Habermas's terms – between *Lebenswelt* and the faceless *Systemwelt*.[36]

The amount of credit needed for the late medieval commercial system influenced ways of viewing the individual; men of the landed aristocracy were by tradition men of honour (ideally acquired in war), but the late medieval merchant also became a man of honour, namely in equal proportion to the credit owed to him.[37] Applied to the North, however, this observation needs to be nuanced. In Scandinavia Hanseatic merchants used another credit system to retain loyal suppliers, for instance among Norwegian fishermen outside Bergen, and were thus able to keep competitors away from what they considered to be their own market. This monopolizing probably made for a more rigid framework of ascribing value - concretely and abstractly. One may also argue that the contrast between rural society and the urban environments may have lived on longer here than in other parts of Europe. On the other hand, the *Ratsmänner* in the urban hub Lübeck achieved the right to be called "dominus" at quite an early stage, thus reflecting the use of aristocratic denominations and status attribution by the burgher class.

Scholars have often ascribed the beginnings of fashion to the late medieval period, with its new access to quality fabric, dye etc. Sumptuary laws trying to restrict the display of impressive clothes (in a kind of arms' race between royals, aristocrats and rich burghers) were promulgated everywhere in late medieval urban Europe,[38] and they are, in Howell's inter-

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36    At our conference Ilkka Leskelä presented a paper on fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century commercial letters documenting a specific merchant network between Stockholm, Riga, Gdansk, Stralsund, Lübeck, Tallinn and Turku; Leskelä will present his results in his forthcoming PhD. thesis.

37    HOWELL 2010, 23-29 and 195.

38    Around 1200 Saxo referred to the abundance of luxury clothes that were sold in the town of Ripen. The first laws against conspicuous consumption were passed in 1283 in Denmark and specified who was to wear what clothes on which occasions. They also restricted the number of people who were allowed to gather for weddings, christenings etc. Sumptuary laws were later passed in Norway in 1315 and in Sweden in 1345. At the beginning of the fourteenth century similar provisions were regularly added to town laws in Denmark. Sumptuary laws disappear in Scandinavia after the arrival of the Black Death and did not reappear until around 1500. This serves as a good illustration of the set-back in resources many towns suffered after the plagues' arrival; *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*, vol. 11, 2-5.

pretation, also to be understood as "part of a larger struggle to reimagine the relationship between a person's appearance and his or her identity".[39] The confusion around the relationship between the representation and the reality of an individual played out over a long time and in various contexts. Some of this discussion bears on the debate between medievalists and Renaissance scholars about the discovery of the individual – the borderline drawn between the true inner self and its outward appearance: "According to this logic, clothing was considerably more than a producer of social status, more even than a *sign* of identity. It was constituent of identity".[40]

## Guilds

This volume focuses especially on guilds and their role in the interaction between merchants and craftsmen from different parts of the North and how this furthered the transmission of culture across or along the Baltic and the North sea. Much too often guilds have been reserved for specialists and their relevance alleged to be important only in specific matters. A quick glance at their sheer numbers will cast doubt on the validity of such a judgement. In a new study Håkon Haugland has registered all the known guilds in Scandinavia and found their number to be 542: 349 in Denmark, 144 in Sweden and Finland and 49 in Norway.[41] Considering the sparse source material available in Scandinavia, Aksel E. Christensen was probably right when he estimated that their numbers in medieval Denmark alone could be counted in thousands.[42] A similar result was reached by Clive Burgess, when he suggested the number in England to have been around 30.000.[43]

Secondly, guilds were involved in many other things than just business affairs. Tom Pettitt illustrates a whole range of activities among English guilds in his article, showing that they acted plays at festivals or saints' days, walked in processions or celebrated their own feasts with invited guests and engaged in a broad range of performances. Guilds were deeply involved in servicing their members in matters of worship, often by maintaining an altar dedicated to prayers and commemorations of their dead brothers and, of course, by arranging the funerals of fellow members. These aspects are treated in the articles by Mänd and Kala with examples from Tallinn.

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39  HOWELL 2010, 47.
40  HOWELL 2010, 244–245.
41  HAUGLAND 2012, 89.
42  BISGAARD 2001.
43  CROUCH 2000.

One of the advantages of focusing on guilds is that you achieve access to channels of cultural transmission, as it were, from below. At this level no central powers such as Church or King acted as communicative and controlling transmitters, although kings and queens, bishops and abbots might be members of particular guilds (se below). It is all the more important, therefore, to make clear what is meant by the term guild.

In recent research "guild" has been suggested as an analytic term that covers fraternities, craft guilds and ordinary guilds.[44] Guilds may be defined, in the word of John Henderson, as voluntary associations based on a model of brotherhood, but without the ties of actual kinship. In this way the townspeople compensated for the lack of aristocratic networks based on family ties and land ownership.[45] They provided mutual support for the living and the dead, as was overtly expressed in their communal feasting.[46] Each guild had its own statutes, confirmed by civic authorities or by the church. Further, guilds were exclusive in the sense that membership was normally limited to those who fulfilled certain criteria stated in the statutes of the association. Criteria varied: for example, having the same occupation or craft; living in the same area such as a parish, a village or a quarter of a town; or more broadly formulated criteria, such as fulfilling a certain religious task for a community or the like. Becoming a member usually required a recommendation from an existing guild brother. It is important to stress that membership was not restricted to men: women, children and servants are often named on membership lists.[47]

Religious tasks, various feasts and an oath taken upon admission to the guild helped secure a common bond or feeling of brotherhood. Many guilds had their own side altars to accommodate masses for dead and living members. The altars were situated in local churches or religious houses with which the respective guilds were associated. Some guilds even had their own priests.

The multiplicity of the guilds in late medieval towns made room for new functions and interests. One of the most successful associations was the kind that combined trade, craft and guild. Merchants and craftsmen had their own guilds, although one should be careful not to view these associations as too exclusive. Analyses of preserved membership lists show that other in-

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44   Anz 1998.
45   Cf. Najemy 2006, 39–40.
46   Henderson 1994, 2.
47   Bisgaard 2001.

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dividuals could participate as well. Among the bakers in Malmö one would also have found carpenters, tailors, potters and fishermen.[48]

In the late medieval town, generally speaking, guilds specialized and competed to obtain more members. The Corpus Christi guilds may serve as an example. The Corpus Christi feast entered the church calendar at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and not long after that the first guilds dedicated to the holy body of God saw the light. One of their important tasks was to carry the large canopy that protected the monstrance from rain and sunlight during the annual Corpus Christi Day procession. These processions developed in many places into a representation of the social hierarchy of the town, with the guilds taking their place in the procession according to their prominence and influence.[49] For this reason Corpus Christi guilds often attracted the elite of the late medieval towns as members. However, new studies on the situation in Bergen, Oslo, Lübeck and Tallinn, presented here by Haugland, Jahnke and Kala, modify this impression. The well-preserved material from Lübeck gives a rare insight into the fluid lines between religion and politics, showing that in time of revolt in the council, members of the guild had to flee and no new members were admitted because the guild had fallen from favour. Thus elite members were certainly there in Lübeck as was the case in Bergen and Oslo. On the other hand it is shown that the popularity of the Corpus Christi was so intense that in Lübeck alone more than five confraternities dedicated to the holy body of God were fostered. The smaller of them did not extend beyond a certain quarter in town or a specific group of members. In Tallinn two guilds may have existed, Kala shows, and both of them, seemingly, played a minor role in town life compared to the major guilds. This may serve as a warning not to interpret every mention of a Corpus Christi guild in a certain town as an elite phenomenon.

In the context of our anthology, however, it is noteworthy that religiously inspired guilds like the Corpus Christi fraternities, as well as all other types of guilds, functioned as a meeting place for different groups in and around the medieval town. The Corpus Christi guild in Aalborg in northern Jutland offers some good examples.[50] Well preserved member lists with the names of 2.393 persons show that the guild attracted both secular people and religious men ranging from bishops and abbots to ordinary rectors and vicars. Both genders participated. Married women, widows and

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48   Ibid., 24-29.
49   Rubin 1991, 232-271.
50   Bisgaard 2001.

young maidens all appear on the lists. So do servants who followed their master or mistress. Names of ordinary craftsmen are also found, although one has to remember that the difference between poor and rich craftsmen could be considerable. Besides various groups from within the town men and women from the neighbouring countryside also came and participated in the annual procession. People from both the gentry and the aristocracy came, as well as foreigners and others we cannot identify. Norwegians from the south coast of Norway, in particular from Oslo, appear from time to time, Dutch do as well, but especially Hanseatic merchants were regularly present. 477 German names appear on the lists (about one fifth), and the statutes state that one of the aldermen always had to be a German (he bore the title of *Schaffer*).[51] This probably meant that he also served as a kind of steward at the feast ("Drunke"/guild drinking) that began after the procession had ended. In sum, people of both higher and lower status participated.

The normal procedure in all kinds of guilds was that members were allowed to invite at least one guest to participate in their social gatherings. When this is added to the above-mentioned circumstances, the role of the guilds as a meeting place becomes even more obvious. In Aalborg in the Corpus Christi guild, the chance of being a guest was apparently much coveted. In 1455 a friar who was not allowed to cross his chosen enclosure appeared as a "brother" in the guild too. This special arrangement was on the condition that the friar promised to pray well for the guild members when he returned to his daily life.[52]

Modern theories of networking could easily be applied to this characterization of the late medieval guild but more important here is the cultural spin-off effect. New ideas, new ways of behaviour, practical knowledge, fashion, entertainment, principles of organizing, etc. – all such things could be exchanged, learned, and developed.

The cultural impact involved may be illustrated by the example of the new fifteenth-century Low German title in guilds mentioned above, *Schaffer*. The word entered the Danish language in the same century as *skaffer* is first encountered in guilds, later on more broadly in society. Eventually it came to mean a person who arranged country weddings and took care that everything necessary was at hand.[53] When village halls were erected in the Danish countryside in the 19th century the manager of such an establishment was called the *skaffer*, especially in Jutland and on Funen. This

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51 Frandsen 2007, 40.
52 *Danmarks Gilde- og Lavsskraaer fra Middelalderen*, vol. 1, 627.
53 *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog*.

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diffusion can only be explained in terms of cultural transmission and the importance of guilds in earlier times.

## The Role of the Church

As a participant in the newly rising urban civilization the Church played a very important role. The skyline of Lübeck or any other major city in the North with its many church towers and spires demonstrates that at once. The technique of bricklaying, introduced in the twelfth century, proved to be of high value all around the Baltic Sea and spread by way of ecclesiastical networks. St Mary's Church in Gdansk (Danzig), begun in 1343 and finished in 1496, is still one of the largest brick churches in Europe. The city churches of St Nicolas in Nakskov in Denmark, St Laurentius in Söderköping in Sweden, or of St Nicolas in Tallinn are considerably smaller, but likewise good examples of wealthy city churches deriving advantage from urban culture.

One source of income of great value for churches and religious houses was the foundation and maintenance of altars held by guilds. Two thirds of the side altars in Danish medieval towns seem to have been guild endowments.[54] Guilds wanted their dead and living members to be commemorated through regular prayers and masses, and they willingly paid for it, either through gifts from prominent members of the guild or by voluntary collections among the members. A retable could be added and methods of payment were the same as those just mentioned. Haugland, Jahnke and Kala further investigate guild investments in the afterlife, and the examples given range from Bergen in the west to Tallinn in the east. Meanwhile Anu Mänd closely examines career patterns in guilds and shows how a position here could provide access to a career in town politics, with examples taken from the rich guild material from Tallinn.

At a deeper level, guild arrangements with churches raise the question of the relationship between the Christian faith and urban civilization. Back in the 1980s Jacques Le Goff suggested that Purgatory emerged as a third place between Heaven and Hell exactly at the time when burghers appeared regularly as a third major group in western society, i.e. around 1200.[55] For this blunt theory he received much criticism. Notions of Purgatory were much older, critics said, and referred to liturgical documents. And his jux-

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54   Bisgaard 2001, 149–202.
55   Le Goff 1981.

taposition of a rising urban culture with developments in Christianity was too crude and schematic to be taken seriously.

At the same time, however, another scholar from the *Annales* School, Jacques Chiffoleau, formulated a grand theory in a related field.[56] He wished to explain why private masses achieved such high popularity in the later Middle Ages. In a regional study of Avignon, he examined more than 6.000 wills and endowments, and not only did he find confraternities as regular receivers of gifts in wills and as donators of masses, he was especially alert to the dynamics between salvation and what was the right number of endowed masses to achieve it. Chiffoleau claimed that as a result of this uncertainty, a new awareness was fostered of countability in religion and that it was very similar to the accountability that arose in trade and business at the same time.

The reactions to Chiffoleau's ideas have been no less sharp than those Le Goff experienced. Of minor importance here is Chiffoleau's idea of a connection between the rise of guilds and the impact of the Black Death – much evidence indicates that he was wrong and that the notion of confraternities was much older. More crucial was the criticism formulated by Eamon Duffy.[57] Asserting the superiority of religious ideas, he operates with the concept of traditional religion. Traditional religion was common to urban and rural society and there was nothing new about masses for the dead and commemorations as they had been present in Christendom since Antiquity, although he admits that they slowly evolved to become increasingly dominant.

In our context of a new urban civilization, the concept of (ac)countability would be a tempting aspect. On the one hand it could integrate the Church into the rising urban culture, and with the institution of masses it would at the same time make it easy to document the transmission of a new culture. And Chiffoleau's observations may be applicable without accepting his (and Le Goff's) dictum that religious ideas simply follow material conditions. On the other hand, one has to be careful not to postulate that masses in themselves led to an early capitalistic way of thinking. Such a generalization would be difficult to substantiate directly from the evidence.

Although some of these characteristics of late medieval European urban civilization cannot be documented in detail in the Nordic regions, it is difficult to imagine that they were not, to some extent, also present there. The

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56   Chiffoleau 1980.
57   Duffy 1992, 3.

spread of technical improvements, inventions, social strategies, and attitudes into the North did to some extent follow a simple diffusion from the centre to the periphery: new quality beer, types of ships, art objects and fashion, etc., were imported or copied (the lines of contact are exemplified by Poulsen). The assimilation of Low German features into the Scandinavian languages was indeed a one-way traffic of considerable importance (Braunmüller) – and in addition wonderful evidence for a mainly urban exchange which had long-range effects for all speakers of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (irrespective of how those languages or dialects were defined or perceived at the time).

When we move to a level beyond that of objects, inventions, artistic styles, language, and new figures of worship, the traffic of cultural transmission is more difficult to spell out directly. Organizational structures, legal solutions, power relations, festivities, private masses, etc. could be similar in towns in the North and in the dominating centres of Germany and the Low Countries without wholesale import or copying (cf. the discussion in Gustafsson's paper), and might rather be seen as similar responses to similar social dynamics and pressures – not unambiguous uni-directional cultural diffusion, but nonetheless expansion of an urban civilization. In practice, imported elements were obviously mixed with local solutions.

Another way of conceptualizing the spread of a civilization and cultural transmission from centre to periphery is to apply the phrase proposed by McNeill & McNeill in *The Human Web* (2003) about the period c. 1000-1500, namely "thickening webs". The idea of a progressive thickening of human networks of increasing complexity lies at the core of their narrative of world history – and this again can be related to the growing *Systemwelt* as mentioned above. Increasing density can be illustrated in the chronology of cultural imports in the North during the Middle Ages.

Significant cultural import into the North during the period c. 1000-1300 was most often negotiated, transported and diffused by a powerful but small elite. The Christianization of Denmark, Norway and Sweden and all its cultural effects were underpinned by an international elite network – a very tenuous web in comparison with the exchanges in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Often objects, skills, and education were, in the earlier period, imported directly from far away, through face-to-face elite links. Books and Latin writing came first from England and Saxony; texts, music, liturgy and literary styles often also came from Normandy and Northern France; theology from France and England; cathedral builders came from England and Lombardy. This was all a high culture copied from foreign elites – often from far away. In the late Middle Ages – with the new tech-

nologies, the urbanization and the commercial networks, the dominance of Lübeck, the new German universities etc – the cultural transmission involved considerably more people, goods and skills than previously. Northern "German culture" (including that of the Low Countries) became an almost impenetrable "thickened web" from which new goods, arts, fashion, lifestyles, and religious practices all made their impact on the North, in the process marginalizing influences from further afield. In many senses the Baltic space (and some of the Norwegian coastline) became a cultural province of Northern Germany – a fact that was was forcefully driven home by the course of the Reformation.

## Levels of Urban Identities

In the context of the present collection of studies, social identities – and hence cultural memories – were formed on the levels of region, language, town, gender, and, most importantly here, guilds. The special constellation in the North in which the rising urban culture was predominantly associated with immigrants (mainly Low German speakers), made for regional and linguistic markers of identity, as discussed in the papers by Braunmüller (communication), Lamberg (Finns in Stockholm), and Opsahl (Germans in Bergen, Tønsberg and Oslo).

Opsahl discusses several examples of anti-German sentiments found in late-medieval Norwegian documents, mostly expressed at a political level. In Norwegian historiography as well as in other Scandinavian countries such anti-German sentiments have been taken for granted and explained in terms of economic exploitation and as a natural national reaction. Opsahl is more cautious. His article is important, addressing a difficult topic and asking for more investigations before proper aswers can be given. Lamberg, on the other hand, clearly states that immigrant merchant minorities of Finns in Stockholm, caused by better possibilities of trading and possibly also employment for family members, did not give up their family structures, nor their language, as they seemingly settled in the same areas of Stockholm. Only a minority of them achieved burgher status.

Specific town identities and patriotic feelings were, in the wider European context, clearly marked by the spectacular rise of town chronicles and histories from the thirteenth century onwards;[58] the sentiments which gave rise to these were probably present in Nordic towns as well, but the same

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58   SCHMID 2010 with further references.

does not seem to apply to the cultural resources. Only post-medieval specimens of this genre have survived from the North, although a few cathedral towns' simple annals have come down to us, as well as written evidence of a collective town memory in local archives. But general urban attitudes are quite clear in the *Fastnachtspiele* (of German and Nordic origin) discussed in Søndergaard's article. One play is mocking peasants and their attempts to cheat the townspeople, another describes their filthiness. The anxiety about women in charge is also thematized – just as in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*; another displays very directly a male audience.

Much more is known from England about the guilds' involvement in putting on shows of various kinds, and Pettitt discusses their contexts which are suggestive for their Nordic counterparts. Again, urban confusions of gender and social roles appear – as well as a large Biblical and saintly repertoire which was both educational and reflected townspeople's everyday life. Pettitt further underlines the fierce competitiveness and hierarchization between guilds in their promotion of pageants, processions, plays, etc. This is a reminder that guild identities were constantly cultivated even when gendered, urban, or regional issues were being thematized.

Modern comparative and regional history should, on the one hand, relativize and sometimes entirely abolish previous exceptionalisms – in the present case questioning both the "exceptional" nation states and overcoming the fragmented historiography of individual towns. By focusing on regional webs and common urban patterns such aims too are part of the ambition of the present volume. The central and very concrete theme of guilds should, furthermore, invite readers, we hope, to envisage, however imperfectly and distantly, a "whole" of late medieval urban life in the North, momentarily undisturbed by the modern compartments of economic, cultural, religious, literary, and social history. Such concrete glimpses of a highly important type of medieval social organization can in turn enrich our modern understanding of the dynamics of late-medieval towns which is necessarily formed through our own concepts of and interests in culture and cultural transmission.

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