

**'The metropolis and the state. The autonomy of Amsterdam
and Antwerp in a comparative perspective' (ca. 1530-1830)**

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Introduction

This paper is part of a research project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the University of Amsterdam which aims at a better understanding of the autonomous field of major commercial centres towards the state in historical context. Above all, the relationship of the urban authorities with the central state are taken into account, in interconnection within the (international) economy and the (local and national) socio-political settings.

This project can be situated in the historiographic background of the studies of Ch. Tilly, W. Blockmans and others concerning the role of towns in the process of state formation. According to these authors, the relationship between the central state and large urban communities was ambiguous. On the one hand, there was a strong mutual interdependence, based on the towns' need of protection and the state's need of financial means for developing its policies; on the other hand the towns shunned political interference and overtaxation by the state.¹ Major commercial centres were of considerable importance for the state because of their economic role for the whole territory and because of the extensive taxable wealth they represented. Their extraordinary financial potential promised funds for public loans, which was always crucial for a state in crisis or at war. To preserve this extraordinary role, the commercial centres needed a significant degree of freedom and autonomy in order to attract merchants as well as streams of goods and finance. As the central government had an interest in stimulating the economic performance of their major cities, special privileges and liberties were granted. As a result, these centres acquired a strong bargaining power towards the central government. However, this tendency towards autonomy was in conflict with the tendency of the early modern state to increase its hold on its territories and to centralize its power. Furthermore, the urban elite had to take into account the conflicting interests of their own separate power groups. It is in this multiple conflict situation that we have to situate the relationship between the world-cities and the central state.

¹ C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, Cambridge Mass., Oxford, 1990; W.P. Blockmans, Voracious States and Obstructing Cities: An Aspect of State Formation in Preindustrial Europe, in C. Tilly and W.P. Blockmans, eds., *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, a.d. 1000 to 1800*, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1994, p. 218-251; Fernand Braudel, *Le temps du monde. Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme Vol. III* (Paris 1979).

Antwerp and Amsterdam were two of the great commercial centres of the early modern period to which the description of commercial metropolis discussed in the previous paragraph applies. Other comparable centres were Venice, Genoa, Hamburg, Bordeaux, Barcelona, London etc. Antwerp and Amsterdam were particularly suitable for a comparative case study, as they were situated in the same geographical region, belonged (at times) to the same political system (16th century before the Dutch Revolt and in the early 19th century), and enjoyed similar social and economic characteristics,² although their ups and downs did not coincide chronologically. Neither were seats of the central government, thus both depended upon other urban elites and/or upon the central government elite.

Economic as well as political changes, such as the Dutch Revolt, the Closure of the river Scheldt in 1585, the Napoleonic Wars, but also long term developments in government and administration structures, shaped the history of both cities in a quite different way. In general, however, these changes were treated in the historiography as external factors that happened to the towns, rather than looking to the field of urban strategies, in interaction with the state institutions, with the economic opportunities and with the different local pressure groups.

The questions of this project can be summarized as follows, each one following in a more or less logical order:

- 1) How successful were the urban governments of Antwerp and Amsterdam in pursuing their cities' interests towards the central state in the long term? Or, in other words, what was the degree and the extent of their autonomy?
- 2) In case of a significant degree of autonomy, was the urban autonomy directly dependent upon contemporary economic success, and hence of negotiating power towards the government, or rather, did the economic performance of the past forge the urban autonomy?
- 3) In case of a significant impact of past economic performances, is it possible to discern a certain pattern in the way the urban autonomy was styled and negotiated

² H. Van der Wee, J. Materné, Antwerp as a world market in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in: J. Van der Stock, ed., *Antwerp, story of a metropolis* (exhibition catalogue, Antwerp, Hessenhuis, 25 June -10 October 1993), Antwerp, 1993, pp.19-32.; C. Lesger, Clé Lesger, *Handel in Amsterdam ten tijde van de Opstand. Koopliden, commerciële expansie en verandering in de ruimtelijke economie van de Nederlanden ca. 1550-ca. 1630*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2001 (Amsterdamse Historische reeks, grote serie, deel 27).

through time? In other words, can we trace a strong path-development in the negotiations that supported that bargaining process?

- 4) How did the urban governments comply with the different and often conflicting interests of their own sub-elites, while carving out their autonomy from the central state? Is there some continuity in the styling of the strategy towards the state, and who decided actually upon that strategy (were the ways the bargaining elite was constituted similar through time)?

Thus, next to actual/short-term economic or political opportunities and crises, long-term developments in the economic and political constellation, both in society at large, as well as within the local community itself, are expected to matter as to the way the autonomous space of the major commercial centres was taking shape. Above all, we are interested whether certain long-term characteristics can be traced in the strategies of the urban power elites *vis-à-vis* the central state.

Autonomy and political strategies, a challenge for comparative urban history

In contrast with other fields of comparative urban history, such as that of demographic or economic development, the study of urban autonomy and political strategies of cities are difficult to compare, out of lack of quantitative factors of comparison. Similar obstacles were encountered by O'Brien a.o. in their attempt to make a comparative study of 'achievements' in different urban centres during their Golden Ages.³ Indeed, the relationship between the urban authorities and the central government is reflected by multiple factors with different characteristics. The institutional structures are relatively stable and can be quantified to a certain extent. The processes of decision making and bargaining, however, are much more complex and volatile and can only be analyzed through a qualitative analysis of a broad variety of sources.

The concept of autonomy is highly questionable, of course. Autonomy itself is a relative concept – there is always more or less, in comparison with other situations. In this study, autonomy is perceived in relative sense, for which we use a number of

³ Patrick O'Brien, Derek Keene, Herman van der Wee and Marjolein 't Hart (eds.): *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe. Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London*, (Cambridge, 2001).

proxies: the number of fields of urban policy in which the central government interferes, the number of officers in town appointed by the central government, the number of times the central government applies force to restore order/ to enforce decisions, the amount of taxes destined for the central government (also related to the number of subsidies received), the number of urban elite members (in the negotiating process with the state) who are also closely related to the central government elites (family networks/ social capital). We do not wish to compound the term “autonomy” for all policy fields – for example, a high degree of autonomy in the economic field may well be counterbalanced by a low degree of autonomy in social-religious issues.

Another concept that needs clarification is the “central state”. After all, the composite state of the 16th century was quite different from the centralized monarchy of the 19th century, both in range and competence. In the time of the Republic (17th-18th century) Amsterdam even did not have to face a central government.⁴ In our study, the “central state” is the group of (central) government bodies in Brussels or The Hague; in case of the Dutch Republic, the Council of State, the States General, the generality Chamber of Accounts, etc., all situated in The Hague. That constitutes the core of the analysis, but in some cases the interaction has to be studied with the Habsburg rulers (16th century) and with the provincial estates (16th-18th century). Indeed, as the character and the scope of the central governments changes through time, we have to be aware that the opportunities for urban autonomy also underwent significant changes, as new fields of urban policy were designed whereas others were privatized or nationalized.

Furthermore, we need to be clear as to the concept “urban government” (sometimes the “bargaining urban elite”). In general, the main actors we are looking at are the local political representatives (mayors/burgomasters, aldermen, members of the town council when appropriate), the major urban officials (magistrates, pensionaries, secretaries) as well as the delegates of the town in the central and provincial bodies of the state.

Finally, we have used the term “path-dependency”. Following Douglass North and Avner Greif,⁵ we will try to single out certain continuities through time in the

⁴ Marjolein 't Hart, *The making of a bourgeois state. War, politics and finance during the Dutch Revolt* (Manchester 1993).

⁵ Douglass C. North, *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance* (Cambridge 1990) and Avner Greif, “The fundamental problem of exchange: a

strategies of the urban elite, perhaps linked to a glorious economic past, or to a specific socio-political-geographical setting. Again, we are dealing with a relative concept (there is always more or less of continuity), but the most important proxy here will be the study of the urban accounts, which are expected to reveal a structural character concerning the degree of financial autonomy, the actual policy fields and the persistence of certain priorities in the urban administration.

Two dimensions of comparison

In order to be able to cover a period of 300 years in the history of two different cities, the project focusses on three specific periods, that is 1530-45, 1665-80 and 1815-1830. Comparisons are made between Antwerp and Amsterdam during a similar period, whereas also the development through time can be studied for each of the towns. The study also allows for a comparison between the two towns during different periods, for example during times of economic prosperity or relative decline. Hence we obtain six case studies, each of which had its proper particularities in terms of power relations and issues.

The periods of comparison were chosen in order to obtain clear contrasts between the two cities in their relationship with the central government. In the sixteenth century, Antwerp was one of the larger cosmopolitan cities of the world. Ludovico Guicciardini noted that due to its grandeur and wealth Antwerp “governs itself as if it were a free town”.⁶ The city’s financial and economic resources created a certain room for manoeuvre in face of the centralizing monarchy.⁷ Still, Antwerp belonged to the powerful Spanish-Habsburg empire and was also highly dependent upon the centralising state for its protection and the maintenance of its privileges. At that time, Amsterdam was a rising commercial town, but both in size and importance still far behind Antwerp. The relationship with the central government was more of an

research agenda in historical institutional analysis’, *European Review of Economic History* 4 (2000), pp. 251-284.

⁶ Guicciardini, L., *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania Inferiore* (Antwerp: Willem Silvius, 1567).

⁷ G. Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation. Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550-1577*, Baltimore, London, 1996. G. E. Wells,

indirect character, through the Provincial Estates. Already Amsterdam's financial resources provided the town with a strong bargaining power (shown among others by a most self-willed policy in providing loans to the central government)⁸, yet in order to maintain a good relation with the Habsburgs (expecting state support in foreign trade issues) the Amsterdam government was willing to exercise a strong repression towards local heretic groups, more as compared to Antwerp a.o.. It is interesting to see that in the 1570s, at the time of the Revolt, Amsterdam remained long a stronghold for the Spanish troops, much longer than most other Holland towns.

By the late seventeenth century, the picture had changed completely. Antwerp had lost much of its international importance during that century, while Amsterdam was the predominant commercial centre of Western Europe and the centre for world colonial trade. On the political level, Amsterdam played a leading role within the Dutch Republic, its burgomasters assuming the attitude and dignities of the nobility. New taxes, new customs duties, new loans, monetary regulations, foreign policy: all these major policy fields of the central government were pre-fried at Amsterdam, or at least, the town could hinder them or steer their aims. Nevertheless, 1672 was a year of political-military crisis, and Amsterdam had to accept the installation of a new *Stadhouder* for the Dutch Republic, William of Orange III, the later king of England. In the wake of the crisis, the anti-orangists were purged from Amsterdam's town council.⁹ At that time, Antwerp had remained part of the Spanish Low Countries with Brussels as government centre. The town faced commercial and industrial problems, among others the re-introduction by the government of the import and export duties at the frontier with the United Provinces, called *licenten*. In spite of its declining economic supremacy, the town still proved successful in promoting a policy of low overall customs through its strong position in the provincial estates of Brabant.¹⁰ Among others, by refusing the payment of new taxes, Antwerp maintained a

Σχόλιο [M&B1]: de Spaanse gouverneur was volgens de literatuur niet meer al te machtig, dus heb ik powerful geschrapt.

Antwerp and the Government of Philip II, 1555-1567 (PhD. diss. Cornell Univ., 1982).

⁸ James Tracy, *Renten and renteniers. A financial revolution in the Habsburg Netherlands*, 1985.

⁹ Hans Bontemantel, *De Regeering van Amsterdam, soo in 't civiel als crimineel en militaire (1653-1672)* [ed. by G.W. Kernkamp, The Hague 1897].

¹⁰ I. Van Damme, "Het vertrek van Mercurius. Historiografische en hypothetische verkenningen van het economisch wedervaren van Antwerpen in de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw", in *Neha-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 2003, p. 6-39.

considerable negotiating power, as the central government was desperately trying to find the means to pay the troops needed for the wars against Louis XIV of France.

After 1815, Antwerp and Amsterdam once more happened to constitute part of the same state. But the political context as well as the economic constellations had changed fundamentally. The process of bureaucratization during the eighteenth century and the political turmoil of the French Revolution created a totally new environment for town governments and the central administration.¹¹ At the economic level, Amsterdam was the predominant, but slowly declining, commercial centre. The glorious times of the urban autonomy tradition were not even one generation away. Its historical past cast a significant shadow on the relation between the town and the state, culminating most fiercely in the competence struggle concerning the urban finances.¹² Antwerp was a relative newcomer again, with only little political power. Nevertheless, Antwerp's share in the commercial activities of the country increased.¹³ In fact, the economic policies of the new central government were quite supportive for this town.

Autonomy and state interference – sources and methods

At this moment our research is still going on. The following examples, mainly from the Antwerp cases of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, are presented to inform you about the kind of sources used and how we aim to translate the abstract research questions into a couple of operative research methods.

Amsterdam and Antwerp were part of a territorial state, but had acquired considerable privileges in the late Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century. Antwerp was eager to defend the Brabantine constitution, the so-called *Joyous Entry*, a set of privileges the estates of Brabant could impose on the duke in the late Middle Ages.¹⁴

¹¹ C.A. Tamse en E. Witte eds., *Staats-en natievorming in Willem I's Koninkrijk (1815-1830)*, Brussels 1992.

¹² Amsterdam Archive: Minutes of the Amsterdam town Council, 1819-1820.

¹³ K. Veraghtert, From inland port to international port, in: F. Suykens e.a., *Antwerp. A port for all seasons*, Antwerp 1986², p. 279-418. H. Greefs, *Zakenlieden in Antwerpen tijdens de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw* (unpublished PhD. diss. University of Antwerp, 2004).

¹⁴ R. van Uytven and W. Blockmans, Constitutions and their application in the Netherlands during the Middle Ages. in: *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis/Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* XLVII 1969, p. 399-424.

The town had the habit to inscribe the letters ‘SPQA’ (for *Senatus Populusque Antverpiae*) on buildings and public property, “pretending to be a free republic, and that the prince cannot command them without their consent.¹⁵ The Antwerp government was appointed by the regent of the Low Countries after nomination of a double list by the city. It consisted mainly by noblemen and lawyers. It is striking that the participation of merchants in the city government was relatively low (ca. 10-15 % of the mandates) and that the craft guilds were only participating as members of the Monday Council, and in the Broad Council, the actual representative body of the town.¹⁶ It was exactly in this council were the great conflicts concerning taxation and the struggle for the urban privileges were fought. Each of the four members (mayors, former aldermen, *hoofdmannen* and wardmasters as representatives of the citizens, and the deans of the craftguilds) had a vote, and, as decisions had to be taken unanimous, the right to veto. In the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830), the institutional framework was completely changed: the city council now had 30 members, elected by electors contributing more than 50 guilders in property taxes. The council elected the mayor and the aldermen, who were then appointed by the King.¹⁷ Instead of one vote for each of the *members*, the discussions were open debates among citizens trying to defend the public interest of the town; decisions were now taken through a majority of votes.

However, the degree of autonomy and state intervention can only be seen through an analysis of the actual decisions and, even more of the process of decision-making. For the nineteenth century, a survey of the competencies can be provided by listing the topics of the decisions of the town administration (table 1).¹⁸ The list is based on the minutes of the meetings of the mayor and aldermen during the years 1817-1818. It covers all types of decisions, and furthermore contains information about the initiative-taker and the degree of the involvement of the central government. The table shows a relatively strong autonomy in questions of public order and internal management of the urban economy and public buildings, as long as they remained

¹⁵ cited in Marnef 1996, 14.

¹⁶ Antwerp, City Archives, Pk. 2071 – 2084, Minutes of the Broad Council of Antwerp, 1665-1680.

¹⁷ F.H. Mertens, K.L. Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen sedert de stichting der stad tot onze tyden*, vol. 7, Antwerpen 1853, 164.

¹⁸ MA CBS A1: College of mayor and aldermen 1817 – 1818.

within the annual budget. Excess spending was only possible with the authorization of the provincial estates or the ministry of finance. Strong intervention of the state can be observed in the fields of urban taxes, urban debt, but also of poor relief and education.

For the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such minutes are not available. Nevertheless, also the town ordinances indicate the major fields of urban policy: they cover a broad range of topics, among which market and labour regulation were predominant.¹⁹ Public order and security were a second major field. Public health took an important place in the preoccupations of the Antwerp administration in the period 1665-1680, because the town was haunted by major epidemics during this period which required severe security measures. The degree of state intervention, however, cannot directly be deduced from the urban ordinances. Yet we can draw some conclusions by comparing the urban ordinances with those of the central government. Some topics figure both in the urban as well as in the central ordinances. In many cases these were confirmations of each other, such as in the numerous 'monetary ordinances'. Here the city government simply reminded the inhabitants to obey the ordinances of the central government. In other cases, there was an overlapping of the competencies and hence potential conflict.

Another way to approach the priorities of urban policy and the dependence of the central government is via the urban accounts, and for the nineteenth century the town budgets.²⁰ This kind of analysis is complementary to the one of minutes and resolutions. Instead of being limited to urban legislation, the budgets show the amounts spent by the town government for different items, the financial flows between the town and the central state, and in some cases the state interference concerning the urban finances. As in the previous example, the process of financial decision making is far better documented for the nineteenth century than for the early modern period. For the period 1815-1830, we can follow the different steps of the annual budgets from the original proposal by the mayor, via the town council, where it was presented in a sumptuous speech, further to the provincial estates, and in some cases up to the ministry of finance. On each step some items were reduced, eliminated

¹⁹ P. Génard, ed., Index der gebodboeken, in: *Antwerpsch Archievenblad*, 2nd series, 9, Antwerp, 1934.

or increased, or larded with comments. Hence in a letter from 8 april 1827, the deputation of the provincial estates writes to the city government of Antwerp:

“We are pleased to see that you increased the means for article 12, which we think is due for a great part to the favorable development of commerce and industry. This should permit the town very soon to decrease some of its taxes, considering that they are higher in Antwerp than in other towns of the kingdom...”²¹

An overview of the income and expenditure during the period 1815-1830 shows the strong dependence of the urban finance upon local taxes and the relative little contribution of the central government in form of subsidies (see graphs 1 and 2 in appendix). As far as the expenses are concerned, poor relief, public buildings and the payment of the urban debt are the main items. The overwhelming importance of poor relief is astonishing. Yet in this field the central government interference was considerable. The strong financial implications may be an explanation, here.

The town accounts of the seventeenth century show a strong continuity as far as the incomes are concerned (see graph 3 and 4 in the appendix). Local taxes and rights make up for the largest part of the urban incomes, whereas there were no subsidies from the central government at all. This can be interpreted as a higher degree of financial autonomy. Instead of paying taxes to the central government to be applied again for local expenditures, the urban finances relied almost entirely on local taxes. The expenses, on the other hand, were structured quite differently: they were heavily mortgaged by annuity payments, which made up for more than 50 %. This was the typical pattern for early modern public finances. Large expenditures had to be paid by means of credit, either in the form of annuities or other forms. This led to an ever increasing public debt that weighed heavily on the urban finances.²² Salaries and public works belonged already among the major posts. Poor relief on the other hand was not a part of the urban budget at all, except for some occasional subsidies to the guardians of the poor.

²⁰ Town accounts 1666-67: R 106, Kas van domeinen, 1666-67, R 1388: Consumptiekas 1666-67, R 883: Reductiekas 1666-67; MA 3523/17-32: Urban Accounts 1815-1830; MA 3532/8-22: Urban budgets 1816-1830.

²¹ Antwerp city archives, MA 3532/19: Documents concerning the urban budget 1827.

²² M. Boone, K. Davids, P. Janssens, Urban public debts from the 14th to the 18th century. A new approach. in: M. Boone, K. Davids, P. Janssens eds. *Urban public*

Finally, we may point to the fruitful possibilities when focussing on the representatives of the towns in the regional or central government bodies. The delegates of the towns were often forced to play a double role: they had to defend the town's interests in the estates/ parliament and at the same time they were put under pressure to convince the town council to agree with the proposals made in the estates. This makes their opinions in the town council also extraordinary documents for the relationship between urban and state interests. It is interesting to note also how the actors perceived themselves: the "perceived" autonomy may well have been less "effective" in actual decision-making. A memoire of a high official of the Spanish government in Brussels from the second half of the 17th century complained, for example, about the political independence of Antwerp:

“...signement la ville d’Anvers at une facon de se gouverner si populaire qu’il ny a autre ville au monde qui le soit d’avantage, de sortes que les ordres et mandements polititques du Roi soit par la voie du conseil privé ou celui meme du Brabant sont reçu que par discretion...”²³

At the same time the city government itself was aware of the town's dependence of the central government as well as of the provincial estates of Brabant by stating that they were just:

“passengers of a ship heading for the same harbour and that they cannot choose a different course than the captain and the other passengers and navigate against the wind and the current”²⁴

despite their powerful representation in the provincial estates. During the French domination the centralization of the government institutions curtailed the cities in their veto right on the regional or even national level. Antwerp had a strong representation in the provincial estates of the Antwerp province – that is, in a much smaller territory than in the former duchy of Brabant - but only very little influence in the States General of the Netherlands.

debts. Urban government and the Market for Annuities in Western Europe (14th-18th centuries) (Studies in European Urban History 1100-1800 nr.3) Turnhout, 2003.

²³ *Briefve memoire de la forme des ressorts du gouvernement politique des provinces des pays bas soub l’obeissance de sa majesté.* s.d. (ca.1656) (Brussels, National Archives, Aud. 1225 bis).

²⁴ Antwerp City Archives, Pk. 2071: Broad Council on 9 dec. 1665.

Major issues and conflicts

For a deeper analysis of the issues which led to discussions and actual struggles between the central and the urban government we have to turn to the correspondence and to the discussions in the town council, in which the arguments of both sides are exposed. C.R. Friedrichs distinguished several major issues leading to conflicts in urban politics during the early modern period: religious issues, economic issues, accountability, autonomy.²⁵ For our purposes, we should also add tax issues and military power.

Taxation was the major point of debate between the state and the city in the early modern period. The central state was in urgent need of money and regularly proposed new taxes, in forms of aids (*beden*) or subsidies. These negotiations took place on the level of the regional estates of Brabant and on the local level. The claim of the estates for unanimous decisions gave the great cities and the groups represented in the town council the tool for political resistance. They could put forward conditions for their consent to introduce new taxes, and persist in their non-agreement during months until their conditions were accepted. Between 1668 and 1680, the second and third member of the Antwerp Broad Council tried by all means to obtain the abolition of the import and export duties to and from the United Provinces (*licenten*) which they considered as an infraction against the privileges of the Joyous Entry.²⁶ There was a lively discussion in the Broad Council whether it was the more successful strategy to refuse the proposals all at once, or indirectly by putting forward the condition to abolish the *licenten*. The mayor and aldermen insisted that a total refusal would close the doors towards negotiations with the government. Although the policy of tax refusal did not lead to an abolition of the *licenten*, it seems that the pressure of Antwerp pushed the central government to introduce a very low tariff for the customs in 1680, which was considered by many contemporaries as extremely

²⁵ C.R. Friedrichs, *Urban politics in early modern Europe*, London, New York, 2000.

²⁶ P. Voeten, 'Antwerpens verzet tegen de licenten tussen 1648 en 1670', in: *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 40 (1957), pp.72-80.

harmful for the economy of the Southern Low Countries, as well as for the central treasury of course.²⁷

Military power was another issue that led to frictions between the city and the state. On the one hand, the city was aware of the necessity of an army to protect the country from invasion by other states. On the other hand it tried to reduce its own financial support to a strict minimum. The central government could however also use its military power to impose its will on the cities. In the troubles preceding the Revolt of the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, this policy was pursued indeed by the Spanish, among others in Antwerp. In the seventeenth century the threat was pronounced in a more indirect way: In case the troops were not paid, they could easily get out of control, and the government declared not to be held responsible for the damage that surely was to follow. Likewise, the 'threat' that troops had to be billeted by the town or even in the proximity of the town always caused great unrest.

For commercial cities such as Antwerp and Amsterdam, economic issues were of course of primordial importance. The protection of trade was therefore the major priority of the Antwerp government. Hence, in the sixteenth century, the town had to consider the economic implications even in its religious policy. Research by G. Marnef shows that in the sixteenth century the Antwerp leaders managed to maintain the juridical autonomy against the central authorities during a long time, which made it possible to apply a relatively tolerant religious policy towards foreign merchants. Portuguese converts were protected because of their major role in the economic life of the metropolis. Also Lutherans, who often came from a wealthy background, could count upon a much more tolerant treatment than the Anabaptists. The latter were generally poor craftsmen; they were also feared to cause social destabilization. Only after 1566 the duke of Alba put the city magistrate under strict control and enforced a strict application of the heresy placcards.²⁸ A similar position can be observed during the wars against Louis XIV in 1673, when the Antwerp government protested against the expulsion of French merchants by the central government while referring to the town's traditions.²⁹ However, the one-sided focus on commercial freedom which constituted the predominant ideology of the Antwerp city government was often quite

²⁷ Van Damme 2003.

²⁸ G. Marnef, Charles V's Religious Policy and the Antwerp Market: a confrontation of different interests? in: M. Boone & M. Demoor (eds.), *Charles V in Context: the making of a European Identity*, Gent, Brussels, 2003, p.21-33; Marnef 1996: 84-87.

detrimental for the local industrial interests, especially in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁰

These examples show that the different contentious issues in the city-state relationship were closely connected to each other: economic, military, fiscal and religious considerations were often counterbalanced in the discussions. The topic of autonomy is generally treated in terms of privileges, which the town had acquired throughout its history or which were part of the Brabantine constitution, the Joyous Entry. They are used as an argument against the introduction of the *licenten*, against the expulsion of French merchants, against actions by the admiral of the Scheldt, against the granting of exemptions within urban taxation, and many more. In the early nineteenth century, in contrast, the argument of urban autonomy or privileges is hardly used any more. Instead, the town government is considered part of the state; its functions almost entirely within the framework of royal legislation and the constitution of 1816.

The metropolis and the state: a comparative study

The division of our research into six case studies (by town and period) provides us with a most interesting set for a comparative analysis of the relationship between the metropolitan centres of Antwerp and Amsterdam and their respective central governments during different stages in their historical development. The examples presented in the previous paragraph show some of the possibilities, but also of the difficulties in the comparison between the different cases. Among the difficulties the different types of sources and the differences in the political and economic context are to be stressed. The examples of Antwerp in the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries illustrate this problem quite clearly: The detailed and systematic minutes, yearly reports, budgets etc. open insights in the processes of decision making and interactions between the different levels of government which are not possible for the earlier centuries. Similar discrepancies are to be expected between the seventeenth and the early sixteenth century, considering the fact that the minutes of the town

²⁹ Antwerp City Archives, pk.1732: Broad Council 29 okt. 1673.

³⁰ C. Lis, *Social change and the labouring poor. Antwerp, 1770-1860*, New Haven, London, 1986; Van Damme 2003.

council as well as the correspondence between the town government and the central government are only preserved from ca. 1550³¹. The same problem arises in respect with the town accounts. While the accounts of the early nineteenth century permit a detailed analysis of public spending, the seventeenth century countability is made up of three different accounts and the specifications given in each of them are very general. On the level of the political and institutional context, the French revolution formed a profound turning point. The relationship between the urban government and the central state was practically redefined within several decades. Nevertheless, there was some continuity as far as the major issues are concerned. The claim for autonomy in the economic policy of the town, questions concerning taxation and even the claim of control of urban the finances reappeared in the seventeenth as well as in the nineteenth century.

We hope that the analysis will reveal common issues in the debates between town and state concerning autonomy, leading to common strategies of the urban elites, as well as distinctive situations leading to very different strategies of the urban representatives towards the central government. The success of our project will only show once we can put together all the results of our research. At this point we can only present for discussion our method and approach as one way to deal with comparative urban history in relation with an abstract and not easily quantifiable topic, over a long period of time.

³¹ Privilegiekamer. Archieven van de stadsmagistraat, de hertogelijke instellingen, de Brede Raad, de vreemde natiën en de boden. 1249-1840. Inventaris, Antwerp, 1997.

Table 1: Competences of the Antwerp administration, 1817-18

Topic	number	initiative	state intervention
Receipts	numerous	particular	if beyond budget
Public works	25	college	if beyond budget
Individual claims	15	particular	depending on situation
Public order	10	mayor	none
Appointments	10		approval
Economy	11	different levels	different levels
Military affairs	9	with military authorities and provincial estates	
Port	7	different levels	
Lease of public buildings	7	city council	
Police and prison	7	mayor, governour	
Nightwatch and fire brigade	7		
Urban taxes	7		strong intervention
Poor relief	6		strong intervention
Urban debt	6		strong intervention
Education	5		strong intervention
Lease of public functions	5		city council, provincial governour
General administration	4		
Financial control	3		Provincial estates
Extra expenses	3		Provincial estates
Central taxation	2		Provincial governour
Scheldt quais	2		Ministry of 'Waterstaat'
Cultural initiatives	2		Provincial estates (= extra expense)
Countryside	1		in agreement with local mayor
Religion	1		intervention through royal decree
Urban property	1		
Diverse	1		

Source: Antwerp city archives: MA CBS A1: College of mayor and aldermen 1817 – 1818

Table 2: Ordinances of the Antwerp city government and the central government (1665-1680)

Antwerpse stadsgeboden

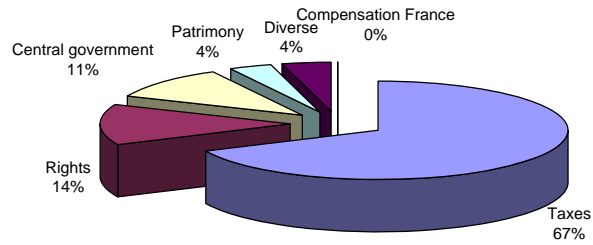
Brabantse plakkatén

topic	number	percent	topic	aantal	percent
Market regulation	102	18.25	Military affairs	18	18.56
Labour regulation	82	14.67	Economy	11	11.34
Criminal justice	75	13.42	General administration	11	11.34
Public order	60	10.73	Taxes	9	9.28
Taxes	46	8.23	'licenten'	8	8.25
Public health	40	7.16	Juridic procedure	7	7.22
Announcements	21	3.76	Foreign trade	7	7.22
Police	18	3.22	Monetary affairs	6	6.19
Public security	16	2.86	Foreign policy	4	4.12
Monetary issues	14	2.50	Public order	3	3.09
Civil justice	15	2.68	Post	2	2.06
Public space	12	2.15	National policy	2	2.06
Town economy	9	1.61	Criminal justice	2	2.06
Traffic	9	1.61	Forests	2	2.06
Juridic procedure	7	1.25	Public security	1	1.03
Reglementation	6	1.07	Medicines	1	1.03
Messengers	5	0.89	Market	1	1.03
Military	5	0.89	Hunting	1	1.03
War	5	0.89	Civil justice	1	1.03
Central government	4	0.72			
Defence	4	0.72		97	
Civil servants	2	0.36			
Foreign policy	2	0.36			
Censorship	2	0.36			
Economic					
reglementation	2	0.36			
Education	2	0.36			
Privileges	2	0.36			
Corporations	1	0.18			
Urban finance	1	0.18			
	559				

Sources: P. Génard, ed., Index der gebodboeken, in: Antwerpsch Archievenblad, 2nd series, 9, Antwerp, 1934.

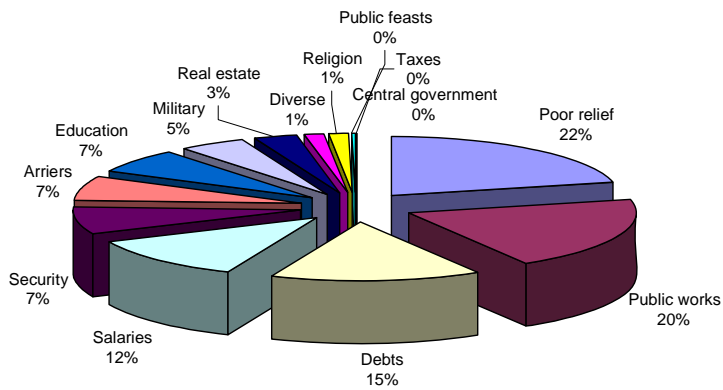
Christyn, Johannes Baptista II, Wouters, J.M. [edit.] Placcaeten ende ordonnantiën vande hertoghen van Brabant, 10 vols., Brussels, 1648-1774.

Figure 1: Incomes Antwerp 1818-1830



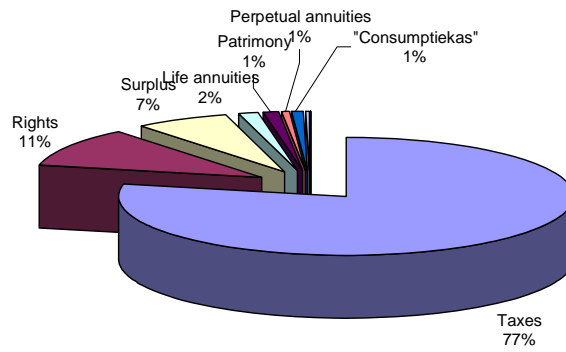
Source: City Archives, MA 3523/20-32: Town Accounts 1818-1830

Figure 2: Antwerp expenses 1818-1830



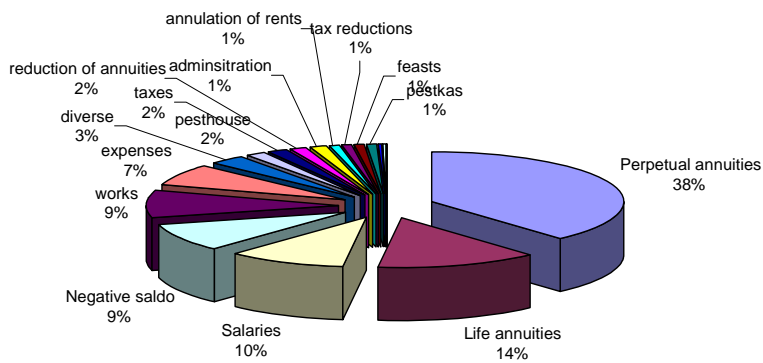
Source: Antwerp city Archives, MA 3523/20-32: Town Accounts 1818-1830

Figure 3: Incomes Antwerp 1666-67



Source: Town accounts 1666-67: Antwerp City Archives 1666-1667: R 106, Kas van domeinen, R 1388: Consumptiekas, R 883: Reductiekas

Figure 4: Expenses Antwerp 1666-67



Source: Town accounts 1666-67: Antwerp City Archives 1666-1667: R 106, Kas van domeinen, R 1388: Consumptiekas, R 883: Reductiekas