

René Jean-Paul Dewil

The City of Ghent

1379-1400

Ghent in the fourteenth century

Revenge

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The Characters

The Vresele family

Heinric Vresele	(1325-1390)	son of the deceased Gillis Vresele
Marie Vresele	(1312-1388)	daughter of the deceased Gillis Vresele, married in 1332 to John de Smet.
Evrard Vresele	(1320-1387)	son of the deceased Gillis Vresele, monk.
Boudin Vresele	(1316-1395)	son of the deceased Gillis Vresele, trader, married 1350 to Margaret van Westvelde
Ser Jehan Terhagen	(1319-1390)	adopted son of the deceased Gillis Vresele, married in 1350 to Wivine Denout
Ser William Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry	(1352-1417)	son of Ser Jehan Terhagen, married to Agneete Vresele in 1378
Ver Kerstin Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry	(1353-1420)	daughter of Ser Jehan Terhagen, married to Zeger van Noortkerke in 1378
Gillis Vresele the Younger	(1350-1405)	son of Boudin Vresele, married in 1385 to Selie Denout the Younger,
Agneete Vresele	(1351-1407)	daughter of Boudin Vresele Married to Ser William Vresele van Ter Hage

The de Smet family

John de Smet	(1310-1395)	goldsmith, son of the deceased Wouter de Smet, married to Marie Vresele in 1332.
Heyla de Smet	(1333-1385)	daughter of John de Smet
Wouter de Smet the Younger (1335-1382): Amelberga van Dorme (1336-1390):		son of John de Smet, goldsmith. wife of Wouter de Smet the Younger, married 1357
John de Smet the Younger	(1358-1421)	son of Wouter de Smet, married in 1387 to Zoutin van Lake
Alise de Smet	(1360-1428)	daughter of Wouter de Smet, Married in 1383 to Lieve de Hert

Children of Heyla de Smet with Count Louis van Male:

Beatrise of Flanders	(1350-1410)
Robert Bastard of Flanders	(1352-1423)
Margaret of Flanders	(1361-1420)
Baldwin Bastard of Flanders	(1370-1432)

The van Lake Family

Alise van Lake	(1331-1385):	daughter of the deceased William van Lake, married 1350 to Clais de Hert
Avezoete van Lake	(1332-1390):	daughter of the deceased Raes the Younger, married 1351 to Martin Denout.
Boudin van Lake	(1340-1382):	son of the deceased Raes the Younger, weaver, married to Agte Homberg in 1362

Agte Homberg	(1344-1390):	wife of Boudin van Lake, married 1362
Raes van Lake	(1363-1430)	son of Boudin van Lake, monk
Zoetin van Lake	(1365-1440)	daughter of Boudin van Lake, married 1387 to John de Smet the Younger

The Denout family

Ser Martin Denout van Westdorp	(1330-1382)	son of the deceased Pieter Denout, landowner-poorter, formerly fuller, married to Avezoete van Lake.
Wivine Denout	(1331-1391):	daughter of the deceased Pieter Denout, married to Ser Jehan Terhagen
John Denout the Younger	(1353-1422)	son of Martin Denout, fuller and landowner, manager of the Pharaïldis domains, married to Anna van Zeebrouck in 1386
Anna van Zeebrouck	(1356-1424)	married to John Denout the Younger in 1386
Selie Denout the Younger	(1355-1425)	daughter of Martin Denout, married in 1385 to Gillis Vresele the Younger

The de Hert family

Clais de Hert	(1332-1382)	son of the deceased John de Hert, shipper, married to Alise van Lake 1350
Arnout de Hert the Younger	(1351-1405)	son of Clais de Hert
Lieve de Hert	(1355-1427)	son of Clais de Hert, Married in 1383 to Alise de Smet

Other characters

Albin van Dorp	(1325-1390)	steward at Old Terhagen
Marie van Axel	(1330-1392)	wife of Albin van Dorp
Kateline Dankers	(1319-1385)	wife of the deceased Ywen de Wilde, cook at New Terhagen
Ruebin de Wilde:	(1345-1402)	son of the deceased Ywen de Wilde
Kerstiaen de Wilde	(1344-1410)	son of the deceased Ywen de Wilde
Everdey de Handscoemakere	(1319-1390)	friend of Ser Jehan Terhagen
Marie Colpaert	(1322-1392)	wife of Everdey de Handscoemakere
Arent de Handscoemakere	(1343-1409)	son of Everdey de Handscoemakere, married in 1385 to Greet van Noortkerke
Lieve de Handscoemakere	(1344-1415)	daughter of Everdey de Handscoemakere
Mathis van Noortkerke	(1324-1395)	steward of Ser Jehan Terhagen for the Vitry domains
Anna de Cleyne	(1326-1398)	wife of Mathis van Noortkerke
Roegier van Noortkerke	(1346-1420)	son of Mathis van Noortkerke, monk
Zeger van Noortkerke	(1347-1425)	son of Mathis van Noortkerke, married to Ver Kerstin Vresele van Ter Hage
Greet van Noortkerke	(1349-1430)	daughter of Mathis van Noortkerke, Married 1385 to Arent de Handscoemakere

The feudal Lords

Note: the dates stated are dates of reign, unless otherwise indicated.

Kings of England:

Richard II (1377–1399), married to (1) Anne of Bohemia and (2) Isabella of Valois.
Henry IV (1399-1413) Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, married to (1) Mary de Bohun (1380) and (2) Joanna of Navarre (1403).

John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster (1340-1399), duke of Lancaster (1361/1362), king of Castile (1372-1387), duke of Aquitaine (1390), son of King Edward III
Edmund of Langley, duke of York (1341-1402), earl of Cambridge (1362), duke of York (1385), son of King Edward III
Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester (1355-1397), earl of Buckingham (1377), duke of Aumale (1385), duke of Gloucester (1385), on of King Edward III

Kings of France:

Charles V the Wise – Charles V le Sage (1364-1380), married to Joan of Bourbon, son of King John II

Charles VI the Beloved, the Mad – Charles VI le Bienaimé le Fol (1380-1422), married to Isabeau of Bavaria.

Louis, duke of Anjou (1339-1384, count of Anjou (1351), duke of Anjou (1360), titular king of Naples (1382), son of King John II

John, duke of Berry (1340-1416), count of Poitou (1357), duke of Berry (1360), son of King John II

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy (1342-1404), duke of Touraine (1360-1363), duke of Burgundy (1342), son of John II

Louis II, duke of Bourbon (1337-1410), duke of Bourbon (1356), brother-in-law of King Charles V and maternal uncle of King Charles VI

Louis I, duke of Orléans (1372-1407), duke of Touraine (1386), duke of Orléans (1392), Son of King Charles V, brother of King Charles VI

Counts of Flanders:

Louis II of Male – Lodewijk van Male (1346-1384), married to Margaret of Brabant.

Margaret III of Flanders (b. 1350, r. 1384-1405) – daughter of Louis of Male, married (2) in 1369 to Philip the Bold (r. 1363-1404), Duke of Burgundy, son of King John II of France.

Popes

Urban VI (1378-1389): papal schism, Rome - Bartolomeo Prignano

Clement VII (1378-1394): papal schism, Avignon - Robert de Genève

Boniface IX (1389-1404): papal schism, Rome – Pietro Tomacelli

Benedict XIII (1394-1424): antipope, papal schism, Avignon - Pedro Martínez de Luna y Pérez de Gotor

Kings of Germany and Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire:

Wenceslaus – Wenzel von Luxemburg (1376-1400): deposed as German King in 1400, continued to rule as King of Bohemia, married to (1) Joanna of Bavaria and (2) Sophia of Bavaria

Duchess of Brabant, Lothier and Limburg:

Joanna (1355–1406): married (1) to William IV, Count of Holland and (2) to Wenceslaus I Duke of Luxemburg

Counts of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland

William V of Wittelsbach, Duke of Bavaria-Straubing (1356-1388): married to Mathilda or Maud of Lancaster

Albert I of Wittelsbach, Duke of Bavaria-Straubing (1388-1407): married to (1) Margaret of Brieg and (2) to Margaret of Cleves

Counts and Dukes of Guelders

Matilde of Guelders (1371–1379): and John II, Count of Blois (d. 1381), her third husband
 Maria of Guelders (1371–1379): and William II, duke of Jülich (d. 1393), her husband.
 She disputed the duchy of Guelders with her sister Matilde.

William I of Jülich-Hengebach (1379–1402): son of Maria and William II, duke of Guelders, and duke of Jülich. Married to Catherine of Bavaria. See William III of Jülich

Counts of Jülich

William II (1362-1393): married in 1362 to Maria of Guelders, daughter of Reginald II of Guelders.

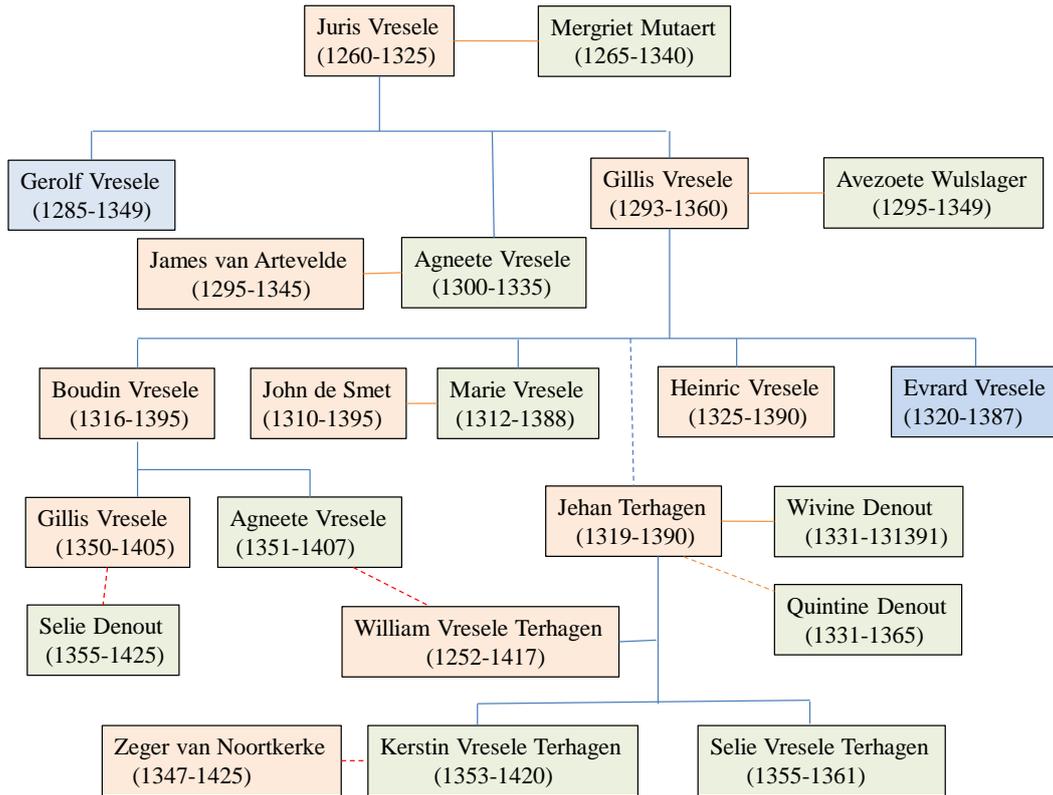
William III (1393–1402): also Duke of Guelders since 1377.

Dukes of Brittany

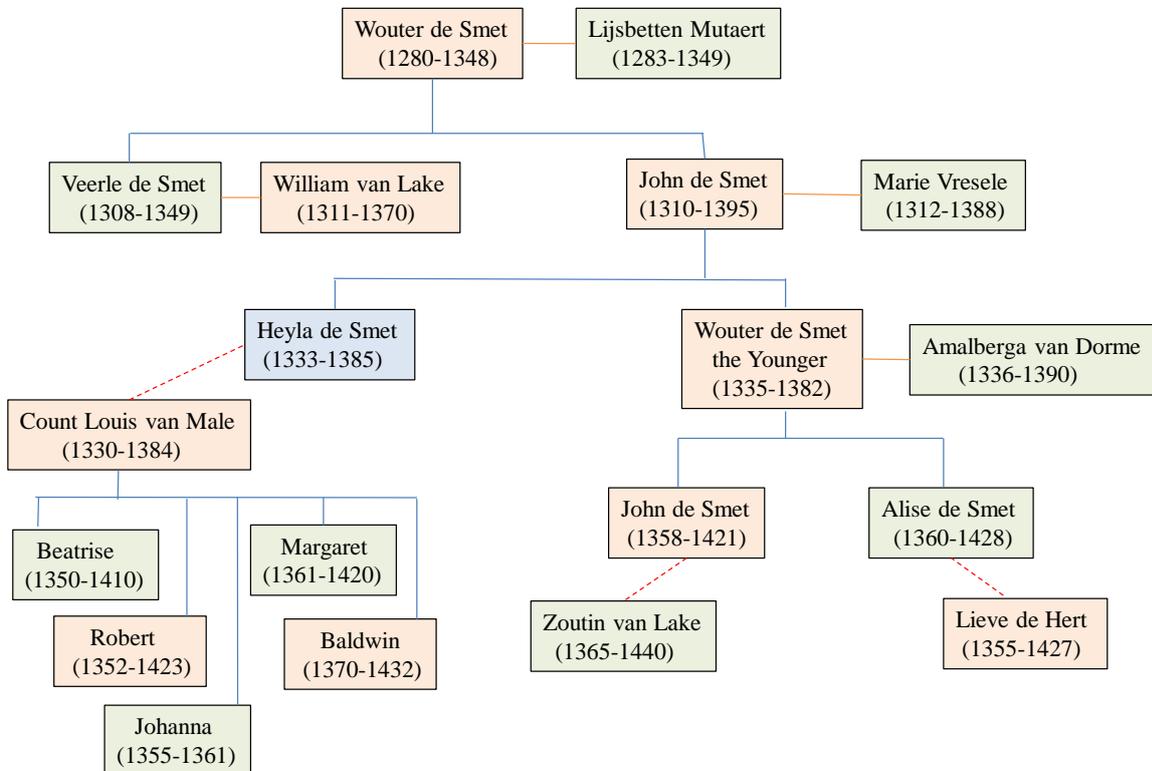
John IV de Montfort (1341-1345, b. 1295) married to Joan of Flanders, sister of Count Louis de Nevers.

John V de Montfort (1345-1399, b. 1339) married to Mary of England (1344-1362), daughter of King Edward III, later to Joan Holland of Kent (b. 1350, 1366-184) and finally to Joanna of Navarra (b. 1370, 1386-1437)

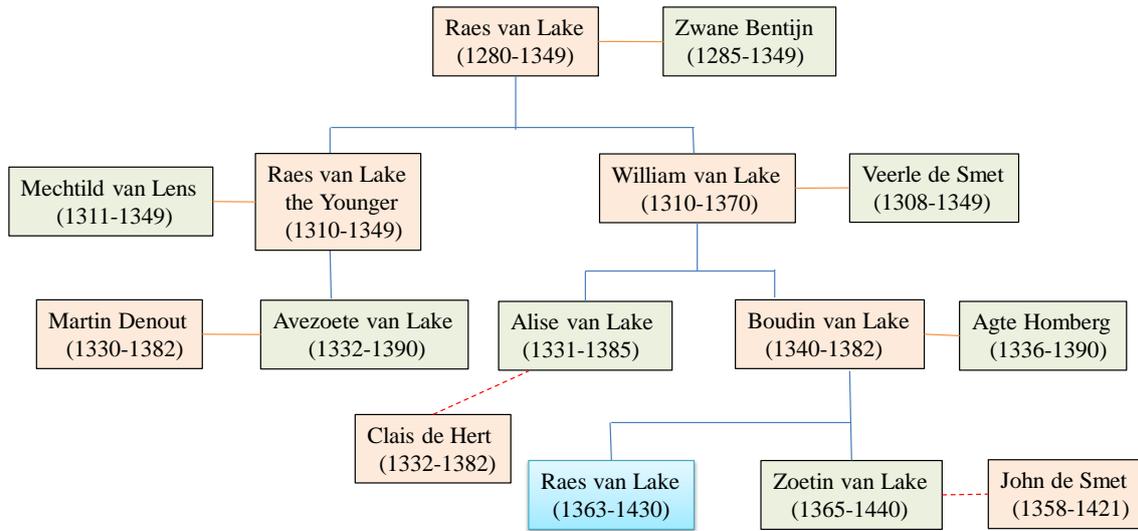
John VI the Wise (b. 1389, 1399-1442) married to Joanna of France (1391-1433), daughter of King Charles VI.



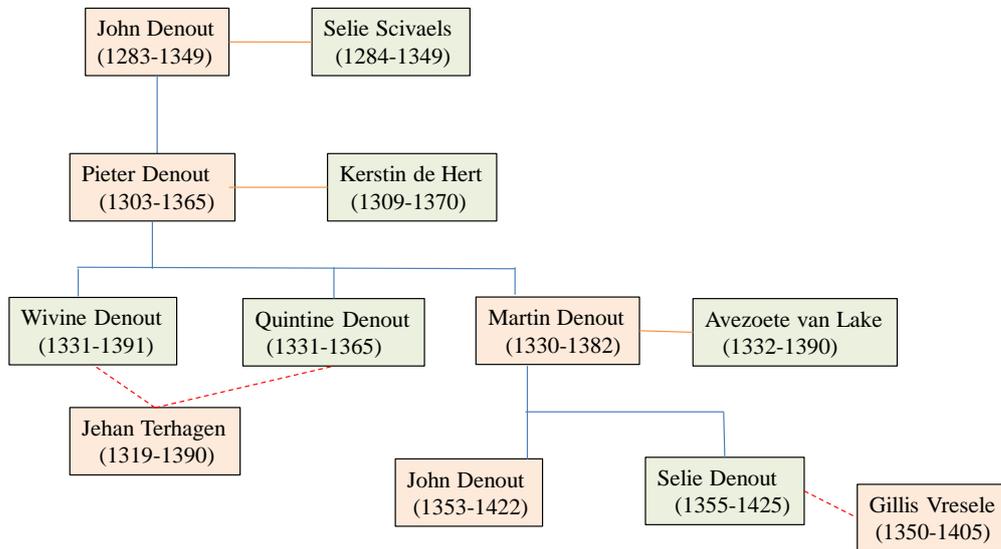
The Vresele Family



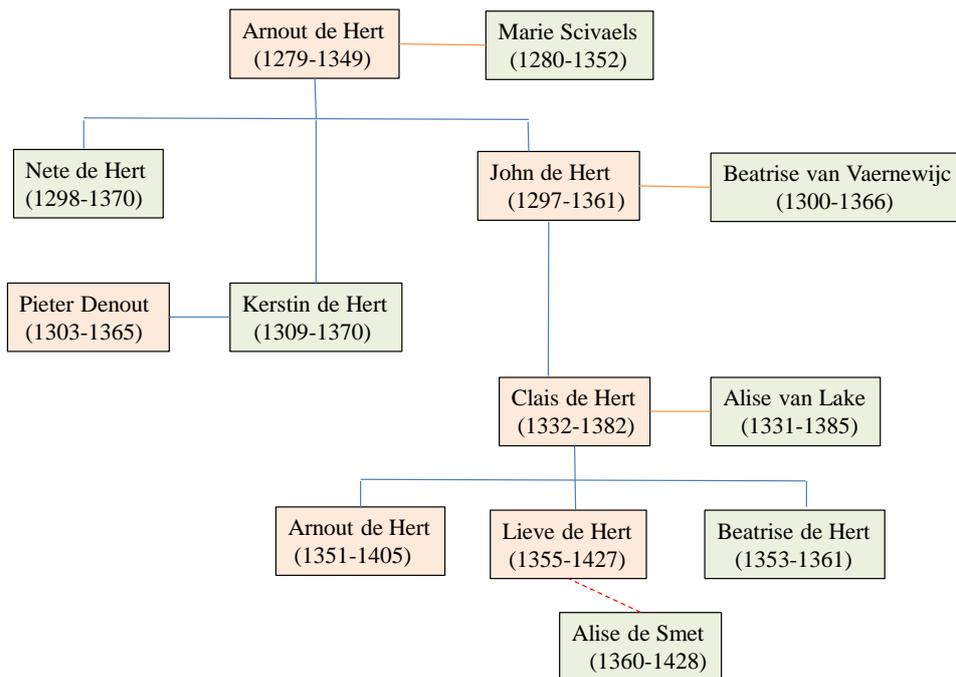
The de Smet Family



The van Lake Family



The Denout Family



The de Hert Family

Legend

Juris Vresele
(1260-1325)

Red field: male member of the family, dates of birth and death

Quintine Denout
(1331-1365)

Green field: female member of the family

Evrard Vresele
(1320-1387)

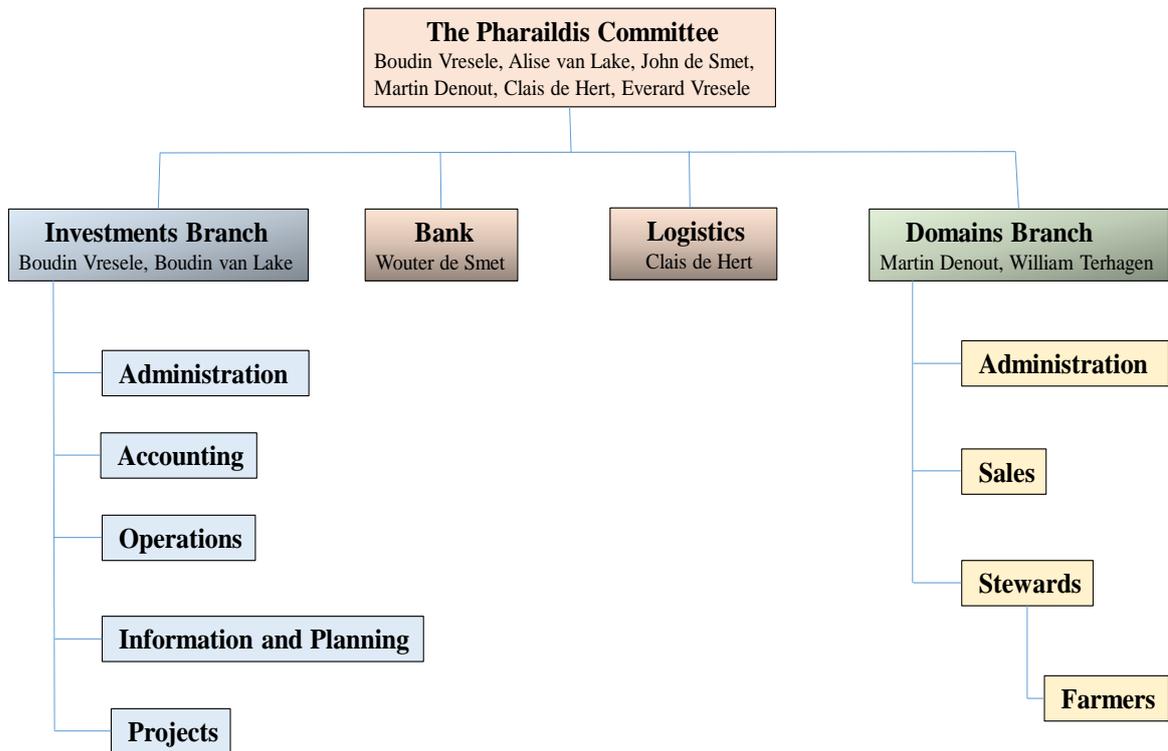
Blue field: monk, member of the family

—

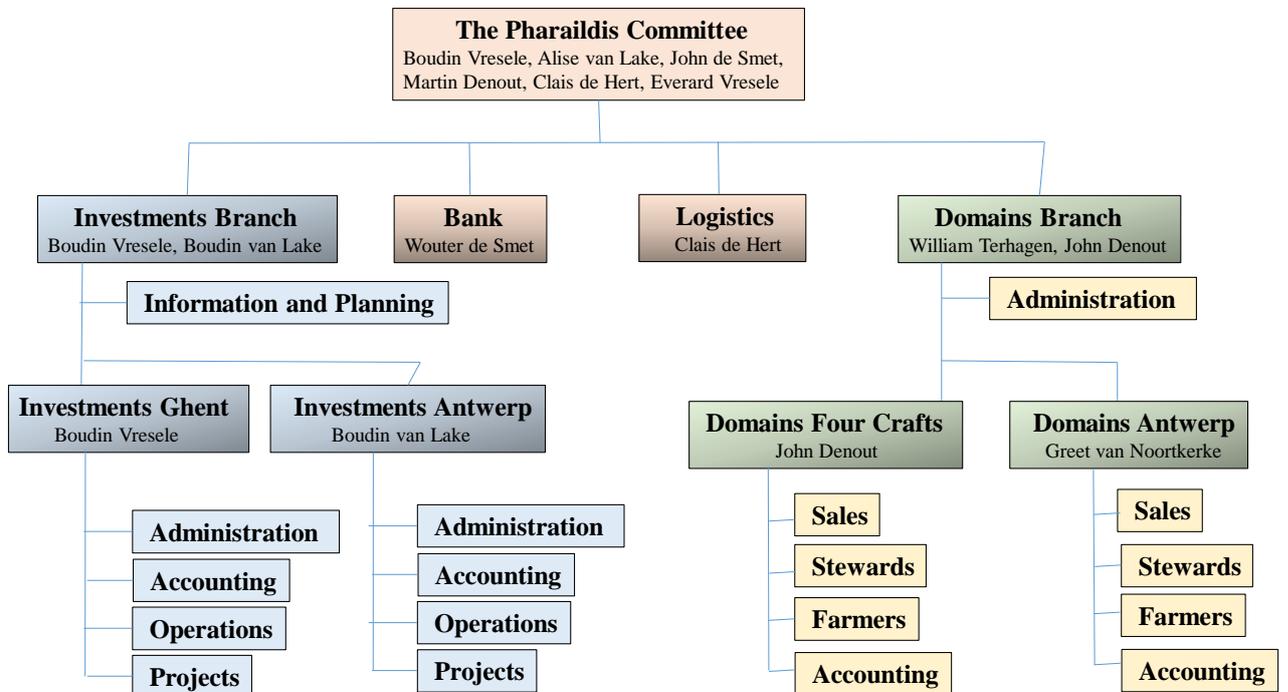
Blue line: parental link in the family

—

Red line: marriage link in the family



The Pharaïldis Consortium



The evolved Pharaïldis Consortium

Chapter 1. The Ghent Revolt. 1379-1380

William Terhagen

My name is Ser William Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry, but the people who know me well simply call me the Ghent way by the simple name of William Terhagen. My full name indicates three provenances. The Vreseles are a family of poorters of the glorious, famed city of Ghent in Flanders, even though the word points to the little town of Zele. Zele is situated in the countryside north of Ghent, the largest city of the county of Flanders. My father, Ser Jehan, was adopted in that family after all his relatives bearing the name and the title of knights of Ter Hage had been murdered in the great revolt of the Flemish peasants in 1325. The men of Ter Hage owned a large farm and manor near the town of Axel. Axel lies further north of Ghent, in the lordship of the Four Crafts.

Our real title of the Sers of Ter Hage, should be spelled thus, but in Ghent we were called more intimately by the word Terhagen, as at first understood when my father offered his name to Gillis Vresele, the man who found him as a small boy in hiding. My father kept the name of the family that raised him, gave him love, fed and educated him. Few people in Ghent are aware we are knights, and knights twice. We are not only lords by the charters of the county of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, as our oldest origins must lay even farther north, but also as lords of Vitry in the Champagne region of France. We inherited a title and vast lands near the towns of Troyes and Provins from my grandmother's side. Those territories are now managed by my father, Jehan, and by my mother Wivine.

Wivine is a Denout *poorter* woman of Ghent, a family of renown, a fullers' family. Wivine is my father's wife. My sister and I call her mother, because mostly she gave us her love and affection, and our education, but our real mother was her sister. My father would have liked to be married to Quintine Denout, but wasn't or couldn't. It was she, Quintine, who had been his great love. My mother Quintine, the twin sister of Wivine, died in a fire in Ghent when she was still young. Wivine brought us up and gave us her love. We called her mother too, and she deserved our affection.

My father Jehan is the lord of Vitry. He descended from a family of stewards of the counts of the Champagne, a lineage that is now extinct in the male line, but continued through our grandmother. The Champagne has been incorporated in the royal domains of France. The Vitry family died out, like the male line of the Champagne counts. We, my sister and I, continue the Vitry lineage in the female line.

My sister, Ver Kerstin Noortkerke Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry, married Zeger van Noortkerke, the son of a former guard and steward of my father. Zeger and Kerstin are nice, loving, intelligent people. They shall continue the Vitry title. I have never aspired to the Vitry domains, because we own enough land for any man to handle and manage. Our lands are situated near Axel in the Four Crafts, in the Land of Waas west of the mighty Scheldt Stream, and in Ghent. I am a man of the polders, loving the wetlands around the Scheldt. I am eager to tame that territory, part of many such men who learned to dominate the stream and fight with it to earn a living. For one man to handle, oversee and master both the Ter Hage domains and the Vitry territories, so far apart, spread far from Flanders, would have been impossible. I am considered to be a poorter of Ghent, an owner of land and houses within the walls of our good city. I am a member of the landowners' guild of Ghent, though I seldom take part in their meetings. My father spent his childhood in Ghent, so Ghent is considered our home town.

I have undertaken, dear reader, to continue the family chronicles my father, started many years ago. Only my father and I know where our chronicles are kept. We hide them, for they contain many family secrets, better not told to the family members of our own generation.

The Ter Hage men before my grandfather, have served as counsellors of the counts of Hainault, even though our home had been built in Flanders. Maybe because of our diplomatic origins, we kept a keen interest in the politics of our times. Ghent being so large, so wealthy and of such a particular, proud, obstinate, freedom-loving nature, exercised a profound influence on Flanders, on the continent and on England. Its story in the context of the three main powers around us, England, France and the German Empire, could not be considered separate from these blocks, or from the families that reigned over them.

Yes, reader, you will engage in complexity within complexities, for the Four Crafts are a feudal loan of the German Emperor, and yet forming part of the lands of the count of Flanders, whereas the rest of that county is actually a feudal loan of the king of France. And then, two sovereigns vied for the crown of France. One was the king appointed to the royal authority by the peers of France, a man from the Valois family, the other the nearest in kin to the last Capetian king but in the female line, the self-proclaimed sovereign of the Plantagenet family. This last man, Edward, also rules over England as the descendant of William the Conqueror. Moreover, these two houses and kings have been dominated by two other figures who were so intricately linked with Flanders, one being the Ghent-born son of the English king, John of Gaunt, and the other a son of a former king of France, Philip the Bold, now duke of Burgundy. The duke of Burgundy will be our future count of Flanders, for he married the only child of Count Louis of Male, the fair Margaret of Male. I will have to explain you much about these two men, as well as about our current count, who is almost a relative of ours.

Except for me, my sister and my father, the Ter Hage family is extinct. Our real family are the Vreseles! I have even married into this family, so that our blood-ties are strengthened. My wife is Agneete Vresele, the daughter of the former, formidable patriarch Gillis Vresele. He was the man who consolidated our fortune and who was one of the founders of what we call the Pharaïldis Group.

The Pharaïldis Group is constituted of five families, the Vreseles, de Smets, van Lakes, Denouts and de Herts. The Vreseles were traders ever, the van Lakes weavers, drapers and traders. The Denouts were fullers, now also traders and landowners, and the de Smets were blacksmiths originally, then silversmiths and goldsmiths, money-changers and now bankers. The de Herts are shippers, shipwrights, owners of a shipping-trade, but they will handle any problems of logistics for you, with transport over sea or over land.

These five families have placed large parts of their funds and domains together, to be managed by one body, the Pharaïldis Consortium.

The Pharaïldis Consortium is controlled by a committee of five members, one person from each family. The committee members are, quite logically, the older men and women of our families, the ones we call patriarchs. Boudin Vresele, Alise van Lake, John de Smet, Martin Denout and Clais de Hert are our current patriarchs. Among these, Clais, forty-eight, is the youngest and John de Smet, seventy, the eldest. Note one woman in the committee. Indeed, the Pharaïldis women are as much present in our general meetings as the men.

Heading the Investment branch of the Pharaïldis Consortium are Boudin Vresele and Boudin van Lake, the latter the assistant of the former. They are commonly called Boudin One and Boudin Two. Their offices are situated in the *Kalanderberg* of Ghent, in a complex of several

interconnected houses. About ten people work there with them in administration, accounting, operations, information gathering and planning, and in the management of larger projects. This group is essentially our trading business. All families have invested funds in the company.

Our Domains branch is led by Martin Denout and by me, William Terhagen, serving as Martin's assistant. I should add that the full name of Martin is Ser Martin Denout of Westdorp, Westdorp being the name of his manor. Count Louis of Male knighted Martin not so long ago. Martin is very much a lord, though, and keeps his administration in his manor. Westdorp lays not far from my own castle, still called New Terhagen. We have several stewards working for us, who manage farmers in their turn.

Finally, we invested together in our bank, led by Wouter de Smet the Younger, and we also have a Transport branch, led by Clais de Hert. In both these companies, the five Pharaïldis families also invested together.

The Pharaïldis families have placed large parts of their wealth together to be more powerful yet. Each of the families owns a separate fortune in money and in terrains and castles, manors and houses. The Vreseles and the van Lakes have invested most of their money in the Pharaïldis Consortium, and most of their lands too, but they own houses and offices in Ghent. The Denouts own fuller mills and a few fulling workshops. The de Smets are still goldsmiths and they still keep a blacksmith's shop in the Saint-Veerle Square. In name, they own the bank we use, but much of the money in the bank comes from the five families. The de Herts own a shipping-yard and ships, as well sea-going vessels as river-boats, but part of their shipping business was funded with Pharaïldis money. We all own parts in their trade too. We thus spread our risks over the activities of the five families, and so add to our wealth. Our profits and income come as well from trade as from such diverse businesses as the loaning of money, the fees for sea-transport, the selling of peat, hops for beer, and the selling of grain and legumes and milk from our country farms. In fact, we trade in every product you can think of, and get richer by it.

I, William Terhagen, manage the land and the farms of the Pharaïldis families, but I also own my proper land and farms, part of the Ter Hage inheritance.

Both I and Martin Denout do not live in Ghent, although we remain very much linked to our home city. Martin lives in the manor and castle of Westdorp, whereas I am lord of New Terhagen, a castle near Axel. Westdorp Manor and New Terhagen Castle are close. In half an hour's ride we are at each other's home. We are much connected to a third castle, to Beostenblijje, a domain owned by the Lady of Beostenblijje, who is no other than Heyla de Smet. Heyla is the beloved mistress of our Count Louis of Male. Beostenblijje is the full property of Heyla, so her lordship will pass at her death into the de Smet family. We were recently able to add vast lands to her lordship too.

We harboured a spiritual dimension to the Pharaïldis Group. From the onset, we decided to work and trade according to rules of honesty and respect for our religion. We channel a part of our profits to good works of the Church, to charity, and do the same with a part of our acquired wealth. The monk of our families, Evrard Vresele, controls our deeds. He is our conscience and serves as our moral mentor. With his help, the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Pharaïldis elaborated ten rules, the ten commandments of the Pharaïldis, by which our company would abide. It took much time and many discussions to agree on the rules, for in the beginning we had at least thirty of them, and neither the men nor the women would agree on them all, or found some rules more important than other. Finally, Gillis and Evrard Vresele

came up with the following list, which is not perfect, but they refused to change them. With time, we adopted these rules as our guiding principles. Here they are:

1. The Pharaïldis Group works as devote Christians would do, abiding by the values proclaimed by Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the compassion of Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, and the mother of God.
2. The Pharaïldis shall remain honest and fair in their dealings, but ruthless with regard to brawlers, liars and deceivers in trade.
3. The Pharaïldis shall never bodily harm opposers.
4. The Pharaïldis leaders shall always openly and totally explain the vision, investments, issues, losses and gains, with the means used to acquire profits, to the other members.
5. The Pharaïldis shall not engage in government politics.
6. The Pharaïldis shall keep their deeds, projects and investments a secret at all times, divulge their trade information outside the families only on a need-to-know basis. They consider discreetness as a virtue.
7. The Pharaïldis will protect and help other family members with all means at their disposal.
8. The Pharaïldis members shall live frugally and uphold the virtues of a healthy family life.
9. The aim of the Pharaïldis Group is to enhance and secure the well-being of the families. A tenth part of their wealth shall be dedicated to charity.
10. The Pharaïldis shall honour count, king and emperor, the pope and the bishops, but emphasize and pursue the freedom of trade, the freedom of movement, the freedom of the individual and the freedoms and privileges of our good city of Ghent.

In the end, as with Moses's Ten Commandments, the Eighth rule would appear to be the hardest to realise by the men of our families. Many would feel these rules could be reduced to a few more fundamental ones, and some would argue family members had already broken some of those rules in the past, notably the Fifth and Eighth. Had not our families arranged for James van Artevelde to come to power in Ghent? Had not my father, Jehan Terhagen, lived in sin of adultery with my real mother Quintine? Nevertheless, we considered them a fine set of rules to live and trade by, added to the Ten Commandments handed over by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Our five families were not only linked by common economic interests. We were also linked by multiple blood-ties in marriage. John de Smet was married to Marie Vresele. My father was married to Wivine Denout, and I to the sweet Agneete Vresele, a daughter of Boudin. Boudin's son would marry Selie Denout. John de Smet the Younger, son of Wouter, would be wed to Zoutin van Lake. Wouter's daughter Alise would marry Lieve de Hert. Clais de Hert was married to Alise van Lake, and her sister Avezoete to Martin Denout. Since long, we were not five families anymore, but one large, interlinked group, actually one sole family!

I lived at New Terhagen, a castle not far from Axel, and near the site of the Ter Hage Convent. New Terhagen had been built by my father as an alternative for the old manor in the Old Terhagen farm. The castle was thus relatively young, a splendour of warm, red-glowing brick walls and grey-slatted roofs. The castle looked slender and elegant, because the builders had placed with the manor and the other buildings many high towers and turrets. It had been attacked several times by bands of hoodlums, even by groups of mercenaries, but it had never been taken, for it was too well built, enclosed in high walls and surrounded by a very wide moat filled with not bracken but by freely flowing water derived from a nearby river. Our gatehouse was massive, flanked by four sturdy brick towers, with a double drawbridge, a

heavy oak gate and an iron portcullis! We kept a very large garden, equally enclosed by walls, at the back side of the buildings, past the moat. From the castle we could walk to the garden over a long, narrow, wooden bridge.

We lived inside the castle with our guards, maids and servants, and we trained regularly with arms, the women and children included, servants as well as masters. The distinction between servants and masters was rather small at New Terhagen! We lived all together, called ourselves by our first names. When attacked, we sounded our alarm bell, which was of course called our '*Klokke Roeland*' after the Ghent main bell. In case of real danger, we could escape by a secret tunnel leading from a room of the castle to the bay of Axel, to a boathouse in which we kept at all times and in good order a large sailing boat and several smaller boats for a surreptitious flight over the waters.

As I have already hinted at, New Terhagen had an Old Terhagen, a fortified farm and manor laying in the vicinity of the castle. This had been the former home of the Ter Hage family. It was now merely a large farm, on which lived our main steward and his family, Albin van Dorp and his wife Marie.

My father had used the services of the families of three mercenary guards inside New Terhagen. These were the families of de Wilde, de Handscoemakere and van Noortkerke. The van Noortkerke family – most of them, anyway - had moved with my father to the Champagne region. Ywen de Wilde was deceased, but the sons of the de Wilde and of the de Handscoemakere families had become stewards on our domains. They lived now in large farms, in what might also almost be called manors, where they grew into wealthy men in their own right.

This brings me to the woman called Greet van Noortkerke, a formidable challenge, a great pain and a great happiness to me.

Greet van Noortkerke

Greet van Noortkerke and I grew up together at New Terhagen. I have always known her. I remember her as a chubby, ugly-looking, strong girl, who ran around in dirty rags although her mother kept changing her clothes almost each day. Greet was just too wild for us and for her parents. She and I were the youngest of the children of New Terhagen. The others were five years or so older than her, and she two and a half years older than I.

When we played in the barns and stables of the castle, or in the castle gardens, or along the moat and even in the nearest wood, she was the only utterly wild, untamed, turbulent, unbridled girl in our bunch. My sister Kerstin would have been the only other girl, but Kerstin always felt herself too precious and too elegant to dabble with our lot. Ruebin, Kerstiaen, Arent, Lieve and Roegier took a keen interest in Greet, who ran as fast as us, laughed harder and developed very feminine traits early on.

Greet had grown up among boys. She had also learned how to hold her own in a fiery world of aggressive lads. She was not stronger than any of us, except me who was quite younger, but she was much fiercer in her reactions. If one of the other boys tried to get hold of her, especially when they grew older and entered puberty, she would ruthlessly kick, scratch and bite until they released her. We, boys, always hesitated in our wildest fights to hurt Greet, but if she felt she was losing in a fight, she would wound us. We merely forced our opponent to the ground, I more than often feeling my mouth filled with the grinding sand of the floor. Kicks and hard bumps would have brought us the severest of reprimands from our parents.

Greet, however, shrank back from nothing and from nobody. She got away with it too, for our parents agreed a girl had the right to defend herself more fiercely than any boy or man.

Greet grew up by lengthening and by getting slimmer to a tall girl, still heavy of limbs, of muscular arms and stout legs, because she helped in the stables as we all did, outperforming and outrunning us. She developed to a beautiful young woman with a thin waist and at first thin hips, and heavy chest.

Greet trained with us in arms and combat as if she were a boy. It was very hard to beat her at wrestling, for she had a nasty eye, the cunning of a fox, the claws of a she-bear. She knew every trick in our mercenaries' book and she did not hesitate to bite and scratch when she was losing. No doubt her father, Mathis, had taught her what we also knew, plus a few more tricks.

At New Terhagen, the boys stuck to the boys, often also with the boys of Old Terhagen. Roegier stuck with Kerstin in a very quiet way, and Greet stuck with me. We ran to the woods usually, the two of us, because that was most forbidden. We liked to roam among the trees and in the bushes. We laid traps for rabbits and hares, stole birds' eggs, and climbed in the highest trees. We turned home with our clothes torn and grimy, our cheeks flushed red from the wind and the exertion. The others then called me a girl's boy.

When I was sixteen, Greet was close to nineteen. I then discovered she was too old for me. She sought other challenges and other pleasures, forcing me into my own way. Greet had developed a very alluring figure by then, a figure I felt awkward with. I shied away from her. My cheeks turned scarlet when Greet came too close. I had other thoughts than tossing around with her in the woods, though she might not have said no had I approached her.

The other boys were attracted to her like wasps to a flame. She held her court in those months, discarding the boy I still seemed to be, preferring the company of true men, as the others called themselves already. A cluster of three or more young men flocked around her at all times, and would quickly have kicked aside the boy I still was. She did not always like that attention, as the boys pinched her breasts or buttocks, tried to grab her and kiss her, but she rarely fled to the baby I suppose she took me for. I got my first wet kiss from Greet, and my first glimpse of a naked girl's breast.

In those months, my father separated me more and more from the other boys and girls of Terhagen. He made me travel and taught me the trade. I sailed with Arnout de Hert in his father's ships to France. I continued to learn languages with the monk Evrard Vresele. I learned the value of coins as a clerk's apprentice to Wouter de Smet in his Ghent money-changer shop, and I made a whole set of new friends, young men and young girls in Ghent. I seldom returned to New Terhagen in those years.

Later still, my father sent me to dig out peat on a farm near Axel. That was very hard work, and I had to survive on herring and cabbages. I caught herring too, on a fishing-cog of Axel. I sailed in and out of the Scheldt. I was sick almost every trip of those boats, until I acquired my sea-legs, and laughed with howling winds and storms.

Finally, my father ordered I had to learn a farmer's work, so I laboured several seasons as a journeyman on a large farm in the polders of Bornem. I developed an interest in pear- and apple-trees in the Land of Waas, and I forgot all about Greet, for a few farm-maids made me hump them in the hay of the barns. They thought me a lot more than my father had intended. Luckily, those girls knew how to avoid children to be born.

When I was twenty-six, I returned to Ghent, met Agneete Vresele and married her fairly quickly. Agneete was a sweet, gentle, intelligent and nice blonde, with a pert nose in a small

face, who seemed to think and feel like me. She took an interest in me, looked at me with fine, inquisitive eyes when I spoke, and made me feel at ease with her. She was a sensible young woman and sufficiently attractive for me to be drawn to her. I wanted to close in to her to feel the intimacy of a girl's body, to make our hearts beat more rapidly. Our blood flowed hotter then, and the atmosphere became softer, so that a furtive touch was possible and not refused. Agneete was accessible. We remained chaste for some time, kissed and embraced, but were not engulfed in the flames of passion before we married.

When my father left Ghent and New Terhagen, drawing the van Noortkerke family with him to the Champagne, I remained in New Terhagen on my own, the lord of the castle, but with Agneete. Greet van Noortkerke had refused to leave the Four Crafts. She married Arent de Handscoemakere surreptitiously, and she disappeared from the environs of Axel. Like the other young men of the de Wilde and the de Handscoemakere families, Arent had been placed as farmer and steward in the countryside.

I was supposed then to manage and oversee these domains, but Ser Martin Denout and his son John did most of the work also for our domains. They rarely asked me to become more involved. I was the odd man out. I had to carve my own path.

I first began looking into the proper domains of the Terhagens, learnt the job with Albin van Dorp and his wife, our tenants of Old Terhagen, until I felt confident enough to stick my nose into the vast possessions of the Pharaïldis. I asked to be shown the fields, pastures, forests, waterways, the business and their accounts of the families. Martin Denout let me. He had to, for the Pharaïldis Committee had made it very clear I had my orders to be second-in-command. I began to exercise my powers. Ser Martin let me. He quickly and very happily withdrew to the background, let me and John do the hard work. He held a right of final decision in everything we did, but John Denout and I soon handled all daily matters. I rode to all the farms we possessed, wanting to see by myself in what state they were in.

So it happened that one evening of a particular hot summer day I arrived at Arent de Handscoemakere's farm, tired and weary of my long inspection tour of several other farms. I hadn't even realised the farm I was riding into was the one on which Greet and Arent lived. I hoped to stay for the night, otherwise I would have to ride on to the nearest town and find me an inn.

I was riding near a place, a few cottages thrown together, called Clinge. Hulst was not far off. The farm I rode into was big, square, constituted of several buildings interconnected and enclosed in high walls, with a large inner courtyard, an imposing curved gate flanked by turrets. I remarked the hand of my father and of his friend and master-mason in this design, for my father was always keen to protect his tenants the best he could. The yard was clean when I rode through the gate, though this was cattle-raising country, but I found soon enough what I liked even less than my father: a large heap of warm manure at the side of the yard. The heap stank in this hottest of summers more than I had expected and wanted to endure. I saw few people working in the stables, but these watched me with some astonishment. I looked sideways and did not immediately become aware of the woman who sprang in front of my horse, shouting angrily, 'well have you ever ...'

The woman no doubt would have wanted to add a curse. While she stopped abruptly, I turned my eyes to her, and my mouth fell open. I jumped off my horse, keeping the animal at the reins with my left hand, and I advanced with open arms to show my joy and to mean this was not all my fault.

I saw tall, stout woman, who now also rushed at me, opened her arms to a bear hug, and flung herself at me so powerfully I was almost swung to earth. We might have had the intention to

give each other merely a few pecks on the cheeks, and to hold each other, but her lips went straight to mine and we kissed. Our lips merely brushed at first, but memories branded in our mind of long forgotten intimacy surged on, and we kissed and kept on kissing, and I felt sudden lightning flare in my veins, feelings of lust and want and fulfilment flame up. We held closely, my hands went around her body, caressed, and we kissed with a passion I had never before experienced. We kept on kissing, ate at each other with lips and tongue. I drew Greet very close, hard, to me. I let my hands explore her body, until she must have become aware that much more, much, much more was going on suddenly than a mere welcoming embrace. She pushed me away, but we kept standing in front of each other, panting, in the instantaneous recognition of something devastating that had happened to us.

We took in our eyes and features, and had to restrain ourselves from rushing back in each other's arms. Greet had grown into very much a woman indeed, into much woman! Her legs and arms were as stout as I remembered. Her hips had widened, her waist too, though the difference in width between her waist and her hips and her showy, heaving breasts, were still striking. She stood with bare shoulders in the heat of the afternoon, in a dirty apron, a skirt held up to almost her knees, for she had been working in the barn. Her very thick auburn hair hung loose around her face. Her eyes flickered even more green and brown than I remembered. Her mouth with the thick, moist lips smiled as insolently as before, but she seemed surprised at what had been suddenly become so clear. I wanted to feel this woman wring in bed with me! She saw the raw desire to reach out to her flare once more up in my eyes, and for a second I thought I detected the same eagerness in her. She held out an arm, however. She held her arm in front of her, warding me off, and then a high, coarse, hoarse laughter sprang from her throat and filled the yard.

'Dear Jesus and Mary, William, you come bursting in here like a whirlwind and surprised me out of my wits!'

I had gathered my own wits by then, smiled mischievously back, and answered, 'it's been a very long time indeed, Greet. You have become quite a splendid woman. I am not a boy anymore. How are you?'

'I'm fine, William. I'm married and well. You have done equally well, I hear. Aren't you the lord of New Terhagen now?'

'I will ever be no more than your playmate, Greet,' I ventured, but we knew much had changed since we ran in the woods of Terhagen. And some things had remained the same.

True, I hadn't thought of inviting my former playmates of New Terhagen to my wedding. Few people had been invited to my wedding with Agneete, but the boys of Terhagen and I had also drifted apart. They might have been too much the clumsy countryside farm boys at the poorter's marriage in Ghent we had organised.

'I will always be your friend,' I dared to add, not believing one word of what I said. 'We're both married. Is your husband in?'

'No, he isn't, William. It's harvesting time. Almost finished, we are. That is why so few people are in the farm, today. They will come back late.'

Greet hesitated, then continued, 'it would be better if Arent didn't see you alone with me. He is a good man, a hard worker, but he doesn't like too much other men hanging around me. I suppose you want to hear how matters stand at the farm. Arent told me you might drop by one of these days. He has been expecting you. Tomorrow is going to be a rainy day, he says. He will not harvest, then. Come back tomorrow. Sorry for that. I'll tell him you've passed by. I can tell you the farm is doing fine, better than most.'

Had Greet thrown a bucket of iced water over me at that moment, I would not have been more appalled. Was Arent de Handscoemakere one of those ever and obstinately possessive husbands, who couldn't stand seeing their wife talking gently to another man? Was he deviously jealous, and maybe envious of me and of what I had become?

Greet had drawn in just a few words and a sad face the image of a violent man also, of whom she was afraid. Greet would never before have given a damn about another one's opinion. I nevertheless understood that Arent might only have need of an instant to know what was happening between us.

Something irresistible had been awakened suddenly, with overpowering strength. What would happen to us? Had Greet dreamt of this instant, and had it been lingering, smouldering like a volcano in my body and mind too? For the first time, I felt the raw lust and longing for a woman, as men are subjugated by. How had these feelings remained hidden under the surface for so long?

I held my horse quiet, meant to jump back in the saddle, but I turned again to Greet, saying, 'Greet, yes, I'll come back tomorrow in the late afternoon. Just tell Arent I announced myself today.'

I hesitated, lingered, then muttered, 'I want to see you again. Alone. I have a hunch I won't see you tomorrow, and it might indeed be better Arent didn't see us together. When and when can I see you back? For old times' sake.'

Greet had lowered her eyes when she understood what I asked. She looked again straight at me.

She too hesitated, shook her head, looked aside and then back at me, moistened her lips, sighed, and finally said, 'you know as well as I it would not be for old times' sake. I am married. You are married. To a fine lady, I heard. It is too late. Think about that!

Nevertheless, I have to go to the market at Hulst two days from now. Be in the market at noon. In front of the church. If you still want to see me then, that is. Think about the consequences. You know what shall happen when we see each other again. I shall not be here tomorrow, when you come to see Arent.'

I nodded, stepped into the saddle, turned my horse and spurred it out of the gate. I seethed with desire, astonished of my feelings. I had wanted to be a good husband for Agneete, a virtuous man, father and husband, a true virtuous Pharaïldis man. I simply couldn't cope with the torture of the desire Greet had aroused in me. How could this have happened so fast and so unexpectedly, this sudden awareness that Greet and I belonged to each other, with strings attached stronger than any other bond?

I rode to Hulst, took a room in an inn my family used for ages, and returned to the farm of Arent de Handscoemakere the next day. Arent welcomed me warmly. We shook hands, embraced even briefly, for we too had spent our childhood together, and we had been educated by the same teachers. There was no sign of Greet, and Arent never even once mentioned her name. I caught not the least glimpse of her presence in the farm that afternoon. Arent immediately showed me a book of accounts. The entries had been made meticulously, a little clumsily maybe, but with the pen of an honest man. He explained to me how matters stood with the farm and with the fields, with his harvests and his breeding program of cattle. He seemed happy and proud. We remained very formal, cold even, and I did sense the wish to hold me at a distance from him and his family.

I sensed some of that coldness also in the men and women who hurried in the yard, in the barns and in the house when we walked around the buildings. I felt I was welcome here, but I shouldn't expect joy and affection. Yet, this was not a happy farm! The people didn't talk much while I was around. We discussed which crops suited these lands better than other, but I

detected no ambition to ameliorate further the fields and the crops, no intention to experiment, no will to really excel ever more. The farm did well, the barns and stables were clean and well organised, the cattle fat and healthy, but I felt the farm was led more by fear than by common zeal and enthusiasm. Still, Arent's farm was not one of the lesser well managed establishments my father had founded. I lingered, waiting to hear as yet Greet coming in the house. I asked unnecessary questions, until I could tarry no longer. I expressed my thanks and admiration for a job well done, and rode back to Hulst.

Greet had promised to meet me in the market square the next day, near the church, at noon. I waited anxiously in my room, until I was too nervous and too eager to remain sitting passively on a chair. A long time before noon I walked through the town of Hulst, sauntered in the streets and alleys of the centre. I went to look at the works on the new walls around the town, and must have passed the market church five times before noon arrived. Somewhat later than the agreed time, I saw Greet wandering on her own among the stalls of vegetable sellers. She was dressed in a prim, brown tunic, a white shirt lined with white lace, a red ribbon on her cape, and she held a basket of woven reed filled with legumes in one hand. We ran into each other head on, feigned surprise, and then I opened an arm, without touching her, to lead her out of the square. We walked silently into a quieter street.

'You must have taken a room in an inn,' Greet began nervously but straight on.

'I have,' I confessed. 'I'm in the Red Knight. The room is large and clean, the food decent, the ale of the best I have ever tasted.'

'Take me'' she ordered, without looking at me.

I wasn't too sure anymore where this would lead us to, but I did bring Greet van Noortkerke to where I held a room. We didn't need to pass through the hall of the tavern. One reached the hostel rooms of the Red Knight by back stairs that led to a landing, where several of the better rooms of the inn gave access to.

I opened the door and Greet entered, hesitating not once. I took the basket out of her hands, placed it on a chair. We kissed. I held Greet in my arms, into which she seemed to slump, abandoning her body to me. My desire for her soared again, and I could feel her tremble with expectation. Greet looked eagerly at me. I took off her cloak, tossed it over her basket on the chair, and let my hands roam over her bare shoulders. When I reached the end, I drew her shirt down, away from her magnificent breasts until the taut nipples emerged. I buried my head in her swelling, harder breasts, my hands kneading her warmth. I heard Greet sigh, 'finally!'

The Start of the Revolt in Ghent. 1379

Differing opinions in Ghent

In the years before 1380, Ghent was a place where people lived with very diverging views about how the city should be governed. Ghent was a formidable cauldron of ideas and opinions. Anyone capable of imagining a conception of how and by whom authority should be exercised was convinced his or her preferred form of government should be applied without concessions. The views of others were a source of annoyance, for some even of hatred, until those views were quenched and did not seriously enter into competition with one's own conceptions.

Most of the landowner-poorters and knights of Ghent remarked that Flanders was a county, Ghent a city of the county, and therefore, total respect was due to the count. Taxes should be paid to allow the means for the count to rule. Taxes were justified because ordered by the count. Only the authority of the count could mean a barrier to internecine wars, revolts, conflicts within, and therefore provide a guarantee of peace. Whatever the count and his court decided would prove beneficial for county and cities, because the count had the welfare of his people in mind. He ruled with wisdom and benevolence.

Other men among this class of usually wealthy poorters believed the counts of Flanders had always been rapacious, arrogant men, who had ruled the cities by forcing them into submission and unjustified taxation. The counts had regularly devaluated our coinage to pay off their debts more rapidly. They didn't really care about the population of Flanders, even not for their minor lords. They only wanted to use their authority to extort more money from those who had a little, from the traders and from the knights of the cities. The men who were of this opinion sought their bliss in the ultimate, terrible but distant powers of the king of France. Was the king not the overlord of the counts? These men were called *Leliaerts* in Flanders, after the lily, the symbol of the '*fleur de lys*' of royal France.

Yet other men agreed to the God-given dominance of the king, but as the throne of France was contested, they swore to the even more distant superiority and legitimacy of the Plantagenet line of the English kings as overlords over Flanders and France. The English kings would be gentler, wiser and less wealthy monarchs, who ruled under the control of a parliament in which the people were represented. With those kings, the influence of the cities could weigh heavier. England was where a man could be proud, courageous and intelligent and then become counsellor of the king and even gain knighthood. England was also where the wool came from, the wool from which depended Flanders' wealth, for only from the excellent quality wool imported out of the English valleys could the weavers and fullers of Ghent produce the best cloth of the continent, for which they enjoyed almost a monopoly. No wool, no weavers, no fullers, no dyers, no shearers, no stretchers, no drapers, no militia, no power, no freedom for the cities, no Ghent, and no wealth in Flanders!

Many opinions raged thus in Ghent. Many men staunchly believed in the independence and in the most complete freedom of the city-states, of which Ghent was the finest and largest example. Had Flanders not been well managed while James van Artevelde had created the government of the three quarters of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper? Had the charters and freedoms of the towns then not prevailed? This opinion too was still strongly in support in Ghent, mainly among the weavers, and the weavers exerted their powerful influence on the government of the city. They formed the guild with the most members, and they were the men with money.

More conflicting lines of thought ran naturally through the *poorters* of the city. Ghent was envious of Bruges, for in Bruges money came easily from overseas trade and from banking, whereas Ghent and Ieper had to toil, had to weave, to full, to work hard, to transport goods from far over the Leie and the Scheldt. Competition and envy between the cities was ever present. In each city, the weavers sought power to dominate the government. From old, the landowner-poorters, the members of the families who had owned land in the centre of the towns, in the former vicus, considered they had a right of ownership over the city. Therefore, they only had the right to determine the fate of the city. Ghent elected twenty-six alderman to rule, thirteen Aldermen of the *Keure* or of the Law, and thirteen of the *Gedeele*, of the State. The man in highest authority in Ghent was the First Alderman of the Keure, equivalent to what in other cities was called the Mayor or the Burgomaster. An annoyance was the count's military representative, the bailiff. The bailiff only had the right over life and death in the city.

The aldermen could not sentence a man to death. That was a privilege of the count and his bailiff. Nevertheless, a free porter of Ghent could only be judged and sentenced by the aldermen, his punishment for murder being exile or long pilgrimage to far-off lands. The craftsmen were organised into guilds. The guildsmen of course resented seeing only members of the ancient landowner-poorter lineages be elected to the eminent functions of aldermen. Gradually, also other men of fame had been elected to the posts of honour. The election committee that chose the aldermen now consisted of four members among the former aldermen, and four men chosen by the count. These electors still usually came from the great families.

Many of the wealthier drapers and weavers, men richer than the men of the old lineages, resented this automatic power of the old families. The drapers and weavers, economically strong, were intelligent men who vied for more personal power. They formed a force opposed to the traditional, self-provided privilege of command and dominance of the old lineages. They represented a power opposed to the count also, and opposed to the king of France. The kings of France, they claimed, would always strive to grasp Flanders in their own greedy fists, ready to exploit the county for their own ambitions of expansion of the royal domains. These guildsmen were in favour of England, which provided the life-necessary wool, and which seemed to be inclined to give more power to who brought wealth, taxes and fame to the land now, rather than in the past.

The weavers of Ghent were the group that let other people live decently and thrive. The fullers were paid by the weavers for fulling and for preparing the cloth of Ghent. The shippers transported the cloth for the drapers. Many other smaller guilds, such as those of the blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, masons, thatchers, and many more, tens of guilds of craftsmen, got their income from the money spent by the weavers – or so the weavers declared. The weavers wanted the prices of these other artisans to be as low as possible, and to be strictly regulated so that no competition over wages could arise. Envy, hatred, resentment, ran deep as a result, between the powerful guild of the weavers and the other guilds. The society of Ghent was a society in constant conflict! Moreover, each poorter of Ghent had inherited a keen sense of dignity. Insult or assault on dignity caused by others was felt to have to be revenged. Most of the population of Ghent felt quite belligerent when it came to defending the freedoms and the privileges of the city. Many more men felt quite responsible when it came to defend the honour of the family they were a member of. Many people nevertheless proposed a quieter, more peaceful attitude. These men and women were sensitive to the messages of the priests, monks and nuns of the city and to the teaching of Our Lord. The former were called angry, belligerent, blood-lusting fools by the latter. The latter were felt to be naïve, innocent, cowardly lambs bleating in the wilderness by the former.

Why was Ghent such a cauldron of diverging opinions, of inner conflicts, which regularly exploded to outside our walls? I surmise Ghent was a haven of individual freedom, in which each man and woman could freely express his views and feelings without restraint, without fearing to be imprisoned. One was imprisoned in Ghent when one had committed a crime such as a murder, not when one stated one's opinion in a calm way. The realisation of this individual freedom hung so strong in the air in our city, that every man and woman felt as strong within our walls as the pope and as the king and the count. We dared even to feel for another pope than our king! We were prosperous, had time left to think about whatever we wanted to give our thoughts to. We had the money to put a large army, formed of the militia, in the field. No pope, king or count, had the power to impose his views on us. They could not tell us what we should do, how to live, how to feel, and even not how to act!

Had not the militias of Flanders proven to be as ferocious, courageous and as numerous as the feudal armies of France, England and the Empire of Germany? Which monarch dare to throw an army against our cities and run the risk of being defeated? We, the cities of Flanders, had proven in the past we could defeat any army of noblemen, and we could do it again! Had the knights of France not lost hundreds of golden spurs to a church of Kortrijk in Flanders? The blood spilled from the French knights by militiamen of Flanders had fertilised the fields of the *Groeningekouter* for ages!

The people of Ghent knew very well that despite their internal disputes, the concentration of all their armed forces could be adamant at times, when the continued existence of our freedoms had to be defended. The concentration demanded unity of command. In such times, we elected five captains to lead the town, one from each parish. These were given the command of our militias, given power to act. In the toughest moments, we chose one man who obtained the *Beleed der Stede*, the management of the city. In the years before 1380, the man everybody listened to, though he was not the First Alderman of the Keure and also not the head-captain, yet to whom everybody listened when he spoke, was named John Hyoens, Jan Yoens in our Flemish language.

John Hyoens

John Hyoens was a shipper, albeit not a very good one. He was a member of the guild that had come to prominence in Ghent lately, because the weavers, though now very influential, had been for a long time excluded from the government of the city by the count, by the fullers and by the other guilds. The fullers had always felt submitted to the weavers, because they depended upon the willingness of the weavers to provide them with cloth to work on. The fullers were regarded a less challenging guild by the counts and by the landowner-poorters of the old lineages. Within the global organisation of the lesser guilds, who had each a dean but one over-dean, the largest separate guild were the shippers.

John Hyoens was not a great shipper at all, but a good orator. His family did not enjoy a straight record of fame. His father had been an alderman of Ghent, maybe because he had been a staunch supporter of the count. It was rumoured he had despatched a man the count wanted dead to the other world. After the murder, he had been exiled from the city by the aldermen, but had seen the sentence commuted into much less of a punishment by the count, and re-installed in his prominence. John Hyoens, father and son, had been deans of the shippers at one time. Our current John Hyoens, was a man of some fame, some influence, of strong opinions, but a shipper who had not been very successful in his craft. He was constantly in debt, acquired new ships but had to sell them off a little later. Why should we follow a man who could not manage his own affairs, some shippers wondered, our Clais de Hert among the most sceptic.

John Hyoens dared to speak out loudly in meetings and in the councils of the guilds, proffer his opinions with good arguments, whereas others remained silent. The Hyoens family had fallen out with the count, which pleased many weavers! This had happened a few years ago, and had added to their image of a daring people. In fact, it was not so much the count having quarrelled with the Hyoens, as another shippers' family having flattered the count more! These men were called with the name of Mayhuus. Men of the Mayhuus clan had undercut the influence of the Hyoens by suggesting earlier to the count a tax on the transport of goods over the rivers Leie and Scheldt. The new tax could fill the count's empty treasury with gold. The tax had been installed. The Hyoens had found the suggestion insulting. The tax was

imposed to the detriment of the guild of the shippers, but the Mayhuus family was rewarded by the count. For many years, the men of the Mayhuus family had been called to the dignity of the aldermen, and deans of the shippers, whereas the Hyoens suffered.

The beginning of the revolt

In the spring of 1379, a group of shippers stood talking and gesticulating on the quays of *Tussen Bruggen*, the inner port of Ghent. Among these men stood John Hyoens, Clais de Hert and his two sons Arnout and Lieve, shippers and men who knew each other. They were discussing heatedly how their shipping business evolved, what products brought in profits and which not, which routes were safe and which should be abandoned, when they heard a loud commotion in the *Koornmarkt*, the Grain Marketplace. A crowd shouted excitedly. The group of shippers walked together to the square behind the grand buildings of the quay.

John Hyoens asked why the people had assembled and why they shouted so excitedly. A man, a stout fuller, told them what had happened. A herald had cried from the *Schepenhuis*, the Town Hall, Count Louis of Male had decided to organise a great tournament in Ghent on Whit Monday of that year, the day after Pentecost. The issue was not really this organisation, for that might be a day of joy for the *Gentenaars* and a fine spectacle that could draw many knights with purses full of golden coins to the city. The crier had, however, also announced a new tax would be levied, on orders of the count, to pay for the feasting. The tax was modest, but the people shouted they did not need a tournament at their expense. The noblemen of Flanders, Brabant, Hainault and Artois would be invited to come to enjoy themselves at the expense of the inhabitants of Ghent! Was that not a true scandal? The crowd demanded a meeting of the aldermen of the city to protest! John Hyoens was scandalised, as were most of the porters of Ghent.

The next day, a meeting of the aldermen was indeed called together in the *Schepenhuis* of Ghent. Most of the aldermen had already accepted the payment of the subsidy for the tournament. They had nevertheless been surprised by the negative reaction of indignation of the people. It was a time at which the treasury of the city was as empty as the count's, the reason why a new tax had been imposed.

A few aldermen reproached the First Alderman for having announced the tax in the same breath as the organisation of the tournament. The new tax had to be levied, but did that announcement have to be linked so obviously to the demand of the count? Other aldermen smiled in their fist, held a hand to their mouth to hide their smiles. A man called Goswin Mullaert pleaded openly and very loudly in a diatribe directed against the count, attacking and scolding the count for having asked money for his personal pleasures.

‘Is it not scandalous?’ Goswin cried, ‘that the count, who walks in the finest silk and who moves, accompanied by a court of tens of nobles in the greatest luxury, could possibly have the effrontery to demand money from a poor city, so hurt, in famine, ravaged by the plague waves not so long ago? Do we really have to pay over and over again for the smaller pleasures of a frivolous court? I say a hundred times no, no, no, no! I refuse to pay for such deleterious expenditure, at times when Ghent has to face ruin and has to turn around each pound twice, thrice over, to keep up with the necessary constructions of roads and institutions!’

Put like that, the aldermen could but agree with Goswin Mullaert's words.

‘We, Flemings, have already paid the debts of Count Louis of Male many times over,’ an alderman declared. ‘We cannot be milked like a cow!’

The aldermen refused to grant the subsidy to the count. Nobody thought of how the count might react.

The deans of the guilds had equally been called to the city council. John Hyoens for the shippers and for the lesser guilds, looking contemptuously at his enemy Mayhuus, who was in favour of the tax. He shouted his anger at the greed of the count, at the count's effrontery. He vociferated against the taxes, which he declared in violation of the privileges of the city. Count Louis of Male would not receive his subsidy from Ghent!

Outside the *Schepenhuis*, a large crowd waited for the aldermen to come out of the building, but John Hyoens was the first to speed out of the building and to cry what the aldermen had decided: no subsidy! He was cheered by the crowd.

A little later, John Hyoens was made leader of the White Hoods, the group of adventurous, determined men wearing arms in the town, who were also members of the militia of Ghent. The White Hoods could be called upon as a small but intrepid force of men-at-arms in the event of troubles in Ghent. The White Hoods were the city's men to keep pace and order. They were named as such, because they were usually dressed in a brown tunic thrown over their mail, to which was attached a bleached, white hood that could be drawn over the head as protection against the rain or the sun. Each city of Flanders thus had its colour of hoods, for instance white for Ghent, red for Bruges.

Count Louis of Male was at Beoostenblijde when he heard his tax had been rejected by Ghent. He wondered where he would get the money for his tournament. His treasury was not empty at all, but he had thought wealthy Ghent could easily have funded the tourney! He might have to postpone the event, for he did not want to pay by his own money. He would lose much face, he feared, for he had already promised it to the nobles of the Low Countries.

'How dares Ghent lack so much in respect for her count?' Louis of Male bellowed to the impassive Heyla de Smet, who sat knitting in the great hall of her castle. 'I only asked for a small retribution for services rendered, a mild additional subsidy for all the benefits and added income the presence of so many noble knights of our lands would add to the city's wealth. The aldermen of Ghent are idiots. They count how much they might have to spend, not how much they could gain. They are weaklings who cannot resist even to a few rowdy idlers showing up under their windows.'

'The populace was outraged at the new tax, I heard, Louis dear,' Heyla tried to console and calm her lover. 'The aldermen can only so far act against the outcry of the poorters of Ghent. They walk on a tightrope. Don't get excited over such a small, temporary setback. You'll find the funds elsewhere.'

'I don't want to have to find the money elsewhere! My public treasury is empty and I refuse to spend my own funds for the benefit of Ghent! The costs of everything have soared. My army, small though it is, costs me heaps of gold! No, no, I shall teach these *Gentenaars* to dare oppose my wishes! Wait until I've finished with them. I bet once more those damn weavers, supporters of the king of England too, are behind this plot.'

'Ghent has lost very many people in the plagues, dear. Bruges is much richer than Ghent nowadays. Why don't you ask the traders of Bruges for the money?'

'Should I be begging on my knees for merchants, now?'

Louis of Male stopped walking up and down, fists in his sides. He nevertheless calmed a little, for Heyla indeed had proposed an idea he hadn't immediately thought of. He had resented the refusal of Ghent. He had not thought one moment Ghent would refuse to pay.

'Why not?' he asked of himself. 'Why do I not get the money from Bruges? I have many supporters in Bruges! But the men of Bruges only give after taking. What can I offer them? I

know how I can placate Bruges! I can offer to let them continue digging the canal to the Leie from Damme or Sluys, ending south of Ghent. They have been bickering me for almost twenty years with that canal. I have granted them my permission to dig that waterway such a long time ago I had forgotten about it, but I forced them to halt the works because Ghent protested. I'll tell Bruges they can go ahead with the works, and give them a charter if I have to. They can take up the project anew. That will make the *Gentenaars* laugh very green, and I'll get my tax.'

Heyla had guessed his thoughts. She bit on her lips. She knew Louis of Male as well as the back of her hand. She looked up.

'You cannot do what you are thinking of, Louis! You officially granted Ghent the privilege of the grain staple on the Leie and the Scheldt for Picardy grain in Flanders!'

'So what?' Louis chuckled. 'I do not abolish any privilege! Ghent can keep its grain staple for all grain that is transported over Ghent on the Leie and the Scheldt. I don't break that right. Only, far less grain shall reach Ghent from Picardy, for the French grain may well increasingly be transported over the Leie and then directly be brought to Bruges by the new canal.'

'That should come very hard as an insult to the shippers of Ghent,' Heyla protested.

'Why?' Louis of Male threw in. 'The shippers of Ghent can continue to transport the grain of Picardy. Only, they shall increasingly bring the grain loads to Bruges instead of to Ghent!'

'The shippers of Ghent form the most important guild of the city for the moment, dear. They are very much emotionally linked to their home city. No, they will not like having to sail to Bruges instead of to Ghent and face shame and scorn in their home town, and competition from new shippers of Bruges. Shall they be allowed to sail to Bruges? Shall Bruges allow shippers and river boats of Ghent in its waters and ports? I doubt that! Ghent will lose income from taxes. The poorters of Ghent may come to hate you for such a measure. It is not a very positive act, Louis. It is not right to tease and harass people like that. God does not like deeds that harm. You may be punished for your recklessness.'

'The measure could do the shippers of Bruges a lot of good, Heyla. Ghent will lose, and Bruges will win. Bread for the one means always the other's loss. The deed is neutral. It'll teach the arrogant *Gentenaars* a much needed lesson!'

Heyla sighed. She did not like vengeful retaliations. She felt Louis only wanted to scourge Ghent for the insult, because he had lost face to the city. The measure would, however, move Ghent to revolt. She was sure of that. She did not have the leverage she had formerly on Louis. Not anymore. She could not curb his anger.

The first War of Ghent. John Hyoens. 1379

A few days later, Louis of Male rode to Bruges. He proposed Bruges to pay for his tournament, in return for the permission to dig the canal of the Leie to Damme.

Bruges, ruled by the rich landowner-poorters and cloth merchants, accepted the offer. They paid Louis of Male a handsome subsidy. Immediately, six hundred journeymen began to dig the canal to Ghent, starting from Bruges. The engineers followed the course of the Reye River, which they widened and deepened. The works advanced rapidly.

It took some time for the poorters of Ghent to understand what Bruges was doing. The works on the new canal, the aims of which became clear to the shippers of Ghent, caused much commotion in Ghent. Some form of competition and envy had always existed between Bruges

and Ghent. Bruges was too rich and money came too easily to the merchants of that city, thought the men of Ghent. Bruges had its wonderful harbours, Damme and Sluys. It had its Lombard bankers and its German traders, the Hanze of London and the German Hanze. Bruges sold what others had to toil for. The men of Bruges gave only in return for all the trade and products brought, the basic necessities for the people of the quarter of Ghent, such as German grain and northern hides, at hefty prices.

The magnificent city of Bruges began digging its canal where it had left it off more than ten years ago. The canal would effectively end the grain staple of Ghent, despite guarantees provided by the count. The Ghent shipping trade was endangered at a moment when the shipping guild was very influential in the local politics. The atmosphere in Ghent grew perceptibly hotter. John Hyoens cried out his indignation in every council session. He talked at every guild meeting. He might not have been a successful shipper, but he was a fine, inspired orator. He incited the shippers to action. Few people of Ghent warned to caution, because the insult and danger was so blatant. Hyoens' arguments sounded true and persuasive. More men flocked as volunteers to his White Hoods.

In July of 1379, the six hundred journeymen Bruges had hired and put to work on the canal reached the border of the quarter of Ghent, entering from the *Brugse Vrije*, Bruges' countryside lordship. The architects and engineers of Bruges advanced to the town of Aalter. The porters of Ghent decided to act.

In August of 1379, John Hyoens marched out of Ghent at the head of a force of several hundred experienced, well-trained, ruthless White Hoods, armed with *goedendags* and dressed in armour. They walked rapidly to Aalter. With John walked Arnout and Lieve de Hert, probably by now the most well-known shippers of Ghent, and also Heinric Vresele, the city's clerk. The warriors marched quickly, unknown to the aldermen of Bruges. They arrived unhindered in view of the Herculean, wide trough in the earth dug out by the hundreds of journeymen hired by Bruges. The new canal cut through the landscape as if opened by a giant, cruel knife.

John Hyoens and Heinric Vresele stood on top of a hill from where they enjoyed a fine view of the works. Hyoens liked having Heinric with him. Was Heinric not a veteran of the glorious victory of Flanders over Brabant? Heinric Vresele could be a fine counsellor in this small war.

'They have done a great job,' John Hyoens remarked to Arnout de Hert and to Heinric Vresele. 'I almost regret destroying such fine work.'

'They have,' Arnout de Hert agreed, 'but they have to be stopped. They mean harm to our trade and to our craft, to our income also. They mean to grow richer by making Ghent all the poorer. Stopping the works is entirely justified, a matter of elementary justice. Why didn't they come to talk to us? Their canal is a vile way of trying to subdue Ghent.'

'They have spent enormous sums to bring the canal so far,' Lieve de Hert, the youngest, added.

'What needs to be done must be done,' John Hyoens mentioned coldly, throwing his white hood back on his shoulders. 'How do we go about it? Have you got suggestions?'

'We just run, now, immediately, down there,' Heinric pointed. 'We must not tarry until the militia of Bruges arrives. We attack now, fast, hard. Look, almost no guards have been positioned on this side. I propose one fourth of our men to run round the place where the works have ended, to attack the other bank. We run from this side. We simply overwhelm them. We kill a few men, profit from the surprise and confusion. The workers will run to

where they can, to the other bank. Our warriors will be waiting for them. We don't need to kill many. We disperse them, take a few prisoners, preferably guards, and tell them that if ever one man of Bruges returns over here, we will come back and kill them all before they get the time to flee. We send those men back, rough them up a bit. Then we destroy the barrage, over there. That will call a flooding in the valley, making it all the more difficult for them to resume the works. The mud will hinder them. They will have to wait for next summer to be able to continue. Our aldermen must warn their colleagues of Bruges we shall never allow Bruges to set one foot on Ghent territory with diggers for a canal.'

'Bruges will appeal to the count. They will have made huge losses on the construction so far.'

'The appeal to the count will be useless,' Hyoens grinned. 'We have moral justice on our side. We stop them here and now, or we'll never stop them. The count can bring an army. We can put three to five times more men in the field, and we'll surprise them again.'

Heinric Vresele and the de Herts nodded in agreement. Hyoens brought his *goedendag* in the air. Then, he pointed it down. Far below him, the workers of Bruges had stopped working. They looked upwards, to the hillcrest. Four hundred militiamen of Ghent, the White Hoods, appeared there in a long line. The militiamen of Ghent were heard to hit their shields with their weapons and the warriors shout with course voices, 'Ghent! Ghent! Ghent!' The war-cries thundered into the valley.

The armed men of Ghent came running down the hill in one wave. The journeymen of Bruges threw away their shovels and picks and baskets, and ran to the other side of the deep incision in the valley. Heinric Vresele and his men had already skirted the end of the works. They pursued the men of Bruges from the side these fled to. The workmen were trapped, ran in panic. That was exactly what the *Gentenaars* wanted! The White Hoods of Ghent swamped over the works. They killed a few guards who tried to resist. They slew a few workmen, but John Hyoens held his men back. The point of Ghent had been made. Crossbowmen of the guilds of Ghent loosened a few arrow into the backs of the running men, inciting the others to run harder and to continue running. John Hyoens and Heinric Vresele then made a few prisoners, beat them half to death, but drew them back on their feet. The men of Bruges had their faces smashed in, and they bled from many bruises and wounds. Heinric delivered them the gruesome message not to be come back or to be killed. Any man of Bruges would die the next time, for Ghent would never consent to a canal from the Leie beneath Ghent to Damme. No such canal would be allowed to be dug in the Ghent quarter.

Little time later, when most of the White Hoods had already left the site on their way back, the *Gentenaars* broke the dam that held the water in this part of the Bruges canal that was already finished. The water flooded the valley, turning the place in an enormous swamp, which would drain the rest of the canal empty. It would take enormous sums to dry out this part for renewed works. The canal would never be resumed, however, for Ghent would fight with all its might against the works. The White Hoods returned to Ghent.

When John Hyoens and his men entered the gates of the city, they were received in triumph, glory and great joy. Shouts were called to make John Hyoens the dean of the shippers and overdean of the lesser guilds, as well as head captain of the town. This was done, so that John Hyoens became the undisputed leader of the city. Although he was clearly the man in command, the man who held the *Beleed der Stede*, the city continued to be administered by the twenty-six aldermen. The other captains chosen were John de Winter, Clais van Lippezele, John de Drussate and Gillis van de Hoeven. This regime by which Ghent was ruled by its five captains, was installed on the sixth of September of 1379.

When Count Louis of Male heard Ghent had stopped by arms the construction of the canal, he ordered his bailiffs to arrest any man who had participated in the raid of Ghent. The bailiff of Ghent, Roger van Outryve, read the message, but he grumbled, ‘how, in heaven’s name, can I arrest five hundred White Hoods? How should I follow up on this order? If I arrest John Hyoens in the city, the *Gravensteen* will be broken down, stone by stone!’ He racked his mind, trying to discover something he could do to satisfy the count at least some, if only as a probe.

A few days later, a man ran through the streets and in the Saint Veerle Square near the *Gravensteen* shouting, ‘*poorterie! Poorterie!*’ in favour of a government of the common people, and in defiance of the count’s garrison in the castle. The bailiff sent a few guards out, arrested the man and threw him in the prison of the castle. The bailiff Roger van Outryve had looked with much apprehension and envy at how the weavers had once more gained power in the city, and how the lesser guilds had joined them, even won more influence than the weavers, whereas the authority of the count and of the *Leliaert* knights, also his authority, had waned. Van Outryve was quite satisfied with having imprisoned a daring man who had cried out in favour of a government by the poorters. The man was clearly a fool, but the count didn’t know that. The bailiff wondered what would happen next.

The inhabitant of Ghent the bailiff had arrested had committed no murder. So, John Hyoens and the aldermen of the city came to talk to the bailiff, reminding him that according to the privileges of the city, according to the charters the counts of Flanders had granted to Ghent, any free man of Ghent had to be judged by the aldermen of the city, not by the bailiff. Roger van Outryve nevertheless refused to hand over his prisoner. The bailiff resented too much the power of John Hyoens and he did not want to suffer loss of face and loss of authority. He claimed the man had insulted the count, and committed a major crime. Van Outryve, a knight, was a man profoundly imbued with contempt for the lower classes, and for the guilds of Ghent.

The dean of the weavers of Ghent, strengthened in his cause by the support of the lesser guilds, by the head captain and by the dean of the shippers, was very angry at the blatant disrespect of the bailiff for the town’s privileges.

The weavers had recently won another clash with the fullers over a dispute concerning the wages for fulling. The two guilds had stood like bulls in heat in front of each other in the Friday Market. A new, bloody clash had narrowly been avoided when the fullers had to acknowledge the weavers had confronted them with the town militia formed by the weavers and all the other guilds of the city. The fullers had swallowed their pride in front of overwhelming numbers of armed men. They had remained bitter over the conflict, however. The fullers had tried appealing to the count, but without much success. Count Louis of Male had learned to exert some prudence in these matters. He had not wanted to call the weavers to arms against him at that moment, and refused the fullers their raise of wages.

The dean of the weavers, having thus gained much face, called for a general strike of all weavers. This also forced the fullers and many other crafts out of work, the men of the lesser guilds who earned a living from the weaving industry in Ghent. The shippers supported the weavers.

With the city in such turmoil, the aldermen of Ghent decided to appeal for appeasement to the count. In the meantime, however, the more belligerent groups of adventurous men ran through the city in arms. Then, the militia of the weavers and of the shippers patrolled in Ghent with the White Hoods.

A delegation of twelve poorters of Ghent, among whom several aldermen, Heinric Vresele and the shipper Clais de Hert, rode to the castle of Male to explain the situation to the count and ask for the release of the free *poorter* the bailiff had imprisoned. Louis of Male received them in his great hall. He welcomed Clais de Hert warmly, and listened to the arguments of the delegation.

When the notables of Ghent had finished pleading, Louis of Male stood from his seat, looked at his courtiers, then back to the aldermen, and said, ‘good men of Ghent, I appreciate your coming to me to discuss these matters which concern your city. As to the construction of the canal between the Leie and Damme, the port of Bruges, I can grant you right. It is true the rights of staple in grain imported from Picardy do seem to have to be interpreted in your favour. Please note I have not abrogated the rights of staple, but I concede the canal may harm your trade. I am not inclined to withdraw the staple privilege from my good city of Ghent.’ The faces of the aldermen of Ghent brightened.

‘Nevertheless,’ the count continued, ‘Ghent is in arms, and the presence of the militia of the White Hoods is a danger for my military authority. I can release the *poorter* of Ghent imprisoned by my bailiff on my orders, a man who I remind you has openly insulted me by shouting rebellious slogans in favour of powers alien to me. Yet, I am only willing to release him on the condition that Ghent returns to order, in complete recognition of my authority as your lord. I demand therefore the disbanding of the hotheads you call the White Hoods. Only when the White Hoods have been disbanded, and its men returned to their crafts, can I consider the release of the man imprisoned by my bailiff. I cannot tolerate other military authorities in Flanders but mine. The militia of the cities must be called together on my orders only. They and the knights of Flanders must serve to defend the county, not to war against each other. I hope you understand what I am saying, and I will respect then the privileges of the cities.’

The aldermen bowed, not showing their disappointment. One alderman who had been installed by the count, answered politely the message had been understood, and would be taken into consideration during a council meeting of the assembled aldermen of the city. The men of Ghent bowed and left the hall.

In Ghent, the deans of the guilds and the captains, and also John Hyoens, refused categorically to disband the White Hoods. Such an act limiting the freedom of the city could not be taken in consideration.

A little later, a large group of knights of the Ghent countryside, with a group of knights-*poorters* of the city, with the men of the bailiff, assembled outside the walls of the city. They thought it possible to grasp power in Ghent by surprise. They expected help from a group of poorters assembled by the Mayhuus family, who were natural enemies of the Hyoens. The bailiff brought together a force of two hundred riders. His men were heavily armed and armoured, and determined to break the rabble of Ghent and teach the lesson of obedience the city deserved.

On the fifth September of 1379, the two hundred men-at-arms of the bailiff rode suddenly into the city of Ghent, shouting their war-cries of ‘*Vlaanderen de Leeuw!*’ They reached the Grain Market and even the Friday Market unharmed. They planted the count’s banner in the Friday Market. Ghent seemed to have been captured in the easiest manner possible.

It had taken the White Hoods and the captains of the city some time to realise what was happening. The city was being attacked from within by forces they considered hostile to the cause of Ghent and of the guilds.

The White Hoods reached the Friday Market in sufficient numbers only when the knights had already placed the count's banner in the city centre. The White Hoods had run without heavy armour, brandishing only *goedendags*. They would never have been able to force back the men of the bailiff, the knights of the count and a small group of Mayhuus sympathizers, had not also the militia of the weavers and of the shippers ran into the *kuipe* of Ghent, all men in arms, with shields, spears and *goedendags*.

A short but terrible, cruel skirmish ensued, a small battle. The knights were overwhelmed by the numbers of the militiamen that continued to flood into the squares of the centre of the city. A large number of the count's knights could escape by the weight, the ferociousness and later the speed of their horses. They forced through improvised barrages of pikemen in the streets. Many knights fought ardently in the squares of Ghent. When evening fell, they were overpowered and massacred. It was only a small battle, but nevertheless very bloody, for no quarter was given among the men who resisted and fought.

In the Grain Market, the horse of the bailiff Roger van Outryve was stabbed through and through by so many spears, the animal had fallen dead under the bailiff. Roger van Outryve was thrown out of the saddle, and instantly beaten to death by the clubs of the *goedendags*, then transpierced by lances. The banner of the count of Flanders was trampled upon in the Friday Market, and torn to pieces.

John Hyoens took control of the mob that poured out of the poorer streets of Ghent, directing them to the *stenen*, to the stone houses of the wealthier poorters. The larger dwellings of the known *Leliaert* knights were attacked, the inhabitants killed, and the houses looted. John Hyoens and the White Hoods were master of the city, but much crying and wailing was heard in Ghent that day.

The aldermen of Ghent feared the wrath of the count. Louis of Male would no doubt bring to arms many more knights and men-at-arms to restore order in the city and revenge the death of his bailiff. The aldermen therefore sent a delegation to Louis of Male, to beg for amnesty for the rash deeds of the militiamen, to ask the count to pardon them, and to assure him of their loyalty. Count Louis of Male made the aldermen wait at Bruges. Then, at Male, he showed his anger, telling the death of his bailiff asked for terrible revenge. After many fine words of the aldermen, however, Louis of Male relented, and concluded the meeting by granting his pardon.

John Hyoens, who had remained in Ghent, wanted to hear of no pacification of the city in favour of the count. In agreement with the other captains, he gathered a large force of several thousand militiamen. He marched to Wondelgem, where the count had modified and installed a luxuriously decorated castle. The castle of Wondelgem was only guarded by a small garrison. Hyoens attacked Wondelgem, took the castle by storm, destroyed it, plundered it and finally put the proud castle to the fire. The White Hoods also destroyed a hotel of the count on Ghent.

While this happened, the delegation of the aldermen of Ghent was still negotiating with the count's courtiers at Bruges. The count summoned the aldermen again to Male. Count Louis seethed with anger. He had liked much his fine castle of Wondelgem, having decorated it richly for his pleasure.

Louis of Male shouted at the frightened aldermen and at the other influential men of Ghent, 'bad people, bad people, you are! You came to me with sweet words, but the sword in your hands at your back. I granted you pardon with magnanimity and much good will, but while I did this, you burned down the castle I liked and my house in Ghent. I gave you a safe-conduct, so it would be a stain on my honour if I now did to you what I would have liked, that

is slaying you all by separating your miserable heads from the rest of your body. Get out of my eyes, disappear from my sight, return to your malicious city, and tell your people there shall be no peace and no new treaty of pardon with Ghent until I have Ghent at my mercy and until I have decided on life or death over whoever it pleases me in your horrible city!’

Count Louis of Male thus declared his war on Ghent. The aldermen and the delegates shrank from the anger of the count, bowed, almost ran out of the hall of Male, and rode from Male as fast as they could, glad to be still alive.

In Ghent, John Hyoens heard of the terrible words of the count, but he was pleased, and not impressed. He didn’t seek peace with the count. On the contrary, he hadn’t forgiven the count his traitorous act of having granted Bruges the right to dig the canal that would have harmed the shippers of Ghent so much.

The two warring parties, Ghent and the count of Flanders, gathered their troops. Louis of Male called to his aid his knights and their men-at-arms. He began to garrison the towns of Flanders that had remained more or less loyal to him. A few towns immediately declared for Ghent, fearing the total power of the count over Flanders once Ghent would be submitted. Ghent took the initiative already on the eleventh of September.

John Hyoens, as head captain of Ghent, marched out of the city with a few thousand militiamen. The troops marched to Ieper. They arrived at Ieper on the seventeenth of September. The resistance of the noblemen was easily overcome. The *poorter*-knights of Ieper sent messages to count Louis of Male assuring him they would hold the city against the *Gentenaars*. They would probably have succeeded in that promise, had they not been betrayed from within. The knights of Ieper guarded the walls with their men, but the guildsmen sprang on the knights, killed many of them, and opened the gates. The militiamen of Ghent could not believe their eyes or their good luck. Without any parley or official delegation from the aldermen of Ieper, the troops of Ghent saw the massive gates of the city be pulled open. The weavers and fullers of the city ran out and invited with many shouts and much merriment the craftsmen of Ghent to march into the city. The *Gentenaars* helped the craftsmen of Ieper quench the last resistance of the *poorters* in favour of the count.

A little later, also Kortrijk opened its gates to the cause of Ghent, which had become once more the cause of all the cities and towns of Flanders.

On the twenty-third of September, the Ghent army marched to Bruges, which was captured. The army of Ghent had grown to about eight thousand men, quite sufficient to scare the Bruges magistrates out of their wits. The aldermen of Bruges were *poorter*-knights and wealthy traders. They feared a revolt of the craftsmen in their city. To appease the guilds, they rode out to meet the captains of Ghent. After a short parley, during which Hyoens promised not to harm the *poorters* of Bruges, not to give the city over to plunder and devastation, the aldermen agreed to open the city to the *Gentenaars*.

A large number of the *knight-poorters* of Bruges, who were staunchly in favour of the count, joined Louis of Male’s troops at Dendermonde.

The guilds took power everywhere. As in the times of James van Artevelde, Flanders was in uproar. The cities formed an alliance, re-installed a regime of domination by the three quarters of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, and they formed an army that could easily have been fifty thousand militiamen strong. The undisputed leader of this urban army of Flanders was John Hyoens.

We, the Pharaïldis men, feared that if Hyoens did as well as head captain as he had done as a shipper, our troops would sooner or later march into disaster. The troops did better than expected, however! It was vital Ghent kept the Scheldt open. Hyoens therefore marched to Dendermonde, where the *Gentenaars* were cheered and welcomed with much enthusiasm. The gates of Dendermonde opened. Then, the army of Ghent marched on to Aalst, to open the roads to Brabant. Aalst also declared for Ghent. John Hyoens marched on to Bruges.

The events accelerated in an incredibly fast tempo. I had to reconstruct events afterwards, for I received in those months very contradictory news from the war. By mid-October, John Hyoens drew to Damme to secure the harbours of Bruges. He died suddenly at Damme! The death of John Hyoens was not a normal one. Hyoens was a strong man, used to living in the open air, as all shippers, sailing in all weather. Maybe Hyoens had lived too rapidly, and too intensely. Maybe he had a weak heart. There was much talk of poisoning, and I too believe this was the most plausible cause of his death. So many people in the cities hated him, that poisoning seemed a reasonable cause.

John Hyoens has been compared to James van Artevelde. From what I had heard of the Pharaïldis patriarchs, no comparison was possible. James van Artevelde had been a very intelligent, far-looking man, a very successful trader, an excellent diplomat, and a prince among princes. Hyoens was a man of low upbringing, often vulgar and rough. He showed his cunning, yet he lacked in wise intelligence, as proven by his debts in the shipping trade. He should have realised he would not be able to hold out against the count in the end. John Hyoens' body was brought back to Ghent and buried in the churchyard of his parish of Saint Nicholas.

The Peace of Tournay. John Perneel. 1379-1380

In mid-October of 1379, the captains of Ghent were changed and four new captains appointed: the shipper John Boele, Ser Rasse van Herzele, a knight who had espoused the cause of the city against the count, John Perneel and Peter van den Bossche. Among these men, John Perneel seemed to have gained the most fame and power. Perneel now dealt the cards and used the army of Ghent to his views. He continued the politics of freedom and independence John Hyoens had started. The power of Perneel was not left unchallenged, for especially Peter van den Bossche vied with him for the image of first figure of authority in Ghent.

Count Louis of Male concentrated his forces at the town of Oudenaarde. He sent eight hundred knights and men-at-arms to garrison and hold Oudenaarde. Oudenaarde was a town of the quarter of Ghent. It lay sufficiently south in the county of Flanders to be used as a rallying point for more troops brought in from the French-speaking territories of Flanders and from France. Count Louis of Male could launch attacks from out of Oudenaarde and quickly push forward with that town as his base.

John Perneel moved his army of the Flemish cities also to Oudenaarde, and he laid a siege to the heavily defended town. Ghent had acquired many cannons lately, engines of steel hat could throw with much might large, round stones against the walls. Despite this might of destruction, the city held. Perneel used also other, more traditional siege engines, as well as

nearly fifty thousand warriors, Oudenaarde continued to resist. The town could not be taken. The count's knights defended and held the town despite several assaults. The terrible siege lasted for two months. The end of November of 1379 was reached, but Oudenaarde still held.

Louis of Male had gathered another small army near Dendermonde. The *Gentenaars* attacked the troops of the count also there, but they had as little success as at Oudenaarde. Louis of Male succeeded in throwing back the Flemish militiamen with his heavily armoured knights. The troops of Ghent withdrew.

Both Ghent and the count came to realise they would have to negotiate some form of a peace treaty or a truce. The war was costing too much for both parties.

At that moment happened something that may have been a relief to the count, a great relief, but ultimately made him feel very weak in his land.

Margaret of Artois, the mother of Count Louis of Male, was a princess of royal French blood. She had followed with increasing pain the events in Flanders. She sent a message to Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, to beg him to mediate in the conflict between the count and the cities of Flanders. She asked the duke to come to her at Arras, where she lived. Count Louis of Male had not wanted his mother to intervene in the conflict with own initiatives. He resented her message to Philip the Bold, the more so because Philip the Bold was the brother of the king and an important, powerful figure at the French court. It seemed to Louis his mother had asked for the king of France to intervene in the conflict of Flanders!

Philip of Burgundy saw an opportunity and grasped a marvellous chance to gain popularity in Flanders. So far, he had never had had the occasion to enter the politics of the county, to assert his authority over the county that would one day be his by heritage. If he could succeed now in bringing the peace to Flanders, he reckoned, his gravitas would be enhanced and his role in the county established. Philip the Bold also wanted to inherit a wealthy, intact Flanders, not a devastated ruins. The revolts that were happening could only hurt the commerce of Flanders. Burgundy had known beforehand he would have to establish his authority to inherit something else but an empty basket. He could not stand another power but his own over the county, so he felt he had to ride to the rescue of the counts of Flanders. He had to reinforce the institution of the counts, but not necessarily to enhance the authority of Louis of Male! Urged by Margaret of Artois, Philip the Bold contacted the rebels of Ghent.

Duke Philip promised peace and pardon to a delegation of the guilds of Ghent, general amnesty, and the end of the war. John Perneel and his other captains did not want to lose face. They wanted Oudenaarde! The knights of Oudenaarde promised the duke they would hold out till eternity. Philip the Bold let Ghent know that Oudenaarde was fresh, the garrison intact, and willing to hold the siege for ages.

Two months of siege by craftsmen whose families had no more income than the small wages of war Ghent could pay them, proved to be a long, too long time. With the prospect of many more months of siege before them, Ghent agreed to a truce and the count could keep Oudenaarde.

John Perneel rode to Tournay to meet the duke of Burgundy in person, and a peace was signed on the fourth of December of 1379. Later, this peace was called the 'Peace of the Two Faces', of Perneel and of Philip the Bold, but also of a smiling face of conciliation and a backward hypocritical grin of cunning! The duke of Burgundy promised pardon for the *Gentenaars*, but he did not give them Oudenaarde. The count of Flanders promised to return to his good city of Ghent.

The Peace of Tournai stated the count of Flanders would uphold the privileges and freedoms of the towns. A commission of twenty-five dignitaries, among them nine men from Ghent, eight from Bruges and also eight from Ieper, would hold an inquiry into the abuses denounced by the cities and the lords. The treaty stated explicitly the count was a free lord, a '*vrijheer*' in Flemish, and his subjects free people, '*vrije lieden*'. The towns promised a legal inquiry and a fair judgement to the men that had been pursued as *Leliaerts*. New magistrates were appointed. The bailiffs of the towns had to accept similar legal inquiries and judgements of their acts. They received the opportunity to prove they had not maliciously conspired against the authority of the towns, on punishment of being deprived of office. Every five years, the bailiff of the count and two representatives of the aldermen would control the administration of the towns. They had to inquire into grievances brought forward against the aldermen for past governments.

A separate peace pact was also signed by the weavers and the fullers of Ghent. This pact confirmed the ancient privileges of the two guilds.

While the treaties were being confirmed, the troops led by the Ghent captains abandoned the siege of Oudenaarde. A delegation from the aldermen of Ghent was sent to Bruges to accompany Count Louis of Male to Ghent, where he would be reconciled with the city. Louis of Male was found between Bruges and Deinze, where he rode on horseback, accompanied by his knights, on his way to Ghent. A banquet was hastily organised at Deinze. The aldermen officially begged the count to return to his good city of Ghent, which Louis consented to do. When the count entered Ghent, the people cheered. The aldermen offered the count fine presents. Count Louis of Male barely saluted the poorters, however. He was still thinking about his fine castle of Wondelgem, charred ruins now.

A meeting had immediately been organised in the Friday Market, for the count to address the people. Louis of Male arrived in the Friday Market, on horseback, accompanied by his most loyal courtiers. He was astonished to find the place invested mainly by the militiamen of the White Hoods. These stood in armour and arms, and with their war banners deployed and flapping in the wind. It was a colourful spectacle, but Count Louis was not pleased to have come to a display of such urban power and pride. Nevertheless, he dismounted. The aldermen brought him to a *steen* on the market, where he could speak from a balcony. Louis of Male had asked to say a few words to the people of Ghent, and the city had granted him that occasion. When Louis saw the White Hoods, troops he had so many times asked to disband, his anger rose, but he steeled his patience.

Most of us, the Pharaïldis men present in the market, heard the count address the people, with many fine words of reconciliation. Louis shouted his phrases slowly from the balcony, on which a scarlet cloth had been hung to lend more solemnity to his figure. Louis reminded the people of Ghent how much love he had given to the city. He told it was the duty of a people to love, fear and honour its prince and lord, the symbol of the land. Louis asserted he had done everything in his power to preserve the peace and the prosperity of Flanders. He had defended the people against many threats. Louis reminded the silent men below of the waterways he had opened or maintained in good working order, canals that had been closed before his reign, been neglected, and allowed to deteriorate. He had favoured commerce and industry by wise measures.

'The people of Ghent have shown no consideration for the many good measures I have taken for the well-being of the cities of Flanders,' Louis complained towards the end. 'The grand city of Ghent has rebelled against my best intentions and good rule. I have pardoned your

misdeeds and the wrongs that were done should not be brought up again. I ask however, that in the future, the good city of Ghent would refrain from rebellion against my authority, against the authority of the counts of Flanders, and therefore I ask you to dissolve the militia of the White Hoods. These form a permanent threat to the peace and to the rule of the count.’

Louis of Male had spoken for more than an hour, but he had remarked bitterly that however much he emphasized his good intentions, the White Hoods militiamen below him had remained standing in silence. They had shown sneering faces and mocking eyes, grins on their lips. Jokes, no doubt, and sarcasm, were being passed among the people in the marketplace. When Louis of Male finished his speech, he received no warm applause. The White Hoods began to whisper, a soft murmur rose to the balcony instead of cheers. They felt insulted by the count’s last words. Louis of Male then asked for the people to return to their work, but the White Hoods remained stubbornly standing in formation. The count left the Friday Market on horseback. The crowd of the militiamen still stood firmly in place, almost challenging the count with mocking smiles on their faces, and no one saluted him when he rode off.

When riding to the *Gravensteen*, Count Louis of Male thought, ‘peace has been signed, declared, sworn to, but peace is not in the hearts of the townsmen of Ghent! They are hard men and women who came today to the Friday Market! The peace we have signed will not last long. Once they are determined to hate me, they cannot change. I shall never, never, never, forgive them and surrender to them. I shall not suffer their malice and pride!’

Everybody present in the Friday Market that day could see how cold and angry the count rode to his *Gravensteen*, and not to his indefensible newer palace at the Ser Sanders place. Louis of Male remained five or six days in the city, and then he rode on to Beostenblij in the Four Crafts.

We of the Pharaïldis families, had gathered with the aldermen and other dignitaries in the Friday Market. Afterwards, we slowly sauntered to the *Brabantstraat*, where Boudin van Lake had prepared us a banquet. We sauntered because we talked. When we arrived in the *Brabantstraat*, almost all the Pharaïldis men and women gathered in the van Lake House, except the clerk Heinric Vresele. He had to organise yet several meetings for the city councillors. We preferred to dine on our own. We had our sweet wine first, a piece of meat pie, more white wine, and only then the tongues loosened. We sat in Boudin One’s hall and enjoyed life.

‘The confidence between Ghent and the count is broken,’ John de Hert began. ‘Ghent will nevermore love, even show respect for Louis, and Louis showed clearly he despised the attitude of the White Hoods and of Perneel. I listened to what the White Hoods were saying among themselves. They told there would be no peace, whatever the Treaty of Tournai might have declared. One who is not going to like that at all is Philip the Bold. The words of Louis of Male, given from his balcony, were hollow. The White Hoods told to sharpen the peaks of the *goedendags*. We will soon go to war again mark my words!’

‘The White Hoods have done a good job at defending the town,’ Wouter de Smet added, ‘but now the White Hoods govern the city with the sword, not with the word. They patrolled in the city the previous days, and did not hesitate to demonstrate they ruled Ghent. They even held me back on the quays of the Leie, forced me to declare who I was. They were astonished at the richness of my clothes when I opened my cloak. I was dressed too richly for their taste.’

Was I a landowner, a *poorter* of Ghent or from elsewhere, was I a knight? It took me some time to prove more or less who I was, where I lived, to prove some of the boats that moored at *Tussen Bruggen* were mine. A shipper had to come to testify I was who I am. The resentments between the lords of Flanders and the cities run very high.'

'The worse we could do now,' Clais de Hert interjected, 'is to show we are divided. I also believe the end of the affair is not near. We must stick together, however, to our aldermen and captains. The moment we admit publicly how divided we are, how much we, merchants, fear the new power of Ghent, the sooner shall Ghent be attacked, besieged, and the more we risk losing our freedom, our charters, among which our freedom of trade and of government.'

'I heard the *poorters* of the city are preparing for new conflicts,' Boudin van Lake added. 'I heard they are proposing to gather the funds necessary to levy the militia once again. Since the treasury is empty, Ghent demands money from the wealthy. They will come to us begging for money to finance their campaigns by. We must hope on loans to the city, but I fear the money we give will never be recuperated. We thought we could hold back from supporting the White Hoods and the other militia, to go our way and act as if we had nothing to do with the conflict. Those days are over! We shall be forced to take sides. The wealthier *poorters* are assembling money, jewels and silver plates, to so contribute to the defence of the city. If we do not contribute a significant amount, each of us, we shall be considered enemies of Ghent and supporters of the ugly monster called the count of Flanders! I propose we do contribute, but admit only the minimum. I have to say I have more sympathy for the count than for John Perneel. Perneel can only lead us into the abyss. The man is incapable of wise leadership. He has no military knowledge! He may have talents for governing, but I doubt even that. I also hope you have noticed the role our friend and Pharaïldis member Heinric Vresele has played. He is the better strategos. There is a man who knows how to lead, however odd a character he might be. He has hidden in the background, as a good clerk is supposed to do, but I wonder how he feels about the events. He is fomenting something with a small group of men, among whom I noticed Philip van Artevelde.'

'Who knows?' I answered. 'Anyhow, yes, we have to sacrifice some funds to the city now, show we are good citizens of Ghent but not as wealthy as some believe. We should not hope to gain profit from that money. The trick is to lose not more than we might win. We must consider the funds granted to the city as an investment, an insurance for continuing to do our thing.'

'Correct,' concluded Martin Denout.

Ser Martin had grown fat and content, a great lord. He wanted this annoying subject closed. He was still perspicacious. 'Ghent remains our city, my friends. Yet Ghent is never, never, at peace. I propose we look elsewhere. We still have our reserves intact in our Domains branch. We could buy more fields and pastures near Antwerp. It is perfectly feasible to trade out of Antwerp instead out of Ghent. Antwerp has no banking tradition. It is not much more than a large village, really, but it is peaceful land. More Jews are settling in Antwerp, bringing in new money, and I tend to follow the Jews' noses! Believe me, Antwerp is going to develop! It has an excellent harbour. Why, the entire town is a harbour! The ships can sail far inside the city. Ghent is too much in conflict to my taste, too much in conflict also with Bruges. Everything we want to do, we can do out of Antwerp. Bruges is the place to be, of course, to trade, to find the necessary connections, to find easy money for investments, although we mainly invest with our own funds. Antwerp is the place to look to! There is no harm in working both out of Ghent, enjoy the advantages of the grain staple, and also to trade out of Antwerp, and yet seemingly to deal with Ghent and Bruges.'

'I agree,' Boudin Vresele nodded. 'I agree with what Boudin van Lake proposes. I like what Martin said. I suggest we split our Investment branch. Would you all, Pharaïldis men, agree to

set up an office in Antwerp headed by Boudin van Lake? This is work for a younger man! We, Boudin van Lake and I, shall still manage our investments globally, but Boudin is to found a house of trading for the Pharaïldis in Antwerp, and manage that for a while. We can evaluate later how well he is doing there, and he can explain the opportunities to us, as well as the dangers.’

‘I agree! Agreed,’ pronounced Alise van Lake. ‘Clais can very easily expand his shipping trade out of Antwerp instead out of Bruges, where everybody looks at our fingers, nowadays. We’ll have to invest in better quays for our larger ships to moor, but I too believe it is better to have our eggs in more than one basket, in Ghent and in Antwerp, rather than in one.’

Those were wise words of a woman with such fine intuition as we knew Alise van Lake had. We agreed to open a branch in Antwerp of the Pharaïldis Investment Company.

‘I wonder how Count Louis of Male feels about Flanders and about the cities at this moment,’ Wouter de Smet wondered.

The answer to that question would be provided, we all knew, by Wouter’s sister, by Heyla.

Our dear Heyla de Smet heard the answer to her brother’s question a few days later. Heyla was a wonderful matron now, a woman of luxurious forms, with still a fine, though rounded face, and as beautiful as a rare flower in winter. She was listening in her hall to what her lover, Count Louis of Male was telling her. The fire in the large hearth of the castle of Beostenblijje blazed, warming the hall. It was very cold outside this winter. The fields of Axel were covered with a white snow carpet. Louis of Male had barely gotten through the Four Crafts on horseback, but he always dared to ride to his mistress, in any weather. Heyla de Smet loved this season because it emphasized her colours, her beauty, as well as the warmth of her body and of her voice. She always wore the harshest of colours in winter. She now sat like a saintly figure in a broad chair near the hearth, a shepherd dog at her feet. Louis of Male, a formidable figure shivering in his layers of woollen clothes, ermine-lined collars, bejewelled chest and fingers, paced up and down. He was warming his body, as he had just arrived. He was talking more to himself than to Heyla, as was his habit, but he knew Heyla was listening and would comment. He asked this benevolent attention of Heyla, desired her interest, and hoped on an occasional grunt to show she agreed with what he was saying. He would look at her whether she nodded or drew a grin of doubt, whether she jerked her hand in astonishment, bemoaned his sorry fate, or gave him a warm, pitiful look from under her long eyelashes by a head held oblique in admiration. Only then did Louis feel safe and understood in a cruel world!

Louis was desperate, yet clear-headed as always about what had happened. He remained in sorrow. He was exhausted, not from the ride through the vast plains of snow, but from feeling despised and misunderstood by his people.

‘I never wanted anything else but the good and best for my people of Flanders and of the cities,’ Louis complained miserably, walking to and fro, hands crossed behind his back. ‘How badly do they render to me everything I have given them! Those damned militia of Ghent didn’t even greet me. They showed not the least respect. Look where I am! I wanted Flanders to like me. I have done so much for them. Now, they despise me, act as if I were the worst monster on earth. They would love to throw their militia at me, force me back to France or to hell, and govern Flanders once more from out of the three cities under captains who are not more than scum. Everything I did to give the cities a gentle and stable government by a fine lord lies shattered at my feet like a precious vase smashed to shards on a stone floor. I am the

enemy of my people. That is how they see me! And all that started over a very low tax for a tournament in one town that is as rich as Croesus. My tournament would have brought them far more glory, fame and profit than the tax amounted to. I have returned at the point I was as a boy of sixteen when I entered Flanders as count! My authority has dwindled. I called in Philip the Bold as my heir and son-in-law, but all my power and authority has now be siphoned to the duke of Burgundy, to France. Philip the Bold has arranged the shameful Peace of Tournai behind my back, negotiating directly with the cities without involving me. It is to Philip the cities now turn, not to me. They have forgotten so quickly I gave them Mechelen and Antwerp and Dendermonde, the canal between Ghent and the sea of the estuary of the Scheldt, and so many works more. How ungrateful these people are! They have rejected me. The true governor of Flanders is Philip the Bold, now, and that way before his time. Does he think I am dead already? He acts as if he has already inherited Flanders! That man act as if he were the king! The real master of Flanders is the great Duke Philip of Burgundy! I am to play the second role, the role Philip deigns to give to me. Oh, cruel and undeserved, unjust fate!

Heyla had heard the tirade repeated with many sighs.

‘Calm yourself, Louis,’ Heyla whispered. ‘As to Philip the Bold, you should maybe be grateful your son-in-law ran to your help. It is not a bad thing his image is better so soon in Flanders. He shall have to rule the county one day! It is a good thing he has asserted some of his authority already now. There is no need to be bitter about something you should rejoice in. Was what has happened not what you always wanted for Philip? He has not taken over the rule in Flanders! He has come to your assistance! He has not diminished your authority over Flanders at all. He has re-established the authority of the counts, by the might of France. You and your council still manage the county! You should be grateful peace has been restored. Keep the peace now, and rule with moderation and love. Our Lord tells you will be rewarded for fine deeds. Moreover, aren’t we getting old, Louis? Enjoy life! Enjoy your children! The boys are fine knights, our girls are beautiful and witty. You have deserved some peace of mind.’

Louis of Male considered Heyla’s words. He went up to her, placed his head in her lap, and she fondly caressed his tousled hair.

‘Yes, yes,’ he agreed. ‘We are getting old. Your beauty does not wane, however! You do remain the only living being I like to be with, the only one who knows how to console, and who loves me. It is true we have fine children, haven’t we?’

‘Of course,’ Heyla nodded. ‘Don’t fret so much, Louis. Try to be more magnanimous. There is no need to execute so many people in the cities. By executing them, you make the others hate you all the more. Show you can be a grand count. For the rest, enjoy life! Let this peace now have a chance to set in, and you’ll see, the fickle *Gentenaars* will crawl back to you. You are their father, not a dark monster.’

‘You may be right,’ Louis sought hope, but he remained pessimistic of mood all through his stay at Beostenblijje.

The worries of Count Louis of Male were not over. In that same month of December of 1379, King Charles V called him to Paris. The messenger who arrived at Male showed openly his disdain when he handed over the royal message to the count. Louis was aware of a few errors made, which might have angered the royal court.

Louis had given refuge at his castle of Male to John of Montfort, the duke of Brittany, and that for a rather long period. In that same month of December of 1379, a French royal court of justice has summoned John of Montfort, to come and justify his actions against the king of

France. Montfort did not show up. His title of duke of Brittany was promptly declared null by the court. From then on, Montfort connived even more against France with England and with the count of Flanders. Montfort hid in Flanders for a while. He was considered an enemy of the king of France. Montfort was family of Louis of Male, however. How could Louis have refused giving refuge to a member of his family? Was he not a man of honour?

Also, there was the matter of Pierre de Bournezeaux. The French court had sent this knight on a mission to Scotland. Bournezeaux had travelled to Sluys to go aboard a ship bound for Scotland. Knights of Flanders had intercepted him, handled him rather roughly and brought him to Male. Louis had received Bournezeaux in the presence of Montfort. How was he supposed to know what Bournezeaux had come to Flanders for? Louis had scorned the man for the fact the knight had not deigned presenting his credentials to the count of Flanders. Louis had felt insulted, shown disrespect to by the court of Paris. Bournezeaux had protested vehemently. He had been well cared for during the rest of his stay, but the English spies in Bruges had caught wind of the affair, and Bournezeaux' mission had been compromised, the secret broken. The knight had returned to Paris, where he had spoken in the most outrageous words of the discourtesy of the count of Flanders. John of Gistel, a very good friend of Louis, had been present at the court of Paris. He had passionately spoken in favour of Louis with very finely chosen phrases. Nevertheless, the king had silenced van Gistel, and demonstrated his anger at the affair.

Louis of Male tarried riding to Paris. His mother, Margaret of Artois, princess of France, heard of his distress. She proposed to accompany her son. When Male and Margaret finally arrived in Paris, King Charles V had already forgotten what he had been angry about. Male had contributed a nice amount of money to the treasury of the kingdom. Louis was received warmly at court. He used the occasion to ask for support in his struggle against the revolt of Ghent, a cause King Charles V was sympathetic with, for the king too feared uprisings in the towns of his kingdom, after the example of Ghent. King Charles was not very inclined to launch a campaign in Flanders, though. Maybe his coffers were empty once more. 'Has peace not been re-established in Flanders?' Charles asked innocently, looking to the side of Philip of Burgundy. Burgundy bowed his head. He knew how volatile the mood on Flanders, how brittle his peace. Count Louis of Male stayed a few days at the court of Paris. Then he returned to Flanders, but he stopped at his town of Lille and remained there with his court.

The second War of Ghent. The Battle of Woumen. 1380

The Peace of Tournai, the Peace of the two Faces, lasted not even three months. It was not broken by the count, and, even more surprisingly, not even by John Perneel and his White Hoods of Ghent. It was broken, not unexpectedly, by the brother of the murdered bailiff of Ghent, by Olivier van Outryve.

The knight van Outryve considered it his duty to revenge the death of his brother, the insult done to his family by the *Gentenaars*. The duty to seek vengeance kept him awake at night. He glanced suspiciously at everyone who smirked at him, believing the man or woman was thinking he was a coward. The way he satisfied his lust for blood, his never-ending hatred for the *poorters* of Ghent, was outright appalling.

To the north of Ghent, outside the city, van Outryve and a group of about fifty knights obstructed the Scheldt. They stopped about forty ships that sailed, laden with goods, to *Tussen Bruggen*. Van Outryve and his knights seized the boats, destroyed most of them, plundered the cargo, and loaded everything of value on wagons, which they drove to the nearest towns to be sold, but not to Ghent. Then, they tortured the shippers.

This action was clearly directed in the first place to insult and harass the shippers' guild of Ghent. The knights esteemed the shippers responsible for the humiliations afflicted to the count and to his former bailiff. The revenge of van Outryve was terrible, a deed of unheard-of cruelty. The knights sliced off the hands of the shippers and they cut out the eyes of all their prisoners, except one. Then, they sent the shippers on their way, on foot, along the river, led by the man without hands but whose eyes had not been blackened. The knights sent the poor shippers home to Ghent to tell their story. A few of the unlucky guildsmen did not even reach Ghent. Two men died on the way from loss of blood, their arms only stumps, and their eye sockets empty and seeping blood.

A sorrowful sight was thus presented to the good people of Ghent! The men were well cared for in the hospitals of the city, but the shocked families demanded revenge from the aldermen, revenge on the bailiff's brother. A roar of horror and shouts of vengeance and of aversion rocked the squares of Ghent.

The guilds, the traders, drapers, weavers, shippers, everybody, blamed Count Louis of Male for the awful mutilation of free *poorters* of Ghent. The aldermen could not appease the war cries in Ghent. The people wanted revenge!

John Perneel, the head captain, summoned the White Hoods and the militia of the city. With the other captains, he marched out of Ghent in full panoply of arms and armour.

The news of the mutilations was brought to the other cities of Flanders, who equally set themselves on the march.

There was some call to caution in the cities. With Ghent marched practically only the militia of the weavers of the towns of Flanders. The other guilds hesitated to sacrifice the peace for Ghent, for its weavers and shippers only. The weavers, the greatest worry of Count Louis of Male for almost his entire life, could not be stopped. Their fearless militias marched in great numbers!

John Perneel and five hundred men of Ghent immediately and once more besieged Oudenaarde, the place with the strongest garrison of the count's men. The White Hoods surprised the garrison. The warriors of Ghent tore down two gates, massacred the guards, and demolished part of the walls in the direction of Ghent. The White Hoods invested the town and placed troops around and in the place.

While the siege of Oudenaarde was going on, the captains Arnout de Clercq and John Boele of Ghent marched from Ieper to Bruges, whereas Captains Rasse van Herzele and Peter van den Bossche drew to Kortrijk.

When John Boele and Arnout de Clercq arrived at a crossroads on their way to Bruges, John Boele proposed to follow the road to Torhout instead of the one to Roeselare. On that road, they met a strong force of troops of the count. They engaged the count's men, but they were defeated. Boele and de Clercq escaped. When Captain John Boele returned to the main force of Ghent, he was declared a traitor for having led his *Gentenaars* in the arms of the knights who had ambushed the militiamen. John Boele was the scapegoat for the defeat of the Ghent militia. He was executed in Kortrijk.

Louis of Male heard soon enough he had lost the last of his towns in Flanders, a strategic entry point for a possible invasion into the county from the direction of France. He bellowed in anger in the hall of his castle of Lille. He sent men of his court to parley with Ghent. The messengers of the count reproached the city for having broken the Peace of Tournay signed with the duke of Burgundy. The aldermen of Ghent had it easy to retort by showing the mutilated shippers, arguing Louis of Male must have known about the punitive expedition of his knights, of Olivier van Outryve, and have agreed with the atrocious mutilations of the free *poorters* of Ghent. The messengers returned empty-handed to the count, but they were sent back rapidly. Count Louis eagerly wanted Oudenaarde!

Negotiations continued in Ghent, with the outspoken aim of restoring the peace. For Ghent, the parley was not only led by sympathizers of the cause of Ghent, but also by men in favour of the count, by the poorter-knights Simon Bette, Gilbert de Grutere and John van der Zickele. This allowed for easier discussions.

The talks between the aldermen and the representatives of the count succeeded! In the final agreement, the count pardoned Ghent once more, but he demanded Oudenaarde. The aldermen of Ghent promised to hand over that town. John Perneel would be banished from the city, on condition that the count equally promised to banish the knight Olivier van Outryve, who had so cruelly insulted the city. The people of Ghent might as well have been shocked by the revenge of the former bailiff's brother, as by the revenge taken on the good town of Oudenaarde by the White Hoods.

The banishment of John Perneel seemed not to be a great issue in Ghent. Perneel had already lost much authority in the city, and he had never been the sole man in command. John Perneel was seized by the Ghent militia and by the men of the count, and brought to the border of the quarter of Ghent. Van Outryve also was indeed pitilessly banished by the count.

With these measures, Olivier van Outryve had gotten his terrible revenge, but he had been punished. Ghent had taken its revenge on Oudenaarde. Count Louis of Male had not yet received satisfaction and revenge. He could not let the matter pass.

When Oudenaarde was back in his hands, he repaired the gates of the town, reinforced the walls, and installed a garrison that was stronger than the former one. The walls of Oudenaarde were more heavily guarded than before.

Then, he pursued John Perneel, who had insulted him so many times.

John Perneel had found refuge in the town of Ath in Hainault. In April of 1380, Count Louis of Male demanded of duke Albert of Bavaria, governor of Hainault, to deliver the three leaders of the Ghent rebellion to him. Albert had indeed imprisoned John Perneel, William de Scopele and Hanin dou Wiele called Wielkun. He handed them over to Louis of Male. The count promised to return people banished from Hainault to Albert, in the same way as Hainault had assisted him. John Perneel and the two other leaders of the White Hoods were brought in chains by Hainault knights to the count of Flanders. The knights of Louis's court put Perneel on the wheel, broke every bone in his body by having the executioner flail him with iron bars, and then they quartered the former head captain. Louis of Male's revenge shocked Ghent.

Count Louis of Male had forced his vengeance on Ghent, but in doing so the war between Flanders and the count sprang up again. Too many people in the cities had been appalled by the cruelty of their opponents. The rest of the year of 1380 would see a terrible series of skirmishes, and battles even. These devastated the towns and the countryside of Flanders. Both sides, Ghent and the count, would know successes and failures. During that entire year,

Louis of Male did not return once to Beostenblijje. He had to remain constantly in armour, leading his troops, and riding from one place to the other with his knights and men-at-arms. Flanders was on fire again!

In April, Count Louis of Male finished the fortification of Oudenaarde. With another, rather small force, he rode to Ieper, one of the three large cities of Flanders. Louis was definitively on the initiative in the war! He hoped that by the horrible death of John Perneel, Ghent had been left without a belligerent, impulsive, but inspired leader. His knights devastated the countryside of Ieper, killing the farmers and journeymen working in the fields. The fields of Flanders would be left unsowed there, a catastrophe for the agriculture around the town. Louis of Male could surprise the defences of Ieper. He entered it with his troops, and subsequently executed hundreds of guildsmen. Many among these were weavers and fullers. Male punished thus the city for having quickly rallied Ghent in the war of before the Peace of Tournay. From a gentle man who had his mind filled with maybe naïve but the best of intentions for his people, Count Louis of Male had been transformed by hatred into a blood-lusty wolf, scourging his lands and his subjects. In defiance of all town privileges, hundreds of free *poorters* of Ieper were slain.

Count Louis of Male, fearing yet a military reaction of Ghent after the scourging of Ieper, led his knights to safety at Lille. He waited there for reinforcements to confront further initiatives of Ghent.

Ghent was poised in confusion! The aldermen had diplomatic issues on their mind. The aldermen of the city were particularly awed by the alliance between Louis of Male and the count of Hainault. They wrote to Hainault, asking the count to withdraw his knights from the war. Hainault refused to comply. Thee aldermen ordered the confiscation of the possessions of the lords of Hainault held in the quarter of Ghent.

The aldermen also sent letters to King Charles V, assuring him the war in Flanders was not directed against the French overlord, but merely against the bad, cruel government of their count. Ghent hoped thus to isolate Count Louis of Male and to withhold the king from sending reinforcements to Louis of Male. King Charles V was secretly pleased with this turn of events, for he had still not digested or forgiven Louis of Male's arrogance to the crown. In particular, he now regarded the choice of Male for the pope of Rome instead of for the pope of Avignon as a personal insult.

A new captain then emerged in Ghent. Peter van den Bossche seemed the most apt and the most ambitious at leading the city in military campaigns. Peter was one of the captains chosen with John Perneel to head the militia of the city. He took over from Perneel. He too spoke out against the nobles of the city, against the men who were known to have favoured the count and the king. After an enflaming speech in the Friday Market, he launched the White Hoods and the mob of Ghent against the houses of the knights-*poorters*. The mob rushed out of the square and plundered the houses of the knights.

Meanwhile, Ghent also tried to assemble at least part of its militia for a new offensive against Louis of Male. The hostilities began with the destruction of castles held by faithful followers of the count.

For a moment, we, the Pharaïldis men, feared the militia of Ghent would march into the Four Crafts and attack Beostenblijje, New Terhagen and Westdorp Manor. To our luck, the troops of Ghent remained close to the city, and to the west and the south. The Four Crafts were much a less known territory for the inhabitants of Ghent! The war was not waged seriously in the Four Crafts, and also not in the Land of Waas. We remained safe.

Good news came to Ghent from the city of Ieper. The guilds in that city showed the remarkable quality of being able to rise from a bloodbath like the Phoenix of antiquity. A few knights of the count had been left in control of that city. The weavers and the fullers had run through the streets in arms, and fought off the count's garrison. After wild atrocities, the knights were expelled from Ieper. Even the dean of the lesser crafts of Ieper turned against the domination of the landowner-*poorters*. The militia of Ieper then marched to Poperinge, and forced also there the knights to abandon the town. In the meantime, Ghent had invested once more the strategic town of Dendermonde, liberated the navigation over the Scheldt. Ghent and Ieper coordinated their military actions, to form a larger army that could threaten Bruges.

In Bruges, similar revolts as in Ieper had happened. The weavers and the fullers rose against the men of the count. Here, however, the nobles had a larger base in the traders, the drapers and other merchants. They held the upper hand. They could only barely hold out against the guilds, so they sent messengers to Lille, begging Count Louis of Male to come to their assistance with troops. The means of Louis of Male were near exhausted, however. A small contingent of White Hoods had already arrived at Bruges, but these too were expelled by the desperate, wealthier *poorters* of the city. The party of the count could thus narrowly hold Bruges, also because a part of the militia of the weavers had marched out of the city to help Ghent and Ieper against Oudenaarde and Dendermonde. The weavers and fullers remained in the minority among the guilds of Bruges. The guild of the Hanze was too powerful. The lesser guilds of the city, constituted by the landowner-*poorters*, the wealthy traders, and the smaller crafts that lived from the cloth trade, opposed the weavers and the fullers of Bruges.

When at the end of May 1380 the larger army of the Ghent militiamen finally arrived in view of Bruges, the captains found the city solidly in the power of the knights of the old lineages of the city. Also the smaller towns and villages around Bruges, the *Brugse Vrije*, remained dominated by the lords and their men-at-arms. These smaller troops harassed the army of Ghent near Bruges.

At that moment, bad news for Ghent also arrived from Ieper! The noblemen had re-captured the city. They had profited from the absence of many men of the militia of the weavers, who had marched out to assist Ghent in its campaign against Bruges.

Events followed each other rapidly once more! Two of the three large cities of Flanders, Ieper and Bruges, thus declared for the count at that moment, and Ghent was more isolated than ever. The war for Flanders evolved evenly for both sides, for the count and for the forces of Ghent. In Bruges, Count Louis of Male, fearing a large intervention of the army of Ghent and Ieper, consented to a truce with the various parties. Relative calm set in at the end of spring 1380, but no one doubted a hot summer would follow.

In July of 1380, Count Louis of Male succeeded in gathering a considerable army of knights and men-at-arms from Bruges and from the *Brugse Vrije*. He could launch a new campaign with these, his own forces, attacking the coastal area of Flanders, in the quarter of Bruges. His men rode and marched first against the town of Diksmuide. Diksmuide was situated centrally in the quarter of Bruges. From out of Diksmuide, Louis could control vast areas of the lands of Bruges. Diksmuide had declared in favour of what Louis now called the rebels of Ghent. Louis was clearly out to control the entire quarter of Bruges, not just this one city, but Diksmuide was a key location.

The White Hoods and the militia of Ghent, grown to several thousands of men, occupied Deinze and marched westward to meet the new army of the count on the way to Diksmuide.

The army of Ghent marched north of Roeselare, then ever more to the west, to near Diksmuide. A major confrontation between the two armies was in the making!

Four thousand militiamen of Ghent marched to Diksmuide. They arrived from the southwest, kept the wettest territory and the lakes of that region in their back. Then, they prepared to attack the troops of the count in the vicinity of the town. The men of Ghent saw the church tower of Saint Andrew of the village of Woumen before them, then in their back. They marched on in long rows, expecting to meet Count Louis of Male at Diksmuide, and form their groups for a major battle.

The territory was wide, open, dispersed small woods only blocked the view. The troops of the count had not yet been discovered. The captains of Ghent had expected these to have set up camp in view of the town of Diksmuide, still quite a distance farther. The troops of Ghent marched on, slowly, led by their captains. Their troops formed not one long, dense mass, but were rather constituted at that moment by separate groups following each other.

The militiamen of Ghent marched in the heat of summer on the road to Diksmuide, past a large wood, from behind a low hill, into the fields of Woumen. There, they were suddenly being attacked without warning by the massed horse riders of the count's army.

Two thousand riders, knights in heavy armour, long lances couched, launched a massive assault on the dispersed columns of Ghent. Behind the on-riding knights ran armed men on foot, among them militiamen of Bruges, to finish the work of the knights. The leaders of the army of Ghent were utterly surprised!

The tactic of the armies of Flanders had always been to mass pikemen, the men with *goedendags*, against such an assault, to a depth of ten rows at least, to absorb the shock of the galloping knights. Such battle order had not been formed at Woumen. The knights slammed into the marching *Gentenaars*, who were totally unprepared for such an onslaught. The knights hit like a hammer of steel into a heap of butter. The marching men lacked consistent leadership. Confusion was total. The knights overran group after group without being stopped. One group of *Gentenaars* after another was thrown to the ground, transpierced by the couched long lances of the knights, crushed by the morningstars and the maces, trampled upon by heavy war destriers, to be finished off by the footmen of the army of the count who ran behind the riders.

In a nick of time, the road to Diksmuide was littered with corpses of the guildsmen of Ghent and of the White Hoods. The troops of Ghent could not find the time to form organised lines of defence of crouched militiamen behind rows of *goedendag* spikes. No coherent stand was made against the wild forces of the count, no deep ranks of militiamen placed together. The heavily armoured lords did not even have to drop their lances after the first assaults. They continued to gallop on to crush one group of *Gentenaars* after the other. They held their lances horizontal, and couched. They pierced through soft bodies, crying out their joy of killing, finding war so easy! Many warriors of Ghent were not even wearing full mail, and no breastplates. The armour of Ghent followed on wagons, far behind the front troops!

On rode the count's knights, throwing the army of Ghent completely in disarray. The groups of militiamen at the end of the Ghent columns were not even well aware of what happened in front of them. The lords of Flanders and their squires, though in much lower numbers than the troops of their enemies, simply rode on and made of the army of Ghent and Ieper a leaderless rabble that could not be brought to offer the least coordinated resistance. The knights rode on and killed instantaneously very many militiamen they passed. Other warriors of Ghent were thrown to the ground, had to confront fierce men-at-arms, were killed, or fled to all sides. The ones who did make a stand, were slaughtered by the expert and overwhelming numbers of

men-at-arms on foot of the count's army. These groups concentrated their numbers on the smaller, individual groups of *Gentenaars*. The Battle of Woumen was a massacre! The militiamen of Ghent had been so confident, and so naïve to believe the count's army would nicely wait for them to give battle. They had posted no reconnaissance troops in front of them. They had no intelligence of what the count's men were actually doing, or where they had assembled. Many of the *Gentenaars* who fled backwards, southwards, were cut in the back by pursuing, lighter horse-riders.

When the rear troops of Ghent and Ieper finally understood what was happening in front of them, they believed the troops of Count Louis of Male so fearless, ruthless, victorious and terrible in their attack, they lost all hope of resisting. They were routed and fled in disarray. Many fled back to Oudenaarde, but while they dispersed even more than before, they became also easier targets for the roaming groups of knights. The army of Ghent and Ieper was massacred, and thrown into catastrophe and flight.

The Battle for Diksmuide would never take place, had been replaced by the Battle of Woumen. The army of Ghent was utterly defeated and routed. The knights of the count pursued the militiamen as much and as far as they could, until they and their horses were exhausted. Over a thousand bodies of *Gentenaars* remained lying broken, wounded, maimed, or dead, on the roads and in the wet fields between Woumen and Diksmuide. Many more men were slaughtered without mercy until far on the way to Ghent. The Battle of Woumen, fought on the twenty-third of August of 1380, was a major disaster for Ghent and Ieper.

The militiamen that succeeded in escaping regrouped north of Roeselare, on their way back to Deinze. The militia and their captains had lost all hope of being able to resist the knights of Louis of Male. They walked in shock and in despair. The knights of the count had clearly proven they possessed much more experience and cunning in war than the militias. The defeated army returned to Ghent. The part of the urban army consisting of the militia of Ieper, returned to their own city, in fear of the revenge of the count.

Woumen was a decisive turning point in the war. After the defeat of the army of the cities of Flanders, the army consisting only of militiamen of Ghent and Ieper returned quickly to these cities. Count Louis of Male then threw his limited but victorious troops first against Ieper. He did not really have to besiege the city, for the aldermen hastily opened the gates to the victorious army. The aldermen knelt in front of the count in their marketplace, telling Louis of Male they had been forced by the common people to take the side of Ghent. Count Louis of Male silenced them quickly. The aldermen gave a very weak excuse.

In the next days, the lords of the count executed more than seven hundred *poorters* of the city, mainly weavers and fullers. Some *poorters* were decapitated, others hanged, a few quartered by horses.

Ieper lay once more a martyred city in the war of the three quarters against the count. It was the weakest link in the organisation of the Three Quarters of Flanders. Its role as a large urban centre of industry of cloth-making was almost finished for long.

The horror of Ieper came to be known throughout Flanders. All the towns opened their gates to the count's men, offering no organised resistance. Hoping Count Louis had been satiated by the blood of the *poorters* of Ieper, they begged abjectly for his magnanimity and pity. The count did not always grant them such hope.

Count Louis of Male did spare most of the other towns the fate of Ieper. His forces grew then also with parts of the militia of all the towns of Flanders. He marched on with this larger army to besiege Ghent.

Louis of Male and his warlords hoped to surprise Ghent, but the population of Ghent proved more resilient to catastrophes! The men of Ghent ran all in arms, to protect the walls of the city. Louis of Male had to acknowledge he would have needed ten times more valiant warriors to surround Ghent completely than he currently had. A number of gates to the east of the city remained open therefore, so that the town could be provisioned. The count had to recognise also the towns of Brabant supported Ghent with food and weapons.

The roads to the Four Crafts also remained open! I and Martin and John Denout made a fortune in providing Ghent with all sorts of agricultural products, grain, vegetables, fruit, fish, dried herring, lard, salt, milk, cheese, beer, and so on. We totally depleted our farms to relieve Ghent. The Scheldt remained open, so the de Hert boats sailed on and off between Ghent and Antwerp. No, this Ghent could be besieged, but not captured! The militiamen of Ghent, standing on their high walls or behind their marshes, showed their bare bottoms to the count's men and farted the lords away.

Ghent did not remain passive. It did not merely resist! Under the leadership of Peter van den Bossche, it sent out raids to Dendermonde, to Aalst and Geeraardsbergen, to keep its roads and waterways of provisioning open. Revolts threatened in Mechelen against the count. The Scheldt towards Antwerp remained open!

By the end of the autumn of 1380, Count Louis of Male and his court realised this kind of siege of Ghent could last for ages without result. Ghent was too large, the militia too strong. The city remained untamed, and unafraid. Ghent could not be subdued by the arms! Winter also threatened, with hard times for an army that could only live in tents in the open plains around Ghent. Count Louis of Male chose to negotiate. An agreement with the aldermen of the city was quickly found. Count Louis pardoned the city, as usually. He swore to uphold the charters and freedoms of Ghent in exchange for a truce. How could he have done otherwise? This city could not be tamed! It could be cajoled, charmed, won over, never be defeated, not be captured.

The count offered amnesty to Ghent and a truce, which everybody hoped would gradually transform into a peace, due to the stalemate. Count Louis granted his pardon, but on the condition that the men who had led the rebellion would be punished by the aldermen. This condition was accepted by Ghent, but everybody knew, also Count Louis, that the leaders of the militiamen had been elected captains of Ghent, who now also wielded all power in the city. These men would not be harassed, not be taken, not be thrown in prison, and certainly not be sentenced! Peter van den Bossche remained in power.

Count Louis of Male returned to his castle of Male and to his city of Bruges. There, the nobles and the knights and the landowner-*poorters*, as well as the wealthier traders remained faithful to him. He continued to block as many roads leading to Ghent as he could, hoping as yet to starve the city. The truth was Count Louis never abandoned entirely the siege of the city. He merely withdrew most of his troops to greater distances from Ghent, but still closing as many roads as he possibly could with not too many warriors. He was determined to cast down the pride of Ghent and to ultimately force to its knees the last city of Flanders that resisted him in the war, even if he would have to blockade it for many, many months more. The very uneasy truce that was never really a complete cessation of hostilities, set in.

In the years of 1379 and 1380, we, the Pharaïldis men, met with very varying success in our businesses. During 1379, our Investment branch could trade as in the years before. Trade stopped much in the largest part of 1380, and then stopped altogether in the autumn and winter.

Boudin Vresele complained Ghent and his business had diminished, and then had halted completely, as if in a plague year. The two Boudins placed their funds in our bank of Ghent, but they remained very nervous about the count's intentions with the city. They talked of transferring their funds out of the de Smet bank to Bruges and to Antwerp.

'Wait, we have to stay calm,' I argued. 'For as long as Ghent is not captured, the money, our golden coins, are safe. I cannot believe Ghent could be taken by the arms, and even if that happens, Count Louis of Male will not confiscate the money. He will not risk Ghent, one of the two main centres of wealth in his county, to go down entirely. He knows very well that if he drastically draws away the funds needed for commerce, all trade would stop. That would cause Flanders to run a serious risk of becoming a ruins, as Picardy is today. The roads, anyhow, are too dangerous for the moment. Transferring our funds to New Terhagen or to Westdorp Manor would be far too risky. Beostenblijje seems a much better place to hide our Florins and Ducats, but would that not be hiding our riches too close to the wolf's den? What if Louis of Male finds out about our fortune and confiscates it at Beostenblijje? No, our funds are safest in Ghent. If felt necessary, we can hide it in several places, bury it, hide it inside walls, dig out cellars and hide the entrances to our underground corridors. We have houses enough in Ghent for that, and yards too. Bands of troops are roaming in the countryside. Terhagen and Westdorp are fine castles, Westdorp maybe a bit less so. However strong our castles, we would not be able to hold out against hundreds of determined warrior-knights. Fifty men we can easily hold back. More troops could overwhelm us, fill our moat and flow over our walls using scaling ladders. No, the best we can do is to sit tight with our money, in a house among houses, hide the bank's assets, and draw as little attention on us as possible. I am confident you can arrange something of that order!'

'Is already done,' the Boudins grumbled.

Our other side of the consortium, the Domains branch, was making great profits. With the green produce from the farms, and with our dairy products, selling as much as we could to Ghent at quite high prices, we could secure formidable income during the war. Bringing our wagons and Clais de Hert's river boats to Ghent, loaded to the brim with food, also with imported fruit secured at Antwerp, was straightforward. We earned heaps of good money. Martin and John Denout and I were ruthless! We demanded coins before we delivered, but we did deliver, even when we occasionally, seldom, lost a load of wagons.

Loads were lost, but no ship was lost, and in that we were lucky. We secured many deliveries for Ghent. We made sure by Heinric Vresele, who handled the city's receivers for us, we were paid in advance and then we proved very reliable, so that Heinric was not reproached for his choice. We kept our prices decent, relied on volume.

As much as possible, of course, we kept a secret about who it was who brought food to Ghent. Pay, don't ask where the food comes from, and the deliveries will continue to come! Despite the secrecy, even we realised we were not powerful enough to bring Ghent everything the city needed. We delivered a large part, but by the year's end also our stored goods ran out. Ghent began to starve, slowly but surely. We drove up our trade out of Antwerp with imported goods from other countries, and transported the lot over the Scheldt. We smuggled, of course, for Antwerp also suffered from the control of the count's men.

Some kind of better agreement with the count would have to be negotiated.

‘Are you becoming aware,’ Boudin Two remarked, ‘how attractive it seems now to continue trading out of Antwerp instead of out of Ghent? Have you become aware of how much smaller than ten years ago Ghent has become? We are diminishing rapidly in population, in weavers and fullers, in traders and other craftsmen in Ghent! We are currently a city barely larger than Bruges was ten years ago. Ghent is still considered an extremely large city, which she still is in number of houses and monuments, but we must know better! We are living on past fame and glory! Ghent is still important, but the life-giving blood of Ghent is being spilled constantly! Our best weavers have left, they have been ruined or killed. The production of cloth has diminished drastically. Heinric gave me the city figures of taxes this year, at a record low. Our secrets of producing high quality cloth have been spread all over Flanders. There is still much wealth from trade in Ghent, but the larger wealth is draining away. That means less investments, less trade, and less wealth. Have you noticed our militia is diminishing in numbers of men that can be put to the march? Count Louis of Male must stop blockading the city, or we will face ruin. Funds of Ghent are being funnelled to Bruges again, large amounts are moved to Antwerp and Mechelen. We have established an office in Antwerp too. Have you noticed how quiet and easy life is in Antwerp, as compared to Bruges and Ghent?’

‘You see,’ Boudin One continued, ‘we have been seriously considering splitting our Investment branch. We will still be working as one body, but holding offices as well in Antwerp as in Ghent. I, myself, am too much anchored in our city. I shall stay here. I am too old to move. But Boudin Two and his wife Agte have agreed to move to Antwerp and to hold offices of our consortium there. They will have to hire the necessary people. I propose you agree to the move.’

We all nodded. Yes, until the end of the war with Count Louis of Male, we would have it easier to trade out of Antwerp.

‘The same goes for our transport business,’ Clais de Hert declared. ‘I shall stay in Ghent. Arnout is already more at Sluys than at Ghent. He works autonomously at Sluys! I can send Lieve to Antwerp. Lieve will have to start our shipping trade out of Antwerp. We shall have to count on Boudin van Lake, however, to give us ample work. This means Boudin will have to develop even more trade with Brabant, with Liège, with the Germanic lands, and with Hainault.’

‘Agreed,’ we nodded.

We nodded, but we were also sad. We realised how very keen we were on drawing away commerce from Ghent, shifting our business partly to other cities, mainly to Antwerp. It tasted of treason! We remained all very emotionally connected to Ghent, like a newly born child was connected to its mother by an umbilical cord. Ghent was our home. And Ghent was such a grand, beautiful city! What is a man torn away from his roots? We prayed our measures were only temporarily, but we suspected many members of our families would move to Antwerp. We felt dictated by money, but what else is a trader but a man who moves with the money?

While the Pharaïldis men discussed our business, I too was thinking of Antwerp, though for an entirely different motive. My head was being filled with Greet van Noortkerke! I could not stand knowing her under the name of de Handscoemakere, which I found ridiculous. Greet and I were being regular lovers, now. Greet had confessed she had always known she was in love with me. She had often despaired, because I did not react to some of her overtures, which I truly hadn’t even dared to remark. I had always thought such an ass,

only half a man, compared to the other young men who made court to her. I had rather suddenly married Agneete Vresele. I had never thought it plausible a woman such as Greet Noortkerke would want to marry me, the least interesting of the boys of New Terhagen. I did not have a great opinion of myself in those years! So I had withdrawn into another life. Greet had married Arent de Handscoemakere only because it had been the only way for her to remain in Flanders, and in the Four Crafts. Had she not married Arent, she would have had to join her family in the Champagne region, far from Ghent and far from New Terhagen. I had to admit to Greet I was so awed by her superiority of years, greater maturity, attractiveness, her knowledge, and by her beauty, that although I was very drawn to her, subjugated by her, I was also extremely awed by her. I had accepted the fact she would never even look at a stupid, uninteresting, ugly lad like me. I would be the new lord of Terhagen, but as long as my father lived I was nothing at New Terhagen!

‘But now you grabbed me,’ Greet protested.

‘I am not that young anymore,’ I countered in the conversation in Hulst, as we lay naked in each other’s arms, a ray of sunlight warming our bellies. ‘I am a big boy, now. I learned a lot. I travelled. Now, I dare to touch you!’

‘You are still a spoiled brat!’ Greet shouted. ‘But you are my spoiled brat now!’

Greet chuckled then, finding my reasoning rather silly. Maybe it was. In any case, we vowed to a passionate, very sensual need for each other. We had made love again.

Greet and I were keenly aware we were doing something that was completely wrong and prohibited in the eyes of God and of our fellow-men. Not one second, however, did we consider dropping each other and return dutifully to our husband and wife. My feelings for Greet were very passionate, and very sweet at the same time. I had an almost feral need and craving for her. She was the formidable woman I had always desired. I really wanted to care for her, and Greet assured me she truly belonged heart and soul to no other man. She did not want Arent to touch her anymore, she vehemently declared. She wanted no children with Arent. She realised very much she had done a wrong to her husband, but she couldn’t help herself being cruel to him. Greet had a very passionate nature! She wanted to leave Arent instantly, not tomorrow, but today! She wanted to flee and never see him again.

‘We cannot thus disappear or flee,’ I told. ‘I am married to Agneete, and she is a fine lady. She is not the most joyous and not the most intelligent of women, but she is a sweet soul. I cannot hurt her. Moreover, I work in a circle of families. I cannot risk being cast out. Not now! We must live. I have some means of my own, but my father may draw away all funds from me. We must be smart too.’

I had thought of installing Greet in a farm near the Scheldt, maybe on the right banks, far from the Clinge, far from Hulst, at a place where Arent de Handscoemakere would not find her.

After our first meeting in Hulst, we met regularly in the town. Each appointment was a torture, each leaving and separation a killing. We devised a scheme whereby she would come to the market, go to a young boy I had hired and receive a message from me with a date for a next meeting in a house I had hired in Hulst, in a quiet alley. The procedure remained tedious. We missed meetings because we could not get free at the designated date and hour. Hulst was too close to Arent’s farm. What would happen if he found out? He already must have nurtured some suspicions! We lived in the awareness of our guilt, in remorse, and yet in eagerness of feeling our naked skin touch, but always in the fear of being found out. We had become terrible, compulsory liars, too. That was the way we were forced to live, or never see each other again, a prospect we dreaded even much more.

Antwerp could be the solution to our dilemma, I thought! Greet could flee from her husband and hide in Antwerp. She could subtly change the way she looked. We could dress her in splendid clothes, make up her hair in another fashion, and then have her living as a lady in a fine *steen*. Greet could manage an office for me in Antwerp. She was an intelligent, enterprising woman. She could charm other traders and yet see through their schemes of lies until nobody dared lie to her anymore. I could travel to Antwerp very easily, for I could be in half a day at the Scheldt, sail in a boat to Antwerp in another half a day, and spend the night with her in our love-nest of Antwerp. Who would know us there? It was not an ideal solution, and we were bound to be found out sooner or later, but we could push back that moment to the far future. It was more than worth a try. Greet would have to flee from her husband anyway, for I feared the wrath of Arent. She would surely be pregnant soon, for we could not get enough of each other's body. Greet's pregnancy would throw Arent in a killing mood! He might very well kill her and then come after me. Yes, Antwerp was also a fine solution for us.

'I too would like to set up a trading post in Antwerp,' I added then to the Pharaïldis men. 'In normal times, we handle more of our produce, fruit notably, and milk and cheese, than we can sell in Ghent alone. It would be fine to sell to Brabant and also to Holland, out of Antwerp!' The Pharaïldis men nodded, and I became suddenly elated as if a heavy burden had fallen from my shoulders. In Antwerp, I could love Greet van Noortkerke in peace, and have a life.

I thought my resolution to live in sin was as determined and as compelling as my father's choice had been to live with my real mother, with Quintine Denout, instead of by his wife, Wivine. Was it a family characteristic of the Terhagen men to live in sin, to make the wrong choice of the women we married and the ones we loved? I took some comfort in the hope my father would understand why and how I had married Agneete, but loved Greet van Noortkerke. Was it a sign also my sister had fallen in love with Greet's brother, with a van Noortkerke? She had made the right choice! I was convinced that if found out, nobody in this world and nobody in heaven, would forgive me for what I was doing. Certainly not the monks in our family would do that, but I had to live with my love. I was a bastard, an adulterer, and a liar, but renounce to Greet van Noortkerke I could not.

Chapter 2. The Protagonists. 1379-1381

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy

Among the protagonists of the Wars of Ghent that raged in the years from 1379 to 1385, and which were part of the many clashes between the peoples of Western Europe in the fourteenth century, were Count Louis of Male of Flanders, his son-in-law Duke Philip of Burgundy, Duke John of Lancaster, who was also called John of Gaunt, and for a short but tragic while Philip van Artevelde, the only surviving son of James van Artevelde. Heinric Vresele served as private advisor of Philip van Artevelde, and some say he was the force who drove Philip to his destiny. John of Gaunt may have played a lesser role directly, but his views of the war between his country and France were of the utmost importance in England, and therefore had much influence also on Flanders. The English and French kings in 1381, Richard II in England and Charles VI in France, remained in the background, because they were too young.

Philip the Bold, John of Gaunt, and Philip van Artevelde, the main protagonists of the wars of Flanders, were of about the same age. Philip the Bold had been born in 1342, John of Gaunt and Philip van Artevelde in 1340. Heinric the Advisor was born much earlier, in 1325, so he was about fifteen years older than the man he counselled.

King Richard II was much younger, born in 1367, and Charles VI in 1368. They too were of about the same age. Charles VI of France ruled as of the end of 1380, Richard II as of 1377. They would form a new generation. The kings were very young during the Wars of Ghent, so that mainly their uncles John of Gaunt and Philip the Bold determined how their kingdoms reacted to the events in Flanders. The uncles of the kings, dukes all, dominated the royal courts of both kings.

Count Louis of Male died during the wars. His role in Flanders had been much diminished, as gradually his son-in-law Philip the Bold surpassed him in influence, authority and power.

Philip the Bold was the fourth and last son of King John II the Good of France. Philip's mother was Bonne of Luxemburg, the daughter of the blind king of Bohemia, who like Louis of Male's father, died in the Battle of Crécy. Bonne was a sister of the Holy Roman Emperor of Germany, the great Charles IV.

Count Louis of Male had accompanied his father, Louis of Nevers, at the Battle of Crécy between the armies of France and England. Louis's father had been killed in that slaughter. Philip the Bold likewise accompanied his father at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. He was merely fourteen years old. His father was not killed at that battle, but taken a prisoner by the English crown prince, Prince Edward of Wales, the one who would be called much later the Black Prince.

Philip earned his surname of 'the Bold' at the Battle of Poitiers. He had fought well, but he surrendered, like his father the king, and followed John II to England. He remained in England for four years. Philip met the sons of King Edward III, among them John of Gaunt. He found the future duke of Lancaster a fine fellow, a jovial friend. Later, on several occasions, mostly during peace negotiations, he would meet John eye to eye. The two men appreciated each other.

While Philip stayed with his father in England, he learned to know the English better. He even learned to speak the language a little, though the language at the court of London was French. He feasted with his father and with the old King Edward III. Philip the Bold remained in

captivity from April of 1357 to the end of 1360. Until then he was also known by the name of Philip Lackland, for he had no hereditary title to any county of his own. In 1360, however, King John II gave him the lands of the beautiful region of Tours and the title of duke of Touraine. Philip liked the lovely and fine town of Tours and the accompanying lands in the middle of the Loire valleys.

In this year of 1381, Philip stood, hands in his hips, at one of the windows of the upper floor of the old manor of Germolles, a property he had recently confiscated and now visited for the first time. His servants ran through the rooms and halls to try their best to liven up the place, prepare the rooms for the duke's stay. His chamberlain was asserting the state of the domain. Philip wanted to call the manor a castle, but the place was hardly and badly fortified! The buildings, a high seigneurial house and long stables in front, lay partly in ruins. The manor had not been well maintained these last years. It would cost a fortune to repair. Philip sighed. The one thing he liked about the mansion was that it was situated deep into his duchy and not very close to any town, far from Dijon, his capital. Quietness was guaranteed, here! Germolles lay deep in Burgundy, and that was much protection already. The countryside here, Philip marvelled, was very agreeable. Small woods could be seen in bucolic green valleys. Low hills broke the strict lines of the plains, the landscape was green throughout the year, and excellent vineyards had been planted around it.

The castle lay a little west of Châlons-sur-Saône. It could easily be reached, but was situated far enough from Dijon to discourage many noblemen and noble women to ride into the woods of the Morvan, which started not far off. Philip was looking for a fine castle or manor to offer as a gift to his wife, Margaret of Flanders. Instead of forcing her to accept a grand, ugly castle with high towers, a sinister fortress, and the proximity of a city, he had thought to present to her this manor of human dimensions. It was not really a castle but a large manor, which could be added to. This gentle, maybe humble but sweet manor, could be a symbol of the peace and quiet he had brought Burgundy to.

It was a place Margaret could transform and decorate the way she wanted, entirely to her own taste. He was convinced she would like the attention. Germolles would give Margaret something to do and allow her to model her living place to her own character. The climate was soft, nature lush, the manor protected from the winds by the woods, yet open enough to receive the warm sun of Burgundy. This gentle warmth ripened the grapes to such excellent wines as his duchy could produce. Yes, it could become a place of peace and rest.

Philip sighed again while he looked out to the landscape. Well, he could not afford building a new, grand castle. If Margaret did not fancy Germolles, she might always have to continue staying at the castle of Dijon. She would be happier here, Philip surmised. She would, of course also spend fortunes on repairs, on modifications to the walls and to the gardens, on tapestries, paintings, sculptures and the like, as well as on the artists she would call to here and entertain. His finances were very low again, but that was something he was used to. He would have to devaluate his coinage once more, demand higher taxes from the duchy. Nevertheless, he liked Germolles, even though it would cost him a few years of headaches in finances. Maybe he could hand the headaches and the worries for money over to his chancellor!

Philip was also thinking about his youth, remembering how he came to stand here! He was a tall man, with an awkward gait. Some said he was clumsy in his movements. Strong, massive as an old oak, somewhat heavy, Philip the Bold leaned against the window. He was not born in this duchy, but in the castle of Pontoise, in one of the castles of the royal domains. He had no longing for his birthplace, scarcely knew it. It was just one of the many places the

royal court of France owned and occasionally visited. Philip had no bonds with his birthplace, which saddened him a little. He had no physical or sentimental roots! He would have liked a place to belong to. He craved for a place he could truly call his own, and that could now only be a place where Margaret would like to live and be happy.

Philip was well aware he was rather ugly of face. His chin was too strong for the rest of his face, a curved nose stood above it as if he were of Jewish origin, and his skin was dark, which, as he travelled much, was not easily sunburnt to red, but darkened even more. Margaret of Flanders, luckily, did not seem to care! She too seemed rather plain to many, but Margaret suited him like a glove. She was a gentle woman, and seemed to have become happier with time, more sure of herself and restive, more than she seemed the first time he had met her.

Philip smiled now, for he considered how well he had married. Margaret was a joyous companion, a very good advisor, a rational, impassioned thinker, and a demanding, sensual woman in bed. She had a good heart, she was a woman of good sense and one who rarely gave herself over to unjustified sensibility. Philip actually enjoyed taking Margaret to bed, and she felt at ease with him, indulged him, and even laughed and played with him under the sheets. They would have many sons and daughters! Margaret had been a happy discovery! He would have no need of mistresses!

What had his sculptor, the artist called Jehan de Marville, once told him?

‘Sir Philip, most people think only one kind of beauty exists. That is a grave error, and men such as you know this all too well, though maybe only intuitively. You see, there is the outer, apparent beauty, the exterior beauty, and most men look no further. But there exists another beauty, the inner beauty, the interior beauty, which shines through the eyes of a woman and through her smiles. It is shown by the way she holds her mouth and by the way she loves. So it must be with the forms of a sculpture or in the lines of a painting. I am not looking for the exterior beauty, lord, but for the inner glow. That is what I try to express!’

‘Yes,’ Philip thought, ‘that is what Jehan is teaching his apprentices, and that is the beauty that radiates out of Margaret and makes me happy. Only when she is around is my court happy. Fine decisions are only devised in a happy atmosphere. I am but a gaunt man, my wife plain, but we have discovered our inner beauty, which we have plenty of, even though we do not show it too much. That beauty also radiates from Margaret, for me to appreciate. Only with Margaret could I develop my inner beauty, and she hers. I am satisfied! She deserves a fine manor.’

Many men suspected that as Philip was not a handsome man, he must be a fierce, crude warrior, a brutal man. Philip had fought in numerous skirmishes and battles, the hardest one when he was only fourteen years old at Poitiers against the English, but he did not feel a warrior at all! He was a commander, a leader, a manager of men, and as such he thought he was unequalled. He did not love fighting, however. Like his brother Charles, the King Charles V, he would rather avoid a battle than seek one. But when he was sure he could win, he would not hesitate leading his army into one. He was born a prince of royal blood, so he had never even thought he could be something else but a leader of men. He was born to rule, and he had assembled instinctively all the abilities needed to rule in his person. Of course, he knew he was haughty. That feature was part of the aura of leadership, expected by men. Of course he did not like being contradicted, but he had learned to recognise and value a good argument, even when it annoyed him. Had Margaret taught him that patience? Some of her counter-arguments, thrown sarcastically against him, but true, were razor-sharp with intellect, insight and impassable logic. Such was her Flemish nature! Philip had learned to listen to such sparks of bright insight, not only in his wife, but also in some of his more clever knights.

Philip the Bold knew how to lead armies. It was something he excelled in. He had discovered this special talent, a talent offered by God. He knew how and when to throw his men into a battle, not simply in the form of a wild, massive phalanx, but as the members of a body, with arms to embrace deadly and legs to force forward and overwhelm, a chest to crush. It was stupid, Philip esteemed, to ride in a skirmish or in a battle among other knights dressed from top to toe in heavy armour, unable to watch how the battle evolved. Philip sought out a hill, stood on the crest of the height with his squires and knights of his court. Then, he would send his courtiers to left and right and to the centre with orders on how to move, where to attack, where to strengthen the rows. His riders and his footmen were used to move a lot around during a skirmish. That was how Philip the Bold fought, not with the sword or axe in hand. No other lord, certainly no other lord of Burgundy, could resist this logic of movements that came in images to his head.

‘Maybe,’ Philip mused, ‘has my teacher, Sylvester, taught me all of that by having me read so many texts of ancient battles of Roman and Greek times. He taught me Latin that way, but also how to lead in battles. I would have liked to be a strategos, an Athenian commander! Battles are directed like plays, constructed like novels and poems, prepared and set together. They are chess games, and troops have to be moved over the board like the pieces in chess. As in chess, an intellect is needed in moving the pieces. My teacher was called Sylvester de la Servelle. ‘*Cervelle*’ means brain matter in French. Brain matter is what is needed to win battles, not swords and axes. Brains are also needed to rule!’

Philip the Bold was born to rule. He allowed freedom of mind, as members of a body mostly seem to move with a mind of their own, but the head commanded the body. When the head said how an arm was to move, the arm moved so. His lands had to move as his head ordered, even though he allowed them most of times to evolve on their own. Too many commands suffocated, he knew. But he would tolerate no deviation when he ordered. He knew the cities of Flanders, and foremost Ghent, wanted to do otherwise. Ghent was as the member of a body that wanted to move on its own will. Ghent might cause revolts in Flanders, but any other kind of rule without the simple measure he applied, would not even come to his mind as a conceivable alternative. Philip the bold was the archetype of a man born to command. So he commanded, and he commanded well! It was thus ordained. Thus was the order of the world, and thus it would be!

The years in captivity in England were easy years despite the imprisonment, Philip thought on. He had learned much and he had read much. He could now read Latin fluently. The years after the English period had been much harder. After the Peace of Brétigny, the English had brought King John II and Philip to Calais. The ransom for his father had been assembled, at least partly, and the peace with the scandalous conditions signed. Six months later only, did King John and Philip return to Paris.

The last duke of Burgundy of the line of Hugues Capet died from the plague in November of 1361. The duchy passed to one of its legal heirs, to King John II. King John entered Burgundy around Christmas of 1361, and took possession of his lands. Henry of Bar, lord of Pierrefort, was appointed governor. John of Melun, count of Tancarville, was given the function of lieutenant, the head of the armed forces of the king in Burgundy.

Count John of Tancarville did not succeed in mastering the warring forces in the duchy, the Free Companies of mercenaries that roamed in the region and devastated the wealth of Burgundy, and also not the quarrelling lords. Finally, King John gave that function of lieutenant for Burgundy to his son, Philip the Bold, sending Tancarville off in disgrace.

Philip set about conquering the duchy from the men who were the obvious evil masters of it.

To the east of the duchy of Burgundy lay territories which feudally still belonged to the German Empire. These lands were of the old palatinate county of Burgundy, which bore the same name as the duchy. The lands were also called the Franche-Comté. King John II arranged secretly with the emperor for these regions, which he had also inherited, to be handed over to Philip the Bold.

The name 'palatinate' was old. It dated from the period of the first empire founded by Charlemagne, Charles the Great. Charles had erected palaces in his regions and had installed governors of his territories in those palaces, to manage the lands for the emperors. These palace lords, or palatinate lords, had come to rule in heritage from father to son. The lands became counties, and that was also the case for the palatinate county of Burgundy. Philip fought not only the Free Companies, but also the fierce lords of the palatinate. He was also called upon to fight in France, in the environs of Paris.

As a result, Philip the Bold was not a weak duke of Touraine! He was a warrior, a leader of armies, who had seen action and violence since very young. He knew the value of staunch determination, of stubborn fighting. He knew how blood smelled.

In the year of 1364, right after the death of his father John II, seven days after the crowing of his eldest brother the Dauphin Charles to king of France as Charles V, Philip the Bold received the duchy of Burgundy to rule. Philip inherited the vast lands as his proper domains, and he got feudal rights over the rest of Burgundy, over the county. He handed over Touraine for richer, larger Burgundy. Yet, Burgundy was a land in turmoil. It had to be put to rest. Philip did not receive Burgundy sweet as a ripe peach! Burgundy was a hornet's nest!

Philip learned to fight ruthlessly against the mercenary Free Companies and against the belligerent lords of Burgundy, who refused to acknowledge his rights of authority. He fought them bitterly for six years, from 1363 to 1369, almost without pause. At last, he succeeded in submitting Burgundy and in ridding his region from mercenaries.

Philip did not participate in the campaign in Castile, directed against King Pedro the Cruel, because he was involved in fierce fights in Burgundy. The skirmishes in Spain and the final battle of Nájera in 1367 did rid him of some of the more ferocious companies of mercenaries. Some of the bands that devastated Burgundy had joined Bertrand du Guesclin for France in that war, and these forces had been decimated. The English won a brilliant victory at Nájera, of course. France lost the battle, though not the war. Philip wondered how he would have done at Nájera.

Philip the Bold understood it was much better to avoid pitched battles with the English unless one was absolutely sure to win. He would have liked to test his ideas of battles against the English war lords. He would never be engaged in such a battle. He thought France had no sufficiently effective answer against the English longbowmen. Philip racked his mind for a solution, but judged no warrior leader of France truly capable of warding off that threat. He fought primarily against the fierce lords of the Franche-Comté, and threw himself also sometimes into the fray, sword in hand. He fought the Montfaucons and the Neufchâtels. He fought on two fronts, against these lords and against the rests of the mercenary bands. Siege after siege, victory after victory, he won the duchy and the county, and established his peace.

He remembered with much bitterness how he remained in armour almost all the time of those six years. Yet, it was also in those years he perfected his skills and gained his best friends, his marshals Guillaume de la Trémoille and Guy de Pontalier, his bailiffs Girard de Longchamp and Hugues Aubriot, and also Jacques de Vienne, who became lieutenant of Burgundy in his

absence. He won his chancellor Bertrand d'Uncey, and many others to his service. The wars in Burgundy were times of hardships, but also of wonderful companionship. Philip had forged now strong, loyal, trusted bonds with his friends. He knew the valour of each of these men, trusted them, counted on their courage and knew their weaknesses.

At the end of those years of permanent strives, he married Margaret of Flanders, the best thing that had happened to him so far, far better than he could ever have hoped for.

The new duke of Burgundy saw it as his duty to consolidate and to extend his territories. He wanted to make of Burgundy a powerful duchy, over which he could rule as he wished. At one time in the future, he would also add Flanders to his lands, for his father-in-law had only his daughter Margaret as legal heir.

Philip did not like Count Louis of Male too much. He judged the man for being just that little too arrogant, too dissipated by his mistresses, too sure of himself, too less disciplined in his character, too impulsive, too weak at times, to be a good ruler. Philip did admire the energy of the man. Flanders was immensely rich, a fine complement to Burgundy, and with Flanders would come Nevers and Rethel, with time also Artois and maybe Brabant. Bruges was the pearl of the continent, the prize of a king, Ghent the powerhouse of the wealth of Flanders. Philip discovered, however, that the cities of Flanders were too powerful for the count of Flanders! Philip visited the cities, looked at the maps of the extent of the quarters Bruges, Ghent and Ieper dominated, and effectively ruled. He sought to understand the issue of Count Louis of Male, the issues also his predecessors had to cope with. The cities were too powerful for the count! They had too many warriors and too much money. The quarters of the three cities covered Flanders entirely. In these quarters, Bruges, Ghent and Ieper had subjugated the towns and villages of Flanders. Bruges, if he were optimistic, was not really part of the problem, for the knights and the extremely wealthy old lineages of knights-traders still held the city in their grip, and these men were in favour of the count. The *Brugse Vrije*, a large part of the quarter of Bruges, was in the hands of the lords of the countryside, naturally in favour of the count. The quarter of Bruges could be ruled by the count of Flanders without too much resistance and without too much show of power. Ieper was too small to be able to resist on its own.

The real issue, Philip the Bold surmised, was Ghent. When Ghent marched against the count, and when the count lost a battle to them, then the other cities would rally Ghent! Since the quarters of the three cities covered the territory of Flanders, the count could only use his lords, knights and their men-at-arms in the war. That army was small, and could merely be a third or so smaller than the militia of Ghent alone! No count of Flanders could therefore impose his will and power and authority over Flanders without the goodwill of the cities. Count Louis of Male had tried to win that goodwill, won it, but now he had lost it!

Philip the Bold reckoned he would at one time not only need his warriors of Burgundy to subjugate the Flemish cities, but probably also the army of France. He should isolate Ghent by allying with Bruges and by subduing Ieper before tackling Ghent. Philip was secretly convinced he would have to wage a war against Ghent. His father-in-law, who had only the knights of the county on his side, would never be able to bring Ghent to its knees. Ghent was the real key and obstacle to the count's power over Flanders.

The wars for Ghent had started, Philip knew, and he did not believe by his analysis Count Louis of Male was strong enough in men-at-arms to conclusively win that war and defeat Ghent.

How strange, Philip thought, that so much power had been built by the Flemish cities, but not by the French cities. No such power had realised in the royal domains and in the duchies of

Anjou, Bourbon, Berry, Orléans, Languedoc and Burgundy. That was a good thing for the lords of France. Ghent could not be tolerated to be victorious, for Flanders was a part of France. Cities of the royal domains and of the duchies might take Ghent as example, and revolt likewise. Uprisings might happen in Paris, Rouen, Amiens, Chartres, Angers, Dijon and many other French towns. Burgundy was pacified and happy, if only recently. Philip doubted revolt would foment in Dijon, but one could never be sure.

Philip the Bold knew Ghent well. It was there, in the abbey of Saint Bavo and in the church of Saint John that he had been married. He had met the knights and the traders. He had seen how well dressed they went, how big the men were, how splendid the city buildings and how active the life of the inhabitants. He had listened to the endless talks about the investments in trading expeditions the Flemish were organising. He had admired the splendid façades of the grain and the meat halls of Ghent, the Belfort and the churches. He had seen the inner harbour of *Tussen Bruggen* with his own eyes! Conquering this city would be one of the toughest challenges of his life! Philip had already begun addressing the challenge. Burgundy had granted him funds and men. He would need many more men, and much more money, to prevail over Flanders. Most of the funds necessary for his campaign would have to come from Flanders itself, which would mean higher taxes, always a very unpopular measure. Men-at-arms could come from France, but there he faced other challenges. France had received a new king, and that king was still a minor. Philip had to look at his brothers, the dukes of France, the regents for support. The dukes, however, were watching him grow more powerful, and were naturally envious of him.

Philip the Bold bit on his teeth then. He forced the muscles of his face into determination. In and after 1369, he had been called by the king of France, at that time by his brother, Charles V, to lead the armies of France. He had fought loyally for France. In July of 1369, Charles V had asked him even to lead an expedition against England. Nothing came of that campaign, because King Edward III had landed at Calais with a large enemy army. The English campaign was a scourge for Normandy and Picardy, but it did not accomplish much and stopped rather abruptly.

Philip became more and more to be regarded as the main warlord of the kingdom, the leader of armies, even though his brothers and the excellent constables of France exercised the command over the troops. His brothers, Philip grinned, were not as gifted to lead large armies as he was.

His brothers were Duke Jean of Berry, Duke Louis of Bourbon, and Duke Louis of Anjou. His uncle was Duke Philip of Orléans. These were the main peers of France. Philip the Bold led the enormous French army that had been called together to contain the *chevauchée* of John of Gaunt in 1373. The terrible 1373 campaign of the English ravaged large territories of France, from Picardy to the Languedoc. Philip would have dared at certain moments to give battle against the English. His brother, the king, had withheld him and the *connétable* from a regular battle. Since Philip did not hold back this way, he had become popular with the war lords of King Charles V. Philip the Bold recognised the wisdom of Charles's decision, however. He had obeyed, but he had also wept at the devastation the English had caused to France. Around Troyes, for instance, large domains had been destroyed entirely. This had made the country a lot poorer. Many people were ferociously killed without real need to do so. Causing unnecessary deaths was a crime, a sin, Burgundy thought, and a stupid waste of lives. He cursed the English for their crimes in France. Burgundy also had suffered!

Later, Philip had participated, even led, the peace negotiations between France and England at Bruges. He had met John of Gaunt once more, an interesting figure, a mix of doubts and

decisiveness. Philip would not forgive John for the *chevauchée* in France of 1373, but he did like the man in person, and accepted John had more been forced to this punitive expedition than the man really liked by himself. In Bruges, Philip vied with John of Gaunt in feasting, tournaments and splendour of court. Philip smiled again at those memories. The expenditure for the luxury and glory had almost bankrupted him, as it must have done to John of Gaunt. No peace had been reached. A long series of truces had been agreed upon, which held to the present day, and that was no little achievement. The negotiations had lasted for more than three years! Well, as long as the great and the powerful talked, the peasants could put seed in the ground and harvest, and trade could continue unhindered.

Philip the Bold remembered with some satisfaction how he and John of Gaunt had laughed with each other, agreeing on feasts and talks and truces, which after all were much better than making war on each other. Philip had found John of Gaunt as reluctant to start the war all over again as he. Nevertheless, Philip could not bring himself to trust John entirely. Not after the terrible *chevauchée* of 1373!

After 1374, Philip the Bold had enjoyed for the first time in his life a period of relative peace and rest. The ‘Four Lilies’, the brothers-dukes, quarrelled, of course, over who should come to prominence in France, but those quarrels remained court intrigues, which Philip could play and handle easily.

King Charles V died from a heart attack after a long illness in September of 1380. Before his death, the king appointed Philip as captain-general of France. Philip could summon the knights of France to form armies, take the armies on whatever campaign he desired to lead. He had the right to hand out letters of pardon to whoever he wanted to give his grace to, and to call back people from exile at will. His duty was to defend the realm. It was not a job of ease and glory! Philip had to face immediately yet another English invasion.

The duke of Buckingham, the youngest son of King Edward III, tried in his turn his hand at an expedition into France. Buckingham drove the wedge of his army, of course protected by his bowmen, a wedge of terror and destruction, from Calais to Troyes, in the now familiar pattern. He threatened Burgundy. The best warlords of France were with Philip and the army at Troyes. They showed the English how well Troyes was defended, so the English marched and rode around the town and withdrew to Brittany, from where they returned to England. No major battle was given. Philip would have consented to a battle, but at that moment Charles V expired.

Philip now sadly remembered the scandalous quibbling over the heritage of France. Philip’s eldest brother, the duke of Anjou, was dreaming of glory in Italy, where he intended to conquer vast territories. On the seventeenth of April of 1379, in a papal bull issued by Pope Clement VII of Avignon, the pope had asked Anjou to reconquer the Papal States in Italy. Anjou was to receive the Adria kingdom as a fief of Pope Clement. The pope also had named the duke of Anjou the heir of the childless Queen Joanna of Naples. Anjou needed enormous amounts of money for such an expedition. Charles V had already had to draw Anjou away from Aquitaine, to which Anjou had been appointed governor, because of his misconduct and because of the extortions of money in the country. Anjou’s behaviour was a real danger for France’s reputation in Aquitaine.

Right after the death of Charles V, Anjou stole as many jewels in the royal palaces as he could put his hands on. Charles V, realising how rapacious his brother could be, had already separated the functions of regent for his young son, the future King Charles VI, from the management of the finances of the realm. After Charles, Anjou was the oldest son of King

John II, so the first in line for the regency. For a while, Anjou had even tried to be crowned, but his brothers Berry, Bourbon and Burgundy had brought the young dauphin to safety to Melun, and prepared for war. Berry, Bourbon and Burgundy wanted Charles VI as king. They hastily assembled a council to discuss the issue of the regency. Anjou claimed the regency! The dukes participated at the council meetings.

Finally, the dukes of Bourbon and Burgundy received the tutorship of the young king. Berry received the governorship of the Languedoc, but Anjou did receive the regency over France. He received what he had always coveted: the jewels, the utensils of silver, the silver and the golden plates. Anjou even heard that Charles V had hidden a large treasure in his hotel at Melun. Anjou forced the chamberlain of Charles V, the Sir of Savoisy, to reveal to him the hiding place. Savoisy was threatened with a slow and painful death. Anjou could lay his hands also on this treasure!

Bertrand du Guesclin, the connétable of France under King Charles V, a man Philip the Bold knew very well for having worked with him during the English *chevauchées*, had died in the summer of 1380. While besieging a castle in the Auvergne, he fell ill and never recovered. His logical successor was Olivier de Clisson, another Breton. Clisson was not immediately appointed to the function, because Clisson also had enjoyed the favour of King Charles V. The dukes resisted his choice of constable for Charles VI in 1381. Later, when the reign of Charles VI had started, and when the uncles of the young king drew power to their person, Olivier de Clisson was nevertheless appointed to his function of constable.

The dukes finally agreed to govern the kingdom together. They, and especially Anjou, dismissed or sent to exile most of the councillors of the previous King Charles V: the chancellor d'Orgemont, Mercier, Jean de la Grange the bishop of Amiens, Bureau de la Rivière, old friends of their brother. Bureau de la Rivière was even accused of treason, but Olivier de Clisson spoke for him and protected him, so that he was not harmed.

When the people of Paris heard how the dukes squandered the money of France, they revolted. King Charles V had promised to abolish the taxes on salt and on sales, but nothing had been done to bring this decision to execution. The people of Paris asked to meet with the royal court. The regent, the duke of Anjou, spoke well, but the young King Charles VI was soon forced to agree to abolish the hated taxes. The Paris mob then attacked the Jews in their city. Some noblemen of Paris had excited the people against the Jews, so that they would be able to recuperate their debt contracts. The Royal Council had to take the Jews of Paris under its protection.

The uprising could be stopped by negotiations, by promises of less taxes, by the fine words of mostly Anjou, who was a clever orator. But everybody in France knew these promises could not be held, for a war had to be waged against England. The four princes, Anjou, Berry, Bourbon and Burgundy then formed a new council of the regency, which Anjou presided. Under this Council of Four they established a council of twelve men. Burgundy and Bourbon retained the protection of the king. Anjou had not received money from the French Estates General, but he pressed the individual provinces. Most of the provinces paid, but Paris refused.

The provost of Paris, a function similar to that of mayor in other cities, was no less than Hugues Aubriot. Aubriot was a citizen of Dijon, proposed by Philip the Bold to King Charles V for Paris, because Philip knew Aubriot was a very capable man. Aubriot had put Paris to

good order indeed, embellished the city, fortified it, built new walls and new bridges, but he was openly disdainful of the church. The University of Paris condemned him as a heretic! Aubriot was attacked, and had to flee for his life. He was caught, and imprisoned for life. When a little later the new taxes were announced, despite earlier promises, Paris rose in violence. The people of Paris grabbed the leaden mallets which had been bought for the militia of the town to bring order. They used the mallets as weapons and ran through the streets. In French, the mallets were called ‘*des maillets*’, and the men who wielded them ‘*maillotins*’. The uprising in Paris became known as the Revolt of the *Maillotins*. The rebels ruled in Paris, but they soon understood they could not win from the armies of the dukes, the armies of the knights of France entire. The rebels allowed negotiations to be held. Hugues Aubriot was released from prison. He refused, however, to lead the revolt. Revolt also threatened in the city of Rouen. The mob of Rouen killed the tax collectors of the king.

Finally, the dukes promised a general pardon for the revolt of Paris. Anjou, true to his nature, wanted money, a sum of a hundred thousand gold francs. The citizens of Paris taxed the churchmen of Paris. Of course, the clericals refused to pay all. The peace had nevertheless thus been re-established in the kingdom. Anjou took what he could, not the full amount demanded, and left for the south of France, for the Provence, to start his campaign in Italy, leaving his brother, Philip the Bold, to govern France.

At the beginning of 1381, the city of Ghent and the county of Flanders thus had to confront Count Louis of Male, but behind Male lurched a much greater figure, a man who was the ruler of France, a leader of vast armies. This man could not think in other terms than in the mind-set of a true, determined ruler, a true warrior, a very capable, intransigent man when it came to matters of rule: Philip the Bold of Burgundy.

John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster

Like Philip the Bold of Burgundy in France, John of Gaunt was not the eldest son of his father, King Edward III of England. He was born in the Flemish city of Ghent, hence his surname. His godfather was James van Artevelde, the head captain and manager of the city at that time. King Edward III was not present at his baptism, so that in later years, when his popularity had waned, rumours claimed the king was not his real father. His father was a butcher of the city. His mother’s reputation, however, was without fault.

Some say one inherits at least part of the character of the land one is born in. That may have been true for John of Gaunt, for he was wise and strong-hearted, but he had to learn much by himself to attain wisdom. Little was innate. He had been gifted with no particular talent, yet he was a rational thinker, a patient and peaceful man, who acted by logic and careful reasoning. He was very hard-working, and a man who began by trusting everyone until the contrary was proven. John developed his in-born good and gentle character. When he had experience of the horrors of the war, he became a staunch supporter of the peace. He abhorred violence, though he could use violence when he considered it totally justified. John was a person who knew almost nothing by instinct. He had to learn everything from others or from experience. He possessed no innate talent to rule or to wage war. He had to work hard to win his fame. Such men are rarely popular to the people. The people like the dazzling genius of a man standing out tall among fellow-men in stature, genius and luck. He was but a simple man

who did for the best, and more often than not did not well succeed in that. Since he was the son of a king, he nurtured high ambitions.

The few courtiers who knew John of Gaunt intimately esteemed him highly for his humility and goodness of heart. His gentle nature was also his main weakness. John doubted a lot, until he had given the matter sufficient consideration. He was not indecisive, and once he had come to a decision, even a terrible one, he pursued it to the end with stubborn doggedness. He acted by logic, as people do in Ghent, in a very practical and simple way. John was also a loving husband, a lover, and a father of many.

John of Gaunt showed a tall, imposing figure. He was of royal demeanour, solemn, domineering, rarely smiling, but very energetic, and agreeable in company. He was not devoid of cunning, clever in answering to his councillors and a reasonably good orator. His traits were regular, not really sharp but well in the flesh, his body and limbs well-shaped and harmonious, so that he walked with elegance. People paid him their respect naturally. He might have been an irresistible charmer of women, but he was too honest to deceive them. In fact, he resembled much his father, King Edward III, but for what Edward did intuitively and succeeded in, John had to reflect on, experience, and reason on. He acted a second time much better than the first in all his deeds.

Despite so many qualities, his intellect and his dedication, John of Gaunt did not succeed well in the war with France. The English people reproached him of bad government, but most of those reproaches were really undeserved, if founded. It is true he was not the genius leader in war and skirmishes his father and his brother, the prince of Wales, were, but how could that be held against him when he was such a warm-feeling, humane personality?

You may assume, reader, I, William Terhagen, to be a very partial judge of character when it comes to John of Gaunt, but from what I heard of him from the best sources, I have formed an opinion of him by which I think of him with fondness. Maybe I love the city he was born in too much, and admire too much his godfather and his mother, Philippa of Hainault. More than the counts of Flanders, more than Louis of Male, who was also born in Flanders, more than Philip of Burgundy, because of his mother and because of his birthplace, I always thought of John of Gaunt as one of our kinsmen, even if he lived in England.

John of Gaunt was the third surviving son of King Edward III. In 1359, he married the daughter of one of the best friends of his father, the daughter of the loyal earl of Lancaster. The girl was called Blanche, and Edward proved a nice royal affection with that marriage arranged for his son, for Lancaster was Edward's most loyal companion-in-arms, and also about the wealthiest magnate of England! Lancaster had no male offspring, only two daughters.

When his father-in-law died in 1361, John inherited half the lands of Lancaster, and the title of earl, which Edward III later transformed into duke of Lancaster. Not a long time afterwards, Blanche's sister, Maud, countess of Leicester, who had married Count William V of Hainault, died also. That happened in April of 1362, and John of Gaunt inherited from her the second half of the Lancaster domains. By then, he owned more than thirty castles, and territories in every county of England. He was the wealthiest man of the kingdom!

John loved Blanche dearly. His marriage was a fine one. John had already an illegitimate daughter when he married to Blanche of Lancaster, a girl who had received – oddly maybe – also the name of Blanche, a daughter by his mistress Marie de Saint-Hilaire, a Hainault lady-in-waiting of his mother.

Very sad tidings perturbed the marriage with Blanche, for several children of John and Blanche died young. The boys John, Edward and another John died very young, but the third son – after a daughter Elisabeth – was named Henry and lived. This Henry later received the name of Derby, and he would become King Henry IV of England, following up on King Richard II after Edward III. But that lay in the future and in the stars!

Blanche of Lancaster died in September of 1368, after about nine years of marriage. She was only twenty-six then, had born seven children of whom only four survived. She died shortly after having given birth to her last daughter, Isabel.

In 1369, the terrible plague year for England, the king of Castile, King Pedro the Cruel, was ambushed by Enrique of Trastamara at Montiel. John of Gaunt had fought with his older brother, the Prince of Wales, in the war for Castile. He had participated in the Battle of Nájera, where the English had defeated the French and Enrique. Constance of Castile, Pedro's daughter, fled to Bayonne in English-held Aquitaine. Two years later, John of Gaunt would meet Constance and marry her. From that marriage, he could claim the title of king of Castile.

After the plague year of 1369, the war with France resumed. John of Gaunt was appointed captain of Calais and Guines, and he took part in an English campaign into France under the earl of Hereford. In August of 1369, the English men-at-arms stood in front of a much larger French army led by Philip the Bold. John of Gaunt did not order the assault, and neither did Philip the Bold. The two armies remained many weeks on both sides of a marshy land, until the English received reinforcements from the earl of Warwick. Philip the Bold then withdrew, no battle consented. The English army marched to Honfleur in Normandy, captured the harbour in October, but lost so many warriors from the plague it had to return in haste to protection. John of Gaunt returned to Calais.

On the return march, he defeated another French army, reaching Calais in November, where Warwick died of the plague.

John of Gaunt's raid had not been very successful, as so many expeditions of the English would fare, but at least it had forced the French to abandon their plans for an invasion of England.

The following summer saw John of Gaunt in Aquitaine with his brother, Edward of Woodstock, the prince of Wales, and with his younger brother Edmund of Langley, earl of Cambridge. The three brothers tried to win back the territory the French had conquered in Aquitaine. They besieged and sacked Limoges in 1370, but then Edward became so sick he could fight no more. He returned to England, leaving John of Gaunt in charge of the duchy. John of Gaunt lacked the means to re-conquer territory from the French, but he met the Infanta Constance of Castile at Bordeaux and married her in September of 1371. At the end of September, he relinquished his command in Aquitaine and equally returned to England. John of Gaunt handed over his command to a real war lord, to Jean de Grailly, the Captal de Buch. A few months later, in July of 1372, Constance's sister, Isabella of Castile, married Edmund of Langley.

At the end of that same year a man died in Aquitaine who had fought with the English army and with John of Gaunt, one Hugh Swynford, who was married to another former lady-in-waiting of John of Gaunt's mother. She was a woman he knew well, a lady called Katherine. By her marriage, she was known as Katherine Swynford. Her maiden name was Katherine de Roët, for she originated from the Hainault region of the town of Mons. Her father had come to England with the men from Hainault that had accompanied Queen Philippa, wife of King

Edward III, to England. Katherine was twenty-one when she was widowed. She would play a great part in John of Gaunt's subsequent life.

No great love was lost between Constance of Castile and John of Gaunt. Castile had been since long an ally of England, and that alliance had been broken by the wars of the current king. Constance also primarily wanted to conquer the land of her father, and become queen of Castile. John of Gaunt was merely the instrument by which she thought to win back the throne of Castile for her and her family. At the beginning of 1372 already, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford became lovers. There hung a difference of ten years between them. John was thirty-two and Katherine twenty-two. Katherine was a lovely young woman with a voluptuous figure. She was the prettiest and most desirable woman at the royal court of England. She was not a lady-in-waiting of Queen Philippa anymore, for the queen had died in August of 1369.

In the winter of 1372, John of Gaunt's first son by this mistress Katherine Swynford, was born. John remembered he was still in title lord of a domain called Beaufort in the Champagne region of France. The domain had been lost by treason to the French, but the title and the claims remained with John. Moreover, John liked the name. He therefore gave the name of John Beaufort to his first son by Katherine Swynford, and would name also his other children by her so. He estranged from Constance of Castile.

John of Gaunt had not been very successful after his brother, the prince of Wales, had left Aquitaine. Neither had his other brothers. After his return to England, the English continued to lose terrain to the French. The French armies captured almost entire Aquitaine. John of Gaunt was considered by many responsible for the defeat.

John of Gaunt did not hear the criticism at that time. He had meticulously been preparing his own invasion of France. He hoped to relieve Aquitaine from the French pressure by launching a fierce *chevauchée* from out of Calais to the south. The punitive expedition lasted from August to December of 1373. It showed to be one of the most heroic feats by any English army accomplished in France, comparable for many to the invasion of Roman Italy by the Carthaginian leader Hannibal.

At the end of December of 1373 John of Gaunt arrived with the poor remnants of his army in Bordeaux, having been able to force nothing of importance in France! The French army had consistently refused to give battle. The towns the English arrived at were too heavily defended for the English army that had brought no siege engines. The warriors of John of Gaunt died in large numbers, the army lost its horses and most of its baggage wagons. In Bordeaux, many men-at-arms continued dying of the plague. John of Gaunt had no funds anymore to pay his men with, not even to give them passage back to England. In April of 1374, extremely aware of his failure, John of Gaunt went on board a ship that sailed to England, abandoning Aquitaine to its fate.

John of Gaunt's *chevauchée* of 1373 had become an enormous failure for the English and a personal tragedy for John of Gaunt. He had not been able to assert his personality as a conqueror of lands. More than anyone realised, however, except maybe Katherine Swynford, this campaign marked henceforth John of Gaunt to deep in his soul.

He had seen the horrors of the *chevauchée*, horrors for France and for his own men. He had understood how vast France was. He had marched the long distances between the towns and the counties. He saw the immense resources of men and money that could be summoned by France in its war against England.

This France, John of Gaunt knew, was ultimately invincible. It could he hurt hard by the devastations. It could lose skirmishes and battles, but it could not really be defeated in the

war. John had wept in despair when he stood with his army in front of one of the larger French cities, unable to capture them. He had not enough warriors by far, no siege engines. He extrapolated. The city of Paris was so huge, any king of France could withdraw his army, or part of his army, inside the capital. No enemy army, however large, and certainly no English army, would then be able to capture the city.

John of Gaunt was also abhorred at the sight of so many noble young men dying on both sides in the most atrocious way. Thousands of good men died in the skirmishes or from disease in the madness of the *chevauchée*! John's troops, mostly his foraging battalions, had been decimated by the harassing French fast riders. The corpses of the English were left to rot along the way of his advancing army. John of Gaunt had seen close every possible and imaginable wounds on his friends and men. He was used to violence and to maiming, but not to the accumulation, month after month, of the pain and suffering caused to his men. He had also lost thousands of horses in the worst of circumstances. In devious attacks of the French, his men had suffered ugly wounds and many deaths. Hundreds of his men-at-arms also had died of hunger, thirst and cold, especially when John had to march through the rugged terrain of the mountains and treacherous valleys of the Auvergne region. Such mountains, such freezing cold winds, endless snow and rain in the valleys, inundations of roads, did not exist in England, except maybe in the most northern regions and in Scotland!

The expedition of 1373, which ended in a harsh winter, forced John of Gaunt to become quite another man. He seemed to have shed off his impetuous youth!

From 1374 on, John of Gaunt became a man who would pursue the peace between France and England. Already while returning to Bordeaux by the Auvergne, he had contacted Guillaume Roger, the brother and advisor of Pope Gregory XI, letting the pope know he desired serious peace negotiations with France. He also advocated for this peace in England.

New peace negotiations indeed began as of 1374, in Bruges. The main negotiators for France were Philip the Bold, the bishop of Amiens and the mayor of Bayeux. For England, the main ambassadors were John of Gaunt, the earl of Salisbury, and the bishop of London. John of Gaunt met Philip the Bold often, and the two men learned to gauge each other. They appreciated each other's skills of negotiation, even if total trust never could set in. The negotiations ended in truce after truce, which lasted until the summer of 1377, but not in formal peace.

John of Gaunt now remembered keenly how, after his return from Aquitaine, the people were angered against King Edward III, the court, and his person. The criticism seemed to converge on him! The reproaches came to a crisis during a session of the English Parliament in May of 1376.

King Edward III was too sick and infirm to attend the sessions. Parliament accused the king, and also John of Gaunt, of having profited from the war for their own enrichment. Parliament shouted the king should learn to live from his own resources, and not continually extort new taxes from the people. An enquiry was ordered into the administration of the king, despite the protests of the courtiers. Parliament went as far as to openly accuse the courtiers of corruption. Alice Perrers, the mistress of the king, was banished from court. John of Gaunt did not have to bear the brunt of the attacks alone. The Prince of Wales was brought in a litter to the sessions, but he too was very sick. He fainted several times, and was forced to leave the hall. More often than not, the wrath of Parliament found only John of Gaunt to shout its indignation to!

John of Gaunt's made other powerful opponents. He disliked the clergy intervening in all issues of the country, of the reign of the kings. He had found justification of his doubts in the

writing and preaching of a man called John Wycliffe, a scholar, theologian and philosopher, born in Yorkshire, but who had lived in or near Oxford, before receiving a crown living at Lutterworth in Leicestershire. John Wycliffe preached the secularisation of the ecclesiastical properties in England. He wrote that in temporal matters the authority of the king should dominate the authority of the clergy. He abhorred the power of the popes in temporal matters, and he preached against the wealthy possessions of certain monk orders. The polemical ideas of Wycliffe of course angered the churchmen of England, and especially the bishops, who were still very influential in government rule at all levels. John of Gaunt protected John Wycliffe, and therefore made powerful enemies in the clergy.

John of Gaunt had declared his ambitions on Castile. These ambitions were driven by his wife Constance. He needed funds for the campaign in this far-off land, at a moment when England had been severely scourged by the plague waves and when the people had it extremely difficult to pay the existing taxes. He was a staunch advocate of the peace with France, whereas the English were being humiliated by France. The English armies won nothing in Aquitaine. In war, John of Gaunt had not proved to be the genius needed by the kingdom. He worked no miracles, won no splendid victories with limited means. In that, he was unlike the prince of Wales, who had offered England such glorious victories against all odds, such as Poitiers. A war leader had to have luck on his side, but John of Gaunt seemed not to be able to curb luck his way. Had God forsaken on him because he lived with his mistress, Katherine Swynford? John had succeeded only in negotiating truces, at great expense of money, and the people had heard of his expenditures in the feasting at Bruges. All this had happened while the common people were heavily burdened with taxes. Also, as John of Gaunt was a loyal man, loyal to his family and to his father the king. He defended the views and interests of his ailing and badly aging father Edward III. Parliament and the people were turning against the king, as the clergy reproached the king for the presence and influence of Alice Perrers.

Sombre events shook English society in the year of 1376, and John of Gaunt stood in the centre of the turmoil.

In May, a session of Parliament took place. The representatives insisted Alice Perrers would be banished from court. The court gave in, to the distress of the old king. On the eighth of June, the Prince of Wales died. He was buried with much pomp in Canterbury Cathedral. John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, became the principal ruler of the kingdom, as later Philip of Burgundy would become in France.

In July, Parliament refused the crown's request for new funds.

In September, John of Gaunt allowed the courtiers of the king, who had been displaced by act of Parliament, back to the king's council, as well as Alice Perrers.

In that same month, John Wycliffe preached against William of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, one of the main lords of the kingdom. Although Wykeham was defended by the new bishop of London, William Courtenay, a powerful figure, John of Gaunt also accused Wykeham of corruption, of having misappropriated public funds. Wykeham was banished from court, but John of Gaunt once more attracted the wrath of the clergy to his person. The clergy of England came to see Wycliffe as a danger for the faith. The reaction of the clergy came quickly.

Bishop Courtenay accused John Wycliffe of heresy and summoned him to justify himself before a number of clergymen of his choice. John of Gaunt, Earl Henry Percy, friends, and four begging friars defended Wycliffe. At the trial in Saint Paul's Cathedral of London, the discussion, arguments and counter-arguments, and even insults ran high between Bishop Courtenay and John of Gaunt. John of Gaunt cried he would humble the clergy. Both parties

were more shocked than they admitted by the exchange of views. Courtenay did not let the confrontation come to sentences. Outside the cathedral, in the streets of London, John of Gaunt was openly harassed by a mob, excited by the trial and by the clergy. Wycliffe was from then on attacked for blasphemy, pride and scandalous opinions.

King Edward III protected his son. In nearly June of 1377, as a sign of appeasement, he pardoned Wykeham and restored him to his temporal functions.

On the twenty-first of July 1377, King Edward III died. A day later, his grandson, the son of Edward of Woodstock, Richard of Bordeaux, was proclaimed his successor. King Richard II was only ten years old.

Not all was bad news for John of Gaunt! In that same month happened the official reconciliation of the city of London with John of Gaunt. John solemnly accepted the apologies of the city.

On the sixteenth of July of 1377, loyal as always, John organised the official crowning of King Richard II at Westminster. Three days later, a Royal Council of twelve men was installed to assist the young king in his reign. John of Gaunt and his brothers were not part of the council! In October, however, during another session of Parliament, John of Gaunt's actions were lauded, and his deeds deemed justified. The peace between the king, John of Gaunt and Parliament had been restored. Alice Perrers was now definitely banished, her properties confiscated.

John of Gaunt's worries with the people of England were not over. His protégé, John Wycliffe, published in the spring of 1378 a controversial work on the bible. A papal bull against his ideas had been published, but Parliament had shown rather sympathetic to the opinion of Wycliffe. The papal Curia was indeed exhausting England with taxes. Simon Sudbury, the archbishop of Canterbury, was obliged by papal pressure to summon Wycliffe to be judged at his court of Lambeth. Wycliffe was charged with heresy, but he had powerful defenders, among whom not only John of Gaunt, but also the king's mother, Joan of Kent. The bishops were divided over the issue, and satisfied themselves by only a slight rebuke at the end of the trial: they forbade Wycliffe to speak out on the controversy.

In that time, John of Gaunt was still married to Constance of Castile, but the couple did not live together anymore. In April of 1378, John of Gaunt openly presented for the first time Katherine Swynford with him in public. The relation rapidly became a public scandal. John of Gaunt was called an adulterer, but most of the scorn was directed against Katherine. Thomas Brinton, the bishop of Rochester, dared to scourge John of Gaunt publicly for his adulterous relation. He called Catherine an immoral person who had snared John in her nets, and who sought to exert an evil influence of seduction on the duke of Lancaster.

In the meantime, a new English army had opened a campaign in France. Almost at the same moment, King Charles V of France had thrown his army against Charles of Navarra in Normandy. The French troops were led by the warlords Enguerrand de Coucy and Bureau de Rivière. The duke of Anjou also assaulted Navarra in the south. He took the famous city of Montpellier from Charles of Navarra. Navarra, the ally of the English, lost all his strongholds and estates in Normandy. Only the harbour of Cherbourg remained in English hands. These losses were again seen in England as so many disasters.

As of mid-June 1378, John of Gaunt had been appointed as the king's army leader in France and in Aquitaine. He couldn't stem the losses of the English. He assaulted Saint-Malo with a fleet, accompanied by the earl of Arundel. They besieged the town, but they were forced back

by Castilian ships. When John of Gaunt returned to England, he was severely blamed for the failure. He was accused of cowardice and incompetence.

Another meeting of the English Parliament on October of that year also practically terminated the influence of John Wycliffe. Wycliffe declared the church had to be subjected to obedience to the king. He had published theses for a reformation of the church. He did not find much sympathy from Parliament, although the representatives were divided over the matters. John of Gaunt distanced himself from the preacher.

John of Gaunt had not won much success in the war with France. King Charles V also was not satisfied with the results of his war against the English. Charles too lacked the glorious victories that might spectacularly have turned events. He sued for peace, proposing serious concessions to the English. He offered Aquitaine south of the Dordogne River, the region of Angoulême, and a peace marriage between his daughter and the young English king. The English courtiers were not in favour of peace, however. England had been humiliated in its war ventures. They refused the offers of King Charles V.

The French warlords therefore continued to assault the English positions in France. Philip the Bold was in command of the raids. The French army marched against Ardres, Mardick and Gravelines in the north. It captured these fortified places, before the king disbanded the expensive troops.

In Aquitaine, some relief came for the English when in 1379 the Lord Neville of Raby was sent to Guyenne. He succeeded in containing the French in Guyenne.

Also, the territories of Aquitaine that were now under French rule suffered much from the high taxes of the duke of Anjou, so that the French garrisons had to cope with numerous uprisings against them. In July of 1379, the duke of Anjou levied a new hearth tax without asking the permission of the Estates of Aquitaine. The cities of Le Puy, Nîmes and Clermont rose against his rule, killing magistrates and looting the houses of the wealthy merchants. The duke of Anjou could, however, suppress the revolts by October of 1379, after several massacres among the population. The lords of Aquitaine and the people lost, because they were unable to appoint one leader. They could not offer a united, organised resistance against the troops of the duke of Anjou. Anjou entered Montpellier in January of 1380, ending the revolt of Aquitaine. The duke's vengeance was terrible, as he executed about six hundred citizens, declaring also their property confiscated. The town had to pay a large fine, the famous university lost all its rights and freedoms, and the walls of the town were to be demolished. This sentence was reduced the next day, in view of the general outcry in Aquitaine. After the revolt, King Charles V called Anjou back to Paris and Angers, taking away his governorship of Aquitaine. His brother, the duke of Berry, replaced him. Berry proved at least as rapacious of gold coins as his brother!

In the year of 1380 died King Enrique of Trastamara, the king of Castile. His son, Juan I, succeeded on him and remained in favour of France. John of Gaunt and Constance of Castile had not abandoned their wish for a campaign in Castile. Constance urged John on, telling him a campaign against Juan was a holy duty.

In June of 1379, France took the initiative in the war with unexpected assaults on England. Admiral Jean de Vienne chastised the English. He landed with a French and Castilian fleet at Rye. Also Folkestone, Portsmouth, Weymouth, Plymouth and inland Lewes were attacked and many people killed. The people once more blamed the humiliation on John of Gaunt.

New parleys between France and England were introduced in September of 1379 at Boulogne.

More disasters happened in the war with France for England. In December of 1379, yet one more English expedition was sent to France. This fleet was not commanded by John of Gaunt, for other men had supplanted him in fame in England, and no doubt, John preferred not to lead. The leader this time was the earl of Arundel.

Arundel sailed, but his fleet was caught in violent storms. The fleet was scattered all over the North Sea and never even reached France! The tax money obtained from Parliament for this campaign was wasted once more. Arundel lost twenty-five ships to the sea. His own war-cog was thrown on the rocks of the Irish coast, and Arundel drowned. For many devote men in England, it seemed God was reproaching the English for launching their killing campaigns in France!

In the beginning of 1380, King Richard II was a young boy of thirteen. The most influential men in the kingdom were his uncles, Duke John of Gaunt of Lancaster, Earl Thomas of Woodstock of Buckingham, the later duke of Gloucester, and Earl Edmund of Langley of Cambridge. John of Gaunt, pressed by the public opinion directed against him, had to relinquish the war initiatives, to the advantage of his younger brother, the earl of Buckingham, who was in his early twenties.

The treasury of the kingdom was empty. Large loans had to be consented to pay for the maintenance of the English garrisons in France, such as for the harbours of Calais and Cherbourg. The crown jewels had to be pawned. The English Parliament reluctantly agreed to a new poll tax, always a very unpopular tax in England.

With these funds, Thomas of Woodstock, earl of Buckingham, could land with a fleet at Calais in the beginning of July of 1380. He had assembled an army of five thousand men, of which half were archers. John of Gaunt knew these troops were too small in number to be able to accomplish anything durable. Nevertheless, Buckingham, lacking experience, but he was more aggressive and ruthless than John of Gaunt. Blinded by the energy and hopes of youth, launched a new *chevauchée* through France from Calais to the Champagne and Burgundy. The English devastated the environs of Rheims and Troyes. Duke Philip the Bold waited for Buckingham with a large army and the best of his warlords, but King Charles prohibited pitched battles. Buckingham, bereaved of splendid victories, marched on, to the Loire River. He had realised nothing of value in the conflict. In September of 1380, the English army crossed the Sarthe, and tried to enter Brittany.

Duke John of Montfort had brought some good news in the war, for he succeeded in taking Brittany back from the French. After the death of King Charles V, however, negotiations had begun between him and the French court. When the earl of Buckingham arrived in Brittany, he found the towns and castles of Brittany closed and hostile to him. As France and Brittany quickly signed a peace treaty, Buckingham had no other option but to sail back to England, which he did in March of 1381.

In England meanwhile, in November of 1380, John of Gaunt could profit from the new poll tax by having Parliament accept to finance his incursion into Castile.

In March of 1381, John of Gaunt's son, Henry of Derby, married the Lady Mary de Bohun, the thirteen year old daughter and also heiress of Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton.

In that same month, the Royal Council ordered that the poll tax, decided upon end 1380, had indeed to be collected entirely. The first collection of the tax had been executed reluctantly.

The people resisted the payment, and tax collectors were bribed to ‘forget’ entire families. As the tax did not bring the expected amounts, a second round of collection was decided to. Resistance spread.

The measure for the second collection immediately led to widespread, open discontent in England. The people refused to pay, they assaulted the tax collectors, killed some of them. They pointed to the lost battles and campaigns. Everybody protested. The taxes, plus the general displeasure over the turn of the war with France and the wasted money, the apparent incompetence of the royal uncles, brought exasperation and irritation to the people. More often than not, and mostly undeserved, these sentiments found John of Gaunt. John of Gaunt seemed to be the kind of man to whom everybody looked first to lay on him the sins of the country.

In May of 1381, the last truce with Scotland was about to expire. John of Gaunt thought it better to leave England for a while, to divert the generalised anger of England from his person. On the twelfth of May of 1381, he was glad to ride out of his Savoy Palace of London. He would lead the negotiations for peace with the Scots. He was far from believing he would soon be called back to England, to circumstances which were even more dramatic than before, and always directed against his person.

The Wat Tyler Revolt

Revolt against the third poll tax in the last four years started at the end of May of 1381, when villages of Essex refused in group to pay. Men took up arms in Kent, and captured a castle where a peasant who had refused to pay the tax had been imprisoned. The peasants, or villeins, of Kent formed a group and chose as their leader a man called Wat Tyler.

Tyler was inspired by Lollard ideas, spread by John Wycliffe’s texts and preaches. He had heard of notions of equality among the classes of people. He realised keenly villeins had almost no rights in English society, whereas Wycliffe told the differences in people were not ordained by God. Villeins were bound by tradition and laws of men to serve a lord. They were bound to the land they were born on. They had no means to better their destiny. Adam and Eve had been created equal. Where then was any justification in a few men holding and exploiting others in abject servitude? The contesting spirit of the Roman de la Rose, though very probably unknown to the English villeins, the beliefs of Wycliffe and of the Lollards found a loud response in the shouts of the villeins of Wat Tyler’s hordes. The poll tax had merely ignited the violence of the resentments of the peasants in Kent and nearby Essex.

The bands of Wat Tyler attacked Canterbury. They liberated from the archbishop’s prison a zealot who preached equality among all men, the priest John Ball. They chose as their spokesman a man called Jack Straw, who had similar ideas. Wat Tyler took Canterbury on the tenth of June and then marched on to London at the head of from twenty to fifty thousand men, as on the way more villeins from the countryside joined his force. On the twelfth of June 1381, this army set up a camp of tents at Blackheath, near London. The men of Essex also joined them there. On their way, Tyler’s groups had attacked and looted abbeys and manors, distributed the stolen food and riches to the peasants. They murdered a few lords, tax collectors, attorneys and judges.

From outside London, the peasants demanded a parley with the king. John of Gaunt was on the border with Scotland. Edmund of Cambridge was gathering troops at Plymouth for the campaign in Castile. The duke of Buckingham, the third son of Edward II, was in Wales. The young king disposed only of about five hundred guards in London. King Richard III was only fourteen years of age! The royal court was forced to accept negotiations with Wat Tyler. The peasants shouted they wanted the heads of Archbishop Sudbury, of the Chancellor and Treasurer Sir Robert Hailes, and of course of John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster, who they held responsible for the failing war with France and for the poll taxes.

Wat Tyler demanded the abolition of the poll tax, the free use of the forests, the end of the game laws which forbade the poorest to hunt in the fields and woods of England, the right to commute their services to rent, and the abolition or reform of the Statute of Labourers. The king could do nothing else but to consent to Tyler's demands.

Despite all their wishes having been accepted by the king, the peasants entered London. The gates of the city had been opened by sympathisers. Wat Tyler's men spread in the streets and took the Tower of London. They killed Sir Robert Hailes and the Archbishop Sudbury. They also sought revenge on John of Gaunt, but Gaunt was at Berwick. They swarmed over John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace near the Thames. Wat Tyler had forbidden to loot the palace, but he allowed the place to be destroyed. The mob killed the duke's guards, as well as John of Gaunt's doctor, Brother William Appleton. Some of Tyler's villeins reached the cellars, where they destroyed the wine vats and began drinking. Other men threw the duke's treasury, his gold and silver, out of the windows, into the Thames. They grinded the precious stones and jewels, destroyed the fine armour, tore the tapestries and the cushions, heaping all cloth on a pile to which they set fire. Other peasants had found three barrels in the cellars, which they thought contained more silver and gold. The barrels were hurled into the flames. The barrels contained black powder, however, and exploded. The entire palace went up in fire. Thirty-two peasants were trapped in the cellars, where they lay drunk from the wine. When the roof caved in, they perished in the flames.

At the same time as the Savoy Palace went up in fire, the Temple of London with its archives was ransacked and destroyed. The mob wreaked havoc in the streets of London.

Other castles of John of Gaunt were also attacked, such as Hertford Castle and the castle of Leicester. Servants of John of Gaunt were murdered.

The hatred of the peasants also turned against the Lombards and against the Flemish merchants of London. The foreigners were called traitors all. They were hunted down and murdered. Wat Tyler's men dragged thirty-five Flemish merchants out of a London church and beheaded them in the streets. A hundred more men were killed elsewhere in the city.

In the general chaos, King Richard II rode out in great pomp and granted in charters everything the peasants demanded. Many peasants then left the city, believing their demands had been met. Meanwhile, Sir Robert Knollys was assembling an army outside London. Wat Tyler suspected the charters granted were no more than a lull. He wanted the peasants to grab power in England and to imprison the king.

Wat Tyler requested another meeting with the king. He reiterated his demands. All inequalities of rank and status were to be officially abolished. The properties of the church were to be distributed among the common people. Tyler acknowledged one only lay hierarchy, the hierarchy of the king. He recognised only one ecclesiastical hierarchy, of one bishop. King Richard II granted everything Wat Tyler asked.

The discussion was held on horseback. While Wat Tyler was speaking to the king, calling Richard II by no other name than brother, the Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Walworth, was appalled by the condescending manner in which Wat Tyler addressed the king. He tried to arrest Tyler. Tyler drew a dagger, but William Walworth slammed his sword deep in Tyler's breast. In the ensuing confusion, King Richard II succeeded in calming the peasants, shouting he was their king and only leader, as Tyler had confirmed. He began to speak to the peasants.

At the same time, Sir Robert Knollys' men-at-arms surrounded the peasants' camp. The peasants were dismayed as the heavily armed and armoured knights and men formed a strong force around them. When but a few moments later Wat Tyler's head was shown to them, stuck on a spear, the peasants threw down their makeshift weapons.

The repression of the peasants followed. The leaders of the peasants' revolt were hanged. The revolt was suppressed. The charters granted to the peasants were revoked.

When a delegation of the villeins complained to King Richard II, he answered, 'villeins you are, and villeins you shall remain!'

With the killing of Wat Tyler on the fifteenth of June of 1381, the peasants' revolt ended.

John of Gaunt heard of the revolt only on the nineteenth of June, at Berwick. He immediately agreed on a truce with the Scots that would have to last until February of 1383. He rode back to England and stopped at the castle of Henry Percy, his former ally. Percy did not welcome the duke of Lancaster. He told John it was better he should not return to London immediately. The king had to clear John for access to the court. John of Gaunt rode back to Edinburgh, profoundly distressed, believing the revolt had been all his fault, thinking he had become some sort of a pariah in England. He declared in public he understood God had wished to punish him for his misdeeds and for his adultery with his mistress, Katherine Swynford. He decided to renounce to Katherine.

John of Gaunt was well received at Edinburgh. From there, he asked his wife, Constance of Castile, to join him. In mid-July of 1381, he received notice that King Richard II and his court were ready to admit him in London. John of Gaunt rode south, to Northallerton. There, on the nineteenth of July, he met his wife. Constance had fled from the peasants' revolt to Knaresborough Castle and she was on her way to her husband. John of Gaunt implored her pardon for his misdeeds, and she forgave him. The couple returned to their estates in England.

John of Gaunt had refuted his mistress, but he remained on excellent terms with her. Years later, he would marry Katherine. John of Gaunt continued to dominate the Royal Council and the English Parliament until 1386. He never rebuilt the Savoy Palace. He resided at Hertford Castle or at other manors in London, residences of bishops. He remained loyal to and in favour with the king. It was he who brought the new queen, Anne of Bohemia, through London to be wedded to King Richard II in January of 1382. Richard II was married to Anne of Bohemia at Westminster.

John of Gaunt seemed to me a tragic, but also very human figure. I have no doubt he was an honest man, a man of good will who tried to do good and sensible things. He did not like war, sought peace, but he was drawn inexorably into the conflicts of his times. Of all the personalities of those times, he seemed the most sympathetic and the most human to me, a fine ruler had he gotten the chance to rule. Luck passed him by, and discontent was drawn to him instead of to other leaders, even when these merited the anger of the people even more. The drawbacks and disappointments of the people of England were laid upon him, but John of

Gaunt had powerful shoulders. I found it remarkable revolts demanding freedom and equality broke out in that period not only in Flanders, but also in France and England. Wat Tyler's revolt in England took origin in the villages and in the countryside. The revolts in France and in Flanders originated in the largest cities of the kingdom.

Heinric Vresele

Heinric Vresele was born in Ghent in the prestigious, well-known and already very wealthy family of Vresele. The Vreseles were traders, and also landowner-poorters, who owned land within the walls and far outside the walls of Ghent. They were no knights of the city because they did not originate from Ghent itself. They had come to Ghent from a small town to its north, from the town of Zele. Heinric was the son of Gillis Vresele and of Gillis's wife, Avezoete Wulslager. Gillis and Avezoete had other sons. Evrard became a Fremineuren monk, a Franciscan monk, Boudin was the trader and successor to Gillis in the association with the other families of the Pharaïldis group. Gillis also had a daughter, Marie, who married the goldsmith and money-changer John de Smet. Heinric Vresele was the stepbrother of Gillis's adopted son, Jehan Terhagen, who engendered me, your servant. In a way, Heinric was my uncle. He was also the youngest son of Gillis Vresele.

Gillis Vresele was a formidable man, one of the original patriarchs of the Pharaïldis families. He was the keenest thinker I have ever met, a man who shaped our ways of considering the world, our views on politics and on trade. Gillis was the great shaper of our wealth, and the man who forged the union of our five families.

Gillis also tried to shape the character of his son Heinric, but Heinric's character seemed to have been formed already when he escaped from his mother's womb! Gillis had succeeded in kneading the personality and the temperament of his other children, though they were all very different in capabilities, interests, talents, and skills of the mind. He could never change the ways Heinric thought and worked, though. Gillis chastised his youngest son hard, because Heinric acted stubbornly as he wanted, not as others wanted, not even his parents. Gillis thought his son lacked what he, Gillis, appreciated most in true men: sound, reasonable judgement. His son acted weirdly as a child, in totally unexpected ways, not as other intelligent people would. There seemed to be no boundaries and no pre-set lines of thinking for Heinric. He did not reason like others. He arrived at the strangest of conclusions, by the most twisting, devious ways of reasoning. In the end, faced with his failure, Gillis regarded Heinric as something of a low-witted boy, and later as a man incapable of thinking and judging in the same ways as sane men. Heinric was different, indeed, but not necessarily less intelligent!

Maybe Heinric resembled too much the men from his mother's family. Some told Heinric resembled to his grandmother, to Gillis's mother, to Mergriet Mutaert. Mergriet had been a woman of many interests and of great, recognised erudition, a hard and tough woman. Whatever, Gillis could not get a grip on the child Heinric, even not in Heinric's first youth. Heinric resisted all exertion on his mind by others.

Heinric's birth came as something of a surprise to Gillis and Avezoete. Avezoete was already thirty years old when Heinric came. She had not expected him, and she had no more children after him. Maybe Gillis had cared so much for his firstborn daughter and other sons, that no love remained in stock for Heinric.

Heinric seemed to have feared his father from the first moment his small eyes opened in the *Kalanderberg* and when he tried to take in his environment. From that instant on, Heinric sought protection from his giant of a father at his mother's breast. Gillis's intention had been to call this son Juris, after the child's grandfather, or even Gillis after his own name, as was the tradition in the better families of Ghent. At the last moment, however, when the midwife asked him for a name, the baby shown to him enveloped in white windings, Gillis seemed to have had a strange intuition that this son was not of the same breed as his other children. Gillis did not doubt one second the newly born was of his blood, for he had a total, blind faith in the loyalty of his beloved Avezoete, but he must have felt with a stir of inspiration this child would remain by a long distance something of an alien in the family.

The instinct of Gillis Vresele may have been unfailing, for Heinric grew up to a boy and then to a youth ever so different as we of the Pharaïldis families ever knew any other child, boy, young man and even adult. Heinric as a boy took no interest in and no pleasure from the games other children in Ghent played. He did not particularly appreciate the company of others, either. He did like to hear stories, to avidly learn of everything. He listened attentively to what his teachers told him, noted much, whereas we ridiculed our teachers and learned far more by ourselves. Heinric showed from very young on he was a meticulous boy with what he learned. He gathered information from wherever he could find some. Like his grandmother Mergriet, he became an erudite, and therefore seemed pedantic to who should have been his playmates, boring too. He was always trying to impose his better informed views, or embarrassing us with never-ending questions. As a result, from a very young age, he was forced into corners, into being a loner. Even the girls avoided him!

Heinric could run out of the house of the *Kalanderberg* and ask stories from our neighbours, from the craftsmen living in our street. He eagerly sought anecdotes from the lives of other men and women, and he thrived on their interest rather than on our sympathy. Heinric knew all about the techniques of weaving and fulling, how to brew beer, and how to shape copper kettles, before his brothers and sister had even taken a slight interest in such things. Gillis concluded Heinric had been picked out of different skies than his other children. Heinric thrived on the interest of others, rather than on the sympathy of his family.

Heinric Vresele remained alien to his father, as if the boy had been spawned by an odd evil instead of by Gillis. As Gillis saw his son grew up, he discovered in his offspring other features present in no other person he knew. Heinric was a devious liar, who could be charming to others when he needed something. But when adults had turned their back, Heinric could suddenly pinch or punch another child, or push a sack over the head of one of his playmates, trying to suffocate him or her, or do some other harm no one in Ghent had thought possible of so young a child. Young Heinric lied his way out of any complaint formulated against him. Gillis Vresele tried brute force in such cases, when no persuasion, threats, logic or affection seemed to have any effect on the youngster. Heinric submitted to the blows and the whiplashes stoically, fled to his mother as soon as he could escape, and grinned behind her back when she stopped Gillis's fervour. After a few months of this treatment, Gillis gave up on Heinric, and let his weird son do as he wished, though still punishing him when the boy had done harm. Gillis considered Heinric as someone living in the same home, but not worthy of the least consideration. Heinric was an annoyance. Gillis acted more or less as if Heinric did not exist, certainly not as a son of the Vresele family. Strangely, this suited Heinric perfectly, for he had his mother to run to for protection, and Heinric was very glad not to be taken notice of by the only man he truly feared in the house.

Heinric grew up as a loner, aware of the total lack of affection of his father. He went his own way. He studied, learned the languages French, Latin, Greek, sought a little Hebrew from a Jewish merchant who lived a few streets off, a man who desperately had wanted to nurture good relations with the Vresele family. Heinric even picked up some Italian from two Lombard traders who regularly came into the Vresele house of the *Kalanderberg*, and who addressed him.

When his father was out of the house, Heinric opened the folders with the pages of the accounts of the Vresele family, trying to understand the meaning of the figures and of the comments.

Heinric also listened with his grandmother to the stories told by his uncle, the monk Gerolf Vresele. The stories did not really touch him, or affected him in any way, but he gradually understood they satisfied his curiosity. The stories provided him with information, with names of people, with dates and deeds, and with opinions of other people.

Soon he found out where his grandmother and his uncle got much of their knowledge from. That was out of the heavy books they loaned from the abbeys and convents of Ghent. Heinric first asked his grandmother to read the books she brought home, and then he was helping his grandmother by returning the books she had lent from the convent of the Bijloke, and by choosing new books for her. Heinric borrowed more books than he showed his grandmother. The monks and the nuns did not mind, for they knew - or thought to know - for who the books were intended. Heinric merely fetched the volumes, took extra good care for them, brought them back in the same state he had received them. He was also such a nice, polite boy! Heinric read everything he could lay his hands on, the lives of the saints, and the 'Golden Legend'. He read books written by Latin and Greek writers, by Herodotus and Thucydides, Plato and Xenophon, and so many more.

When Heinric was still a young man, his reputation as an erudite was already well-known in Ghent, among the monks and even the magistrates of the city. The nuns of the Bijloke were kind to him. With time, they allowed Heinric to look for his own books in the library. He sought far and deep in the library for the most interesting books.

He found a nicely illustrated copy of the 'Legends of Arthur', written by one Chrétien de Troyes, and the volumes of the 'Roman de la Rose' of William de Lorris and Jehan de Meung. These volumes had been trapped behind a series of more pious works. They had probably arrived in the convent in the chests of a wealthy girl sent to spend the rest of her years in the convent, had been confiscated and stuffed in a place where nobody would look for them and truly might have been forgotten since long. Heinric understood already then such books were worth a fortune, but the nuns gave them no look when he took them amidst other works and ran off.

He did not particularly like or dislike these stories. The 'Roman de la Rose', he found fantastic and confusing, often long and boring. He judged the heavy allegory form not really necessary as a means to divulge the messages of the writer. He laughed wryly at the description of the hypocrisy of monks and priests. He read for the first time an author who dared reproaching noblemen for believing they were better than common man. He read nobility lay in one's proper value of character and valour of mind, not in one's birth. A man was noble by his virtues and a villain by his vices. The nobility of birth meant nothing compared to the worth of a man who proved the courage of his lineage. Heinric also learned in the 'Roman de la Rose' to distrust women even more than he already did, as well as the feelings they could awaken in man.

Heinric Vresele was not very attracted to girls as an adolescent, contrary to the young men of his age. He had heard some of the young men with whom he occasionally drank beers in a hostel, talk in whispers about what girls could do. These boys mocked him for his lack of interest in females. They told him he was a boys' boy, but when he had finally understood what his drinking-mates had meant, he was sure he was not particularly interested in men either. Heinric had enough with himself. He satisfied himself with his own body and had developed a certain aversion for other naked bodies, be they of men or of women. He could admire the forms, not more. He did not go regularly to bathhouses, and he did not dislike either the nude bodies of men, but he definitely shied away from the bodies of women. Women did not really appeal to Heinric Vresele. The only things he really seemed to like was to hear out and discuss with the men and boys he knew, and listen to the latest gossip of Ghent. Still, he was charming enough to be a welcome partner in any group, be it in the streets or on the quays of Ghent, in the hostels and inns or in the bathhouses.

Heinric grew up to a weird young man, as he had been a weird boy. He was a tall, bony man with long, thin limbs, a long neck and a long face topped by sparse brown hair. He had a long aquiline nose, thin lips, angular cheekbones, long ears. Not a wisp of hair on his lips, cheeks and chin mollified his lines. He dressed sober but elegantly, usually in subdued colours. He wore the same in spring and summer as in autumn and winter, always in a woollen tunic, brown or green, buckled leather shoes, the stockings in the colours of the *kuipe* of Ghent.

Gillis Vresele secured him a function of clerk in the city administration. Heinric seemed to be pleased with the modest post. He worked hard, was much appreciated by everybody in the *Schepenhuis*, especially by some of the more successful aldermen. He helped these whenever they needed something, becoming quickly an indispensable man in the city administration. Whatever one wanted, Heinric delivered it, from a speech to a banquet for five hundred people to a proposal of names of men for an embassy to be sent to a foreign country. He was the only man of Ghent who knew everything, could find anything, and knew how to organise whatever the aldermen asked him to provide them with. He organised splendid banquets and receptions for hundreds of notables of the city. When people of some fame from outside the city were received at the *Schepenhuis*, and one wanted nothing to go wrong or being overseen quite closely, there was only one name that came up, the name of Heinric Vresele. To Gillis's astonishment, Heinric became a personality as important and well-known in Ghent as the aldermen themselves! Only one word was necessary, and Heinric arranged everything necessary, to general satisfaction. He was so meticulous, everything he did was arranged to perfection, the food, the music, the servants and the decoration of the tables. He also arranged for decent prices, and the aldermen knew nothing would be stolen or wasted. The successive aldermen of Ghent came to rely totally on their clerk.

When Heinric Vresele was twenty-three years old, already much appreciated by the city magistrates, Heinric told his father he would leave the house of the *Kalanderberg* to live on his own. He asked for a part of the Pharaïldis money and bought a small *steen* in the *Hoogpoort* near the *Schepenhuis*, where he worked. Gillis provided his son with the funds he needed, and Heinric settled in a comfortable house that originally had belonged to the Borluut family. Heinric redecorated the rooms with fine furniture, tapestries of Brussels, and with silver objects he bought from the de Smet smiths. He chose an elderly couple to serve him, to clean and maintain the house in good order, as well as an elderly matron known for her fine cooking, which he paid well to serve him exclusively. These people did not stay at night in his house. From the end of the afternoon on, Heinric Vresele lived alone in his house. He went to mass at Saint John's, the church of his parish, and lived a quiet, frugal life.

Heinric seldom visited his father, but he went to see his mother regularly. Heinric continued to resent the treatment his father had reserved for him. He also resented noticing how his brothers and the members of the other Pharaïldis families obtained important functions in the Pharaïldis businesses, but not he. After his mother had died, when after the plague waves the Pharaïldis Consortium was officially founded and organised, he realised bitterly he had effectively been barred from the families working together. He was too proud to beg for a function in the organisation. He laughed wryly when Gillis Vresele ostentatiously gave up control over the consortium to a committee of five or six Pharaïldis members. Heinric did not protest, gave no comments, but he silently reproached his father for being a manipulative man and a hypocrite, for while Gillis relented being in control and heading the consortium, Gillis had forced Nete de Hert on the group as the keeper of records. Only Heinric knew that Nete was very secretly the mistress with his aging father. Through Nete, who never married, Gillis had direct access to all accounts, knowledge of all initiatives and investments, to all acquisitions of the Pharaïldis group. By that information Gillis continued to control whatever happened with the funds of the group! Heinric was very bitter with his father's doings and schemes, but he never spoke one word about all this to the Pharaïldis men.

Heinric was subjected every day to the reality of the city, to very practical problems. He proved to be an excellent organiser of what the city needed, a task at which he showed much presence of mind, sound intelligence and a practical, no-nonsense way of handling matters and souls. Yet, he developed in private a strange state of mind, half submerged in legends, derived from the fantastic stories he read in his books. When Heinric passed away and when we had to clear out his house, we discovered a personal library of close to one hundred expensive volumes, a few even copies of works written by his own hand. Heinric had spent a fortune on books, which were probably his only passion during his long evenings. We found texts of poets and of romantic writers, but also medicinal works and ancient texts on philosophy.

We discovered he had filled tens of additional volumes with notes on what he read! We also found a diary, in which he had inscribed what had happened to him year by year, month by month. I was particularly intrigued by the idea of keeping a diary! We hold chronicles of our Ter Hage family, which seem more and more also to be chronicles of our city of Ghent. The idea of a personal chronicle, of a diary of the events happened to one person only, was novel to me. I have never known anyone else to hold such an account. We tell our family and friends what happened to us, and such stories are avidly listened to, but we don't write them down. I guess Heinric was truly a loner, but he nevertheless must have felt the need to communicate what he had accomplished, and how he felt about matters. He did not just speak to the pages he wrote. He spoke to himself as to yet another man. Such was the necessity of the lonely Heinric, to express himself and have somebody listen to his joy and distress, if only that was himself again. Heinric lived with a second person in his house, but that second man was himself again!

The successive waves of the plague that scourged Ghent seemed to have had the greatest impact on Heinric Vresele's state of mind. Heinric's resentment against the Pharaïldis families augmented in that time. He was present at the first meeting at which his uncle Gerolf Vresele warned of the very first danger of the sickness threatening Ghent in its very existence. He was present when his father proposed for the families to retreat to the castles of the Four Crafts, to Beostenblijje, to New Terhagen and to Westdorp Manor. Heinric was terrified to silence when Gerolf Vresele told how many people would probably die from the sickness, and argued that their only hope of survival might be to flee to the countryside into isolation. Gillis,

Heinric's father, once more twisted his hand by telling he, Heinric, would have to stay in the city as clerk. Heinric would have preferred to flee, but what his father said was law! By not acting sufficiently drastic, by not forcing everybody to flee and search isolation, Gillis had lost many lives in the families!

The plague waves were very traumatic experiences for Heinric Vresele. The Pharaïldis families admired his stoical calmness at the height of the terror, but inwardly, Heinric was indeed horrified by what was happening around him. During the first wave, Heinric remained in shock for days. He saw the scenes of the dying in the streets of Ghent, the horror of the putrefied corpses, of the rotting boils on the sick, of the suffering of the living who would soon die, of the horrible disfigured, howling acquaintances of his who were brought into the hospitals to never walk out of the abbeys or convents again. He saw heroism, too rare, and much cowardice. We all considered Heinric as a rare hero. We never realised the extent of his private terror and aversion until he told me, and only me, much, much later, and not until I fully read his diaries.

Heinric also remarked very clearly the hypocrisy of some of the aldermen who preferred to flee the city instead of serving their fellow-man. He took note of these names, so that he would not forget. He saw the monks who fled, but also the courage of Gerolf Vresele, his uncle. He saw the high and mighty who barricaded themselves into their houses in Ghent, and yet succumbed. He saw the debauchery caused by the utter loss of the women who would have offered everything, even their body, for the slightest hope of survival. Heinric reacted with aversion to the groups of flagellants roaming in the streets and squares of Ghent, and he urged time after time the aldermen to action.

Most of the aldermen had either fled the city, had died, had abdicated, or had lost their mind. Only a few courageous aldermen still remained at work in the *Schepenhuis*. Heinric kept the most urgent city services at the minimum of effectiveness with obsessive drive and stubbornness. It sometimes seemed only Heinric believed there would still be a Ghent after the plague. It was only Heinric who, at the height of the terror, still organised teams of men, with some of the few monks left, with the poorest among the poor who had survived, and who Heinric assumed had acquired some form of immunity to the pestilence. With them, he formed the last service that pushed handcarts through the streets to pick up the dead, to bring them to the large pits which would become the common tombs of hundreds of unnamed dead men, women and children, victims of the plague. Heinric didn't mind he knew the men he employed could be thieves, beggars or even murderers, who were also out for the last jewels and coins the deceased had hid in their clothes or in their houses. He nevertheless acted rudely to them when he found out they had stolen.

Other teams went to help the sick get to a hospital, or to the churches, to chapels and halls prepared for them by the monks and nuns. It was Heinric who had preserved order in the city of Ghent in those worst months. Heinric saw the horror in those places.

Later, when the plague was finished, the aldermen recognised the tremendous work Heinric had provided to Ghent. He had earned the gratitude and the admiration of the aldermen by his heroic behaviour, and by his dedication to the city. The first plague wave promoted Heinric to head clerk of Ghent, and he held that function for the rest of his life.

In the Pharaïldis families, some said Heinric went out of his mind during the plague! He had not wanted to stay in Ghent, but his father practically forced him to confront the ordeal, on danger of his life. He was a hero despite himself! That may well have been the case.

Heinric never cared much for girls, or women, and also not for men. He never sought to marry, but the Pharaïldis also never heard any complaint of sodomy formulated against him. In fact, we knew he had no special inkling for men either. He apparently lived a very chaste man, as maybe a saint would have lived. Heinric's frugal way of living and his chastity probably preserved him from the wrath of God that harassed other men and women. He began to think staunchly he was a chosen man. He was a prophet among the sinners. He was like an angel in the depravation of a city of thieves, liars, greedy men, whores, hypocrites, sinners all. He became convinced of his untouchability by anything human and natural, such as other men and sicknesses. He was the chosen of God, he wrote us, protected by God like Lot to preserve some of the last order on earth, while chaos set in around him, and protected from the horrors of the sickness. He was the equivalent of Lot surviving the destruction of Sodom on orders of Yahweh.

I could very easily believe Heinric's mind had wavered at the ghastly scenes he had to endure during the plague. He had a natural abhorrence for everything impure, whereas he only saw putrefaction around him. These scenes would have profoundly affected any sensible mind. Mixed with the constant fear of being himself infected by the sickness, of dying in the most horrible circumstances, he living entirely on his own and knowing he was something of an outcast in his family. This must have had a devastating influence on his personality. Heinric tried to describe me this horror indeed many years later. He told me it had taken him months after the plague waves to regain his sanity. He evolved to a man who was yet more of a loner, a pedantic, cynical man, withdrawn and distant, apparently warm-feeling, but in fact an arrogant and cold-headed man with a cold heart. He developed a profound disgust for the world of the families he knew so well. As a sort of survival reaction, he lived in a delusive world of his own imagination. He convinced himself he was a chosen, exceptional man, who could not die.

There was only one man, Heinric told me, who proposed him help and who held regular contact with him during the plague years and after. Heinric explained to me in long, bombastic phrases that took much time to form, how he felt towards that man. He did feel grateful to him, though I wondered whether Heinric was capable of any feelings at all. The man was Jehan Terhagen, my father. Heinric said the only person who had offered him safety and had insisted to invite him to his castle of New Terhagen in the countryside, had been my father. Later on, Jehan had also insisted for Heinric to be invited to the Pharaïldis meetings. Only Jehan had proposed, as a normal decency, to have Heinric be considered a member of the families, equal to the other men. Jehan Terhagen also did not hesitate appealing to Heinric Vresele when he, Jehan, needed help to solve the Vitry mystery, when my father's castle was attacked by groups of bandits and when my father had needed information he considered only Heinric could dig up from the archives. Nobody from the families had ever appealed to Heinric for help. Only my father had done that, without afterthoughts. Heinric also remembered how he had been invited to New Terhagen, and how kindly Wivine and Quintine, my mothers, had received him. I had been convinced by then Heinric was incapable of feeling anything for people, but when he told me about my father's attitude to him, I suppose these instances must have touched his soul. It concerned, of course, feelings of others towards him. Those feelings he did recognise! Heinric was something of a bigot, but I heard him never judge my father for living with two women. Heinric seemed to have held my father, Wivine and Quintine, in high esteem.

Heinric also told me how he had learned, how he had realised, his own strange, extraordinary, nature. He told his father had never said to him what he thought of him, never explained what

he liked in his son and what he disliked. Gillis never said what he thought Heinric's qualities were, what he appreciated in his son, and what not. Heinric had to find out what his character was like all by his own.

Heinric described himself as a very logical man, a typical offspring of the Pharaïldis, a typical *poorter* of Ghent, a man who thought with logic and distance, without emotions, in very real terms, about what arrived to him and to the world. I had it difficult to believe this, for Heinric had reacted to the terror of the plague waves in a quite emotional and extreme way. He was a man, he told me, who always tried to picture the bigger image by reasoning. He calculated a lot before taking a decision, weighing alternatives. The most remarkable feature he discovered in himself, was that he did not recognise strong feelings in his mind. He had a keen notion of what feelings were, for he could recognise the signs of feelings in others. He knew quite well when other people were sad, in a dark mood, angry, loving and caring, in distress or despair, hateful, when they feared, and so on. He discovered no signs of such feelings in himself.

'I weigh things, I calculate,' Heinric emphasized. 'I do not feel and I do not feel for others. Feelings have no effect, and no grip on me.'

I could believe him, but I also argued he had experienced strong feelings during the plague waves and when he had fought in battles. He acquiesced to my counter-arguments, but he asserted these were emotions of very extreme situations, when his own existence was at stake. Only then had he truly experienced strong feelings. Heinric thought logic and calculating was a characteristic present in most of the members of the Vresele clan, but the feature was the clearest and the most complete in him only. When I acknowledged this, I felt he was a very pathetic man. I felt pity for him, but pity was something Heinric obviously did not know or did not want to know of.

Heinric felt no remorse for being deceitful. Once he had well thought out and taken a decision, he was convinced he had decided for the best. He had taken into consideration also moral arguments, and then he acted without further regard to any other consideration. He had a free conscience. If he had to hurt and harm other people, kill even, he experienced no remorse, for such eventuality had been taken into account. The pain and horror was to be ignored, not even felt. Heinric remained calm in all circumstances, experienced no terror. He felt some form of satisfaction, of pleasure I suppose, only in the most extreme circumstances, such as during a battle. He had effectively banished anxiety from his mind. Heinric admitted he did not conform to any social norm. He could easily transgress religious norms when necessary for his decisions.

Nevertheless, he was a charming man in meetings at the *Schepenhuis*. He was appreciated in group discussions because he was a poised man, displaying great charisma in his presentation of sound arguments. He had the rarest of talents to bring people to agree, even on points and decisions he had expressed different opinions for. He found it more productive to bring people to agree on a solution than to have them agree on his own opinion, or to impose on them his own views. Maybe he didn't really care what they decided.

Although he calculated, he could also be impatient, impulsive! He could unexpectedly flare up when, especially among his subalterns, he heard them bickering over unimportant items. At such moments, Heinric was being feared by the people who worked with him in the administration of Ghent. He was not a man to be trifled with! He despised intensely many men around him, many aldermen, too, though few men knew his profound rejection. Nevertheless, he showed an almost abject obeisance to his superiors, even though he loathed them in private.

With time, though strange and so unlike most men, the people of Ghent came to appreciate the insatiable, never-ending energy and drive of Heinric Vresele. He was the man of last resort, the man who was always ready to help, who always came up with a solution in the most delicate of situations. He was the man who could arrange matters in all circumstances. He was indispensable at the *Schepenhuis* of Ghent. Because of the way he acted, stayed unwaveringly in function during the plague year, and also because of his role in so many armed conflicts, in which he fought as a true hero, he came to be seen as one of the most famous characters of Ghent. His hermit-like way of living was easily forgotten and excused.

The greatest revelation of Heinric Vresele was not so much what he learned of his true nature during the plague years, as what he discovered of himself during the campaign of Count Louis of Male in Brabant. Louis of Male sent his war lords to capture the Brabant cities and to defeat the army of the duchess. Heinric Vresele took part in the battle for Brussels. The militiamen of the Flemish cities defeated the Brabant army and captured the capital of the dukes of Brabant. In that battle, Heinric, who had been somewhat mocked at by his men beforehand, fought like a lion, to the astonishment of everybody who had marched with him from Ghent to Brussels. He had not received much training as a militia warrior, but a *goedendag* was not hard to manipulate! It was much easier to wield than a sword.

While Heinric threw himself with his men into the throng of the warring *Brabanders*, he discovered the epic joy of the fight, of the killing and of the comradeship the battle afterwards inspired in the men who had fought.

Heinric had thought he could not experience feelings. Near Brussels, shield and *goedendag* in his hands, he found out he actually liked and enjoyed much the elation of entering the frantic fray of battle. Throwing his body forward between the sharp points of spears and yet knowing they could not harm him, shouting like a madman amidst a group of enemies, frightening them by his wild energy of gestures and unleashed ferocity, brought him extravagant satisfaction and pleasure.

In battle, Heinric was unsurpassable, insuperable, and invincible. These were about the same feelings to those he had felt the last days of facing the sickness of the plague! He was sure God had given him the quality of being unsurplussed in battle, unreachable by enemy weapons, untouchable by opposers.

Once more he ascribed this quality to the impassive, frugal way he had lived in. Sexuality had not corrupted him. He gave much to charity, honoured the Church, even when the only one measure in everything he did ultimately was himself. He thought no weapon could defeat him, and so he entered the battle convinced of his invincibility. He forced a deep wedge into the ranks of the enemy troops before Brussels, and he finished the battle unscathed, winning the standard of Brabant with his militiamen.

Such was the man Heinric Vresele, who would exert a forceful influence on the events that happened in Ghent the next two years.

I was fascinated by characters such as that of Heinric Vresele! I wondered why people like him were so different from us, the Pharaïldis men. To begin with, the words of normal and abnormal, of natural and unnatural, could not apply, because Heinric was as much the product of nature and of our world as we were. The difference between Heinric and us was primarily that when Heinric slit a throat in battle, he did not project himself into the suffering of his victim. We, on the other hand, would have thought we were slitting our own throats, would have felt the horror and the pain beforehand and in the act, and therefore we might have refrained. I, William Terhagen, I hate and abhor physical violence and spiritual violence such as injustice done to people. Such abhorrence, I feel is the way to God. I am no coward. I

realise our society is a very violent one. I see a very long way to God in the bettering of our society towards the general rejection of violence, and towards justice for all. We are very far from such a state, but advance we must, for otherwise we would never follow the spirit of the messages of our Lord Jesus Christ. The advance towards Christ could therefore only happen through the elimination of people such as Heinric, who were naturally violent and who could not feel the pain of others. The issue was, that eliminating such men was equally an act of violence, and hence would plunge us, the non-violent of the earth, into the other side. This was a dilemma I had no solution for.

Still, Heinric understood who he was. He was acutely aware of his love of violence, and reacted against it. Except for in battles, he was quite a calm and agreeable person. Maybe bringing people like Heinric to such conscience of their own nature was another way of bettering our society. I realised how many people were like Heinric, how much they dominated our society, how violent our society was. I admired all the more the ways the Pharaïldis men had wanted to live by. I saw hope for our society only in such men. Our patriarchs had been formidable men indeed, so different from most of the other leaders of our time! One could only hope more men like them were born with time than the violent ones.

A much smaller event, the meaning of which became only clear much later, is worth mentioning.

In the summer of 1379, Heinric Vresele was working behind his desk in the small office of the *Schepenhuis*, when he received the visit of two well-dressed men who had asked to see him, no reason given. The men entered his office, and he amiably invited them to sit. They quickly introduced themselves as John and Ralph van Ieper, cousins. They both spoke halting Flemish with an uncommon accent, and Ralph interspersed his short phrases with English words.

They told Heinric they were traders, born in Ieper as their name indicated, but who had been living a long time in London. They explained, a long time ago, they had met the Lady Catherine de Coster in London, and had provided her with important papers at one time of her stay, documents they would have liked to recuperate. Alas, Catherine de Coster had no papers left of the times she was married to her first husband and had been exiled. She was not interested anymore in those times, for happily married to a second husband.

Then, the men had discovered papers had been placed in chests of her, and the chests seemed to have been given in the custody of the city of Ghent. Indeed, the chests also held private documents of the former James van Artevelde. When James van Artevelde had been murdered by the weavers, his chests had been brought to the archives of Ghent, or so it seemed.

Heinric asked what the documents they sought were about. The van Ieper men refused to answer that question. They evaded to respond by changing subjects. They assured Heinric they would offer much money to him for recuperating the documents. Heinric understood the men were offering him a substantial bribe. Heinric was a very honest man! He instantly distrusted and despised the men who thought he could be bought.

Heinric knew very well where the two chests filled with documents of James van Artevelde had been deposited after the death of the head captain. They were here indeed, in the archives of the *Schepenhuis*. Nobody had opened the chests, also not Heinric. The chests had been sent by the aldermen of the city right after the murder of James van Artevelde, and the chests had been left closed and sealed ever since.

Heinric knew the Englishmen, as he forthwith called them, were lying. Catherine de Coster had not been engaged in trade before she had been exiled. The chests had been sent before

Catherine de Coster had moved in exile to England! They could not hold documents offered to Catherine much later! The men were lying. They wanted access to documents of van Artevelde for one or other dark reason, much more than to documents of James's wife Catherine. Or the chests of van Artevelde were not the ones the men were after and they simply wanted access to the Ghent archives.

Heinric felt no scruples, therefore, to tell the men he, the principal archivist of Ghent, had no knowledge of the chests they sought. He told the men would not find in the *Schepenhuis* the information they were looking for. The men insisted, placed many golden coins in front of Heinric, but Heinric told them several times the same message in other words. Heinric did not change his mind. The men went as far as to demand access to the archives to be able to search for themselves. Heinric refused categorically access to the city archives to men who were no *poorters* of the city and who held no official function in the city.

In the end, angry at Heinric's imperturbability, the men left the *Schepenhuis*, telling Heinric he would be seeing them again, and then be forced to show them the chests. While they crossed the square, Heinric kept watching them from behind his window. He saw the men arguing and gesticulating wildly while they walked off, quite excited and angry at his refusal.

Heinric expected the men to want to force access to the archives by other means, maybe by reaching and bribing one or other alderman of the city. Heinric therefore went immediately to the archives, found the two chests, and brought them one by one to his own office.

He hid them in his enormous cupboard, below, and he strayed other folders and old papers on top of them. He did not really know why he acted in this way. Maybe he did have some family sentiment after all, and maybe he feared the chests might contain something that could implicate members of his Pharaïldis families. Heinric wanted to open the chests later, find out for himself what might have interested two English merchants in them. Other events and matters, however, distracted him in the following days and months, so that he lost interest in the chests, then forgot about them, and they remained hidden in his cupboard.

In the following days, Heinric did receive questions from two different aldermen as to where the chests might had been brought to. Heinric only chuckled, and told the men he didn't know anything about James van Artevelde's chests, inviting the aldermen to look for the coffers when they wished to do so. The aldermen did not insist.

Heinric Vresele did mention the existence of chests with documents of James van Artevelde to a man he had more or less fraternised with lately, to a son of James called Philip van Artevelde. He called this man his friend, though he did not really know what he term meant.

Philip van Artevelde

Philip van Artevelde was born in 1340, as the fifth child in the family of James van Artevelde. He was called Philip after the name of the English Queen Philippa of Hainault, who was present at his baptism. Philip was the son of James's second wife, Catherine de Coster. When his father was murdered in Ghent, Philip was not yet five years old, so he had no recollection of his father. At the moment of the tragedy in Ghent, Philip was at sea, sailing to England with his mother and other relatives. They sailed up the Thames Stream to London, fleeing in exile and safety, sent there by his father. James van Artevelde had taken the precaution to send his children and his wife to safety in England. In Catherine de Coster's chests was

hidden a small fortune in gold coins, as well as papers with which she could appeal to Lombard bankers for much more gold. King Edward III also provided her with additional funds, so that the family could live decently in England.

Catherine de Coster had wanted to dedicate her son Philip to the Church. Whether that indeed happened or was begun in England but not finished, and whether that education of Philip continued a while after his return to Ghent in 1360, remains something of a mystery. Philip never wanted to talk about that period, even not to men such as Heinric Vresele or Peter van den Bossche, who were his closest collaborators. He never explained what had happened to him in the years of between 1345 and 1369, when he was finally and well settled in Ghent. That episode of his life may have been quite painful, for it was the only subject Philip refused categorically to talk about. He was not close to his mother, saw her little. Had he been destined to become a monk or a priest in England? Had the separation from his mother been early and traumatising when he entered an abbey of England? Had he been humbled and mistreated in England? Had he been chastised severely, whipped, and tortured, had he been abused of? We shall never know! What I did learn though, was that he knew Latin and Greek, and could cite all the stories of the Bible, as if he knew the book by heart. He also knew something of the ceremonies of the Church, the names of the saints and their days.

When Philip van Artevelde first met Heinric Vresele, we were into the mid 1370's. Philip was well established in Ghent as a trader and a landowner. He had inherited funds from his father and from his older brothers James and John, who had both died violently.

John was killed in 1365 in unclear circumstances, James in 1370. John had been killed in a brawl, James murdered in a dispute over land owned north of Ghent and near the Scheldt, near Weert and Bornem. James was killed traitorously by Walter de Mey, but also John van Merlaer was involved, and maybe John Panneberch.

Earlier on, John had revenged the murder of James van Artevelde by killing John de Scouteete, who had betrayed the former head captain of Ghent. John de Scouteete had lured James van Artevelde into town, telling he would be well received by the aldermen and the guilds of Ghent. Scouteete had assured James the Elder he could return peacefully to Ghent from Damme, and find safety. Nothing had been less the truth, and James had been murdered by the weavers. The murder of Scouteete had been perpetrated by James, and then atoned for, the '*zoengeld*' or atonement money paid.

When Philip's mother married the count's knight and Bailiff Zeger de Bornaige, Philip must also have felt abandoned and betrayed by her, maybe for the second time after she had abandoned him to the Church. Had he closed his heart entirely to feelings then? Was it around that time he had definitely left the Church to live on his own? Just how far had his education in the Church advanced? Had he been ordained a monk, a priest? He had remained a pious man after his return to Ghent!

I insistently interrogated Heinric Vresele on that subject of Philip van Artevelde. Heinric had to admit he did not know much about the man. Heinric was not someone to probe deeply into another man's feelings either, simply because he was not interested in such matters. He merely told me Philip van Artevelde never elaborated on what he had done in that period of before 1370, never answered questions when probed on that episode. But Heinric, I am sure, also never explored far. Talking about feelings and bad experiences was much out of boundaries both for Philip van Artevelde and for Heinric Vresele.

Philip van Artevelde, at thirty years of age, was a rather handsome man, not tall but well-formed. His features were harmonious and regular, his face angular and proud. He showed a

fine, strong head. He would probably have become a stocky man at a more advanced age. In character, he resembled much Heinric Vresele, which may have been why these two were so often seen together in the 1370's. They had it easy to walk and talk in symbiosis.

If they were true friends, which Heinric never truly acknowledged, because he didn't really care about the concept of friendship, it was because they were so similar in thoughts and in ideas on how to confront the world of Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde was even colder of heart than Heinric. Philip, I believe, had forged his attitude to the world entirely on his own, whereas Heinric had at least been exposed to the ideas of the Pharaïldis families.

Philip van Artevelde was far more easily ruthless. He too didn't care about how others felt. He seemed to have no sympathy whatever for others. I don't think he knew what remorse was, or what it meant to have a conscience. Philip was often impulsive in his deeds. He calculated less than Heinric, who still took honesty in account, and religious concepts of bad and good, so that Heinric often withheld Philip from doing rash things. Philip recognised this quality in Heinric.

Philip could lie and deceive without twisting an eye or a lip, his face always remaining impassive. A lie or a truth was the same to him, so even Heinric believed Philip didn't really know what scruples meant.

Like Heinric, Philip was quite satisfied to live on his own. Philip did not seek the company of girls. Heinric confided in me once Philip definitely preferred the company of men, whereas men were as indifferent as women to Heinric. Heinric declared these urges scandalous, but he wouldn't dwell more on that subject to me. He knew a lot more, I guessed, about Philip than he wanted me to know.

Philip van Artevelde was not extremely wealthy, but he was well-to-do, and quite successful in trade. He owned much property in Ghent and in the countryside. He lived in the complex of houses in the *Kalanderberg* where his father and family had lived. Like Heinric, he had few servants. Philip traded, as his father had done, and used many of his father's contacts. He traded in almost everything that Ghent needed, but mostly in consumables, in victuals, in food, in grain, vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and more seldom in cloth. Nevertheless, he could be engaged with others in large investments of the cloth trade. He was involved with quite a number of other traders. He invested in projects and lent money. He traded in wood, in peat, in wine, in fuller's clay, in dyes, in beer, and so on. He was a fine trader, in the best tradition of the van Arteveldes of Ghent.

Two obsessions dominated Philip's mind.

He sought revenge for the murder of his father and for the murder of his brothers, as well as for the bad fate befallen to his family. He wanted revenge on any man who had been an enemy of his family. He sought revenge for the harm done to his kin. The opposers had stood in the way of the rise of his family to total prominence, a fact he could never forgive. He called everybody who had opposed his family enemies, and enemies had to be pushed aside, and crushed. His family was not to be harassed, even if only by the slightest competition among traders of Ghent!

The second subject Philip always brought up to Heinric was his insatiable ambition, a sentiment Heinric did not share at all. Heinric was not extremely ambitious, not obsessively ambitious, whereas Philip definitely was all of that. Heinric was convinced he could not be harmed by the sickness of the plague, and not by his enemies in a pitched battle. He believed in these illusions with an utmost superstitious determination. In the same way, Philip van

Artevelde was convinced he was destined to great deeds, to government, to rule over others, to power in Ghent, as his father James had been head captain and the '*Beleeder der Stede*', the governor of the city. Philip wanted to play a similar predominant role in the government of Ghent. That was no less than his due! Philip had no idea how he could attain a significant position as ruler of Ghent, but such was the dream, the aim he laid out before Heinric from the very beginning they met. Heinric believed Philip wanted to surpass James van Artevelde in everything.

Philip van Artevelde realised he was too young in the 1370's to be called to the function of alderman soon, let alone to First Alderman of the *Keure*, the first man of the city. He also keenly realised his name was an obstacle for many people of Ghent, for the landowner-*poorters* in the first place, for all men who were followers of the count and the king. Van Artevelde was a dangerous name! It was a rebel name! Too many people in Ghent remained suspicious of Philip's name, confounding it with dominance and even with dictatorship. The name of van Artevelde was the best-known example of antagonism to the count of Flanders. Some people still regarded it as a synonym for the freedom and independence of the city, but these men were not in power.

Heinric Vresele and Philip van Artevelde had met during a banquet organised by the city. Philip had addressed Heinric with respect, agreeably, after which the two men had engaged in further conversation about the state of the city. They had arranged to see each other later, and these casual meetings rapidly became regular ones.

The relations between Heinric and Philip seemed odd to me, as any relationship of these two must have seemed strange to anyone who knew them a little. They were both loners and odd men, who did not particularly like the company of others. Still, they agreed well together. They could be seen drinking a beer in an inn, joking and laughing. They made long strolls along the quays of the Leie and the Scheldt, showing each other peculiar aspects of the city. Heinric and Philip had very different interests, the one a trader and the other a clerk, yet they continued to frequent each other and seemed to derive some pleasure from the encounters. They rarely invited the other to the privacy of their houses, arranging to meet in public places, in the grain and meat halls, in a particular inn of the *Hoogpoort*. From there they started their walks. In the 1370's, it seemed nevertheless the only person Philip van Artevelde was to some small degree intimate with, was Heinric Vresele.

Heinric Vresele was a man who left no issue unresolved. Matters unsolved turned in his mind, held him from sleep, bothered him, and itched him until he had discovered a solution. Heinric had made a habit of writing down on paper all the problems he had to solve in the next days. He was a meticulous man. In his office, sitting behind his table, he would grab his paper, start with the first line on his list and then scratch out the lines as he solved the points listed, until his entire list had been exhausted, found an answer and a solution to. Then, he would start a new list. This was the only way he kept the issues from bothering him all day. He handled one issue after the other, and concentrated on one issue only. Heinric made Philip's obsessions his own.

For Philip van Artevelde's wish to take revenge on the adversaries of his family, Heinric added these men would also have been adversaries of the Pharaïldis, Heinric asked one day innocently, 'on how many people would you like to take revenge on, Philip?'

'I don't know how many they are,' Philip answered, drawn out of his musings, 'but my father and brothers, and I, had and have many opponents!'

‘You should write down a list on paper,’ Heinric suggested. ‘The list will show you how you can handle the issue. By the way, these enemies must also indeed be enemies of my family.’ ‘I’ll do just that, Heinric, a good idea, yes, I should do that,’ Philip nodded. He looked at Heinric, and asked the fatal ‘can you help?’

Philip van Artevelde’s thirst for revenge may well have remained unfulfilled had Heinric Vresele not begun to address it systematically! But Philip and Heinric were in more than one aspect complementary!

Philip added in a begging tone, ‘you work at the archives of Ghent. You know many people. The *poorters* of Ghent could be interrogated as to who was an opponent to the cause of the Arteveldes and who not. Does there still exist a group of people who would applaud the return of a van Artevelde to prominence in the city?’

Heinric reflected on that proposal. Should he really become involved? His life had been rather boring, lately. Did he want to go through life this way, living for the unsatisfying administration of Ghent, or did he crave for an upheaval in his doings? He remembered James van Artevelde had been considered a good friend of the Pharaïldis families at one time, his enemies also the enemies of the Pharaïldis. Was it his duty to place the enemies and the opposers of the van Artevelde, also of the Pharaïldis, on one and the same inventory? The two men discussed how to go about assembling such a list.

‘There will be names on our list,’ Philip pondered, ‘of men who were outright enemies, who hated the van Arteveldes, and also names of men who were mere opposers of the regime, but who were probably not very active against our families. I propose we place a cross against the more dangerous men. The ones with crosses would deserve my worst revenge.’

Heinric was sceptical about Philip’s opportunity to exert his actual physical revenge, but he continued with the list.

Heinric Vresele worked for a month, and then came up with a first version. Philip van Artevelde would put crosses after the names of his worst enemies. Heinric insisted some comment was written behind the names, with a justification of their wrongdoings. Gradually, as Heinric and Philip asked questions to the people they knew, they added names. They found a new name plus justification sometimes only once a week, then one per month. They realised how varied the opinions and allegiances were, even within one family. One man might have been a fervent enemy of the van Arteveldes, but his brother and his offspring followers and sympathisers of the anti-count faction in the city. Families were as divided in opinions as the city was in its entirety. Heinric had to copy the list several times all over, taking notes of the family names, adding comments, adding first names of opposers, and the names of the most fervent opposers, and the reason why. It was a list of hatred, the hatred not often on the side of van Arteveldes or the Pharaïldis, but deserved. Not all of the families had members of some importance left in the city, for many people had died between 1345 and 1375. Nevertheless, the names of the extinct families were added to the list and the offspring tracked.

Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele declared themselves only satisfied with their list when the following names had been written down: Aper, Borluut, Damman, van Steenbeke, de Grutere, Denijs, van der Vloet, de Scouteete, Panneberch, van Contersvoorde, Speliaert, van Breebaert, Soyssone, Bette, Beys, de Mey, de Ruemere, de Schachtmaker, Mayhuus, Stocman, uten Dale, van Loevelde, van Zinghem, van Gavere, van Veurne, van Waes, van Bost, van Lovendegem, Wederic, van Vaernewijc, and Sloeve.

About three dozen names stood on the list. Somewhat more than a dozen names bore a cross. Among the worst names were thus indicated and commented: de Mey, van Merlaer,

Panneberch, Bette, de Grutere, Mayhuus, Sleepstaf, de Ruemere, Soyssone, uten Dale, and van Waes.

Out of sheer curiosity, Heinric Vresele also drew up a list of names of families who had been known sympathizers of the van Artevelde and of the Pharaïldis families. That list luckily seemed to be far longer! Philip van Artevelde was at first not interested at all in that second list. Later, the names were to be used, not to be taken revenge on, but to appeal to for assistance.

‘I am destined to become the ruler of Flanders, to be applauded as a brilliant leader, to be the chosen of God,’ Philip van Artevelde mused one day when Heinric and he sauntered along the Scheldt in the *Reep*, dressed in heavy cloaks for it was winter and very cold, in misty weather. Heinric had to smile mockingly at those words. He thought Philip had gone out of his mind. The idea only of being able to take actual revenge on the long inventory of names seemed extraordinary. Philip had delusions of grandeur! Philip seemed to look very seriously at Heinric, however, and then he peered back over the dark waters of the river.

‘I must have been born high,’ Philip continued.

‘What do you mean?’ Heinric asked, wondering what had suddenly come to the mind of his friend.

‘Am I really the son of my father?’ Philip wondered.

Heinric laughed out loud, ‘if not, whose son are you then? Everybody is the son of one’s father!’

Philip was piqued by Heinric’s doubt. He remarked the mocking grin on Heinric’s face. He turned away his eyes.

‘Why did my mother Catherine have to sail three times to far England on missions of Ghent? Have you ever heard of any other woman of Ghent being sent as ambassador to England? Had Ghent not many very capable men, knights too, supporters of my father, men fully able to fulfil such missions? Why did she have to talk directly to King Edward III? Edward III stayed in Ghent for several months before my birth. I was born at the right time after those months.’

Heinric’s mouth fell open of surprise. This was outrageous!

Philip paused.

‘On one of those missions, my mother did not find King Edward in London, not even in England, for he fought in Brittany. My mother sailed to Brittany to meet the king. She was caught in a storm and her vessel was shipwrecked. How many representatives would not have turned back and waited when they did not find the king and his court in London? The mission could not have been that important! Why did my mother have to sail in winter, when storms are particularly dangerous in the North Sea? Why did King Edward look so well after her and after us when James van Artevelde was killed? Why did my mother and her children receive fine lodgings in London on orders of the king? Why did my mother want to destine me to the Church? Was she ashamed of something? Was I not a child as any other? Why did my mother afterwards left us so often for residing at the court of the king at Westminster? Edward was a chivalrous king, but at that time, when her husband had been killed, my mother represented nothing anymore, nothing at all. What was Edward grateful for? King Edward III was a great womanizer. He had many mistresses! The court of England was not ruled by reasons of state when it came to choosing spouses and mistresses. Did not the former Prince Edward of Woodstock, the prince of Wales, marry his Joan of Kent? Could my mother have been the mistress of King Edward III?’

Heinric had listened intently, with growing astonishment. The possibility Catherine de Coster had been a mistress of Edward III was not to be rejected. King Edward III had liked his queen, Philippa of Hainault, but he had indeed enjoyed many mistresses while spawning sons and daughters on his queen. His last mistress was Alice Perrers, the mistress of his old age. Catherine de Coster was not an ugly woman, far from it, tall, good breasts, small waist, long legs, and an amiable face. How much stubbornness and what passion laid hidden behind that face?

Heinric had also apprehensions about Philip's preference for men. This inclination he thought more pronounced in Philip than in himself. Heinric had remarked they were both loners, men who liked being on their own, like Narcissus. Narcissus had admired his own image in the water and had drowned in it. Vanity and egocentricity were traits Heinric had detected in many men, especially in the aldermen of the city, and also clearly in Philip van Artevelde. Heinric had to admit he had detected the traits in his own character, but this realisation had made him more cautious, lest he be drowned in the admiration of his own face. Heinric sensed Philip van Artevelde might drown someday if he continued being unable to control himself. Heinric surmised he stood at one end of the measuring rod here, not preferring men more than women. Philip was perched at the other end, definitely preferring the flirting company of men. Heinric had seen Philip's eyes roam around the hall of inns, fleeing to the eyes of men Heinric would have avoided. Had he not heard persistent rumours King Edward II had been a lover of men, causing his Queen Isabella and her lover Lord Mortimer to imprison, depose and murder the king? Was it not said a long, hot-red iron had been shoved into Edward II to punish him for his sins of sodomy?

'Yes, yes,' Heinric concluded with a shock which left him a long while speechless. 'It is possible. What Philip is telling me might be truth. It is just possible. His conviction may be a delusion, however. Philip may be the son of James van Artevelde after all, albeit a weird one. There are no lovers of men in the Artevelde family. Philip may be right, but he may also be living a delusion! He may be inventing things and like believing he was a king's son!' Then, Heinric Vresele went pale in his face.

Why had two Englishmen arrived in his office lately? Why had they asked to see the private documents of James van Artevelde? Who had sent them? Were they really the merchants they had claimed to be, who had made business deals with Catherine de Coster? What if they knew something, or suspected something about the birth-right of Philip van Artevelde? Why had they been so insistent as to want to bribe him openly? A secret might lay hidden in the chests of James van Artevelde in the *Schepenhuis*!

Heinric was suddenly less sure Philip was only ranting. When a cow or a bull had fine qualities, you could preserve those in later breeding. The same could be the case with qualities of vice. What difference was there between the breeding of cows and bulls and the breeding of humans? Did not nobles seek noble women to marry? They rarely wedded common women, however beautiful and gentle. They took such women to bed as mistresses, not as spouses. How did sins and vices arrive in families? Could these be inherited? Maybe this peculiar vice of King Edward II had bred into Philip van Artevelde! The sudden insight shocked Heinric to silence. He walked, and thought on.

'Not much would be different,' Heinric refused after a while. 'If you were the bastard son of an English king, you would still be Philip van Artevelde. You would still be a *poorter* and a trader of Ghent. As far as I know, King Edward III has not recognised you as his son! You are Philip van Artevelde of Ghent, the son of James van Artevelde of Ghent. James did not reject you.'

‘Oh no, no, everything would be different,’ Philip protested. ‘I would need proof, but a son of a king receives royal titles in England. I would be a knight, an earl. My name would be Fitzroy! A son of a king is a man with divine rights. I have a duty to be worthy to my forefathers. What if I were borne with the destiny to rule over Flanders?’

Heinric’s mouth fell open once more. Philip was not satisfied with ruling over Ghent. Did he want to be *ruwaard*, regent of Flanders?

‘You should keep your calm,’ Heinric continued. ‘If you would publicly claim such descent, you might be quicker dead than knight! The *Leliaerts*, Count Louis of Male, as well as Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, maybe also the king of England’s sons, John of Gaunt one of them, might want your death earlier than you might think! Keep such beliefs for yourself. Better Philip van Artevelde alive than Philip Fitzroy of Gaunt dead and buried!’

‘Oh, I will,’ Philip answered, disappointed. ‘You are the only person in Ghent and in the world to know what I suspect. But don’t you grant I have a higher destiny than merely being a trader of Ghent? What do I do with my suspicions? I believe I can help my people of Flanders. Maybe God placed me in the womb of my mother to save Ghent. I believe I can help my people! We are engaged against the count, many of us. I just know I can help Ghent fight against the arrogance of Count Louis of Male. I might appeal to England! The court of England must know or suspect who I am, a prince of royal blood! Will they not see an opportunity there to send their armies to Flanders?’

‘You would still merely be a bastard son,’ Heinric threw in. ‘A bastard son is no prince. England may be embarrassed with the bastards of Edward III. I do not believe England wants to be involved in a new war on the continent. John of Gaunt is a prince in favour of peace. John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster, is the most influential man in England now, and I heard he wants peace. He will not allow the English armies to run to the aid of a supposed bastard son of his father. He too may well seek to eliminate you!’

‘You may be right, of course,’ Philip sighed sadly, ‘but I can yet lead Ghent! The name of van Artevelde must still mean a lot in Ghent, don’t you think? James van Artevelde called all the *poorters* of Ghent to the Bijloke Field to proclaim he had found a solution for the distress of the city. I can do that too! Ghent will not support much longer the dominance of Louis of Male. Then, I can come forward and tell Ghent needs a new leader. We can confirm our alliance with England. Could a bastard son of the legal king of England and France not rule over Flanders? A van Artevelde can once more call the *poorters* of Ghent to the Bijloke Field!’

Heinric Vresele smiled again. How naïve this Philip was!

‘Do you really believe James van Artevelde had nothing more to do than to come forward, shout he knew a solution to the distress of Ghent and be instantly followed and acclaimed by the weavers, the fullers, the guildsmen of Ghent, and even by more than half the aldermen, as well as by some of the better known knights of the city?’

Philip was surplussed.

‘Was that not what James van Artevelde did?’

‘Oh no it wasn’t, not at all!’ Heinric shook his head. ‘What James van Artevelde did had been carefully prepared for months, planned over an extensive period of time, by a group of men. The people of Ghent had been hearing for many months how grave and desperate their situation had become. Famine was harassing Flanders! A group of families, families I know very well, five of them at least, stood by James van Artevelde, advised him, and prepared the people of Ghent. The actions and the speeches of James van Artevelde had been carefully written beforehand, for the right moment. Even knights of Ghent knew what would be proposed in the Bijloke Field, and they had agreed that Ghent needed a leader, agreed with the

name! These men who brought James van Artevelde to power had formed a party in Ghent, a secret party, but a very effective party. The taking over of power in Ghent was the work of a group of men, not of one van Artevelde only!

Philip blanched, was surprised at first, but he listened intently to Heinric. Despair transformed into better hope.

‘I can form a party of my own too,’ he continued. ‘We two can do that! Don’t you want revenge on the enemies of your family too? We made that list of our enemies in Ghent. You wrote what those names did to us, not just to the van Arteveldes, but also to your family and to families you know. We can dress a second list, a list of the men that would be in favour of a new van Artevelde regime! We can defeat the count easily, for Ghent has ten times more men in its militia than the count can muster. Then, I’ll be triumphant! I’ll be called *ruwaard* of Flanders, and I’ll rule. Counts and dukes will treat me as they should, and a bastard son of Edward III will rule over Flanders as part of the English royal domains!’

Heinric whispered, ‘it is sheer madness, Philip! France won’t let you!’

But Philip had excitedly ran on, in front of Heinric, convinced of having seen his glorious destiny, as well as the means to realise it.

Philip van Artevelde began to look for people of influence in Ghent who satisfied his criteria of support. He and Heinric sought men who were very dissatisfied with the management of the city, wanted no count to diminish their freedom, disliked the arrogance of the knights and the lords of the county, preferred the king of England over the king of France, and remembered with agreeable nostalgia the hopes brought by the van Artevelde regime of the past.

When they had assembled about a dozen names, Heinric and Philip organised a meeting in a quiet corner of the city, in an inn where they hired a large room. For the first meeting, they invited men like Peter van den Bossche, Peter de Wintere, Francis Ackerman, Rasse van Herzele, Raes van de Voorde, William de Otter, James de Rijke, Lawrence de Maeck and Giles de Meulenaere. With these men, Philip van Artevelde only talked about his ideas and he exchanged opinions. Philip presented himself, for not all the men knew him well. He told he had organised this meeting solely to learn how they felt about the city. Other such meetings followed in the next weeks. More men, Lievin van den Erlge, Sanders van Vaernewijc, John Herman, Hector de Vos, William de Meyere, John Willaert, John van den Houte, Henry van Oudenaarde, Diederic Valke, John Rase and John de Hert – who was very far family of the shippers in the Pharaïldis group - participated. Heinric had feared the worst for these meetings, but he had to acknowledge Philip could lead them well, displayed a gentle charisma and was immediately accepted as a potential leader, even though at this moment he did not claim any leadership.

When a first few meetings had been held with about four dozen men, Philip van Artevelde invited everybody together to a banquet, organised in the same inn of the ‘Golden Drum’. The hosteller closed the inn for the day. These men formed a conspirational group of influential men with almost similar ideas on the government of Ghent. Many of them were weavers or men who were member of the weavers’ guild. They all opposed the arrogant rule of Count Louis of Male. They were all in favour of the independent government by *poorters* of the city, no intervention of the count tolerated. They rejected the count’s rule for their beloved city. They vowed for a city-state of the quarter of Ghent. If they had to choose for a sovereign, they would have preferred much more the English king than the actual king of France.

After the founding first meetings had thus been terminated, a small group of men met together to plan the taking over of the power of Ghent. These leading men were Philip van Artevelde, Heinric Vresele, Peter van den Bossche, Francis Ackerman, Raes van de Voorde and James de Rijke. Each of them held contact with a number of *poorters* of Ghent who were willing to move with them. The first mission they received was to prepare the public opinion of Ghent for their ideas. At each meeting, Heinric Vresele urged Philip van Artevelde to remain calm, to be clever, to be smart, to be patient, and to take time to manipulate the men by positive, persuasive arguments rather than by hollow slogans.

‘Do not force your figure too fast to the foreground,’ Heinric advised. ‘Wait until they come to ask you, instead of reaching out for power already now.’

Philip van Artevelde showed to these men he could be an intelligent, poised, conciliating leader, a charming man who sought consensus, never confrontation, and who could bring them to an agreed upon conclusion. Philip regulated the meetings, but he did not push his personality on them. The group recruited more followers to van Artevelde’s cause by the month, and with time the men came to accept Philip van Artevelde as their natural leader. They had a great name to draw their ideas on. Philip showed a natural authority that pleased them. They had a figure with Philip they could place in front of the count!

Chapter 3. The Revenge of Philip van Artevelde. 1381-1382

Antwerp

Greet van Noortkerke remained living a while with her husband on their farm of the village of the Clinge near the town of Hulst. Greet and I met in our small, hidden house of Hulst. The arrangement was not satisfactory, and we would no doubt soon be found out. I told her about my idea to have her leave Arent de Handscoemakere and move alone to a new home in Antwerp. Greet listened intently to me, did weep a little, a few tears appeared in her eyes, but then she told me she did not want to be the slave of any man. She wept, not because she was thinking of her husband, but because she thought I would hold her as a paid prostitute in Antwerp, buy her a house and support her entirely. I knew she would find that degrading, so I had to explain some more. I told her the second part of my proposal: to work, to become a trader and the head of the Pharaïldis trading post of Antwerp. The Domains branch of the Pharaïldis Consortium would pay her immediately for her work, but she could trade on her own with her hard-earned money. She could build out her own business. I would teach her. She made large eyes at that.

‘Are you serious, or out of your mind?’ she asked. ‘Do you really believe I could do such a thing? Do you think I am clever enough?’

‘Of course,’ I said, a little scandalised.

Why did Greet believe in herself less than I did?

‘I’ll teach you how to trade, but there is not much you need to know. You’re an intelligent woman. I know you. We’ll put people around you to keep the accounts, to write the letters, and I will tell you all there is to know about prices. You will have to use your head, find out which products to buy cheap and sell with profit. You will have to look for opportunities in lands to buy, good lands for pastures and fields and for building.’

On a fine morning of the summer of 1379, Greet van Noortkerke arrived not with a cart at Hulst, but merely seated on a horse. She had taken only a few clothes in a saddle-pack, behind her on her horse. We rode to Antwerp. I had made an arrangement with a widowed lady who lived near the Marketplace, to provide shelter for Greet. It was a temporary solution. I paid the money for her room and upkeep.

After Greet had met the widow, thrown her pack on the bed, I took her by the hand to show her where I wanted to build our trading post. I had found a large, open terrain near the Wharf, between the Wharf and the *Borchkerk*, the Castle Church of the large castle of Antwerp. The Wharf was a piece of land that entered the Scheldt, along which the main harbour of Antwerp was situated. This was the main quay where the largest sea-ships came to harbour. On the Wharf stood a large wooden crane to unload goods from the sea-cogs. It was possibly the liveliest part of town, situated within the walls, and the most interesting for trade. I wanted a post in the busiest neighbourhood, a good place for a trading post in victuals, not far from the Meat Hall, not far from the enormous Fish Sellers’ Tower, not far from the massive Saint John’s Gate, the entry by water to the interior of Antwerp. I had found an open place to buy, a little behind the Wharf, along a street that was large but a little more tranquil than the harbour. I thought I had arrived at the right time. I felt lucky to have been able to buy here, for soon this entire street would be filled with buildings, houses and stores. We could build in such a way that Greet could enjoy a view on the Scheldt from one side, a view on the busy Wharf from the other. While we stood there, Greet dazzled, I explained her.

I wanted not one but three buildings here, actually, and there was enough space to build wide! I would build a *steen* of bricks and stone for her to live in with her children. When I mentioned children Greet smiled. She was already pregnant by then, so we were right on time to leave, but she had not yet told somebody, not even me. She confessed her state a few hours later. Next to the house, but separate from it, I wanted the offices of the trading post proper, a large office for Greet, and rooms to meet traders, other rooms for her people to work in. A third building would hold the warehouse, the storeroom, which I wanted very spacious. The storerooms would continue on the second floor above the offices. We needed ample space to store the goods, I explained. There was place for a large gate, and for a separate alley to let the carts and wagons ride in conveniently. I wanted wagons to be able to drive right into the storerooms, or into a sheltered place, directly next to the warehouse. We would have to build grand, wide and high, even if the first years we would not need all that space. The Pharaïldis were out for rapid expansion! I explained to Greet whose money we were going to use: our own, plus the funds of the Pharaïldis consortium. She would have to keep both apart, speculate on lands for both separately.

Greet immediately proved she had remained alert! ‘A storehouse, yes, but where do we keep the wagons?’

‘Aha,’ I said proudly, ‘one or two wagons you can keep here, in the main storeroom. For the other carts and wagons, and for the horses, I bought another terrain a little farther down the street. We can build something light, but covered and closed, to place more wagons.’

Greet was already thinking as big as I!

I had seen great opportunities in Antwerp. How many times already had not the city already expanded beyond its walls in the last years? Antwerp organised magnificent markets, large yearly markets at Whitsuntide, the end of May, and on Saint Bavo’s Day, on the first of October. I had been astonished at how large and crowded those markets actually were. I had been thinking at how we could use the yearly markets to display a fine array of products, and discuss contracts with other merchants. Especially English and German traders seemed interested in Antwerp, so we could start our trade instantly. Greet spoke of making discreet contacts also with the chapter of the Church of Our Lady, which was the most important institution of the city. It was a place to meet the influential men of Antwerp. It was a fine idea!

I had looked around not only at the yearly, grand markets. Smaller markets were being held each day at Antwerp. I found more specialised sites. At the Church of Saint John, tapestries were being sold, a booming business, I remarked. Paintings began to be sold in large numbers in a hall of the abbey of the Franciscans. I was at first astonished at that, but so many new and fine houses were being built in Antwerp, that more decoration was needed. Paintings were less expensive than tapestries, and as decorative. Jewels were bought and sold on a terrain of the Dominican Friars. I could notice all the signs of the rapid increase of wealth in this town! There was also a fine Cloth Hall in Antwerp, and much cloth was woven, fulled, dyed, and being sold in the town. The tanners’ quarter of Antwerp had gained some importance.

We were not the only ones to have noticed the potential of Antwerp! The Church of Our Lady was being enlarged, and I could see large sums were being invested in the building. It would become a magnificent church. Men told me the towers would be very high. Such money invested meant wealthy sponsors, merchants and knights. There was money to be found in Antwerp!

I might have brought Greet to father-off Bergen-op-Zoom, which was at that time larger, and which lay nearer to the open sea, but Antwerp was situated closer to Ghent and to Brabant, regions that were more familiar to Greet and me.

Greet actually smiled with my dreams. She told me I saw palaces in the sky, but she too became serious when I told her we would create a lineage in Antwerp, a lineage of traders. We would have male children, who would be smart, and who would form a line of men called van Noortkerke after her name, or Terhagens, depending how fate would work for us. Our children would be bastards, we knew, for I didn't think it possible to declare void my marriage with Agneete, and also not Greet's marriage with Arent. I wasn't sure I could give my children my name. Greet didn't mind names. Names were not important. First names were, however, for patron saints had to protect our children. She began thinking about first names, and powerful saints. Our children would need powerful protectors.

It took us almost an entire year to build what we wanted. Greet looked more regularly at the works, and she scolded the masons and carpenters when they did not build how she wanted. Greet got her *steen*.

The trading post and the warehouses were built in wood. We opened a small gate from her house to the trading post, closed by two successive sturdy oak doors, so that she did not have to go out of her house, into the street, to go to her office.

We began to subtly change the looks of Greet, then. A fine barber cut her hair a little bit more than she was used to, and she learned to knot it most of the time behind her head, so that her white neck was free. She wore her head straighter and more proudly. A woman taught her how to put a little shade on her eyes and on her cheeks, how to redden her lips. Another woman prepared hats for her and caps. I took her to a shop that provided her with the finest tunics in Antwerp. I asked the women of the shop to dress her as a lady, promising to buy and outrageous number of dresses at once, pretending Greet was a traders' daughter. The women in the store noticed easily she was a farmer's wife. I was not a farmer, however, so they were polite and gentle with Greet when I opened a purse of golden coins and pointed to a same such purse Greet wore of her own. Her leather purse was as filled with golden coins as mine was. The girls showed Greet not only the finest of dresses. They told her how best to wear them, offered shoes that were splendid but discreet to go with the dresses, and stockings, and other women's stuff. They even promised to teach Greet how fine ladies walked in Antwerp. I waited, sitting on a chair at one end of the shop like a Pygmalion, while Greet and the other women worked on her at the other end. I paid.

Greet van Noortkerke did not stay doing nothing while we built. She gave birth to a first child, a girl we called Quintine after my mother, and was rapidly pregnant of another child. She roamed the streets of Antwerp, until she knew all the quarters by heart. She visited and studied the Meat hall, the Grain Hall, the Fish Hall, and made acquaintances with the merchants and stall-keepers. She pretended to be a merchant's widow of Ghent.

After only two months, she began asking what we could sell in Antwerp out of the Four Crafts. I smiled, told her, and said to her what I could bring to Antwerp, at what prices including transport. Even before her office was ready, she began selling our grain, vegetables, much fruit, peat, herring, salt, honey, milk and cheese and many more victuals from the countryside. We delivered to butchers, bakers, hostellers, and to other merchants of Antwerp. We tried selling beer, and that went reasonably well. We concentrated on new sellers who established novel businesses in Antwerp. I owned brick factories, so I proposed her to find someone we could sell bricks to. She learned to know all the masons of Antwerp. The widow

she lived with gave her a room downstairs, and Greet began to sell! She befriended the widow, a joyous woman. Greet used the knowledge of that lady, a woman born in Antwerp, to make connections with merchants.

The widow entered the game. Her cheeks reddened, and she became some sort of associate to Greet. The trading house came to be known as the house of the two widows. At one time, when our buildings at the wharf were almost ready, I was pushed aside when the two women ran into the house, papers already stacked everywhere, shouting prices to each other and names of people to contact. The two widows were born merchants, it seemed. I thanked God my intuition had not left me. Greet was a fine trader, and she seemed to enjoy it. So did her friend. The trading post came to be known as ‘The Two Widows’.

We talked a lot about how Greet would call herself in Antwerp. A widow she was already. Our constant fear was that Arent de Handscoemakere would find out where she hid. I considered myself rather a coward when it came to physical violence. I did not like aggressiveness and brutalities. Arent had been a good friend at New Terhagen. Why could I not just go up to him and explain. I had not really wanted to fall in love with Greet. It had simply happened. Would Arent not understand, could we not agree on some understanding, some compensation maybe? No, decided Greet, never would Arent agree! He had become a very violent man, very embittered about Greet and about his marriage, dissatisfied with his fate. He had hit her. He had hit her hard. Arent was not of the forgiving kind.

We continued hiding Greet as another kind of woman entirely. I proposed her to use the name of Vresele, of Terhagen, or even of Vitry, but we finally remained with Noortkerk, shortening the name a little. Many people of Antwerp called her conveniently ‘Greet of the Two Widows’. We avoided embarrassing questions from the Pharaïldis that way, for another trading post, set up by our Investment branch, was being organised at the Saint John’s Gate, near a smaller inner harbour of Antwerp. It was the name Noortkerk that would live on in Antwerp! I still hoped ever to be able to legitimise my children, but we didn’t bring up that subject often. These were subjects we forced to the outmost corners of our mind. We enjoyed being happy while we could.

The moment came when Greet Noortkerk, the widow of Antwerp, could move to her new house and buildings. We offered a grand feast for the opening of our trading post, inviting also aldermen of Antwerp and other merchants to a great banquet. Many of these people thought I was a relative of Greet. A few of course guessed I was her lover, the lover of the famously beautiful, alluring Widow Noortkerk. Some called me Mer Noortkerk. I didn’t mind, I did not correct them. I would remain in the shadows. The men who really knew, didn’t seem to care either.

I had to explain to the Pharaïldis Committee who led our trading post. Boudin van Lake had founded the offices in Antwerp of the Investments branch. His offices were situated near the Saint John’s Gate, and I was sure he knew already what was going on between me and Greet. He was a very discreet man. He not only knew where my trading post was being stamped out of the earth, he also knew who led it, and had put two and two together. He knew who Greet Noortkerk was, had met her often enough, and he knew to whom she was married. I spoke with Boudin van Lake, explained with sad eyes what had happened. He listened to me, didn’t say a word. It was the most I could expect.

I announced to the Pharaïldis patriarchs what person I had placed at the head of our Antwerp post for farm products and other victuals. Many eyes looked at me, sharp, probing eyes. Mouths grinned. Eyebrows went up and foreheads frowned. Adultery was not accepted in the founding rules of the Pharaïldis Consortium, and they too doubted not a second what had

really happened between Greet and me, even though I did not tell them in any words my true relationships with Greet. The men scrutinised me, and then they began asking me hard questions about the competences of a woman in trade. I answered, provided them with figures, listed them our contracts, and expressed my confidence in somebody I had known from youth. I did not have to explain further. Of course, they suspected strongly Greet and I were lovers. They assumed Greet's marriage was wrecked on the cliffs, but they did not comment. I guess that was some discreet form of forgiveness. I think they liked me too much to dismiss me there and then. I reddened like an overripe apple from my orchards in the Land of Waas, but they avoided speaking about all matters of the heart.

I knew and the Pharaïldis men knew that if Greet van Noortkerke did not deliver results, some decision would be made after a few months to oust her out. If Greet did not come up with fine figures of profits, we would be relegated to minor positions in the Pharaïldis Consortium, or to the management of merely our own, personal fortune. One of the patriarchs would come to have a polite, sympathetic chat with me, and I would be replaced by somebody else from the family. So far, though, Greet and I brought in fine profits.

I explained in many words I was very confident Antwerp would prove a fine investment opportunity. The city was becoming a fast growing city of commerce, where we would find sufficient people to trade our products with, and in which we found ways of importing new, unknown products from far countries. In other words, we were expanding our trade, and doing well. The pressure on me was enormous at that meeting, but I jumped over the river and touched the banks with my heels. The Pharaïldis men smiled. Every group of families should admit one satyr in their midst, hoping not more would come.

I understood their worries. Our trade in the Investment branch was not faring well because of the blockade of Ghent and the conflict with the count. At the same time, I came with the proposal to place a woman at the head of our trading post in Antwerp, a risky move to say the least. I appreciated the patriarchs when they gave me their confidence. I needed Greet in Antwerp and she would have to prove successful. The Pharaïldis men needed me too, for at that moment our profits only came from the Domains branch, and they knew expansion of that business was very important for our future.

I held strong in my faith in Greet Noortkerk of the 'Two Widows' trading house. She too understood how important those first months were after our opening of the post, how important it was to prove herself capable. Contrary to me, she also had a house with children to take care of. The widow, her friend, helped her a lot, and she was smiling too, because she was getting richer by the day, and liking her way of living. She told us she had been dying of boredom after her husband's death.

When I remarked to Greet how many English and German traders came to Antwerp, she hired men to teach her the languages. She wanted to speak to the foreign traders in their own language. She told me she needed the languages to be polite to the nicest among the foreign traders, and to be sufficiently cunning to those who would try to deceive her.

Greet entirely immersed herself very quickly into the world of commerce of Antwerp. She proved me her intelligence and cleverness, more than I had expected. More sharks swam in the city of Antwerp than in the Scheldt, but she avoided those, or taught them a lesson. I did have a nice star somewhere in the heavens, I supposed. I hoped she could keep her efforts up, and I admired her for her work. She astonished me beyond expectations! I could scarcely believe everything ran so smoothly for us.

Antwerp, like Ghent, was a devout town. Its *poorters* spent much money to the churches and abbeys and hospitals, as was appropriate. Passion plays were often staged in the Marketplace.

Anybody who had eyes could observe money was streaming into Antwerp with the waters of the Scheldt, which were particularly wide, vast, and impressive here. The *poorters* of Antwerp were good-hearted, joyous, boisterous, quite a sympathetic bunch.

Antwerp was a walled city, a quite safe place, and beyond the walls ran broad waterways. The defences of the towns consisted not only of the high walls, lined with towers, but all around the city ran the '*ruien*', an immense moat filled with water of the Scheldt. The walls roughly formed a half circle, with a diameter that was the Scheldt. The stream was equally lined with walls and towers. The towers and the gates were powerful, the *ruien* deep. Behind the grand Saint John's gate lay an inner harbour, small, but extremely well protected.

A waterway ran from this harbour to the other side of the walls, cutting Antwerp in two, but many bridges and streets had been built over this canal, so that it could hardly be used for transport over water, except for the smaller, flat-bottom boats. Some of the other waterways that had ever penetrated the city had been filled up with earth and been dried out. The main harbour of the city lay around the Wharf, but all along the Scheldt one could see the large sea-cogs moored, and great activity of fishermen and traders. The harbour of Antwerp had been ejected from the city. Around the city lay fertile polders, from which grain and vegetables were brought in, but not in large quantities. Antwerp was growing rapidly, the houses bursting out of the walls and out of the *ruien*. Life was good in Antwerp. The ancient lineages had not acquired the arrogance of the Ghent knights. The solidarity among the merchants was still great, as of a society that had just been born and was only now realising it could make gold of its position on the wide stream.

The situation in Ghent, the most prestigious city after Bruges, but competing with Bruges on other terms, was far from rosy. Antwerp was growing fast, money streamed into the city. Ghent was slowly starving and dying! People continued to flee from our city, its population dwindled. The blockade of Ghent became harsher every day. Count Louis of Male kept many roads closed for transport, seized all goods from Ghent that tried to break the isolation. Louis of Male had to do this to subjugate our city, but he was also killing a great deal of the wealth of Flanders in the effort.

Sufficient food could be brought into Ghent over the roads that had been kept open by our militia, mainly the roads from the Four Crafts and Brabant, but foreign merchants avoided the city. Trade was difficult. If money flowed into Antwerp, it flowed out of Ghent!

People fled from Ghent, weavers and fullers alike. The most energetic, dynamic, lively blood seeped out. The population did not grow. Children were born, but as many people departed from the city for Brabant, Hainault and England. Except for the closure of the main roads by bands of the count's men-at-arms, the war had stalled. The war crept insidiously on Ghent, and slowly strangled our beautiful city!

The Pharaïldis men still kept a good insight into the finances of the count. We realised Louis of Male would at that moment not attack Ghent massively, because he did not have the funds necessary to do so. The men-at-arms he had to keep in the field against Ghent exhausted his resources. Ghent and the count stood at a stalemate!

Ghent seemed entirely on the defensive, but the city felt far from defeated. The aldermen acted on the old fame.

In May of 1381, a large force of militiamen of Ghent marched westward out of the city. The captains of Ghent and about five thousand men tried to open the roads to Deinze and Kortrijk, the heart of Flanders, maybe also wanting to surprise Bruges. A somewhat stronger army of the count surprised the militiamen. The army of the count was an army of knights, an army of battle-hardened men in army and armour, troops of very heavy, feared cavalry. The knights were led by excellent war lords. The militiamen of Ghent saw the knights attack. They could

form stout rows, and they planted their *goedendags* firmly in the earth. They too were led by fine war leaders, among them Rasse, the lord of Herzele. Rasse, though a knight, had remained loyal to the government of Ghent. The militiamen of Ghent stood their ground, but strong defensive positions seemed not to have the strength they had in former times. The knights of Louis of Male overran the *Gentenaars*, broke through the defensive phalanx and routed the *Gentenaars*. Very many militiamen, artisans of Ghent, were killed in this battle, given not far from the city, at the village of Nevele. The Battle of Nevele was a fearful debacle for our city, and a terrible massacre.

Rasse van Herzele, our indispensable knight and leader, was killed. His uncle, Zeger or Shier van Herzele took the title. The lords of Louis of Male sought as much revenge on rebellious Ghent as they could get. Another Ghent leader, John de Lannoy, fled with a large number of warriors into the church of Nevele, hoping the count's men would spare him and not destroy the church. The count's knights put fire to the building, ignoring the entreaties of the priests who showed the Holy Cross from out of the large doors. The church was burnt down, and all the men inside killed in the fire.

Peter van den Bossche, always better in defeat than in victory, could re-assemble the guildsmen into some kind of organised body that marched together, in good order, back to Ghent. He avoided being assaulted once more. He brought the defeated and discouraged craftsmen back within the walls of Ghent.

Count Louis of Male then continued his very subversive war with Ghent. In February of 1381, when our business in Antwerp was fast growing, he ordered to seize all the goods of Ghent in the towns of Flanders. Ghent reacted with cries of outrage. Boudin Vresele complained bitterly about what Louis of Male had done to the Pharaïldis Consortium. It was truly an inconsiderate act of war, a dark revenge. For the first time, the Pharaïldis families lost much money in that spring, as also our goods and wagons were taken. Antwerp remained relatively spared. The city was part of the county of Flanders, but the presence of the power of the count was felt less oppressively. Antwerp had no tradition of direct obeisance to the count. One talked little in the town about the count's changed rule. The aldermen only respected the measures when somebody pointed out goods and properties originated from Ghent. Nobody harassed the Two Widows, and also the offices of Boudin van Lake remained untouched and continued to work as before. We were grateful.

The answer of Ghent came with the reviving of its alliance with Ieper, and with the organisation of yet another army of craftsmen. In the Kouter and on the Bijloke Field, the training of the young men continued unabated. More than ever, Ghent prepared for other confrontations with the count. Louis of Male had extremely disappointed our *poorters*.

In July of 1381, new negotiations started at Oedelem between Ghent and the count. The parley could begin anew because of the mediation of the count of Hainault. Almost one hundred negotiators from Ghent discussed one point after the other with the representatives of the court of Louis of Male. The discussions were eased because Ghent also sent knights of the old lineages to confront the count, people like Simon Bette and Gilbert de Grutere. The head captain of the city at that moment was Giles de Meulenaere. He too participated.

The negotiation led to nothing, for the two parties remained stubbornly to their own views. Count Louis of Male wanted the total surrender of the city and the punishment of all leaders of the revolt. We knew what that meant! No amnesty would result in hundreds of our *poorters*, aldermen, captains, leaders, and deans of the guilds to be hanged or decapitated. Ghent demanded full amnesty and the oath of the count to guarantee the freedom charters of the city. Too much hatred, resentment and thirst of vengeance hung between our city and the

count. We, the Pharaïldis men, thought with bitterness how the once so idealistic young man Louis of Male, who had wanted so much good for his people, now only wanted to destroy us, humiliate us, crush us, and kill us. Louis of Male had finally shown himself a worse monster than Louis of Nevers, his father. The Pharaïldis men did not ask further meetings with him at Beostenblijje, but actually, we also organised fewer and fewer meetings of our families. Our mood was sad and depressed. It seemed we were all waiting for some extraordinary event to change the course of our beloved city.

The events of January 1382 in Ghent

In the summer of 1381, the tensions among the political factions in Ghent rose further. Gangs of the various groups of differing opinions, roamed in the streets. Bands of men of the landowner-*poorters* and knights of the city were seen to walk openly with swords hanging on their side. The White Hoods ostentatiously patrolled in tight ranks and in arms and mail. Groups of militiamen of the guilds marched on and off to the walls, in arms and armour. Other group of *poorters* went through the streets unarmed, but with knives almost as long as swords on their belt.

The knights of Ghent resented the military power of the guilds, which in these times of war resulted in real political power. The captains ruled in effect over the city, though the aldermen still met regularly. Representatives of the city held endless and seemingly fruitless negotiations with the count. The aldermen hoped yet to reach an honorary agreement for a peace declaration. Simon Bette and Gilbert de Grutere, rich landowner-*poorters* and knights both, were the most prominent men to lead these negotiations for Ghent.

At the very beginning of January of 1382, the alderman Simon van Vaernewijck accused the dean of the weavers, Francis Ackerman, of not having presented the accounts of the income and expenditures for seven villages around Dendermonde. Ackerman had been assigned by Ghent as one of the four captains of the parishes. Van Vaernewijck accused Ackerman of having stolen money that was due to Ghent. This happened during a session of the aldermen in the *Schepenhuis*. Simon van Vaernewijck was a landowner-*poorter* of a well-known old lineage of Ghent, a man from one of the most well-known families of aldermen. Van Vaernewijck lived in the neighbourhood of many well-to-do shippers, and he traded as a broker for many shippers of Ghent. Ackerman denied, of course, but the accusations held.

Francis Ackerman went wild with anger, drew his sword and jumped to assault Simon van Vaernewijck. Shippers in the hall sprang between Ackerman and van Vaernewijck to hold them off from doing each other physical harm. Van Vaernewijck went blank in the face. He was not too courageous a man, especially not in face of energetic violence. Together with some of his friends, he returned to his house. He told several men on the way home he knew of at least one other man who wanted to kill him. A faction of *Gentenaars* wanted him dead, he whispered, in order to destroy all hope on peace with the count. Pressed by his friends, he gave the name of Giles de Meulenaere, the city lawyer.

De Meulenaere had indeed not been a man in favour of the peace with the count. He attended the meetings organised by Heinric Vresele and Philip van Artevelde. He ran the hard course, claiming Ghent had to be defended with arms against the count. He did not want to see the count's men inside the city, not before Count Louis of Male had sworn to general amnesty for everybody in Ghent, and not before the count had sworn to uphold the freedoms of the city. Van Vaernewijck reproached de Meulenaere for being one who prevented the peace to be

settled for Ghent. De Meulenaere shouted to van Vaernewijck the knights of Ghent would rather surrender the *poorters* to the count, without guarantees, than defend the city. This was an accusation of treason against the current regime.

The next days, Simon van Vaernewijck recovered his courage. On the second of January, Simon ran with a crowd of supporters to the *Schepenhuis*. He found de Meulenaere in the *Schepenhuis*, also called *Thoochhuis*. From outside, the men shouted the lawyer Giles de Meulenaere should come down to them.

Simon van Vaernewijck had by then gathered quite a crowd with him, who were shouting loudly, ‘respect for the Law! Respect for the *Keure!*’

Giles de Meulenaere was frightened. He refused to come out of the *Thoochhuis*. He was afraid of the angry people, knew he would be taken and maybe killed, whatever he said to his defence. The crowd then broke through the gates of the building, and ran to the hall where Giles de Meulenaere was waiting. Giles was out of wits from fear. He offered no resistance, was grabbed, and stabbed many times by the long knives of the fiercest men. De Meulenaere had been thrown on the floor. He groped for his breast, but yet other men used this gesture to thrust ruthlessly at the throat of the lawyer. De Meulenaere sank entirely to the floors, and spread his arms. The crowd then threw his lifeless body out of the windows.

He did not hear anymore the men upstairs shouting, mocking, ‘the lawyer de Meulenaere has finally decided to come down!’

While these events happened, the crowd that accompanied Simon van Vaernewijck had taken prisoner two men who had been conferring with de Meulenaere in the *Schepenhuis*. The aldermen had these men be tortured to prove the allegations of van Vaernewijck. The aldermen wanted dearly to prove the negotiations with the count had been hindered by men who talked and acted against the peace. Under torture, the men confessed they had worked against the peace parleys. They also named James de Rijke, Peter van den Bossche and Francis Ackerman as their accomplices. The men had been tortured to death after having confessed these terrible accusations.

The murder of Lawyer de Meulenaere and the accusations brought against other men were differently interpreted in Ghent!

The guilds regarded the killing and the imminent sentence of the aldermen as one more sign of the contempt held by the men of the old lineages for the common men, for the guilds. The guildsmen feared the landowner-*poorters* would cause an uprising within the city, open the gates to the men-at-arms of the count, and grab power. At that time, both in Bruges and in Ieper, the old lineages had succeeded in taking over the power in these cities.

The knights had been seeking some kind of understanding with the guilds and the captains, which might have led to reconciliations with the count. They realised their chances on that peace had been shattered by Simon van Vaernewijck, for the chasm between them and the guildsmen had now widened instead of being narrowed. Many of the landowners had marked their disapproval at the murder of the lawyer, even though he had been opposing their cause. After the election of August of 1381, James de Rijke had been elected as dean of the landowners. Francis Ackerman was dean of the weavers, and Peter van den Bossche overdean of the small guilds.

During a subsequent session of the aldermen, the weavers, still very powerful in the city, denied that the three murdered men mentioned had hindered in any way the peace efforts. In another session, the weavers refused to let any bodily harm come to James de Rijke, Francis

Ackerman and Peter van den Bossche. A crowd shouted loudly outside the *Schepenhuis* they wanted vengeance for the death of Lawyer de Meulenaere.

Two factions, of the weavers and of the shippers – these last supporting van Vaernewijck – fought bitterly in the *Kammerstraat* over the murder and the accusations. It was only a fight of fists. The aldermen intervened. No one was killed. The fighting men, however, also hit the aldermen. The aldermen received a few blows, but nobody got killed.

The aldermen then tried to keep the peace in the city by holding an urgent, short meeting in the Church of Saint John. They wanted everybody to return peacefully to their homes with Peter van den Bossche, who also tried to appease the tension. The men present nevertheless continued to cry vengeance for the death of de Meulenaere. They demanded punishment for the murder of the city lawyer. The aldermen immediately held a new meeting, and agreed to call Simon van Vaernewijck and four other men, who they held responsible for the murder, to justify themselves. The conflict between de Meulenaere and van Vaernewijck was considered as a dispute among two men, so the bailiff did not intervene to arrest van Vaernewijck. The weavers did not want to hear of any sentence against Francis Ackerman. The aldermen of Ghent merely sentenced Simon van Vaernewijck to lifetime banishment from Ghent. Peter van den Bossche had been briefly imprisoned during this van Vaernewijck episode. Heinric Vresele and Philip van Artevelde used the influence of the men who worked with them to release the man. He was one of theirs. Peter van den Bossche was indeed released a few days later, and confirmed in his function of overdean of the small guilds.

These events also troubled the negotiations with the count, which were being pursued at Oedelem. The peace negotiations continued. They were somewhat later continued at Harelbeke, near the town of Kortrijk. Ghent sent twelve representatives, among whom once more Simon Bette and Gilbert de Grutere.

At the end of December 1381, the aldermen had also installed a special commission of six men. This commission was to sell property confiscated from exiled men who were opponents of the current regime in Ghent. The six commissioners were John Raes, Goswin Mulaert, a landowner, Walter van den Vivere, a baker, Giles Theys, a draper, and Peter van den Broucke, a shipwright. Also Philip van Artevelde was appointed to this commission. Later still John van den Bijle, a brewer, was assigned to it. Mullaert and van den Vivere had been captains in 1381.

For the first time, Philip van Artevelde was called to a public office as commissioner of this group! Many eyebrows went up at the news a son of the great but dangerous James van Artevelde had been called to prominence. The landowner-*poorters*, the knights and the *Leliaerts* balked. Philip met Peter van den Broucke, and was invited several times to his house. He saw Peter's sister serve, a girl called Yolande or Lente van den Broucke.

The war effort had begun to weigh heavily on the wealthy *poorters* of Ghent. They paid the highest taxes to the city. The *poorters* grumbled. Taxes went up, prices tumbled, and goods remained unsold. The determination of the richer traders to continue the conflict with the count wavered. The guildsmen also despaired. The service of defence of the walls cost them dearly in tough times. The poorer fullers and the mob of Ghent shouted they wanted grain and reasonable prices for meat, fish, vegetables, bread, and everything else. Prices could not be lowered, for Ghent had to get its victuals from the Four Crafts and from Brabant, mostly over the land in expensive transport. Insufficient quantities could be brought in. The fortress of Dendermonde was back in the hands of the count, so provisions from over the Scheldt were perilous to transport to Ghent. The land route from Brabant over Aalst could easily be attacked by bands of roaming knights, and transport over land was costly.

In mid-January, clergymen arrived at Ghent with an ultimatum from the court of Louis of Male. The message stated that if the aldermen and deans of Ghent did not accept the latest conditions defined by the court for a peace agreement, and if Ghent still refused to offer hostages as guarantee, then no peace would be forthcoming at all, and the war would be continued with all might.

Peter van den Bossche, overdean of the small guilds, the guild that was regarded the most important of the city, began to consider the possibility of bringing Philip van Artevelde to the front rank in Ghent. He talked of that proposal in a meeting with Heinric Vresele and Philip van Artevelde.

Peter van den Bossche had gotten scared with the responsibility of leading the war against the count all alone. He knew the city was weakened in her captains and militiamen. Ghent was the only city in Flanders to withstand the count. It was isolated in politics and in power, deserted by her allies. Peter sensed the most influential people of the city, the landowner-poorters and the wealthier merchants, began to tire of the efforts the war demanded. These men might soon give up on the war and urge to surrender the city to the count.

Peter van den Bossche was convinced that if a peace were concluded, he and his friends who currently wielded power in Ghent, would not be saved. He would be executed! And he would probably be horribly mutilated under torture. The count of Flanders would take terrible vengeance on him. Peter shied away from the responsibility of governing Ghent on his own. He had not sufficient natural and gained authority, not enough knowledge of politics and power to govern, no taste for intrigues or for how to counter them. Van den Bossche did not wish to be burdened with the principal command, however much face, gravitas and fame it might bring for him. He turned to Philip van Artevelde.

Philip van Artevelde could be made the greatest man of Ghent and of Flanders! Philip would be pushed into the forefront, and on him would fall the worst of the count's wrath. Van den Bossche might even lean into the shadows of power, profit from it but not wield it.

'The time could be ripe for a grab of power, indeed,' was the advice of Heinric Vresele. 'Ghent needs some form of superior authority. In the absence of a head captain who holds the *Beleed der Stede*, Ghent runs the risk of having the old lineages surge to command and from a deleterious agreement with the count, which may well cost us all our heads. The landowner-poorters and the knights of the city still dominate the aldermen. They may well force the government of the city to take very favourable measures for the count. They may even command the militia to open the gates for Louis of Male's troops. We would have to face treason from within. Yes, Ghent needs a man of authority over the city, a *'Beleeder der Stede.'*

'The circumstances are difficult,' Philip van Artevelde hesitated. 'We are isolated. Bruges and Ieper have governments that do not support what happens in Ghent. Ieper started the war over issues of Ghent, not really of Ieper. The wealthier *poorters* there have been working much on the mind of the guildsmen. They said things like, "why would we have to wage a war over the interests of Ghent?" They urge the guilds of Ieper to caution and to passivity in the war. We must not count on either Bruges or Ieper.'

'All true,' Peter van den Bossche agreed. 'All the more reason to act now! If we wait too long, we may lose support in Ghent too. The war has begun to hurt everybody. We must act now.' 'How de go about it?' Heinric asked as a rhetorical question.

Heinric had already formed a plan of action stages for how Philip could be brought to power, but he wanted to know how the other two felt about the matter. Philip could just not jump forward and shout, 'I'll be your saviour!'

The urge to want a leader in Ghent should first be instilled in the minds of the *Gentenaars*! A need should be created for the guildsmen to appeal to Philip as their saviour. Philip van Artevelde should be asked to come to power, almost in the same way his father, James van Artevelde, had been called to come forward by the guilds.

Philip van Artevelde said nothing. Heinric saw he was already inebriated by the power that would come to his person. His face stood in a strange rictus, as if he had plans of his own, but was not willing to divulge anything to Heinric and to Peter. Heinric feared a moment Philip might double-cross them.

‘We should call a meeting in the Friday Market, the largest square in the *kuipe* of Ghent,’ Peter van den Bossche explained his plan. ‘The aldermen should participate in this meeting, also the deans, all the deans, not just I, the overdean of the small guilds. All the deans should come. Also the clerks of the city, the captains, a number of prominent men, the abbots and the main priests of the parishes. We can arrange for many men to gather in the Friday Market and in the side streets, most of them in arms. I thought of the following.

Heinric is a fine writer of speeches. Heinric could write us a letter, which we can say has been sent by an anonymous person. The letter must state in simple words that Ghent should have a new leader, a man of authority, to lead us in the war with the count. It should say that Ghent can only be saved by a man of the breed of James van Artevelde, who solved the misery of the city many years ago. We need a saviour! We need a leader! Who better to bring us to success than James’s son, Philip van Artevelde? Is that not a sufficiently prestigious name? Were the times of James van Artevelde not good times, when trade flourished and peace set in, though the count was still ferociously positioned against Ghent?

We read that letter in the Friday Market. We see to it by our supporters that Philip receives an applause in the Friday Market, and is called upon to lead the government of the city as *Beleeder der Stede*! Philip can then bring order in the town, do away with the men and the factions that resist our aims and views. We aim for an independent Ghent that needs no count to be governed by, and we re-institute the government of the three cities with their three quarters, the three members of Flanders!’

‘We can position our people among the crowd,’ Heinric proposed. ‘They must shout for Philip. The others in the crowd will follow. If necessary, we can pay a few of those men. We create a mob to shout for Philip van Artevelde.’

‘We can do all that,’ van den Bossche grinned. ‘Let’s do it all, call on our men to support Philip after I deliver the speech and produce the letter in his favour.’

‘Philip must not be seen at the start of that meeting,’ Heinric warned. ‘It would be too obvious if he were present when the letter is read. We must pretend he was not even aware the people called on him. We must do as with James van Artevelde, when James came to power. The people ran to James. James was not in their midst, but he was expecting them.’

‘We also must be quick, now. We cannot take the crowd to the *Kalanderberg*. The people may hesitate while going that far. Other men may use the duration to change minds,’ van den Bossche worried.

‘I go to a bathhouse in the environs of the Friday Market,’ Philip van Artevelde suggested, solving the matter. ‘I can wait until a few men came to fetch me. I shall be waiting in the entry hall, not inside the baths.’

The conspirators discussed about this procedure a little more, refining it. Heinric declared himself willing to write a letter as was needed. He found the procedure a bit strange, a letter by an anonymous sender! But the trick might just work. He asked for some time to think about the exact wording of the letter.

The three men decided as the day of the assembly in the Friday Market to be Saint Paul's eve of the twenty-fourth of January, 1382, a Thursday.

The Meeting in the Friday Market

On the day agreed upon by the conspirators and Philip van Artevelde, a large crowd gradually gathered in the freezing cold of the Friday Market. A dry eastern wind had cooled the city and whitened with frost the roofs of the houses. The sky was very dry, and of the deepest blue. Peter van den Bossche waited, enveloped in furs, at the same balcony from which not so long ago Count Louis of Male had addressed the *Gentenaars*. Around him stood friends and guards.

When sufficient men had gathered to a large audience, Peter van den Bossche opened his arms to silence the crowd, and he began to speak, shouting over the heads of the men. 'Good people of Ghent, friends, we are assembled to talk about our present issues. We are engaged in a cruel conflict with Count Louis of Male. As you know, the count threatens us with ruin if we don't give in to his malevolent and greedy will. He wants Ghent to deliver him hostages, who no doubt will be executed as soon as he can lay his hands on them. He murdered in the same way hundreds of *poorters* in Ieper, and before that in other towns. By surrendering to the count, we would lose all our freedoms, and our justice. Our proud city would be the slave of a despot. We have, however, received a letter at the city of Ghent, which proposes an alternative solution for slavery. I feel I have to read this letter to you.'

Peter van den Bossche paused, letting the tension and expectancy of the people grow. He appealed to their curiosity. He opened a parchment with wide gestures for everybody to see, held the document high, and began to read.

'To the good people of Ghent. My dear fellowmen, I send you this letter because the city of Ghent is in great peril. The people of Ghent are not united to confront the danger of Count Louis of Male. The count desires eagerly to submit the *poorters* of Flanders to his person in absolute power. Ghent is the only remaining city of Flanders still to fight for her freedoms. The city is divided among people of very many various opinions, and in doing so she is weak. A strong, united city is needed to confront the lords of Flanders. Ghent is in need of a leader to whom all ranks of people can lend their voices and arms, and call him their saviour. Ghent is in want of such a man who can form alliances with authority, within the city and within Flanders, and also abroad.

There exists in Ghent only one man who can lead us, the good *poorters* of Ghent, to victory in war. There exists only one man who can unite us to a common cause. The name of that man is well known in our city, and we should thank God such a man still lives. His father and his family were loved in Ghent! The name is well remembered by many with affection, for his father was admired and followed. When his father received the government of the town, the management of the affairs of Ghent was exercised with wisdom and authority. Ghent was saved from famine, from dishonour and ruin. He was called by many of the wise men of Ghent. The city swore loyalty and obedience to him, and fared well. Not only was our industry and trade revived then, also our militia was respected and the power of Ghent was exemplary in Flanders.'

Peter van den Bossche held his voice a while. Hundreds of eyes looked at him. He resumed. 'That man, of course, was James van Artevelde. His son is Philip van Artevelde. Philip was christened at the baptismal font of Saint John's by the noble queen of England, Philippa of

Hainault, wife of the great King Edward III. Philippa was his godmother and gave Philip his name after her own. At the time, James van Artevelde was at the siege of Tournai with King Edward of England, with the dukes of Brabant and Guelders, and with the count of Hainault. Those were our glorious times! Flanders was better governed than ever before and better than during any rule we experienced afterward. We were better off under James van Artevelde than after he died! James van Artevelde, by his fine sense of all practical matters and by his good fortune, regained Flanders for us and brought us back to prosperity. Now, we can choose as leader his only remaining son, a valiant man of the same lineage, to lead us to victory. I propose therefore the people of Ghent to swear loyalty and obedience to the man called Philip van Artevelde, the esteemed *poorter* of our city. This is the only way to bring Ghent back to times of flourishing and of freedom. We need such a man, a head captain who can be dreaded by our enemies, respected by our allies and loved within Ghent. This man will show our strength in arms and our wisdom in rule, so that Ghent would rise again as a free, peaceful and prosperous place!

Peter van den Bossche stopped reading. A silence remained hanging in the marketplace, but soon a buzzing of voices was heard, and then also commands were shouted.

Many guilds and militiamen had marched into the market. The banners were deployed. Suddenly, about half of the banners were seen to move and to draw away from the market, into the adjoining streets. About half of the men present that moment in the Friday Market left with their banners.

Peter van den Bossche said nothing, but he cursed inwardly. He had not expected this ostentatious refusal of Philip. The people that marched off refused to hand over to Philip van Artevelde the *Beleed der Stede*, the government of the city.

Peter van den Bossche despaired for a moment. He saw the aldermen below him looking at each other and whisper to each other with interrogating faces. Van den Bossche feared that if also these men would leave, the atmosphere in the Friday Market could turn against the proposal of the letter. The silence remained as frozen as the air.

Then, as suddenly, the followers of Philip van Artevelde began to shout very loudly, 'Artevelde! Artevelde! Ghent! Ghent! Ghent!'

Van den Bossche recognised the first voice to shout thus, as belonging to a man who had been present at his meetings with Philip van Artevelde. Heinric Vresele had stood in the midst of the people. Now, he shouted with his strong, deep voice in the Friday Market. Then gradually, more men began to clap in their hands, in union, and to take up the shouts for Artevelde. A few trumpets sounded their shrill tones to the same rhythm, and drums began to beat as if an army were advancing in the streets. This excited the men who had remained in the Friday Market with their banners. More shouts for van Artevelde and for Ghent then rose to the heavens. The men who had remained in the Friday Market began to wave their banners over the heads of the people. The shouting grew to a thundering roar. More men came pouring out of the side streets, and soon the Friday Market was filled again with men.

The voices shouted in scansion, 'Artevelde! Artevelde! Victory! Victory! Ghent! Ghent!'

Peter van den Bossche let the people shout, harder and harder, so that Ghent entire could hear the noise. Then he smiled, opened his arms, and tried to calm the crowd.

When the shouts subsided to but a little less, he cried, 'we shall now go and fetch Philip van Artevelde! Stay in the marketplace, my friends. Some of us, here, on the balcony, know where he is. I ask you for just a little while of patience!'

The men who had stood around Peter van den Bossche, among them Francis Ackerman, ran downstairs. Some of the men wearing banners joined them, but most of the men remained

standing and shouting in the Friday Market. The delegation of the deans and captains ran out of the Friday Market, to the bathhouse where they knew they would find Philip van Artevelde. But a little time later, the banners returned with Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele in their midst. With more shouts, Philip ran into the house and to the balcony where Peter van den Bossche waited on him. Philip van Artevelde came to stand next to Peter, but van den Bossche took a step backwards, offering Philip to the people.

More and more *poorters* of Ghent came then running into the Friday Market, shouting the name of van Artevelde. Philip van Artevelde opened his arms to embrace the crowd. He enjoyed the glory. He brought his eyes to the sky, smiled, and then looked back at the people beneath him. The heavens were of the finest, pure blue, all humidity chased from the air by the frost. Philip saw in this a sign God was pleased with his coming to power. He too then tried to silence the crowd.

When silence had more or less returned to the marketplace, Philip shouted slowly, ‘good people of Ghent, I have heard you! You want me, so I shall obey! I swear on my faith. I will act in your favour always, to uphold our honour and freedom or to die, sword in hand. I swear to lead our militia to victory, or to perish with you for the glory of our fabulous city! We are an example for Flanders, for France and for all the peoples. We want and shall live in freedom!’

Philip stopped speaking. A short message of such strength would suffice. The shouts began anew, the banners waved.

Peter van den Bossche stepped forward, shouting, ‘do you, free and valiant men of Ghent, *poorters* of our good city, swear to loyally follow our leader, Philip van Artevelde, to glory or to death, for our privileges, freedoms, prosperity and honour?’

The men under the balcony shouted, ‘to glory or to death! Artevelde! Artevelde! Ghent! Gent!’

The shouts lasted and lasted. Philip van Artevelde remained standing on the balcony, arms wide open, smiling enigmatically, eyes to the skies, as if in trance. He took in the shouts of the crowd and thought he became stronger with each moment.

Heinric Vresele saw with stupor how Philip van Artevelde enjoyed these almost mystical moments as if he were a prophet, ordained by God to lead his people. Philip was the Moses of Ghent!

Heinric then looked at Peter van den Bossche, who understood this kind of scene should not last too long. Peter began to quieten the men in the Friday Market. He asked the people to return home, to leave the marketplace, saying Philip van Artevelde would talk with the aldermen of the city soon.

It took a long time for the Friday Market to reach its normal, calm aspect. The men who had stood on the balcony walked into the house and closed the windows.

The same day, Philip van Artevelde chose four captains to rule the city with him. These were two men from the richer *poorters*, with a weaver and a shipper. These men swore loyalty and obedience to him on Friday after Saint Paul’s Eve. Philip van Artevelde took about fifteen young men from among the militiamen to guard him. He declared his prime counsellor would be the clerk Heinric.

On Saturday, the aldermen organised a meeting at which Philip van Artevelde was invited. In fact, Philip had ordained the meeting!

He entered haughtily in the hall of the *Schepenhuis* to the assembled twenty-six aldermen and the deans of the guilds. He came as head captain and *Beleeder der Stede*, appointed to that

function not by the aldermen, but by the people. He immediately defied the aldermen by asking them in a loud voice why they were at war. The lawyer of the city was the only one to dare answer, saying he didn't know why. He was a man in favour of the count.

'Of course you know,' Artevelde threw in his face from very near him, 'and I will tell you tomorrow!'

He then forced a vote to accept him and his captain, and to recognise his position of *Beleeder der Stede*.

Peter van den Bossche had entered the hall of the aldermen with Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele. He then began to speak, reproaching the aldermen of their inefficacious rule. He told them they had abused of the seals of the city to deliver Ghent into the hand of the merciless count. The meeting with the aldermen degenerated in a wild discussion and in insults over the means of the city to answer to the actions and threats of the count. Philip van Artevelde was much displeased by the attitude of the aldermen, who continued to argue about the relations with the count, some strongly in favour of war and others in favour of the peace.

Philip van Artevelde was thus appointed as head captain of the city of Ghent on the twenty-fourth of January of 1382. He had always wanted to become the ruler of Ghent, always known he would hold the function of *Beleeder der Stede* one day, as his royal birth had promised him.

He obtained a salary of twelve pounds Groot from the city, as well as sixteen young guards to protect him.

His four colleagues were men he knew well and who had participated in his conspiracy: Sanders van Vaernewijck, Rasse van den Voorde, John de Hert and John Herman. They received a salary of four pounds Groot and six guards. The three deans of Ghent, James de Rijke for the landowner-*poorters*, Peter van den Bossche for the small guilds among which the shippers, and Lawrence de Maech for the weavers, received each also four pounds Groot and eight guards for protection.

Philip van Artevelde

Philip van Artevelde took command of the town with great determination and rapid decisions.

The first of the executions ordered by Philip van Artevelde in the city of Ghent began on Sunday. At eleven o'clock, the First Alderman of the Law Simon Bette, the man who had foremost negotiated for the city with the count, was killed. His was the first of a series of executions ordered by the head captain in total impunity.

Philip van Artevelde also immediately promulgated a series of harsh measures to keep order within the city. These measures were as follows:

1. He who commits a murder shall lose his life. By this rule, Philip took to him a privilege of the count of Flanders. It was the count's privilege to punish men who had committed murders. Only the count could pronounce death sentences, not the city.
2. All the private quarrels and feuds must be stopped until the fourteenth day after the conclusion of a peace treaty between the count and the city.
3. He who fights with a *poorter* without wounding him, shall be imprisoned for forty days and put on water and bread.
4. The same punishment shall be applied to people who blaspheme, frequent bad places, play at dice, or excite the people to revolt.

5. Everybody shall be allowed to participate at the meetings of the *Collatie* and give his or her advice or opinion, the poor as well as the rich.
6. Only one money exchange office shall be held open in Ghent, to evaluate each coin at its right value.
7. The city shall justify its accounts once each month.
8. All prisoners must be brought before the head captain for judgement. The good men shall be released, the bad ones punished.
9. All who took water and food at Ghent, who lived in the city, have to wear a white sleeve with the words, '*Helpt God!*' meaning 'God help us!'

Like James van Artevelde had done before him, Philip ordered the stores of the abbeys and the reserves of grain of the wealthy *poorter* to be opened. His guards ran through the city, forcing entry into the *stenen*, in search of grain sacks. He fixed the prices at which all grain should be sold in the city. These measures made him very popular with the poorer inhabitants.

The people also approved the treason and the execution of Simon Bette, the First Alderman. By his death, of course, Philip van Artevelde reduced many aldermen to terror and silence. These measures had been decided by Philip van Artevelde, Heinric Vresele and Peter van den Bossche.

The rulers also chose to send out the captains and troops of the militia to capture castles of the count in the vicinity of Ghent. The castles of Woestijne and of Hansbeke were besieged. This was an open declaration of war with Count Louis of Male.

The count understood that from that moment on, Ghent did not seek peace anymore but a straight confrontation. The castle of Hansbeke was commanded by Philip van Artevelde's uncle, Ser Daniel van Halewijn. Philip nevertheless ordered the attack. His captains threatened to put the castle to fire, so the garrison and the Lord of Halewijn surrendered on condition he and his guards could leave unharmed. When the Lord of Halewijn had left, the castle was looted, sacked, and finally burnt down.

The next Thursday, a first meeting of the *Collatie* was held, a gathering of the greater assembly of *poorters* of Ghent. The aldermen were present, but they remarked rapidly they sat on the bench of the accused.

Philip van Artevelde attacked openly Gilbert de Grutere. He made Heinric Vresele read a letter, in which he accused de Grutere of having sent to the count the money levied from the seven villages near the town of Dendermonde, and not to Ghent. De Grutere would have handed over the hostages of the city to the count. De Grutere had also promised, to the disadvantage of the city, several points of surrender to the count. He had promised these to the count on his life. Philip van Artevelde reproached Gilbert de Grutere having exiled John Perneele from Ghent and also William de Scepen, merely to please the count, which led to their death.

Gilbert de Grutere said to his defence all these measures had been taken because he was an alderman in function, and taken to promote the peace with the count. Since they had been taken when he was an alderman, these acts were legitimate.

'I was at that time the First Alderman of the Keure,' Gilbert de Grutere told hesitantly. 'Those measures were necessary to ensure the peace with the count. They had to be ordered so!'

'You shall nevermore banish men from Ghent,' Philip van Artevelde shouted, giving no further justification.

He drew his sword and plunged it into the chest of Gilbert de Grutere. De Grutere had been too stunned to react. Philip van Artevelde pushed his sword deep in de Grutere's heart, so that the man fell to the floor in the hall of the *Collatie*.

The other alderman looked in horror at the murder. Nobody dared react for fear of being equally killed by van Artevelde. Outside the hall, where many people waited, shouts of triumph were heard, cried out by the satisfied mob. These men afterwards ran back to the Friday Market with their banners, shouting for van Artevelde and for Ghent. The meeting of the *Collatie* ended in chaos. Philip van Artevelde and his men also hastened to the Friday Market. Artevelde addressed the people, telling he had executed the men who had acted against the better interests of Ghent. The people cheered, shouting the killings were justified.

Philip van Artevelde, seeing he had the crowd with him, gave the order to execute three more men. In the *Castelet* of the town, the town prison of the *Koornmarkt*, immediately after the message was received, John de Ruemere was dragged out of his cell by the *Amman*, the cell in which ever also Juris Vresele had been locked up. A giant guard of the *Castelet* pushed John on a block of wood, and decapitated John de Ruemere with a large axe. John was dead before he truly understood what was happening to him. John Mayhuus was fetched next, and this John immediately saw the dead and decapitated body of de Ruemere still lying near the wooden block. He gave his soul over to God, and was likewise decapitated in a matter of seconds. The third John, John Sleepstaf, wept and begged and cried. Three men had to keep his head on the block, one stretched his head by grabbing his hairs. John Sleepstaf was equally decapitated.

By these five early executions of the heads of the families Bette, de Grutere, de Ruemere, Mayhuus and Sleepstaf, Philip van Artevelde did away with the five first names on the list he had written down with Heinric Vresele. Heinric would draw a thin line of red ink through the five names. More would follow! Philip van Artevelde had taken his first vengeance. Later on, Philip van Artevelde would order the execution of seven more men, all named in the list of Heinric Vresele, all former enemies or opponents of James van Artevelde. Among these was James Soyssone, a butcher, a well-known man also by the Pharaïldis families, a man we had always considered antagonistic to us. We did notice the logic and the plan behind the executions. Philip van Artevelde was taking personal vengeance on a large scale.

The van Artevelde Regime. February to April

In February of 1382, Philip van Artevelde could walk in the streets of Ghent in great pomp. He relished his power. When he strode from the *Kalanderberg* to the *Schepenhuis*, four *knapen* or young guards of the White Hoods of Ghent preceded him, wearing his banner with the badge of the van Arteveldes. The Arteveldes were no knights, but Philip had found a drawing with a project for a coat of arms. He had used this drawing to have a banner prepared for him.

He stepped right behind the banner, followed by his counsellor Heinric Vresele and his squire John van Bracht. Philip and these two men were dressed the same way as the aldermen of Ghent, a sign of their highest authority.

Behind them followed a dozen more guards, all armed and in mail. Philip, Heinric and the squire were armed with swords. Philip and John van Bracht wore mail under their tunics. Heinric had refused this protection.

Philip van Artevelde continued to defy count and king. He allowed John de West, the counter-bishop of Tournai, appointed by the pope of Rome Urban VI, to reside in the city. This bishop had not been assigned for Tournai by the Avignon pope supported by the French king. Philip heard with satisfaction of several revolts in French cities.

Philip van Artevelde sent envoys to England to ask for the support of the English King Richard II. Philip had the letters to the English sovereign be written by Heinric Vresele. Heinric did not mention any hint of the possible royal blood of Philip.

King Richard II was not unsympathetic to the cause of Ghent. He asked for money from the English Parliament to intervene in favour of the Flemish cities, but those funds were categorically refused. The peace faction at the court, of which John of Gaunt was an important figure, proved strong in influence.

In March of 1382, famine threatened in Ghent. Despite the deliveries of grain from the Four Crafts and Brabant, not enough flour could be produced or brought to Ghent to bake bread, biscuits, cakes and the like, and to make gruel, in sufficient quantities. Also vegetables and fruit, and even fish lacked. Disparate troops of the count of Flanders had occupied and closed the western and southern routes to Ghent. The Leie and the Scheldt towards Ghent were closed, as well as the access to and from Antwerp on the Scheldt by the fortress of Dendermonde, equally occupied by the count's forces.

Ghent could only obtain grain from the Four Crafts and from Brabant in the early weeks of Philip van Artevelde's rule. Despite the orders of the duchess and duke of Brabant, the Ghent troops continued bringing in provisions from Brussels and Leuven. These expeditions were led by Francis Ackerman. At Liège, Ackerman obtained six hundred wagons loaded with goods such as wheat and bread. The Ghent captain realised Ghent would be starving soon, so he asked the duchess of Brabant and the bishop of Liège to mediate in the conflict of Ghent with the count of Flanders. The grain from Brabant was brought in over Aalst. A little later, the count's troops attacked also the environs of this town, blocking the access to Brabant via this town. The inhabitants of the farms in the countryside of Aalst were killed if they stayed around. The villagers had to flee with their cattle to Hainault.

Philip van Artevelde accepted a proposal of the princes of the Low Countries to hold a peace conference with the count at Tournai. In the meantime, Philip had used his time well to force the various factions in Ghent to silence and not to oppose his rule. His captains and the deans were his allies. The aldermen settled back in their functions, daring not to oppose Philip. The men feared additional executions and they reconciled more or less with the form of peace and order in Ghent that Philip van Artevelde provided. The administration of the city continued as before.

The poorer *poorters* of Ghent flocked to Philip's rule, as he had brought in new supplies of grain. Heinric Vresele held accounts, presented the accounts publicly, but it became clear the new-found reserves of grain would not last long.

The peace talks of Tournai were held in the week of Easter of 1382, from the thirty-first of March to the sixth of April. A delegation from Ghent rode to Tournai under a safe-conduct guaranteed by the king of France. Tournai was situated in Flemish territory, but the town was a French enclave in Flanders, with a French royal garrison. Philip rode with the delegates of Ghent to Tournai, and let Ghent be ruled in his absence by Peter van den Bossche. Heinric Vresele accompanied Philip. Philip intended to feast Easter at Tournai. The meeting had been organised by Ghent and by the rulers of the adjacent countries, by Brabant, Hainault and

Liège, rather than by Count Louis of Male. The count was irritated once more by this intervention of third parties into the affairs of his lands.

At the first meeting session of Tournai, Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele had to hear a messenger of the count reading from a scroll. The man read Count Louis of Male refused to attend the parley!

The men present in the hall began to talk among them. Such a refusal was unheard of! Louis of Male was refusing a meeting that had been arranged also by the king of France!

The messenger, the courier knight of Louis merely stated the demands of the count of Flanders, reading from another parchment scroll. Count Louis of Male demanded no less than the total, unconditional surrender of the city of Ghent to his authority and mercy! All the *Gentenaars* of between fifteen and sixty years of age had to march before him, halfway between Ghent and Bruges, dressed as penitents in long, white shirts, barefooted, with halters around their neck in sign of submission. Ghent would have to provide hostages.

Heinric Vresele had asked his brother, Boudin Vresele, to attend the sessions of Tournai, and Boudin explained to me later what had happened. He told me the count had ignominiously demanded that when the men of Ghent and the hostages would be brought to him, he would decide on how many men would be pardoned and how many would be executed. We knew the count's anger to be great. Philip van Artevelde might have accepted exile, but he told us he refused to accept bloodshed in Ghent. He did not mention what everybody knew all too well, that the first blood shed by the count would be his own.

Philip van Artevelde had been insulted and humiliated by the count's refusal to come to the peace conference. Privately, he told Heinric Vresele how awful it was the count dared to insult the ruler of Ghent, a man more powerful than he was. He said the count would regret dearly having injured the dignity of his person.

After the aborted peace meeting of Tournai, aldermen and *poorters* of Brabant, Hainault and Liège tried to reason Count Louis of Male in Bruges. Louis of Male obstinately refused to reduce the demands of the surrender of Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde and his delegation returned to Gent. Peter van den Bossche arranged a meeting with the people of Ghent in the Friday Market. Philip proposed to explain the results of the peace conference at Tournai.

It became clear to us, the Pharaildis families, how much Philip van Artevelde relied on the people, on the mob of Ghent even, to hold his rule in place.

Van Artevelde, as well as Peter van den Bossche, realised how much in the classes of the wealthy, in the old lineages of the knights, of the better-off *poorters*, the factions of old continued to determine opinions and moods. Philip's power came from the poorer craftsmen, from the journeymen, from the White Hoods and from the militiamen, but these lived in Ghent in large numbers. That basis blindly followed a man they regarded as their natural leader, an imposing charismatic orator, who told them loud and clear what they might have thought already. Once again, Philip van Artevelde was led to the balcony of the house on the Friday Market from which previous speeches had been delivered.

Philip saw hundreds of men standing in the vast marketplace, heads expectantly turned upwards to him. Banners of the militias fluttered slightly in the breeze of spring. It was a fine, sunny day, Philip noticed, as he first looked at the sky. Philip took intense satisfaction from such meetings in the Friday Market. He rejoiced in being cheered as a great leader. His sense

of power and of being an extraordinary man elated him. He basked in power. He began to talk.

‘Good people of Ghent, friends, courageous men of the guilds and of the militia, welcome! I greet you! Just a few days ago, a peace parley was held at the town of Tournai. The meetings ended soon in a strange way, for the count of Flanders did not deign to meet with us. I deplore much this open show of contempt for the good people of Ghent the count dared to present. I have asked to meet with you here, to come to a decision about how we should continue to live in Ghent. The count of Flanders has offered us no peace! You heard me right, Louis of Male not even deigned speaking to us. He merely sent a squire with a letter containing his decisions, which could not be discussed.

I ask you, is that the way to hold a negotiation for peace? The count of Flanders wants Ghent to surrender to his will. He wants all the men of Ghent, capable of wearing arms, to be humiliated in front of him. Afterwards, he wants to choose who to grant life to and who to execute. We may be certain he will kill hundreds of our best and beloved *poorters*, anyone who refused in the past in one way or another to submit to his will. We have three choices left, and among those alternatives we have to choose!

Our first alternative is to submit to the count. This would mean Ghent surrenders and submits to the count’s whims. Many *poorters* will be executed. All we can do in this choice is to bend our knees and our heads to the count. Louis of Male will choose who he wants to kill by the sword and who he wants to kill by hanging, by decapitation, or who he wants to put on the wheel and be quartered. Ghent will forever lose its freedoms, our charters will be declared void. The *poorters* of Ghent shall live in slavery!

Our second alternative could be to continue living as we do today. Ghent cannot be besieged. Our walls of defence and our army of militiamen is too strong. The count can never enter Ghent by force. The count of Flanders, however, holds Bruges and Ieper and Dendermonde. We heard recently the garrison of Dendermonde has once more attacked, looted, devastated, and finally burnt the Land of Aalst. In doing that abominable act, the count’s knights have cut off our supplies of grain from Brabant and Hainault. Our only supply of grain and other food comes from the Four Crafts. Luckily, our small fleet still brings in other supplies from the ports of Holland and Zeeland. We know these supplies to be insufficient to feed our people. This, of course, is also the cruel count’s doing. This alternative would become the choice of famine for us, for our women and children.

There is a third alternative, my fellow citizens of Ghent. That third choice is to fight, to take the initiative and to attack with our militias and with the White Hoods the troops of the count, and thus break the blockade. By attacking the count’s knights and his men-at-arms, we can force the siege of Ghent to stop, get in new supplies of grain and defeat the army of the count. I am confident we can gain once more, after a few victories, the support of the men of Bruges and of Ieper, and then we will be in a good position to defend Flanders entire against the despot. Before that happens, however, our militia only and alone, will have to defeat the count’s men in battle.

What do you say? I give you the three choices: slavery, famine, or fight for our freedom. What do you choose?’

Philip van Artevelde had presented his three alternatives slowly, clearly, accentuated by broad gestures of his arms and hands, his body and with the mimics of his face. He now repeated loudly, once more, opening his arms wide, ‘slavery, famine or fight for freedom and crafts?’

The answer was obvious. Hundreds of throats roared hoarsely while the flags turned above the heads of the men, ‘fight! Fight! Fight! *Vrijheid en Nering!* Freedom and Crafts! Fight! Fight! Fight!’

I and Boudin Vresele stood in a corner of the Friday Market, near the *Kammerstraat*, which led to Saint James’ Church and to the Cattle Market. We had been certain of the answer. We were totally convinced no crowd in any city of Flanders and no city of the world would have chosen otherwise.

‘It is strange,’ I said to Boudin, ‘how people who lack feelings for others, men like Philip van Artevelde, Heinric and Peter van den Bossche, use emotions to direct a crowd to a certain decision. They have appealed to the feeling of personal honour of the *Gentenaars* to force new initiatives of Ghent in the war. Had this choice been presented to the men present not here, but individually, in the peace of their house, eye to eye, in the presence of their wife and children, then very many men might no doubt have chosen submission, or a less bellicose alternative. They might have asked to negotiate more. They might have asked to appeal to the king of France. Our *poorters* are peace-loving. Some of them might even have consented to living on as today, speculating on that nobody knew what the future might have in stock for us, hoping on the clemency of Count Louis of Male. But here, all together, with their neighbours and friends and with some of the war-craziest men of the White Hoods, nobody wants to be known as a supporter of slavery. Nobody wants to be called a coward, nobody wants to let go of honour even at the peril of their life! The outcome of Philip van Artevelde’s appeal to the people was clear from the beginning. So, we shall wage war totally!’

Boudin Vresele, next to me, nodded to my thoughts. He too did not smile, even though all the men around us cheered. Boudin looked at me with very sad eyes, and his forehead frowned. ‘This was a scandalous masquerade,’ he told me, as we walked down the *Kammerstraat*, leaving the Friday Market. ‘The outcome of the choices was so obvious! How stupid people can be when they form a crowd! They don’t think anymore, they only excite more the men that stand next to them. This is a general hysteria! Philip van Artevelde has used the working of a crowd to force our hand for total war. How many dead guildsmen will this cost Ghent? You know, William, there was a time when Ghent could throw ten to twelve thousand or more militiamen in the field. That was in the times when Ghent had from two to three times more people living in the city than currently. I doubt Ghent will be able to put together more than five-thousand able-bodied men for the army. The captains of Ghent are fine men, but inexperienced leaders. They shall have to face about three thousand men of the count, among which two thousand knights. The rest of the count’s troops will be formed of experienced and trained men-at-arms, and rude mercenaries. Ghent can still bring superior forces in the field, but my strong feeling is the count is more powerful. The count’s army will ride on thousands of armoured horses. Ghent has not won one major skirmish these last years. The most probable result of this decision of the people is defeat, inexorable defeat. Hundreds of dear *poorters* of Ghent will be killed. Disaster awaits the city. How long will it last before enough good weavers will take up our weaving industry?’

‘I am very afraid you are right in that analysis, Boudin,’ I agreed with him. I felt sad.

‘There is nothing we can do about this,’ Boudin continued. ‘The dice have been thrown, as Julius Caesar would have asserted.’

‘We can talk to Heinric,’ I proposed. ‘Our warning may have some impact.’

‘Heinric is mad, as is Philip van Artevelde, stark mad,’ Boudin hissed back. ‘Maybe Heinric is not mad in the usual meaning of the word, but he definitely does not react like the most of us. He tried to convince me he was a rational, reasoning man, but he acts entirely on impulses.’

Our father knew what kind of man he was. I did try talking to Heinric. It felt like talking to a wall. I am sure not one warning, not one argument, not one idea reached his mind. He too wants war!’

We sauntered on, passed Saint James’s Church. It darkened. Suddenly, Boudin halted, and I was two paces farther when I noticed he had stopped walking. I looked at him interrogatingly, went a step back, thought he felt bad, but then he continued walking up to me.

‘There is another matter we should talk about,’ he told, almost whispering.

I knew what he wanted to bring up. I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear him out. I stepped on.

‘This Greet van Noortkerke,’ began Boudin, grasping my arm, ‘she is doing well in Antwerp.

The figures prove that. Our sales are far up, we use her means of transport. She buys good land. She is also your mistress, isn’t she? I am saddened, William, for I love my daughter.

What you are doing is contrary to the Pharaïldis code of conduct. I will not intervene in your private affairs. Take care, however, for when I have to choose between my daughter and you, I shall always choose for my daughter. She is of my blood. I promised her mother I would take care of Agneete.’

I said nothing. I was better I added nothing. I did bow my head. Was Boudin delivering me also an ultimatum of war?

‘This Greet van Noortkerke,’ Boudin continued, pushing the knife deeper in, ‘she is married too! Do you realise that sooner or later you will have to stand before her husband? Her husband will ask you why you seduced his wife. He will find out where she is. That seems inevitable. You’d better have a very sharp sword then, for this Arent de Handscoemakere knows how to fight. I saw you all train at New Terhagen! He was a skilful swordsman. Your affair with this Greet cannot find approval in the eyes of God. You may have to face a tragedy.’

‘I know that too,’ I finally answered hoarsely, with a dry throat.

Boudin was sixty-six that year, I only thirty. I owed much respect to Boudin, the finest friend of my father. Boudin had always been very good to me. I tried to explain.

‘When I married Agneete, I sought a fine marriage with a dignified, agreeable woman. I wanted to love and cherish Agneete. She is barren. She cannot have children. It is not the normal way of men to remain without children, not even a daughter. My name and my lineage would be stopped. When I met Greet again, after very many years, a passion that had not existed before but had been lurching in our mind, doomed us. We share the passion. I often don’t know anymore where I stand with Agneete and with Greet. In a different way, I love them both. I cannot abandon Greet. It may be difficult to understand, but that is how things are. I cannot give up Greet. I love Greet with a devouring passion.’

‘And thereby you condemn Agneete to shame and humiliation! A sad, sad story this is!’

I sighed. We walked on, in silence, until we arrived at our houses. I offered him my hand as parting, and Boudin accepted the hand. He seemed to want to say a last thing, but then he turned and entered his door. Sadness overwhelmed me. I remained standing at the Vresele door for a long time. This door might soon be closed forever to me!

The Battle of the Beverhoutsveld. April to May

In the last days of April of 1382, the captains of Ghent assembled the army of the militias of the city, about six thousand men in all. When ready, the army of Ghent marched out of the gates. Behind the men rode two hundred wagons laden with provisions and with a new

weapon, a great number of small cannons, called *ribauden* in Ghent. These were the products of the blacksmiths of the city. The cannons were the secret weapons of Ghent, although no captain had great faith in their efficiency in a battle. The captains more relied on the speed with which they had brought their troops together, and on the audacious thrust to the city of Bruges, right to the heart of the count's power. Count Louis of Male was not expected to believe Ghent would try to dash to Bruges. Had not Ghent always first attacked other towns in its own quarter? Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele had proposed to attack directly the seat of power of the count, knowing they would have to face superior numbers of warriors, but relying on the effect of surprise. The militiamen marches in forced marches, very rapidly. They marched with the words '*Helpt God*', may God help us, on their sleeves. They marched so quickly they reached the environs of Bruges after two days.

The reason why Philip van Artevelde, Heinric Vresele and the other captains of Ghent marched so quickly to Bruges, was that Bruges was feasting exactly at that moment! The second May of 1382 was the beginning of great celebrations in Bruges, festivities that were to last several days. The Procession of the Holy Blood would walk through the streets of Bruges. The Holy Blood was the major relic of the city. Thierry d'Alsace, a twelfth century count of Flanders, had brought a vial of the Holy Blood from Jerusalem to Bruges. Drops of the blood had been gathered by Joseph of Arimathaea in the Grail, and part of this Holy Blood had remained in Jerusalem. Thierry d'Alsace had brought some to his city. The Holy Blood was transported through the streets of Bruges in procession, together with all the other relics of saints for which Bruges was famous. At the same time was held the yearly May Fair, a very large gathering of all the merchants of the city displaying the finest products they had to sell. Many visitors were expected to the city, many foreigners too, hoping to do fine bargains on the days of the market. The feasting of the Holy Blood and the May Fair would last several days. The men of Bruges would be occupied with the procession and the fair. Who would expect Ghent to attack on such a day? Who would dare attack a large, wealthy city on the day it venerated its finest relic? The grand, solemn procession would walk through the streets of Bruges, lasting two days. The feast and the market were an occasion for much eating and drinking and carousing. The militia of Bruges would not really be very fresh in mind and body when they would have to stand in front of the militiamen of Ghent. They would also have their mind more on the merriment of the feasting than on bashing the heads of the poor *Gentenaars* who dared attack them!

Bruges was strongly held by the count's knights and by the men who had remained loyal to the old lineages of the city, mostly merchants of the Hanza of London. Also, near Bruges lay the fine castle of Count Louis of Male! Nobody expected the *Gentenaars* at Bruges, and nobody expected them so soon.

The Ghent militia stood in a field in front of the walls of the city on the second of May 1382. Philip van Artevelde ordered the camp to be set up near a large, open field, called the Beverhoutsveld in Bruges. There, the militia of Ghent offered their troops to a battle with the forces of Count Louis of Male. Philip van Artevelde sent a few representatives to the count, to ask him to relent his harsh demands of surrender of his city of Ghent. Count Louis of Male came to the walls of Bruges. He saw Ghent had come with a sizable army, but one he could confront with at least double as many men. The aldermen of Bruges too were outraged at the lack of decency of the *Gentenaars* to assault their city on such a day. They promised their militias to the count.

The *Gentenaars* placed their wagons in line, set up their tents behind the wagons. In the morning, Philip van Artevelde asked for Holy Masses to be held in the army. The *Fremineuren*, the Franciscan monks of Ghent, celebrated the masses at seven different places among the militiamen. The monks gave the men the same message as Moses had given to the Hebrews at the departure from Pharaoh and from Egypt.

‘You too, good people of Ghent, are held in slavery by the count of Flanders, as the Hebrews were by Pharaoh. Your troops are multiple and strong. God will guide you. Do not forget that if you are defeated here, no hope remains for Ghent, no hope at all! Fight like lions, and if you must die, die with honour. Don’t be intimidated by large hordes of men running out of Bruges’ walls. Victory lies not in numbers! Victory is granted by God. Victory goes to the courageous! It has been proven time to time again in the Bible how a small but virtuous people can overthrow grand armies by zeal and fervour and courage and faith in God. You have God, righteousness and justice with you. You can take courage from these truths! God be with you!’

More than three quarters of the men in the army of Ghent went to communion. The men received the host, and took strength. They formed their hands piously in prayer and then started shouting, ‘Ghent! Ghent! Ghent!’

Philip van Artevelde, flanked by Heinric Vresele and Peter van den Bossche addressed the warriors of Ghent with a few words. He reminded the men Ghent had humbly asked to be pardoned, but the count had refused amnesty.

Philip Van Artevelde then pointed to the wagons, saying, ‘this is all the food we have left in Ghent. There is bread and wine. If you want more to eat, you will have to take it at the sharp points of your *goedendags*!’

The militiamen ate a little, each received a piece of bread and a cup of wine. Then they went to stand in large blocks behind their parish captains. They stood, dressed in mail and tunics. Only a few men wore breastplates. They put a large shield for protection in front of them. Most of the men brandished a *goedendag*, a simple weapon that was inexpensive to produce, but very many also had a sword and a long knife dangling at their belt. All wore helmets, from simple pot helmets to more elaborate steel contraptions decorated with wings or horns or lion snouts.

Philip van Artevelde, Heinric Vresele and Peter van den Bossche stood in the centre block facing the Gate of Ghent, the *Gentse Poort*, expecting the count’s army to sally out of Bruges. They expected to see long rows of *Bruggelingen*, of militiamen of Bruges, to come flowing out of the gates in long rows to take up ordered ranks in front of them, followed by the hundreds of knights of the count on horseback. Once the Bruges battle formations were complete, the battle could start. The *Gentenaars* feared especially the heavily armoured cavalry of the knights.

Count Louis of Male stood on one of the towers of the walls of Bruges when the *Gentenaars* advanced. He had come to his Court of Princes, the *Prinsenhof*, his hotel in Bruges, for the May Fair. When he heard a panting squire choke out Bruges was under attack by an army, he had first laughed at the joke. Then, when he was told indeed the *Gentenaars* stood in a field called the Beverhoutsveld, he had run to the walls.

‘They are fewer in number than we have as warriors in Bruges alone,’ he pointed out. ‘I admire their ardour. They prefer to die by the sword rather than to be starved. They are fools! My lords, this is the sacred day of the Holy Blood. We shall serve blood. We cannot lose this

fight. More blood will flow than you have ever seen, not blood from Jerusalem, but blood of Ghent! We'll give them what they ask so dearly. We'll give them the blood they desire!' Count Louis of Male gave the order to assemble the army. Bruges and the knights should sally and form blocks in front of the gates.

A few knights of the count's court muttered it was already late in the day. Knights prefer to fight in clear light. They also told the *Gentenaars* had almost no provisions with them. The militiamen would be weakened from hunger the day after. The Lord Heulaert van Poucke and others advised the count not to fight on this day. The *Gentenaars* could not escalate the walls! They had no ladders with them. Bruges could not be captured by so few warriors. The knights emphasized this because they knew many men were still feasting inside the city. Most men would be exhausted from the feasting, and the guildsmen of Bruges liked to drink beer. The aldermen and knights of Bruges, however, wanted the battle to be over as quickly as possible, to continue their market and their banquets. Count Louis of Male rather agreed with the knights who urged him to caution, but the gates were already being opened, and militiamen of Bruges ran out of the gates!

The *Bruggelingen* ran out of the gates and seemed to want immediately to attack the *Gentenaars*, head-on. Was this not their day of the Holy Blood, their powerful land precious relic that would easily grant them victory over any army? They did not attack without some sort of logic, however, for they sent a large number of crossbowmen out in front. These released their arrows and bolts on the enemy. Many men of Ghent fell to the ground, killed or wounded. Ghent would not be able to suffer under this punishment for long. Behind the crossbow men, many more warriors ran out from the gates of Bruges, but not in any formation or battle order. The crossbowmen and the Bruges warriors advanced rapidly, scouring the blocks of the *Gentenaars*.

Heinric Vresele saw the militiamen of Bruges run out in small groups of from fifteen to twenty men. They flowed out of the *Gentse Poort* towards his positions. He couldn't believe his eyes. There seemed to be no order at all in how the warriors ran towards the positions of Ghent. He only noticed how the over-enthusiastic *Bruggelingen* looked to behind them, to make sure they were followed by still more men, which was indeed the case. The *Bruggelingen* ran towards the Ghent lines, aware many more militiamen would come running out of the gates than the men of Ghent had brought to the Beverhoutsveld.

Heinric did not hesitate. He took the initiative. He did not wait for Philip van Artevelde to realise the opportunity that was offered. The *Gentenaars*, though in the end would be standing with less men than Bruges and the count could make to sally, stood in good, disciplined order, led by their captains. They could now surround these small groups of enemies and massacre them to a rout. This could be done well before the entire army of Bruges and of the count had run out of the city. Why wait and let the army of Bruges form nice ranks to lead a concerted assault on Ghent? No, Ghent should attack instantly! Heinric nevertheless kept to the agreed stratagem of using the secret weapons of Ghent to start the battle. The secret weapons of Ghent could frighten the opposing army first. He thought this surprise was not really necessary in view of the developments he was watching, but he gave the agreed sign. He had wanted to launch the counter-attack now, in mass, but he let the cannons of Ghent speak first.

The men of Ghent drew away the branches and bushes that hid the cannons they had placed in between their wagons. Ghent had brought a few hundreds of small cannons with them. The long barrels of the cannons had been rapidly placed between the wagons, in line, because the new metal weapons had been placed on large wheels. The cannons were not large, no

monsters destined to shoot at the walls and destroy oak gates. They would have been almost useless against the thick walls of Bruges, but they might do some damage to enemy troops. The cannon spoke. A thundering noise was thrown over the running Bruges militiamen. The sound reverberated against the walls of the city and came back. The cannonballs did make victims among the on-running warriors, but not sufficiently to ward off a determined attack. The attack of the *Bruggelingen* was not a determined one! The surprising noise and the huge cloud of smoke that suddenly formed among the blocks of the stoically waiting *Gentenaars* threw the men of Bruges instantly in disarray. Most of the men stopped, some looked at the bleeding rests of their friends torn to pieces, other ran on but looking to all sides. The leaders of the militias of Bruges had not yet been able to place their groups in organised troops. Everywhere, the men of Bruges fled from the unknown horror.

Heinric Vresele was the first to come to his wits after the tremendous noise that had also frozen the militias of Ghent and dumbed the minds of all the men in the field.

He brought his *goedendag* to the sky, shouting, ‘Ghent! Ghent! Attack! Attack! Ghent, forwards!’

Thousands of *Gentenaars* took on his shouts and answered with the same. Philip van Artevelde and Peter van den Bossche also beat their swords on their shields. Heinric began to run towards the men of Bruges. Heinric noticed with satisfaction how many of the *Bruggelingen* fled even faster than before when they saw a compact wave of enemies surge towards them. The cannonade had frightened them out of their wits. They watched with horror in their eyes how the ranks of Ghent would not let them so easily kill them. The *Gentenaars*, the massed ranks of the militias, ran towards Bruges, slowly at first, then ever faster, and that on-flowing mass looked like a wave that could engulf anything! The most courageous of the men of Bruges made a stand shield to shield, but these men were few. They were quickly overrun and disappeared in the massed rows of *Gentenaars* that flowed around them. Heinric ran, grinning with satisfaction, for the lines of the *Gentenaars* never disintegrated, but continued to move on. The line remained a line, even though it now resembled a curved wave, and the wave engulfed the men of Bruges and continued to move towards the walls of Bruges.

Heinric heard another deep, grumbling noise in the far. He looked up, and saw large groups of armoured knights ride out on heavy destriers from another gate. The knights couched their lances and rode in the direction of the centre mass of *Gentenaars*. The count had thrown his knights in the battle! Now, the real test of the courage of Ghent would be proven. The ranks of the *Gentenaars* remained tight. The middle lines continued to advance, but on the eastern side, a wall of shields was placed to receive the riders. Shield stood to shield, *goedendags* were stuck in the grass and pointed forward. The knights of Louis of Male would be received on a hedge of spears! They would not pass! The Ghent captains had ordered a strong defence, and the orders had been executed with good discipline. The knights would not succeed in breaking through the ranks of Ghent, for they were too few here, and also not well coordinated. The army of the count had not had the time to organise, to be put in position, and even now nobody on the side of Bruges had the patience to wait and form a proper battle formation. Heinric knew what the result would be: isolated attacks the *Gentenaars* could handle separately, with larger numbers of men.

The battle evolved into a chaos of fighting men. Heinric had reached with his troops the groups of men of Bruges who ran back to the city. He enjoyed the battle, but much less this easy work. He ran in front of his men and slammed the weight of his *goedendag* in the back of a fleeing *Bruggeling*, breaking the man’s spine. He saw the man drop. He reached another

militiaman and stuck his *goedendag* in the man's legs. The warrior fell. A *Gentenaar* behind Heinric pushed the blade of his spear in the neck of the man. Blood spurted, but Heinric was already on a third man. He took no pleasure from killing men in the back, but he and his men were decimating the *Bruggelingen*, and he didn't stop. He killed while he ran, and so did all the men of his battalion. Bruges was suffering a massacre during the flight!

Heinric hesitated. He could now stop and direct his men to attack in the back the men of Bruges who were fighting the *Gentenaars*, surround them and crush them, or he could keep on running forward. By running on, he could cause more terror among the fleeing *Bruggelingen* and augment the chaos. He could even try to get into the city before Bruges could close the enormous panels!

From where he ran, he could see what happened at the gates of Bruges.

The three gates nearest to him stood wide open. From the gate to the right of him poured out many riders in armour. Their attack on the lines of Ghent in the east was ongoing. The first wave of riders had been absorbed by the thick rows of *Gentenaars*. The gate remained open, but few men of Bruges ran to that gate trying to get into the city by that opening. Heinric surmised the men feared being trampled upon by the knights.

At the other two gates he could see, one in front of him, the *Gentse Poort*, and the other to his left, he saw a chaos of enemies fleeing into the city, running into the gate and colliding with militiamen of Bruges who came still streaming out. The fleeing men pushed against the troops who wanted to reach the battlefield. All those men would not participate in the battle.

Heinric did like chaos in battle. Disciplined troops always had the advantage over undisciplined rabbles of men. Still, he was a little disappointed of not being able to show his rage and skill in battle against a worthy adversary. He could add to the chaos at the gates by falling on the men of Bruges who fled to the city. He and his militiamen could keep on running, keep on pushing, and kill men of Bruges by hitting their *goedendag* and spear and sword in backs. That was not very honourable, but very much more effective to sow despair and panic in the enemy! It would definitely stop more men from flowing through the gates, give more time to the *Gentenaars* who were killing the militiamen of Bruges who had remained in the Beverhoutsveld, and let more *Gentenaars* face the knights of the count. Heinric could cut off many Bruges warriors from the safety of the city. He could find easy prey in these cowardly warriors of Bruges.

Heinric decide to run on and to wreak further havoc.

He ran on, but while doing so he pointed his *goedendag* to Rasse van den Voorde who ran with him. Rasse had discarded his horse early on. Heinric shouted for Rasse to run to the other, left open gate. Rasse nodded. He had understood, and grinned. Rasse too had seen the opportunity of the beckoning, open gates. He directed his men more to the left. Heinric and Rasse realised they could cause a massacre at the gates before the leaders of Bruges could re-organise their men.

The centre mass of thousands of Ghent militiamen advanced inexorably but slowly towards Bruges. The *Bruggelingen* could not form consistent phalanxes. They fought in small blocks of men against long, thick rows of *Gentenaars*, who plied around them and eliminated them very efficiently. Bruges was being slaughtered in the Beverhoutsveld! The militiamen of Bruges hardly delivered any coherent resistance. Individuals fought courageously, but were massacred by the mass of men of Ghent. Philip van Artevelde still fought in that centre, having let Heinric Vresele run on, to push his wedge through the Bruges groups. He kept the line of Ghent straight. He too noticed the men of Bruges offered no hard resistance.

Count Louis of Male rode out of the city in the midst of the knights of his court. It took him a while to reach the ranks of Ghent. He passed such a chaos of men, that some of his own troops on horse also turned around and fled back to Bruges, thinking the battle already lost. The men of Ghent continued advancing. They formed groups of warriors to ward off the knights. Three, four *goedendags* stuck in each horse that tried to break through the blocks of *Gentenaars*. A carnage ensued.

The battle raged this way for a few hours.

At the end of the afternoon, the Lord Heulaert van Poucke took the banner of the count to ride in the direction of Assebroek, more to the east. Maybe he tried to ride around the Ghent lines and attack them in the back. A large contingent of men of Bruges had actually stopped the advance of Ghent there, and heavy fighting took place at this south-east place of the Beverhoutsveld. The decision of the battle could still be made here. Ser Heulaert broke off his intention of riding on and assisted the militiamen of Bruges who fought here.

Philip van Artevelde had noticed the commotion to the east. He sent his reserves to that side, commanding by messengers. The battle maybe raged the worst on that eastern side, but after two more hours, the lines of Ghent also did not waver there. The Lord van Poucke was defeated. He had lost almost all of his knights. The militiamen of Bruges fled to safety, to the gates of their city, as everywhere men fled. Heulaert van Poucke abandoned the battle and also ordered his few, remaining warriors back to Bruges. The rout seemed complete!

As often happens on a battlefield near to a city, the first groups of enemy warriors ran through the gates together with the last fleeing defending warriors. Ghent flowed through the gates! Ghent militiamen streamed into Bruges! The militia of Heinric Vresele assured the monumental gates of Bruges were kept open for Ghent. Darkness fell.

Louis of Male

Count Louis of Male had ordered to close the gates of the city, but the guards had hesitated because so many *Bruggelingen* still ran or fought outside, hoping to find safety within the walls. That hesitation cost them the city! The men of Ghent ran into the streets of Bruges, together with the men the Bruges guards had tried to save! A little later, Heinric Vresele and his men made sure the gates could not be closed again.

Count Louis of Male had also pushed back into Bruges, knowing the battle outside had evolved to a battle within the city. He hoped to assemble a large number of his troops in the Marketplace of Bruges. But that was also where the captains of Ghent had directed their warriors to. The *Gentenaars* succeeded in forming a tight block of militiamen in the place. Many market stalls still stood in the place, but the merchants had fled. The *Gentenaars* used the wood of the stalls to make a barrage. In some streets of the city the *Gentenaars* had even met the chaos of parts of the Holy Blood procession, creating great panic. By then, the evening had fallen, so the *Gentenaars* had lit lanterns in the market. These threw an eerie light over the place. The block of *Gentenaars* stood in good order, strong, convinced of victory, *goedendags* held outward. When Count Louis of Male arrived at the Marketplace near the Belfort, he cursed, for the entire place was invested by *Gentenaars*.

‘Don’t continue riding on, Lord Count,’ a courtier shouted a warning to him. ‘The place is too heavily defended. Another large group of *Gentenaars* runs through the streets! They run towards Saint James’s Church and towards the *Oude Zak*. The *Gentenaars* kills everybody

who resists them. Worse, the guilds of Bruges that were in the past rather more inclined to defend the freedoms of the city, rather than you, their count, have begun joining the *Gentenaars*. The weavers of Bruges are joining the militia of Ghent! We cannot win in the present state from both militias together! The militiamen of Bruges may be tempted to make you their prisoner!

Count Louis of Male realised also Philip van Artevelde would like nothing better than to capture and imprison him. He stepped from his horse and let the animal wander on its own. His courtiers had disappeared. He had lost them in the darkness. Only one valet had remained with him. He asked for the coat of the man, a coat that didn't hold the very proud badge with the black lion of Flanders on a yellow background. The coat was wide, he knew, in coarse brown, non-conspicuous wool.

Louis said to that man, 'you'd better step down too! Save your life, and don't betray me! You'll have better chances hiding on your own. Join the crowd. Meet me in Lille.'

He swung the coat around him and ran through the darkest and smallest alleys of the old centre of Bruges. He ran and hid until past midnight. He noticed how the militiamen of Bruges and of Ghent roamed together in armed groups in the streets. The men of Bruges indicated the houses of the wealthy, the dwellings of the knights and of the Leliaerts. Louis cursed by this blatant unfaithfulness of the *Bruggelingen*. He might have expected this development.

Louis of Male got cornered in a small, dark alley, when he saw men in arms blocking off both ends. The men checked every house. He pushed with his body against a small door, which gave way.

The house was very small, not larger than a hut. It was filled with smoke. The house had no chimney, just a hole in the roof and a fire in the middle of the floor. Louis had not thought such small houses could still exist in his cities. The peat fire in the middle of the only room stank foully. He saw an old woman sit in a corner, near the fire.

He shouted, 'woman, save me! I am your lord, the count of Flanders! Men try to kill me! Hide me!'

Louis opened his coat, so that the woman could see the splendid, bright yellow coat of arms with the rampant black lion on his breast.

'I do know you, yes,' the woman whispered. 'I have often received almonds at the gates of your castle. You have been good to me. Go up that ladder. My children slept there, but they are grown-up now and have left the house. Hide up there, lord!'

'Thank you. I will reward you for helping me.'

Count Louis of Male climbed the ladder and hid between the hay mattresses of the children. He could see nobody had slept here for a long time. He placed the mattresses in front of him, curled within the hay.

Louis had only just hid, when a group of *Gentenaars* pushed open the door, shouting, 'we have seen a man enter this house! Where is he?'

'No, no,' the woman protested. 'That was only me! I only just returned home. You are mistaken. Nobody else came in here!'

The men lighted candles, looked in all corners, went even up the ladder, but did not rummage through the mattresses and the hay. They didn't find the count.

Count Louis of Male waited for some time until the militiamen had left. He waited until he heard no noises anymore in the alley. Then, he thanked the woman and cautiously opened the door. Nobody could be seen in the alley. Louis stepped out, ran in the streets of Bruges. He

saw the *Gentenaars* kill the last resistance of Bruges. The men who had remained faithful to him were being exterminated.

In the dark night, *Gentenaars* and *Bruggelingen* together looted the houses of the wealthy. At one point, Louis of Male saw almost naked men being thrown out of windows.

A little later, militiamen almost surprised him. He noticed a man-at-arms looking out for something. He hid in bushes, but in a flash of scarce light he recognised one of his knights. He showed himself to the man, sword in hand. The knight declared he had been looking for him. He knew the streets of Bruges.

Together, two streets on, they ran into a small group of men, knights also, who joined them. Louis had been lucky to meet these men, for seconds later, in the Saint-Amand Street, they had to fight for their life. They got help there of yet other men of his army. With the count of Flanders and his guide in the lead, they fled to the walls of Bruges, now a group of about two dozen men. To avoid the militias of Bruges and Ghent, they had to pass the interior waterways of Bruges, the *Minnewater*, in a small boat. One of the men knew of a small door next to the *Gentse Poort* that led to outside the walls. Using that escape, they ran to beyond the walls. Count Louis of Male found a few horses there, horses of knights that had been unseated from their destriers, and also a wagon with horse that stood abandoned a little farther. The count and the men on the fastest horses fled then, away from the city. Louis of Male had a small escort! The group rode as fast as they could to the city of Lille in the south, to safety, for that city had always remained faithful to the count. Louis of Male had been ignominiously defeated by the *Gentenaars* in the battle of the Beverhoutsveld!

The Cities of Flanders

Throughout the night, the militiamen of Ghent occupied the Marketplace of Bruges with part of their men. The men in the square were led by Philip van Artevelde and Peter van den Bossche. The lord of Herzele and the other captains still fought the knights and the men-at-arms of the count outside the walls and inside them. Messengers came running to the centre of command here, and messengers were sent out for more news. The Marketplace served as temporary headquarters for the *Gentenaars* and for the guilds of Bruges that had joined Ghent. One large block of warriors stood thus in the market with flying banners. The block had an outer perimeter of shields out of which protruded the points of the *goedendags* of Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde had taken the heart of Bruges!

The power of the count in his famous city had been broken! Only a very large force of militiamen of Bruges would have been able to dislodge this block. Bruges had not been able to bring order in its troops of half-drunken warriors. Philip van Artevelde knew all troops of Bruges had been thrown in confusion. Where was the count? He asked his captains to search for Louis of Male and take him prisoner.

The streets around the Marketplace were too sinuous for massed assaults by heavily armoured knights of the count. The knights would not be able to erupt in the square and do much harm. The streets were cobbled, cobbles being dangerous for the destriers, as the animals might slip on the polished, round stones. Philip van Artevelde felt safe in Bruges' Marketplace. He admired the fine buildings in the light of his lanterns. While the command group waited in the Marketplace, other groups of *Gentenaars* ran through the dark streets of Bruges.

Heinric Vresele led some of these groups. He ran with the militiamen of Ghent who had confidence in him. His men knew by now his insatiable lust for victory, blood and revenge. They relied on his reputation for being a leader who was lucky. They killed everybody who resisted them. After a while, they noticed they had to oppose mostly brokers, hostellers, furriers and butchers of Bruges.

Near the *Oude Zak*, Heinric came to stand in front of a large group of weavers and blacksmiths of Bruges.

He held back his men and shouted, ‘weavers and smiths of Bruges, we fight against the pernicious count, not against good guildsmen of your city. We have no quarrel with you! For Freedom and Crafts do we fight! We can stop the massacre of good men of Bruges. Death to the landowners and knights of the city, but long live the guilds of the weavers and of the smiths!’

A man holding a torch of fire stepped forward from out of the group of weavers.

He called out, ‘yes, we shall join you. We also shall fight the count. We want our city back from out of the crooked hands of the lineages of Bruges! The weavers and the smiths will join you! For Bruges and for Ghent!’

Heinric equally stepped forward, having confidence in the man.

He embraced him, saying, ‘my name is Heinric Vresele, counsellor of Philip van Artevelde, the head-captain of Ghent and the *Beleeder der Stede*. What is your name, good man?’

‘My name is Simon Cokermoes,’ the other answered.

Heinric then told Simon he could be of more use in the Marketplace, from where Philip van Artevelde was organising the end of the battle. Simon could help gathering all the militias of the weavers and the smiths of Bruges to join Ghent. He told Simon to quote his name to the leaders of Ghent.

Simon nodded. He and his group ran to the market.

Heinric Vresele continued to roam in the streets, killing everyone who did not yield immediately. Then, when he considered Bruges safe and without resistance, he allowed his men to plunder at will, but he indicated them where the most plunder was to be expected. That also made Heinric a popular leader.

On the Sunday and Monday after the Procession of the Holy Blood in Bruges, the militiamen of Ghent looted the houses of the wealthy. They killed mercilessly the aldermen and the other notables of the city who had served the count, whether these men were knights or not. They plundered the finest *stenen*. They also looted the *Prinsenhof*, the Court of Princes, the count’s hotel in Bruges. The silver and gold and other objects of value they could gather, they placed on wagons to have the valuable items transported to Ghent. In the cellar of the *Prinsenhof* they found a nice treasure: more than forty, large oak barrels of wine. The captain who entered the cellar with his men did not want a troop of totally drunken men with him. He stroke the bottom out of the barrels. The wine filled the floor of the cellar.

On Tuesday, the fourth day of the procession, the guildsmen of Ghent assembled solemnly in the Marketplace of Bruges. Not all the *Gentenaars* could find a place in the market, but all the battalions of Ghent were represented. The banners of Ghent flowed under the Belfort of Bruges. Philip van Artevelde held a short speech, calling the battle of the Beverhoutsveld the greatest victory Ghent had ever won against a count of Flanders. The news of the victory of the Beverhoutsveld was brought to Ghent by the messenger Coppin Dalscaert.

Philip van Artevelde appointed Peter de Wintere as captain of Bruges. This Peter was a man of some prominence in Bruges. He had been born in Bruges, but exiled from the city. He fled to Ghent, where he had become an alderman. He had been an early supporter of Philip van

Artevelde. Also Peter van den Bossche would remain in Bruges to rule over the city with a garrison of Ghent guildsmen. His main task would be to install a government of aldermen from the weavers and the other guilds that had joined Ghent.

The next day, on Wednesday, the *Gentenaars* had three gates of Bruges be demolished. Those were the gates in the direction of Ghent: the *Kruispoort* or the gate of the Cross, the *Gentse Poort*, and the *Katelijnepoort* or Gate of Saint Catherine. Near these gates, stones were thrown into the moat that surrounded Bruges, so that the moat was filled up and would form no obstacle anymore to marching troops. Bruges henceforth would not be able anymore to defend its walls from an invading army of Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde and his captains killed more than a thousand men in Bruges, mainly men from the guilds that had opposed the weavers. These were furriers, butchers, fishmongers, wheel-rights, glaziers, and so on. The *Gentenaars* took about two hundred hostages of Bruges and led these to imprisonment in Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde took great care to protect the Lombard, German and English traders in the city. Many of these traders had flocked to Bruges for the May Fair. Philip made sure they were not harmed, their goods not plundered.

A few days later, hundreds of wagons, laden with booty, were brought to Ghent.

The *Gentenaars* broke the bronze dragon of the top of the Saint Donation Church of Bruges, the main church of the city. They had it brought by boat over the Lieve Canal to Ghent. The dragon would henceforth adorn the Belfort Tower of Ghent.

A large contingent of *Gentenaars* also marched out of Bruges to attack the castle of Male. Male had been left practically undefended by the count. The *Gentenaars* ravaged Male, looted it, and brought all the silver and gold and tapestries to Ghent.

Once Bruges secured, the *Gentenaars* marched with a large number of troops to Damme. At the nearest sea-port of Bruges, they confiscated the grain supplies. They loaded hundreds of wagons with grain and sent these to Ghent. Heinric Vresele sent a message to Clais de Hert he could bring his boats to Damme over the Lieve Canal. A steady stream of grain boats travelled from Damme to Ghent and back. Ghent was saved from famine!

Philip van Artevelde returned to Ghent a few days later. The people cheered him not only for his splendid, almost miraculous victory, but also for having saved them from famine. He returned in great triumph. Unlike the count, Philip van Artevelde did not ride a horse. He marched through the main streets of the *kuipe*, the centre. A group of twenty trumpeters announced his approach. A large contingent of guards and troops followed the trumpets and the drums of Ghent. A banner with van Artevelde's badge, the badge with the three silver hats, preceded him. Philip van Artevelde was dressed in the coats of an alderman of Ghent, in a scarlet tunic over a light mail hauberk. He waved to left and right as a glorious Roman Emperor. Ghent had organised a large banquet to celebrate the victory of the Beverhoutsveld in the Bijloke Field. At the table of van Artevelde, the invited men and women dined off the count's silver plates, looted at Male and the *Prinsenhof*. Philip van Artevelde's triumph was complete. He had pushed Count Louis of Male out of Flanders, out of power, and humiliated him. What was the count of Flanders now but a powerless puppet? Philip van Artevelde had realised his revenge on the counts of Flanders too!

As a result of the splendid victory of Ghent over the count's forces, revolts broke out in many other towns of Flanders. These rallied Ghent. Philip van Artevelde began to call himself Regent of Flanders. Only in Oudenaarde and in Dendermonde did the knights still resisted his

rule. The captains of Ghent dispatched a large number of troops to Oudenaarde, to lay a siege to the town.

Oudenaarde was still held by a garrison of three hundred knights and men-at-arms of the count. More knights, sent by the count, reinforced them, under the leadership of the Ser van Halewijn, family of Philip van Artevelde. Oudenaarde had received the time to get in sufficient provisions for a siege of many months. The town refused to yield to Ghent. The army of Ghent set up camp in front of Oudenaarde and began the siege. Ghent surrounded the town with the help of the militias of the other cities of Flanders, and prepared for a long siege. The *Gentenaars* began to construct enormous siege engines. They launched attack after attack on the town, but the garrison fought back, defended the walls, and threw off all assaults.

This angered the leaders of the Ghent army so much, they sent out patrols to devastate the countryside of Oudenaarde. Many castles around the town were looted and burnt. In doing so, these roaming battalions reached the environs of Lille, so that also this city was called to arms. The gates of Lille closed, and the militia manned the walls. Lille remained faithful to the count.

While ravaging the countryside, the Flemish urban forces reached the environs of Tournai, where they destroyed the village of Helchin, which was situated between Tournai and Kortrijk. This destruction was an error, for Helchin was not a part of Flanders. It belonged to the lordship of Tournai, which was part of the royal domains of France. The destruction of Helchin angered the king of France. It was never wise to step on the toes of a sleeping bear!

War and Diplomacy. June to October

Count Louis of Male stayed temporarily in Lille. Knights rode on and off with messages to and from the lords of Flanders. Louis let it be known he was alive and well, and ready to continue the war with Ghent, now also with almost all the other towns of Flanders. His war was with a dictator for Flanders, he told, of the name of Philip van Artevelde, who had diverted the good faith of the cities to his illusions of power.

The count's authority had been annihilated in one day, and Louis of Male felt extremely depressed because of that. The name of van Artevelde and the miraculous, extraordinary victory of the rather modest army of Ghent, assembled in haste, had released the urban aspirations for total freedom. The cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, decided, as they had done during the previous van Artevelde regime, to govern Flanders through their organisations of the three quarters of Flanders. The count's authority was equated with all the vices of dictatorship, although Philip van Artevelde acted exactly the same way from the very beginning of his rule.

Count Louis of Male did not entirely grasp this turn of feelings against him in the Flemish people. Had they not more than a few times come to him, kneeling, begging him to be ruled by a gentle, wise prince? Louis of Male could not believe for a second Philip van Artevelde would be anything else but a despotic ruler. He, the count, seemed to have lost all power. He had also lost his fine castle-palace of Male, which lay destroyed and looted. Louis reflected for many days on what he had done wrong, what he should have done otherwise, and on by what means he might have defied the skies to deserve his current bad fate. He felt deeply humiliated.

The more he pondered over his problems in the county, the more he became moved to bitterness and hatred. He also realised he did not have the means anymore to bring the cities to heel. He had not enough men, he had not enough funds. Flanders was closed to him, and so were the roads to Beostenblije. He could not seek consolation in the arms of Heyla de Smet. He was over fifty years of age, but he already experienced the feebleness of old age, physically and in his mind. He was practically incapable of continuing the war, despite to what he said, feeling exhausted by the constant conflicts. On the other side, he realised that if he cried out for help, that help could only come from the lords he had previously been haughty and proud with, his pride now demolished. Appealing for help from Burgundy and France meant admitting his inadequacy in coping with a situation he should have mastered. He would have to fall on his knees and admit to his helplessness. His lack of power and authority would forever make of him the laughing stock at the court of Paris.

Count Louis of Male did the only thing he could do, however much he hated it. He went on his knees to Canossa! He rode with a few of the knights of his court to Bapaume, to where his son-in-law Duke Philip of Burgundy resided. Duke Philip the Bold had heard of the latest developments in Flanders. He had already made up his decision to intervene, but he privately enjoyed seeing Louis of Male, the proud and wealthy count of Flanders who had so much rubbed the wealth of Flanders in his eyes, come and humiliate himself in front of him. Louis of Male had boasted so often to his son-in-law about the riches of Flanders and about the power of its counts. Count Louis now came begging for Burgundy to unleash the army of France against Philip van Artevelde, a tribune who had grasped control of the cities.

Duke Philip thought about how fate also could turn against himself. He did not turn the knife deep in the wound of his father-in-law. He felt rather glad to be able to help the man, a kind of soft revenge he cherished. Burgundy, moreover, liked his wife, Margaret of Male, and Louis was her father. He also regarded it much his duty to intervene, as he would be the inheritor of the lands of Flanders. The example of Ghent was causing revolts in several cities of France! Duke Philip realised clearly a clash of regimes was being fought. The power of the princes was pitted against the power of the cities, and that war he would have to win! This was not just a war of one count against his cities. Much more was at stake. What had happened in Flanders was but one example of the battle between the class of the kings, counts and lords against the power of the numbers of commoners. He therefore received Count Louis of Male with compassion, and promised his help immediately, telling he had that duty. He put Louis of Male at ease.

‘Yes, Lord,’ Burgundy told with frowned forehead. ‘I have given much thought to the situation in Flanders. We, lords, we must now work together to avert this danger. We must solve what has happened. We must thwart the ambitions of that vile man Philip van Artevelde. We cannot have such a lowly criminal rule over Flanders. Knighthood and chivalry might be destroyed forever in our good county. Such ignominy must not be allowed to continue. I shall ride to the court of Paris. This issue must be solved by the feudal army of France! Meanwhile, please do what you can to organise the knights of Flanders. Assemble your army, and try to hold Oudenaarde and Dendermonde!’

Duke Philip of Burgundy rode to Senlis, where the French court was held at that particular moment. Philip first spoke to his brother, the duke of Berry. Berry proposed to proceed cautiously, being not very enthusiastic to intervene in Flanders. He feared the strength of the militias of the cities of Flanders. He did not want to be blamed for a very expensive expedition in the county, and maybe have to suffer the blame for a defeat. He proposed to call

together a conference of the pairs and bishops of France and have that assembly come to a decision. A little later, also the young King Charles VI expressed the opinion a military campaign against Flanders would be necessary. He added the campaign would be his first major military expedition, which sent him into a fit of enthusiasm for the cause of Burgundy.

The conference of the most important lords of France was held at Compiègne, in the very north of the royal domains and Picardy. The dukes and counts agreed rapidly it was not desirable to discuss the issue at long. Determination was needed! Rapid intervention would limit the damage caused in Flanders and in France by a revolt of the cities. The young king was fervently in favour for calling together his army and invading Flanders.

A surprise came when letters arrived from Ghent, sent to the king of France. The letters were written in the name of Philip van Artevelde. The regent of Flanders asked the king of France to serve as mediator in the conflict with the Count Louis of Male. The pairs of France merely laughed with the arrogant letters, and the court had the Flemish messenger be thrown in prison.

Count Louis of Male had more surprises that spring. On the ninth of May of 1382 died Margaret of France, his mother. It was one more bad tidings for the count, although he had never felt close to his mother, and though he would inherit well. Margaret was countess of Artois in the north of France, very near to Flanders. She had also inherited from her cousin twice removed, Philip de Rouvre, the county of Burgundy, which was now also called the Franche-Comté of Burgundy. When she died, these lands passed to Count Louis of Male, although the territory was already ruled in fact by Duke Philip of Burgundy. Louis did not expect to rule over the county of Burgundy, but Artois was a great prize. He felt a little more powerful than he had been before, and he gathered his last courage.

In late spring, King Charles VI was at the town of Meaux, negotiating with the city of Paris about a dangerous revolt. The lord of Coucy mainly negotiated for the king with the Parisians, and reached a satisfactory solution. Revolts also raged in Aquitaine, the revolt called of the *Tuchins*. The duke of Berry, governor of Aquitaine, had his hands and mind full with this uprising.

In Ghent, Philip van Artevelde continued his program of executions of people who had opposed his family and their rule. Men like Joseph Aper, James van Loevelde, John van Bart and Lievin van Waes thus disappeared. While he was still in Bruges, Philip van Artevelde also had his second cousin once removed killed, because the man had violated his orders not to pillage the foreigners in the town. Philip had the man executed by having him thrown out of a window onto the pikes of the militiamen waiting below.

James de Rijke and James Diederic organised the decapitation of seven German mercenaries who had served the count.

The months after the Battle of the Beverhoutsveld were used in Ghent for active diplomatic efforts with France and England. Philip van Artevelde sent representatives of Ghent to England to ask for an alliance and for military aid by the English king. At the same time, however, he demanded the English king to pay back to Ghent the sum of two hundred thousand Florins. King Edward III had received this much money from Flanders in 1340. The sum had not been refunded since forty years. The court of England did not appreciate this last demand. Demanding this payment was regarded as a strange form of arrogance and of lack of respect of the new ruler of Flanders. John of Gaunt deliberately tarried providing Ghent with an answer.

The court of France heard of the overtures made by van Artevelde to England. They brought a little more caution in their relations with Philip van Artevelde, fearing contingents of English bowmen in Flanders. King Charles VI had the Flemish messenger released and sent back to Ghent with a proposal to enter negotiations at Tournai. The levy of the feudal army was delayed.

The prudence of the king of France made Philip van Artevelde even more daring and arrogant. He imprisoned the messengers of the king, and answered to the court of France he would never begin any negotiations before Oudenaarde had been handed over to him. In the letter she sent back, he complained once more about the bad faith of the count of Flanders. He announced his future alliance with England, and proved how little he considered the might of France as compared to the power of the cities. He even scolded the king for having imprisoned his messenger, telling he would hold the messengers of France prisoners in reprisal! This letter was first sent to Tournai, to the negotiators for the king. These were the bishop of Laon, the lord of Rayneval, Arnaud de Corbie who was President of the Parliament of France, and Guy de Harcourt. The French representatives returned to the king with the letter of Ghent in their hands, considering further parley impossible. King Charles VI received the letter and his representatives at his court of Paris. Count Louis of Male was also present at this session of the court, for he had come to give homage to the king for his county of Artois. The court and the king were scandalised. They showed much sympathy for Louis of Male. The court of Paris decided to delay no longer, and to call together the feudal army of France.

Duke Philip of Burgundy had quite another issue with the planned expedition to Flanders. His finances were low again! First, he had to arrange for new subsidies from the Estates of Burgundy for his campaign in Flanders. The Estates assembled at Châtillon-sur-Seine. They voted for a new hearth tax and a new tax on wine. Duke Philip the Bold had to make promises in return. He annulled earlier arrears of taxes, and agreed to chase the Jews and the Lombards from his territory. The subsidies from Burgundy did not suffice for the campaign in Flanders. Philip the Bold borrowed more money from bankers. He had part of his silver plates be melted down and transformed in coins. From the silver of his hotels and castles he obtained thirty thousand five hundred and seventy pounds.

In the last week of May of 1382, Philip van Artevelde was at Ieper. The aldermen received him as the ruler of Flanders. He confirmed the aldermen in their function. He also met two English merchants who had come to secure further English trade with Flanders. He returned to Ghent in June.

In Ghent, he had to confront new issues. Rumours ran in the city Philip van Artevelde was a lover of men. In pious Flanders, such an allegation had to be taken very seriously.

During a banquet in the Saint Peter's Abbey, Heinric Vresele dared to speak to him about the subject.

'Are you satisfied now, Philip? You have obtained your great triumph over your enemies,' began Heinric.

Philip van Artevelde drank, drew a haughty mouth, finished his cup, and he gave Heinric a condescending look.

'Not yet, Heinric, not yet! We can go farther! There is still much to do. Louis of Male has fled, but we must still take Oudenaarde and Dendermonde. We need more troops and new taxes to pay for our expenditures. When will my triumph be complete? Flanders entire must submit to me. Our frontiers must be secured. France must be deterred from sending an army against me. I must have a strong alliance with England, and England must send contingents of

hers to assist us. I must be recognised by England as a bastard son of the great King Edward III. I want to govern Flanders in feudal loan of the English king! I want to become an earl or a duke of England. That kind of triumph is still some way in the future, I'm afraid. Yet, those are my aims.'

'Then it seems time you chose a woman as wife and start continuing your line!'

'All in due time, all in due time, Heinric! I am not much of the marrying type, nor are you. I am quite aware the line of the van Arteveldes must be continued too.'

'The time is now, I'm afraid, Philip. There has been talk in Ghent. You know how our city always buzzes with rumours. A persistent gossip can become as dangerous as an enemy army. A nasty rumour goes around about you.'

'Oh! What does it say?'

'It says you are a not a lover of women, but a lover of men. Jokes go around telling you are a sodomite. Sodomites are considered particularly depraved men. The Church condemns sodomites quite spectacularly. In some countries, sodomites are put to the stake and burnt. The rumours are libellous, of course, aiming at nibbling at your authority. They make you vulnerable to all sorts of criticism. If they continue and grow stronger, you might be accused in Ghent by one or more men who have remained faithful to the count. The rumours may originate in the old lineages, with the help of the knights and of some prelates of the Church. These men are observing you. They track your goings and doings. You don't need such a scandal!'

'Neither do you, Heinric, neither do you!' Philip bit back.

'Nobody needs such rumours. You can easily put an end to them. I spotted several girls this evening alone, eyeing you. You might flirt with them. One of them might be foolish enough to let her be drawn in bed. Have it be known publicly you are seeing a girl. Marry one. Have a child by her. Have you not met any such nice girl in the past? You are the most admired man and bachelor of Ghent. You must have noticed women who wanted to approach you, draw you into their nets. Try one out! Some of them have short hair, small bosoms, and resemble young boys.'

'Sometimes you seem extremely vulgar to me, Heinric,' Philip ended the conversation, 'but you are a fine counsel. I'll think about what you try to tell me.'

Two of the aldermen of Ghent came to stand between Philip and Heinric to pay their respect to the leader of Ghent.

Heinric left the table and went to greet a few men he knew. When he came back to the table, Philip van Artevelde still was sitting at his place. He drank. Heinric sat down.

Philip had calmed down, 'maybe you are right. There may be someone I am not disinclined to. I have given the affair some thought. You know, when I was a commissioner last year, a member of the commission that sold confiscated goods for Ghent, I met many people. Your cousin, William Terhagen, bought quite some lands from us. One member of the commission was Peter van den Broucke, the shipwright. He befriended me. I talked quite politely with him. He even invited me to his home. I met his family. There was a girl at his home, one Lente van den Broucke. She was the younger sister of Peter van den Broucke, not his daughter. Her mother must have been French, her real name is Yolante. Her parents have died, I believe, so she lives in Ghent. She ogled me quite a bit. I have met her a few times afterward. She openly flirted with me. She is sitting two tables farther on your right side. No, don't look now! She knows I am talking about her, I can tell. Try to look naturally. She sits between the wife of Alderman John van Lembergen and the wife of van den Broucke. Have a discrete look. Her attention has been drawn away from us!'

Heinric looked to his right, and saw the table. He spotted the group, saw the aldermen van Lembergen and his wife, and the young girl of sixteen or seventeen. She was a small,

buxomed girl with hair the colour of ripened wheat, richly dressed, with flushed cheeks, a nice bottom, alluring looks, a small uplifted nose, with a strong mouth with red lips. She directed her eyes again to their table. Heinric watched her discreetly on and off. Then, he turned back to Philip van Artevelde.

‘Any wench like her will do. She has a good figure, a good name, hips made for pregnancy. She is a bit young and inexperienced, maybe, but I doubt she will give you much trouble. She may be as good a choice as any. A little scandal with that girl will be better than the rumours. She should do as mistress, wife, whatever! Ghent and the lineages will not tolerate anything less than a marriage!’

‘If Ghent wants a marriage, she shall have a marriage,’ Philip van Artevelde whispered. ‘A pity, really. I would have preferred marrying the daughter of an English duke or earl, but that can always be arranged yet. I guess you are right. I must stop those rumours. You were not the first to warn me. I shall be making some work of Lente van den Broucke, then!’ Heinric nodded.

From the twelfth of July on, Philip van Artevelde was at Edelare near Oudenaarde, in his tent in the camp of the army of Flanders that was besieging Oudenaarde. With him in his tent giggled Lente van den Broucke. More than once his army leaders walked in the command tent to find a scantily dressed girl sitting on Philip’s knees in his chair, pushing her ample breasts to his chin. She drank his wine and lived with him in the tents.

Philip van Artevelde was in that period more at Oudenaarde than in Ghent. He met the English Herald Richard Hereford, with whom he discussed an alliance with England. Van Artevelde had made overtures to King Richard II to that effect. Richard of Hereford arranged for further negotiations to begin in mid-July by other English royal envoys and by the two English merchants Philip had met previously. Philip van Artevelde offered an alliance, arguing additionally both countries were Urbanist in faith, followers of Pope Urban VI of Rome. Pope Urban VI declared for an expedition to help Flanders against France. Aid from Flanders would be a crusade, the pope wrote, so clerical tithes could be used to pay for the expenditures.

In August of 1382, by orders of Philip van Artevelde, the aldermen of the three main cities of Flanders, Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, began to equip a fleet to deal with the piracy along the Flemish coast. This had been a special demand of the family de Hert, the shippers of the Pharaïdis families. Also Peter van den Broucke was a shipper and insisted. Van Artevelde wanted the shippers to continue being his very faithful allies in Ghent.

In France, in the summer of 1382, revolts rose in France against the reimposition of the hearth taxes. The people of the cities of Paris, Amiens and Rouen revolted once more. Mainly Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy did his utmost to end these uprisings, which delayed the campaign into Flanders. He did not dare risking having the feudal French army return to France to fight revolts in its own country. France had to be pacified first! He succeeded in obtaining guarantees the peace would be held in Paris.

For the *Gentenaars*, in August and September, the siege of Oudenaarde continued unabatedly. The town held and did not surrender. Ghent sent other expeditions to submit Flanders, mainly to the Land of Aalst.

In August, however, King Charles VI and the court finally agreed to gather the feudal army of France with the aim of reconquering Flanders.

In September, Philip van Artevelde was back in Ghent most of the time. In the beginning of the month, he went with three aldermen of Bruges to Ieper to mediate in a conflict between the weavers and the fullers. The fullers had been shouting and running in the streets of Ieper, wanting higher salaries. Philip van Artevelde put an end to the conflict, and the agreement was accepted by the three cities.

By the end of September, the aldermen of the cities discussed with him about the agreements with England. Van Artevelde wanted to offer a military alliance to England. He also sought joint actions against the French and Castilian pirates in the North Sea. He was readying his Flemish fleet. He could offer the English free access to the Flemish harbours, and free traffic for English merchants in Flanders. He asked in return the transfer of the wool staple from Calais to a town chosen by Ghent. He wanted the English king to hand over to him all the men exiled from Flanders who had fled to England since May of that year. He promised in return to hand over the English exiles sought by the king. Philip continued to ask for the payment of the sums borrowed from Flanders in 1340 by King Edward III. By mid-October, the English found especially this last demand unacceptable.

The contacts between Flanders and England were intense during the months of September and October. On the seventeenth of October, a delegation of aldermen from Ghent, Bruges and Ieper left Ghent for new negotiations with the court of England. These men were Michael Boene, John van Waes, William van den Pitte, with Rasse van den Voorde who was captain, and the clerk Master William van den Coudenbergh for Ghent. For Bruges went Martin van Erpe, Peter van Beerevelt, Louis de Vos, James de Scoteleere and William Matten. Gillis Tand, James Moenen and Lamsin de Borghgrave were sent for Ieper.

Also French messengers came and went to Philip van Artevelde. By half October, the French court offered negotiations with Ghent. The French feared a campaign in winter, in the cold and in the marshy lands of Flanders. Philip van Artevelde remained at Edelare in October, with his now spouse Lente van den Broucke, so the French emissaries came to the Ghent military camp of Oudenaarde. The negotiations quickly led to nothing.

Philip van Artevelde demanded at the end of October once more from King Charles VI that Oudenaarde and Dendermonde be surrendered to him as the first condition for a true parley to be held. He arrogantly wrote he had indeed begun negotiations with England. He blamed King Charles VI for this initiative, having thrown his messenger in prison! That messenger had long since returned to Flanders! By the end of October also, the English court had rejected the conditions of van Artevelde for the opening of negotiations.

Philip van Artevelde stayed mainly at Edelare from August to October of 1382, but he held close communications with the city of Ghent. The aldermen of Ghent came to see him at his camp. At Edelare, he met John van de Watere, Simon Braem, John van Lembergen, Jordan de Brune, Lievin van der Bile, William de Dene, Michael Boene, John de Jonghe, William van den Pitte, Roger Everwijn, Peter van den Turre, John uten Broucke, Goswin Mullaert, Laurens de Maeck, John de Hert, John van den Winckele, Daniel van Vaernewijck, Francis Augustijn, John Allinc, John Veelhevel, James van den Hane, Josse van den Nieuwenhuus, Gillis van den Spieghele, Gillis de Sterke, Peter van den Galleyden, and others. These men came to him and conferred with him.

He also arranged various, more domestic matters. He arbitrated for the atonement money to be paid by Peter van den Bossche to the parents of John van Axel for the death of their son, caused by Peter van den Bossche. It was from Edelare that he wrote to the aldermen he had arranged the peace between James Christiaens and Peter de Ketelare concerning the murder of this James's brother John. He asked the aldermen to ratify his judgement. Several such

agreements, directly concluded by Philip van Artevelde at Edelare, were sent to Ghent. The Alderman Peter van den Broucke came several times to Edelare to discuss with Philip matters of the shippers, and no doubt to check on Lente. Philip mediated in a conflict between the city and the shippers over the tonnage of wine that was allowed to be transported over the Lieve Canal.

The siege of Oudenaarde dragged on in the autumn of 1382 for the Flemish city militia. They consolidated their power over several other, smaller towns in the county. Philip van Artevelde, believing the Holy Providence had chosen him to be the leader of Flanders, was happy.

His negotiations with England had, however, proven a hard failure. France remained a threat of which he seemed not at all afraid. He knew his militia were up to the royal France army in numbers, and he keenly sensed the delaying of the French lords as good signs. He did not expect any serious attack before the spring of next year.

Agneete Vresele

The campaign of the captains of Ghent led by Philip van Artevelde took place in May of 1382. In June, the peasants of the Clinge warned me Arent de Handscoemakere had abandoned his large farm. The servants and journeymen continued to take care of the place, but the situation without a master was untenable, for no records were held anymore, nobody paid wages, and the main house stood open to plunder.

I had dreaded this development, expecting to see Arent emerge before me any instant, calling me to accounts. I dreaded riding to the farm and having to take a decision about the premises that would in some way be definite. I had hoped matters to be left unsaid, undecided, and to continue this way in limbo. When two servants of the Clinge came to talk to me at New Terhagen, I sighed and could no longer do as if nothing had happened at all.

I rode to the farm, and noticed its state of neglect. Neglect set in rapidly when a house is not cared for daily. Apparently, Arent had let things drift for quite a while. Then, one day at the end of April, he had simply rode off on a horse, drawing a pack-horse behind him. His people could not tell me more. Arent had been a master who did not much confide in them. His two horses had been heavily laden. Arent had taken clothes, provisions, mail, shield, weapons, and the money he had saved.

I was glad not to be confronted with him at the Clinge. Inside the main house, Arent had left the chests, wardrobes and other furniture in disarray, doors opened, discarded objects scattered on the floor. The house was not dirty, though, except for the dust that had gathered. Arent had told nobody anything about his intentions. He had just left. Nobody knew whether he would ever return. I guessed he would not. I supposed he had turned mercenary like his father had once been.

I sought and installed a steward in the farm, allowed that man and his family to use the hall, the kitchens, but not the rooms of Arent on the upper floors.

I wondered then when Arent would show up in front of me and reproach me for having seduced his wife. The day of reckoning would be violent. I sharpened my sword, and sought more lessons of sword-fighting from a master-at-arms of Ghent. I practised on my own at crossbow shooting, and wrestled with the champion of Axel. As usual, I stayed away for long periods from New Terhagen. I warned Greet van Noortkerke in Antwerp.

Greet and I had two fine children by then, a boy and a girl, and a third would be under way. We were happy in Antwerp. Greet made magnificent profits. She had the heart of a merchant woman. Her warehouses were filled with goods. She was thinking of building a new warehouse in another part of the town, and she had need of more clerks. She had also begun sending out entire shiploads of goods to Germany, so that I began to worry, for she traded in the same goods and to the same towns as Boudin van Lake must be doing from out of Antwerp. We should not compete among branches of the same consortium! Gillis Vresele the Younger worked a lot out of Antwerp too, now. Greet had expanded her business much faster than I had thought possible. Maybe her charm helped. I often arrived at our house in Antwerp, seeing her surrounded by men talking gallantly, flirting with her, and yet slapping her hands to contracts. I had to suppress pangs of jealousy, until Greet flung herself in my arms and killed me with kisses. I would have to talk seriously with her about our purpose in business, tell her to concentrate more on expanding our lands in and around Antwerp. She should buy houses and terrains and maybe help building new quays with our funds, and exploit the harbour.

In the month of August, I had been away from New Terhagen for almost all the time. I returned to my castle at the beginning of September. When I rode unannounced in the courtyard, Agneete welcomed me at the top of the stairs outside. She greeted me rather coldly, but not differently from the previous times. I took the saddle-packs from my horse, swung them over my shoulders, ran up the stairs and embraced her. Then I brought my sacks to my rooms, refreshed, changed clothes, and went into our hall, where Agneete would be waiting for me. She sat on a wide chair. Normally, she would have asked me what I had done in the Four Crafts for so long, and I would have explained some of my worries with the farms. This time, she began to speak before I had a chance to start a story.

‘A man has come to New Terhagen while you were away,’ she said immediately. ‘He didn’t want to see you. He knew you were not at New Terhagen. He came to see me alone.’

I was startled. I understood the man would have been Arent de Handscoemakere, who had been pouring out his venom.

‘The man told me he managed a farm of the Terhagens near Hulst. I remembered him, then. He was one of the sons of the guards who lived at New Terhagen. He was a friend of yours of very long. His name was Arent de Handscoemakere. He told me he had abandoned the farm and would not come back. He brought money. He said the money was for the profits of the farm. He did not want to be known as a thief. The money was due to you. The coins are in our chest. It is yours. I did not touch it.’

‘Yes,’ I answered absent-mindedly. ‘He has left his farm. I had to appoint a new steward.’

Agneete slumped deeper in her chair. I feared she would nevermore crawl out of it. Her body lines were undecipherable under the bulk of her dress, although the summer was hot. She felt always cold. Her white, laced shirt went up to high under her chin. I had never seen Agneete in a dress with bare shoulders, never with her white-creamed breasts showily tugged up over a bodice. Agneete was a true zealous Christian. She made up for her lack of children with pious thoughts. She had sought solace in the Church. She prayed a lot. I was glad she had found some form of solace. How could I compare her to the petulant, clever, bright-eyed, a little foul-mouthed but always lively Greet van Noortkerke, who didn’t shy away from parading around me stark naked, flaunting her heavy breasts and saucy bottom at me? These two women couldn’t possibly be more different in how to address a man!

Agneete crossed her hands in her lap as if in prayer.

‘This man, Arent, also said he had left his farm because his wife had eloped. He told me his wife was called Greet van Noortkerke. I also remembered that Greet well. She too lived at New Terhagen when she was a girl, didn’t she? She too was a child of one of your guards. I remember her as a stout, impertinent, impudent young woman. I heard my father say she was now the woman in charge of a Pharaïldis trading post in Antwerp, a trading post you supervised. Is she not in Antwerp?’

‘Yes, she is,’ I replied, stiffening, expecting the rest to come out too.

‘Arent told me he didn’t know where his wife was. She had run away from him. Don’t worry, I didn’t think it my duty to tell him I knew where she was. Still, Arent told me he thought his wife had run off with the Lord William Terhagen. He told you two must be lovers. Is that true, William? Did she run off with somebody else’s husband, to Antwerp? Do you live in adultery, out of wedlock, with another man’s woman when you disappear for weeks in a row from the castle? Do you then live in Antwerp with the wife of another man, that man and that woman former friends of your youth?’

My throat went dry. The day of truth had indeed arrived. I would have to bite through the fruit, now. This was no time to lie anymore, or to hide. I had some explaining to do.

‘Greet van Noortkerke and I, we loved each other from the times we were young. We didn’t realise our feelings. We lost sight of each other, thinking the other unattainable. She married Arent de Handscoemakere because otherwise she would have had to leave the Four Crafts and travel to the Champagne with her parents. Her brother married my sister. I was not in the Four Crafts at that time. I married you, Agneete, and thought honestly to start a good life together. But I met Greet again, by chance, not by will, and our old passion revived. Yes, Greet lives in Antwerp. She manages our trading post. Yes, we are lovers. I don’t want to deny the fact. I am married to you, Agneete, and I will never lack you in respect. I love Greet. I cannot leave her, for she is my love. We do not have to make dramatic changes to the way we live. Greet is a secret for the world. I have tried keeping matters agreeable for everyone. Greet does not intend to step out in the bright light and walk in society at my arm. She is satisfied with the shadows. She is happy as she lives.’

‘You live in adultery, but you make matters discreet and agreeable?’ Agneete grinned. ‘Don’t you understand God and the saints know what you are doing? Adultery is a deadly sin! Do you really believe God will forgive you? How do you think my father and brother will react when they find out?’

I did not answer.

Agneete then put her most painful question, almost whispering the words, and creeping deeper in her chair, wringing her hands, ‘do you have children by her?’

‘We have two. A boy and a girl.’

Agneete began to cry. I had wanted to spare her this. She sobbed.

‘That’s it, then, isn’t it? I can have no children. I understand. I shouldn’t blame you. A man should have children. The lineage must be continued. I was useless in life. I was useless to you.’

‘Agneete, stop blaming yourself. Stop lamenting over your fate. Life is like that. I truly did not intend to see Greet again, I truly wanted to marry you, and I truly liked you. I thought we would have a fine life together. Yes, I expected children, and I was disappointed when they didn’t come. This may have changed our relationship. Were we to blame? I don’t think so. Life did this to us. We are but leaves the wind blows to and fro. We don’t really master where we go. You changed too. You lamented over your misfortune. You grew bitter and sarcastic. I understood, but our life wasn’t very happy, wasn’t it? Our love waned. I suppose all this added to our growing apart. When I met Greet, I longed for love and tenderness. She did too,

so we were drawn together immediately. It just happened, it was not something we sought. I still have kind feelings for you. My father was married to Wivine Denout and he still lives with her, but his children were by Quintine. You know that story. Wivine and Quintine lived together with my father. Maybe such a curse has been thrown on the Terhagen men.'

'Is that what you want? To imitate your father? The Terhagens are strange men!'

'No, I'm not demanding that much,' I answered quickly. 'I will never bring you and Greet together. I wouldn't do that. Greet shall stay at Antwerp. She has made a new life there. She cherishes her independence. She is such a woman. She seems happy with what she has got. You can stay being the Lady of Terhagen!'

'Yes. For the moment I shall stay the Lady of Terhagen. I have to think about what I want. To begin with, I want separate rooms. I already made arrangements. We shall not share bedrooms ever again. We shall keep up appearances, but we'll live as strangers. I don't want an adulterer touch me. I'll be polite to you, William Terhagen, nothing more. Terhagen belongs to you. With time, I might return to Ghent. I do like the castle and its environs, but the crowd of Ghent may do me some good. You would do me a favour to not return to Terhagen too often. If you feel at home here, and would want to live with your whore here, then I shall move. I shall not live with another woman in the manor!'

'I don't expect you to, Agneete. Greet shall remain at Antwerp. I'll have to return every once and a while to New Terhagen. My papers and accounts are here. New Terhagen really is my home.'

'My home is more in Ghent. I may enjoy life some, despite you. I like to walk along the quays of Ghent. God damn you, William Terhagen! You are a man who thinks only of himself, who grabs at all the opportunities life offers. That is, I suppose, as all men are, but that is not the way of the Christ. You have no scruples. You'll be punished.'

'I did have many scruples, Agneete, but our marriage simply didn't work out. You can put the blame on me, but you are not the sweet, loving woman you once were. Life has changed us. I merely want to do the right thing, as best as possible in the circumstances. I cannot perpetrate lies and I shall not leave Greet for a life of sorrow.'

'Well then, all seems to have been said. I'll inform my father, of course. You may be evicted from the Pharaïldis families.'

'So be it, then,' I remarked. 'Please excuse me, now. I have much work to do.'

I left Agneete slumping in her chair as if she would nevermore, for her entire life, rise out of that chair. Evening fell, and the darkness enveloped her. I saw her now as a daylily, a flower that bloomed only one day. That day had sufficed to take me, and that day had been a bad day for me. I felt much pity for her, for she would scarcely have a life left. No love waited for her, not for the rest of her days. She would not fight for another life. The best she could hope for was solace. Who knew, however, what life could bring? I certainly wished her better than I could offer, which was scant nothing.

A Pharaïldis Meeting

I expected my relationship with Greet van Noortkerke to be thrown on the table at the Pharaïldis meeting of end September of 1382. Nobody breached a word about the affair. We had far more urgent items to discuss. Only Raes van Lake, Boudin's son, who had become a Fremineuren monk, asked to have a word with me after the meeting. Evrard Vresele, our other Fremineuren, saw Raes talking to me. He never left Raes out of sight.

We held our meeting not in Ghent, but at Westdorp Manor, hosted by Ser Martin Denout of Westdorp. It was the first time such a meeting was held at Westdorp Manor! I detected some disapproval of my way of living in this choice. Previous meetings had been held either at Ghent or at New Terhagen. A few meetings had been organised at Beoostenblijje, but that was only when we had wanted Count Louis of Male to be present. We hadn't conferred with the count since several years. We hadn't spoken with him since the beginning of the war with Ghent in 1379, and we had heard he only very rarely still made an appearance at Heyla de Smet's domain. His bastard sons, however, were with him and seemed to be appreciated as warriors and counsellors by their father. From them and by Heyla de Smet, we heard what happened at the count's court.

A few of our members had not been able to make it to Westdorp. Heinric Vresele had not come. John de Smet had declared he was too old, over seventy years of age. He didn't travel anymore out of the city. The others, also the women, had arrived. We were with so many, not all could find rooms at Westdorp Manor. Heyla de Smet had taken in the others at Beoostenblijje. New Terhagen had been shunned, understandably. I was grateful.

The first subjects that were brought up in Ser Martin's hall were the economic situation of Flanders and the state of our companies.

Boudin Vresele began, 'my friends, members of the Pharaïldis families, it is good to see you all here in Ser Martin's great hall. I thank him and his wife, Avezoete van Lake, for having prepared us fine accommodations. My thanks also go to Heyla de Smet, here, for having housed some of us at her castle. We'll have a chance to test whether Ser Martin's wine cellar is up to its fame. Before we start on our wine, however, we have to talk seriously. I'll start with the business I lead.

The Investment branch of the Pharaïldis Consortium is doing very well, thank you. Despite the war in Flanders, we have been able to trade and to trade well. We traded mostly over Damme and Sluys when the Lieve Canal was open, and when the war allowed us, with the north of France. The trade of grain with Picardy was mostly closed to us, but we displaced part of our trade from Picardy to Hainault, and from there to Brabant and then back to Ghent. That meant additional costs, but higher prices of grain compensated, and few other merchants imitated us. In fact, so far, we have more profited from the war than we lost. We obtained good prices, despite issues of transport over the Leie and the Scheldt north of Ghent. We have been able to trade in everything we traded in before and have held our investments stable. We have not grown in business out of Ghent. We set up a trading house in Antwerp. Boudin van Lake leads that branch. He can give you more details later on. Suffice to say for the moment the Antwerp trade is booming. Our increase of wealth comes from Antwerp. More than for our business of Ghent, we deal now for new initiatives out of Antwerp, with more nations than we did out of Damme or Sluys. Some of our partners in Ghent are reproaching us for our choices. To some, we seem like traitors for Ghent. Nevertheless, we make profits, and they don't. Also, when the sea-cogs arrive at our land, some captains wondered why they could not unload their goods simply at Sluys and had to sail along to far-off Antwerp. Once they arrived in Antwerp, however, they were delighted with the facilities offered there. They liked the care with which one can now do business there, at that new harbour. They appreciate the opportunities offered by that port to reach in less time Brabant, Hainault, Holland, and the western lands of Germany. They made interesting contracts and usually left more satisfied than they had arrived! Because of the war we had to adapt, of course, and these have truly been difficult months, but we have held our own and our fortune has not diminished.'

Boudin Vresele stopped speaking for a while. He gave a sign to Martin Denout. Ser Martin would speak for the Domains branch.

‘Dear friends,’ he began with his deep, strong voice and with his extraordinary charm, ‘as to our Domains, especially my son John and also William Terhagen are now more than ever managing our farms and terrains, more than I. I have practically withdrawn from the business. I do keep an eye on how matters are evolving, and our two youngsters are polite enough to ask for my advice. My son John manages our domains in the Four Crafts and in the Land of Waas. These last years have been consolidation years from him and for William. We have not much expanded in lands over there, but we built dikes, set up a few windmills, and we have dried out more polders than ever before. You may call that also consolidation work. By doing so, we were able to bring so much good food to Ghent. We prevented the city from starving out, until new grain could be brought in from Damme. In a way, we too profited from the war, though we didn’t need the war to do well. We have sought other men and places to trade our products with. We continue selling our products at the same rate, even if Ghent would buy its goods from other places but ours. We too have established a trading post in Antwerp, headed by William Terhagen. The post in Antwerp is managed by a woman, one Greet van Noortkerke, the daughter of a former guard of Terhagen. She is quite a woman! She is doing well for us. She has extended the trade of our goods so much, our trading post of the Domains branch might be currently doing almost the same as Boudin van Lake’s house. We shall not compete with each other, of course. William is aware of the possible confusion. He is addressing the issue if there is one.

Recently, we have expanded our reserves in and around Antwerp, acquiring with the profits vast terrains and also houses and land inside the walls of Antwerp, or in the environs of the town. We expect the town to grow out of its walls very soon. Our lands will be worth vast amounts of money, then. We transform almost all of our profits in lands and houses, as conforming to the aims of the Domains branch in the Pharaïldis Consortium.

We also provide extra funds to Lieve de Hert. Indeed, we are building a small fleet of new sea-cogs with Lieve, a fleet based at Antwerp. We so help Clais and Arnout de Hert in expanding, based on their great experience. Lieve too has the shipping business in his heart and kidneys! He is still very young, but he had acquired a good flair of the cities which form the best partners for our transport business out of Antwerp. Lieve is already speaking better German than French. He is more often at Lübeck and Hamburg and Copenhagen than at Antwerp! Boudin van Lake and William Terhagen load his ships to the deck. He seems to agree well with the woman Greet van Noortkerke, too. We pray our Lord our work may continue to grow and bring in profits. Antwerp has been a fine choice for us too.’

Wouter de Smet the Younger scraped his throat and then explained us the state of his banking business. Wouter’s father, John de Smet, was getting very old, so Wouter the Younger managed the bank. It was he who had really founded the bank, too, having not inherited the goldsmith’s skills of his father and grandfather. Also Wouter’s son, John the Younger, worked in the money-changing business now. The bank would continue to be held by the de Smet family, the succession assured. Our bank had served us well, both for the Investment and the Domains branches. The de Smets had contributed much money also to the Pharaïldis Consortium, and continued to do so.

The war had isolated the Ghent bank, but Wouter the Younger announced us that despite the breaking up of the links with Bruges, he had succeeded in setting up a bank at Bruges. John the Younger managed affairs for us at Damme and Sluys. The house of Bruges had remained small, very private. It was relatively new, had to be discreet, suffered from the war, but was slowly thriving. Wouter’s aims were to expand very slowly by creating confidence. He wanted no risks in the investments he supported. Building up the confidence to fight an entry into the most private but most wealthy families of Bruges took time.

He too had cast his eyes on Antwerp. John the Younger had heard of the possibilities of the Antwerp trade from Boudin van Lake and me. He wanted to start small there also, build up confidence as he had been doing at Bruges. He thought the growing trade business of Antwerp might be sound enough to exploit favourably. He also feared the capture and subsequent looting of the house of Ghent by the count's troops. We sighed at such an eventuality, but we all took it into account.

Wouter de Smet looked with affection not only to his wife and son, but also to his daughter Alise. Alise had moved discreetly to the other side of the table, where she was sitting next to her friend Lieve de Hert, joking and smiling with him. I thought the Pharaïldis marriage conspiracies were once more at work. I suspected we would soon feast Alise's wedding with Lieve de Hert. It would be a fine match. I looked for other possible matches among our younger people.

Gillis Vresele the Younger, son of Boudin, was constantly studying Selie Denout the Younger. John de Smet the Younger had eyes only for the very young but extremely pretty Zoetin van Lake. I noticed three possible marriages in the making that afternoon! Only John Denout the Younger remained something of a mystery to me. He was a jolly fellow. We agreed very well, but he remained much closed when we diverged into the subject of women and marriage. He knew, of course, I lived with Greet in Antwerp.

'Friends,' Boudin Vresele continued, 'we have yet another subject to discuss. This issue is rather painful, I have to say.'

More even than John de Smet, who was six years older than Boudin, he was our main patriarch, as his father and grandfather had been before him. He stood here among friends and family, so he had put off his scarlet woollen tunic and his coat lined with ermine. He was very simply dressed, as any commoner of Ghent would. With his flowing grey hair and very strong head, he was nevertheless an imposing figure.

'As you know, we refuse to be involved in the government of our city of Ghent. We also refused these last years to take part in campaigns of the militia. Such is our code of conduct. We have lived by our code, as our fathers thought wise. We have not asked for functions of aldermen or of deans, although some of us have been solicited for such functions. It seems our notoriety had finally caught up with us. We have been discreet, but our power in the merchant circles of Ghent has become very visible. Just two weeks ago, some of us have been called to a remarkable meeting, a private meeting, with the regent of Flanders, with Philip van Artevelde, Peter van den Bossche and with our Heinric Vresele.'

Boudin paused, and we hung at his lips. We knew little about Philip van Artevelde. We were curious to learn something about the man.

'The meeting took place in a hall of the *Schepenhuis*. For the Pharaïldis, I was present, and also John de Smet, Boudin van Lake, Martin Denout, and Clais de Hert. We had a polite talk with the men who currently hold Flanders in their power. We had no idea before arriving why Philip van Artevelde had invited us. The meeting was very frugal. We had no banquet, scarcely a cup of wine to drink. It became rapidly clear what they wanted.

Van Artevelde thanked us for the aid and efforts we had provided Ghent during the siege by the count. He said he was delighted with our services, speaking as a king would have. He was very much aware that without us, Ghent would have starved much sooner. We relaxed, but then Philip engaged immediately in a diatribe against the wealthy poorters of Ghent, reproaching them and us for not having become involved as leaders and warriors and supporters of his war.

We looked astonished at Heinric, my brother, but Heinric's face also remained of stone. Philip van Artevelde and Peter van den Bossche told each in his turn they wanted much more from us than we had given so far. They wanted us to serve in the army of Ghent. We would have to fight with them for the glory of the city, but I suppose much more for the glory of Philip van Artevelde! In words that were hardly veiled, they told Ghent would not tolerate many of its most influential poorters not to commit entirely to the war effort. They demanded funds and the personal involvement of the men of our families. Mind you, they didn't ask for more involvement, they demanded it!

As the meeting and the evening advanced, van Artevelde, van den Bossche and even Heinric, turned their demands into open threats. If we, the Pharaïldis families, did not comply with their demands, we might have to face all kinds of harassments to our activities and to our possessions, maybe have to confront exile or worse, physical harm. In the end, we became very silent. We shook hands with them, stood from our chairs abruptly and left.

We walked together to the home of the de Herts to discuss the strange conference in the *Schepenhuis*. We needed a few cups of wine to digest the threats.'

'The next morning,' Boudin continued, 'we held another meeting in our house of the *Kalanderberg* with my brother Heinric. We wanted explanations for the aggressive behaviour of van Artevelde, van den Bossche and even of himself. Heinric was clearly embarrassed. He explained to us in long, wound-up phrases Philip van Artevelde and Peter van den Bossche talked thus in private conversations with all the wealthy families of Ghent. They gave other families the same message as they did to us. They were rather desperate to call all the hands and minds of Ghent to their war. They wanted us to become personally involved in their war efforts, and they wanted money, much money. The treasury of Ghent was empty. They needed our funds to continue the siege of Oudenaarde.

We asked Heinric what would happen if we didn't comply. Then, you shall be considered an enemy or a coward, Heinric said rather coldly. You may be exiled for life, your possessions will be confiscated, for you will be branded as traitors, and even worse may happen to you. Blood flows in the *Castelet*! You will be treated as traitors to the cause of Ghent. You may well disappear without any trace left of you. You may be hanged or decapitated somewhere outside Ghent, your body thrown in a pit. No one will ever see you again. The, van Artevelde and van den Bossche will have another nice talk with your sons and nephews! We didn't believe our ears, but Heinric was very clear about it all.'

Boudin read the horror from our faces.

'So, here is what we decided,' he finally said. 'Heinric knows of what we agreed and will abide by it. He seems satisfied and has pledged to make van Artevelde and van den Bossche accept what we propose.

First, we'll hand over about one third of our ready money to the war funds of the head captain. Our lands and castles will not be touched. I know, I know! This is a substantial part of our well-earned fortune. Still, either we hand this money over, or we must fear and regret deaths in our families. Heinric knows the extension of our funds. He wouldn't settle for less. Second, van Artevelde demanded our involvement in his army. He needs commanders, he explained. He needed intelligent men to lead his troops. He has been appalled at how few of the better-known families of Ghent have participated in person in his Bruges campaign. He wants the more intelligent men of Ghent also in his army. We discussed about this demand with our families. The leading men of our kin have decided to the following.

The older patriarchs, among whom I myself, are too old to take part in any fighting. We are unfit to fight, and van Artevelde has refused us. War and battles are for the younger man, he said, but we do not want our younger generation to be sacrificed in a stupid battle.

We, the Pharaïldis men, have judged it would be wise to refuse the younger men to march with the army. We must keep our companies working and keep them under good control. We are lucky. Our younger men know already our business and our ways of working.

We have therefore chosen one man of each family to accompany the army of Ghent, in order to preserve the rest of our families from harm.

As of immediately, the men and women who remain will have to leave Ghent and go to our manors, or to Antwerp. The men I am going to mention now will march or ride with the militia of Ghent when called upon. Our decision is final. The men named have already been talked to, and have agreed. No other man shall be allowed to go with the militia, on punishment of being excluded from our families. The decision of the Pharaïldis council is final!’

We remained in shocked silence, sitting in the hall in total silence. Women and girls began to cry.

‘The men of the Pharaïldis who will go to war with Ghent are Wouter de Smet the Younger, Boudin van Lake, Ser Martin Denout, Clais de Hert and Heinric Vresele. That is one name per family. For the Vresele family we have accepted the name of Heinric, who is already heavily involved. Why not other names? I, Boudin, must continue our investment branch and teach Gillis the younger. There is nobody else to continue our trade, and I am getting very old. In our bankers’ family, John de Smet the Younger must continue the work of his father. His grandfather, John de Smet, is too old. In the van Lake Family, we had little choice too. Raes van Lake is a monk, will accompany the army as such, but he can be no militiaman. In the van Lake Family, if anything happens to Boudin, the name will have to be perpetrated through the women. In the Denout family, John Denout the Younger only can lead the Domains branch. Our transport shipping trade had to be continued by Arnout the Younger in Ghent and by Lieve de Hert in Antwerp. These services are crucial to our companies. As to William Terhagen, it is necessary for the continuation of the Terhagen family that he lives, but he is also needed at our Antwerp trading post of the Domains branch. Moreover, should anything happen to Boudin van Lake, he must take the lead also of the Investment branch of Antwerp, which he will have to do anyway in Boudin’s absence during the war. William shall have to coordinate all our trade from out of Antwerp, investments and domains. We ask him to arrange for this very quickly with Boudin van Lake. We must have our Antwerp posts in good order, working with me and with John Denout. We must take into account the fact we, the Pharaïldis families, may have to abandon Ghent. Our trading houses in Antwerp will then be our only and new basis for continued trade.’

Boudin halted. We saw the emotions well up in his mind.

‘My friends, these are the saddest days ever for our families. We hope and pray, of course, that not one member of our families be forced to march into a battle. We hope everybody returns safe and well. We must hope for the best. We believe our decision to be well-founded, and thus is what we have decided. We want our Pharaïldis families to survive this ordeal. We shall doubtlessly come out of this war diminished, but then only in funds. The decision is ours and shall be held. God bless us all!’

The hall erupted in shouts by the men and by the women. The men wanted all to join in the war, but Boudin Vresele and Martin Denout shouted us down. The decision of the patriarchs was strong. They did not waver. We would go to war only with the names mentioned by Boudin Vresele.

Then, in the growing excitement of the shouts and protests, we suddenly heard the strong voice of the very old Evrard Vresele, who stood in the middle of the hall and who began to recite the Our Father. We fell in with him, and the little prayer calmed our minds.

That meeting of the Pharaïldis families at Westdorp Manor in September of 1382 was the most remarkable in my life. I looked insistently at the eyes of Boudin Vresele. Our glances crossed. Knowing what I had done to his daughter Agneete, why had he not sent me to the war? Had it merely been out of necessity for our businesses he kept me out of the turmoil? I had a strange feeling. Maybe he had forgiven me, and loved me as a younger brother. Maybe he knew his sister better than I had surmised and maybe he had understood why I had gone to Greet. Maybe he thought me indeed the only one capable of growing our business at Antwerp. I don't know. I realised he had saved me, though, for I was no warrior! For that I will forever be in his debt. I had no inkling at all to go to war and battles. I realised very well he had saved me from a war I detested.

Ser Martin called his servants in with wine and food. We had need for the wine after the dreadful news. I left the great hall and walked into the entry hall of Westdorp. Immediately, Raes van Lake opened the doors after me and stepped up to me.

'I want a word with you,' he began.

I found the younger man quite arrogant to address me at that instant.

'You are living in adultery,' he croaked. 'Do you think you can get away with such a grave sin? You have sinned against God and against the Pharaïldis code of conduct! Shame on you!' At the same moment, the door opened again, and old, grey and thin-haired Evrard Vresele ran to us.

He hissed, 'Raes, you are an impertinent young man. I warned you already! *Vade!* Go away from here! *Vade!* Only Our Lord has the right to judge, no man! I explicitly forbid you now and ever to harass William Terhagen. I know William. He is a good man. He did not seek perdition. Leave him alone. See to it I don't catch you again on this! Confide your soul to God and pray for humility. Now, *vade*, go! Get out of my eyes!'

I had rarely ever seen and heard Evrard Vresele so full of venom. Nevertheless, there was much truth in what the young Raes had accused me of. I was a sinner, indeed.

Raes van Lake drooped off.

Evrard said only few words to me in the entry hall, but those words also I shall never forget. 'William, I am not the judging kind. I don't judge you. I know of Agneete. My sin will be to not have warned you and have kept you from marrying her. I have been a weak man. Agneete was my family. These young monks know of no pity. They do not understand the soul of men or of women. They do not know to what tensions we can be subjected to. They have not lived much. They tell people how to live by the written word only, but those words are so sterile if they are not accompanied by a warm heart! We, monks and priests, are not here to judge, but to forgive. I try to instil them with compassion, but they just don't seem to have the heart for it anymore. Please tell Greet van Noortkerke I bless her. I know her well. I don't mean her harm. Tell her I bless your children. Raise them in the catholic faith, and raise them well I love. Have many children together. I pray God forgive us all!'

Then, Evrard embraced me, and we returned both to the great hall of Westdorp Manor. I felt absolved of my sin.

That autumn meeting of the Pharaïldis families was our saddest ever. We realised quite well Ghent had been a city of freedom. Ghent had fought ardently for its freedom, but in the Philip van Artevelde regime no freedom lived! Would God allow that?

The Battle of Roosebeke. November and December 1382

The siege of Oudenaarde lasted many months. It never resulted in a victory or even in a moderate success for the troops of Ghent. The besiegers, the militiamen of Ghent, had even brought cannons with them. These cannons were new weapons. They shot heavy balls of iron against the defence walls. The count's garrison, however, repaired at night what had been destroyed during the day. Ser Daniel van Halewijn, a relative of Philip van Artevelde, led the count's men here with wisdom and intelligence. Halewijn had remained faithful to the count, being a nobleman true to his oaths. Daniel van Halewijn was an old, greyed warrior who had even served in the English army. Now, he fought the troops of Ghent with determination.

Philip van Artevelde and Peter van den Bossche were so angry with the dogged resistance of Oudenaarde, they put the countryside of the town to the flames. The villages around Oudenaarde were put to fire. Philip van Artevelde had at one point of the siege concentrated all the power of his cannons against the defence towers of the Gate of Ghent. The gunners managed in destroying the tower. The tower caved in, but the stones fell into the town instead of outside, and the rubble did not fill the moat. The *Gentenaars* continued targeting the wall next to the tower, but the besieged built as rapidly a second wall behind the crumbling one. When Ghent launched an assault against the rubble at that place, the garrison showed the surprise of their second wall and threw the *Gentenaars* back once more. Philip van Artevelde would not have as much luck at Oudenaarde as he had enjoyed at Bruges! The town resisted him, and the siege cost much money to Ghent.

Philip van Artevelde then had a very large cannon be brought to Oudenaarde, the pride of the gunsmiths of Ghent. This cannon was enormous! It might have weighed as much as thirty-four thousand pounds, or little less. The firing of the cannon surprised the men from Oudenaarde extraordinarily, as its noise thundered over the environs. The damage done to the walls by the heavy projectiles could each time be repaired, however. The cannon had to be fired using so much black powder, the strain on the supplies of Ghent proved too much. The cannon had first been called Victory by the *Gentenaars*, then the '*Dulle Griet*', the Mad Vixen. It was shot only a few times, and then discarded.

Philip van Artevelde did win a satisfactory success when he ambushed a small first contingent of troops sent by Count Louis of Male to reinforce the town. After this modest victory, Philip van Artevelde more or less abandoned the siege of Oudenaarde. He permanently left some troops at the town to prevent the garrison and the inhabitants from sallying, but he withdrew most of the militias. The Lord Sohier van Herzele continued the siege of Oudenaarde, while Philip returned to Ghent.

By the end of October of 1382, the royal army of France had been gathered in Artois. The duke of Burgundy and the king rode together from Paris to join the knights. The war was not directed against foreign troops, as Flanders was a feudal loan of France. The pope of Avignon regarded war against lands whose people gave obedience to the popes of Rome as a holy enterprise, so he allowed the king of France to deploy the Oriflamme. King Charles VI and Philip the Bold of Burgundy therefore first rode to the Abbey of Saint-Denis to fetch the holy war banner of France. King Charles VI gave the standard to Pierre Villiers, the master of the house of the king. Villiers would be the standard-bearer of the king.

The maps used by the war-lords showed the Leie River as the most formidable obstacle for the troops. For the knights and men-at-arms who marched from Artois, the Leie obstructed the entry to the heart of Flanders. Philip van Artevelde had positioned his captains Peter van den

Bossche and Peter de Wintere, his captains of Bruges, to guard these borders with France. They guarded the bridges over the Leie.

It was autumn, and autumn's worst month in Flanders was November. The roads were muddy. Inundated marshlands lay along the roads the feudal army of France marched on. A small contingent of knights led by a bastard son of Count Louis of Male succeeded in passing the Leie very early on. These troops were easily discovered and massacred by the Flemish rebels. Few knights could ride to safety to the French army. This was a first success for Philip van Artevelde, who boasted a lot about the feat in Ghent. Shortly after this episode, van den Bossche and de Wintere took the precaution to destroy the bridges over the Leie. The French army would have to stay south of the Leie.

It rained for days on end in the beginning of November. The pelting rain soaked the knights and men-at-arms of France. The Connétable Olivier de Clisson asked his knights where the Leie began. He was desperate to bring his men on the road to Bruges, but for that he had to pass the Leie. He received the answer the Leie began its course not far from where the army was then, near Saint-Omer. Clisson had already given the order to march all around the sources of the Leie, but men who knew the environs of Saint-Omer, discouraged him from doing so. The environs of that town were notorious for their treasonous marshes! The French army, with its heavy cavalry of thousands of armoured knights and horses, would be entirely bogged down in the marshes of Saint-Omer!

The Lord Enguerrand of Coucy then advised to enter Flanders less directly, to take control rather of the Scheldt and to march on to Oudenaarde. He expected Philip van Artevelde to throw the Flemish army in their path and to give battle between the Leie and the Scheldt. This plan had the disadvantage it was slow to execute, by a long and exhausting march. But time was precious to the royal dukes!

The king's court feared uprisings in Paris. The *Maillotins* of Paris had already wanted to rise again in revolt. There had been rumours the commons of Paris had plans to demolish the king's castles in their neighbourhood, the Louvre, Vincennes, Beauté, and the other royal domains. One leader of the *Maillotins*, however, a man called Nicholas Flamand, had withheld the men of Paris from being so rash. He told the people of Paris it was wiser to wait for the outcome of the battle of the king's army against Ghent. He was right, but the uprising could strike any moment.

Other uprisings threatened at Orléans, Blois, Beauvais and Rouen! Everywhere in those territories, on the borders of the Marne until quite near to where the army camped, the noble knights feared for their castles and for their families, for their wives and children, as in the times of the *Jacquerie*.

The people of Rheims had even taken the marshal of Burgundy a prisoner! The duke of Burgundy, having no time to dash into Burgundy and the Champagne to submit Rheims, was forced to pay a ransom for his Marshal Guy de Pontalier!

Revolts also rose in the south, in the Languedoc and in the Auvergne. The revolts of the *Tuchins*, called after the French word of '*touche*' meaning the maquis or the bushes in which the poorest lived, raged especially against the clergymen. These were exempt from the many taxes the people suffered from. The *Tuchins* attacked the rich, the lords, and innocent travellers, merchants also.

The people of Béziers in the Languedoc assaulted the houses of the wealthy in their town. In many places of France, the dispossessed rebelled against the wealthy.

King Charles VI and his uncle-dukes could not stay a long time in Flanders. France was on fire in their backs. They were also well aware that the example of Ghent was a source of

inspiration for many of these revolts! Ghent submitted, they would have it easier to ply the French cities to their will.

The vanguard of the royal army pushed on to the Leie, to the town of Comines, the first town of Flanders beyond Armentières and Lille. The connétable hoped to force a passage there, and then move into the heartland of Flanders, over the Leie. The plan of the connétable was a challenge. All the passages over the Leie at Comines were so well guarded by troops of Peter van den Bossche and Peter de Wintere, that getting to the other side of the river seemed impossible. The Connétable Olivier de Clisson, Philip the Bold of Burgundy, and the finest war lords of France, despaired.

A few knights of the vanguard discussed the issue of getting to the other side of the river. They had transported with them three small boats, which they had confiscated at Lille. They discovered a place to the north of Comines that was not well guarded by the Flemish troops, because it was hidden between bushes in a bend of the river. Clisson, who had a nose for knowing what knights were doing without his direct orders, sent the Marshal Sancerre to have a look at what his knights were concocting on their own.

The marshal rode off with a few of his men. He found the lord of Saimpy, a nobleman of Artois, with one leg in the boat and the other still on the bank of the Leie. One of his men had swum over the river. The man had drawn ropes to the other side, so that the small boats could be tugged to the other side.

‘What the hell do you think you are doing?’ Sancerre cried, admiring the courage of Saimpy, but warning the man for his foolhardiness. ‘Do you realise that if the Flemish see you coming, you will soon be massacred?’

‘Of course,’ Saimpy happily shouted back. ‘We can only be so few to pass the river, here. The boats are small. As long as the Flemish do not see us, we can get a few men to the other side!’ Only nine men could traverse the river on each boat trip. Sancerre had to restrain the men from rushing all at once into the boats. Otherwise, the fragile, rickety boats would have sunk immediately.

Nevertheless, in the shortest of times, quite a sizable company of knights gathered on the other bank. The knights who reached the other banks were mostly intrepid Bretons. The lords of Rohan, Laval, Malestroit and Camboût had arrived with Olivier Duguesclin. A few knights of the Poitevin area passed too: the lords of Thouars, of Pouzauges, of Jaille and Mailly, as well as the viscount of Meaux.

Olivier de Clisson then sent his nephew, the lord of Rieux, to see where Sancerre had disappeared, because his marshal had not returned. Rieux was so pleased, he too jumped into a boat and reached the other side with the Marshal Sancerre. Sancerre had finally considered it a shame if he should remain like a coward standing on the right side of the Leie! These brave men, with others such as the lord of Beaumanoir, formed a small battalion under the leadership of Saimpy. Almost four hundred French knights and men-at-arms passed the Leie this way.

In the meantime, the Connétable Olivier de Clisson had launched an attack on the main bridge of Comines, if only to serve as a diversion.

Clisson saw the banners of some of the finest knights of France, waving isolated on the other side, and enter Comines to near the bridge where he stood.

He cursed and shouted, ‘Longueville, Beaumanoir, Rieux, what are you doing? Do you not worship your life?’

Clisson deplored the fate of some of his best friends in arms. He was not sure at all his friends would be able to resist the fierce attacks the Flemish militiamen were launching against his

valiant knights. He ordered his knights and squires to work hard at repairing the bridge. The French had not enough planks to put on the bridge, so they placed their shields on the beams!

Peter van den Bossche had arrived late at the bridge of Comines with his troops. He waited for the next day. The French knights had nothing to eat, had to wait near the bridge in the cold of the beginning winter, soaked from the rain and with their feet stuck in the mud of the banks. He told the knights would be quite easier to handle the next day!

Van den Bossche thought to surprise the French in the early morning, before dawn. The lord of Saimpy, however, had spent the night awake, running around his position to scout the environs. Saimpy was aware of the arrival of the Flemish.

He placed the French knights very early in disciplined rows, as if they were commoners. The French formed a solid block, armed with their terrible weapons of very long, heavy swords, battle-axes and maces.

The approximately four hundred French knights fought at Comines against about nine hundred Flemish militiamen. The French had a score of long spears with them, which outreached the shorter *goedendags* of the Flemish. With these, they threw off the first attack of the Flemish.

The Flemish had brought with them some sort of sorceress, a very tall, stout, foul-mouthed woman, who had predicted the *Gentenaars* victory if only she could draw first blood from a French knight. She wore the standard of the militia. Her prediction failed, for when the Flemish attacked, she was the first to be slain in the fury of the battle.

The knights defended their position well and inflicted terrible wounds on the *Gentenaars*. Soon also, Peter van den Bossche received a nasty blow of a two-hefted sword. Peter van den Bossche was struck down, wounded at the head and at the shoulder. He fell, and was evacuated from the battle. The French knights on the left side of the Leie succeeded in holding their position in front of the bridge.

They withstood the attacks of the Flemish until the bridge had been repaired. Then, the rest of the French army flowed into Comines, and relieved the exhausted but very courageous knights under Saimpy.

The Flemish were routed. The town of Comines was taken by the French. The militiamen of Peter van den Bossche were slaughtered. Hundreds of Flemish warriors died in that first skirmish of Comines, which had been short but very violent. Peter van den Bossche only escaped because his men had thrown him on a cart. A few militiamen rode that cart as fast as possible northwards, to Bruges, where van den Bossche's wounds could be cared for by excellent doctors.

The king of France, the fourteen-year old King Charles VI resided with his uncle-dukes of Berry, Bourbon and Burgundy at the abbey of Marquette. When they heard of the good news of the army having passed the bridge over the Leie at Comines, they rode immediately to the army. They saw the dead bodies of Flemish and French warriors strayed in the streets. The Breton men-at-arms had pillaged the town and killed more than four thousand people as reprisals. The men-at-arms and mercenaries sought for gold in the first place, but they also found much and fine cloth. They opened a market and sold the cloth on stalls to the merchants of Lille, Douai and Tournai at bargaining prices. The knights threw golden and silver plates, precious cloths, armour, candelabras, everything of value that could be stolen in the town on large wagons, and had their squires transport the loot to their castles. The pillage of wealthy Flanders began at Comines!

The army of France then marched onto the northwest, to the first large city on their campaign to the inner territories of Flanders, to Ieper.

The wealthier poorters of Ieper called together a council of aldermen. Although the captain of Ieper, placed in the city by Philip van Artevelde, refused to surrender the city, the aldermen decided to negotiate with the king's court. The common people revolted and killed the captain. This captain was no less than Peter van den Broucke, Philip van Artevelde's brother-in-law.

The men of Ieper feared the same fate as the people of Comines! The aldermen first sent two monks to the king. Charles VI accepted the negotiation. The court understood it would be far easier to submit Flanders by showing clemency. The duke of Burgundy did not want to destroy his heritage. The royal dukes promised not to loot Ieper, but they demanded the sum of forty thousand francs ransom money. The aldermen of Ieper consented to the sum. Ieper opened its gates, and the court of King Charles VI could enter the city with its knights and their servants. The city was spared.

Soon after the surrender of Ieper, more towns of Flanders surrendered: Cassel, Bergues (called Sint-Winoksbergen in Flemish), Dunkirk, Bourbourg, Gravelines, Poperinge and Torhout opened their gates for sixty thousand francs and the provisioning of food for the French army. These towns also were spared.

Count Louis of Male remained all this time with the French army. Louis of Male felt very humiliated at the court. Although he had brought a considerable force of Flemish knights and men-at-arms, he was not allowed with his men to pass the Leie. The French court held him in disdain and didn't trust him. He was not invited to the council meetings of the leaders of the army, even though he and his knights knew best the environs in which the army moved. The French nobles distrusted him and his knights. They forbade the count and his men to speak Flemish among them. The court clearly feared Count Louis of Male and some of his men might as yet be treasonous and maybe betray the plans of the royal army to the *Gentenaars*. This proved one more, heavy blow to the prestige and pride of Count Louis of Male. He felt betrayed both by the Flemish cities and by the French knights, many of whom he had once called his friends. He had expected some respect from his son-in-law Philip the Bold, but none such respect was offered. Louis of Male was expendable, he was a non-entity in the army.

There were two other reasons beyond the necessity of the army of France to invade Flanders that had angered the French court. Male was, like Flanders, an Urbanist. He and the Flemish people vowed for the popes of Rome, whereas the French supported the popes of Avignon. The French considered this campaign something of a holy war against infidels. That was the reason the Oriflamme rode with the army.

Moreover, Louis of Male had in the past shown his sympathy with enemies of France, with the duke of Brittany, with John of Montfort, and with the English king. The French court resented Louis of Male's favours to enemies of the throne.

The count of Flanders temporarily left the army. He returned to Lille, hoping one or other of the next days to have a chance to follow the French army over the Leie.

As several towns of Flanders surrendered to the king, also many aldermen of Bruges proposed to open the gates to the advancing French knights. After Ieper, the next logical target of the French would be Bruges. The men of Bruges had, however, given many poorters as hostages to Ghent. Bruges feared these men might be killed when the city surrendered. Also, the captain of Ghent in Bruges, Peter van den Bossche, held a strong garrison on guard in the city. He was wounded, in bed, but he continued to command his garrison. Also, many guildsmen still strongly supported the cause of van Artevelde. Peter van den Bossche recuperated slowly

from his wounds. He had the gates of Bruges firmly kept closed, under guard, and he prepared the guildsmen for a long siege. Bruges would not so easily surrender as Ieper. The French army drew rather north-east instead of to Bruges, to the town of Roeselare. From there, they might either move on to Bruges, or take a more easterly course and march over Tielt to Deinze, and then to Ghent.

The French army finally did move, as expected, in the direction of Bruges. Few French knights of the court really had the intention of imagining a major battle in the foul weather of autumn. The courtiers expected some form of negotiation with Bruges and Ghent. They hoped for the surrender of the cities at the danger of the advancing great French army. This was the opinion of the dukes of Burgundy, Berry, and Bourbon. Other men, well-known lords of France such as Sancerre, Coucy and Clisson, the Admiral de Vienne too, and the counts of Eu, Blois, Harcourt and de la Marche, shared their opinion. They made the French army advance slowly, to grant the Flemish leaders the time to react.

Philip van Artevelde and his captains heard of the advancing French army at Oudenaarde. They immediately returned to Ghent to assemble a larger Flemish army. Philip van Artevelde had the choice between giving battle and sitting tight. He could have let the French army face the cold winter of Flanders, let it move to Bruges, and live in tents in the open, in the rain, tremble from cold under the snow and the frosts. He could have expected the army to be disbanded for the winter! Van Artevelde lost town after town, however. He lost face and authority, and might be considered a coward. Did he think such reputation to be deleterious to his image? Maybe he preferred to be a dead, courageous man rather than be a living coward! More probably, he was driven forward by ambition and recklessness. Flanders and Ghent expected him to confront the French nobles. Had not the Flemish militiamen defeated the French before? Was he not the chosen of God, and invincible? Philip van Artevelde could do no less! He did not listen to Heinric Vresele who told him to reconsider, think twice and to use caution.

Philip van Artevelde assembled all the men he could find in Ghent. He marched out of the city at the head of about nine thousand militiamen. Ghent could not have brought together more men for one attack. Everybody who could walk in arms was summoned! The *Gentenaars* marched, and while they marched, more men joined them. Ieper had declared for the count. Bruges followed van Artevelde only partially and risked a long, very hard siege. Van Artevelde nevertheless gathered about five thousand men from the towns in the quarters of Ghent and Bruges. These were sympathisers to his cause, to the cause of the cities of Flanders. Philip van Artevelde would have to confront about two thousand five hundred knights of France, plus more than ten thousand men-at-arms. More warriors and mercenaries had been added, so that the French king brought into the field three thousand more warriors than the army of Ghent. Philip van Artevelde had hoped to obtain numerous troops of English archers, but except for a mere two hundred archers based at Calais, he obtained none.

Around the twentieth of November, Philip van Artevelde's army marched to Kortrijk, which had remained faithful to his cause. Then it followed the Leie to Comines. At the town of Wervik, it moved northward, in pursuit of the French. Philip van Artevelde found the French army near the town of Roeselare.

The French army had set up camp in a large, grassy field between a hill called the *Guldenberg*, the Golden Mountain, and the small town of Roosebeke. The French had set up their tents there, showing they were not that hard pressed to advance towards Bruges. On the

top of the hill stood a windmill with the same name. It continued raining throughout the day. The nobles of France waited in the comfort of their large, luxurious tents. Some sort of conflict arose at the court of France.

A few knights of the court uttered two reasons to take away the command in the field from the Connétable Olivier de Clisson. The king had to be protected, they said, and who better than Clisson to protect the king during battles? Olivier de Clisson, the butcher from Brittany, was too impetuous and too bloodthirsty a Breton to lead the armies. Some courtiers used these arguments to force Clisson to near the king. They wanted him replaced for the main battle by the lord of Coucy, a much more reasonable man. Clisson reacted, of course, for he was a brave and proud man. He went to the king, fell on his knees and begged the young Charles VI to retain his fighting function. Clisson feared being called a coward in France if he could not lead the army into battle. The king consented. Clisson could hold the command of the army in battle.

On November the twenty-sixth, Philip van Artevelde arrived very early with his army at Roosebeke. He invested the hill. He placed his command tent near the windmill. His men were more exposed to the elements there than the French in the valley. The wind and the rain racked the militiamen of Flanders. They had the advantage of the higher terrain. The French would have to ride and run uphill to attack the Flemish! The two armies stood in front of each other. Philip van Artevelde offered a battle the next day, the twenty-seventh of November of 1382, a Thursday.

In the evening, Philip van Artevelde organised a banquet for his captains on the other side of the Golden Mountain. He held a speech.

‘My friends, tomorrow we shall have hard work. The king of France is here, at Roosebeke. He is determined to give battle. We shall serve him. We seek to defend the freedom of Flanders. Accompanying the king are the noblemen of France, his courtiers. Tell your men to spare nobody except the king, for he is still a child. We shall take him a prisoner, bring him with us to Gent, and teach him how to speak Flemish!’

Laughter erupted in the large tent.

Philip continued, ‘the dukes, counts and other lords, kill them all! The cities of France will thank us for having delivered their land of the rapacious lords. We have received letters from Paris, for example, wishing us victory.’

At that banquet also participated Heinric Vresele, Wouter de Smet, Boudin van Lake, Ser Martin Denout and Clais de Hert. They sat at a table in the far corner, with long, serious faces. They had been invited among the honoured guests of Philip van Artevelde.

They each held the command of a group of hundred militiamen of their respective guilds and parishes of Ghent. Boudin van Lake commanded a group of weavers, Martin Denout had a hundred fullers and Clais de Hert gave orders to a group of shippers. Wouter de Smet would fight with a group of smiths and metal-workers. Heinric Vresele was Philip van Artevelde’s counsellor, although Philip hardly now asked for his advice. Heinric led a group of men of diverse guilds.

Philip van Artevelde had also brought Lente van den Broucke with him, as she usually shared his tent when he was with the army. Lente had not stayed in Ghent, a clear sign Philip did not believe he would be defeated.

The Pharaïldis men did not regard the omen very favourable for a major battle. They had looked in awe from the top of the hill to the splendid might of the French army, and especially seen the large number of knights in shining armour. They did agree the Flemish army had a very fine defensive position, but they feared the recklessness of Philip van Artevelde. Philip

would not have the patience to wait for the French to attack! He would run down the hill, believing the impetus of his on-running men could break the French rows. Philip van Artevelde was too self-assured, they said.

The only one who agreed the Flemish would surely win the confrontation was Heinric Vresele. He believed the rush of the Flemish would break the ranks of the French. He also knew van Artevelde did not believe one moment he might lose this battle and be defeated. Philip van Artevelde was certain of victory! Heinric Vresele shared that belief! The Pharaïldis feared the militiamen would run down the hill in disorder, to be crushed by a massive counter-attack of the French knights in heavy armour. They did not share the enthusiasm of Philip van Artevelde and of Heinric. Heinric laughed their reserves away, and told he could not wait to chase the French out of Flanders.

‘No, the French cannot win this battle,’ Heinric assured, ‘for they are heretics who do not follow the legitimate pope of Rome. Their pride will lose them. We should attack first and defeat the self-confidence of the haughty knights of France. That will demoralise the troops of the enemy and set them on the flight. No, my friends, we shall once more pick up hundreds of gulden spurs tomorrow evening and dedicate them to Our Lady.’

Philip van Artevelde’s opinion was also that all sorts of complex movements of parts of the army served nothing and nobody. A battle was a simple killing ground. So, killing needed to be done, energetically, swiftly, and ferociously. Killing fast was what counted. He merely proposed to throw the weight of Flanders like a sledge-hammer at the centre of the French army, at the place where the Oriflamme would wave, and then crush and rout the French. He explained such simple tactic had been applied in the Beverhoutsveld of Bruges, near Brussels against the *Brabanders*, and in other skirmishes. Simple and straight on with much energy, was the only way that worked well in a large battle! Had not Alexander won his battles this way?

That night, Philip van Artevelde slept with Lente van den Broucke in his tent. Lente, however, worried much about the coming battle. She had remained extremely nervous at the sight of the enormous army spread out beneath them in the valley. She had seen and feared the might of the enemy. Her intuition told her of a great, coming disaster. She could not catch sleep that night. She left the tent, looked at the sky and at the blinking stars. Her tent stood on the top of the hill, near the windmill. She could distinguish the many campfires down below, the fires lit by the French.

It seemed to her then she heard many sounds, loud shouts of ‘*Montjoie Saint Denis*,’ the battle-cry of the French. The noise was so hard she thought the French were readying for battle. Lente got a fright. She ran back into the tent and awakened Philip van Artevelde. Philip threw in haste a mail over his head, grabbed an axe, and ran out of his tent. He too heard the same sounds as Lente. Were those sounds made by the French or by the howling winds on the hilltop?

Philip van Artevelde called his trumpeter, who awakened the entire camp. Some of the captains of the Flemish army ran to their head captain. Philip asked whether they too had heard the noise in the French camp. Were the French preparing for the attack? Two of the captains assured Philip they too had heard shouts. They had sent scouts into the valley to learn what was happening, but all was calm in the French camp. The French slept profoundly. They would not attack before the late morning.

Many of the Flemish warriors then thought the noise had been made by evil demons, who had already been feasting about the souls they would take the next day. This rumour spread in the

Flemish camp. The devils were dancing and feasting below! The news troubled much the minds of the militiamen.

When Philip van Artevelde was with his army at Oudenaarde, and moving it, he had remarked he had no crucifix with him. He feared a bad omen. He therefore had asked for a crucifix in a church of Elseghem, receiving a reliquary of silver from the priest. He had promised to bring the crucifix back. He now asked Lente van den Broucke to return the crucifix to the church should anything happen to him.

The next morning, a very thick fog covered the landscape of Flanders near Roosebeke. One could see only a few paces in front. The French woke early, not late. They sent a few knights to find out what the Flemish were up to. Not a few French knights hoped the Flemish would have fled in the night, back to where they had come from, to Ghent. The French scouts found the army of the cities still on the hill. The Flemish army was already on the move and marched slowly towards the French positions!

The Flemish came marching down in tight formation. A large block of warriors descended the hill! The army of Philip van Artevelde, the regent of Flanders, had abandoned its strong defensive position and was on the attack. The militiamen of Ghent, marching in the centre, walked in silence, shields up and *goedendags* stuck out in front.

The Flemish marched in good order, with the banners of their towns and parishes and guilds held high. They were dressed in the livery of their guilds over their mails. Philip van Artevelde had ordered them forward, to advance as they had done at Bruges, the men of Ghent in the centre. The *Gentenaars* stepped, their arms interlaced to form an unbreakable block.

In the first rows went Heinric Vresele, tall and expectant of the fierce battle. Behind him came Philip van Artevelde and his captains. Boudin van Lake's weavers formed part of the left side. Behind him marched the men of Wouter de Smet. Clais de Hert stepped on the other side, in the right side of the block, with Martin Denout behind him. Clais de Hert had the surprise of his life to see suddenly Arnout, his son, creep up to him while he marched. Arnout had defied the command of the Pharaïldis patriarchs. He too had left Gent, hidden from his father. To his astonished and angry, pained father, Arnout told at least one man should look after Clais. Arnout had joined the shippers under loud cheers, for the shippers of Ghent knew him well. Arnout was more popular in Ghent than his father had ever been!

The Flemish marched downhill, away from the windmill, to where the French waited for them. They had the advantage of the attack. The thick fog had hidden them from the eyes of the French knights. Had the Constable Clisson not sent out early scouts, the Flemish might have surprised the French in their sleep and caused chaos so soon in the day.

Only one thing bothered Philip van Artevelde while he walked. Lente van den Broucke had not really believed in the victory of her husband! When Philip van Artevelde had begun to walk down the hill, she had sprung upon a horse and run to Ghent with a few servants. Lente would not see his victory!

The French knights rapidly formed their rows to wait for the Flemish and launch their own attacks. The French had not forgotten how their armies had been defeated in the past because they had impetuously charged into the battle. They had seen the English nobility fight on foot at Crécy and Poitiers. Today, they also would fight on foot. They did not really have the time to armour their destriers completely. The animals had been grazing in fields behind the tents.

The preparation of the animals was being terminated by their squires, for the horses might be needed afterwards. The first shock, the knights of France would hold on foot! King Charles ordered to the battle. The French standard-bearers deployed their flags and banners. Also the Oriflamme opened. The scarlet banner shone spectacularly in colours and symbolism. As soon as it opened to the wind, the first rays of the sun broke through the fog and illuminated the gold fringes of the long banner. The two armies could see their masses of warriors for the first time. Many French knights attributed the clearing of the sky to the Oriflamme, and this gave them much courage. The men whispered of the miracle along the lines. Some French men-at-arms also claimed having seen a white pigeon fly over the French rows and over the king. The French took courage and confidence in the battle from these good omens.

When the Flemish block had reached the lowest ground in front of the French army, it halted. The rear rows of militiamen then stood still in the field. The duke of Burgundy used this pause to try a last time to spare the blood of his future subjects. He sent a herald forward, who read from a scroll. The squire shouted the Flemish could as yet leave the battlefield unharmed if they laid down arms, and gave themselves over to the mercy of their lord. They would only have to pay the half year of salaries for the French army. The Flemish leaders shouted back they had right and justice on their side. They wanted to uphold their freedoms and privileges, as written in their charters. Without the guarantee of these conditions, they abandoned themselves to the justice of God. The French herald rolled up his parchment, rode back to the French army, and did not return.

The Flemish army presented itself as only one, solid block of warriors. Nobody in the army of Ghent had any notion of moving parts of the militias independently. Men like Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele believed they could not be defeated. They intended to deliver one hard blow to the French knights and destroy them in the effort. A tight block would be able to withstand any counter-attacks from all sides. It could attack with tremendous power and push the central French army on the run.

The French army consisted of three parts, which was also a traditional formation. It had a central block and two wings. In the central army stood the Oriflamme, the king and his court. The Constable Olivier de Clisson would fight here, too. He had placed men-at-arms with heavy, large shields and long spears in the front rows. Knights on foot stood behind these men, and more men-at-arms followed closely. Then, a few rows of the knights of the higher nobility of France defended the Oriflamme. With the holy banner stood the young king. The constable and the dukes and counts of the king's court would fight here. The duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold, stood next to the king.

A little behind this centre block stood the left wing, commanded by the duke of Bourbon, the king's uncle, and the Lord Enguerrand de Coucy. To the other side, equally somewhat to the rear, waited the right wing, commanded by the duke of Berry.

The two centre armies of France and Flanders stood in front of each other. The militiamen and the knights began to wonder who would launch the attack first. The fog had cleared, the sun shone, it was a fine but cold autumn day.

Suddenly, a tremendous, thundering noise roared in the morning. Philip van Artevelde had raised his battle-axe, and the cannons of Ghent blasted away. Ghent had become used to this weapon. Cannons had been used at the battle for Bruges to scare the opponents away. Tens of small cannons on wheels had been dragged along for this battle too, and led to down the hill. The cannons were now used to create fear and surprise.

As usual, the noise was worse than the damage inflicted, although the first dead men in the central block of the French were a dreadful, demoralising sight. A French man-at-arms looked strangely astonished as he was standing on one leg only, having not even felt his left leg shot off by a red-hot ball of fire. The man fell and would bleed to death. Another man was hit in the breast and his body torn to parts, flesh, bones and blood flying around and splashing on the man's friends. A cannonball fell in the ground, dug a hole just in front of a knight. Another cannon ball tore a long, open column in the French rows by killing and wounding several men before falling, spent of momentum, in the grass.

This kind of warfare looked more terrible than what the warriors had expected. Smoke enveloped the first lines of the Flemish, so that the enemy could not see what was happening on the Flemish side.

The *Gentenaars* had prepared another surprise. Contingents of the crossbowmen of the guilds of Ghent sent a volley of arrows and bolts against the first ranks of the French warriors. The militiamen could see the lanes opened in the French rows by the cannonballs. They sent deadly arrows to the French warriors who had lowered their shields in the surprise, who had not well protected themselves anymore by shields. These were killed by the arrows of the crossbows, shot from close by with very lethal effect. It was even better for a crossbowman of Ghent to wound a French man-at-arms than to kill him, for wounded men half falling and screaming, added more to the chaos, to the confusion and the horror of the battle!

After two volleys of crossbow fire, the entire block of the Flemish hordes advanced. The men of Flanders advanced slowly but steadily, shield to shield, *goedendags* protruding from the front rows, all men shouting their city's war cry of 'Ghent, Ghent! Ghent!'

The shouting made the blood of the French warriors freeze that morning, more than the cold of the plains of Roosebeke. First blood had been spilled amply.

Heinric Vresele stepped on. He was clad in heavy mail and he wore a breastplate over his tunic. His legs were protected by steel plates, hinged at the knees. His knees were covered by caps. He wore a larger shield than he was used to, and which felt therefore quite heavier to his untrained arms. He held his *goedendag* in his right hand. He wore a simple pot helm, having tried other helmets before, some with visors. He had chosen today for a better, open view with this simpler model.

Heinric ran in the third row. The men around him and in front of him ran with *goedendags* slightly held upward to not hurt the men in front of them. They knew each other, they were *Gentenaars* all. The *Gentenaars* ran forward to deliver a mighty thrust. They burst like a raging bull into the French centre. Yes, the spears of the French seemed long, but spears could be pushed aside with shields. The impact of the more solid and heavy *goedendags* came as a surprise to the French men-at-arms. The French braced for the shock. Wildly shouting, the Flemish militiamen threw their shields, bodies and weapons into the ranks of the French. Were these first rows of the French army not formed by battle-hardened Bretons? Maybe not, for the Flemish wave rolled into the enemy, pushing the French ranks back as if they were merely wheat stalks in a field. The French lines were plied open and then pushed together. Men stumbled behind shields. Others were so hard pressed with their backs against their comrades of the next lines they could not breathe anymore, let alone move their arms to defend themselves against the blows and thrusts of the *goedendags*. They could not move their weapons! Their spears were useless against this onslaught of the Flemish warriors. The Flemish managed quite deftly to avoid the hardened steel points of the French spears, to deflect the danger by their shields. When the Flemish could not go forward more, because too large a mass had been compressed before them, the systematic killing by two blocks of opposing men started.

The thrusts of the Flemish *goedendags* bore the impetus of the iron weight behind them, so that the sharp points slammed into the shields of the French men-at-arms, piercing the shields, shattering them to pieces, drawing the protections of wood and iron aside. Other *goedendags* then ripped open the belly of the French warriors, despite the men's mail protections. Ghent steel would pierce any armour! Blood was drawn out of the French warriors. Men fell. The Flemish rows moved forward still! The first three rows of the Flemish warriors formed now only one row, as the men had been compacted, pushed against each other. They forced the French backward by pure energy and might of arms and legs. The ferocious attack of the Flemish block seemed to have flung the entire army of the French men-at-arms and knights onto each other. The French lines thinned and became longer at the sides. The *Gentenaars* could still thrust their *goedendags* and kill in these first moments. The French were forced to submit to the violence of the impact. They were flung together on a heap, and only tried to push back. In this chaos of struggling men, the French hindered their neighbours and hampered counter-blows. The proud men-at-arms stepped ever backward and seemed to have to submit to the crazed anger of the *Gentenaars*.

Heinric Vresele already cried victory in the elation of this assault. He had reached the French lines, pushed the enemy back far, many steps. He thrust his shield and his *goedendag* forward. He had thrown all his energy and power in the attack. He began to form a wedge that burst into the French lines.

Heinric loved intensely this first glory of the battle. He experienced the thrill of the killing as he had only felt when he had pierced through the bodies of the *Brabanders* in the Battle for Brussels. Heinric thrust his *goedendag*, drew a shield sideways, avoided a spear flung near him, turned his *goedendag* as quickly as he could and sliced open the mail on the heart of a bearded French man-at-arms in front of him. His *goedendag* subsequently fiercely drew upward, and the point sliced at the throat of his opponent. Heinric had by then brought his shield again in front of him to fend off another spear pushed by a French warrior who fought at his right. Blood sprouted out of the neck of Heinric's opponent, as he cut deeper and deeper. He thought he had cut the man's main life artery. Heinric knew then he had killed his first adversary of the day, and he let go of the triumphant call of the predator.

He sprang forward, pushed the astonished French warrior powerfully aside, and confronted yet another French man who had been following the scene with wide open eyes, in awe at Heinric's speed. Heinric detected fear in those eyes, the fear before the defeat. This awareness of death before it happened, was what Heinric cherished most. Life was his to take! He stuck his *goedendag* in the man's unprotected lower leg, which made the warrior groan with pain. Heinric drew his *goedendag* in one movement higher, held the French warrior's spear on his shield, drew higher still with his weapon. He then pushed his shield in the neck of the man, winding him. His new opponent was a rather young man with dark hair protruding from under his helmet. Heinric thrust at the eyes of the man. Heinric's *goedendag* pierced the man's left eye. Heinric let his weapon go deep. He withdrew his *goedendag*, tore a long, red line in the young man's cheek. He felt the man shudder, saw him drop his weapon and move his right arm to his useless and no doubt very painful eye. This was not what the French warrior should have done. Heinric had the time to push his weapon a second time toward the man, pushing squarely into the man's breast. The sharpened point of the *goedendag* passed the resistance of the mail chains. Heinric pushed further. He saw the blood well up from under the mail. He turned his point of steel, tore and twisted. The man screamed out his death thron, began to fall, and Heinric had already stepped on.

Heinric Vresele placed his feet on top of two corpses and sprang on another French man. He advanced. He urged his companions on with curses, to push and push and thrust and thrust. The Flemish behind him used their weapons on the men sideways of Heinric. Forward, forward, forward!

Heinric looked to where the scarlet banner of France flew above the heads. That was his target! At that moment, he could not see what was going on at other places of the Flemish block, but he didn't think. He fought and advanced, fought and advanced. He needed all his attention to ward off the enemy spears and swords that took aim at him.

One person in the Flemish army who could see very well what was happening, was Philip van Artevelde. He had let others run past him and gradually moved thus to the rear lines. He had even stepped backward, away from the core of the battle. He stood now on slightly higher ground. He looked behind him, seeing higher up still a group of monks, apparently saying a mass and kneeling in prayers. He felt a pang of guilt. At the Beverhoutsveld, he had asked for several masses to be celebrated before the battle. Here, he had forced his men down so early there had been no time for grand ceremonies. He recognised the monks. They were the *Fremineuren* monks, the Franciscans of Ghent, who always accompanied the Ghent armies. Among these men prayed Raes van Lake.

All was peaceful on the Golden Mountain, Philip van Artevelde noticed with satisfaction. Not a man, and certainly no French warrior was in sight on the hill. Philip van Artevelde was pleased to note the French lines had been plied together and thrown back quite a distance. The lines stretched out to the left and to the right, so that more men were fighting than moments ago. The French seemed to have been thrown in chaos and in retreat. Philip van Artevelde had expected nothing less.

The *Gentenaars* were killing methodically and pitilessly. The Flemish energy was being directed at the heart of the French army, at the Oriflamme. The French knights and men-at-arms stepped back almost continually. They fought listlessly, Philip thought, defending themselves. No, the French did not have the initiative and they were not on the offensive. They were being pushed back. They had to concede longer lines, which only meant more victims for the Flemish onslaught.

The battle raged on. Philip van Artevelde saw the *Gentenaars* advance over heaps of corpses, which gradually disappeared in the on-pushing Flemish ranks. Yes, he would soon be able to call the victory in this Battle of Roosebeke! He felt jubilant, very confident of final glory. His supposed father, King Edward III, would have been proud of him! His face wrung in a sneer. The French army was being massacred. He would soon teach the young French king a lesson, and probably also the future count of Flanders, the duke of Burgundy.

The duke of Bourbon and the Lord Enguerrand de Coucy stood at ease in the left wing of the French army. They heard the ominous noise of the raging battle at their centre, the clang of iron to iron, the screams of the men, and the angry cries of despair of the wounded and dying. They stood in silence, in awe. They could not really see what was happening in the centre of the French army. They did notice the French warriors seemed to be streaming back, towards them, away from the hill, backwards. Many French warriors were stepping back. They saw the ranks lengthening in front of them to left and to right.

Bourbon and Coucy were no cowards. They had come to participate in the battle. They were knights. They had fought in skirmishes before, and they were bold men in tournaments. They wondered what they should do. Should they remain here as a form of reserve, or should they

enter the battle? The king had sent them no orders to engage. There were in a quandary about what to do.

‘We cannot advance,’ Bourbon shouted to Coucy. ‘We cannot take part in the battle. The ranks of the connétable have spread out. They stand in our way. We cannot just keep waiting here, and let the king fight alone!’

The lord of Coucy had remarked the same, and he had already given the situation some thought. He was a man used to manoeuvring armies. He had already cursed a few times at seeing so many men here, around him, useless in battle. There was only one thing to do if he and Bourbon should take some initiative.

‘My lord duke, you say true,’ Coucy grunted. ‘We are stuck here, doing nothing. We cannot just wait until our centre breaks. We must enter the fray! We must turn around our ranks, there, farther left, ride and run up the hill as one block, and then fall in the back of the Flemish. It is the only sensible thing to do if we want to attack the enemy somewhere. Here in the rear of the army, we are useless.’

Bourbon grinned, ‘that is then what we should do! I have lost patience! Please lead us, lord of Coucy, and give us the sign! I’ll follow with you.’

Enguerrand de Coucy held up his mace, pointed to the farthest left end of the French centre. He drew all his knights behind him, but he did not gallop. He rode slowly, for a substantial part of his forces were footmen. He looked behind him, and saw the men of his wing follow him. His men on foot ran as fast as they could to keep up with the horsemen. He rode left, aiming to pass the battle there. Coucy’s large block slowly turned around the fighting armies. Coucy noticed no special change in the formation of the Flemish when he arrived to the side of the *Gentenaars*. The Flemish leaders had either not seen the new threat, or they ignored it. Coucy surmised they did not know how to cope with the sudden appearance of new warriors that rode and ran up the hill.

Philip van Artevelde looked every once every while around, but remarked the new threat only when it was too late. He had no idea how to fend off the new attack. His block would have to resist on his right! The only thing he knew to do in battle was to fight with all his power. He shouted a warning to the militias that stood around him, but those men had fixed their eyes straight forward, to the core of the battle.

The knights of Coucy and Bourbon slammed with full force into the right side of the Flemish army. Coucy and Bourbon had at the last moment unleashed a true massed attack with horse riders. The heavily armoured knights fell onto the masses Flemish warriors. The *Gentenaars* seemed to refuse to take into account the danger the arriving knights represented. Behind the horses ran the men-at-arms of Coucy and Bourbon’s wing, several thousand men. The strong mass of knights, lances couched, launched into the sides of the Flemish.

Philip van Artevelde saw the French knights roll on in a vengeful wave, and crush into the side of the Flemish lines. The French riders overran the Flemish warriors easily. The militiamen offered no concerted resistance at first. Only when the knights had penetrated far into the side, did the Flemish warriors turn and try to stop the attack. Shield walls were not being formed. The *Gentenaars* merely swarmed around the riders.

The French knights began to do the fierce work they were used to: killing from horse-back. They attacked with their lances first, killed many men. Then, they dropped their long lances and stroke out with their battle-swords, with battle-axes and maces and morningstars. On the right and at the back of the block of *Gentenaars*, the militiamen of the towns were being surprised and decimated rapidly by the French knights.

On the right side of the Flemish block stood Clais and Arnout de Hert. They too had been looking forward, to the front. They had not yet engaged enemies, but were considering moving still more to the right to flow by the French footmen who fought at the French left side. They were wondering why no orders came to be thrown in the battle. Suddenly, French footmen slammed into them from the right and from the back.

Clais de Hert had been standing a little isolated, a few paces to the right. He had not seen the French men-at-arms coming in mass from behind a copse of low bushes. He was one of the first Flemish militiamen to be killed at that side. A French footman slammed his spear in the spine of Clais and killed him instantly, while a second man slit his throat with a sword. Arnout de Hert saw his father fall, at first slowly, then faster, grasping at his throat with both hands. Arnout saw the blood of life sprout out of his father. He knew he could not help. His father was beyond aid. A groan of despair escaped from his throat. The French men-at-arms had by then reached him. He too had to fight for his life. Behind him, he remarked the French knights attacked in a dense mass, seated on big destriers. A little way behind him, Ser Martin Denout swung a long, sharp sword at the knights on horseback. Martin had taken the allures of a knight himself. He wielded his knight's sword with much dexterity. The place where he and some of his man stood was swamped by the French knights, overrun, so that they were crushed by the on-riding force. Ser Martin was thrown to the ground by the weight of a destrier. A lance pierced his armour. He fell heavily to the ground. Other horses trampled over him. Finally, a battle-axe swung by a French footman finished his life.

Arnout de Hert looked at the spectacle with growing aversion and apprehension. In seconds' time he had witnessed two men he loved being killed ruthlessly. He had witnessed the deaths of two men he respected and loved to the utmost, his father and Martin. He bent over in the melee, vomited in horror. His body shook uncontrollably. Tears welled up in his eyes. He would have remained in shock, had French warriors not engaged him. He had to fight for his life! He encouraged his men to stand shield to shield, to form a shield row directed to the new threat. He faced the sideways attack of the French.

Involuntarily, the Flemish militiamen at the right side stepped back, to the middle of the central block of Ghent. The ranks of the Flemish were now being pushed upon each other. Only the two outer rows could fight, heave a *goedendag*, swing a sword, or thrust a spear. The men who were still standing inside the dense militias' block could not take part in the battle. They stood uselessly. The men in the outer ranks had to face more French men-at-arms than they could handle. They were being killed in great numbers because of the disadvantage of position. The French warriors at this side and the fierce knights wielded heavy weapons! The militiamen of Ghent that were being slaughtered on this side piled up. Arnout de Hert went steadily back, defending himself still. He saw knights attack ferociously, drive their destriers deep into the Flemish ranks and wreak havoc there. French men-at-arms tried to join their knights and commanders, hacking and slashing into the stunned *Gentenaars*. The Flemish had the presence of mind to resist. The more agile French footmen slipped through the Flemish lines, however, brandishing long knives to cut at the legs of the Flemish warriors or to cut the throats of the wounded on the ground.

The *Gentenaars* lost their head. They would have followed Arnout de Hert in resistance, had Arnout received any authority. No Flemish leaders stood at this end. Militiamen began to flee from the slaughter, running up to the hill, many of them having to run between the horses of the French knights. In doing that, they became easy prey for the triumphant knights. The

Flemish ran. Arnout saw many men even throw away their shields and heavy *goedendags* to run quicker up the hill. Without weapons, they could only be killed! The knights continued riding into the ranks, wreaking havoc among the disorganised *Gentenaars*.

The rear ranks of the Flemish army were seized by an unstoppable panic. They hardly contributed to the battle. Arnout de Hert sensed the battle had reached a turning point. The Flemish right rear crumbled and fled! Already, French knights attacked the very centre from the back. Hardly any man in the rear of the militias still offered resistance.

As more and more Flemish warriors ran up the hill, the first rows of the centre of the Flemish army wavered. The men who fought there and still hoped to push the French back, became aware of the development in their rear. They saw many men running away from their battle. More and more men turned and fled.

Philip van Artevelde stood by then not so far from these first middle ranks. Suddenly, the entire centre block of the Flemish gave way, moved back very rapidly and ran in one thick wave back to the Golden Mountain. Militiamen and French warriors mingled. A solid wall of men who were out of their wits by fear slammed into Philip van Artevelde. He tried with wide open arms to hold them back. The wild-eyed men pushed him out of the way. He fell to the grass. He was trampled upon by hundreds of feet of panicked men. Philip van Artevelde tried to get up, shouted this could not be. He was the regent of Flanders, he shouted, the head captain of Ghent, but a man banged him on the head with the club of a *goedendag*. He fell to the ground and people again ran over him. He disappeared under the feet of his own militiamen.

On the left side of the block of *Gentenaars*, Boudin van Lake and Wouter de Smet had seen the danger. They succeeded in shouting to their men to form a circle and so to withstand the oncoming waves of French warriors. They managed to form such a defensive circle of several thousands of men, who saw in the middle of the circle a safe place to hide. At the perimeter of the circle, the Flemish warriors placed their shields together, and they pushed their *goedendags* outwards. Boudin tore at men to push them in a shield wall. The circle became constantly replenished with more Flemish warriors, who thought they could better save their life by fighting than by running.

A new battle ensued. The French knights and men-at-arms made their own circle around the Flemish one. They surrounded the *Gentenaars*. Another slaughter began.

The advantage of a circle in battle is that it could form a strong defensive position. The *Gentenaars* and the militiamen from other Flemish towns put their shields together, held their *goedendags* horizontal to the outside world. They thus formed a defence that was hard to break.

The disadvantage of such a circle is, however, that the attackers could form an outer circle that was longer in length than the inner circle. The outer circle could therefore hold more warriors. In a battle, when one man has to face two adversaries, he usually loses the fight. A battle of attrition of the circle ensued. As many Flemish warriors fell, the circle became smaller. The militiamen standing inside the circle could not fight. They were also being pushed together. They could not participate in the battle, until they could take a place in the outer line of the circle. When the French men-at-arms gathered a group of crossbow archers, the decimation of the Flemish really began. The dead militiamen heaped up.

The Flemish warriors soon understood the circle was a deadly trap from which no one would escape. They broke up the defence, opened the circle, and swamped the French warriors on

the southern side. The men hoped to flee to Kortrijk. The debacle in Flemish army was then complete. The fleeing militiamen were being pursued by knights on horse-back, and also by men-at-arms on foot. The knights killed the fleeing men, giving them no chance at all to escape. The fields of Roosebeke became inundated by Flemish blood. The fleeing men were mercilessly hacked down. The circle disappeared, disintegrated, and every Flemish militiamen was massacred. No quarter was given. Did not the Oriflamme now wave high and proudly?

Arnout de Hert also thought of nothing else but to flee. His father had fallen. It was his duty to continue the business of his father. His brother, Lieve, could not manage the shipping business on his own. Arnout had heard the Pharaïldis patriarchs in his youth tell stories of battles. He had a keen memory for some of the advices the men had given.

‘When you have to flee from a battle,’ stated Gillis Vresele, then a very old and wise man, ‘never flee to where everybody else flees! Try the opposite way! Flee to where nobody else thinks to flee. Do not flee to the nearest town. Flee the other way!’

Arnout saw how many Flemish militiamen ran to the south, to Kortrijk. He was a man of the water. His first instinct had been also to want to flee to the Leie in the south. The warnings of the elders of the Pharaïldis hung in his ears. He had liked to fetch his father, take the lifeless body in his back and bring it back to Ghent. Where his father lay a large throng of knights and French footmen were regrouping. He saw no opportunity to get to his father.

Arnout ran to the north.

He ran as fast as he could. Small woods and roads lined with bushes lay to the north. He might hide in those bushes and disappear from sight. He should keep on the move till nightfall! He ran as fast as he could. More woods and roads lined with bushes lay to the north. Those could mean his salvation!

While Arnout fled, he suddenly heard the hooves of a horse behind him. He looked back, did not slow down, and saw a rider pursue him. He would soon be overtaken and slain by a sword in his back! He did notice only one man rode after him. He thought that man over-confident. A coldness then came over Arnout. He reached a deep, hollow path lined with small trees, long willows, to left and right. He discovered a long piece of dead wood, grabbed it, and faced the rider at the last moment with an unexpected, make-shift weapon. He swung his heavy wood at the rider, not at the horse, right at the moment the man brought his sword down. Arnout saw the French warrior was not a knight, but a man clad in lighter armour, a squire maybe. The horse bore no armour. It was a much lighter, swifter animal than the heavy destriers of the French knights. The man’s sword caught in the wood, stuck deep in it, and Arnout drew the wood downwards. The force of the sword drove Arnout to the ground, but he held on to his wood and in doing so unbalanced the rider. With the momentum of the galloping horse, the French warrior was torn out of the saddle. He fell on to Arnout. By then, Arnout had let his hands free of the wood and of the sword. He had, swift as lightning, drawn his long knife and plunged it now into the throat of the man. Arnout saw the eyes of the squire widening. He heard the gurgling of blood that sprayed from around the dagger. Warm blood fled over his hands. He held on to the dagger until the eyes of the man broke.

Arnout remained lying beside the French rider for a few moments, exhausted, trapped by the horror of his killing. Then, he gathered his senses and stood. His front mail and tunic was soaked with blood. He felt utterly exhausted. The horse had stopped a few paces farther. Arnout drew his tunic over his head, and then his coat of mail. He hated now these obvious signs of war. He threw them away, to the side of the path. He walked to the horse. On the animal, he found another tunic and a cloak, carefully rolled up behind the saddle. He threw the new tunic and the cloak over his shoulders, tightened the cloak around his neck. A mace

and a small axe hung at the saddle. Arnout threw these away. He grabbed the sword of the man, which had remained stuck in the piece of wood. He brought the horse to the dead rider, undid the man's belt and took the scabbard. He hung the scabbard on his own belt and slid the sword in its sheath. Arnout knew how to wield a sword. That would be his weapon, now. He sprang on the horse, eased the frightened animal, and then he spurred it to a slow gallop. He rode northward. Arnout rode on as fast as he could the entire day, without exhausting the horse. He encountered no enemy riders. He continued riding north. By nightfall he changed directions and rode eastwards, back to Ghent.

The broken-up Flemish circle was not the last climactic stand the army of Ghent made at Roosebeke. Heinric Vresele, Boudin van Lake, Wouter de Smet and a few thousand militiamen had continued running as one large group until they were utterly exhausted. They had skirted the Golden Mountain in the direction of Roeselare. Their flight was stopped by a dense wood. At that place, they could run no more. They didn't have the energy left to enter the wood and disperse. They had continuously been pursued by riders. Many of their men had been killed by a swing of a sword or by a vicious stroke of a mace.

The Flemish men turned then, gathered more fleeing men, and gave the last stand the French riders had desired. In fact, the French men-at-arms had as much liked the Flemish to continue running, for they too had had their fill of fighting on this day. The knights, however, resented the rebellious Flemish having drawn them so far north. They sought revenge. More than three thousand militiamen from Ghent and from other Flemish towns stood their last ground with the thick wood in their back. A second battle of Roosebeke began at that place.

As the Flemish stood and began to arrange in a strong defensive formation once more, the French army too gathered. The *Gentenaars* formed closed ranks, shields and *goedendags* out. Boudin van Lake and Wouter de Smet stood next to each other. They shouted orders to their men. Next to Wouter de Smet stood a tall, panting man. Wouter vaguely remembered having seen this man somewhere, but he couldn't place him. He shouted his name, asked the name of the other, but the man was not inclined to much sympathy.

He merely shouted back, 'Arent! We met at New Terhagen,' and then he kept his silence and looked at the on-running French footmen.

The French attacked immediately.

Boudin van Lake was tired. He felt his years. He fought with shield and sword, but he was driven back by the powerful blows of a battle-axe on his shield. A lean, strong French warrior delivered the fast blows. Each time a blow fell, Boudin went a little through his knees. Nevertheless, he held his place. He defended himself, more than taking the initiative. He was so much occupied trying to fend off his atrocious opponent, he did not see how another French warrior, a smaller man clad in armour, thrust a vicious spear in his side. Boudin van Lake let go of his shield, sighed, and knew instantly his life was fleeing from him. The heavy battle-axe descended again, cleaved his helmet and drove shards of iron into his brain. Almost at the same time, Wouter de Smet received a sword in his breast. He could draw backward, into the ranks of his companions, but blood gushed out of his body. Wouter looked astonished at his wound, held a hand to his breast, but another long spear stuck in his throat. Wouter died almost at the same moment as Boudin.

The Flemish block, exhausted from the run, demoralised, all fighting spirit lost, was being massacred. The slaughter of the last square lasted until evening fell. No quarter was given. The French knights did not ask once for the surrender of the *Gentenaars*, and no surrender was offered. The three thousand Flemish militiamen were massacred, except for a few men

who traversed the wood. These men emerged with scratches all over their faces and hands, but they could escape east. These men were few, and they might have been called cowards, for their friends on the other side of the wood were still fighting the French. The French knights would not be looking soon for the few men who had escaped in the wood.

Among the fleeing men ran Heinric Vresele. He ran in shock, for he could not grasp his wild attacks had not succeeded in throwing the French warriors back. He could not comprehend the *Gentenaars* had lost the battle. Heinric had killed many men this day, so he was satisfied. Still, he could not grasp the defeat. The Battle of Roosebeke was lost, and he had to flee to save his life. He had done this instinctively. Saving his life was now an intuitive urge, as much as he had killed.

He had seen Philip van Artevelde fall and disappear under the feet of the wave of *Gentenaars* that retreated. He did not feel any pity for Philip van Artevelde. He merely did not understand how it was possible that a battle in which he, Heinric Vresele, had fought, could have been lost so quickly and so ignominiously. What had gone wrong? What had happened? What force had been opposed to his fighting fury? Why had God given the victory to the French? No, Heinric could not grasp why his rage and why the force of his men had been countered and why or how the *Gentenaars* had been routed. Maybe indeed, God had been on the side of the French king this day!

Heinric ran on. He noticed, coming out of the wood with a few companions, the rain had started to pour down again. They were alone. Nobody followed. Horsemen would soon be launched against them, but that would take an hour or so. It was necessary to be quick, to run on and put some distance between them and the French riders. They had to hide in woods and yet advance, march and run eastwards. The night would save them. Heinric ran on, northwards and then eastwards. He left the towers and walls of Roeselare to his left. Many of his companions ran to the town, but Heinric knew the French riders would be waiting there with death. Roeselare would open its gates to the French. Salvation was in the run! Night would fall soon. Heinric ran on, taking long strides. He looked out for other small woods in front of him. He would have to hide in such a wood during the hours of total darkness, then flee once more to Ghent. He would have to avoid the roads, run over the pastures and fields. One certainty stayed in his mind: nobody would kill him. He would escape with his life! Four companions fled with him.

The Battle of Roosebeke finally ended in the late afternoon. Many militiamen of the towns of Flanders fled south, to Kortrijk. They were being slaughtered on their way by the knights who pursued them. The French army had won a total and a very bloody massacre. Many thousands of Flemish warriors, artisans and merchants, remained lying slain on the grass of Roosebeke, in the battlefield, dead or dying, terribly wounded and groaning but unable to stand or walk. French men-at-arms stepped on the fallen enemies, in search of gold or other valuables. They walked methodically among the corpses and wounded. They took a purse, looked through pockets, and searched for hidden coins. They took the fine daggers and swords, a rare jewel, off the men. They slit the throat of the wounded men they found still groaning but not yet dead, often making no distinction between friend and foe.

Nobody counted the number of dead men, but at least ten to fifteen thousand Flemish men must have lost their life in the fields of Roosebeke near the towns of Kortrijk and Roeselare. Maybe only one third as many French warriors had perished. The battle was a great victory for the French knights. The army of Flanders had been crushed, humiliated, and annihilated.

In the evening, the king and his dukes and counts rode into the battlefield with the Oriflamme in their midst. They rode over the corpses, their horses trampling over the dead. The animals avoided placing their hooves on the bodies, but that was not always possible for whereto the courtiers directed their horses.

King Charles VI wanted to know whether Philip van Artevelde, his opponent, the so-called regent of Flanders, had perished or had fled.

A wounded Flemish militiaman was found, disarmed and brought to the king, for he pretended to know where van Artevelde had been slain. The man directed the knights to a place where the corpses of *Gentenaars* lay on a heap. He drew at the bodies and pointed to a richly dressed *Gentenaar* of whom he told this was Philip van Artevelde.

King Charles looked at the broken man. He descended from his horse, went up to the dead man, studied his face for a moment, kicked a little at the body, and called him a villain. He saw no wounds of sword or axe. The Connétable Clisson suggested the man had probably suffocated under the feet of the fleeing enemies. His breast seemed caved in. The disgraceful death of his enemy pleased the king. Charles VI ordered to hang the body of van Artevelde from a nearby tree branch, for everybody to see how Ghent had been punished. Van Artevelde would be able to see the disaster he had caused for his countrymen.

The king then wanted to save the wounded Fleming who had shown him van Artevelde. He proposed to care for the wounds of the man. The Fleming had fallen to the ground. He refused to be saved by French hands. He wept at the carnage of so many friends. He did not want to live. The French left him to die. The knights of the court spurred their horses to Kortrijk.

After the battle

Most of the remaining few Flemish and Ghent militiamen fled south to Kortrijk. Many had been killed on the way. The gates of Kortrijk had been opened. The French army rode into the town, past the fleeing *Gentenaars*. The town had remained open and without defences after the battle. The aldermen of Kortrijk were very well aware a great battle had been lost for Flanders.

The French knights remembered keenly how, eighty years ago, the Flemish militia had defeated another French army and made very many victims among the nobles of France. Hardly any knight had not a grandfather, or grand-uncle, who had not perished in that battle. Robert of Artois had died then, at the head of the greatest army of knights France had ever been able to gather. The Flemish had picked up the golden spurs of the French knights. The spurs still hung in the church of Our Lady of Kortrijk. The defeat of that French army had been feasted each year at Kortrijk. The French knights were angry they had had to ride so far north in foul weather and suffer so many dead companions in a battle. They felt inspired by revenge.

King Charles VI also arrived in the town. He refreshed briefly, and then announced his intentions to have the town be ransacked and burnt. This was for the Flemish to remember of his passage after the Battle of Roosebeke!

Count Louis of Male had by then also arrived at Kortrijk. He had taken no part in the Battle of Roosebeke, for the French nobles had refused him to pass the Leie. When Louis of Male heard of the intentions of the king for the fine town of Kortrijk, he knelt in front of the king and of all the courtiers and begged for mercy for the beautiful town. King Charles VI refused all clemency.

The king shouted contemptuously to the count of Flanders, ‘my cousin, I helped you and I have destroyed your enemies. However, I remember well how, in the times of my father, you

sided with our enemies the English. You were very favourable to them. Do not try to enliven that alliance ever again! As for the town of Kortrijk, this stain on the banners of France, I shall do with it as I please!’

Count Louis of Male dared not say a word more. He left the town and the army, and rode to Lille with his nobles.

The French army sacked Kortrijk. They looted the town, and then assembled the inhabitants. The poorters, women and children of Kortrijk, hid in cellars and in churches. They were dragged out and put together outside the walls. Many men were slaughtered. The men of Kortrijk did not put up any resistance, but they were dragged into the streets and killed. The French raped the women. They then brought the women and children of the knights of the town out of Kortrijk, to a separate place. They held these prisoner to be ransomed. Kortrijk was given over to looting.

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, took part in the looting. He had the large clock taken down from the tower of the main church of Kortrijk. The clock was dismantled and placed on an ox wagon. This clock was the finest in Flanders. Only two other similar clocks existed in France, one at Paris and one at Sens. Philip the Bold had the clock be brought to his capital of Dijon, where it hangs to this day.

After several hours, the king and his court left Kortrijk. Then, the proud town was given over to fire. Kortrijk was burnt. Houses and thatched roofs were given over to the flames. The last men, women and children that had hidden in dark recesses of cellars or attics, perished in the fire. Such was the revenge of the French army on a town that had surrendered.

The greed for riches of the French warriors was immense. When they had seen how much could be looted from just one town such as Kortrijk, they wanted Bruges to suffer the same fate. Bruges was the jewel of Philip the Bold’s heritage, so he did not allow Bruges to be assaulted. The king consented to negotiations.

Philip the Bold sent the Fremineuren monks who had been with the army of Ghent, Raes van Lake among them, to Bruges. The principal poorters of the town were led to the king. They knelt before Charles VI and asked for mercy. Count Louis of Male was by then back at the court, and he translated for the men of Bruges.

Especially the Breton knights of the court, with Olivier de Clisson, demanded revenge and much money. The king wanted two hundred thousand francs from Bruges, but settled for one hundred and twenty thousand in the end. Bruges was indeed still the richest city of Flanders!

The Breton knights were not satisfied at all. They wanted much more looting and much more ransom money. Greed enhances greed! They proposed to attack the county of Hainault, arguing that the count of Hainault had not wanted to rush to the aid of the count of Flanders, and therefore force the intervention of the army of France. They felt they had the absolute right to take compensation for the expenditures of their men.

Also the lord of Diksmuide, a Flemish lord who had accompanied the army, wanted to take revenge for the sentence to death pronounced at Valenciennes against a member of his family who had committed crimes in that town. He had assembled five hundred lances to sack Valenciennes. He had sworn to put the town to fire for the insult done to him.

The major knights of France, the lords of Coucy, Enghien, Blois, Saint-Pol and de la Marche, saved Hainault and Valenciennes from these evil intentions. The king and the dukes did not allow Hainault to be attacked.

In the meantime, Ghent lay peacefully in its quarter. The city had not yet been besieged. Peter van den Bossche was still recovering from his wounds, but he had escaped from Bruges. He

arrived in Ghent and took command of the city. The full extent of the defeat of Roosebeke had not yet been grasped by the people of Ghent. Van den Bossche inspired the *Gentenaars* to resistance.

The aldermen of Ghent sent a delegation to Tournai, to the king. Ghent proposed to surrender to King Charles VI, but they demanded to be ruled henceforth directly by the king of France and by the Parliament of Paris. They did not want to be governed again by any count of Flanders. Philip the Bold dominated the court of the king. He would never have accepted to lose the still largest city of his future county. The demands of Ghent were immediately rejected by the court. The king also demanded Ghent to submit to the popes of Avignon. The delegates of Ghent refused this categorically.

The aldermen of Ghent realised quite well the French army was not capable of beginning a direct siege of their city! The season was full winter now, the end of December. The air was very humid and freezing cold. So much rain had fallen this year of 1382, that large territories of Flanders had become a marshland. Pastures were flooded, rivers were swollen far beyond their normal beds. The roads were muddy and inundated. Illnesses threatened. The men-at-arms of the French army were tired. They were dissatisfied for not having been able to loot more. Especially the men from far territories, from the Languedoc and from the Auvergne regions, from Savoie, the Dauphiné, and even from Burgundy, suffered from the cold. The court let them return to their lands. The Bretons and the Normans, the fiercest warriors, had been retained. Paris had revolted again. These troops might be needed to crush the revolts in France.

The court of France merely installed garrisons in the towns of Flanders, and then the army returned to the royal domains.

At Arras, the Breton commanders rebelled against their lords. They wanted to ransack the town because their salaries had not been paid. The Connétable Clisson and his marshals could only at the last moment bring the men to reason. Clisson promised the Bretons they would be paid at Paris. The dukes and the court brought King Charles VI to safety at Senlis. The rest of the French army camped nearby. The French court took some precautions before entering the town of Paris!

Chapter 4. The van den Bossche and Ackerman regimes in Ghent. 1383-1387

The Repression of the French cities. 1382-1383

Various riots erupted in France in the beginning of 1382. As of February of that year, new taxes had caused uprisings in Orléans, Rouen, Laon, Amiens and Rheims, as well as in Paris. The revolts did not result in concerted actions of these cities together. The English peasants' revolt of Wat Tyler the year before, and the revolt of Ghent and of Flanders against their count, formed ominous examples.

In Rouen, the weavers and drapers looted the houses of the wealthy. They attacked priests, abbeys and Jews. Royal tax collectors were killed. The uprising was later called of the *Harelle*. The name was given because the rebels called 'Haro!' for halt against the government. The richer inhabitants of the town could direct the riots to less violent purposes, stopping effectively the uprising. They sent a delegation to King Charles VI to ask for mercy. The royal court then brought King Charles VI, still a boy, to Rouen, accompanied by his knights. The court granted the pardon of the king in return for a large sum of money.

In March, Paris rioted. Here also, the revolt happened after the proclamation of yet another tax. Tax collectors were killed, the mallets destined to the police of Paris were seized. Armed with these mallets, the men, now called *Maillotins* after the name of this weapon, spread terror in the city. Tens of people were killed, among whom also many Jews. The royal court sent the lord of Coucy, the duke of Burgundy and the Chancellor d'Orgemont to parley with the insurgents. The Parisians wanted the abolition of the taxes and pardon for the rioters. When Coucy and Burgundy released a few men out of prison to show their good will, the mob broke into the *Châtelet*, the royal prison, and released all the men who were detained there, including Hugues Aubriot. The former provost of Paris refused to lead the revolt. He knew how fickle the population of Paris could be. He fled from the city in the night, never to return. The court then sent an armed force to Paris. The revolt was suppressed by arms. Fourteen leaders of the revolt were publicly executed, twenty-six others taken prisoner. More men were secretly drowned in the Seine on orders of the court. Paris seemed appeased.

At the end of March, the king and Duke Philip the Bold rode back to Rouen. Despite the royal pardon given to the town, many leaders of the revolt were executed in Rouen. Charters of freedom were revoked. The silver and the gold coins of the guilds were confiscated. Rouen was left humiliated and subdued.

Revolts continued to grumble throughout the year 1382 in Paris. In April, the lord of Coucy was sent again by the Royal Council to the city. The king then resided at Meaux. Coucy was well regarded in Paris. He talked with the wealthier citizens in fine speeches, convinced them to halt their uprisings. Paris asked for the taxes to be repealed, but the aldermen promised to help the king by paying for the support of the king's army. They agreed to pay large sums in the hands of an agreed upon receiver.

To return to his good city, the king demanded that the people laid down arms, opened the gates to his men, and left the street chains down at night as long as he resided in the city. The

king also asked for hostages. The *Maillotins* refused these demands! The royal court then prepared for a bloody assault on the city. Nevertheless, Coucy continued to negotiate, trying to persuade the Parisians to better feelings for the king. He reached a settlement. Paris consented to a tax of eighty thousand francs to be collected by their own receivers, and to be distributed directly to the king's army. The Parisians did not want their money squandered by the royal dukes! The king then granted Paris general amnesty. He entered Paris for only one day, which displeased the men of Paris. They considered this a clear lack of confidence of the king in their word.

More revolts subsequently broke out in Rouen again, as well as in Aquitaine and in the Auvergne. At that moment of time, however, the royal army had to be called together for the campaign against Ghent and Philip van Artevelde. The revolts in France had momentarily to be left as they were.

In the beginning of January of 1383, the urban militias of Flanders defeated, the royal army halted first at Senlis. It consisted mainly of Bretons and Normans, the other companies having been sent home. As always, the Bretons were out for plunder. They looked with greedy eyes at Paris.

The dukes and counts first sent their servants to Paris to prepare their hotels. This was merely a means to hear what the situation in the city was like.

The Parisians thought it smart to show how powerful they were. They marched twenty thousand armed men out of the city! These men were placed in battle formation in front of Saint-Lazare below the hill of Montmartre.

The lords who had come as far as Le Bourget with the king were scandalised. They talked of insult, of *lèse-majesté*. Once more, nevertheless, they sent the lord of Coucy with the constable and the lords of Albret, de la Trémoille and Jean de Vienne to parley with the Parisians. The diplomatic skills of Coucy were recognised at court. These men arrived in front of the Parisian army. They sent heralds to the Parisians, asking to talk with their leaders.

The Parisians did as if they were astonished and answered innocently, 'we have no leaders but the king and his lords!'

The Connétable Clisson then rode up to the Parisian army, saying, 'well, men of Paris, what made you march out of your city? Do you wish to combat with the king, your lord?'

The Parisians answered they had never had any intention to fight with the king. They merely had wanted the young king to see for himself how powerful the city of Paris could be.

'The king is young,' they exclaimed. 'He doesn't know yet what he can do with us if need be!'

'That is all right,' Clisson laughed, 'but the king does not wish to see you this way in arms and standing in battle formation. Please return to the city, undo your armour and put down your arms.'

The Parisians obeyed.

The king rode to Saint-Denis. He handed over the Oriflamme to the abbot. There, the provost of Paris and twelve traders came to the king to ask for his good will. The king did not answer. He treated the men condescendingly. He rode into Paris at the head of a large contingent of his army, as if he rode into an occupied or captured city.

The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry still had not digested the insult done to the king. Armed warriors were placed in the most important squares. The king rode to the church of Notre-Dame to give thanks for his campaign, but refusing to receive any delegation of the aldermen or of influential traders of the city. He did not recognise their authority. A part of the army remained threateningly in camp near the walls of the city, ready to burst into Paris.

Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy and the duke of Berry rode through the streets in arms. Then, they organised the repression of Paris!

Three hundred of the most well-known inhabitants were thrown in prison. Two of them, a jeweller and a draper, were publicly hanged. A wife of one of these men was pregnant. When she saw her husband dangle lifeless on the rope, she jumped out of the window of her house and died.

The chains of the streets were taken away by armed men and carried to the castle of Vincennes. Paris lay open to the army. All the inhabitants had to bring in their weapons, also their mallets.

The gates of Saint-Antoine were demolished. The fortress of the Bastille was finished in haste.

The duchess of Orléans, the sister-in-law of King John II the Good begged the king to pardon the city. Also the University of Paris asked for clemency. The king showed some emotion and was inclined to give in, but the duke of Berry urged to set an example.

Although he had convinced the Parisians of caution earlier on, the draper Nicolas Flamand was one of the first men to be threatened. Paris offered forty thousand francs for his life. Also many others, wealthier citizens, could buy their life for large sums. The poorer men were executed in public, others bound in sacks and thrown into the Seine at night. Many committed suicide in prison. The Attorney General of Paris, Jean Desmarets, was an old man of seventy when the revenge of the king reached him. He too had always tried to soften the fury of his fellow Parisians. He was dragged to a square and beheaded in public. The Parisians wept when his head fell, for he was very popular in the city. The executions lasted for more than a month.

These violent measures were accompanied by the abolition of all the liberties and privileges of the city. By royal decree of the twenty-seventh of January 1383, all the offices that had been open to elections by the people of Paris, such as the functions of aldermen, were abolished. All municipal jurisdiction was forfeited. The management of the city's treasury was given in the hands of men chosen by the royal court. The guilds, as well as other associations, were abolished. The provost of Paris was from now on a royal officer, installed by the king and by the king alone, and he was henceforth the only magistrate of the city. The militias of the city were terminated and forbidden to form again. No army of Paris would be placed anymore in the king's way as insult. All previous taxes were re-installed. Paris had lost all of her freedoms, and her autonomy.

Finally, the court of King Charles VI staged a grand but macabre ceremony to end the total humiliation of Paris. The throne of the king was installed in a square of Paris, in front of a scaffold. The people of Paris had been invited to attend the ceremony, so the square was filled with inhabitants of the city.

The young king sat on his throne. His courtiers, the dukes and counts stood around him. The chancellor of France, Peter d'Orgemont, shouted with a thundering voice all the misdeeds the Parisian people had committed since the last forty years. The men and women of Paris stood stunned. They began to weep and to sigh, an effect desired by the staged ceremony. The people of Paris feared all for their life.

Then, the duke of Burgundy and the duke of Berry knelt ostentatiously before the king and begged for mercy on behalf of the good city of Paris. The king solemnly agreed to be clement. He promised his royal pardon. He transformed the criminal charges to civil punishments.

By that rule, of course, the court could pressure the richer people of Paris, anyone, to pay ransom money for their life. A little later, the court taxed and oppressed the people of Paris to high amounts.

The cities of Rouen, Rheims, Orléans, Troyes, Sens, Châlons and other towns of the royal domains were submitted to the same humiliation. The extorted money, over thirty thousand pounds, went to the treasure of the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry. The connétable and his marshals received the money necessary to pay the men-at-arms of the royal army.

Paris and the large towns north of the Loire were thus tamed and submitted to the king's will by the Royal Council. Ghent knew what to expect if it ever submitted to the French court from a position of weakness.

The king then travelled to Lyon, where he stayed for two months. The Estates of the Languedoc were called together at Lyon. The court demanded much money from the towns and provinces. The king obtained the funds he desired. King and court then rode on to Guyenne, and briefly to the Touraine region, where for a moment a new revolt threatened. The cities and regions of France were thus pacified by force and subdued by the court, mainly by the will of the dukes of Burgundy and Berry.

In April of 1383, the attention of the Royal Council was drawn to a new invasion of the English in France, and again to the war in Flanders.

The crusade of Henry Despenser, bishop of Norwich. 1383

Henry Despenser was the youngest son of a family of knights of Norfolk. He learned to manipulate the arms, was daubed a knight, and studied law at Oxford. Destined to a career in the Church, he became a canon at Llandaff. Henry received the income from Llandaff, but he paid an ordained priest to perform the ecclesiastical duties, as was common in other places of England and of the continent. Henry was an insolent and impetuous young man. His contemporaries said he excelled neither in learning nor in discretion. He was ordained a priest when still young, and bishop of Norwich shortly after. He distinguished himself more as a warrior than as a man of the Church! The first time he made a name was during the peasant revolt of Wat Tyler, in 1381.

In Norfolk, the peasants' revolt was led by a man called Geoffrey Lister, a dyer. Lister captured Norwich with his hordes. The merchants of Norwich paid him off to not pillage the town. He nevertheless looted Carrow Priory, a convent of nuns, and he devastated the countryside.

After the death of Wat Tyler, Lister sent money and hostages to the king to negotiate a settlement. He rode with a few men to Newmarket, but came upon a force of men-at-arms led by Henry Despenser, the bishop of Norwich. Despenser had been relieving the large abbey at Peterborough, and he had defeated a group of peasants who had attacked Ramsey Abbey. Despenser and his men clashed with Lister. Despenser could take the men of Lister prisoner, but Lister himself escaped. The bishop beheaded the peasants without pardon at Newmarket, and had the heads displayed on a pillory. Then, he marched with a growing number of loyal troops to North Walsham, to meet the rest of Lister's men. The bishop gave battle to the troops of Geoffrey Lister. Lister was defeated, made a prisoner, and summarily hanged. By

that feat, Despenser made himself a reputation of being a great warrior, rather than a graceful bishop.

As early as 1379, Pope Urban VI of Rome had wanted to revive the war against the king of France, because France supported the popes of Avignon. Urban VI ordered a crusade to be preached in England, which was Urbanist. To finance the campaign, the pope of Rome allowed taxes to be levied on the properties of the Church. Gold, silver, precious stones and money were collected from among the pious. The papal agents had sought a bellicose ecclesiastic, capable in military affairs, and willing to lead men in battle. Henry Despenser was singled out as being young, adventurous and a seemingly fine leader of men-at-arms. He himself had already proposed to Pope Urban to take up the sword and the cross for a crusade against the heretics of France.

In March of 1381, Pope Urban VI appointed Bishop Henry Despenser to lead a crusade against the Clementist heretics in France. Despenser could grant indulgences at will, and dispense priests to participate in the campaign. The papal bulls to this effect reached England in August of 1381. Despenser sent out his men to collect donations. He took on the crusader's cross on the twenty-first of December of 1382 in Saint Paul's cathedral of London.

When Despenser disposed of sufficient funds, he assembled a force of near two thousand knights and their squires, and four thousand archers. He chose as captains excellent warriors such as Sir Hugh Calveley, William Elhalm, Thomas Tryvet, John Ferris, William Ferinton, Matthew Reedman and Hugh Despenser. At the last moment, King Richard II and John of Gaunt, seeking rather peace with France, tried to delay the crusade, but Bishop Despenser ignored the plea to wait. He sailed with this army to Calais, having received additional funds from the English Parliament.

Despenser arrived at Calais at the end of May 1383. He had the choice to launch a campaign in Picardy or in Flanders. He could march south and east, or march north. While he was hesitating, he received a delegation from the city of Ghent. These men told him the towns of Flanders captured not so long ago by the French, had been forced to vow for the Pope Clement of Avignon. Those parts of Flanders were therefore Clementist! The men of western Flanders would, however, rapidly revert to the Urbanist faith when a strong English army showed up in Flanders. The captains of Ghent, especially now Francis Ackerman, desired ardently English aid in their war against Count Louis of Male and against the French. Many English knights around Henry Despenser told him the lords of Flanders were far more Urbanist than Clementist. Count Louis of Male had remained Urbanist. They considered it unreasonable to devastate Flanders.

This was confirmed by a delegation sent by Count Louis of Male, which also arrived at Calais. Despenser and the *Gentenaars* claimed Flanders was not Urbanist, because garrisons of the French heretics occupied the towns in the castellanies of Bruges and Ieper. The delegates of the count asked for safe conducts to travel to England. They would have liked to expose their case before the king. Despenser refused to hand over the safe conducts, so the Flemish delegates could not travel abroad.

Henry Despenser preferred a campaign in Flanders first for two reasons. Ghent promised him support in Flanders, with provisioning and warriors. This encouraged him. He had heard of the might of Ghent. He had heard of that fabulously rich city, one of the greatest on the continent. He felt assured with such an ally.

Moreover, he could capture Flemish cities from the enemy, towns that were among the wealthiest of France. He was attracted by greed, by plunder and ransom money. The bishop of Norwich therefore marched north! He succeeded almost effortlessly in taking the town of Gravelines by surprise, and marched on to Dunkirk.

Count Louis of Male could not allow such incursion into this lands. He assembled a large army of knights to counter Despenser's campaign. His army was put under the leadership of one of his bastard sons. The Flemish army of knights drew to Dunkirk. Henry Despenser gave battle at that harbour town. As so many times already, the English archers got the best of a French or other army. The defeated the Flemish knights. The impetuous assaults of the troops of Louis of Male were halted time after time by the archers. The Flemish rode and ran to the safety of Dunkirk, but the English joined the chaos and succeeded in entering the town with the last Flemish men-at-arms who were fleeing in panic. The battle continued in the streets of Dunkirk. The army of Louis of Male was defeated. It seemed the Flemish could win no more battles at that time! The knights of Flanders were routed, and very many men-at-arms of Flanders were massacred.

Once more, Count Louis of Male despaired. In distress, he begged for reinforcements of the duke of Burgundy, his son-in-law. Philip the Bold responded immediately, sending his Burgundians and Bretons to garrison Saint-Omer, Aire, Saint Winoksbergen, and other fortresses and castles on the frontier with France.

Henry Despenser did not lose time! In a few days, he captured Bourbourg, Cassel, and Saint-Venant. The garrisons of the duke of Burgundy defended these places well, but could not hold them. Then, in common agreement, the English and the *Gentenaars* laid a siege to Ieper. The two armies arrived at Ieper on the eighth of June of 1383. Captain for Ghent was Francis Ackerman. Gent had brought about ten thousand men.

A group of sixty Breton knights of the duke of Burgundy fell into an ambush in Flanders. They encountered two hundred English knights near Kortrijk, and were almost to the last man slain. Philip the Bold was at risk of losing Flanders to the English and Ghent armies! He turned to France. He asked for a session of the French Parliament at Compiègne. The French court decided for the king to enter Flanders with as powerful an army as the one that had defeated the cities six months ago. The *bans* and *arrière-bans* were published, delivered, for all the knights of France to gather with their men at Arras by the fifteenth of August of 1383. Many knights came enthusiastically, even from far lands: the counts of Savoie and Armagnac, even Duke Frederick of Bavaria, the duke of Brittany, the count of Blois though he was ill, the counts of Geneva and of Namur, and the dukes of Lorraine, Burgundy and Berry. The army counted twenty-six thousand lances! An arrangement was made with the merchant Boulard of Paris to deliver grain to this army for at least four months.

Despenser and the *Gentenaars* made several unsuccessful assaults on the city walls of Ieper. Realising Ieper was too strong for him, Despenser wanted to turn to Picardy. The lord of Coucy was captain-general of these lands of France. Despenser had serious issues in his army with the project. Sir Hugh Calveley had never whole-heartedly agreed with the campaign in Flanders. Now, he refused to follow the bishop on further expeditions, judging Despenser a foolhardy adventurer. He left the army with almost half the English troops and returned to Calais.

Norwich had to face the enormous French army alone, abandoned by Hugh Calveley and by his Ghent allies. The English troops of Norwich first moved to Bergues, to Saint

Winoksbergen, but having heard how large the French army really was, he brought his men to Bourbourg. This town was strongly walled, a large fortress. He would be able to hold out here during a siege. He closed the gates of the town and manned the walls.

The *Gentenaars* also returned from Ieper, but they roamed with their army in the environs. They had other, more interesting aims.

Saint Winoksbergen was rapidly taken by the pursuing French. They massacred most of the inhabitants, and burnt the town.

Francis Ackerman had been forced to abandon the siege of Ieper. With his *Gentenaars* alone, he considered his army not strong enough to hold the siege of Ieper. He also needed to know what the French army would do next. In the evening he withdrew, he had a splendid idea. He surprised Oudenaarde!

Ghent had always coveted Oudenaarde in its quarter. As the garrison of the town had joined the French army, Oudenaarde was left without much defence. Francis Ackerman made his *Gentenaars* attack the town in silence and in the last light of the day. The *Gentenaars* used scaling ladders to climb over the walls of Oudenaarde. They opened the gates and swarmed inside with the rest of their army. After so many months of vain assaults and sieges, Oudenaarde was theirs!

In the meantime, the French army set a siege to Bourbourg. Nobody on the French side was in a great hurry. The English could do nothing but sit tight, anyway. The French still feared the English archers. Why would they have launched attacks against Bourbourg? Sooner or later, the garrison would begin to starve, and surrender. The French war lords continued their efficient tactics of not inciting the English to give battle.

As of August, the French nobles settled in front of Bourbourg. They organised festivities and tournaments and made the best of their waiting. More than four weeks thus passed. The Bretons, Germans and Burgundians in the French army were hoping for a great pillage. The other knights were much less enthusiastic to throw their forces against the walls. Cannons were used to set fire to parts of the town, but the effect of these guns was not decisive. Finally, Despenser and the duke of Burgundy accepted negotiations by mediation of the duke of Brittany. An agreement was reached by which the bishop of Norwich could ride out of Bourbourg unharmed with his men, with baggage and all, only to march back to Calais and return to England. When Despenser marched out of the fortress, the French entered the town, and pillaged it. Norwich returned to England in disgrace in September of 1383.

The huge French army had then become unnecessary. The king dissolved it.

Further, new negotiations were then proposed by France and England, to be held at Calais and Boulogne. For France negotiated the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry, the Chancellor d'Orgemont and the bishop of Laon. Also the count of Flanders and the duke of Brittany attended. For England negotiated the uncles of the king, among whom first and foremost John of Gaunt, the lord of Percy and the bishop of Suffolk. John of Gaunt met once more with Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy. Both men wanted peace.

It became rapidly clear peace was not possible! The French negotiators demanded all the towns and territories occupied by the English on the continent to be returned to France. The English of course refused to hand over cities such as Bordeaux, Brest, Cherbourg and Calais. The only agreement that could be reached was on a truce for one year.

Count Louis of Male asked for Ghent to be excluded from the truce. He wanted to continue the war with Ghent! John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, said he wanted no truce that did not

include Ghent. It was the least he could do for the city he was born in. For some strange reason of solidarity, John of Gaunt saved a year of peace for the city of his first youth. The point was the last hurdle to the truce, but John of Gaunt held his ground.

Finally, the duke of Berry, wanting to conclude the matter and go home, placed a hand on the shoulder of Count Louis of Male, saying, ‘my cousin, I would like you to be more obliging. Ghent shall be included in the truce. You have lacked in wisdom and thereby thrown yourself and your lords in great peril and damage. It would be wise now to curtail your anger and to show more circumspection!’

Count Louis felt abandoned, humiliated and insulted by the French lords. He instantly left the negotiations for Saint-Omer.

A truce of one year was then concluded and signed between France and England. The towns of Oudenaarde and Gravelines remained snugly in the power of Ghent, of Francis Ackerman. The only actors who won something in this campaign of Henry Despenser, the only ones to win territory and prestige, were the *Gentenaars*! Ghent had won Oudenaarde, the town they had tried to conquer since before times of Philip van Artevelde. Francis Ackerman was received in Ghent with cheers and laurels. Banquets were organised to feast the victory of Ghent. Since Ghent was included in the Truce of Boulogne, the city would be at peace for at least one year more. This gave the aldermen and the captains time to reorganise.

As for Henry Despenser, his disgrace was total. In the month of October of 1383, he was called to justify himself, as well as the expenses he had made, before the English Chancellor Michael de la Pole and before Parliament.

Despenser was accused of not having fulfilled his promises to hold an army in France for one whole year, for having deceived the king with false promises in order to retain control of his military expedition, and for having refused to take with him leaders indicated by the king because he had wanted to decide on everything during the campaign alone. Despenser tried to put some blame on his captains, but Michael de la Pole quickly rebutted him.

Parliament fined the bishop of Norwich to pay the entire cost of the expedition from what he had pillaged in France and in Flanders. At the end of the session of the parliament, in the presence of the king, the venerable members of parliament impeached the bishop of Norwich and they deprived him of his temporal functions for two years. He was to be treated in the future merely as an ecclesiastic. His treasurer, Robert Foulmere and five of his captains – though not Sir Hugh Calveley – were imprisoned and fined. The English court considered Henry Despenser a disgrace for England.

Count Louis of Male died on the twentieth of January of 1384. He died just a little later than the signature of the truce. Two versions of the death of the count of Flanders circulated. In one version, Louis of Male died from humiliation and despair after the Truce of Boulogne. His heart broke.

In another version, Louis of Male had wanted to recuperate the county of Boulogne from the duke of Berry. Berry held that county in his possession by his wife. Male argued the county had always belonged to Artois, which he had inherited. The dispute between the two men ran very high with insults and curses. In an outburst of anger, the duke of Berry had plunged his dagger into the breast of Louis of Male. Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy had wanted to keep the misdeed of his brother a secret. This version became never the official one.

The body of the last count of Flanders was brought to the city of Lille to be buried there with his wife, Margaret of Brabant, in the church of Saint Peter. The burial ceremony took place on the twenty-ninth of February of 1384.

The wandering woman of Ghent. 1384

In those days, while the militia army of Ghent still camped at Oudenaarde, a woman could be seen wandering in the streets of Ghent. She was clad in subdued colours, in a woollen tunic of brown cloth, a white shirt, with a high, laced collar. When it was cold in the months of October and November of 1383, she wore a heavy green coat. Her shoes were of fine leather, her boots exquisitely fashioned, and her buckles of gold. She wore a belt under her coat, at which hung a purse. The purse indicated she was not without means. The thieves of Ghent avoided her, though they looked at the purse with greedy eyes. She walked slowly, her back bent as an old woman. Her face was often hidden in her wide hood. The people who passed her might have thought she was an old, broken woman, maybe a mother who had lost her husband and sons in the battles for Ghent. God knew many such men had been killed the last months! She was an old, bent woman in despair walking in sadness. In December, she sauntered still through the streets, using a rough-hewn walking stick to pass the frozen cobbles. Although one might have thought she was old, her real age was merely a few years over thirty. Few people would have given her that age. She looked twenty years older at least. Her hair was whitening. Her lips were always thin and drawn to a line. There was no lustre of intelligence or of happiness in her eyes, her hands were gloved always.

The woman was often seen along the quays of *Tussen Bruggen*, or on the *Reep*, along the Leie and the Scheldt. Some feared she would jump any moment in the dark waters. She stood for hours on the bridges of Ghent, fascinated by the movement of the eternally passing water. She looked out over the rivers, taking delight in the boats that glided into Ghent. She could thus be seen on the *Minnebrug*, on the *Veebrug*, on the 's *Gravenbrug* of the *kuipe*, but she wandered as far as the *Fremineurenbrug*, the *Braembrug* and her feet brought her even in the *Zuivelstraat* leading to the *Alins* Hospital. At *Tussen Bruggen*, she saw how few people nowadays went to the Meat Hall and to the Fish Market. Less than a third men and women walked and talked in the markets! In her youth, when she was a girl of twelve, she had run with her friends there, forging a way among the crowd. She found no crowd anymore these days, no laughter, no groups of women gossiping!

On the quays of *Tussen Bruggen*, the harbour of Ghent, between the *Veebrug*, the Cattle Bridge and the *Sint Michiels Brug*, the bridge leading to Saint Michael's Church, river boats still loaded and unloaded their goods, but not half as many as in her young years. The men also hurried more, began far less conversations. The laughing at their jokes did not anymore scare away the pigeons and the gulls. They did not shout anymore to praise their goods. The woman did not recognise this Ghent anymore. When would the old Ghent resuscitate? The men simply unloaded, placed their goods in silence on carts, and ran off, looking at nobody. Few wealthy, well-dressed citizens also sauntered along the quays. Further on, in the *Jacobinenstraat* and even in the *Veldstraat*, the most crowded streets of Ghent in the past, very many houses had been left empty.

The woman remarked to herself, 'here was a butcher's shop, there a leather worker, a jeweller's shop, a tavern. Where have the people gone? Why are the houses abandoned?'

Those dwellings and shops now gathered dust. The façades were not brushed anymore. Green moss hung on the once white plaster between the wooden beams. The colours of the sign-boards were faded, and many that had hung fixed a few years ago now dangled in the wind and broke to pieces. Desolation had set in especially in the neighbourhood of the weavers' chapel, along the *Ketelgracht*. The view was even more desolate on the other side of the *kuipe*, in the alleys of the Friday Market leading to the *Gracht* and the Boudelo Abbey.

The woman did not see this reality though. She was searching for the past and wondered what had happened. She walked all day through these streets, which did not change though she expected them each second to burst into colours and life. She was in search of the images of her youth, which she remembered well, of a Ghent of pleasure and happiness and of much activity. In some streets, she found now more than half of the houses abandoned and in decay. This Ghent wore all the external signs of poverty, and that astonished her. Gone were the days when each street was filled with the sounds of the looms, of the hammering of the smiths, of the ringing of the barrels of beer being rolled out of the breweries, of the singing of the fullers and of the women who were washing their linen in the rivers. The woman wondered where all the people had gone to, and when they would return. She was in search of her Ghent, and she couldn't find it. She sought every day anew! Each day was a disappointment, but she continued looking.

She would suddenly clasp a man's arm in the streets, and ask, 'tell me, my good man, do you know Wouter de Smet? What has happened to him? Where might he be?'

The man would gently withdraw the hand of the woman and answer gruffly, 'I don't know of a man called de Smet, Ver,' and then he would hurry on, believing a mad woman had accosted him.

The people of Ghent got used to this woman. They had seen her roam the streets many times, but they didn't know who she was.

Elsewhere, the woman asked, 'do you know Boudin van Lake, good Ser? Do you know where Clais de Hert is? Where are James de Meyere, and William de Ruddere? Where is John de Voldere, where Giles Sloeve? Have you seen them?'

No, the *poorters* of Ghent had not seen these men and did not know them, but they understood these were ghosts from times long gone, people who might have lived in the past of this old woman.

With time, of course, the men and women of Ghent got used to the strange but otherwise harmless lady who roamed the streets of Ghent, in search of the lost glory of the city and looking for men who, no doubt, had perished in the wars. So many men had died! So many families had been forced into poverty. So many others had left the city in search of a better life elsewhere! The glory of the great city of Ghent was now merely a bright light in the past, an image of lore to be told of to little children by old men. So many houses decayed, so few meetings were held by the guilds. The feasts of Ghent and the markets were bleak, and they drew few people. There was so little money left in the city!

The men and women of Ghent pointed fingers at the woman who lived in that Ghent of old. They left her alone, as she represented a figure that had emerged from these times of beauty, of glory and of power. The people answered her politely, shook their heads, and went their way.

By the end of December, a woman who had a little more compassion than the others, recognised the lonely woman. She went to talk gently to the old man called Boudin Vresele, now almost seventy, of his daughter who walked in the streets of Ghent like a mad woman. Had Agneete Vresele, the daughter of the wealthy Vreseles, lost her mind?

'Agneete has not been herself these days,' Boudin excused her, and thanked the woman.

'Master Boudin, your daughter has been wandering about the city for many weeks, now. She stops people in the streets, asking them where the Ghent of her youth has gone. She asks for people who have been dead for years, for people nobody remembers. She seems to live in the past. She is not violent, very polite, but she should be taken care of! We fear she might do something irremediable to her own life!'

‘Yes, we will care for her,’ Boudin answered.

He immediately put on his cloak and went out of his house in the *Kalanderberg*, to look for his daughter in the streets the woman had indicated.

Agneete Vresele had not wanted to stay at New Terhagen, the castle of her husband. She had returned to Ghent and rented a small house in the *Kalanderberg*, not far from her father’s home. Boudin Vresele was much occupied with his trade. His wife, Margaret van Westvelde, had her work in the house. They had supposed all was well with Agneete, their daughter, hoping the liveliness of Ghent would do her good. Though Agneete lived on her own in the small house, Boudin visited her once every while. Agneete’s mind remained close to him. She did not say much to her father, but he had not suspected something worse had been happening with her. Agneete hardly visited her mother.

Boudin now hurried through the streets of Ghent. The woman had said she had seen Agneete in the Fish Market. Boudin almost ran to that square. He found Agneete in the *Korte Munt*. He thanked God, took her by the hand, asking, ‘Agneete, child, how are you?’

Agneete looked up, drew her hood backwards, and said, ‘oh, I am fine, father. I was looking for Boudin van Lake, you know, but I can’t find him! Have you seen Boudin van Lake lately? Tell me, where can I find him? And where is Wouter de Smet, where is Clais de Hert?’

Boudin did not have the heart to tell his daughter she was looking for ghosts of the past. He could not tell her Boudin van Lake and so many other good men she had known were dead, and buried. Many of the wives of these men lived in despair, did not come out of their houses, or had left the city. How can one tell of desolation to a woman living in the past?

‘Come with me, child,’ Boudin asked, ‘we’ll look for them together. We’ll find our good friends!’

The past glory of Ghent could not return, of course. The days of the wealth and the joy and the great power of the city were gone forever. Boudin Vresele became very tired, suddenly, and he felt very old and very sad. He grabbed for his heart. So much sadness pervaded Ghent these days!

Boudin brought his daughter back to his own house. They had supper together, Boudin, Agneete and Margaret. In the next days, Boudin hired wives of his neighbours to accompany his daughter on her walks. He realised Agneete could not stay alone any longer. He thought of bringing her to the *Sint-Jans-ten-Dullen* Hospital, where the insane men and women were cared for. He had visited that house once, a long time ago, and he had been sick from what he had seen there, sick for two days on a row. No, he could not bring and bury Agneete in that place! He might bring her to the *Rijke Gasthuis*, the hospital of the wealthy, but Agneete was not physical ill!

Finally, the thought of the Bijloke Convent. Had the Vreseles not donated huge amounts to the nuns? He went to speak with the abbess of the Bijloke. She promised to look for a house in the Small Beguinage. She knew many women there, women who helped other women. It was arranged Boudin would bring his daughter there. The abbess would see to it that Agneete Vresele could continue walking in Ghent, but always accompanied by a charitable woman who also lived in the beguinage.

So it happened that my wife, Agneete Vresele, came to live in the beguinage of Ghent. She had lost her mind to the world. She confounded past and present. Nevertheless, she could take care of herself. She washed and prepared her own food. She live a quiet life in the beguinage. She seemed to remember nothing of her marital status. She had wiped me, William Terhagen, form her head. She was aware she had no children, but not that she had a husband. When she talked to the women who accompanied her on her walks, she talked as if she lived in the

beautiful Ghent of her youth, in the lively Ghent of twenty years ago, of days long gone. She forgot all about me, William Terhagen. She refused to see me, for she told she did not receive strange man. I did not see her, except from the far, but all I could do was interrogate the women who lived in her street. Her health remained strong. We were and remained married. With time, I visited her less and less in the beguinage. I lived my second life with Greet van Noortkerke.

Many people of Ghent heard about the wandering woman. The name of Agneete Vresele was not often mentioned, but the wandering woman became a legend in Ghent. Many people thought and said Ghent had suffered enough. Peace should be made with the new count, with the duke of Burgundy. Why could people not return to the easy life? Surely, the duke would recognise the might of Ghent and agree to a pardon and to the continuance of the freedoms of the city! The wandering woman caused a general, slow change in the atmosphere of Ghent.

Ghent and the duke of Burgundy. 1384-1385

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, did not just inherit Flanders from the unlucky Count Louis of Male. He also inherited the counties of Artois, of Rethel and Nevers, the castellanies of Mechelen and Antwerp, Salins, lands in the Champagne, Beaufort and Jaucourt. He could now officially join the Franche-Comté of Burgundy, the county of Burgundy, to his duchy. Despite these enormous and very wealthy possessions, he was very short of money in the beginning of 1384! He asked for money at various sources. From the king of France he received two hundred thousand francs for his services, and a monthly pension of three thousand francs. These gifts saved him temporarily from bankruptcy. He confiscated all the properties of the Ghent nobles and merchants in Burgundy, which brought him some additional funds. My father, Jehan Terhagen lord of Vitry, owned domains in Burgundy, but he was not considered Flemish anymore in the Champagne, so he escaped these losses. Philip the Bold obtained forty thousand francs from the Estates of Burgundy to wage war in Flanders. The clergy of Burgundy at first refused to pay its part in these taxes. The eldest son of Philip the Bold, Count John of Nevers, the lieutenant-general of Burgundy, threatened to declare forfeited all the temporal functions of the clergy. He forced them thus to comply. John seemed to be a worthy, ruthless son of his father! Philip the Bold also obtained money from the Jews of Burgundy. The Jews paid to be able to continue living in the duchy. Burgundy thus amassed a war chest for interventions in Flanders.

The duke of Burgundy began to make his joyous entries in the Flemish towns that were in his favour, and which he would rule as count of Flanders. Mechelen and Antwerp received him as their lord in March of 1384. In May, he was at Ieper, Oostende, Nieuwpoort, and at Veurne. The largest cities Bruges and Ieper remained faithful to him. The war with Ghent continued, so he could not be received as count in his largest city, and also not in the towns of the quarter of Ghent. Philip the Bold could not really open the hostilities against Ghent before the end of the year 1384, for the Truce of Boulogne ended only in November of that year. He gathered his funds and prepared for the coming campaigns.

On the twenty-eighth of June of 1384, Yolante or Lente van den Broucke married Peter Diederick, a shipwright. Lente's family moved in the circles of the shippers and shipwrights. Peter served as alderman of Ghent as of the fifteenth of August of 1384. The marriage took place in total indifference of Ghent and of the duke. Lente van den Broucke was a well-to-do

widow now, for she had inherited from the van Artevelde possessions. She had been twenty years younger than Philip, so everybody knew the marriage had been forced. Peter Diederick was of her own age, and might have been the love of her youth. Lente must have known Peter from before her match with Philip van Artevelde.

A Flemish knight who had remained loyal to the count, the lord of Schorisse, gathered about four hundred men-at-arms against Ghent, unknown to Philip the Bold. Among these men were also a few illustrious men, such as Ser James de la Trémoille, the lord of Estripont, and others. Schorisse sought revenge because the garrison of Ghent in Oudenaarde had ravaged his domains in the environs of the town, and stolen the money of his vassals, the money that was legitimately due to him and to him alone. A few men of Schorisse disguised themselves as peasants. They brought their hay wagons to one of the gates of Oudenaarde and started an idiotic dispute with the guards. The wagons blocked the gate, so that the large panels could not be closed. The lord of Schorisse then rode with his men straight into the town! The garrison of Oudenaarde was but weak at that moment. Francis Ackerman, the head captain for these garrisons, had returned to Ghent. The lord of Schorisse eliminated the garrison of Ghent in a short skirmish, and captured the town. He pillaged Oudenaarde once more.

In Ghent, the aldermen blamed Francis Ackerman for the rapid loss of Oudenaarde. A dispute ensued between on the one side Francis Ackerman, Peter van den Bossche and Peter de Wintere, and on the other side the lord of Herzele. During the dispute, which ran high, the lord of Herzele was killed. The dispute was not only on Oudenaarde. Large sums of money for the army had disappeared, and the lord of Herzele was suspected of having stolen these. Herzele also showed much loyalty to France, rather than to England.

Van den Bossche, de Wintere and Ackerman leaned towards England. Ghent had asked a representative of the king of England to be sent to Ghent. They recognised the king of England also as the legitimate king of France, and hence as their true king. Ghent asked for an English prince of royal blood to serve as their governor, as their *ruwaard*. The then chancellor of England, Michael de la Pole, merely sent the knight Sir John Bouchier with four hundred men-at-arms to help Flanders. Like John of Gaunt, de la Pole merely wanted peace for England at that moment, because he realised the English king, young though he was, was heavily in debt because of the previous wars. De la Pole also knew the English court was slowly but surely losing control to Parliament and to other nobles than the favourites of the king, among whom himself. This was no time for England to enter a new war on the continent!

The *Gentenaars* complained about the loss of Oudenaarde to the duke of Burgundy. Philip the Bold had broken the truce, they claimed. Philip the Bold promised to talk to the lord of Schorisse. Schorisse justified his actions. From long before the truce, the garrison of Oudenaarde had devastated his heritage. He considered himself therefore at war with Ghent and with the garrison of Oudenaarde. He had signed no truce! He proposed to hand over Oudenaarde, but only after Ghent would have submitted to her legitimate ruler, the count of Flanders – being Philip the Bold of Burgundy. Matters were left as such, and Ghent had lost Oudenaarde!

In 1384, Philip the Bold was more looking to Brabant than to Flanders. In December of 1383, the duke of Brabant had died in Luxemburg. The duke and duchess of Brabant had no children. The person who would inherit from the duchess of Brabant was the daughter of her sister, who was no less than Margaret of Male, wife of Philip the Bold! The duchess wanted to

preserve her duchy from wars. She wanted peace from her neighbours. In Hainault ruled Duke Albert of Bavaria as regent for his sick and mad brother. Albert would become the next count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland. The duchess proposed to marry the children of Duke Albert to the children of the duke of Burgundy, and thus create better conditions for peace. She proposed Count John of Nevers, the oldest son of Philip the Bold, to marry Margaret of Bavaria. William of Bavaria would marry Margaret of Burgundy, the daughter of Philip the Bold. These wedding contracts were signed and ratified by the lords of the lands and by the representatives of the cities of Burgundy, Brabant and Hainault. The wedding ceremonies took place at Cambrai in April of 1385. Great feasts, banquets, markets, tournaments and other festivities were organised at great expense of money for Philip the Bold.

At the same time, Philip the Bold arranged also for the marriage of King Charles VI with Isabella of Bavaria, the daughter of Duke Frederick of Bavaria. Isabella would later be called Isabeau de Bavière. She was very beautiful, and King Charles fell very much in love with her. This marriage was celebrated on the eighteenth of July, at Amiens.

Around the time of the royal wedding, in August of 1385, France prepared for a large expedition to be sent to Scotland, directed against the king of England. A large French fleet was being gathered at the harbour of Sluys in Flanders.

The port of Sluys had recently been bought by the duke of Burgundy. The castellany of Sluys belonged to the eldest son of the count of Namur and to his wife, Marie de Bar. Philip the Bold officially exchanged Sluys for the castellany and town of Béthune in August of 1386. The French fleet was being prepared at Sluys. The Admiral Jean de Vienne sailed first to Scotland, with fifteen hundred men-at-arms.

The court of England thought the best way to counter the Scottish expedition of France was to help Ghent in its war against Philip of Burgundy. England sent a few thousand archers to Ghent, and a governor representing the king in the city. With these reinforcements, Francis Ackerman raided the countryside of Flanders, surprising and attacking the French warrior groups wandering or foraging in the countryside, as well as the French garrisons in the towns of Flanders. There was much distress in Flanders from such groups of pillagers. Other bands of looters organised together, captured a few smaller castles, and devastated the countryside, claiming they fought for Ghent. These gangs received the name of *Pourcelets*. The militia army of Ghent under their head captain Francis Ackerman did not remain passive.

In January of 1385, Philip the Bold had appointed as Grand Bailiff of Flanders a man called John de la Chapelle, a very tough, courageous but cruel and ruthless man. He had gathered a strong force of men-at-arms at Aardenburg. This man fought the *Pourcelets* as warrior gangs of Ghent, and also the militia of Francis Ackerman. He was very cruel with the men he took as prisoners: he tore out their eyes, cut ears and noses, and took delight in torturing the unfortunate men who fell in his hands. Francis Ackerman therefore attacked Aardenburg with a substantial army of several thousand men, but he could not take the fortress. He then turned his army to the town of Damme, and succeeded in capturing that strategic harbour of Bruges.

Philip the Bold heard of the capture of Damme at the wedding of the king. He swore to teach the *Gentenaars* a lesson! The army of the king of France moved rapidly from Sluys to attack Francis Ackerman at Damme. The siege of Damme became a hard struggle, but the *Gentenaars* could hold the walls. While the siege of Damme went on, the *Gentenaars* and the English archers remarked that the troops of the French king had left Sluys. The French fleet was left without much protection. The *Gentenaars* contrived to set fire to the ships at Sluys and to destroy the dikes near the town to inundate the French army camp. The plot was

betrayed, however. The poorters of Sluys who had taken part in the conspiracy to set fire to the French ships were caught and decapitated.

Francis Ackerman continued to defend Damme quite well. The lands around the harbour were marshlands, polders, wet and muddy, very difficult to use for the French, and also very unhealthy terrain for the French army. King Charles VI had been obliged to find better lodgings at the castle of Male. Francis Ackerman realised he could not hold the town forever against the much larger army of France. Each day also, that army grew with new men. Ackerman fainted a sally with his troops, but once outside, he rode and marched as fast as he could back to Ghent. Ackerman thus saved his militiamen of Ghent. Damme was left to suffer the anger and violence of the French army. The French pillaged and burnt the town, despite orders of Philip the Bold to the contrary. Damme was a wealthy port, in which lived many knights and wealthy traders of Bruges. They had been spared by Francis Ackerman. Now, the French army massacred them.

The French army also pursued the fleeing *Gentenaars*. The French knights hated the troublesome *Gentenaars*. Because of the *Gentenaars* they had to fight in foul weather and in a foul land! The French army followed Francis Ackerman to the walls of Ghent. Then, they stood frustrated, for the walls were high, defended by many towers, and many guards showed their weapons on the walls. The French knights sought for easier prey. They thought to find that in the quarter of Ghent to the north of the city, in the Four Crafts! A great disaster then fell on the Four Crafts, on the lands I, William Terhagen, had lived in so far. The French army began to terrorise our peaceful region.

We had transformed the Four Crafts into one of the wealthiest, if not the wealthiest territory of Ghent and of Flanders! Many rich *Gentenaars* had built manors and farms in this region. The French army attacked Bouchout, Assenede, Axel and Hulst! The French began to kill our men. They destroyed, pillaged and burnt our houses, farms, villages, manors and towns. Women and children tried to hide in the woods, but those who could not hide in time were mercilessly massacred. The revenge of the French men-at-arms was unleashed in the Four Crafts.

When we heard of the French armies imminently arriving from Zelzate in our territories, we of the Pharaïldis families of the Four Crafts held a conference at New Terhagen. We decided to bring all our families and our servants immediately to New Terhagen. Mine was the strongest castle, the place with the highest walls and the highest towers, a wide moat, a sturdy gatehouse. The castle stood hidden from the road to Axel by woods, some of which I had planted myself for a nicer view. We could defend New Terhagen, but not the other manors. We therefore gathered all our people of Beostenblije, of Westdorp Manor and of Old Terhagen inside my castle.

Heyla de Smet came with her children, the bastards of Flanders. She brought a dozen guards and a dozen servants with her, men and women.

From Westdorp Manor came John Denout and his mother, Avezoete van Lake. John had inherited Westdorp from his father. They also brought guards and servants.

From Old Terhagen came Albin van Dorp and his wife, Marie van Axel, with their children and servants.

I rode out to the Pharaïldis farms in the environs and brought men, women and children back to New Terhagen. These were mainly the sons and daughters of the de Wilde family. I looked for the Handscoemakeres, but they had vanished. Their farms had been abandoned. I guessed they did not want the protection of New Terhagen anymore. Maybe they had fled to Antwerp.

Their farms lay much farther north. The van Noortkerkes lived in the Champagne now, with my father Jehan and mother Wivine.

Also Evrard Vresele and Raes van Lake, who had been visiting Evrard, sought security in our castle.

I also rode to the abbey of Ter Hage. I tried to convince the nuns the abbey was not safe. A few nuns wanted to stay with the abbess, but a dozen nuns joined us at New Terhagen. They were led by a very beautiful nun called Anna van Zeebrouck, a noble woman.

Needless to say, our castle was overcrowded with so many people. We placed beds and mattresses where we could, in the barns, in the corridors, everywhere in our manor. Like in the times of the plague waves, we organised a plan of hygiene. We took in provisions for months of siege, and manned the walls.

We found crossbows for all, even for the women. Have you ever seen a nun with a crossbow in her hands? Our nuns were frightful! They were the ones with the better sense of Ter Hage, and they did not hesitate to help. Well, I have seen nuns train with crossbows, and I can assure you a few of our best archers were among those nuns of Ter Hage! We taught them, of course, but they did not refuse. Even Raes van Lake trained with them. I was sure our nuns would aim for the shoulders and legs of prospective invaders, but they would not hesitate to bring their man down!

We held guard night and day, on all sides of the castle. We kept our drawbridges up all the time.

We noticed troops of up to a hundred men ride past the castle, come to a halt and ride around our fortress to have a look. We showed all our crossbows, lances, goedendags, shields and swords. We did not even have to send our arrows and bolts at them. The troops of the king of France sneered at us, made obscene signs, but they saw they would have to lay a hard siege to our castle. Our crossbows pointed downwards and followed them. They left for easier targets. We saw flames rise out of Old Terhagen. The farm was on fire and would be destroyed. The flames spewed black, foul smoke into our landscape. The chapel and the houses of the village of Terhagen went up in flames and smoke. We knew most of the families that lived there now were safe inside New Terhagen. The families we could not take in had fled into the woods near Beostenblijje.

After a month and a half we saw no groups of roaming French warriors around our castle anymore. We surmised the French had abandoned the Four Crafts. They had not only indeed left our region, but also the quarter of Ghent. The French army had to acknowledge the walls of Ghent were too powerful, too high, and too thick. The walls were so well defended that a siege of the city was considered simply not possible. The French knights were tired from devastating the Four Crafts. The season was late, the autumn and winter would be rainy and cold, the money failed for a long siege. The siege of Ghent had not been set. King Charles VI returned to his castle of Vincennes near Paris, and the army had been disbanded. The French warriors had left Ghent and the Four Crafts.

Heyla de Smet returned to Beostenblijje. Her manor had not been touched. Maybe Beostenblijje was situated too far from the towns and villages of the Four Crafts.

Westdorp Manor had been plundered, destroyed, the last guards killed, and the manor itself had been given over to fire. It could be rebuilt.

John Denout and I rode out to inspect our farms in the environs of Axel, Assenede and Hulst. We met desolation! To near the Scheldt, our farms had been ravaged, barns and living quarters set to fire. Our tenants had fled but were returning, only to feel profound despair at seeing what had happened to the work of their life. Many of our people had been killed,

stewards, farmers and journeymen alike. Our orchards and vegetable gardens had been destroyed, our cattle slaughtered. Many of our animals had not even been slaughtered for meat. The animals had been horribly mutilated and then left to die in their pastures. The towns in the Four Crafts had been pillaged and partly burnt. The abbey of Ter Hage had been attacked, the men-at-arms had swarmed over the walls. They had killed and raped the nuns. Our nuns at New Terhagen wept and wailed for two days. Evrard, Raes and the nuns buried their dead, and then the nuns chose a new abbess from among them. They chose Anna van Zeebrouck as their new Mother Amelberga.

John Denout and I had so much to do! We rode for many months on and off, helping our stewards rebuild our farms. We looked for new people to take care of our domains. We planted new trees, helped to arrange for new gardens of vegetables. We rebuilt Westdorp Manor grander than it had been before. We helped the abbey of Ter Hage with funds. All our reserve funds passed into rebuilding what had been destroyed. We used up all the money we had in the Domains branch of the Pharaïdis consortium! I had to use for my own funds much of the money Greet van Noortkerke had won at Antwerp. We fetched new cattle from Brabant, grain to sow was brought by boat from Picardy. It took us almost an entire year to get the situation back under control and our farms in working order. We succeeded in having to sell no lands, holding onto our pastures and fields. The next spring, we were ready to sow and subsequently to harvest! We reckoned we had lost more than a third of our fortune by then, of my own fortune and of John's and of the Pharaïdis families. Yet, we had survived the ordeal. We were exhausted by the next spring, and I had seen Greet van Noortkerke only on rare occasions that autumn and winter. Greet had been living safe in Antwerp. She, her family and her trading post were thriving!

John Denout surprised us extraordinarily around that time, in the spring of 1386. Like a thunder in a blue sky, Anna van Zeebrouck, the abbess of Ter Hage, suddenly renounced her holy vows. Much, very much money was involved to have the bishop of Tournai agree to her laying down her veils. She was still a young woman of near thirty.

One day, we saw her riding to New Terhagen accompanied by John Denout! John confessed he had been in love with the beautiful Anna since very long. She had become a nun at Ter Hage on orders of her family, however, and for long also John had abandoned all hopes of ever being able to live with Anna. He had seen her back at New Terhagen while the French army raged in the land, and he had told her how he felt for her. He had spoken to her often! Anna had been surprised when the nuns chose her as abbess. Finally, she had followed her heart and renounced her vows.

John Denout and Anna van Zeebrouck married at New Terhagen, for Westdorp Manor was still being rebuilt. We organised a grand ceremony in the chapel of Old Terhagen, which had been rebuilt. Evrard Vresele and Raes van Lake sang the mass. They did this reluctantly, for they had scruples of marrying a former nun. We insisted, of course, and they relented when they saw the happiness of John and Anna. Raes too had much changed for the better since he had returned from the horrible Battle of Roosebeke.

The wedding banquet was held in my castle. The weather was fine, so we set up our tables in the courtyard. We had music, singing and dancing. I asked Greet van Noortkerke to attend. She did not sit at my side, but she was there with our children. Greet feasted with us. We remained discreet about our relation, even at the wedding. Raes van Lake looked at us a few times with frowned forehead, then at John and Anna, equally with frowns on his face, but he made no comments. I saw him look at us repeatedly, and think, and sigh.

We were all glad to have survived. Ghent too, had survived. No siege had been set to the city. Ghent was invincible!

The Peace Treaty of Tournai.

The admiral de Vienne did not have much success in Scotland! The French knights found none of their usual luxury, gallantry, taste for fine decoration, wine and good food in Scotland. The weather in Scotland was appalling. The castles lacked all the signs of the sweet and good life of the manors along the Loire in France. The Scottish found the French knights vain, exacting, spoilt, and not very inclined to battle. The French knights trembled from cold like frail virgins in the Scottish castles! Moreover, the admiral de Vienne offended the Scottish king with his gallant attentions and even love for a lady of royal blood. She warned de Vienne his life might be in danger because of his illicit love. De Vienne did not hesitate for long. He hurried back to France with his knights, cursing he would never return to this damned country. His return also did not go easy, for the Scots demanded payment for the expenses incurred in entertaining the French knights for not the least result in their war with the English.

Once back at the court of Paris, de Vienne nevertheless advised King Charles VI to continue the war with England. For that purpose, another large fleet was needed. Also the Connétable Olivier de Clisson urged for continuance of the war.

The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry spoke out against the war. Philip the Bold wanted to secure Flanders first. A fleet, large enough to invade England, could only be gathered at Sluys. As long as the peace with Ghent had not been concluded, a French fleet at Sluys remained at risk. The court decided to wait with the gathering of the fleet.

The people of France were scandalised. Heavy taxes had been levied for the war with England. The people grumbled the money to levy the army had been used merely to enrich the dukes, the uncles of the king. Some went as far as to assert the dukes had received more money from the English court to renounce to the war!

Philip the Bold thus knew a fleet at Sluys was necessary if the war was to be brought on English soil, but a prerequisite for that fleet was peace in his county of Flanders. He desired peace.

In Ghent also, more and more traders opened their eyes to the vagaries of the war. They began to talk seriously about peace with the count, with the duke of Burgundy. The dean of the shippers, Roger Everwijn and the dean of the butchers, James van Evertburg, took the lead and urged for peace. Also the men of the Pharaïldis families pointed out how many good men of Ghent, artisans and traders, had suffered from the war, being killed or wounded. The environs of Ghent and the Four Crafts had been devastated. This should not happen again! Ghent had traded with seventeen nations, currently its merchants only rarely still sent ships to the Mediterranean to buy goods and to sell cloth.

The Pharaïldis, still among the wealthiest men of Ghent, had lost much money and much trade. Ghent was blocked from the trade of grain with Picardy. Wine came in from Bruges, but in small quantities. Other goods were sold in Ghent only, and so on.

The traders told to who wanted to hear the message, that the city was becoming poorer by the month, not only in men but also in funds. The people and the guilds also had suffered atrociously from the defeat at Roosebeke. They too sought peace and quiet, now more than ever.

Everwijn and van Evertburg, the two deans most inclined to peace, resented the near dictatorship of Peter van den Bossche. They and their friends began to meet and to discuss how peace could be reached.

In agreement with van Evertburg, Everwijn feigned being sick. He asked for Peter van den Bossche to come to his bed. He told Peter van den Bossche he felt so bad because he had promised to go on a pilgrimage to Saint-Quentin in the Vermandois region of France. He had never realised this promise! He asked for the permission of van den Bossche to travel to this destination. Peter van den Bossche considered Roger Everwijn a calm, quiet, affable man. He gladly gave the permission for Everwijn to leave Ghent.

Roger Everwijn departed, but he rode straight to Paris, to the king's court, to talk to Philip the Bold. Duke Philip was very happy to hear Everwijn talk of peace and of a conspiracy to that end in Ghent. This was what he had been waiting for! He thought all other means but war and battles to end the conflict with Ghent were more than welcome. Philip promised to reward well Everwijn and van Evertburg if the war would end quickly. He asked the deans to continue working, agitating, talking in favour of the peace, and write to him about the advances. He was willing to grant concessions.

Everwijn returned to Ghent. He spoke with many other men in the city who were more inclined to the peace than to war. A peace party was created. Everwijn and van Evertburg sent a knight who thought as they did, the lord John van Heyle, back to the duke of Burgundy, as their messenger. They wanted to ask Philip the Bold whether he would accept to pardon Ghent for the conflict, and agree to keep the old charters of freedom of the city of Ghent intact. Those were the two simple but major conditions they asked for a peace between the count, their duke, and Ghent. Philip the Bold consulted with the Connétable Clisson, with the lords of Coucy and de la Trémoille, and with the Admiral Jean de Vienne. These men also were in favour of peace in Flanders. They considered the conditions of Everwijn reasonable and acceptable.

‘Does Francis Ackerman know anything about your actions?’ Philip the bold asked.

‘No, lord,’ de Heyle answered. ‘I don't know whether the men who sent me wanted to open their minds to Ackerman.’

‘Tell them,’ Philip the Bold continued, ‘to include Ackerman in their designs. I happen to know he seeks peace too, and he is not badly inclined towards my person.’

John de Heyle understood Francis Ackerman had already spoken to the duke about the same matter.

The conspirators, Everwijn, van Evertburg and de Heyle then also talked cautiously to Francis Ackerman. The head captain agreed with the conditions for peace. He was most interested in the general pardon. He warned the others for Peter van den Bossche and for the English governor. These men would do everything in their power to stop the people from accepting the proposals of Philip the Bold! The group decided to have John de Heyle read the letter of Philip the Bold with the agreed conditions to the people of Ghent in the Friday Market. Roger Everwijn and James van Evertburg would make sure they were masters of the city before de Heyle read the proposals. To that end, they and their friends talked in confidence to the leaders of the guilds. The other deans agreed with the peace plans.

The basic plan was for John van Heyle to arrive in the Friday Market, to address and assembly of the guilds and of the people of Ghent, and shout, ‘Flanders the Lion! The lord of the county has proclaimed peace for his good city of Ghent and he has pardoned all the men who confronted him in conflict!’

Calling for ‘Flanders the Lion’ was a shout of rallying for the counts of Flanders. The banners of Ghent would then be opened, the letter of Philip the Bold shown and read. Peter van den Bossche would not be able to change the decision of the people.

Nothing could be left a secret for long in Ghent, however, so Peter van den Bossche heard of the conspiracy. He and the English governor proposed to counter the plan by waving the large banner of England in the Friday Market first, and shout ‘long live Flanders! The king of England is the only true lord of the city of Ghent!’

Then, they would kill the conspirators in the Friday Market.

On the assigned day, Peter van den Bossche and the English Governor Sir John Bouchier thought the people had been called together at eight o’clock in the morning. Everwijn, van Evertburg and de Heyle, as well as the guilds, had gathered already in the Friday Market at seven o’clock, an hour earlier! They invested the marketplace with very many men in arms. The banner of England was left closed!

When Peter van den Bossche saw so many men standing in the Friday Market, many more than he had expected, all inclined to accept the peace with the duke, all banners and flags waving in the wind, he understood he had lost his power over Ghent. He hid! The English governor, on arriving, also realised he did not have enough guards with him to change the mood of the people.

Roger Everwijn addressed the governor directly with, ‘what are your intentions, Ser? Are you a friend of Ghent or an enemy?’

Bouchier answered, ‘I must stay loyal to my lord the king of England. That is my honour. My king sent me to your city, but, I remind you, at the explicit demand of the people of Ghent!’

‘That is true and well said,’ Everwijn acknowledged. ‘If not for the city of Ghent having invited you to come, you would be dead by now. We shall not harm you. We want to honour the king of England. We have safe-conducts for you, written by the duke of Burgundy. You and your men can return to Calais. You and your guards may leave the city and we will accompany you. The people and the guilds of Ghent have decided to make peace with our Lord Philip of Burgundy!’

Sir Bouchier left the Friday Market.

The lord John de Heyle then read the letter of Philip the Bold loudly to the amassed men. The people in the Friday Market found the clauses mentioned by the duke quite agreeable. Francis Ackerman also spoke in favour of the peace. Ackerman was the first man chosen to form part, to lead even, the delegation that would be sent for Ghent to the town of Tournai.

Philip the bold was waiting at that town with the duchess of Brabant, with the count of Hainault, the count of Namur, and with the principal lords of Flanders. The peace treaty would be concluded at Tournai. Before the delegation rode off, the people of Ghent pardoned Peter van den Bossche because of the many good services he had consented in the past for the city of Ghent. He had lost most of his influence, though.

The representatives of Ghent, the aldermen and deans and other influential men, did not arrive as humble penitents at Tournai. They arrived in great pomp, with an escort of many guards, dressed in their finest wool lined with ermine, showing their golden chains, and their banners. This shocked the men of the court of Philip the Bold. They wanted to send the representatives of Ghent back to their city. The countesses of Brabant, of Nevers and even of Burgundy, Philip’s wife, asked Philip the Bold on their knees to act leniently to the city. Philip the Bold

all too happily conceded to grant the ladies what they wanted. The plea had, of course, been staged by Philip, and the roles accepted by the ladies.

The Peace Treaty of Tournai that was to end the war with Ghent, was signed on the eighteenth of December of 1385. It marked the end of the war between the lords of Flanders and Ghent.

The Peace Treaty of Tournai contained more than twenty clauses. The duke of Burgundy, as count of Flanders, granted full pardon to the *poorters* of Ghent. The privileges, freedoms, customs and habits of Ghent were confirmed. The people of Ghent promise to obey their lord. They renounced to all acts of war.

Also the privileges of the other towns of Flanders, and in particular of the towns in the quarter of Ghent, of Kortrijk, Oudenaarde, Geeraardsbergen, Ninove, Dendermonde, Rupelmonde, Aalst, Hulst, Axel, Biervliet, Deinze, and many more, as well as the castellanies around these towns, would be honoured by the dukes of Burgundy.

Philip the Bold granted free trade in Flanders. He promised to help the *poorters* of Ghent that had been arrested or might be arrested outside Flanders on account of the past conflict. All prisoners would be released. The fortresses that were still held by Ghent would be handed over to the men of the duke. The *poorters* that had been exiled from Flanders because of the conflict, were allowed to return. Their possessions in land and houses would be given back to them, as long as they swore to uphold the peace. This was granted, wherever the man had fled to, to England, Holland, or to other lands. These men could, however, not claim the ready money that had been confiscated from them in the past.

Ghent officially renounced to her alliance with the king of England. From now on, Ghent recognised King Charles VI and his successors as their lord. The people of Ghent promised obeisance to King Charles.

In yet another article of the treaty, Duke Philip promised to have reasonably considered and handled any condition in the treaty that seemed unclear. This would be done by a council of men, to general agreement.

The Peace Treaty received the seals of the duke and duchess of Burgundy, and of the aldermen of Ghent. Very many among the principal noblemen of Flanders signed the treaty as witnesses. Also the rulers of the Low Countries signed. The aldermen of Bruges and Ieper signed, as well as the Lord Philip de Redehen of the *Brugse Vrije*, the countryside castellanies around Bruges. Also the aldermen of Mechelen and Antwerp signed.

Philip the Bold tried at the same time to bring Flanders to obey the popes of Avignon. The court of Avignon had at that moment a very bad fame, however. The Flemish cities were not inclined to abandon the party of Pope Urban of Rome. The king of France might even secretly have agreed with the Flemish, for he had to oppose his will to the excesses and depredations of the pope of Avignon, denounced by the University of Paris. Burgundy did not insist.

Francis Ackerman had actively helped in re-establishing the peace between Ghent and the duke of Burgundy. He felt safe in his city, even though he knew his power and influence too had waned.

Peter van den Bossche, however, had not much faith in the promises of Burgundy and of the aldermen of Ghent. He feared for his life. He left Ghent surreptitiously, and sailed to England. He was well received at the court of King Richard II.

Francis Ackerman remained in Ghent. He had retained the privileges of his previous function as head captain of the city, without holding that function. The bailiff of Ghent, the representative of the duke, ordered him now to renounce to his privilege of being accompanied by thirty guards when he went in the streets of Ghent. Ackerman protested,

claiming he had done so much for Ghent and for the duke, he had earned some external signs of authority. The bailiff told him to obey, which Ackerman finally did.

A bastard son of the lord of Herzele looked at Francis Ackerman with a bad eye. He wanted to take revenge on the former head captain for the death of his father. The lord Rasse of Herzele had been killed in the Battle of Nevele, apparently abandoned by Ackerman and his men in that fight. As Francis Ackerman now walked unguarded in Ghent, van Herzele's son and a few men attacked Ackerman in a street, shouting, 'to death, Francis Ackerman! You cowardly killed my father!'

Francis Ackerman was thus killed instantly by the hewing of a sword. The son of the lord of Herzele could run away. Nobody told him anything, nobody killed him. The murder of Francis Ackerman was accomplished and left unrevenged.

Thus ended the regime of Peter van den Bossche and of Francis Ackerman in Ghent, as well as the war. Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, had gained Flanders entire at peace and under his firm rule. He had shown clemency, and had gained what he had sought ever since the death of Louis of Male. A new period for Flanders and a new period for Ghent could begin.

A Pharaïldis meeting

In the spring of 1386, the Pharaïldis families held another meeting, once more at my castle of New Terhagen. Time heals wounds, I suppose. We saw each other regularly, so this meeting was not a general assembly. Only the men and women who were very much involved in the consortium convened. Nevertheless, I was happy to organise the meeting in the Four Crafts. Boudin Vresele had asked me whether I could invite the families, and I was too happy to comply. I saw a sign of renewed reconciliation, of forgiving, of return to the core of the friends. I hoped I had been absolved for my relation with Greet van Noortkerke.

Of the Vresele family we had invited the clerk Heinric Vresele for the first time since the defeat of Roosebeke. Heinric had taken up his duties as if nothing had happened in 1382. He served the aldermen of Ghent as loyally as ever! Nobody really referred to his van Artevelde period. Many people in Ghent found it time to forget about that period. Many people, aldermen and deans, nevertheless avoided Heinric even more than before, and he became a very lonely man but for his function in the *Schepenhuis*. He lived a very quiet life and didn't mix with the men who took part in the government of Ghent. We had asked him to come, because he owned still a substantial stake in the Pharaïldis money.

Boudin Vresele arrived early. He was the true head of the consortium now, our first patriarch. He had brought with him his son, Gillis Vresele, who had been married last year to Selie Denout. Yes, marriages remained lively within our families!

The monk Evrard Vresele lived in my village of Terhagen, where he was much appreciated; He was the parish priest of the rebuild Terhagen. He had brought Raes van Lake with him, to present the younger man as his successor to the spiritual branch of the consortium. Raes van Lake was the son of the deceased Boudin van Lake, a much deplored victim of Roosebeke. As Evrard was an old man, sick more often, Raes took his place among us, to help us direct our funds dedicated to charity. In the village, Evrard would be replaced by Roegier van Noortkerke, a brother of my beloved Greet, and a friend of my young years. Roegier had also

become a monk and a priest. He helped Evrard at Terhagen. Roegier had not been invited specifically to our meeting, but he was in the castle and would share our wine and banquet.

Of the de Smet family, John de Smet, our absolute patriarch, now seventy-six years old, had let us know he would not attend because he felt too old and tired to leave Ghent. In his place came John the Younger, his grandson. John the Younger was our banker. He too would marry in the families, for he was engaged to Zoetin van Lake, the daughter of Boudin. They would probably marry the next year.

Also Heyla de Smet, the former love of Count Louis of Male had come. She was nearing fifty, but she still went with the dignity of a queen and the beauty of two princesses together. She was a radiant personality!

The van Lake Family was represented by Alise van Lake. She had been married to the shipper Clais de Hert, killed also at Roosebeke. Alise looked over the accounts of our consortium. We had given her a bookkeeper to help her with that. We had organised administrations in the various companies of our consortium, but Alise could draw us a synthesis picture of our possessions as no other. She was our ultimate controller of accounts. She only could present us a fine overview of our fortune in the various branches of our companies.

Like Alise van Lake was the only person present for the van Lake Family, John Denout was the only man of the Denouts present. Also of the de Hert family of shippers, only one man had been invited: Arnout de Hert.

For the first time, I had been bold and I had invited Greet van Noortkerke. She managed our trading post at Antwerp. I guessed her presence was not anymore a scandal in the families. Indeed, when she showed up, nobody made comments or objected to her presence. Eyebrows went up, of course, but more because she was such a striking, beautiful woman!

The deaths of some of our most appreciated members of the consortium in the war of Ghent had forced us to adapt the structure of the branches of our consortium. In the Pharaïldis Committee now met Boudin Vresele, Alise van Lake, John de Smet the Younger, Ser John Denout, Arnout de Hert and Evrard Vresele. Our Investments branch was still led by Boudin Vresele, but the Investments Company of Ghent was managed more by Gillis Vresele the Younger. With time, he would replace Boudin.

I, William Terhagen, led the Investments branch of Antwerp.

Our Domains branch was managed by Ser John Denout. He also managed directly our Domains Company in the Four Crafts. The Domains trading post of Antwerp was held by myself, but much more by Greet van Noortkerke and her friend. Some of our Domains trading overlapped with our Investments in Antwerp, so I led those. Needless to say, I lived more in Antwerp these days than at New Terhagen or at Ghent. My love was at Antwerp! With Greet I had a home there, near the harbour. I cherished my two sons and two daughters at Antwerp. My steward at New Terhagen was Ruebin de Wilde. He was also the steward of my own farms and lands and houses in the Four Crafts.

At the Pharaïldis meeting in that spring of 1386, we were exactly with ten persons, of whom three women – Heyla, Alise and Greet -, and seven men – Heinric, Boudin, Evrard, Gillis, John de Smet the Younger, John Denout, Arnout and I, William. All our families were represented.

Boudin Vresele opened our meeting, but he immediately let Alise van Lake present an overview of the status of our consortium.

‘We have lost much in the war of Ghent,’ she started with bad news. ‘We have lost our friends and family Wouter de Smet, Boudin van Lake my father, Ser Martin Denout and Clais de Hert. We think of them with emotion, with respect and with great sadness. We mourn our fathers and friends. We have also lost funds. Our fortune in ready money has diminished, not grown! Our investments in Ghent are currently about one fifth lower than what we owned and worked with five years ago. Our trade out of Ghent has suffered much from the embargoes. Our ready money and our committed money in the Investments branch of Antwerp is one third up. This is the only good news I can bring us, but I remind you the funds used at Antwerp are only half of the funds we still use today in investments at Ghent.

In our Domains branch, we have been able to hold on to all our lands in the Four Crafts and in the Land of Waas. That is an achievement. The ready funds of those companies had to be invested in the repairs of the farms and manors destroyed during the war. The French army devastated the Four Crafts. Here, we suffered our greatest losses. We never gave much attention to those funds, however, as they were minor compared to what we placed in our Investments branch. The good news there is that our profits from the Domains are soaring again, so we will recuperate what we lost in the war in about two to three years. Greet van Noortkerke will explain to you in more detail how we are doing with our real estate in Antwerp. Suffice for me to state we are doing well, there. Our Domains post of Antwerp, called ‘The two Widows’, has acquired many interesting parcels of land and also houses in Antwerp, and in the environs of that city. I find those very promising.

I checked and checked the accounts again. I have discovered no signs of wrongdoing or of manipulated figures. We must continue working together this way!

I forgot one important point. We own much land in the environs of Ghent, of Antwerp, in the Four Crafts and in the Land of Waas. So far we counted our lands only in surface. I have asked our various administrations to place a value in money on those lands. We had a surprise! We discovered our grazing land north of Ghent has declined last year to half its probable, previous acquisition price. We bought those lands, my friends, at much higher prices than the current value. The land is tangible, however. It exists in real. Its value can and will rise again. The loss in value is due to the war. With the new found peace, the value of our grazing lands is bound to rise again. Lands are our reserves, our permanent possessions, our long-term investments. They are, as the Flemish say, our apples for our thirst. Taking into account only their present value is not really what we want to do with land, how we want to manage it.’

‘I also perceive a nice opportunity here,’ Alise van Lake continued, ‘for when land is low in price, we can buy and wait till the value of land rises. Our Domains branches are low in funds. We should transfer this year some of our ready money from our Investments branches to Domains, to use the opportunity. I propose to do this during one year only, for also our Investments companies should begin to do much better than in the past, so they will need more funds.’

‘Grazing lands near the towns are bound to rise,’ Greet van Noortkerke fell in and explained, ‘because the towns, the smaller ones that is, and Antwerp particularly, are expanding again. Grazing land will be needed to build houses and walls on, meaning the value of those parcels will rise. It is happening very strongly at Antwerp!’

‘Absolutely true,’ Alise nodded. ‘I noticed that, despite your ready money is low, you bought some very interesting pastures near the harbour. That was astute! Elsewhere, however, in the countryside, we have to buy near our farms, for otherwise we shall have to build new farms. For that we would need ready money, and our ready is low, as I mentioned.’

‘I agree entirely,’ Greet added. ‘Pastures are low in price currently because so many men have been killed in the war of Ghent that journeymen and peasants who can care for cattle are rare.

With time, that will change. When grazing land becomes lands one can build on, prices rise spectacularly.'

We, the Pharaïldis men, kept a polite silence. This was the first time my friends heard Greet in action, discussing with Alise. I could see the men were impressed. We grinned a little, of course, maybe a little condescendingly, hearing these women thus talk of business instead of about dresses and bonnets. I was glad the women were doing well.

'Fact is indeed,' Boudin Vresele continued, 'we have suffered from the war. Who hasn't? We lost much ready money in Investments because trade was low, and we lost in Domains because of the devastations of the French army. We lost also in value of land.' He sighed, 'let's hope we can now thrive from our new-found peace. At least, with the Peace Treaty of Tournai, trade is open once more with Picardy, with France, and with our neighbouring lands of the Low Countries. I have already experienced increased trade for Ghent. We must acknowledge, my friends, our investments bring profits and losses, depending on the political situation. I think it is fine we can hold our own. We profit from peace and lost not too much in war. We have weathered through the war quite well after all, when I compare our situation with what other wealthy merchants and landowners had to suffer. Our worst loss has been the men who died for us to live. Many knights of Ghent have lost much more than we!'

'We have a new count. Philip the Bold has done well,' John Denout changed subjects. 'The war has ended. Ghent has joined Flanders in one opinion. The authority of the duke has been recognised without added bloodshed. Ghent has been saved from destruction. Philip has won Ghent without too much cost. He is making overtures to the weavers' guild, probably realising they, the weavers, form the driving power in the city. He has refused a wage increase for the fullers. He is actively investing in Ghent, promoting our cloth. More cloth to sell, more taxes for the duke, of course, but also more well-being in Ghent. He knows where his money comes from!'

'He is a very intelligent man,' I replied. 'He is practically the regent of France. He is an excellent military leader of armies. The war lords of France, the Connétable Clisson and the lord of Coucy like him well enough. He is everything but a weak leader. Ghent will nevermore be able to contest his authority and hope to win!'

If Flanders rises again, this count and duke can apply not only the resources of the knights of Flanders, but also use the resources of his entire duchy to submit Flanders. At this moment, he can even call upon the royal army of France! Flanders must now necessarily enter a period of dominance by the dukes of Burgundy.

Much depends on what kind of men we will have as dukes. We may lose some of our freedoms, but that should not necessarily be a bad thing. Some generalisation of procedures of justice and the like for Flanders entire may become beneficial to the county as a whole. We, traders, can only win by the peace. The well-being of the poorters of Ghent can augment again. Aren't we very tired of the last war? We never felt secure! We have been hit by the plague waves, and then by the war with the count. I say: enough! I am very glad we can all tend to our businesses again. I am glad I don't have to fear for my friends again. I am glad my ships are not threatened anymore, and that the roads are safe.'

'Louis of Male has chosen a far better man than he had dared to expect,' Heyla de Smet told us. 'Louis admitted to me Philip the Bold was more intelligent, more realistic and more opportunistic than he had been. Louis had high hopes for Philip the Bold and his daughter.'

His hopes have been realised! Philip even addresses the aldermen of our cities in our own Flemish language, and that out of his court in France.

Louis was very sad in the last days of his life, of course. He saw and felt very keenly his days of glory were over. He lost his authority over his county to Ghent, to Philip van Artevelde, and then to his son-in-law. Philip the Bold took away his power. After Roosebeke, where he was not allowed to fight with the French army, he was a broken man. He was talkative before Roosebeke, but after Roosebeke a taciturn and grumbling old man, old and broken before his age. All major decisions had been taken away from him. I was glad he returned to me. We grew together once more, and had good times at Beostenblijje, but his heart had been broken by the war with Ghent, and he realised he had already lost Flanders to Philip the Bold before he died. He was a dead man in his mind, after Roosebeke. Not only Flanders had been defeated. He too!

‘We regret the death of Count Louis of Male,’ I added quickly, ‘and the death of your son, who helped him. That also must have been a blow to him. We mourn and grieve for the men who were our friends. We did not agree anymore with some of the count’s decisions in these last years, but we understood. We liked him for most of his reign, and he did some fine things for us all. In the end, he did not quite well understood what Ghent wanted. How many men before him have not made the same mistake, if it can be called a mistake, for Ghent is as fickle as a pretty girl of twelve years old!’

‘Louis was indeed not a bad man,’ Heyla continued. ‘Oh, I know, he was vain and greedy. Take care, however! Ghent over-reacted far too much to a simple demand of a new tax of Louis. The taxes he asked would have cost Ghent far less than the funds lost for the treasury in the war! Louis always told me so.

Ghent lost much in the war! The war was more a tragedy for Ghent than for Louis of Male, for Male lived and thousands of able men of Ghent died at Roosebeke. Ghent doesn’t realise that! I say, take care, for what happened with Louis of Male may repeat itself with the dukes of Burgundy. We, *Gentenaars*, have a damned untameable character! We love our freedom, but we are fools too! We wouldn’t drop one of our freedoms even if it would cost us our life and bring us doom. Isn’t that foolish? Ghent could have paid a little tax to Louis of Male, and won that money back by trade from the men Male would have invited in the city. Also, the changes in our judicial system Louis introduced, were far better and transparent than the very many procedures we have, city by city different. I say the war with Louis of Male was foolish and stupid!’

‘I agree whole-heartedly,’ I threw in.

I didn’t want some of the Pharaïldis men to start debating against Heyla de Smet.

I continued, ‘wars are always bad and stupid. They resolve nothing. Look at what has remained of Ghent today! A broken city! Ghent has lost two thirds of its population to the plague and to the war. We have lost more than half of our cloth industry, for our finest weavers are dead. The treasury of the city is empty. Very many traders and landowner-poorters have lost their possessions, and entire families have been declared bankrupted. Ghent bends under debts. The war solved nothing at all, for Philip the Bold is firmly in command, firmer than any count of Flanders was before him. He is not a man born in Flanders. He is a Frenchman, his home is Paris. He lives at the royal court. He knows Flanders as little as he knows Burgundy, but he can now wield the power of both to submit us all to his will. Ghent has fought to put in place someone far more powerful than the former count of Flanders! Is that not a strange paradox? I remind you of what the Pharaïldis patriarchs told us. They said

we should not become involved in wars and in battles. They had come to the same conclusions we have arrived at in our times! Let us follow their wisdom.'

'Amen,' Evrard said loudly to my speech.

We continued talking about our family businesses. We drank our wine, ate our banquet, thought about the men who should have been with us but weren't, and discussed heatedly till late in the night. I thought that if Philip the Bold was completely French educated, his wife was not, and Margaret of Male seemed to have a soothing influence on her husband. Also, Philip was smart enough to understand he had to take into account the special character of his northern county. Had not the letter he had given to Everwijn, van Evertburg and de Heyle, the original letter that had contained the main concessions to Flanders, given in Paris, been written in Flemish, and not in French?

During the banquet at New Terhagen, I sat next to Heinric Vresele. Greet sat at my other side. This time, Greet and I could show we were a couple. I had finished with the hypocrisy. The Pharaïldis families knew what had happened to Agneete Vresele.

I talked to Heinric about Philip van Artevelde.

Heinric told me Philip had been extremely ambitious, ruthless with his enemies, and merciless with who stood in his way. Philip had relentlessly sought revenge over the families who had harmed his father. He had eliminated the most prominent men of those families. He had done this not so much because he revered his father, but because of the shame done to him, personally. Heinric also told me Philip van Artevelde, in a dark, devious way, had sought revenge on the Pharaïldis families.

'I told Philip van Artevelde,' Heinric confessed, 'the Pharaïldis families had almost to the end supported the plans of James van Artevelde. Philip told me of yes, indeed, but not to the very end, and the end only counted.'

Philip had become very paranoiac in his last months. It was sufficient for a name to be associated with James van Artevelde, or with Count Louis of Male, for him to see an enemy. That is why he demanded of the Pharaïldis to grant donations and to participate with the Ghent militias in the Battle of Roosebeke. Philip hoped there would be victims among the Pharaïldis men! He also wanted our money, of course, but Heinric could convince Philip the Pharaïldis families owned much less money than they actually possessed. The contributions Philip van Artevelde demanded of our families remained modest, compared to the amounts he squeezed out of many other families of Ghent! Philip van Artevelde had also been a bad leader of armies. He knew nothing of how army companies fought and he did not know how to move companies on the battlefield. He had not even foreseen to keep decent reserves!

'I know I had no notion either of how to lead an army, but for a major battle such as the one of Roosebeke, we should have had a genius military leader, the usual of the French war lords. We did not have such men. That is why we lost!' Heinric admitted.

It was the first time I heard Heinric Vresele speak at long about his own shortcomings. It had always been a Vresele feature of character to reflect on one's own errors and defects. Heinric was no exception to that rule.

We talked on, and suddenly Heinric turned to me, saying rather unexpectedly, 'I would like you to come to Ghent, to my house, for a couple of days, William. You and your father have been good to me. I realise I am a strange man, not a normal man, not like the other *Gentenaars*. I need help. Twice now, Englishmen have been bickering to me about the archives of Ghent. They wanted me to have them browse through the archives of James van Artevelde. They do seem to be looking more for some documents of Catherine de Coster! I have received James's archives, and I hid them. Nobody will find them. I have two chests full

with those documents at my home, hidden in the cellars. I would like you to help me to classify the documents.'

'Why would there be anything in those documents relevant to the English?' I demanded innocently.

'Two Englishmen from the court of John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster, and almost regent of England, talked to me about documents of Catherine de Coster. They were two brothers of a family called van Ieper, probably two Flemish men who had moved to England a long time ago. Later, the English governor for Ghent came back with them. Imagine, Sir Bouchier himself demanding to see the archives of Ghent!

I could not stop them, but the other clerks and the English too did not find James's chests!

The aldermen attributed the futile search to the bad organisation of the archives. That is ridiculous, of course, our archives are organised very well. We have notes of everything we archive! Of course nothing was found, for the chests were already at my house!

You may ask what they were looking for. Maybe the king of England promised much money to James van Artevelde and Catherine de Coster. Maybe there are still parchments of declarations of huge debts incurred by King Edward III in those chests. Or maybe, a more terrible secret lays hidden in those parchments,' Heinric whispered.

'Whatever secret could there be in those parchments?' I asked, fully alert, now.

'Philip van Artevelde always tried convincing me of his real name. He was not a van Artevelde, he claimed. He suspected he was an illegitimate child of King Edward III of England! His real name had to be Philip Fitzroy Plantagenet, he told me.

I found that almost pathetic, really. I didn't dare to laugh and call him a fool, for Philip insisted.

Imagine what a scandal it would have been, had it been true! Philip a child of the king of England! It could mean a major scandal even now, after Philip's death. King Charles VI and his uncles could use these facts to reproach the current king of England and John of Gaunt for having interfered perniciously in the affairs of France. I am sure John of Gaunt does not like for such a rumour to be spread, especially not now! John of Gaunt seeks peace with France. He does not want France to throw another blame on England and so to seek war again. France is already preparing a new invasion fleet at Sluys, even though the dukes, Burgundy and Berry, are also not very enthusiastic to sail with their knights into the lands over the sea. With Philip van Artevelde presumably a child of England, the war party of France would have a fine excuse to attack England, for Philip made war on France.

So, we should go through the contents of those chests. Only, I would not like being the only one to find anything. I am not sure what I would do with such documents when I would find them. I am sure we can read all the documents in one or two days, and decide whether there is anything of value to be read. Afterwards, I can smuggle the chests back into the archives, and then the English van Ieper boys can have them, with a smile.'

I remained silent for a long time, pretending to drink and eat. My mind raged. I did not answer to Heinric's plea at first. Heinric wanted to involve me in state secrets! Where would that lead us? Why should I accept? Yet, Heinric was a Pharaïldis, a son of Gillis Vresele the Elder. I could not refuse him. Maybe I was curious, too. I believed Philip van Artevelde had been a madman. To think he was a king's son was simply crazy. Catherine de Coster had always been described to me as a very virtuous woman. The story did not at all fit with the image I had of Catherine de Coster! I had met her a few times, and her new husband de Bornaige. She was a very dignified person. I simply did not believe her having been the mistress of the lecherous Edward III. We would be digging up stories of ghosts, for both James van Artevelde and Edward III were dead. What was that good for? Then I thought that if this story

was so very improbable, nothing important could be found in James's documents. I could accept and make Heinric happy.

Finally, I agreed.

'All right, Heinric,' I gave in. 'Tell me when you want us to look through those documents, and I'll come to Ghent.'

Heinric thanked me. He said he would think about a right date.

Arent de Handscoemakere

Most of my guests left New Terhagen the next morning. The only people who remained for another day were the three monks and the three women, Heyla de Smet, Alise van Lake and Greet van Noortkerke. The monks sang a mass in the chapel of the castle. Alise and Greet had discovered they liked each other and wanted to chat a little more. Alise also wanted to hear some more about our Antwerp trading post and about the potentials of Antwerp for our consortium. I suppose Heyla wanted to know more about Greet, the other great sinner of the Pharaïldis families. Women are creatures that are inordinately curious. I did not complain, for I loved these women dearly.

Heyla de Smet definitely was and remained the greatest beauty of Ghent and of the Four Crafts. With age, her curves had been amplified to grace, allure, dignity and sensual attractiveness.

Greet was all of that naturally, a stunning woman of mature solidity, her charm enticing as of a sorceress, her voice husky and her features as attractive to men as of the enchanting Aphrodite herself. Her eyes challenged all men. Greet was much woman, indeed. When she had swayed her hips into my hall, more than one Pharaïldis man had to swallow.

Alise was equally tall, but thinner, not stout. She was a very good-natured woman, honest to the bone, likable and sweet, but ruthless and swift and hard as only a shipper's wife could be. Nice as she was, Alise would not have hesitated to kill if necessary! When Clais de Hert was at sea, Alise had managed the shipbuilding site of the de Herts in Ghent alone. She had developed a thundering voice, sharp, accusing eyes, a commandeering attitude, and a down-to-earth manner of talking and of handling things.

In short, the three women were the three most formidable women I ever encountered, and I suppose I was very much in love with Greet, but also a little in love or in awe with Heyla and Alise. I loved their presence in my castle.

I had left the three women inside the manor of the castle. Meanwhile, I checked on the barns and on the other buildings of New Terhagen. My steward, Ruebin de Wilde, was a competent man, but I liked to inspect the castle and form my own opinion about its state. I looked at where I would have to pour some money into walls imbued with humidity, into roofs that leaked. Ruebin might have hesitated to ask me money for those repairs until the last moment. I wanted to keep my castle in good order!

I was looking inside a barn, on its higher floor, when I heard the hooves of a horse clattering in the courtyard. I went down the ladder and out of the barn, stood in the door. I saw a huge black horse turning around with its rider, a heavy-set man clad in much-used brown leather with dark sweat stains, and armed with several weapons. Heavy packs lay on the horse, and I saw a mace and a battle-axe dangle from the saddle. The rider had a long sword and a knife at his belt. He wore a leather bonnet on his hair, a long coat on his back. When the horse turned to face me, I recognised Arent de Handscoemakere. He looked much older than I remembered

him. Deep lines ran on his face, his beard was not shaven since several days. He was a warrior, a mercenary killer. He looked terrifying!

I stepped entirely out of the barn to show me to him. Arent looked at me with wild hatred in his eyes. He too recognised me.

‘The day of reckoning has come, William,’ he shouted at me. ‘You seduced my wife. I have come to fetch Greet. That is my right as her lawful husband. I have come to kill you. You have done me wrong. Vengeance will be mine, today!’

I had no weapons on me, and Arent barred my way to the manor. I only knew crossbows hung near the gate, but I would not have the time to cock those. I could not run to the house to get my sword.

‘I am unarmed, Arent,’ I shouted back. ‘Are you going to kill somebody who cannot defend himself? That would be simple murder!’

‘I don’t care a damn for whether you are armed or not, you rat. You are going to die anyhow, armed or not. You won’t steal another man’s wife anymore. You deserve to die, adulterer. To hell I shall send you, to purge your sins! You, lords, think you can do what you want with us, common people. You steal and grab our women with your money. No more!’

Arent stepped down from his horse. He drew his long, broad sword, a knight’s killing weapon only the strongest men could handle. He began to walk towards me, holding the weapon up and directed straight at me.

I might have escaped into the barn, then, and found me a scythe or a shovel or something, but I was not going to lose my dignity for Arent de Handscoemakere! If Arent wanted to commit murder, he could do so. My small attempts to stop him would be vain. He would not see me crawl. The three women would not see me crawl! I felt rather calm and serene. It was good, I thought in a flash, to have the entire sham of me with Agneete and Greet to be solved. There were far worse ways of dying than to be slain by a sword. I hoped he would be swift.

I cried, ‘you coward, you mistreated Greet, a woman, because she couldn’t defend herself. Now you stand in front of me with a weapon to kill an unarmed man. A coward you are, Arent, a coward you will remain. There is no honour in killing me, and you will receive little satisfaction from seeing me dead. Greet will not come back to you. I didn’t steal Greet! She came to me of her own free will, not in the least because you mistreated her. She never loved you! I am not afraid of you, and neither am I afraid to die!’

Arent hesitated for a second, not longer. He stopped, then he continued to come closer.

Suddenly, I saw the three monks running out of the chapel doors, next to the barn. Evrard Vresele could not run anymore. He limped behind the two younger priests.

‘Arent de Handscoemakere,’ Roegier van Noortkerke shouted, ‘leave that man in peace! Haven’t you done enough harm around you? You have terrorised my sister while you were married. Leave them alone now!’

Raes van Lake ran to between us, stepping in front of me. I tried to shuffle him aside, but he resisted my hands.

He too shouted, ‘Arent de Handscoemakere, remember me? We were together on that hill, the Golden Mountain of Roosebeke! On that hill you confessed your sins to me, you scum! You coveted Greet van Noortkerke since you were children. You wanted her, and you forced her to marry you, although you knew perfectly well she didn’t want to be wedded to you. You knew perfectly well she loved another man. You drew her into marriage so that she would stay at Axel. You promised to hold her in respect. Greet didn’t love you, and you knew that! Still, you forced her to your bed! That also was a deadly sin, Arent, take a woman when she doesn’t

want you. You then mistreated her. You made her suffer because she didn't love you. You did terrible things to her, humiliating her, when you had her in your power. If there is sin here, the sin is with you!

I would never have expected Raes to show that much courage, but he was a son of a famous family! Despite the fact I thought he didn't like me for living with Greet out of wedlock, he sprang between me and Arent and pushed the armed man back.

'You'll have to kill me too, Arent de Handscoemakere,' Roegier van Noortkerke called out. 'Do you remember when we were kids? You used to hit me too until I cried. Not anymore, Arent! You cannot bully us anymore! Your soul will rot in hell if you touch a priest of God. You will not pass by me alive! I'd rather be dead than let you kill an innocent man. Leave us in peace, Arent! Greet was never, never yours, not now, not in the past. A sacrament of God cannot change that. She will never be yours again.'

Roegier now stood next to Raes, between me and Arent.

'You are protecting an adulterer and a whoremonger, priest,' Arent shouted. 'Step aside, you two, monks!'

'You throw a first stone, here, Arent,' Roegier continued. 'They love each other. They have what you never had, I realise that. Is jealousy your motive for revenge? That is a sin too, Arent! The fault is not on them! They have loved each other since they were children. Go off, repent, and leave this house, Satan! Don't sin anymore, don't kill anymore!'

Evrard Vresele had arrived to stand with the other two monks. They stood firm. I drew at them, but they didn't let me pass them. While they fought me, they also held back Arent, the three of them together.

At that moment, I also saw the three women, Alise, Greet and Heyla come out of the door of the manor, to stand at the open panels, on top of the stairs that led out of the house of the castle. Greet brought her hands to her mouth. She stood on the brink of crying.

'Go away, Arent,' Evrard now also shouted. 'Leave us in peace!'

Arent de Handscoemakere did not confront me any longer. He confronted the three monks, men of authority in moral affairs, representing the power of God. They told Arent it was he who was at fault!

'Haven't you killed enough, Arent?' Raes van Lake still insisted. 'I saw you at work at Roosebeke! You are a fine warrior, a man who can kill easily, indeed. Arnout de Hert fought next to you too, at Roosebeke. You are a formidable warrior, as your father was. Haven't you seen enough blood? I have seen too much blood, Arent! I have seen too much suffering at Roosebeke! That cannot be our God's way, Arent! Now I will say no more. I forbid you in the name of Our Lord Christ to spill blood in this place! May your soul be damned if you spill blood here, Arent!'

Raes made the sign of the cross to Arent. Arent stepped back.

'Go away, Arent. Leave William and Greet in peace! Don't return here. Live your life. Go away!'

'Would you spill blood in our home, Arent?' Roegier asked. 'Do you remember how we played here, ran here, when we were young? This was home for us! A better home we never had. We liked this castle, these barns, and this courtyard. We all lived here. We all loved Greet. She was our sister. Why kill a sister? I say, go away! Find yourself a place where you can live and love. Christ is love, Arent, not physical desire. Your heart is full of envy and of hatred because you couldn't get what you wanted. You have lived in hatred for a long, long time, Arent, and that isn't good! Such feelings are bad, Arent, and you had better chase them

out of you. You shall not hurt Greet again, I tell you. Those are the words of God! Step back. Step back, I tell you.'

'I didn't seduce Greet, Arent,' I shouted defiantly from behind the three monks. 'I loved Greet as we all loved her, only I loved her more. There was nothing we could do to change that. It was our destiny to be together, even though life tore us apart for a while.'

Arent hesitated still, but his sword hung down. I was praying in silence he would not look up to the house, for in seeing Greet his anger and hatred might soar again.

Arent looked at the three priests, then at me, then back to the monks. Suddenly, his face tore into a frightful grin and I thought he would be lunging with his sword past the monks. I saw him thinking now, reconsidering, and that was good.

Arent stepped slowly backwards, his sword still pointing at us. He jumped on his horse, naked sword still in his hands, and then he spurred the horse out of the courtyard. He rode out, as quickly as he had come. He could not but have seen the three women standing in front of the house, but to this day I believe he didn't recognise Greet standing there, transfixed. She was dressed as a lady, not anymore as a farm woman. Her hair was made up quite elaborately, and she was handsomer, sweeter, and softer than before. She stood with two other tall ladies, and she held her hands to her mouth. I saw Arent push his sword in its scabbard. His horse galloped to the road of Axel.

That was the last time I ever saw Arent de Handscoemakere again. He disappeared from our lives. I didn't want him to be harmed. I wished him well. He seemed to me a pathetic figure, as pathetic as probably Greet and I were, unhappy no doubt. He had loved, coveted, as I had loved and coveted. I wished him luck. Maybe he found happiness in another land or in another city.

When the tension in the courtyard passed, there was instant pandemonium, of course. The women shouted and wept, wailed and ran down the stairs. The monks shook their arms and shouted harder. I suppose I was the calmest of all of us.

I remained most astonished with Raes van Lake and kept looking at him. Raes had judged me harshly, severely, before. Now, he had been first to stop Arent. Maybe the horrors of the Battle of Roosebeke had softened his character. Maybe Evrard Vresele had lectured him, with success.

Anyhow, Evrard, Raes and Roegier were very, very good friends! That knowledge comforted me. A man needs a few good friends to go through life, men who stood by him. Moreover, the remorse of the guilt of being with Greet now fell from me. The three priests did not judge me! They had forgiven me. God would probably not judge me, either.

Passers-by would have seen a strange scene that day in the castle of New Terhagen. Three priests, three monks, one man and three women hugged each other in our courtyard, cried and wept all. The three women kissed me as if I had been the prodigious son. Still crying, we went up the stairs and back into the house. I was not too proud of having been succoured by three monks, but aren't God's way impenetrable and always astonishing?

Chapter 5. The century's end. 1386-1400

England and Duke John of Gaunt of Lancaster. 1384-1390

In England, King Richard II grew up to a difficult adolescent. He was a very haughty, fastidious young man of the court, not easy to control. The men who flattered him became his beloved favourites. The favourites flocked to him, and constantly turned around him. Richard acted as if he were a Roman emperor, even though his uncles constantly played him down at court. Richard showed a fickle temperament with joyous, boisterous highs and troublesome lows of despair. The men and women at court who wanted to come into his favour satisfied his pleasures. Richard liked fine dresses and good food, feasts and tournaments in which he could be in the centre of all attention. He adorned himself with expensive jewels, which became a strain on his treasury. Rumours circulated he loved men as much as women, a streak in the royal family that had started with King Edward II. The marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia produced no children. Like Philip van Artevelde in Flanders, he was convinced of his own superiority in all matters of the rule over the kingdom. Like Philip, he was prone to violent outbursts of anger, and he remained suspicious and devious in his relations to other courtiers, except with his favourites. As he was the king, and with his father deceased, there simply was nobody at court with sufficient authority to curb his temper and limit his vanity. Two factions developed at the court of England. In one faction, the central figure was John of Gaunt, the powerful and very wealthy duke of Lancaster. In the other faction were several rather unworthy flatterers, such as Simon Burley, a man the king liked inordinately much, and foremost Robert de Vere, the son of the king's uncle, the earl of Oxford.

Robert de Vere was the favourite of King Richard II. He was the ninth earl of Oxford, married to Philippa de Coucy, the daughter of the French nobleman of Picardy, Enguerrand de Coucy. De Vere was the archetype courtier, very charming, slender, pale-faced with blond hair, overdressed and elegant, somewhat feminine of traits, always arrogant and capricious with the people around him. He became a member of the royal council of Richard II, marquis of Dublin and later even duke of Ireland. The Church and the people detested him, not in the least because he had done the insult to Coucy to divorce and repudiate his wife because he had fallen in love with a Bohemian lady-in-waiting of the queen.

The young king came to resent John of Gaunt's prestige and dominance at court. The only man to lecture Richard II on his duties was indeed John of Gaunt. Richard II sought to shake this control off his body.

The fiasco of the crusade of Henry Despenser was particularly beneficial to John of Gaunt. He was recognised as the only man in England with sufficient distinction to negotiate with the French court. He was appointed as the representative of the king in France.

In April of 1384, John of Gaunt attended a session of Parliament at Salisbury. Richard FitzAlan, the earl of Arundel, attacked the king and his favourites publicly during that session. John of Gaunt tried to pacify both parties, and in doing so angered King Richard II and his favourites against him.

While Parliament was in session, a Carmelite friar, John Latimer, explained in the rooms of Robert de Vere to the king that John of Gaunt had conspired to have Richard II be murdered. King Richard accused the duke of Lancaster of wanting to have him killed, but John of Gaunt protested and succeeded in convincing the king of his innocence in the matter. Richard's temper then turned against Latimer. He ordered the friar to be killed, but the lords of

Parliament wanted Latimer to be questioned first. The king's half-brother, Sir John Holland, the son of Joan of Kent, seized Latimer while the man was being taken to prison, and tortured him to death. Holland probably wanted Latimer not to betray who exactly had brought the friar to lie against John of Gaunt. The Parliament had by then evolved to such a pandemonium, that Richard II dissolved it. Thomas of Woodstock, the youngest son of the former King Edward III, threatened to kill anyone, even King Richard, who dared accuse John of Gaunt of treason.

The Latimer incident showed a faction worked at court that was envious of John of Gaunt's influence and wealth.

A second attempt by Robert de Vere to bring down John of Gaunt was tried in February of 1385. A plot to kill the duke of Lancaster in a tournament failed. John of Gaunt reproached King Richard for relying on bad counsellors, and that speech made a profound impact on the lords present at Parliament. John received unexpected help from the archbishop of Canterbury, the same William Courtenay he had confronted in the trial of John Wycliffe. The archbishop too censured the king for his behaviour towards his uncle. He too condemned the bad advisers around the king. Some of the courtiers had to restrain King Richard from striking out at the archbishop with his sword!

It was time for John of Gaunt to leave these court disputes behind him for a while. He feared for his life. He wanted to leave England and seek peace elsewhere. He thought of his long-planned campaign to Castile. This would be a war campaign with companions in arms, far from the intrigues of the royal court!

In the summer of 1385, John of Gaunt and King Richard II raided in Scotland. This became a half-hearted campaign without much result. During the raid, in an attempt to appeasement, Richard II made his uncle Edmund of Langley duke of York, and his youngest uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester.

At the end of the month of November of 1385, John of Gaunt asked for funds to organise a war campaign in Castile against King Juan I. The time was propitious.

In Portugal, King Joao had won a victory over his enemies in mid-August. The king of Portugal, King Ferdinand, had died, and his brother Joao had been elected to the throne. But King Juan I of Castile had also claimed the throne, on account of being married to Ferdinand's daughter. Following the adage that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Joao I was in favour of England, and ready to help an English army against his contestant, Juan I of Castile. John of Gaunt had an unexpected ally in King Joao of Portugal!

King Richard II was glad to be rid of John of Gaunt. He gave his uncle money for the Castilian campaign.

John of Gaunt prepared for the expedition from January 1386 on. On the eighth of March of 1386, Richard II formally recognised John of Gaunt as king of Castile.

In July of that year, John of Gaunt sailed from Plymouth to Portugal.

John had to arrange a court scandal first!

John of Gaunt's daughter, Elizabeth of Lancaster, had been seduced by the king's half-brother Sir John Holland. Holland had been involved in a plot against John of Gaunt before, and he was a court intriguer of the worst kind. Holland had also murdered the heir of the earl of Stafford, a deed that had very much angered the king. Holland had also led a tempestuous love affair with Isabella of Castile, the wife of Edmund of Langley. Isabella was the sister of

Constance of Castile, John of Gaunt's wife. Elizabeth of Lancaster was pregnant by John Holland, but married to the nine years younger earl of Pembroke, who was mere fourteen years of age. The marriage with Pembroke had not been consummated, so John of Gaunt could bring that marriage to be annulled. Elizabeth could then marry the traitorous John Holland in June of 1386.

On the twenty-fifth of July, John of Gaunt and Constance of Castile disembarked with their English army at Corunna. John of Gaunt met Joao I in person, and gave his daughter Philippa of Lancaster in marriage to him. The marriage was celebrated in Oporto in February of 1387. Introductory negotiations with King Juan I failed, so in March of 1387, King Joao invaded the kingdom of Léon, ruled by Juan I. The campaign of Joao I and John of Gaunt did not go well. The curse of failed campaigns hung from the beginning around John of Gaunt's head.

It was extremely hot in Léon. The heat, the difference in climate, other kind of food, sicknesses, dysentery, and constant fighting, wore down the armies, and especially the English archers. John of Gaunt did not have luck at his side.

King Joao I began to talk of entering new negotiations with Juan. The duke of Lancaster's army was suffering terrible losses, more by sickness than by the skirmishes. As more and more men-at-arms succumbed to the heat of Léon, John of Gaunt had to admit defeat and start to parley.

In July of 1387, at Trancoso, the representatives of the belligerents reached an agreement. John of Gaunt and Constance of Castile would renounce to their claims on the throne of Castile, for the payment of one hundred thousand pounds and for an annual pension of somewhat less than seven thousand pounds. The fifteen year old daughter of John of Gaunt and of Constance, Catalina, would marry the son and heir of Juan I, Enrique.

In August of 1387, John of Gaunt sailed to Bayonne, his Castilian campaign finished and failed, but unwilling to return to England. He remained in Aquitaine.

In May of 1388, King Richard II appointed him officially to the function of King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine. On the eighth of July of 1388, John of Gaunt and Juan I signed the Treaty of Bayonne, which confirmed the agreements of Trancoso. In September of that year then, the sixteen year old Catalina married the Infante Enrique, who was nine years old. She would become queen of Castile after the death of Juan I.

When John of Gaunt returned from Castile, the duke of Gloucester and the earl of Arundel contrived to launch a new attack against France. They had received the promise of help from the Montfort duke of Brittany. John of Gaunt, however, refused to attack in Guyenne. Because of this refusal, also the duke of Brittany felt reluctant to start a new war with France. The plot fell through.

From his campaign in Castile, John of Gaunt had obtained that one of his daughters became queen of Portugal, another one the queen of Castile!

The intransigent Constance of Castile, John's wife, was extremely disappointed. She had been very ambitious about recuperating the throne of her father. She separated from John of Gaunt. The separation was real, but John and Constance remained married. Constance first returned to Castile to stay with her daughter. She returned to England in 1389. She continued thereafter to effectively living apart from John of Gaunt in England.

More court intrigues in England

Further court intrigues had come to a climax in England. A group of earls and dukes of the royal court had begun to oppose the rule of King Richard II. During a session of the English Parliament, later called the Wonderful Parliament, a session of 1386, they blamed King Richard's favourites for the military failures in the war with France. They also accused the favourites for having misappropriated funds that had been intended to pay for war campaigns. The Parliament authorised a commission of twelve noblemen, to be called the Lords Appellants, to take over the rule of the kingdom and to act as regents for the king, who was still minor. King Richard II refused this arrangement, of course, but he lacked the power to counter-act on the Lords Appellants.

King Richard began secret negotiations with the king of France in June of 1387. He agreed to surrender all of his possessions in northern France, including Calais, in return for peace and the lands of the duchy of Aquitaine. Richard would receive Aquitaine, provided he paid homage to the French king for those lands.

When the Lords Appellants heard of this proposal, they called out loudly for treason. King Richard subsequently appealed on seven judges of the Superior Court to judge on the legitimacy of the Lords Appellants. The judges agreed under duress the Appellants had no authority whatsoever over the king. The Appellants were found guilty of treason. The king informed the men of the Appellants' counties they were no longer obliged to obey their lords. Nevertheless, the Lords Appellants remained an effective, strong force in the kingdom, opposed to the king.

In the meantime, King Richard II still being a minor, if the Appellants could not touch the king, they had nevertheless succeeded in banning the king's favourites from court. Among these were Robert de Vere. In November of 1387, Thomas of Woodstock and the earls of Arundel and Warwick, the foremost Appellants, even accused Robert de Vere and the other king's favourites of treason. The opposition to the king mounted.

King Richard II sent word to Robert de Vere, who was now also duke of Ireland, to come to his aid against his uncle Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, with troops. King Richard had assembled an army of five thousand men in Cheshire, under the command of his favourite, Thomas Molineux. De Vere would have to bring these troops to London. The roads to London were blocked by the men of the earl of Arundel, so de Vere decided to cross the Thames at Radcot, near Farringdon.

On the twentieth of December of 1387, Robert de Vere's army arrived at the bridges over the Thames, to find one bridge, Pidnell Bridge, destroyed and the other, Radcot Bridge, invested by troops of Henry of Derby.

Henry of Derby, son of John of Gaunt, was then a mere twenty years old. He had joined the Lords Appellants. He was young, but already an astute commander of troops, and a very courageous man. He was a fearless, very brave young man, a splendid warrior, chivalrous and agreeable with his men. He was also ambitious and restless, a calculating person, who enjoyed a battle.

Henry of Derby's men stood in armour and in arms, in tight rows at Radcot Bridge, their shields locked together and their long pikes thrust outward. De Vere attacked the young pup Henry of Derby, but his attack failed. While the attack was stalled at the bridge, a larger force of troops of Henry of Derby arrived from the north, attacking de Vere's troops in the rear. Robert de Vere knew his forces surrounded. The attack on Derby's troops thus failed, and when Derby pushed forward with his pikemen, the troops of Robert de Vere were routed. De

Vere had to hide by jumping in the Thames. He had to swim across the stream to save his life. He hid in the woods and later fled to France, where he would die a long time afterward, in exile. Henry, earl of Derby, had defeated the king's troops led by Robert de Vere at the Battle of Radcot Bridge! He became instantly a hero of England! King Richard II faced disaster.

The king and his favourites fled to London and to the Tower of London. The army of four thousand five hundred men of the Lord Appellants also reached the Tower of London, where Richard II had barricaded himself. The Lords forced Richard to surrender. They held him prisoner in the Tower. In December of 1387, the Lord Appellants had imprisoned King Richard II in the Tower of London, and the lords had effectively deposed the king of England!

The next event in this dramatic revolt were long parliamentary sessions held as of the third of February of 1388. These sessions have since been called the Merciless Parliament. During the sessions, the Lords Appellants raised a series of accusations against the favourites of Richard II. The duke of Gloucester told the king that if he wished to retain his crown he had better stop trying to defend his friends. Richard had to give in.

Robert de Vere, Michael de la Pole earl of Suffolk, James Baret, John Salisbury, James Berners, Sir Nicholas Brembre lord mayor of London, Bishop Alexander Neville and Chief Justice Robert Tresilian were judged guilty of having lived in vice and of having deluded the king. The men were ordered to be hanged. Neville was a bishop, so he escaped with his life and was exiled, his possessions in England seized.

The purge continued further down in the administration. Also the men who had negotiated for the king with France were executed. Simon Burley, probably the most favourite man of the king, was equally executed, even though Edmund of Langley, duke of York, rose to defend him. This defence evolved between York and Gloucester. Other men to be hanged were John Beauchamp of Holt, and Thomas Usk. Robert Bealknap, Roger Fulthorp, William Burgh, John Locton and John Carry were exiled to Ireland.

These sentences radically finished the influence of the favourites over King Richard II.

During these events, John of Gaunt had remained in Castile and in Aquitaine. The Lords Appellants, among whom John of Gaunt's son Henry of Derby, ruled over England by ruling over the king until the return of John of Gaunt in late 1389.

Richard II did not give himself defeated easily. His ego was too large for that! In May of 1389, at twenty-two years of age, King Richard II declared himself of full age. He dismissed the Lord Appellants, and asserted his royal authority.

King Richard II recognised, however, John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster had remained loyal. He forgave Henry of Derby, and restored him to the royal council. He appointed John's son-in-law John Holland to earl of Huntingdon, to chamberlain of England and admiral of the Western Fleet. He summoned John of Gaunt back to England. John of Gaunt arrived at Plymouth on the nineteenth of November of 1389.

The reconciliation between Richard II and the Lords Appellants followed with the appointment of John of Gaunt and Thomas of Woodstock, the dukes of Lancaster and Gloucester, to the royal council. In February of 1390, Richard II granted to John of Gaunt and to his heirs the duchy of Aquitaine in perpetual loan. In March, he named John of Gaunt duke of Aquitaine for life.

John of Gaunt owned many castles, but he had no more residence in London since his Savoy Palace had been destroyed by fire in the Wat Tyler revolt. He therefore leased Ely Place from

John Fordham, bishop of Ely. Ely Place would henceforth be his house when he stayed in London. He did not rebuild the Savoy Palace. He lived separated from Constance of Castile, but remained on very good terms with Katherine Swynford, his love since the death of his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster.

France and Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy. 1385-1390

Once Flanders and the cities of France pacified, King Charles VI and his court could once more take up the war with England. An extremely large fleet would be needed to bring the war to the island. France asked of its allies to gather at Sluys the largest fleet the kingdom had ever been able to bring together.

In the month of September of 1385, twelve hundred eighty seven ships lay on anchor at Sluys. Another, smaller fleet, was being prepared at Tréguier in Brittany. This last fleet was to sail under the command of the Connétable Olivier de Clisson.

The fleet for the invasion of England was being equipped, and nothing was left to chance. The engineers of the army even built an entire town in wood, then disassembled it and put on board of cogs, to be rebuilt in England. The town would be used as a permanent, fortified camp after the disembarkment of the army. It was surrounded by walls of wood, had high towers, and would form a comfortable place to live in for the main nobles of France with their men-at-arms. Campaigns could be launched from out of these headquarters against the strongholds of England.

The lords of France rivalled in magnificence with their cogs. The ships had been decorated in the finest colours. Much gold paint was used, and each ship proudly held the coat of arms of its owner. In the bay of Sluys, a thousand banners opened in the wind! The finest ship was the one of Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy. It was painted in heavenly blue and gold. It showed five huge banners of the duchy of Burgundy, the county of Flanders, the county of Artois, the county of Rethel and the Franche-Comté of Burgundy. The duke's motto, invented for the occasion and used thereafter of '*Il me tarde*', French for 'I am impatient', had been embroidered in golden letters on the sails, bordered by marguerite flowers for his wife's name.

Each duke and count had to levy taxes to pay for the expedition, as had the king of France.

For at least three months, the fleet and the lords of France waited at great cost in Flanders. The large army pillaged Flanders. The Flemish countryside, already ruined by taxes, lay devastated and empty. The poor fled, and the wealthy despaired when their castles were taken and pillaged.

The king had arrived at Sluys, but everybody waited for Duke John of Berry to deign to appear. The king ordered the duke to come as quickly as possible to Sluys, but he received no other answer than that the king should enjoy himself in Flanders and as well from the fine food and good wine, while waiting. The answer angered both the king and the duke of Burgundy. Burgundy was angry because week after week, his lands were being pillaged by the army in search of food. Flanders, Bruges and the *Brugse Vrije* stood on the brink of a new revolt. The lord of Gistel could temporarily calm the men of Bruges who had already taken up arms. It became also late in the season for an expedition to England!

When the duke of Berry arrived a few weeks later, one hundred and fifty captains of the fleet wrote a report stating it was too late in the season to sail to England. The winter storms in the North Sea would scatter the cogs and doom the fleet! An invasion of England was impossible

in autumn and winter. Berry also claimed it was too late! After a long and heated discussion at the royal court, the court knights decided to postpone the invasion until the next year. The king returned to Paris.

The nobles of France were furious. They felt betrayed, and many among them were ruined without prospect of booty from England.

The provisions of the fleet had to be sold at small prices, ruining the noblemen even further. Boudin Vresele made a new fortune from what he bought from the French and sold elsewhere. The wooden town on board of the ships was given to Philip the Bold, who sold the wood.

In the winter, the storms dispersed the ships that sailed back home, and many were captured by the English. The towns of France had been exhausted by the royal taxes for the expedition. All that money seemed to have been wasted.

As John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, had at that time disembarked in Castile, the king of France and his court wanted to send an army to that country. This meant new taxes! Many families of Champagne and Picardy, already doomed to misery, fled their homes and sought new places to live in Hainault and in the bishopric of Liège.

At that moment, a saintly hermit arrived at the court of Charles VI to sermon the king. He showed a cross impregnated on his arm as a miracle given to him by God. When the king finally received the man, the hermit claimed he had come with a message from God. The king should stop pressing the people with taxes. Otherwise, God's hand would strike the king. Charles VI was much affected by the words of the hermit, for he was a pious man who feared God's power. He wanted to stop levying taxes in France.

The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry argued, however, that without the king's taxes no wars could be waged. The houses of the king and of the queen could not be held with the current magnificence of court. The king gave in to them, and nothing was changed. The taxes continued to be collected. The hermit's warning was conveniently forgotten.

The French army marched to Castile and a fleet sailed from Tréguier. The invasion army had been limited to a few thousand men-at-arms. They could accomplish a first success by defeating a small English fleet led by Sir Hugh Spenser. The French made Sir Spenser a prisoner and won much booty.

On the twenty-fifth of March of 1386, the English too won a small battle. They surprised a large Flemish fleet that had been bringing wine from the regions of Saintonge and the Poitou to Flanders. The fleet had sailed from La Rochelle under the command of the Fleming John Buck. The earl of Arundel led the English fleet. He had with him Peter van den Bossche of Ghent, who counselled him in the manoeuvres of the Flemish ships. A few Flemish cogs could reach the harbour of Sluys, so not all was lost for the Flemish, but very many ships and the rich cargo of barrels of wine fell into the hands of the English. Peter van den Bossche proposed to attack Sluys, and no doubt in the disarray Sluys would have fallen, but Arundel merely disembarked part of his troops to ravage the Flemish coast.

In those years, the duke of Burgundy profited from his position at the court. His influence grew in France. He obtained large sums of money from the king for his expenses. These funds allowed Philip the Bold to distribute grand gifts to the noblemen at court, to the king and the queen, and to the duke of Berry. He gave them diamonds, jewellery of the finest faction, cloth embroidered with silver and gold threads. Philip the Bold displayed his wealth, augmented

thus his power, and he nurtured his influence. He married his second daughter to Leopold IV of Austria. His third daughter, a girl of scarcely a few months old, was promised to the son of the count of Savoie. His first daughter had been married to William of Bavaria.

Philip the Bold sent one hundred men-at-arms to help the count of Savoie against the marquis of Montferrat. A little later, his Marshal William de la Trémoille marched north in aid to the duchess of Brabant in her conflict with the duke of Guelders. This way, Philip the Bold thus secured powerful allies to his name.

Two strange, incongruous events then occupied the court of France. One had to do with Brittany, the other with Guelders.

The conflicts with Brittany and Guelders

The duke of Guelders had become an ally of England. He received an annual pension of four thousand francs from the court of England. In a stroke of madness and of megalomania, Duke William of Guelders suddenly sent letters to King Charles VI of France, written in very strong, insulting language, to declare war on France!

At the same time, surprising and unexpected events in the duchy of Brittany caused turmoil at the French court. Duke John of Montfort of Brittany had displeased the English by withholding his help, although the Montfort dukes had always been allies of England. The English had freed Jean de Blois in retaliation. Jean de Blois was the worst enemy of the Montforts, a count who still claimed the duchy. The Connétable Clisson had promptly married his daughter to Jean de Blois. As Clisson was an excellent servant of King Charles VI, he had gathered around him by charm and fame most of the lords of Brittany, so that few of these still served Montfort directly. Montfort had therefore developed a strong dislike of Clisson, that other Breton.

The duke of Brittany organised a parliament of his lords. He demanded of all the noblemen of Brittany to attend the conferences. Olivier de Clisson too arrived, for his fiefs in the land. Montfort welcomed Clisson amiably, and proposed the constable to visit his castle of Hermine, a castle he was building near the town. Clisson arrived in great pomp at the fortress, together with the lords of Laval and Beaumanoir, the same who had courageously passed the Leie at Comines. While Clisson visited a tower, the doors closed behind him. He was taken a prisoner and put in irons. The lord of Laval protested, but was set free. As Beaumanoir protested most vehemently, the duke of Brittany threatened to cut the eye of Beaumanoir with his dagger. Then, he imprisoned that lord too.

The lord of Laval remained at the court of Brittany and tried to save Clisson and Beaumanoir. Three times, John of Montfort threatened to kill Clisson, and three times Laval could convince Montfort to not commit such a vile crime. Finally, Montfort ordered the lord of Bavalan, the bailiff of the castle of Hermine, to put Clisson in a sack and throw the sack in the water.

Laval heard of this design, knelt before the duke and offered money and castles for the life of Clisson. Montfort liked the proposal. He wanted one hundred thousand francs, the town of Jugon and the castles of Blain, Josselin and La-Roche-Derrien. Laval arranged for the handing over of the domains, and for the release of Clisson. He contrived to have the lord of Beaumanoir get the money. He, himself, wanted to stay at court, for he knew how fast the mood of Montfort could change. The lord of Beaumanoir gathered the money and had the

four fortresses be handed over to the duke of Brittany. The duke then liberated the Connétable Clisson. Olivier de Clisson rode straight to Paris. Clisson wanted to expose his affair to the king and to the dukes of Burgundy and Berry.

The king was greatly in favour of Olivier de Clisson. Clisson offered his dismissal from his function, but the king held Clisson in his office of constable of France. Berry and Burgundy received Clisson less warmly.

Clisson was a favourite of the king. The king's favourites, called the *Marmousets*, limited the dominance of the uncle-dukes over their nephew. Burgundy and Berry envied the growing influence of the courtiers on the king, also the influence of Clisson. Moreover, Berry had made a secret pact with John of Montfort to secure the duke's help for the marriage of one of the daughters of John of Gaunt to Berry. The uncle-dukes now rather blamed Clisson for having been imprudent in having left the army for the parliament of Brittany. Clisson was shocked by the cold welcome of the dukes.

The lords of Coucy and of Saint-Pol then advised Clisson to ride to his castle of Montlhéry, where he would be safe, while they worked at court in his favour. They and other courtiers lauded at court the many feats Clisson had accomplished for the glory of the kingdom. The general atmosphere became favourable for Clisson, so favourable the dukes found it wise to take the matter in hands. They sent three nobles, the Admiral Jean de Vienne, the bishop of Beauvais, and the lord of Breuil to John of Montfort, to negotiate Clisson's case. The bishop of Beauvais got sick and died in Brittany. The bishop of Langres was sent to replace him. These men travelled to Vannes and argued with the duke of Brittany, on demand of the king. Montfort bluntly refused to give back the domains and the money of Clisson. He told the money had been spent paying for his debts. When the three delegates of the king of France returned from Vannes to Paris, Montfort knew he would have to prepare for war with France!

The challenge of the duke of Guelders to the king was not taken lightly at the French court. England was the ally of Guelders, and Guelders belonged to the empire of Germany. The German emperor might take his side!

Rumours began to circulate at court accusing the duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold, of being the only one to profit from a war with Guelders. Why not let Burgundy on his own attack Guelders, and so save the kingdom to be at the mercy of Brittany?

King Charles VI summoned the duke of Brittany to justify himself at Orléans in 1388, but Montfort refused to obey. The count of Étampes was sent by the duke of Berry to parley with Montfort, but the duke of Brittany refused to hear reason. The king returned to Paris, quite decided to take vengeance for the insults done by Montfort to his constable.

The war with Brittany could start. An English fleet was signalled in the Channel. Clisson fortified Saint-Malo and Saint-Mathieu for France, two harbours of Brittany that had remained loyal to France.

The courtiers of John of Montfort began to see reason and to fear the war with France. They made Montfort understand the English would not really come to help, as John of Gaunt did not want war, and he was promising his daughter to the duke of Berry. The king of Navarra, another enemy of Charles VI, could only provide for a few men from Normandy. They proposed to the duke to give back the confiscated castles to Clisson, and not to risk a war with France.

Montfort conceded, and gave back the fortresses to Clisson.

King Charles VI expected more. He demanded that Montfort also return the money extorted from Clisson. Montfort did send the money back, apologised to the pairs of France, and told in letters he submitted to their judgement. The French court had assembled at Blois, and Montfort agreed to come to the king there.

The duke John of Berry arrived at Blois in great magnificence. Then, the duke of Burgundy rode in, with Count William of Hainault, and with Count John of Nevers, his elder son. Montfort agreed to talk to the uncle-dukes, but he had no intention to appear at Paris before the king, also because at the side of the king would stand Olivier de Clisson and John of Blois, his arch-enemies. The dukes of Burgundy and Berry promised Montfort would not have to see these men at court.

On the twenty-third of June of 1388, the duke of Brittany arrived at the Louvre of Paris. He found at court the lord of Coucy, the count of Savoie, Jean de Vienne, and the lord de la Trémoille, with the count of Meaux, John de Roye, and others. He knelt in front of the king.

When he heard how well the duke of Brittany had been received at court, Olivier de Clisson was of course scandalised. The pairs of France deliberated over Montfort, and sentenced the duke to give back to Clisson the town of Jugon, the fortresses of Josselin, Blain and La-Roche-Derrien, with all their jewels, treasures and furniture, as originally contained in the buildings, as well as to pay Clisson his one hundred thousand francs. Montfort promised to comply, and in this way the peace between Montfort and Clisson was secured, even though the two men continued to hate each other.

The war with Guelders

As peace had been reached in the Brittany intrigue, the court of Paris could turn its attention back to the war with Guelders. The Lord William de la Trémoille had already surprised the town of Asselen, and pillaged it. Then, Trémoille's men had placed garrisons in three towns on the Meuse Stream, castles that had become the cause of the conflict between Guelders and the duchess of Brabant, and that were strategically situated to pass the stream. The Brabanders had been defeated by Guelders in a skirmish, though only against superior forces. This victory had augmented the vanity and recklessness of the duke.

King Charles VI had felt much offended by the insults of the duke of Guelders. From Montereau, where he still resided and had been talking with the duke of Brittany, he called together his feudal army. The duke of Burgundy would lead the troops of about thirty thousand men, a very great army of the nobles of France. The campaign meant new taxes in France, naturally!

The cities of Flanders gave one hundred thousand francs to the duke of Burgundy, their count. The people of France considered this war to be useless. It would have sufficed, they claimed, to send seven or eight thousand men against Guelders, under the command of one of the uncles of the king, or under the Connétable Clisson. Philip the Bold agreed with these critics, but the king absolutely wanted to go on campaign himself.

King Charles VI was then twenty-one years old, but still minor. He nevertheless began to develop a will of his own. At court, a faction of noblemen sided with the king and with Clisson, who remembered how coldly he had been received at first by the uncle-dukes in his conflict with the Montfort duke.

Like in England, tensions thus arose at the French court between the favourites of the king, among whom Clisson, and the uncle-dukes. The favourites at the French court came much

later to be known as the *Marmousets*, after the little figures which adorned the chimneys of the palaces.

The very large army of France marched towards Guelders. Guelders could be reached by two roads.

One road went through Brabant. This was the easiest way, but the cities of Brabant feared the probable pillages of the French army en route to Guelders. The cities and the lords of the Brabant countryside swore they would close their gates and their fortresses, and treat the French army as if it were an enemy army. Philip the Bold stood by the duchess of Brabant. The French court decided for the other road, which ran by the Champagne through the Forest of the Ardennes. This road was extremely difficult. Two thousand five hundred journeymen were sent in front of the army to clear the trees and bushes for a passable road through the forest. Indeed, the French army was so large it had to draw twelve thousand wagons with it, and these had to be driven through the vast woods.

The hardships and added cost to the French army were of course held against Philip the Bold of Burgundy, as Brabant would come to his family at the death of the duchess. The king also promised the army would pay for anything it took underway. Burgundy soothed the other nobles at court.

The court of France had delegated the lord Guy de Honcourt and Master Yves d'Orient of the Parliament of Paris as ambassadors to the emperor of Germany, to ask for free access to Guelders. King Charles VI received the answer of Germany at Châlons. The emperor of Germany wrote the king of France could handle the Guelders affair as he wished. The emperor would not intervene.

The French army passed the Meuse at Mourzon, entered the duchy of Jülich and began to pillage the lands. The duke of Jülich was the father of the duke of Guelders, but he did not agree with the challenge sent by his son to Charles VI. He had reproached his son for this behaviour. Nevertheless, he saw his lands being ravaged by the enormous French army! The bishop of Liège then came to see Charles VI to explain the good faith of Jülich to the king, and to ask to spare the unfortunate duke of Jülich. The duke came in person to present his excuses to the king. Charles VI pardoned Jülich, whereupon the duke rode to Nijmegen to try to bring his son to better ideas. He had also seen how large the oncoming French army was.

The duke of Guelders still counted on the help of the English army. His father, the duke of Jülich, told the English treasury was empty after the war in Castile and after an unsuccessful war in Scotland. England would not come with an army to relieve Guelders! The duke of Jülich talked for six days with his son, trying to persuade him to end the challenge with France. His wife and the archbishop of Köln stood by him, but the duke of Guelders was very obstinate. He refused to yield. The duke of Jülich then threatened to disinherit his son. Finally, Guelders agreed to listen; He said it was his duty to obey to his father, but he did not want to lose his honour in the affair. A subterfuge had to be found.

The duke of Guelders agreed to withdraw the letters of challenge he had sent to the king of France. Guelders would assert he had given his seal to the knights who had negotiated with England, and these knights had misused their powers to write the letter of challenge to the French king, unknown to him. The duke of Guelders would state he could not rescind his alliance with England, but he promised under oath never to make war to the king of France except by sending a warning to Charles VI at least one year in advance.

It was by then October of 1388, the beginning of winter, and the French army had begun to suffer from the weather. King Charles VI accepted the proposals of Guelders. The army turned, and marched back to Paris!

Once more, the tension rose at court. The return of the army was not easy, and many knights and men-at-arms perished in the dark, humid forest. The courtiers around the king, and mainly the duke of Touraine, the brother of the king, who would later be the duke of Orléans, grumbled against Burgundy and against Berry. Burgundy and Berry always acted for their own articular profit, Touraine let it be known. They never worked to the profit of the king and of the public good.

The majority of the king

On his way back to Paris, King Charles VI called for a large council of noblemen to be held at Rheims. The chancellor of France held a speech in which he announced the king had asked him to bring before the council the matter of the governance of the kingdom. Was it not time the king was declared of full age and apt to rule the kingdom?

In the session, Charles VI asked to the cardinal of Laon, Pierre Aicelin de Montaigu, what his opinion was. The cardinal confirmed the king had arrived at full age to rule. This would stop the conflicts and the hatred between the lords at court. The archbishop of Rheims agreed to this opinion. The lords deliberated, and the king was officially declared apt to rule. The governance of the uncle-dukes of Burgundy and Berry had ceased to exist!

John of Berry returned to the government of the Languedoc, and the duke of Burgundy travelled back to his own lands. Philip the Bold was very angry to have lost so quickly, so suddenly, his authority and the administration of the kingdom.

The king was a rather weak man, courteous, vain, arrogant, and charming in conversations and attitude to the people, so that the people soon came to call him the Beloved, Charles *le bien-Aimé*. He was honest and righteous. He gathered his favourites to his council: the Connétable Olivier de Clisson, the lords Enguerrand de Coucy and Bureau de la Rivière. His great friends were Jean le Mercier lord of Noviant, and also the lords of Montaigu and the Bègue de Vilaines. These men were part of a group of twelve men who formed the royal council. Also the duke of Bourbon came to be a member of this council, but not Philip the Bold and not John of Berry!

A little later, the cardinal of Laon died. It became clear the cardinal had been poisoned. The culprit of the crime was never identified.

Philip the Bold of Burgundy returned to his duchy. He arranged taxes to pay for his debts, and tried to embellish his capital of Dijon. He had to wage a campaign against the archbishop of Besançon, who had dared to begin using his own coinage.

The people of France had hoped that by removing the uncle-dukes from court, taxes would diminish. The king was a spendthrift, however, so the taxes went up instead of down. The tax on salt augmented, and the chancellor diminished the value of the coinage of France. The court of Paris organised grand feasts in that year of 1389. Tournaments of several days were sumptuously staged with grand décor and many performers. At one of such feasts, the duke of Touraine, the brother of the king, married Valentina, the daughter of Gian Galeazzo

Visconti, the ruler of Milan. At another feast, the queen was received into the city of Paris. Paris feasted with her with processions and banquets. These festivities could happen in peace, for a truce of three years had been signed with the English king at Leulinghen, near Calais.

At the end of September of 1389, King Charles VI travelled with a splendid court to the Languedoc, by Burgundy and Avignon. He stayed a week in Burgundy, where costly feasts had to be arranged by Philip the Bold.

Later, the king travelled on to Lyon and from there to Villeneuve-sur-Avignon. Pope Clement received Charles VI. The pope granted indulgences to the French nobles. Ferry Cassinel, a doctor of the University of Paris, was appointed to archbishop of Rheims. The young king of Sicily had come to Avignon. The pope crowned him to king during the stay of Charles VI. Each day, fine feasts with banquets and dancing were organised in the papal city.

From Avignon, Charles VI rode on to the Languedoc, but he refused his uncle-dukes to follow him. He had heard more and more people tell him the dukes of Anjou and Berry had outrageously pillaged and exhausted the Languedoc. The king talked with the lords of the counties.

A little later, the king dismissed Duke John of Berry from his governorship of the Languedoc. The duke's favourite, Bétizac, who had pillaged and authorised many ravages in the Languedoc for him, was burnt as a heretic. From that moment on, Berry sought revenge against the favourites at the court of Charles VI. He became especially envious of the duke of Touraine, the king's brother, who would later become the duke of Orléans. Touraine was extremely rich, not in the least from the dowry of his wife, Valentina.

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, also attributed his fall from favour in the royal council to the influence of Touraine – Orléans. Touraine made two powerful enemies in the dukes of Burgundy and Berry.

After the stay at Avignon, the duke of Berry returned to his fief of the Auvergne, and Philip the Bold to his Burgundy.

First, Philip the Bold bought the Charolais for a heavy price from Count Bernard of Armagnac. Then, he had to handle a crime committed by John de Châlons. Châlons was one of the most powerful lords of Burgundy. He had many friends at court. Châlons had killed a sergeant of Burgundy. In the trial, Philip the Bold confiscated possessions of the knight and ordered the gates of his castles to be destroyed and to permanently stay open. The duke of Burgundy was ruthless as ever. He could not support his authority to be challenged.

The crusade to Tunis

At the return of the king in Paris, an embassy from Genoa arrived at the court. The men asked for the support of France against the Sarrasins of the African coast. These men had acted as pirates and disturbed the commerce in the Mediterranean. They had also ravaged the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, Mayorca, Elba, Monte-Christo and Pianosa. Genoa asked for a punitive expedition to teach the insolent infidels a lesson. Genoa offered the ships for the transport of the troops and confirmed they would pay for the provisions of an army. Many knights at court wanted to depart immediately.

The duke of Touraine told everybody he wanted to lead the campaign in Africa. There was no war to wage anymore in France, so where else could the noble knights of the country gain honour, fame and booty, and rich ransom money, as against the Sarrasins? A punitive campaign to the north of Africa was an occasion to acquire all. Moreover, the knights were

bored in a France at peace! The king and the royal council agreed to a campaign. They felt, however, Touraine, the first prince of the royal family, could not lead it. The honour was granted to the duke of Bourbon.

Many of the noblest knights of France would accompany Bourbon: the Lord Enguerrand de Coucy, the Admiral de Vienne, Sir Guy de la Trémoille, Sir Philip of Bar, the lord of Harcourt, Geoffrey Boucicault brother of the famous Jean Boucicault, Soudic de le Trau, Ysain a bastard son of the count of Foix, and the count of Eu.

Surprisingly, also an English delegation was found willing to join the French. The English troops in the army would be led by John Beaufort earl of Somerset, the first son of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. More importantly, also Henry earl of Derby, the eldest son of John of Gaunt would be part of the English troops! Henry changed his mind at the last moment, however, and went on a crusade in Eastern Germany, helping the Teutonic Knights.

The crusade to Tunis did not last long. The French fleet sailed from Marseille on the first of July of 1390. It consisted of five thousand men-at-arms and about fifteen hundred knights and squires. Forty galleys and twenty cargo cogs accompanied the Genovese fleet. The fleet sailed into heavy storms in the Mediterranean near Elba, but eventually reached the African coast. The Christian army advanced to Al-Mahdiya, about a hundred miles from Tunis. The Berber Sultan Abou'l-Abbas ruled over that territory. He constantly harassed the Christian troops. More significantly, he had about six thousand men inside the town. All major assaults of the army of Bourbon failed against the fortified walls of Al-Mahdiya. After a siege of two months, in October of 1390, nearing winter, the Sarrasins of Tunis paid a large sum of money to the crusaders so that these would sail back to France. The Sarrasins also promised not to harass anymore the Christian ships in the Mediterranean.

The army of Bourbon returned without much booty, and many men had died from sickness, duress, and from the skirmishes in Africa. More men died from crossing the Alps on the march from Genoa to France. The French knights realised they had once more embarked on a campaign that had brought them little if no advantage, at very high cost.

A shipping disaster

In the summer of 1387, we held another Pharaïldis meeting in Ghent, in the house of Arnout de Hert, our shipper. Practically all the men and women of the Pharaïldis gathered in a large building of the de Hert family. Arnout built *duermen* in that hall, but the place had been cleared and decorated to receive our families for a banquet. We had found lodgings in our own houses of Ghent, and we were pleased to spend a few days in our hometown. We had even made a walk together and discussed the *stenen* we knew, the monuments of our city, and talked on the way to people we knew. I brought Greet van Noortkerke to our meetings, so she accompanied me also this time. We walked hand in hand, now!

The banquet offered by the de Herts had been organised to feast the return of Arnout de Hert from an expedition with his sea-cogs to and from La Rochelle in France. Arnout had already told a few of us what had happened on that remarkable voyage. He had narrowly escaped with his life! We liked a good story. So now, we sat at the long table with fine glasses of sweet, white wine in front of us, and we shouted for Arnout to give his story to all. Arnout stood, gesticulated wildly with his wine, and signalled he was quite ready to entertain us and depict

what he had seen. We cherished the story, also the ones who knew the outcome. We wouldn't take away the pleasure of Arnout in telling it again. We drank our wine while he spoke. 'In the beginning of this year, several traders of Ghent asked me whether I was interested in forming a wine fleet. We would put our ships together, buy wine in the Saintonge and Poitou region, and take in tuns of excellent wine. Not only traders and shippers of Ghent would participate, but also of Bruges. In fact, the initiative came from Bruges, but the men of Bruges had asked the *Gentenaars* to join them. The wine would be worth a fortune in Flanders! We could transport it from Sluys to the German Hanze cities, to Lübeck and Hamburg, and also sell much of it to Brabant and Hainault.

When the proposal was presented to us, the dean of the shippers of Ghent was present. We had been invited to a meeting in the guild house of the shippers. Most of my colleagues were present.

I do not usually sail together with other shippers! We have our navigation books, you see, our own maps of the sea that explain which winds and which currents to expect at which time of the year. We have our own indications of depths and of the placement of rocks in the water. We know where people we can trust live in which port, and at which prices we can buy provisions from which merchant. We copy our books for our captains, and keep them out of sight of everybody else. We keep them our most cherished secrets. Of course, we buy other navigation books sometimes. Sometimes also we copy parts of our navigation books and hand them to friendly shippers, but we are extremely careful with that, for once our information goes out of the door, we do not really control it anymore. Whatever guarantees we are given, our precious observations tend to pop up at the strangest of places!

I prefer to sail alone, and my captains also prefer to sail this way. Our captains have a copy of our navigation books for their voyages, they add to it, and protect them jealously. They don't like to explain to other captains why they sail to here and there. The added information is brought invariably to Ghent, and copied into the master navigation book. We hold several copies of this master book, and three exemplars are hidden in various places. The books are our most valued property! You may find this strange, but that is how we make sure we don't lose our knowledge of the sea-roads.

When the traders and shippers of Ghent and Bruges proposed to sail together, I was not particularly enthusiastic about the whole affair. There might be added security in forming a fleet of one hundred or so sea-cogs, as was the objective. Sure, it was safer to present a hundred ships to groups of pirates than just one lonely ship, but so many sea-cogs together could also mean a greater prey to share for combined fleets of pirates, or even for whatever English, French or Dutch fleets large enough in number to dare attack.

The dean of the shippers told the fleet would be kept a secret. He guaranteed the fleet would not be harassed by pirates, because too numerous. I had to weigh how much added security I could gain by joining my colleagues against the security of one sole ship hiding in the vast waters and gliding past pirate ships, avoiding the most dangerous pirate hideouts. I was not at all warm for such a gathering of cogs, but everybody seemed to agree it was a splendid idea. My colleagues told no fleet existed in our waters, large enough to attack a hundred merchant ships at sea. I had to admit the argument had some value. The shippers present were all of the opinion the idea was sound, and something to organise once or twice a year. This voyage would be a first, to try out how one constituted a fleet, and how one sailed with so many cargo ships at the same time, and so on.

The dean then asked how many cogs we could bring together for an expedition that was due from the end of February to the first weeks of March. It would be the beginning of spring, the

end of the winter storms in the North Sea, yet still early enough in the year not to awake all the pirates sailing between La Rochelle and Sluys. The dean read the names of the shippers listed with the guild. Each man gave the number of ships he could send with the fleet. I heard figures from two to fifteen ships! When my name was called, I told I might add five cogs. Oh come on, Master Arnout de Hert, the dean protested. We know you are one of the wealthiest shippers of our trade. You can bring at least fifteen ships or more to the wine fleet. No, no, no, I refused. If you think I am so wealthy, you are all mistaken. I have not more than eight ships on the southern route and a mere three on the northern route! Some men strongly suspected I was not telling the entire truth, and these were right! Other men didn't really know how many cogs I controlled, but thought I had maybe a few ships more than I asserted that evening. Most of the shippers did not expect me to state anything but the truth.

You see, true to the Pharaïldis concepts I always remained faithful, my friends. The concept says: always remain very discrete about what you do and have. In actual fact, I and we, have more than twenty sea-cogs sailing between the Mediterranean and farther on the one end, and France or Sluys at the other end! We have twenty more sailing on the German routes. We sail from Tripoli to Stockholm! Of our German ships, most remain in the Baltic, so the shippers of Sluys never even saw them at quay! A few also only sail between Antwerp and the Hanze cities, so those ships are also not seen at the quays of Sluys! I refused to add more than five of my ships to the wine fleet, because I had a bad feeling about the matter.

Imagine, my friends, so much wine being delivered at once in the one only harbour of Sluys! Why, prices would have dropped by half if not by more when the ships of the fleet arrived together the same day in port! I imagined also what a chaos that arrival would be! The most cunning shippers would reason like me, if only at the last moment. So, a terrible race to be first at quay and get the best prices would happen! There would be a fight for enough journeymen to unload the ships!

I didn't like the idea of such races and competition, for they lead to cogs crashing into each other during the race, to winners and losers, to hatred and envy and bad blood between rivals and friends. I thought it better to have only two or three of my ships be loaded with wine, and I would bring those not to Sluys, but to Antwerp. That would take us a day more at sea, but we would be farther inland, and avoid the chaos of the wine-selling at Sluys.

So I confirmed that the men who thought I was so rich as to have fifteen sea-cogs in France, were fools. I am not that rich, I laughed, and if I had so many ships, I wouldn't know how to arrange for so many to sail at the same time. That also was a lie for the best, because we have perfectly mastered how to follow up on so many ships, and even on many more! One of our other secrets is that we not just hire fine sea-captains and pay them well! We recruit captains who know how to find cargo by themselves! Our captains may buy a load and sell a load at will, at correct prices, without us even knowing about it! They must give us a decent part of the profit, of course, and accept our orders of transport. Contrary to most other shippers, we give our captains a good share of the profits. We prefer the best pilots, but our captains are first and foremost excellent traders, rather than seamen! Seamen they become en route, traders they have to be by blood!

So, I talked for a quarter of an hour on how poor I actually was, on how many issues I had currently with my cogs, and in the month of March. My ships needed to be repaired from long sea-voyages. I lacked so many captains, my ships were on route, and so on. I refused to commit more than five ships! Some shippers knew very well I was not telling the whole truth, or they understood I didn't like the idea too much. That was the way I talked me out of the

venture! Some faces grew angry and red, other faces drew longer. I remarked a few people watching me as if to think I had been wiser than they. I heard a few even beginning to withdraw some cogs. Nevertheless, the dean arrived with the ships of Bruges at a total of over one hundred and twenty ships, so everybody was happy.

I sent my five ships, not of our largest sea-cogs, mind you, but some of our fastest vessels, on the journey. I sent them to La Rochelle in advance of the main Flemish fleet. The shippers protested at Sluys because my cogs would not accompany the other ships that sailed from Sluys in one fleet, but again I had told my cogs sailed in southern waters and would arrive or had already arrived from there at La Rochelle.

A few shippers were smart. How might you have ordered those cogs to sail to La Rochelle in so short a time, they wondered. Well, they were right in that argument too! I would never have been able to warn my cogs of the Mediterranean in time. I answered I had this sailing-barge of mine called the *Hermes*, which sailed so fast she could do the job. The *Hermes* was my messenger-ship. It sailed extremely, extremely fast. That shut them up, for they had not expected such an answer. Of course, even the *Hermes* had not been able to do the job of calling my ships in, but those smart guys didn't realise that. I closed their mouth with my *Hermes*.

I usually stay at Ghent in our offices for an operation such as this one, but I decided to go to sea myself this time. I wanted to see that majestic fleet of Flanders with my own eyes! Yes, my friends, I was curious! Also, if somebody tried to interrogate my captains at La Rochelle, I wanted to be present!

In fact, we sailed from Sluys and Antwerp a week before the other ships, had some rough weather and heavy sea to pass, but we arrived at good time at La Rochelle. We could even take in our wine and other goods before the other cogs entered into the harbour. We succeeded in having first choice of the best wines. Boudin Vresele arranged for us to take in barrels from the people we usually traded with. We organised this venture together, Boudin and I. He paid for the wine and for the transport with Pharaïldis money. If I lost ships, that would be my loss. We remained a few days in the harbour of La Rochelle, resting our crews. Now, that meant some loss of money for me, to leave ships idle and in harbour instead of at sea, but one doesn't need to be too greedy in such ventures! Because we had been early, we could all stay at La Rochelle and didn't need to find a place at quay in one of the smaller harbours around that town.

Our five ships were the *Phaëton*, the *Latona*, the *Minerva*, the *Althea* and the *Scylla*. I chose to sail from Sluys to La Rochelle and back in the *Scylla*, the fair virgin of Sicily. That would be my flagship, if you want. My ships were our fastest.

I was convinced everybody in the North Sea would have heard by then of the famous Flemish fleet that would transport wine to Sluys! Anyhow, all our ships were heavily laden with tuns of wine. I guess thousands of barrels went on board at La Rochelle!

When the fleet had taken in its cargo, we sailed. Luckily, the dean had organised for one man to be in authority. We called him Admiral John Buck. The title pleased him much. He was a sturdy fellow of much experience, a sea-captain of about fifty, and a man who knew well the sea and the harbours. He was a fine commander. He made everybody to agree on how he wanted the expedition to sail. We formed more or less rows of five ships, thirty rows of five ships sailing one row behind the other. John Buck sailed in a small, fast cog. He sailed along the rows and ordered the cogs together or farther apart. So far so good!

We sailed to the north. We followed the French coast and then the Flemish coast, but we stayed a fair distance from the harbours on the way. We did not run into storms. The sky was covered all the time, the rain drizzled, but the wind was low, yet hard enough to push our sails. Sailing past Calais and into the Channel was tricky, as many English ships patrolled there. We saw many English ships following us, but the stratagem of our deans seemed to work, for no war-cog attacked us. We were in a good mood when we finally sailed in fine weather past the coasts of Flanders. We did not expect any pirate fleet so far north. We reached the mouth of the Scheldt. I seriously began to think I had been far too suspicious about nothing. We sailed into the Scheldt, large as a bay here, and had the island of Cadzand on our port-side, our left side. Then, my friends, disaster struck!’

Arnout de Hert saw how we hung at his lips. He was thirsty, drank half a cup of wine, wiped his mouth dry, and continued only after a while. We were not too pleased he stopped at that moment!

‘I sailed with my cogs at ease, somewhere in about the middle of the wine fleet. Suddenly, we saw tens of English war cogs sail rapidly from behind Cadzand towards us. The wind blew from the north-east, so we laboured against the wind, whereas the English had the current partly with them, and the wind as well. In half an hour’s time, the English predator cogs broke in one long line straight and perpendicular into our rows of freight ships, two rows in front of my five ships, cutting our fleet in two parts!

The English cogs immediately used all their archers from their front- and rear-castles to send down hundreds of deadly arrows on the crews of the ships they wanted to board and plunder. They cut through our lines and then sailed along our ships on starboard. The English turned east when they had broken through our line, you see. They sailed along our rows, sailed against ship after ship and boarded our cogs. Needless to say, we had no efficient answer to the attack by so many English war-cogs. Those damned English archers! They killed and wounded many men! Mind you, I could at first count no more than forty or so English ships, maybe a few more. I could not see, because part of the English ships sailed in a far fog. As they attacked the first ships of our fleet, they could easily overcome these! I saw how the English went about their gruesome business!

An English war-cog would bump against a Flemish ship. Clouds of arrows were then sent from the high castles over the deck of their enemy, clearing it from many sailors, wounding many. The first sailors targeted on our ships were of course the men who stood around the rudders. There would stand the pilot and the captain. The English targeted these men especially and first. Then, the English sailors threw boarding hooks into our cogs, to secure the two ships together. Knights and men-at-arms in full armour of mail and breastplates would then jump on board of the Flemish cogs. These killed the rest of the crew, or made prisoners. Our crews stood not in mail! They were first and foremost seamen! They had not been trained to fight with the sword and the battle-axe! One cannot work in mail on board of a cog! The English had warriors on board, however! So, our people were easy prey for the knights and the men-at-arms of the English. Not much more than five or ten English were needed to capture a ship of ours! Fights on board a cog of ours did not last long. It was a fiasco, a pitiless slaughter!

We were not being attacked by a small private, pirate fleet. I recognised the banners of the earls of Arundel on the ships. I supposed the earl was the leader of the English, and this was a royal English fleet! The English gave no quarter when the seamen resisted.

Meanwhile, in the rear part of our fleet, there was chaos, nothing but chaos. All the ships that were not being attacked fled to everywhere! One thing I have heard our patriarchs of the Pharaïldis tell us over and over again, was that when you have to flee, you should certainly not flee to where all the others flee to. Well, all The Flemish ships of the second group sailed to Sluys at that moment. Sailing east was straight in the wind, with the wind against us. This sailing went slow.

Remember the Pharaïldis lesson, I repeated to myself. It was far better to flee to the northwest, profiting at least a little from the easterly wind. As the English came sailing full speed to us down Cadzand, I would sail right into their direction, meet them, but at a respectable distance, and sail north later. I wanted to sail north, past Cadzand, turn around the island easterly, and slowly advance towards Antwerp behind the islands. Of course, had the English placed a few ships past Cadzand, to cut off the direction of Antwerp, I would have had bad luck and I wouldn't be sitting here, drinking wine.

Now, imagine, I sailed in a row, but on the most southerly end of my row of cogs. I sailed straight in front of my four other ships, back north, showing them what to do. Imagine! Two fleets navigated in total chaos to left and right of us. One half of our fleet was fighting an atrocious sea-battle lost on all odds, the other half was fleeing to Sluys in chaos also. These cogs sailed as fast as they could, which wasn't really fast in contrary winds! The fifty or so English vessels were capturing one after the other of our cogs in the front half of our fleet. They would gain tens of cargo chips today!

I made the *Scylla* to sail north, trailing the four other of my cogs behind me. Our last ship was the *Latona*. That cog didn't make it. It couldn't escape out of the embrace of two English war-cogs that blocked its way. The English ships had the wind with them. There was nothing we could do. After the *Latona*, the English war-cogs also caught up with the *Minerva*. They boarded the ship. The *Minerva* had prepared a surprise for the English! I had put a few cannons, our new Ghent weapons, on board of three of our ships. The *Scylla* had cannons on deck, also the *Phaëton* and the *Minerva*. When the *Minerva* was being attacked by the first English war-cog, it shot its cannons and destroyed the front castle of the English war-cog. I saw how panic shook into the English ship. When you force back an English ship, however, two more vessels arrive to take vengeance! The English surrounded the *Minerva*, so she could not release a second volley from her few cannons, and was taken! There was not much we could do. I had lost two fine sea-cogs to the English!

I cursed a lot then, called the English dirty names. The *Scylla*, the *Phaëton* and our *Althea* sped more northerly. We disappeared from sight of the sea-battle around Cadzand. The other English ships chose not to pursue us. They had other, easier prey in their eye, and we sailed fast! They turned, and directed their attention to the other cogs of our fleet. I nevertheless noticed how at least ten more Flemish cogs were following us. Their captains had understood what the *Scylla* was trying to accomplish! I became the admiral of a small fleet, for I headed the more than a dozen ships that sailed unharmed into the Scheldt, towards the harbour of Antwerp.

We arrived without damage at Antwerp. I sent a man to our offices. I had the surprise of my life to see a woman come running on board, holding her tunic far above her heels. No woman should go on board of a ship! No woman should show her legs aboard a ship! It was bad luck! Anyway, that was our Greet van Noortkerke! It was the first time I and my crew could smile since we left La Rochelle, for she was shouting orders to a horde of men who busied themselves immediately to unload our ships.'

Arnout de Hert once more stopped, drank and then continued.

‘My friends, I mourn the two crews I lost. Many men died on board of my two captured ships. I have no excuse for the loss of those lives. God will judge me when I stand before Him. Those men were my responsibility. They worked for me, worked with me, and had placed their confidence in me. I should have cared better for them.

A few lessons can be learned from my adventure at sea, young Pharaïldis.

First, listen to the wise advice of your elders. Things are said by them that may save your life one day.

Second, in trade as in shipping, you win some and you lose some. Better not despair at your losses. The trick is to win more than you lose. I lost two good ships, one out of ten of my southern fleet, one out of twenty of my entire fleet. That was a substantial loss for one day! Of course, at sea, one always loses a ship in the very shortest of times. A shipwreck is a catastrophe always. You have to take losses into account.

Third, it is good to use logic and to reason calmly about trade ventures. However, follow your intuition when logic does not force you into this or that direction. And rely on your own judgement, not on the judgement of others! My gut feeling told me not to add ships of my own to that Flemish wine fleet! My mistake was I pushed my intuition aside to follow the opinion of others. I have to mourn many men and the loss of my ships for my mistake. I was glad I did not commit more of my cogs to that unlucky fleet!

You know what happened to the rest of our formidable Flemish wine-fleet. Our Admiral John Buck was made a prisoner. It was indeed the earl of Arundel who led the English, but he had Peter van den Bossche with him. The English must have attacked with sixty war-cogs, led by Arundel. We know our own Peter van den Bossche advised the earl, which is a real scandal. Van den Bossche is now a traitor of Ghent! I hope he burns in hell.

The English must have had spies in Sluys, for how else would they have known so many ships would be arriving on the twenty-fifth of March of this year of 1387 near Cadzand? I heard fifty ships had been captured by the English. Peter van den Bossche advised to attack Sluys, but Arundel got scared, I suppose, and merely raided the Flemish coast a little.

Arundel could unload about twenty thousand barrels of wine in English harbours. He must have become stinking rich from the sale of the Flemish cogs taken. I heard the *Minerva* now sails out of Yarmouth with an English crew, the *Latona* out of Rye. The names have not been changed, for such a change brings bad luck. I am happy the cogs have not been destroyed.

Only one man in ten from their crews returned to Flanders.

A few of the men who returned have cursed me for not having sailed to their help. My only excuse is that if I had done that, we would have lost many more men. You see, there is also a time to calculate and to weigh the odds! I pray God our Father looks with compassion at the men who perished at sea’

Arnout de Hert said an Our Father then sighed, and looked back at us. I saw tears in his eyes.

We, the Pharaïldis, sat in silence. We shuffled our feet, scraped our throats, sighed, and drank. ‘Right,’ Boudin Vresele broke the silence. ‘We lost two ships and their cargo. The last three years we gained a lot more! The peace of Tournai has been good to us. The authority of Philip the Bold is total, but as long as we pay his taxes, which have remained moderate, harsh as they sometimes are, he leaves us in peace. I don’t think he cares much for Flanders, except as a source of income for him. We haven’t seen him in our cities these last years. He is too much occupied by France and by Burgundy. We expect him ever to return to Flanders and to Ghent, but the latest is the better! We certainly shall have to pay then for his feasting, banquets and

tournaments, but Ghent is prospering again, and what we must spend on his feasts is for sure much less than the cost of a war. We have lost very many people in Ghent! I also heard that by the shipping disaster, at least five Ghent traders have bankrupted. We lost, but what we have lost we can gain back in two to three years, as Arnout can confirm. We have made enormous profits from the aborted French invasion of England. The trade with Picardy has taken off again, though slowly. Picardy lays devastated! We can at last work again in some quietness of spirit, use our peace with France and with England for trade. I see fine young men and women at our table. I am so glad our lineages will continue. I would like us to remind you all of the good members of our families we lost in the previous years. I will not recall the names of the men who died at Roosebeke and sacrificed their life for us. We have remembered them so often already in our prayers. I mourn Heyla de Smet, who passed away two years ago. She was one of the finest women I ever met. Evrard Vresele, my uncle, is very ill and will not live long. Alise van Lake died, the mother of Arnout. I have a special thought for her, as she installed the way we should keep our accounts. We shall miss her very much. We also lost Kateline Dankers. How many times have we not held banquets at New Terhagen, and applauded her fine food? She was the best cook of our houses! Please, let us say a little prayer once again to honour their memories.'

So we did. I thought of Grete van Noortkerke. The pangs and the barbs of our desire did not torment us anymore. We now lived as conspirators, aware of each other's intimacy, trust, and sweet affection. I caught Greet's smile often, and that was a miracle of beauty. We delighted in the love of our splendid children. Our own love had widened and deepened. We held each other's hand now, more than before, enjoyed our bed less than in the first months, but with longer intensity. I had been very lucky indeed to have discovered in Greet the same feelings I nurtured for her. That love was a daily miracle, for which I thanked God. We lived a good life.

Of course, the darts in our side were still Agneete to whom I was married, and Arent to whom Greet was married. Those darts, ugly mistakes, bled us, but we thought and spoke of them less and less, as time healed our wounds of the heart. One does not deny love. Denying love would be the greatest sin. Greet and I knew we had love. Agneete and Arent knew they had looked at the wrong place for love. I wished them well, but I feared they only had place for envy and hatred in their heart. Why did they look to only Greet and me for love? Greet had also been fully accepted into the Pharaïldis families. We had explained how we had come together despite being married to others. I hoped one day to marry her and give my proper name to my children.

Finally, I was glad Philip van Artevelde was dead. Men like him, as pitiless, devoid of feelings for other people, ruthless and vengeful, as ambitious and vain, should not exist on earth.

I thought again of the two men who held now war and peace for our countries in their hands: John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster in England and Philip the Bold of Burgundy in France. Lancaster still influenced the English court, and despite everything, Burgundy still dominated the French court. I had heard both men desired peace. John of Gaunt waged war in Castile. Philip the Bold was ambitious and out for winning more territory, but he seemed to want to do that by other means than expensive wars. John of Gaunt I saw as a large brown bear, a very powerful animal, but one that was so big he was the constant target of mean hunters. Philip the Bold I regarded as a large wolf, but a wolf larger than any such beast I had ever seen. I thought it was a good thing wolves only attacked when they were hungry or harassed. I hoped

Burgundy's appetite had been satiated. I hoped Ghent would leave him in peace where he lived, in France.

A king's secret

Heinric Vresele lived like a hermit in a *steen* of the *Hoogpoort*, a house of stone with a slate roof. His house was elegant of façade, very clean, frugally decorated inside, a bachelor's nest, cosy and snug. Heinric cared for his comfort. The objects he had collected over the years looked all exquisite. I recognised candelabras and silver plates made by John de Smet in his heydays, cups of Venetian glass, and German tankards. On his walls hung tapestries from Brussels depicting scenes from the life of Joseph the Egyptian. Did Heinric consider Joseph an example for him? I saw a small painting in glistening colour pigments of a crucifixion. These objects had cost a small fortune. I had never given much thought about what Heinric sought in life, but his images pointed to a complex inner life. What did Heinric want from life? What were his objectives? What did he think of life in Ghent? I had to admit Heinric had remained an unwritten book to me. I wondered why he needed a companion to open the chests of James van Artevelde, for he had led a life of solitude. He had decided on his own about all he had wanted to accomplish. I had understood, of course, Heinric had not really chosen his life. His father, Gillis Vresele, had decided for him! Gillis Vresele had drawn Heinric's line of life. Gillis had arranged for Heinric to become a clerk. He had intrigued and cajoled the aldermen of years long past, until Heinric was accepted in the *Schepenhuis*. Then, Heinric had just lived on in that function, content with his destiny. He had felt at ease in his role of clerk of Ghent, as his father had surmised. Gillis Vresele had known his son's character and capabilities well. He had also been a man who held the reins tightly in his hands. With Heinric, he had his private source of information on everything that happened and was about to be happening in the *Schepenhuis*!

It was the first time, really, I had been invited to this house. I discovered the rooms not of an ascete, but of a sophisticated Epicurist. The house was immaculately cleaned. Fresh straw had been spread thinly on the cleaned floor. On the table in the main hall, a sturdy yet finely carved oak furniture, lay a white woollen, laced tablecloth. Heinric invited me to sit. He told me to wait. The van Artevelde chests stood hidden in his cellar. He would have to fetch them. This was what I had come to do with Heinric, a few weeks after the Pharaïldis meeting during which he had asked me to share the contents of James van Artevelde's archives. We would open James's chests together.

I felt slightly uncomfortable at that, for James's widow still lived, though she was ill and old. We had no right to open the documents, of course, but then: who had? The family of James had shown no particular interest in the archive chests, not even Philip van Artevelde, and also not the aldermen of the city. The city administration had brought the chests to the *Schepenhuis*, right after James's murder. The documents of the house had been hastily thrown in coffers by the alderman who looked through James's rooms after the murder. Nobody had opened them since. Somebody should open the chests and look for interesting parchments. I considered it rather a good thing at least two *Gentenaars* opened the coffers and passed through the documents, looking for something of interest to the city. If there was nothing hidden of earth-shattering importance in the coffers, Heinric could simply place the chests back in the archives of Ghent, for future generations. The chests would be stored in a dark, far corner of the *Schepenhuis*, and forgotten for eternity.

Heinric returned into the hall with one, then with the other chest. They were large, brown oak cases, heavy and unadorned. Heinric placed them on the table, one next to the other. He must have cleaned off the dust in the cellar.

He said, 'I propose to look into one chest each. Take this one, I'll go through the other. Seals, we can break. Nobody will suspect those documents have only been opened lately. I don't know what to expect. I propose we open the documents, read them one by one, tell when something interesting comes up, and close the parchments again. You can place the documents read on a heap next to the chest. When we have done, we'll place the parchments back in the chests. Is that all right with you?'

'Sure,' I acquiesced.

'This work may take us quite some time,' Heinric continued. 'On the cupboard behind you, you will find a carafe with sweet, white Rhine wine. Please serve yourself. There is water too, and I prepared some bread and cakes. For supper this evening, I have reserved a table in the 'Lion of Flanders', the inn near the Belfort. It might be nice to get out of the house for an hour or so, and have supper. I don't expect this opening of the documents to last beyond this evening.'

'Fine,' I agreed. 'Let's get to it!'

We opened the chests, took out document after document, and read. This was painstaking, meticulous and extremely boring work! Most of the papers I read were short notes of accounts, usually written by the clerks of Ghent to James van Artevelde. The letters told how much money James van Artevelde had loaned to the city of Ghent, how much the city had paid James. There were letters that inventoried the presents James had offered to delegates of France and England. I found notes of his military campaigns, descriptions of his battle at Biervliet, endless lists of goods transported for the army of Ghent. Practically all the notes I found pertained to the period of the seven years van Artevelde had ruled over Ghent.

'I have all notes of public accounts with the city of Ghent,' I told Heinric. 'There are very little private notices, here.'

Heinric looked up, 'mine are all private accounts of James van Artevelde's business ventures. Many of these are letters of sureties. I didn't realise James van Artevelde got such a respectable part of his income from interests on sureties! He was some sort of a banker, too. I found letters of investments, and inventories of cargoes, also bills of lading for the ships he hired. My documents also date almost exclusively of his period as a public figure of Ghent. I have the impression he destroyed previous papers and letters, and only preserved the ones from the period he served as the leader of Ghent. I found copies of a few letters sent to England. James wrote to King Edward III, mainly to intervene for Flemish merchants who lost ships and cargoes to English pirates. If you have notes of accounts, then he must have kept doubles of accounts also stored in the regular archives of Ghent. He was a prudent man to hold on to copies!'

I continued reading, placing the pieces I had read carefully next to the chest. Most of the notes were written in Flemish. A few were written in French. Some presented a text in Latin. Those were the ones the most elaborately calligraphed and decorated, such as a nice copy of the alliance of the Flemish cities with Brabant and Hainault. These might have been of great interest to Ghent, but they were merely copies. Ghent would have finer exemplars of these alliances, truly signed by the aldermen and the noblemen of the counties. The charters might still lay in coffers in the secret of the Belfort. For some of the Latin texts I had to take much time, and I had to ask for the translation of certain words to Heinric. I'm afraid my Latin was rusty.

We read almost in silence for a few hours. We didn't talk much, did not have dinner at noon. We drank our wine and ate our cakes while we read. The work was boring! Not much of real interest lay in the chests. Accounts, accounts, accounts! At a certain point, quite after noon, I told Heinric I needed fresh air. The dust of the documents had dried my throat.

We took a stroll to *Tussen Bruggen*. I asked Heinric there what kind of a man Philip van Artevelde had been.

'He was not a man of much substance,' Heinric Vresele answered after a while. 'I cannot say he was a smart man, not in the sense the Pharaïldis men were. In many aspects he remained a very young man, with wild, impulsive ideas. He was devoured, of course, by the desire to take revenge on the enemies of James van Artevelde. I never really understood why. Philip staunchly believed he was the son of King Edward III, not of James. So, why would he have needed to take revenge for James? That question has baffled me. I suppose Philip looked at the opposers of James as a kind of symbol for everything he considered his, but was not granted to him. He was not a very rational man, you see. He was a man of contradictions, and he could not reconcile his contradictions. He merely lived with them and acted without thinking, intuitively. I believe nobody taught him the way we, the Pharaïldis men, have been taught to act and think. We have been educated to reflect on matters in very practical terms. Not so Philip! He was more of the passionate, impulsive and obstinate kind!

You see, William, from reading all those letters of James van Artevelde, I deduct that James dominated and managed what was happening to him, except probably his very last moments. James knew that when he did this something, that other thing would happen. He controlled events. What happened to James van Artevelde was what James van Artevelde wanted to happen. Maybe I am exaggerating.

It is obvious, though, that Philip van Artevelde did not control his destiny. He did not make things happen. Things happened to him! He was like a boat on the ocean, tossed to and fro by the waves. That was most obvious in the Battle of Roosebeke!

On that morning, Philip awakened, and said we would run down the hill and fight the French. The French were more numerous, better trained, led by knights that reflected about the situation. I was a fool at that battle! I should have devised some sort of plan, organised a few surprises for the French. Only: I was not the leader of our army, Philip was.

In the last months before the battle, you know, Philip had taken matters in his own hands. He listened less and less to what we, his advisers, told him. He could do it all by himself! It is true his ego lurked towering high by then! Maybe Lente van den Broucke influenced him, I don't know. From somebody who had remained very unsure of himself just months earlier, he then decided everything on his own!

At Roosebeke, we should not have attacked all at once, not so impulsively. I have been so stupid! My eyes only opened afterwards. I read a few books on the art of war, too. We could only lose that battle, the way we attacked! There was no intelligence in the way we ran down the hill to the French, on that tragic day. Do you know I have nightmares of that battle, William? I have killed many more men in the Battle of Scheut before Brussels, than at Roosebeke, but I have no nightmares about Scheut! I have only nightmares of what happened at Roosebeke! At Scheut, I was invincible. At Roosebeke, I had to defend my life and several times I thought I would be killed, I, Heinric Vresele! No, everything went wrong at the Battle of Roosebeke! We have only ourselves to blame.'

I said nothing. We remained silent for the rest of our walk. We went back to Heinric's house when a slight rain began to fall.

We read again. I was deep down in the van Artevelde coffer, when I began to find letters and accounts of Catherine de Coster. Most notes were accounts also, of her missions to England.

These mentioned Catherine, but they were still very much notes of James van Artevelde. I found not really anything of importance. I sighed. We had looked through the chests for nothing. Heinric Vresele, I saw, was equally disappointed. He had finished his chest before I had done with mine. With a sigh, Heinric began to place the documents he had read back in the coffer. He placed them meticulously, neatly stacked, and then he closed the lid. He crossed his fingers and waited patiently.

‘Nothing of importance,’ he said. ‘We should not have bothered. It is getting dark. We should soon have our supper. I am hungry, too. I am going to tell my servants they can leave for the day. Are you staying here, tonight, or do you sleep at the *Kalanderberg*?’

‘I promised Boudin Vresele I would see him late this evening,’ I replied absent-mindedly. ‘I am expected at the *Kalanderberg*. I’ll sleep there, for it might be late until Boudin and I have finished. We have to discuss our investments.’

‘A night-owl he is, indeed, our Boudin,’ Heinric smiled.

He went to the back of the house. I was left alone in the hall, opening and reading the last documents, one by one. I had only a few documents to read.

And then, I came upon the document we were looking for, the only one that was really worth its while in the two chests, the jewel among junk. It was not a parchment not, really. It was a small silk scroll, flattened beneath in the chest, written in courtly French, with the seal of the royal administration of England on it.

It said that King Edward III of England recognised the child, the boy with the name of Philip, first son of Dame Catherine de Coster. Philip was the son of King Edward III. The document was written by a courtier of King Edward, finely drawn in beautiful letters and glorious phrases, but it was short. It stated nothing more than the ominous ‘this is my bastard son’! Such documents must have normally contained lists of presents given to the child, titles, lands, and special names. This document merely stated Philip was a son of the king. The word bastard was not mentioned. Four signatures only stood at the end of the document, signatures of King Edward III, of the archbishop of Canterbury, and of two courtiers, one the duke of Lancaster, the other the earl of Arundel, two faithful servants of the king. This was a very private document! There could be no doubt as to the authenticity of the contents!

I called out for Heinric. I must have shouted wildly like a madman, for Heinric came storming into the room. I handed him over the silk scroll, opened, with the seals and the signatures.

While he read, I told him I had found the one document we had been looking for. I stood from my chair while I gave it to Heinric. Heinric read eagerly, then read again.

When he had finished studying the silk document, Heinric exclaimed, ‘yes, yes, yes, this is it! When he told me, I thought Philip van Artevelde was mad! I thought he was subject to delusionary obsessions, but he was right! He was indeed the bastard son of King Edward III! This document has all the signs of authenticity!’

‘It has,’ I agreed. ‘I found it at the bottom of the chest! It lay among notes and accounts of no importance. It seems to me Catherine de Coster must have inserted it at one point deep under the lower layers of the other documents in the chest, hiding it. We must assume she had wanted to hide the document also from James van Artevelde, yet hiding it in an obvious place. Where is the best place to hide a document? Among other documents of no real importance, of course! She must have known James would have preserved these, his documents, at all times.’

‘Of course,’ Heinric nodded. ‘The chests contain the documents James van Artevelde needed to defend himself with in case of accusations by individuals and by the aldermen of the city. The accounts you showed me have also been written down in the accounts of Ghent. James

held doubles to be able to defend himself when he was accused, fearing some of these accounts might have disappeared from the archives of Ghent. They were his life insurance.'

I had been looking through the rest of the notes, and found nothing interesting remained in the chest. I placed all the documents back, like Heinric had done, rolled up to scrolls or neatly folded as I had found them. The confession of King Edward III, a remarkable piece of great historic value, remained open on our table. We continued staring at it, standing at the table. It was dark outside. Heinric should have lit a few candles.

Heinric was much calmer than I.

'Let's have supper,' he said. 'The hosteller will be waiting for us. We need some time to think. Better for us not to decide something on an empty stomach!'

I wasn't sure whether there was anything to decide upon, for King Edward III and Philip van Artevelde were both dead. I agreed with Heinric to leave. It rained outside, so we took our coats. We walked to the Lion of Flanders and ordered a hearty supper with a stew of beef. We drank a few tankards of beer.

I asked Heinric, 'Philip van Artevelde loved men, you told me. King Edward II was notorious for that vice too. I heard King Richard II, though married, is seen mostly in the companionship of preferred men. How did Philip van Artevelde come to be married?'

'We had him be married,' Heinric told. 'The army would not have followed a lover of men. We feared the militiamen would have seen a woman in Philip. At that time, he still listened to me and to Peter van den Bossche. We told him to marry. He proposed us someone. He kept Lente often in his tent, though. I tend to believe he could sleep with both women and men.' 'As I have been told of Richard II,' I concluded.

We returned to Heinric's home. I would have to go soon, Boudin Vresele was waiting for me. 'What should we do with this silk document?' Heinric asked.

'It is the property of Catherine de Coster,' I remarked. 'It should either be left in the chest, or be given back to her.'

'Catherine has not come to fetch it in all these years,' Heinric whispered. 'She may have put it in the chest to be forgotten. I don't think Sohier de Bornaige would have liked it to surface. Catherine de Coster is an old woman, now. She is very ill. She may die soon.'

'The document was forgotten, yet saved for posterity,' I protested.

'Yes, but what will posterity do with it? What do we do now? What happens when the Englishmen who asked me to show them the archives find the document?'

'It wouldn't be of much use to them,' I proposed. 'Philip van Artevelde is dead. Catherine de Coster doesn't care. It might be useful to somebody of the van Artevelde family, to extort money from the English royal family. They will want to smother a scandal.'

'Or, if some Englishman finds it, it might be used to put yet another stain on the royal family of England. The kings of England surely will want to avoid a scandal.'

'Then we should burn it,' I suddenly decided. 'Let the secret remain a secret, no proof existing. Nobody can be served by the information contained in it. Philip van Artevelde had no children. This document should not be used by the Bornaige men, and not by the family of Lente van den Broucke's second husband. It should not be used by any Englishman other than the sons of King Edward III. I am sure John of Gaunt would have wanted the document destroyed.'

Heinric thought, and hesitated. Conflicting ideas raged in his mind.

Finally, he said, 'you are right! We must burn it. Do you agree, then?'

'I do,' I nodded.

I went to the hearth. Heinric had lighted a fire, for the evening was getting cold. He too stepped to the hearth. He held the document in his hands, hesitating still. Then, I saw the determination flicker in his eyes. With a quick movement of his wrist, he shoved the silk in the fire. We heard an angry hiss. The silk caught fire and burned in a second. We sighed. ‘We have done the right thing,’ Heinric said. ‘I hope so! May Philip van Artevelde rest in peace, though I fear he must be purging his sins in hell! I will certainly meet him there.’ I gave no comments. I put on my cloak, said goodbye to Heinric, and almost ran to the *Kalanderberg*, to Boudin Vresele.

We burnt the Philip van Artevelde document in the late autumn of 1387. Catherine de Coster died the next year.

In 1387 also, merely a month later, died Evrard Vresele at my castle of New Terhagen. I had loved that man very much. He died slowly, like an ending candle. He died without pain. We were four at his deathbed: the two monks Raes van Lake and Roegier van Noortkerke, Heinric, his brother, and I.

Marie Vresele, Heinric and Evrard’s sister died a few months later; She was married to John de Smet, who was in that year seventy-seven but continued to hang on to life.

Also the year of 1390 was a very sad one for the Pharaïldis. Several men and women died in the first months of that dreadful year!

My father, Ser Jehan Terhagen, died in January. He was already buried when I arrived in the Champagne. His wife, my mother by right, Wivine Denout, died a year and two months later. The Vitry domains would be inherited by my sister Kerstin and by Zeger van Noortkerke, whom I could call twice my brother-in-law. I took Greet van Noortkerke with me on that voyage.

In March, at the beginning of spring, died Amelberga van Dorme, who had been married to Wouter de Smet, one of the heroes of Roosebeke. Two months later passed away Avezoete van Lake, the wife of Ser Martin Denout, the other hero of Roosebeke. And in the summer, also Agte Homberg died. She had been married to Boudin van Lake, who had also been a victim of Roosebeke. Three venerated widows of Roosebeke died in the same year!

In the autumn of the year 1390, the Clerk Heinric Vresele was found dead in his house of the *Hoogpoort*. He had been stabbed several times by daggers and by swords. On his half naked body the men of the White Hoods found ugly burns, the signs he had been tortured before his death. The burn wounds were on his arms and on his back. He had been tortured by a red-hot iron poker that hung near the hearth. The poker was found still in the extinguished hearth. Heinric must have been lying slaughtered in his hall for several days, before other clerks of the *Schepenhuis* and a few men of the White Hoods opened his door. His door had remained unlocked. They found him in a large pool of dried blood.

I went to the *Schepenhuis* to talk to the clerks of Ghent about Heinric. I asked them whether somebody had asked for Heinric in the days or weeks before his murder. The only people who had come to see Heinric had been two Englishmen. The clerks told me they had heard much shouting in Heinric’s office, after the two men had been admitted to him. The two men had come earlier with two aldermen to demand access to the archives of Ghent. They had been interested in the archives of James van Artevelde. Two chests with private documents of the wise man of Ghent had been shown to them, also. The men had been much disappointed, and told they had found nothing of importance in the archives. The clerks did not know what to think, but they had not seen the two Englishmen again in the city.

I said nothing further to the clerks, but I imagined what might have happened. The Englishmen had returned to Ghent. They had found a way to the archives of James van Artevelde, had found nothing, but learnt how closely Heinric had been involved with Philip van Artevelde. They had tortured Heinric to get to the document that attested to Philip's origins.

I regretted Heinric, but I was glad we burnt the confession of the king. I did not think Heinric had mentioned my name. Heinric had always been a very loyal man.

We celebrated the funeral of Heinric Vresele with great pomp at Saint John's Church of his parish, and buried him in Saint John's churchyard. The king's secret was buried with him, as nobody knew I had read the document with him.

I had a last surprise when Heinric's last will was opened. He left the largest part of his fortune to the Vresele family, but he gave me his fine house in the *Hoogpoort*, with all the beautiful objects he had collected. I kept the house in Ghent.

Chapter 6. Epilogue. The last years. 1390-1400

England in the last years of the century

On the eighteenth of June of 1389, the French and English delegates signed a truce of three years at Leulinghen, near Calais. The peace factions in the two countries had gained the upper hand. Most influential among these were John of Gaunt and Philip the Bold, uncles respectively of King Richard II in England and King Charles VI in France. John of Gaunt was a powerful figure at the English court, and a loyal councillor of Richard II. Duke Philip of Burgundy had lost much of his influence on the king when Charles VI had declared himself of full age to reign. King Charles VI acted, however, more against the dukes of Anjou and of Berry, his other uncles, who had despoiled the Languedoc region for their own purposes. Charles VI kept good relations with Philip the Bold, whose military capabilities were amply recognised at court.

With the war between France and England moved to the background, the main attention at the royal courts of both countries shifted to the situations inside the two kingdoms and to the ever-present intrigues at the courts.

John of Gaunt's family

John of Gaunt could look more after his sons after his Castilian campaign. His seventeen-year old bastard son John Beaufort was one of his great favourites. John was a fine, courageous knight, who liked tournaments, in which he excelled. His half-brother, son of the same mother but by the first husband of Katherine Swynford, Thomas Swynford, often accompanied John Beaufort to tournaments. Also John of Gaunt's heir and oldest son, Henry Bolingbroke earl of Derby, joined these. Other knights in their company were John Holland and Henry Percy. In May of 1390, Henry of Derby and Thomas Swynford left England to help the Teutonic knights in their crusade against the infidels in Eastern Germany. They sailed in July of 1390 from Boston to Prussia and Lithuania.

John Beaufort became the leader of the English troops that sailed with the French army to attack the Sarrasins of Tunis. Henry of Derby had first wanted to fight this campaign too, but he had changed his mind at the very last moment.

John Beaufort returned from the short crusade after the siege of Al-Mahdiya near Tunis at the end of the year 1390.

In the meantime, the young Henry Beaufort, about fifteen years old, was destined for an ecclesiastical career. He received the wealthy prebends of Thame and Sutton in the diocese of Lincoln, as well as the prebend of Riccall in York. John of Gaunt sent this son to Oxford for his studies.

John of Gaunt and Constance of Castile lived separately. John of Gaunt drew back to his mistress Katherine Swynford, even though years ago he had forsaken her after he had been shocked by the revolt of Wat Tyler's peasant army.

In April of 1390, Henry of Derby and Thomas Swynford returned to England from their crusade in Eastern Germany. The years of 1390 and 1391 passed quietly for John of Gaunt and his family. France and England remained in the truce.

John of Gaunt negotiated the peace with King Charles VI at Amiens as of the spring of 1392. Like in the past, these discussions could yield nothing more than an additional year of truce. John of Gaunt returned to England in April of 1392.

In June, Henry of Derby left England once more for a new crusade in Prussia with the Teutonic Knights. He returned only in December of 1393. In that period, he had also been on a long pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In England, Henry continued to take part in tournaments and festivities.

In his turn, in early 1394, John Beaufort departed to Lithuania and Hungary to fight with the Teutonic Knights. He took part in battles with the knights.

John of Gaunt had to suffer again harsh critics from envious courtiers in 1394, this time by the earl of Arundel, during a session of Parliament. As the knights of the court were waging no war, they quarrelled all the time amongst each other. Arundel reproached John of Gaunt his influence on the king, the money granted to John of Gaunt for the Castilian adventure of the duke, and the handing over of Aquitaine to John. King Richard II supported John of Gaunt. He forced Arundel to publicly apologise during the session. John of Gaunt was declared free of blame by the Parliament.

In March of 1394, John of Gaunt returned to France to sign at the end of that month a new truce of four years with the French delegates.

Constance of Castile, his wife, died on the twenty-fourth of March, while he was in France. He was again a free man. Katherine Swynford was waiting for him. She had not remarried. In June of that same year died other women of the royal family of England. Queen Anne of Bohemia, wife of King Richard II, died of the plague. At the funeral of his wife, King Richard's temper was sharp. The earl of Arundel arrived late at the funeral in Westminster Abbey. Richard regarded that as an insult. He struck Arundel in the face, drawing blood inside the church. He thereby desecrated the church, so that it had to be re-consecrated before the funeral ceremony could continue. The event became a major scandal at court. Arundel was imprisoned in the Tower of London. He stayed there until he swore to serve King Richard loyally, and to pay a large sum of redemption money to the king. Richard II and Arundel hated each other from that moment on, even more than before.

A little later died Mary de Bohun, the wife of John of Gaunt's son Henry Bolingbroke, earl of Derby. She was only twenty-six years old, but already left seven children behind!

King Richard II confirmed John of Gaunt to duke of Aquitaine in October. John sailed to his fief from Plymouth. Around that time also, he sent a letter asking for dispensation to the pope Boniface IX in Rome for his marriage to Katherine Swynford. Such a dispensation was necessary because John of Gaunt had been the godfather of Katherine's daughter by Swynford, her first husband. The consent of the pope arrived at the end of 1395. John of Gaunt returned to England from Aquitaine in December of that year and in January of 1396, he married Katherine Swynford. They were married in Lincoln Cathedral.

In late 1394, John of Gaunt's son John Beaufort had married Margaret Holland, daughter of Thomas Holland, earl of Kent and son of Joan, the Fair Lady of Kent by her first husband. The links with the royal family were thus tied even closer.

John of Gaunt returned from Aquitaine because he had been summoned by King Richard II. Richard had devised a plan to secure the peace with France by marrying Isabelle, the daughter of King Charles VI of France. He needed John of Gaunt's support for this plan, for Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, his other uncle, was opposing the marriage. Gloucester was the leader of the war party at the court!

Although John of Gaunt and the king had the same interests for the war, their relations remained rather cold. The king also had begun to envy John of Gaunt's wealth and power. Many men at the English court were also of the opinion John of Gaunt had disgraced the court by marrying his mistress. Among these were the same Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, and his wife, Eleanor de Bohun. They were envious of the wealth and the influence of the duke and the new duchess of Lancaster at court.

In July of 1396, further treaties were concluded between France and England. These arranged for the marriage of Isabelle of Valois, daughter of King Charles VI with Richard II. John of Gaunt and Philip the Bold prepared for that marriage in France that same month. In September, Pope Boniface IX pronounced John of Gaunt's marriage to Katherine Swynford valid. In the same letter, Pope Boniface also declared the children of the couple legitimate. The Beauforts had become legitimate children of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford!

The marriage of Isabelle and Richard II took place with great pomp at the end of October of 1396. The two kings met and embraced one another. John of Gaunt was present at the wedding, and also Duke Philip of Burgundy. John of Gaunt and Philip the Bold now knew each other very well. The royal marriage that had to guarantee the peace between France and England took place in the Saint Nicholas Church of Calais. The celebrant of the wedding ceremony was Thomas Arundel, the then archbishop of Canterbury. Isabelle was only seven years old, Richard was nineteen! The little queen arrived in London by mid-November of 1396.

In February of 1397, the king promoted John Beaufort to earl of Somerset. In July, Richard II confirmed John of Gaunt to duke of Aquitaine for life, but a severe crisis entered in the relations between the king and the family of the duke of Lancaster.

The king's revenge on the Lords Appellants

King Richard II had sought revenge on the Lord Appellants since long. During a banquet in Westminster in June of 1397, the duke of Gloucester asked Richard what he and his friends should live from, as they had never properly been paid for their services in the war. The king answered they were living at his expense at four villages of London. The money due to them would be paid in good time. Thomas of Woodstock, Gloucester, shouted angrily back the king should first risk his life in capturing a city, before he gave up any of the cities his forefathers had conquered. Gloucester referred to the harbour of Brest, as at the same table sat knights of the garrison of this town, which had recently been sold for money to Brittany. Gloucester saw the face of King Richard II whiten and deform at the insult. He knew the king would seek revenge for the insult, as Richard was very vindictive of character.

In August of 1397, therefore, Gloucester met secretly with his friends, the earls of Arundel and Warwick, in Arundel's castle of Sussex. They discussed how to seize power in England and to imprison the king. The plot was quickly betrayed!

King Richard II began by informing John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley, his two other uncles, he had received information from Thomas Mowbray, a former Lord Appellant turned loyal to the king, that their brother Thomas of Woodstock and the earls of Arundel and Warwick were plotting to depose him from the throne. Gaunt and Langley did not really wish

to become involved in this dangerous conflict, but they consented to have the three conspirators be arrested.

John of Gaunt's concern was for his son, Henry Bolingbroke, who had fought in the period of the Lords Appellants from 1387 to 1388 on the side of Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick. John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley rapidly retired to their castles. The three conspirators were imprisoned by the king.

On the fifteenth of August, King Richard II accused Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick of treason against the king. Later that month, he ordered John of Gaunt and his son Henry of Derby to gather troops for the king.

In the month of September of 1397, Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester and uncle of Richard II, was brought to Calais and murdered on orders of the king. Gloucester was suffocated in a feather bed.

The actual trial of the conspirators took place on the twenty-first of September, though Gloucester had already died by that time. Arundel was beheaded the same day. Warwick had appealed for mercy and pardon to the king. He was imprisoned for life. Richard II had taken his first revenge on the main leaders of the Lords Appellants.

The position of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, was seemingly not affected by the events. His sons and son-in-laws received more titles and lands from the king. John Holland, son-in-law of John of Gaunt, was made duke of Exeter. The other son-in-law Ralph Neville became earl of Westmoreland. John Beaufort received eleven of the confiscated manors of Warwick, and later in the year he was made Constable of Wallingford Castle.

From that episode on, from the summer of 1397, King Richard II was more and more aware of his absolute power in England. He began even more to act as a tyrant and to oppress the people by taxes. He held an extravagant court, which cost a fortune to England. This increased his unpopularity. Richard was vain, arrogant, cunning, and still very vindictive.

The Mowbray betrayal

In December of 1397, Thomas Mowbray told Henry of Derby that the king's four most favourite lords of the court were plotting to kill him and his father when they would arrive at Windsor Castle for the first session of Parliament of the year 1398. The king desired to seize the vast domains and wealth of the duke of Lancaster. John of Gaunt would be disinherited from the Lancastrian domains by the annulment of the pardon granted posthumously to the forebear of the duke, Thomas earl of Lancaster. Thomas had been executed in 1322 by King Edward II. John of Gaunt would lose his duchy. This would be King Richard's revenge for his defeat at the Battle of Radcot Bridge against Henry of Derby!

Henry Bolingbroke spoke with his father, but John of Gaunt did not much believe the story and simply decided to confront the king face to face with the allegation. Called to King Richard, Mowbray and Derby accused each other for treason. Mowbray was of course very outraged Henry of Derby had brought the matter to light. King Richard II held a decision temporarily pending.

After this ordeal, at the beginning of February of 1398, John of Gaunt fell seriously ill. He left the royal court and withdrew to Lilleshall Abbey to recuperate. The king remained well inclined towards John of Gaunt, for he appointed almost at the same time John Beaufort to Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle, two months later to Admiral of

the North and West fleets. At the end of February also, the king appointed Henry Beaufort to bishop of Lincoln. Henry was consecrated to the bishopric on the fourteenth of July. In the summer of 1398, the health of John of Gaunt was failing fast, so he played practically no role anymore in public life.

On the twenty-ninth of August, King Richard II finally ordered that the until then still unsettled conflict between Thomas Mowbray and Henry of Derby was to be decided by a judicial combat between the two men. In this combat, the guilty would be the man who was left dead or severely wounded, or who surrendered in the duel. The trial by combat would take place on the sixteenth of September.

Late that summer also, John of Gaunt, too sick to move, relinquished his duchy of Aquitaine. King Richard II promptly appointed John Beaufort to his lieutenant in Aquitaine for seven years.

On the day of the trial by combat, King Richard II changed his mind. He forbade the combat and sentenced Thomas Mowbray to exile for life and Henry of Derby to ten years of exile. They were to leave England by the twentieth of October. Richard II had thereby finalised his last revenge on the Lords Appellants! John of Gaunt pleaded for his son, but the sentence was merely reduced to six years of exile for Henry of Derby.

Death of John of Gaunt

By the autumn of 1398, John of Gaunt's health deteriorated further. His son, Henry of Derby sailed from England via Dover, to spend his exile in Paris, at the French court. At the end of October, John of Gaunt retired with Katherine Swynford to Leicester Castle. He drew up his last will on the third of February of 1399. He died the same day at the age of fifty-eight years. His official funeral took place in Saint Paul's of London on the fifteenth of March. He was laid to rest in Saint Paul's beside his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster. The new duke of Lancaster was from then on Henry Bolingbroke, earl of Derby, exiled from England.

On the eighteenth of March of 1399, after having celebrated the ceremony of the funeral of John of Gaunt, King Richard II prolonged the exile of Henry Bolingbroke to life. He declared the inheritance of the duchy of Lancaster forfeit to John of Gaunt's son. He annexed the duchy to his crown, and distributed the lands among his favourites.

In June, Richard II was on a campaign in Ireland. John Beaufort was in Aquitaine, raising troops for the king. While King Richard was in Ireland, Henry Bolingbroke left France. He sailed with a small group of friends and men-at-arms to England. Thomas Arundel, the archbishop of Canterbury, who had also been exiled for his connections to the Lords Appellants, sailed with him.

Henry of Derby landed at Ravenspur in the Humber Estuary on the fourth of July. Ralph Neville, the husband of Joan Beaufort, rallied to his cause immediately. John Beaufort, however, declared publicly for King Richard. He joined the army Edmund of Langley was raising to defend the king. Henry Bolingbroke's armed forces eliminated all resistance, so that by the end of July King Richard's troops surrendered to him.

King Richard returned hastily to England, but he had no loyal troops left anymore in England. He was taken at Conway on the nineteenth of August, and brought a prisoner to the Tower of London. The king was Henry Bolingbroke's prisoner!

The new conspirators forced King Richard II to abdication on the twenty-ninth of September of 1399. Richard's heir presumptive was Edmund de Mortimer, earl of March, but Henry Bolingbroke also put the young Edmund and his brother in custody at the castles of Windsor and Berhampstead. These were the first in line as grandsons of a daughter of Lionel of Antwerp, another son of King Edward III.

On the thirtieth of September 1399, in Saint Paul's, Henry Bolingbroke was proclaimed king of England as Henry IV. He was crowned on the thirteenth of October in Westminster Abbey. A new reign started, and a new century. John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster's son was king of England. King Henry IV became the first of a dynasty of Lancastrian kings of England.

Richard II was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. He was brought to Pontefract Castle. The former king died soon thereafter, in February of 1400, thirty-three years old. He may have died of starvation. Thomas Swynford was his guard at Pontefract Castle and may have ordered to bereave him from food.

Richard's body was displayed in Saint Paul's cathedral to prove he was truly dead, and then buried discreetly in the priory of King's Langley in Hertfordshire.

The last years of the century in France

After the all but very successful crusade against Tunis, France planned yet another expedition of war.

Pope Clement of Avignon had been insisting to the duke of Berry to end the schism in the Church by chasing the pope of Rome from his lands. Berry emphasised at the royal court how important it was to re-establish the unity in the Roman Church.

The campaign in Italy would depart in the month of March of 1391, with a large army of knights. More than ten thousand men-at-arms could be motivated for the crusade to Rome. The royal council of King Charles VI assembled at Saint-Germain to decide on new taxes. A terrible storm ravaged the forest during this meeting. Terrible thunder sounded, the clouds darkened the day and lightning struck with much violence. Many courtiers saw this as a bad omen. They came to believe the heavens had tempested against the levying of the taxes, and against the campaign.

To reach Rome, an alliance would have to be made with Florence. Florence was at war with Rome, but also with Milan. The duke of Touraine had married Valentina, daughter of the lord of Milan! Both Valentina and the duke were on the best of terms with the king, so Charles VI listened to their protests. Also the dukes of Burgundy and of Bourbon opposed the rash plan. The expedition to Italy would be very risky!

At that time, the king of England proposed new peace negotiations between the two countries. The dukes of Gloucester and Lancaster, John of Gaunt, would ride to Amiens from Calais to discuss the proposals with the king of France. The expedition to Italy was therefore abandoned.

Nevertheless, Florence asked France for help. The count of Armagnac was the brother-in-law of the Visconti who had been deprived of Milan by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the current ruler of Milan. The count of Armagnac promised to lead to Italy the Free Companies that still

devastated the regions of Auvergne, the Limousin, the Rouergue, the Quercy and other territories of the Languedoc. Thus, France would be rid of the terrible exactions of these outlaw bands. The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry favoured this new scheme, although they feigned not to, on account of Valentina Visconti.

To levy an army for Armagnac, the royal council decided on an additional tax of two hundred thousand francs. With this money, the count of Armagnac could hire his mercenaries, and march out of France. He marched to Alexandria, laid a siege to the town, fell into an ambush, and was promptly killed. This ended the ambitions of Armagnac.

Gian Galeazzo Visconti, rich as Croesus, promised each man of the invading army one gold Florin to return to France! Although the mercenaries passed the Alps on the way back and lost very many men in the freezing cold and in the dangerous passes through the mountains, they ravaged the Savoie and the Dauphiné regions on the other side of the Alps. The men of the Free Company of Aimery de Severac even defeated an army led by the bishop of Valence, the prince of Orange and the count of the Valentinois. These three lords were made prisoners and ransomed, after which Severac's company returned to the Armagnac, where they continued their plundering!

The de Craon intrigue

While the peace negotiations between the English and the French lasted at Amiens, the duke of Brittany provided for new intrigues.

Duke Montfort still hated the Connétable Olivier de Clisson. Clisson was a too powerful lord in his duchy.

Also the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry had become increasingly antagonistic to de Clisson, as they feared the influence of the old warrior. One of the causes of the displeasure between Clisson and Burgundy was Philip the Bold's wife, Margaret of Male. She was the niece of the duke of Brittany, and she remembered well how her father, Count Louis of Male, had affectionately talked of the Montfort duke. She too therefore disliked Clisson. She worked on her husband in favour of Montfort.

The duke of Brittany had defied once more the king of France. He had dared refusing to join the expedition to Italy against the pope of Rome, because he thought he enjoyed the support of the duke of Burgundy. He had also not accomplished much of what he had promised to repair the injuries done to Clisson! Moreover, he did not recognise the authority of the popes of Avignon. He used his own golden coinage, and his justice officers did not accept the ultimate jurisdiction of the Parliament of Paris. Montfort demanded the oath of loyalty of his vassals, but he did not ask at the same time to honour the suzerainty of the king of France. King Charles VI became increasingly annoyed and angry with the duke. Then entered another man in the intrigue.

The Lord Peter de Craon was related to the duke of Brittany. This Craon had in the past abused of the confidence of the duke of Anjou.

Anjou had put de Craon in charge of his treasure in France, while he rode to his campaign in Italy. At the most decisive moment of that expedition, either by negligence or by avidity for the money, de Craon had held back the funds from Anjou, so that the duke marched to his ruin and was killed.

Anjou had gathered enough money for his invasion of Italy in 1382. He marched with an army of fifteen thousand men. The pope had given Anjou rights on the kingdom of Naples,

but he had to fight the current, self-appointed king of Naples, Duke Charles II of Durazzo. His expedition ended in disaster in the very south of Italy in March of 1383.

In the spring of 1384, Enguerrand de Coucy was sent to Italy with an army of nine thousand men to save the duke of Anjou. He crossed the Alps in July, the Apennines in August, but when he arrived in Tuscany in September, he heard that on the twentieth of that month already the duke of Anjou had died.

Coucy returned, but attacked and captured the town of Arezzo on the way. Florence coveted Arezzo, so she arranged for a league of other Italian towns, among which Genoa, Bologna, Naples and even Milan to assault the invader. Coucy was besieged by an army of Florence, led in part by the famous condottiere or war leader John Hawkwood. Coucy agreed to surrender Arezzo for the ransom of forty thousand Florins in November of 1384. Then, he returned to France. Coucy arrived at Avignon in January of the next year. The adventure of Anjou in Italy had been a total failure.

The duke of Anjou buried, the duchess continued to pursue de Craon for the missing funds. She was Mary of Brittany, a daughter of Charles of Blois. She claimed the throne of Naples for her son Louis II of Anjou. This dream would never be realised!

De Craon was now one of the confidants of the duke of Touraine, the brother of Charles VI. The two men were inseparable. Olivier de Clisson knew well of the treachery of de Craon, for his daughter was married to the count of Penthievre, the brother of the duchess of Anjou. Clisson hated de Craon for his deceit, and because the man was related to the duke of Brittany.

Peter De Craon committed one more treachery, which cost him in the end his most powerful friend at the court of Paris! The duke of Touraine had fallen in love with a fine beauty of Paris. He had offered the girl much money for her graces. De Craon hastened to tell the amorous adventures of Touraine to the duke's wife. Valentina Visconti heard de Craon with cold politeness, but her anger seethed. She called the beauty to her, reproached her for her illicit relation. She scared the lady so much, Touraine did not get the beauty's graces anymore. Touraine found out who had betrayed him to his wife. He then accused de Craon of being a sorcerer to the king.

Charles VI ordered the lord Bureau de la Rivière, the lord of Noviant, the lord of Breuil and the *Sénéchal* of Touraine to signify de Craon he had to leave the court immediately. De Craon retired to his castle of Sablé near Le Mans, fulminating on Touraine.

He told of the insult done to him to the duke of Brittany, who felt sure the wrong had come from Olivier de Clisson. Montfort received de Craon with so much honour, that he defied and angered once more the court of Paris.

The king and the nobles of the court of Paris ordered the duke of Brittany to ride to Tours to explain himself. The king even formed a limited royal council for the matter, consisting of the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry, and of the bishops of Autun and Chartres. The king delegated the duke of Berry, the count of Étampes and Master Yves de Noviant to summon the duke to him.

The delegates were received at Nantes with much honour and great festivities. When they explained, however, why they had come, the Duke of Montfort became so angry and excited he would have imprisoned there and then the king's representatives. After much arguing, the duke promised to come to the king of France, but he did not want this to take place in the presence of Olivier de Clisson.

The duke of Brittany indeed came to Tours to speak to the king. He refuted all the allegations made against him. The discussions of Tours lasted no less than three months, and more than once the French lords arrived at the point of declaring war on Brittany! The dukes of Burgundy and Berry calmed the court, arguing that right at that moment peace negotiations were under way with English delegates. It was not opportune to start a new war in Brittany, they said!

The best way to end the conflict seemed to be by a double wedding. The daughter of the king of France would marry the son of the duke of Brittany, and the daughter of Brittany would marry the son of the count of Penthièvre.

Despite this agreement, the hatred between Montfort and de Clisson continued unabated.

The duke of Brittany returned to his lands. The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry travelled to Amiens, where the representatives of the king of England were to arrive a little before Easter of 1392. The negotiations of Amiens were led principally by the duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, with Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy. The English demanded the lands and clauses granted to them at the Treaty of Brétigny, as well as the rest of the ransom for the release of King John II.

The French demanded three million francs for the damages caused by the English troops in France. Since King John II had died in England, they argued, no ransom was to be paid by France! The English could keep what they still commanded, but the walls of Calais had to be demolished, and even the entire town.

With such irreconcilable and conflicting demands, the negotiations ended in the greatest courtesy, but with merely one more truce of one year as only result.

After the conclusion of Amiens, King Charles VI fell ill. He was brought to the palace of the bishop of Beauvais, and cared for by doctors. In June of 1392, the king was back in Paris.

The de Craon intrigue continued! Craon had sold all his domains to the duke of Brittany. He bought armour and weapons and horses for forty men, and gathered provisions in his beautiful hotel of Paris.

Somewhat later, the king organised a grand feast in his hotel of Saint-Paul at Paris. The Constable Clisson was one of the last invitees to leave the hotel homeward. He had eight unarmed servants with him, of whom two bore torches in the night. In the Saint Catherine Street of Paris, de Craon and his men attacked Clisson's company. As Clisson's people had no arms, they ran away. Clisson wore only a long dagger at his belt. He tried to defend himself. A blunt weapon struck his head. He fell down on the stones of the street. In falling, he opened a baker's door. The baker quickly drew him further in, closed his door behind Clisson and barricaded it. Luckily, it was a sturdy door, so that de Craon's men could not enter and reach the constable.

De Craon and his men, all on horseback, fled from Paris by the Gate of Saint Anthony.

The servants of Clisson had fled, but they soon returned. They found Clisson, lying in the baker's shop in a pool of blood, but still alive.

When King Charles VI heard of the treacherous attack on his confident, he went immediately to the baker's shop to comfort Clisson. Charles VI could talk to Clisson, who accused de Craon. The king then ordered the provost of Paris to arrest de Craon and his men.

Two of these men and a page were caught at seven miles from Paris, brought to the *Châtelet* prison, and sentenced four days later. They were first taken back to the Saint Catherine Street, the place of their crime. There, their wrists were cut off. Then they were taken to the Parisian *Halles*, the marketplace, where they were beheaded. Their corpses were hung on the gallows.

In the next days, a trial took place over Peter de Craon. All his possessions were confiscated, and his fine hotel of Paris destroyed. The Admiral Jean de Vienne rode with royal troops to Craon's castle of La Ferté-Bernard. De Craon's wife Jeanne de Châtillon and her daughter were chased half naked from the castle. Most of de Craon's lands were given to the duke of Touraine.

De Craon fled to the duchy of Brittany. Duke Montfort received a messenger of the king with the order to hand over de Craon, but the duke feigned knowing nothing about de Craon. King Charles VI felt insulted by this answer and wanted to declare open war on Brittany. Many other men at the royal court, mainly those men who did not like Olivier de Clisson and also not his influence on the king, were not inclined to go to war over this personal dispute. Moreover, it became known that Olivier de Clisson had dictated his testament when he had been wounded and lay in fear of death. The testament stated that Clisson left behind the very hefty sum of seventeen hundred thousand francs in ready coins, plus his extensive wealth in domains and castles. Where had Clisson amassed such a fortune? Even the king of France owed not such a great sum!

The king, however, insisted on war with Brittany. Burgundy and Berry were staunchly set against the war, but they were played down by the court and the *Marmousets*. They had to prepare their men-at-arms to join the king's great army. The king marched with his army to invade Brittany. The army marched to Chartres and from there to Le Mans. The grand army of France gathered at Le Mans in full.

At Le Mans, the king fell ill again. While Charles VI got better, a letter arrived at the court sent by the queen of Aragon. She wrote a Frenchman had wanted to hire a ship at Barcelona, bound for Naples. The man had been arrested. Many at the court suspected the man had been Peter de Craon. This news might mean the duke of Brittany had indeed known nothing of whereto de Craon had fled.

Nevertheless, the king wanted not to hear of any innocence in the matter by the duke of Brittany. He ordered the war preparations simply to continue. A major war was in the making. France would invade Brittany, and no doubt destroy it!

The king's madness

It was by then the beginning of August of the year 1392. The days were very hot and the army advanced in sandy lands, which accumulated and augmented the heat. King Charles was still a little ill, but he rode with his men from the roads of Le Mans, in the direction of Brittany. The court one day rode through the large forest of Le Mans. The king led the group. Behind him rode two squires in arms, wearing lances. The king rode almost alone that day. A little behind him followed the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry, in conversation. Then followed a group constituted by the dukes of Orléans and Bourbon, the lord of Coucy, and after them rode the lords of Navarra, of Albret, of Bar, of Artois, and many other of the most noble knights of France.

Suddenly, a tall man dressed in a white tunic sprang from out of the bushes beside the road. The man grasped the reins of the king's horse, crying, 'don't ride on, noble king, for you have been betrayed!'

The squires hit the man's hands, so that he released the reins of the king's horse. They caught the man by the arms. The squires saw the man was only a poor fool, so they let him go. The man followed the king's knights for about half an hour, shouting the same words.

The royal escort continued on, past the forest, into a sandy terrain where the sun struck with renewed power. It was very hot on this stretch of the road. No shadow refreshed the men who rode. One of the squires of the king had fallen asleep on his horse in this inferno. He dropped his lance. The king was startled, trembled, his horse pranced.

The king gave his horse the spurs, crying, 'forward! Forward! On to the traitors! The traitors want to take me and deliver me to my enemies!'

The king rode back on the road, straight into the groups that followed him, creating chaos among the men. He drew his sword and may have slain several men, among whom a bastard son of the count of Polignac. The king rode on with upheaved sword to the duke of Orléans, to strike the duke too. Burgundy shouted for Orléans to flee. The king pursued the other men, until he was exhausted. The king's chamberlain, the lord William de Martel could then put his two arms around the sovereign, so that he could be disarmed. King Charles VI then let himself be taken from his horse. He collapsed. Squires placed the king on an ox wagon. The arms of the king had to be constrained by ropes, for he kept sweeping them around him. Everybody returned to Le Mans.

The king continued to suffer from a severe fit of madness! He had not been wounded.

Elimination of the Marmousets

The uncle-dukes of King Charles VI used the occasion immediately to isolate the king from his favourite *Marmouset* courtiers, from Bureau de la Rivière, Noviant, Montaigu, Vilaines, Bordes, Lignac, and especially from Olivier de Clisson. The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry placed four chamberlains to guard over the king at Le Mans.

In the next days, the army was disbanded. There would be no war with Brittany! The king was brought to the castle of Creil-sur-Oise. A doctor of Laon, a friend and confidant of the lord of Coucy was called upon to care and try to heal the king. The doctor was called Guillaume de Harsely. Under his care, the king's health ameliorated slowly.

The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry organised a large assembly of nobles in Paris to decide on the government of the royal domains. The nobles concluded this task should be given to the uncle-dukes of the king, and in particular to Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy. The pregnant queen was given to the care of the duchess of Burgundy.

The uncle-dukes then set about to systematically destroy the authority of the counsellors of the king, the *Marmousets*. Olivier de Clisson, the constable, understood better than the other courtiers what was going to happen. He fled to safety in his castle of Montlhéry. The other Marmousets of the king were arrested. The dukes imprisoned the lords Lemercier, Noviant and Vilaines in the Louvre. Enguerrand de Coucy, William de la Trémoille, the lords of Château-Morand and of Barres were sent with three hundred men-at-arms to capture Clisson. Clisson had been warned of their coming. He had time to escape to his castle of Josselin in Brittany. Bureau de la Rivière surrendered quickly to the lord of Barres. The dukes also imprisoned him in the Louvre.

A trial of the counsellors took place in Paris. The judges sentenced Clisson to perpetual exile from France. He lost thus his title of constable of France. He also had to pay a ransom of one

hundred thousand francs. The sentence was given by the Parliament of Paris, and signed by the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry.

At that moment, the health of the king had evolved to a little better. His doctor de Harsely declared himself old and exhausted. He left the king, for he disliked intensely the atmosphere of intrigues at the royal court.

From then on, despite the king's better health, the uncle-dukes continued to reign in the name of Charles VI. The king desired negotiations with Olivier de Clisson, offering to his former confidant the restitution of the nobleman's domains and the annulment of the procedure of judgement. The Lord of Vilaines also recovered his freedom, but he received the advice to retire to his vast properties in Spain. The lord of Montaigu was equally released. Noviant and Rivière were taken to the Bastille of Saint-Anthony in Paris. All their possessions remained confiscated. Their trial and sentence took months to conclude. Many people, also members of the families of Burgundy and Berry, pleaded for them. The dukes of Orléans and Bourbon, and also Master Juvénal des Ursins, the provost of the merchants of Paris, pleaded in their favour with the king. Finally, after more than a year of imprisonment, King Charles ordered to set them free.

All that time, the tutelage over the king and over the administration of the kingdom was left to the queen, to the dukes of Burgundy, of Berry and of Bourbon, and to Duke Louis of Bavaria. The government of the kingdom was given to the king's brother, the duke of Orléans, the prince closest in relationship to the sovereign. In fact, however, power in France was exercised by the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry! They held strictly in 1393 to what the doctors had prescribed for the king: no strain, no stress. The king enjoyed himself with splendid festivities.

Despite the king's madness, Isabeau of Bavaria gave the king four children in the period from 1395 to 1400. She abandoned Charles VI to a mistress who resembled her very much, a horse-dealer's daughter called Odette de Champdivers. Odette received the nickname of the Little Queen at court. Isabeau also indulged herself to one feast after the other, and she behaved more than once scandalously, flirting with the younger courtiers.

The 'Bal des Ardents'

One of the sumptuous feasts of the royal court might have proven fatal for King Charles VI. The queen was celebrating the wedding of a German lady of her following. The marriage was to take place in the king's hotel of Saint-Paul. A grand feast concluded the ceremony.

Towards the end of the festivities, in the evening, when almost all the invited men were drunk from the wine, one of the most foolish guests, the lord of Guisay, imagined a masquerade.

The Lord Huguet de Guisay was young, cruel, insolent, and haughty. He indulged himself in all sorts of vice. He took pleasure in mistreating his servants and the common people, calling them no more than dogs. He took much joy from their cries of pain.

The squire of Guisay, four young knights and the king put on costumes of savages. They wore a long tunic of linen on which a resin had been poured to hold a skin of dark feathers, so that the men looked covered with hair from top to toe. They entered the hall, shouting and dancing wildly, led by the king, but wearing masks so that nobody could recognise who the savage dancers were. The men ran around, jumping, mocking and tormenting the ladies.

The duke of Orléans and the young count of Bar knew not who the men were. They imagined the ladies would be even more frightened when they put the fire to the costumes. The duke of Orléans took a torch and approached the wild savages. In an instant, the men danced in flames! Chaos ensued in the hall. The queen fainted, and other courtiers, who knew who the savages were, cried of, 'save the king!'

The duchess of Berry had the presence of mind to retain the man she supposed was King Charles VI. She covered him with her ample dress, so that no fire sparks reached the king. The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry were not at the feast at that moment. They now arrived rapidly in the hotel Saint-Paul, and noticed the king was unharmed. Of the four companions of the king, only the lord of Nantouillet saved himself. He jumped in flames into the container of water that served to cool the wine bottles! The others died horribly from their wounds, also Huguet de Guisay.

The feast was soon called the '*Bal des Ardents*' in Paris, the ball of the ardent, or of the 'fiery ones'. The people of Paris felt scandalised, indignant by what had happened at court. How had it been possible to expose the king, the symbol of the nation, to such dangerous frivolity? The people of Paris were revolted. They shouted their anger against the corrupted morals of the court. The king had to be shown in public still alive, and the day after the nobles of the court had to stage a procession of penitence. In that procession, the nobles walked behind a huge cross, from the Gate of Montmartre to the church of Notre-Dame. The king rode on a horse. The uncle-dukes and the duke of Orléans walked barefoot behind the king.

Peace negotiations

In 1393, Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, eagerly sought the peace with England. He thought he could only keep the peace in Flanders and in Hainault by assuring the peace with England. He did not need Englishmen to foment disorder and revolt in his tempestuous Flanders! The cloth commerce of Flanders linked the country to the excellent wool of England.

In England, John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster, did much to promote the peace, too. He convinced the war party of England to allow a chance to the new negotiations. These took place at Leulinghen, a small town between Calais and Boulogne, on the border of the county of Boulogne and of Ponthieu.

Leulinghen had been ravaged by the war. The meetings were held in a chapel covered with an old roof of thatch. The bad state of the half-ruined walls was hidden behind large tapestries representing battle scenes.

When he saw these scenes first, the duke of Lancaster gave the opinion such images of violence were better not shown while one was to discuss the peace, so the tapestries were replaced by other, depicting the passion of Our Lord. King Charles VI had found lodging in the neighbourhood, in Abbeville.

Both parties brought to the table the same arguments as the ones used at Amiens. The main delegates, Burgundy and Lancaster, could not do much more as to present the impasse to their respective kings.

At that time had appeared at the court of Abbeville a squire of about fifty years of age, a squire of Normandy called Robert Mencrot. He was such a pious man the people called him

Robert the Hermit. He had just returned from Palestine and Syria. A knight of the chamber of the king, Guillaume Martel, also a Norman, introduced that man to the king.

Robert the Hermit told how his ship had been surprised by a violent storm in the Mediterranean. Everybody on board had begun to pray. Then, Robert heard the wind calm and a figure, white and transparent as crystal, appeared to him. The figure ordered Robert to go to see the king of France. The white figure told the war with England had lasted long enough! It was time to make the peace. God would punish the men who resisted the peace-making.

King Charles VI received the words of Robert the Hermit very favourably.

Philip of Burgundy thought it judicious to bring Robert Mencrot also to the English delegates, to repeat his divine message. John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster, was much touched by the hermit's words.

Despite the intervention of the Holy Man, the negotiations of Leulinghen could not be concluded. The only item of agreement was that the English promised to hand over the harbour of Cherbourg back to the king of Navarra. Navarra's father had sold the town for only sixty thousand écus. Navarra bought the town back.

At the end of the negotiations of Leulinghen, King Charles VI recuperated from his madness. The doctor Harsely who had saved the king from his first sickness, had deceased. The nobles called on other doctors, among whom a magician of Guyenne, one Arnout Guilhem, to cure the king. Despite many processions and many pious prayers, the king got no better. Seven months later, the madness left the king, as suddenly as it had come.

At the royal court of France, the intrigues raged. The lord of Clisson fought the duke of Brittany. The duke of Orléans helped de Clisson with troops.

Master Juvénel des Ursins, provost of the merchants of Paris, tried to save the lords Noviant and Rivière, and had in doing so angered Philip the Bold. The duke of Burgundy thereupon found witnesses to bring forward information against Juvénel. Juvénel was called to the king at Vincennes, accompanied by more than four hundred of the most notable, rich, influential inhabitants of Paris. Juvénel spoke so well with the king, the sovereign ended the accusations against the provost.

Somewhat later, the king also liberated Noviant and Rivière. Then he went on a pilgrimage to the Mont Saint-Michel.

The schism in the Church

In September of 1389, King Charles VI had conferred with his younger brother, Duke Louis of Orléans and with his uncle, the duke of Bourbon, over the schism in the Church. Together, they proposed to regain the sole control of the papacy in Italy for Pope Clement. They would thus also win for Louis of Orléans the illusive, as yet undefined kingdom of Adria in the north of Italy, as well as for Louis II of Anjou the kingdom of Naples in the south. Pope Clement even crowned Louis II, duke of Anjou, to king of Naples. Nothing came of these plans, however, for lack of means.

The University of Paris sought the unity of the Church, the end of the schism. The duke of Berry also tried to bring about the end of the schism. He, however, supported the current Pope Clement of Avignon.

In the spring of 1391, yet another idea to end the schism had matured in France. The French court concluded on yet another expedition against Pope Boniface to chase him from the Holy City. In favour of this plan were the duke of Berry and the lord of de la Trémoille. The expedition was called off in March of 1391, for it proved to be too expensive.

In the year 1394, many forces of France had once more tried to end the schism in the Church. One of the university's most noted doctors was Master Nicolas Clémengys, archdiacre of Bayeux. Clémengys spoke out in hard words against the schism.

Pope Clement tried to lead the University into discredit. He sent the Cardinal Peter de Luna of Aragon to plead his cause at the French royal court.

The doctors of the University presented also their conclusions to the king. The scholars had devised three ways to end the schism.

The first solution was for the two current popes to renounce to their function at the same time, and then to organise a new election at a conclave of the joint cardinals of Rome and Avignon. The second was to agree on a group of persons who would decide on the destiny of the popes and leave only one in office.

The third was to organise a general council of the Church. This solution was but an extreme one, for among so many factions of ecclesiastics, disputes were sure to rise.

France proposed the popes to choose among these three solutions. The University of Paris advised the king to renounce to the one pope who would refuse a solution to end the schism. Charles VI even ordered a translation of the report to be made in French, so that everybody could debate easier on the issue.

In the meantime, however, the Cardinal de Luna had intrigued so much at the royal court, that the court told the University to mind its own business.

Pope Clement then called the scholars of the University to Avignon. He was so angry with the arguments exposed by the doctors, that he died on the sixteenth of September of 1394!

As soon as the news reached Paris, the royal council convened. The king wrote a letter to the cardinals of Avignon, asking them to postpone the election of a new pope until he would have sent them an official embassy. The University also asked the king to send a clear message to Pope Boniface in Rome, urging him to peace and reconciliation.

In Avignon, the Cardinal de Luna persuaded the other cardinals not to open the letter of the king of France until after the election. He himself was almost unanimously chosen as the new pope, with the name of Benedict XIII.

The king then ordered the second of February of 1395 to discuss the matter. Charles VI did not formally recognise Benedict XIII in the meantime. He was displeased with the election of Avignon.

While this happened in Paris, Philip the Bold of Burgundy succeeded in reconciling the duke of Brittany with Olivier de Clisson. The insidious war in Brittany could end. Montfort and Clisson swore to friendship.

In February of 1395, the royal council of France met on the matter of the schism. The proposal arrived at was to demand the double abdication of the two popes. This message was to be delivered at Avignon by the dukes of Orléans, Burgundy and Berry, with the bishop of Senlis, the delegates from the University of Paris, and the wisest men of the court. This embassy reached Lyon on the eighth of May of 1395.

There, they encountered ambassadors from the king of Hungary, who came to ask help from the king of France against the invading Turks. Burgundy and Orléans told them to continue their journey to Paris.

The dukes arrived at Villeneuve-les-Avignon, French territory near the city of the popes, on the twenty-second of May of 1395. The next day opened the conference with Pope Benedict. After long discussions, all the cardinals except the cardinal of Pamplona asked Benedict to accept the proposal of King Charles VI.

Of course, Benedict refused flatly, so that on the eighth of July of 1395 Philip the Bold told to the pope his embassy would return to Paris empty-handed. The king would not be pleased.

A royal marriage

Matters of the highest importance called the uncle-dukes back to the king. The king of England, King Richard II, had joined the peace party in his kingdom. He sought the peace arduously. Having lost his wife, Anne of Bohemia, he asked the hand of Isabelle, the daughter of the king of France, even though Isabelle was only seven years old at that moment.

An English embassy arrived in France in July of 1395, composed of the archbishop of Dublin, the Admiral Count of Rutland, and the Marshal Count of Northumberland, with a delegation of more than five hundred persons.

Many nobles at the court of France were of the opinion a daughter of the king could not be promised to an enemy. Still, the chancellor of France, Lord Arnaud de Corbie, a very wise and prudent man, spoke in favour of the proposal. The French court remained prudent too. It gave a courteous promise that was quite favourable. It asked to reconvene on the matter in the spring of 1396, to conclude the marriage and to agree if not on the peace, at least on a truce of twenty-eight years between the two kingdoms.

Philip the Bold was in favour of the peace and of the marriage. Berry and Orléans showed themselves more reserved.

The royal council decided to send Robert the Hermit to the English court. He would have to try to persuade the war faction in England, mainly the duke of Gloucester, towards the conclusion of the peace. Robert indeed spoke to Gloucester for two days. He tried to convince the duke of the necessity of peace. Gloucester told him he was not averse to the peace, but not at the expense of the honour of England. Gloucester stuck obstinately to his opinion.

In the beginning of the year 1396, ambassadors of England came to Paris to discuss the modalities of the marriage. The dowry was established at eight hundred thousand gold francs, of which three hundred thousand would be paid immediately by France, one hundred thousand at the moment the queen went to live with the king of England, and one hundred thousand each successive year. The children of the marriage would not be allowed to claim the throne of France.

The marriage contract was signed on the ninth of March of 1396. The marriage was celebrated with much pomp.

Ten days before the ceremony, the truce of twenty-eight years was signed between the uncles of the king of France and the English ambassadors.

Nicopolis

While the marriage between the daughter of the king of France and the king of England was being discussed and concluded, the ambassadors of the king of Hungary arrived at the court of Paris. The ambassadors were a bishop of Hungary and four of the principal noblemen of the country. They told the court the Turk Sultan Bajazet threatened to invade the Christian kingdoms with a huge army. Bajazet had let it be known he would give his horse to eat at the main altar of Saint Peter's of Rome! The king of Hungary wrote how cruel the Turks treated the Christian populations in the countries they conquered.

The ascent of the Turks in Europe had begun about fifty years ago. The first time they were named with some apprehension for danger in the eastern European lands was when in 1353, the Turkish Ottoman Sultan Murad I had conquered Gallipoli, the key to the Hellespont. Ten years later, Sultan Murad I had brought his capital quite into Europe, to Adrianople. In 1371, he defeated a large army of Serbs and Bulgars in the territory of Bulgaria itself. In 1389, Murad I defeated yet another army of Serb, Rumanian and Moldavian troops in the Battle of Kosovo. By this battle, the Turks could invade Serbia and occupy the land. The king of Serbia died in the battle, but also Sultan Murad. The new sultan was chosen on the battlefield. His name was Bajazet.

Sultan Bajazet invaded Serbia and Macedonia, strengthened his hold in Bulgaria and even besieged Constantinople for seven years. He captured Tirnovo, the capital of the eastern Bulgarian kingdom in 1393.

Bajazet also captured Nicopolis, a strong double fortress on the Danube. Nicopolis consisted of a high town and a lower one, both formidable fortresses. Nicopolis dominated the Danube, in front of a similar but Rumanian fortress on the opposite bank. Two rivers, tributaries of the Danube, entered the stream here, so that Nicopolis was also a strategic site that controlled much of the trade with the interior of Bulgaria. Sultan Bajazet sent troops to attack Vidin, the capital of the western Bulgarian kingdom. He threatened to throw an army of forty thousand warriors against Hungary.

Sigismund of Luxemburg had become king of Hungary by marrying the daughter of the last Angevin king of the land, Louis the Great, who died without male heirs. Sigismund was an important figure, for he was the son of the late Emperor Charles IV and the younger half-brother to the current Emperor Wenceslas. He was a tall, strong and handsome man.

Sigismund was intelligent and well-educated. He was a brave warrior, a man who meant well for his subjects, but also somewhat extravagant. He had been reproached for his several love affairs in Hungary.

In favour of the envoys of Hungary were the duke of Burgundy, the constable d'Eu, and the Marshal Boucicault, as well as Peter de la Trémoille.

In fact, Philip the Bold had sent William de la Trémoille to the king of Hungary with the advice to ask for the aid of France by an official embassy! Philip the Bold had thus persuaded the king of Hungary to send the embassy!

The king of France was favourable to the idea of a crusade, and so were many other courtiers of France. The expedition to Hungary was soon decided upon, and was to be led by the young Count John of Nevers, the oldest son of the duke of Burgundy. Under his command would serve the constable of France, the count d'Eu.

Many nobles were enthusiastic to accompany the two men: the Admiral de Vienne, the Marshal Boucicault, the two lords of Bar, the count de la Marche who was a cousin of the king, the lord of Saimpy, the lord of Roye, and the lord de la Trémoille.

For the large army and the expenses of the many noblemen, high taxes were necessary in the kingdom. These taxes were levied in France. Flanders had to pay large sums, too. Money had also to be borrowed from Venice and Vienna.

In August of 1394, the cities and the county of Flanders had already given sixty-five thousand pound Groot to the duke of Burgundy. The towns of Mechelen and Antwerp had given two thousand pound Groot each. In 1396, Flanders contributed the same amount, and the towns and Mechelen and Antwerp gave once more two thousand pounds for the expenses of the crusade of the count of Nevers. Burgundy had wanted to have two hundred thousand pound from Flanders, but the Flemish cities had negotiated for one hundred thirty thousand pounds.

On the sixth of April of 1396, the count of Nevers departed from Paris. He rode first to Dijon to say goodbye to his mother and his family. On the thirtieth of April, he left for Germany. The plan was to liberate Hungary from the Turks, and then to march to Constantinople, to pass the Hellespont, to enter into Syria, to liberate Palestine and the Holy Tomb of Our Lord, and to return by the sea to France.

The count of Ostrevant, son of Duke Albert of Hainault, soon joined Nevers. Numerous lords of Hainault accompanied him. The count of Ostrevant tried to recruit men-at-arms and archers in England. Earl Henry of Derby, son of John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster, wanted to join in the adventure. On the advice of the duke of Guelders, however, he remained in England. Ostrevant could rally to the banners of Hainault only few knights, squires and archers of England! Nevertheless, the lords of Jumont and of de Ligne of Hainault accompanied Ostrevant.

Other allies for France would be the Knights Hospitallers of Rhodes, and also Venice, which would supply a fleet. German princes and the Hungarian army would join the French. Pope Benedict XIII gave the crusaders the papal absolution for crimes committed on their campaign.

While the expedition to Hungary was under way, King Charles VI entered one fit of madness after the other. He dismissed his doctors, for he felt exhausted from their useless remedies. He also fired the most famous Master Renault Feron with them. The king often thought his real name was Georges. He broke all the windows of his castles that bore the *fleur-de-lys*, the white lilies of his coat-of-arms.

The people attributed the pain of the king to Valentina Visconti, wife of the duke of Orléans. Orléans therefore withdrew for a while from Paris. The ruler of Milan sent delegates to complain about the insults he had heard against his daughter.

In the meantime also, King Richard II was at Calais, discussing the final preparations for the official wedding with the daughter of Charles VI. Mainly Philip the Bold talked with Richard II.

From at the end of October of 1396, the court of France travelled slowly from Paris to Calais, with King Charles VI and Isabelle, the little princess. The dukes of Lancaster, Gloucester and Rutland came to the king of France for the very last preparations. Burgundy, Berry and Bourbon went for the same purpose to King Richard II. In the absence of the constable of France, the count of Eu on crusade, it was the count of Harcourt who wore the sword of France as constable. The last preparations were discussed in a large camp of tents near the town of Ardres.

The two kings met in solemn ceremony. Then, the little princess was handed over to the English in a splendid procession of decorated wagons and horses. After endless banquets and other festivities, the king of France returned to Saint-Omer. The dukes of Burgundy and of Berry rode with King Richard II to Calais for the marriage celebrations on the fourth of November of 1396.

During this time, the lord of Craon had returned to Paris to be judged in a trial. The queen of Sicily had started a procedure against him at the Parliament of Paris! The Parliament sentenced Craon to pay one hundred thousand francs immediately. He could not gather that sum! He was therefore imprisoned in the Louvre. Now, King Charles VI allowed de Craon longer terms to pay the amount, and he liberated de Craon from prison.

King Richard II gave the fortress of Cherbourg back to the king of Navarra. Richard still sought the alliance with Brittany! He offered the earldom of Richmond to the duke of Brittany, and also the harbour of Brest. This angered very much the duke of Gloucester. Gloucester had remained a partisan of the war with France. Philip the Bold had tried in vain to bring Gloucester to more peaceful attitudes towards France. Philip the Bold admitted his failure in turning Gloucester around.

For long months, no news arrived from the crusade to Hungary. Then, in the month of December of 1396, groups of poor men arrived in France. They arrived half-naked, half-dead from the cold, exhausted, and starved. These were the miserable rests of the troops that had survived the terrible massacre and destruction of the grand French army sent against the Turks!

Philip the Bold was very worried about his son, the count of Nevers. One of his knights, William de l'Aigle, the chamberlain of the duke, offered to leave for Athens and Rhodes by Venice, to hear about what had happened.

The truth about the fate of the French crusader army came finally to be known in detail when the Lord Jacques de Helly, a knight from Artois, arrived at the king's hotel Saint-Paul in Paris. He had been with the crusader army, and he had participated in the great Battle of Nicopolis, in which the Christian army had been annihilated by the Turks. Jacques de Helly arrived in Paris at Christmas Day of 1396. He told the sad story of the campaign.

The French army had traversed Bavaria and Austria. On the twenty-fourth of June of 1396, the crusaders reached Vienna, and in July they had arrived at Buda in Hungary. The army had been followed by boats on the Danube that transported the best French wine in barrels. Many men also had brought women of bad morals with them. They enjoyed the favours of the local girls for money. The French had feasted all the way, and pillaged the countries they passed through, so that the lords of the lands were disgusted at the crusader's army. The priests had tried in vain to halt the corruption of the French!

In August of 1396, the Christian army crossed the Danube at Orsova to reach the right bank. At that moment, the Christian army was still about nine thousand men strong. The Turkish hordes seemed to have withdrawn to Asia, so the king of Hungary did not really need the French army anymore, and rather regarded the French now more as a plague than as a saviour army. The Christians decided to continue the crusade, however, following the Danube Stream. The count of Nevers and the Connétable d'Eu sent a knight of Flanders, the Lord William of Rupel, who knew the German language, to talk to the king of Hungary on how to advance. The lord of Rupel spoke about the terrain, and about the hardships that might lay on the way

to Constantinople. Sigismund of Luxemburg, the king of Hungary, knew the Turks well for having fought them. He told the lord of Rupel about the ferocity of the Turks. He told they had a strong front guard of horsemen, which had not to be confused with the real army. The king advised the Christians to also form a reconnaissance group, and to wait patiently until the main Turkish army would arrive. The front guard was not worth bothering with! King Sigismund was certain Sultan Bajazet would bring an army to confront the Christians soon. Bajazet would not allow the Christians to advance much farther!

The French nobles felt rather offended the king of Hungary urged them to so much prudence. The young knights threw prudence in the wind. The older warriors, such as the lord of Coucy and the Admiral de Vienne, found such bravado quite vain. The count of Nevers, the Connétable d'Eu and Marshal Boucicault were as impatient to fight as the young knights. The French army captured a few fortresses and villages. At a town called Rachova, the Turks resisted so strongly behind their walls, the king of Hungary had to bring his army to the siege to aid the French. Only then did the town surrender.

Then, the French laid a new siege to the large, very fortified town in which a strong garrison of Turks guarded for the sultan. This town was called Nicopolis, the first aim of the expedition. The French had brought but few cannons with them, and no siege engines, so they would have to starve the town to take it by surrender. Unknown to them, a Turkish army of twenty thousand men was under way to relieve this town.

The lords of Coucy, Saimpy and Roye took five hundred knights. They trapped the front guard of the Turks in an ambush, and defeated the enemy. This angered the younger knights, who envied Coucy. They now reproached him for having endangered a part of the army. The French knights set up their tents near Nicopolis. The fortress was formidable, but the French army set up a siege at the town. The Turkish defence had been organised by the governor Dogan Bey.

The French indulged in festivities, in wine, women and debauchery while they waited at Nicopolis.

The Sultan Bajazet advanced while the French feasted. His troops were from twelve thousand to twenty thousand men strong, according to some sources.

When Bajazet's army arrived at Nicopolis, the French began by attacking the front guard. The Turks had planted sharpened wooden stakes in the ground, in front of their cavalry.

Nevertheless, the French knights rode into this defence, lost many men but broke it, and chased the Turkish cavalry away. The Turkish front guard fled. The French knights pursued them, and rode into the large, terrible arms of the enormous centre of warriors of the Turks. The Turkish leaders had merely applied a much tried-out, traditional tactics of their warriors. Sultan Bajazet could easily surround the French, close the wings of his army, crush and destroy the French. The Hungarian troops had already fled, abandoning the French crusaders to their fate. King Sigismund tried in vain to rally his men back to the battle. To save his life, he and the grand-master of the knights of Rhodes, Philibert de Naillac, had to jump into a small boat and row up the Danube.

The French fought well, but they were defeated.

The lord Philip de Bar and the Admiral de Vienne were killed in the Battle of Nicopolis. Sultan Bajazet ordered to spare the noblemen of France, for he wanted to ransom them for much money. Sultan Bajazet recognised Jacques de Helly among the prisoners, for de Helly

had fought a long time ago in Bajazet's army against other infidels. Bajazet ordered de Helly to single out among the prisoners the main knights of France. The count of Nevers, the count of Eu, the count Jacques de la Marche, the lord Enguerrand of Coucy and twenty or so more knights were pushed aside. The other prisoners were brought before Bajazet and mercilessly executed. The count of Nevers could save Boucicault by asking grace for him to Sultan Bajazet.

Bajazet later sent Jacques de Helly to France to demand the ransom money.

The Christian prisoners had to march to Gallipoli on foot, and from there to Brusas, the Ottoman capital in far Asia.

The news of the defeat spread rapidly in France. The French lords began to assemble the ransom money. The duke of Burgundy sent to the Turkish Sultan the knight Jacques de Helly with three of his most respectable knights, the lord of Vergy, the governor of the county of Burgundy and the lord of Château-Morand with the Flemish lord of Levreghem, the sovereign bailiff of Flanders, Mechelen and Antwerp. They would have to negotiate the exact amount of the ransom with Bajazet. Philip the Bold gave magnificent presents for Bajazet with these men, among which splendid tapestries made at Arras.

The lords found the court of Bajazet, discussed with him, and returned to France. High taxes were once more levied in France, Burgundy and Flanders, for the liberation of the count of Nevers. The financier for Burgundy to handle the delivery of the ransom was a Lombard merchant from the town of Lucca, called Dino Raspondi. Raspondi arranged for the payment of the ransom. He also advised the Duke Philip the Bold on how to gather so much money.

During the imprisonment by the Turks, Enguerrand de Coucy died. He died at Brusas on the eighteenth of February of 1397. With his death ended the lineage of Coucy, which had originated from the ancient counts of Guines. His body was brought back to France and buried in the town of Nogent.

Sultan Bajazet offered the freedom of the count of Nevers and of twenty-four other knights who were still with him, for the ransom of two hundred thousand ducats, a huge sum. The arrangement for the money, to which many parties contributed, also the king of Hungary, could be finalised by a merchant of Genoa, Bartolomeo Pellegrini. He was established as a trader at Chios. He had great credit with Sultan Bajazet.

The Marshal Boucicault and the lord de la Trémoille were allowed to go to Mytilene to borrow more money. From there, they sailed to Rhodes, where they obtained money from the prior of Aquitaine. The Connétable d'Eu died there. Boucicault gathered enough money and returned to France. The Connétable d'Eu, however, died in the east.

The king of Hungary paid to Raspondi the amount he had promised, half the ransom money. He used funds Venice paid him yearly. When Raspondi had delivered the entire ransom, the prisoners were liberated.

In February of 1398, the count of Nevers, Boucicault, Guillaume de la Trémoille and Jacques de la Marche arrived in France. Nevers first rode to Dijon, and then he visited several cities of Burgundy and Flanders, where he was welcomed with cheers and in triumph.

Sultan Bajazet had proven to be a great conqueror. He would never reach Rome, however, nor conquer much more territory to the west of Nicopolis. On the twentieth of July of the year 1402, the Turkish-Mongol leader Timur, called Timur the Lame or Tamerlane, defeated the

Ottoman army at Ankara. Timur captured Sultan Bajazet alive. Bajazet died in an iron cage placed on a wagon.

The conflict with Avignon

The year 1397 saw King Charles VI several times sick with the madness that affected him. Many charlatans arrived at the court. They tried all sorts of tricks and remedies on the king. Nothing helped, and some of these men were found to be thieves and liars. They were hanged or burned at the stake in Paris.

At the end of 1397, Wenceslas of Luxemburg, king of Bohemia and emperor of Germany, proposed a conference with the king of France to discuss the schism in the Church. The town of Rheims was designated for the discussions. The court of France received the emperor of Germany with great pomp. He was, however, a drunkard and a rude man, a bad-tempered, irritable and violent man, who could come to fits of cruelty with his knights as well as his servants. He did not even appear at some of the meetings.

Philip the Bold had heard what kind of man Wenceslas was, so he had not even bothered to ride to Rheims! His son, the count of Nevers, recently arrived in France from captivity, stayed at Rheims for a couple of days.

The conference proved indeed useless. How could it have been otherwise, with a king of France who was out of his wits half the time and the emperor of Germany drunk the other half? The conference broke up, having achieved nothing.

The people knew about the state of the king and the emperor, as they did about the two popes of Avignon and Rome. They mocked the grand shame of the Christians, as the Sultan of the Turks had done to the count of Nevers during his captivity. Many people thought the madness of the king of France might be a punishment for the dire state the kings had left Christianity in!

At the end of 1399, an assembled Diet of the nobles of Germany deposed the always drunken and depraved Emperor Wenceslas. They appointed Ruprecht von der Pfalz, palatine count of Bavaria, as emperor. In France, the duke of Orléans supported Wenceslas, but the duke of Burgundy abided by the decision of the Diet. Wenceslas remained king of Bohemia until his death in 1419.

On the twenty-second of May of 1398, in the palace of the king, the archbishops, bishops and abbots of the kingdom of France assembled with the representatives of the Universities to discuss once more the matters of the Church. The king of Navarra, the dukes of Orléans, of Burgundy, of Berry and of Bourbon were present for the sick King Charles VI.

Master Simon Cramault, patriarch of Alexandria, opened the conference with a fine history of the schism. The conference then lasted for eight days, with arguments given by six doctors and counter-arguments by six others. The bishop of Mâcon pleaded in favour of Benedict XIII, the pope of Avignon. Decisions were postponed to the month of July of 1398.

In the time between May and July, King Charles VI felt a little better. He was in favour of a resolution to withdraw the Church of France from obeisance to the popes of Avignon. This conclusion was also given by the chancellor of the king to the assembly. The conference ended in a solemn procession to thank God for having inspired the wise decision. Master Gilles Deschamps explained in passionate but simple terms the motives of the decision to the public.

At that time, the abbot of Saint-Denis died. The duke of Burgundy recommended to appoint the Master de Villette, a young theologian to the task. The appointment had to be confirmed by the pope, but now only the confirmation of the bishop of Paris was asked. To support the nomination, the dukes of Burgundy and of Berry personally accompanied the new abbot to his church.

In September of 1398, the cardinals of Avignon wrote to the king they approved of the refusal of France to recognise still the pope of Avignon. They declared themselves ready to name Benedict XIII a heretic and a schismatic if he would refuse to accept the verdict. Two cardinals only remained faithful to the pope of Avignon: the cardinals of Pamplona and of Tarragona. With their aid, the pope contrived to have troops of Aragon come to his defence. The other cardinals fled to French territory, to Villeneuve. The people of the town of Avignon rose to war against the pope and against the men-at-arms of Aragon.

The king then delegated the Marshal Boucicault with troops to Avignon. He also asked the bishop of Cambrai, Pierre d'Ailly, to persuade the pope to relent. Benedict XIII organised a new meeting with the French cardinals. The cardinal of Amiens pleaded to honour the decision of the king of France, but Benedict XIII wanted to hear of no stepping down from his function. The pope refused to obey to the king. The Marshal Boucicault had by then arrived at Saint-André, ten miles from Avignon. The cardinals told him the pope wanted to hear nothing of the decision of the cardinals of France. Boucicault instantly blocked all the roads to Avignon. The people of Avignon negotiated with Boucicault, and they allowed the marshal into the town. The cardinal of Neufchâtel accompanied him.

The siege of the castle-palace of Avignon began. The pope had amassed provisions for two years, but Boucicault's men sent Grecian fire into the warehouse where the pope had stored his wood. As the winter of 1398 to 1399 started, the men inside the castle suffered very much from the cold. Beams of the roofs had even to be torn down to warm the meals. The cardinal of Pamplona and Boniface Ferrier, the general of the Chartreux Order, tried to escape, but were caught and imprisoned. The king of Aragon sent no more reinforcements to the pope.

On the fourth of April of 1399, some sort of truce was declared. The pope accepted not to leave the palace of Avignon as long as the peace was not re-established in the Church. Provisions would be allowed into the palace, but the roads remained blocked. In reality, the pope of Avignon had become a prisoner of his castle. The man who conducted this affair for the peace of the Church, was Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy.

Pope Benedict XIII fled the imprisonment of Avignon for Perpignan in 1403. From then on, no more popes resided in Avignon. The Great Schism of the Church ended only in 1415 with the election of the unique Pope Martin V in Rome.

France until the death of Philip the Bold

The duke of Orléans became very envious of the prestige gained by Philip the Bold during this affair of the pope of Avignon. Others joined his party, among whom the duke of Bourbon and the duke of Berry. Berry would join anything for money! Orléans succeeded in replacing the Chancellor Arnaud de Corbie by Master Nicolas Dubois, bishop of Bayeux. The lord of Montaigu was to hold the government of the finances of the

king, of the queen and of the duke of Orléans. Philip the Bold had to face a powerful party directed against him in France.

In the year 1399, King Richard II turned against the Lord Appellants in England. He had his uncle, the duke of Gloucester murdered, exiled for perpetuity the earl of Warwick, and Arundel sentenced to death. The earl of Derby, son of John of Gaunt, arrived in Paris, exiled for six years. Especially the dukes of Berry and of Orléans became his friends.

When King Charles VI sent the Marshal Boucicault with twelve hundred knights and their men to help the emperor of Constantinople, the earl of Derby wanted to leave with them. King Charles VI and the duke of Lancaster refused, however, to let Derby run any risks in this expedition. Derby stayed in France! He concluded a treaty of mutual assistance with the duke of Orléans.

Derby had fallen in love with the daughter of the duke of Berry. This lady had already been widowed twice, of the counts of Blois and of Eu. She was a great beauty. The king of England dispatched the earl of Salisbury to France, to put a halt to the ambitions of marriage of the young Derby. King Richard II even wrote to King Charles VI Derby was a traitor to the crown of England, not to be trusted in France. King Charles VI could now call King Richard II his son-in-law, so he complied. With the assistance of the duke of Berry, he forbade Derby formally to seek the hand of the countess of Eu! Also Burgundy was against the marriage, and treated Derby as a traitor.

At that moment, John of Gaunt died. King Richard II refused to grant the title of duke to the earl of Derby. Derby knew of the situation in England. He saw his chance for a bold move. Derby surreptitiously left the court of Paris. Philip the Bold ordered his men to arrest Derby on the roads to Calais, but Derby rode by then as fast as he could to Brittany. He sailed back to England, arriving there in July of 1399. Derby received much support. His own troops defeated royalist troops. King Richard II was deposed by Derby, and Derby was recognised as King Henry IV.

When King Charles VI heard of what change had happened in England, he fell sick again. Charles VI had already been sick in the head seven times in that year of 1399! The lord of Sancerre, the new constable of France, had even sent the Holy Shroud of Our Lord to the king, but the relic had no effect on Charles.

The French court sided with King Richard II, but the treasury of the kingdom was empty. King Henry IV also desired peace with France. He needed to ascertain his rights on the throne of England. The royal court of France merely asked to send the little princess Isabelle back to France. A delegation sailed to England to negotiate her return. These talks lasted a long time, until after even the death of King Richard II had been announced.

In France, the court and the people regarded England doubly reprehensible, once for having made such a cruel war with France, and once for having as king a man who had betrayed and deposed the son-in-law of Charles VI. Richard II had wanted peace with France. Had not a twenty-eight years truce been signed? What wanted Henry IV? Part of the courtiers desired to go to war against this England and against Henry IV. Others, men who had known Henry of Derby a little better, refused to make war over the little princess Isabelle. One of these last was Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy. The duke of Orléans was of the opposite opinion, so the discord between Burgundy and Orléans widened also with this issue. A new, bitter internal conflict was in the making in France between these two powerful men.

On the first of November of 1399 died the duke Montfort of Brittany. Some suspicion of poisoning was whispered. The duke of Orléans immediately massed troops at the border of Brittany. His intention was to obtain the guardianship over the merely ten years old new duke of Brittany. He would have brought the young duke to France, as the boy was engaged to the second daughter of King Charles VI. The barons of Brittany, however, encouraged by Philip the Bold, tried to keep the young duke inside the fief of Brittany. The following years would see more of such differences of opinion between Orléans and Burgundy. The events led far into the fifteenth century.

The year of 1400 would mean a new jubilee year for Rome. France still did not recognise Pope Boniface of Rome, even though French warriors held the pope of Avignon a prisoner in his castle. Rome was nevertheless regarded as the holy capital of Christianity. At the court of Paris, King Charles VI considered the pilgrimages a danger for the country. The men that would depart on pilgrimage to Rome might be so numerous as to leave the country defenceless and weak. The men on pilgrimage might also deplete entirely the finances of France. In a royal ordinance, Charles VI therefore forbade his subjects to go on pilgrimage to Rome. His order had little effect.

The fate of the pilgrims in the Holy City was utterly deplorable, so that the decision of the king proved to have been a very wise one. Pilgrims died of the plague, which resurged in that period. Many were maltreated in Rome or under way. Their money was stolen unashamedly by bandits and by the guards of Pope Boniface. Many French pilgrims were killed by groups of bandits on the roads of Italy. Much misery was brought back to France from Rome!

The people had already been impoverished by the taxes for the wars. Many lands remained untilled, especially in Picardy. Vagabonds and bandits multiplied by the day, replacing the groups of the diminished former mercenaries of the Free Companies. The prisons were filled with criminals.

In the Languedoc, Charles VI had reinstalled the duke of Berry as governor. Berry had cruelly extorted the last money from the inhabitants of the region. Now, the exactions regained force. The finances of the kingdom passed to the authority of the duke of Orléans, into the hands of the lord of Montaigu. These two men did nothing but sadden the fate of the French people even more.

Philip the Bold of Burgundy handled the return of the little princess Isabelle to France. King Henry IV sent Isabelle back to France in 1401. He kept the dowry and her jewels, arguing her dowry had not been paid in full.

Philip the Bold went to meet her when she disembarked at Calais, and welcomed her back at the chapel of near Leulinghen.

After her return, for the very first time in a long, long period, he visited Flanders. He returned to arrange for his heritage.

John the Fearless, count of Nevers, Philip's oldest son, would receive the duchy of Burgundy and the counties of Flanders and Artois, with the castellanies of Mechelen, Aalst and Dendermonde. He would also inherit the Franche-Comté, the county of Burgundy, and the castellany of Salins.

Anthony of Burgundy would receive the county of Nevers and the barony of Donzy. He would marry the daughter of Waleran of Luxemburg, count of Liney and Saint-Pol.

In September of 1390, Duchess Joanna of Brabant had been thinking about her succession, as she had remained childless. She was well inclined toward her niece Margaret of Male, and toward her niece's husband, Philip the Bold of Burgundy. She had proposed to have Philip the

Bold inherit her duchy. The towns and lords of Brabant, however, wanted to have a lord of their own, for their own. The final agreement was to have the duchy of Brabant go to Anthony, the son of Philip the Bold. Anthony would become duke of Brabant after the duchess's death. One of the conditions of the towns of Brabant had been that Anthony was to be educated near the duchess of Brabant. After the death of the duchess of Brabant, Anthony would also inherit the town and castellany of Antwerp, the duchy of Limburg and the lands called of Outre-Meuse, on the other side of the Meuse Stream.

Philip, the third son of Philip the Bold, would receive the county of Rethel, Château-Regnaud, and lands in the Champagne. If the duke of Berry would die without male children, he would also get the county of Étampes, and the castellanies of Dourdan and Gien.

These arrangements were agreed upon with the kings, dukes and counts of France, Germany and of the Low Countries.

Philip the Bold died not long afterward, on the twenty-seventh of April of 1404. He died from a sickness at Halle in Flanders, sixty-three years old. His son John became the new duke of Burgundy. Anthony took the title of duke of Limburg, and Philip of count of Nevers.

Philip the Bold's daughter Margaret, had married William of Bavaria, count of Ostrevant, the future count of Hainault. His other daughter, Catherine, was married to Frederick of Austria, and Mary was married to Amédée, count of Savoie.

Philip the Bold's wife Margaret of Male, did not survive her husband for long. She died on the sixteenth of March of 1405.

Philip the Bold had lost two sons and a daughter.

The illustrious lineage of the Valois dukes of Burgundy would continue with John the Fearless.

With time, the dukes would reign over practically all of the lands mentioned, and many more. The dream of Count Louis of Male would come true far beyond his expectations.

The Pharaïldis Families

A new wave of the sickness of the pest harassed Ghent, Antwerp and the Low Countries in the year of 1399. This was one of the reasons why so many people travelled to Rome for the jubilee year. Many perished under way. This wave of the pest was not as murderous as the preceding ones, though as terrible for the people who succumbed to the sickness. It lasted longer throughout Europe, and especially in Italy. As previously, from what I, William Terhagen, had read from the chronicles of my father, the plague started after the winter in our lands. It raged this time from March to August. We of the Pharaïldis families, left our cities, as our fathers had done before, to hide inside our castles. Beoostenblijje had been given to one of Count Louis of Male's warrior bastards. Although this man was one of Heyla de Smet's sons, we had scarce contact with him. We brought the Pharaïldis men and women to New Terhagen and to Westdorp Manor. We closed off the village of Old Terhagen that had grown to a small town. My wife Agneete refused to leave the Beguinage of Ghent, but she too survived. Greet van Noortkerke and our children stayed at New Terhagen. Once more, our families survived.

We had only to stay for five months in isolation in our castles. By letters and messengers, we continued to direct our business. There was this time no disruption in our trade and in our

handling of our farms and construction works. We had learned to organise ourselves better than ever. Again, our cities deplored many deaths, but not nearly as much as during the previous waves of the sickness.

The sickness of the pest subsided already in the summer of 1399. It would not return during my lifetime. By the end of August of 1399, we emerged from our castles and returned to Ghent and Antwerp. We had been talking a lot about our situation and about our life when we had stayed together, cut off from the outer world. Then, in the late autumn, all danger hopefully passed, we felt the desire among the Pharaïldis men to see each other again in our good home city of Ghent.

And so it happened that I was walking with my closest friends and relatives of the Pharaïldis families at *Tussen Bruggen* in Ghent. We admired the fine buildings of the port of Ghent, saw the men and women hurrying as ever along the quays on both sides of the Leie. This Ghent was eternal. It did not change, whereas we were growing old! Arnout de Hert showed us the boats, the cargoes, and explained what kind of ships lay here. We had visited the Fish Market, the Meat Hall, the Wool Hall and the Grain Market. Before that, we had said our thanks at Saint John's Church for having guarded our families from worse, and we strolled in the *Hoogpoort*.

The public buildings there, and the fine stone houses, the *Schepenhuis* also, the town's hall, had impressed us as always. We knew a city was its people, and how much and well the inhabitants worked and lived, but the buildings had remained, whereas many people we had known had disappeared. The buildings formed the mould out of which generation after generation of *Gentenaars* would spring. So, we venerated our old buildings, our monuments of the greatness of our men and women.

With me walked Gillis Vresele, John de Smet, John Denout, Arnout de Hert, and Raes van Lake. We were six, and in this year of 1399, the last year of the century, we were men of substance. We were all in our late forties, except Raes van Lake, who was in his late thirties, but then, Raes was a monk, our monk! We were married and had many children, so our lineages would continue in our offspring.

That would, of course, not be the case for the van Lake Family. The lineage of the van Lake weavers would pass into the other families we represented. The van Lake women had married into the de Smet, the Denout and the de Hert families. Raes van Lake was the only male descendant, and he was a monk. God knew the blood of the van Lakes would flow powerfully in the arteries of the other families! We were relatives all, by one link or other, and glad to be so.

We were all wealthy men, and content with our current lives. Gillis Vresele was our trader, working out of Ghent. John de Smet was our banker, Arnout de Hert our shipper and transporter. John Denout led our land properties and our farms in the Four Crafts and in the Land of Waas. I, William Terhagen, led our trading company and our land properties in and around Antwerp.

We were aware we walked at a crucial time for our generation. Our wealth had been concentrated in our few persons, in the men who walked here. We had many children, so our private possessions would be divided after our death, and maybe scattered. We hoped our sons and daughters would leave their main funds and lands in the consortium our fathers had created. However, what the future would bring, we could not predict.

Our fortunes were large enough to be divided. We had arrived at a point our wealth was so high, we had begun to wonder what the use and the sense still was of so much richness, concentrated in the hands of so few. It would be good to see our wealth spread within our

society of Ghent. We knew how to continue augmenting our common fortune. We would find in our children sufficient talent and intelligence to see our work be continued. We had faith in the future.

‘The last fifteen years have been very good to us,’ John Denout remarked pleasantly. We were walking the six of us, shoulder to shoulder, at *Tussen Bruggen*. We remarked with how much respect the people of Ghent we knew saluted us, and we nodded gently to the left and right. It had become known by then in Ghent how wealthy we truly were, and how much we contributed to the treasury of Ghent.

‘It is nice to have a lord who is never in the county and leaves us at peace to trade and mind our own business,’ John Denout continued. ‘Philip the Bold is too occupied with France to bother with us. So, we are left in peace, and I almost forgot how heavenly peace can be.’

‘Does it not prove we are quite able to govern and manage our lives and cities ourselves?’ Gillis Vresele grumbled. ‘The van Arteveldes were right in that view.’

‘Maybe our God’s given destiny is to be ruled by a lord,’ Raes van Lake protested.

He grinned, ‘I agree we don’t seem to need one. It is a gift from heaven Philip the Bold looks to France and not to Flanders. God bless him! Ghent has suffered much. We have suffered much! I pray daily for the deceased men and women in our families, the men and women who have been the victim of the plague waves and of the wars. The clerks of Ghent told me our city is now three times smaller than she was fifty years ago. I think they exaggerate. I cannot believe Ghent has fallen so low. Nevertheless, methinks I have never seen Ghent so happy!’

‘True, so very true,’ John de Smet agreed. ‘Our businesses are flourishing, more than ever. We have many golden coins in our coffers, our ships sail on all the seas, our names are known in trade from Lübeck to Constantinople. What a peace for fifteen years can do to a county and to trade! How prosperous peace has made us again! Nothing of importance has happened in Flanders, thank God! Let the kings of England and of France make war on each other and when the knights are bored in their truces make war elsewhere, but let them stay out of Flanders! Taxes we can pay, with a smile. I pray God, Raes, we may keep this kind of peace forever! That is probably a vain wish, for mankind ever fights, for a thousand stupid reasons, but they fight constantly!’

‘Some reasons are not so stupid,’ I fell in. ‘Freedom of mind, freedom of action, and freedom of trade, freedom of setting up our crafts, safety for our women and children, are all good reasons. Many men are bad, and real predators for their co-poorters. Against these, also the lords among the predators, it is justified, nay, it is a duty, to fight!’

‘It is,’ John Denout agreed. ‘Yet we, the Pharaïldis men, have vowed not to be predators. We promised to live by the rules of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is good to be honest and righteous!’

‘The main lesson of Christ is much more than that. Christ is love and preached us to be charitable. We have a responsibility for the poorer people in our society. Weird is it not, that so few people realise that simple message fully, and apply it. I myself, though I am a monk, had to live very many years and hear the good words of my soul-teacher Evrard Vresele, before I understood that!’

‘Self-centredness, egoism, vanity, envy, greed, pride, and so many other vices seem to me to be so powerful and bad qualities, that love is often forgotten,’ Arnout de Hert mused.

‘Don’t be too hard on yourselves, my friends,’ Raes continued. ‘I staunchly believe some retribution of God to the righteous does exist! If that is not true, we must believe in it to find happiness, anyway. I am proud of our families in the humblest way, but proud, so very proud. Is it not because the Pharaïldis families have been pious, righteous traders that you walk here now, with me, dressed in scarlet velvet and in furs? Maybe indeed, God has been pleased with

you and has smiled upon you. You should continue to act this way and do the good around you.'

'We funnel quite some money to the Bijloke Convent,' John de Smet remarked, 'and John Denout also gives to the convent of Ter Hage.'

'With the help of Raes, and of my wife,' John Denout added.

'Strange, isn't it,' Raes van Lake entered a subject I had rather not heard mention this day, 'that one of you married a former nun, and the other of you lives out of wedlock with somebody else's wife. Yet, you are all friends. I cannot but tell you that I too, despite the laws of our Church, feel that love is stronger than everything else!'

'God loves you more than other monks because you have attained wisdom, Raes,' I intervened. 'You put the deep sense of the message above all other considerations, above the rules of men and even above what men have made of the message of Christ in all sorts of absolute rules. The messages of Christ are so simple, they are never absolute. There is but one who can judge us, and that is God. So let nobody throw the first stone! For the rest, we must act according to our proper conscience, feeble though it is. When we act as we think is right, God may well forgive us our sins. And we must show true repentance when we can only act as we do.'

'Hear, hear, who is now preaching?' Raes laughed, and we all grinned.

Yes, we, the Pharaïldis men, we had lived as we thought we should, seeking the good and not the bad. We had not always succeeded in that, for also our human temptation had laid strong on us. Our mood and reactions had not always been simple. Yet, we had tried honestly to apply what Christ and our family patriarchs had told us to do. They had passed us a fine message from what they had experienced. I hoped I had been able to pass the same lessons on to my children. Had they listened well? I hoped so! I too didn't know what the future held for us, to what temptations our families would be exposed, but I hoped God would show some lenience for how we had tried to live by his message.

We were happy now, chastened by our sufferings. We had suffered many deaths in our families during the plague waves and in the wars. Now, we and Ghent, could give again without too many worries.

Yes, we could live and love, and hope for the best for our children. The way we and our fathers and mothers had lived, had been good.

We could enter the new era with confidence, enter the new century with good hope. The past had died, with John of Gaunt, with probably also soon Philip the Bold, with Edward II and Richard II, with such famous men as the Prince of Wales, Gloucester, Coucy, Montfort, de Vienne and Eu, and so many others. The new century would be entirely different, but full of hope for humanity!

Author's Notes

'The City – Revenge' is a novel, a work of fiction filling the empty space within the written lines of history. It is a historical novel, but not a historical account and not a work of historical investigation. Nevertheless, I tried as much as possible to remain within what historians know as fact of Ghent in the fourteenth century, filling with fiction the gaps about which we know nothing. The Vresele, de Smet, Denout, van Lake and the de Hert families, the guards at New Terhagen, are pure fiction. The remarks formulated in similar paragraphs of the previous novels of this series (The Rebellion, the Captain and The Scourge) remain valid also for this volume.

I have found only very little information on the battle of Woumen, except the fact the battle indeed took place and that the troops of Ghent were ambushed and surprised by the knights' army. Much has been left to my imagination. The battle was a major turning point in the civil war of Flanders between Count Louis of Male and the cities of Ghent and Ieper, but the battle has largely been forgotten and has not received the fame it merits in the part of the Hundred Years War that happened in Flanders.

A Ghent chronicler mentioned and quoted by Napoleon Depauw in his 'Cartulaire historique et généalogique des Artevelde' Depauw (Havez, 1920) mentions how Philip van Artevelde chose as councillor a poor clerk named Henry. In 'The van Artevelde of Ghent: the varieties of vendetta and the hero in history' of David Nicholas (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1988) the author states it is tempting to identify this character with Henry Colpaert, who may have been a shipper, and whose name is mentioned in the accounts of Ghent. I preferred to name Philip van Artevelde's councillor the rich clerk Heinric Vresele, to mark the fiction in this novel. The figure of Heinric Vresele and his deeds are totally fictional.

For the figures of John and Ralph van Ieper, who would be called in more English John and Ralph d'Ypres, I used two figures who have really existed, but whose deeds as told in the novel are entirely fictional, of course. Sir John d'Ypres owned lands in Amounderness and he was a man in the service of John of Gaunt. He was appointed as sheriff of Lancaster and participated in the Battle of Najera in Spain, where on the morning of the battle he received his knighthood from the hands of the duke, of John of Gaunt. He lived in a house of London, headed at one time the private council of the duke, and was named as a member of the committee that would have custody of the duke's lands after the death of John of Gaunt, until the heritage had been arranged for. Ralph d'Ypres was a squire of the duke, participated in the duke's famous chevauchée of 1373 through France, and was at one point named as bailiff for Amounderness.

For French coinage, the text in this series uses four different names: the pound Parisis, the pound or pound Tournois, the écu d'or and the franc. These coins were but three different names for approximately the same value of silver (except for the écu). The pound of Paris was the oldest name, gradually replaced by the pound of Tours or the pound Tournois in the thirteenth century of the same value, then by the écu d'or or golden écu. The écu was worth three pounds Tournois. From 1360 on, the franc was introduced, still with approximately the same value as the pond Tournois. In the army of France, a knight was paid about two francs a day, an unmarried knight half of that. A man-at-arms received half a franc per day. A journeyman earned about a franc per month.

I used the name of Giles de Meulenaere in this text, following Napoleon de Pauw in his ‘Cartulaire Généalogique’. Other chronicles and historians have mentioned the name as de Mulre, de Meulneere or de Muelnare. For the succession of the events that led to Philip van Artevelde’s coming to power, I applied a mixture of Froissart’s chronicle and the chronicler of Flanders mentioned in the ‘Cartulaire’ of de Pauw. In the same way, I used mainly the ‘Excellent Chronicle of Flanders’ and the chronicles of Froissart to depict the Battle of the Beverhoutsveld, avoiding the numbers mentioned in these texts of warriors, hostages, and so on, as I thought them obviously exaggerated.

The Battle of Roosebeke happened on the territory of the current commune of Westrozebeke in Flanders, Belgium. The basis of the windmill still stands on the *Gulden Berg*, the Golden Mountain.

No documents of Philip van Artevelde being involved with the family of the kings of England have ever been found, neither in Ghent nor in England. This part of the novel is pure fiction. Nevertheless, the arguments presented in the novel remain.

Much confusion exists in texts on the territories covered by the names of Aquitaine, Gascony, Guyenne and Languedoc. No strict, coherent definition used throughout history exists for these lands in territorial terms, and the lands covered by the names has changed in history.

- By Aquitaine I meant in this text the ancient duchy of Aquitaine, consisting of Gascony, the counties of Armagnac, Fézensac, de la Marche and Angoulême, the Périgord, Saintonge and the Poitou. It often is called also to comprise the regions of Quercy, Rouergue and the Limousin.
- Guyenne derives in the dialects of the south-west regions of current France from the word of Aquitaine, via ‘Aguienne’ to Guyenne. In its restricted sense, it covers the current regions of the Lot, Aveyron (or Rouergue), Tarn-et-Garonne, Lot-et-Garonne, Dordogne and the Gironde. It is often used as a synonym for Aquitaine in the times of this text. It was mostly only the eastern part of Aquitaine.
- Gascony similarly covers often the Gironde region, Lot-et-Garonne, Tarn-et-Garonne (lands often attributed also to Guyenne), plus the Landes, Gers, Haute-Garonne, Pyrénées-Atlantique and Hautes-Pyrénées. It consisted of lands south of Guyenne proper, and formed with Guyenne the duchy of Aquitaine.
- The Languedoc is the region grossly defined as laying between the cities of Alès, Nîmes, Montpellier, Albi, Toulouse and Béziers, the lands of the ancient county of Toulouse. The Languedoc belonged in the years of this text to the royal domains of France.

For the historians’ texts and the chronicles consulted during the writing of this novel, please refer to the ones mentioned in the first three novels of the series of ‘The City’, plus the following:

- ‘Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne de la Maison de Valois’ by M. de Barante, ninth edition with notes by M. Gachard (Société Typographique Belge Adolphe Wahlen et Cie. Brussels, 1839).
- ‘Friedrich Christoph Schlossers Weltgeschichte. Bände 5, 6, 7 Mittelalter III, IV, V.’ Notes by Prof. Dr. Oskar Jäger and Dr. Franz Wolff. (27. Auflage, Verlag Neufeld und Henius, Berlin, 1905) Original edition: 1815-1848.

- ‘Antwerpen. Twaalf eeuwen geschiedenis en cultuur.’ Karel van Isacker and Raymond van Uytven. Mercatorfonds. Antwerpen. 1986.
- ‘De Gentse Opstand 1379-1385, “Le commun se esmeut”’ by Dries Merlevede, work to obtain the title of Master at the University of Ghent, 2009.
- ‘Katherine Swynford. The Story of John of Gaunt and his scandalous Mistress’ by Alison Weir (Vintage, Random House Ltd, London, 2008).