Beyond the façade

Town halls, publicity, and urban society in the fifteenth-century Low Countries

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Order, disorder, and contestation

Town halls housed different offices and provided different services. Given that these were both publicly available and spatially enclosed, contemporaries gained access to them by way of doors, demarcations, and passageways. This meant that members of urban councils were able to structure communication flows. That said, the buildings' multifunctionality also had its disadvantages, especially for the magistrates, their main users. Indeed, the behaviour of different people in and around the building occasionally came into conflict with ideal practices. Although the public courtroom, for example, provided a context in which relatively large groups of people could assemble, it was vulnerable in case of unrest. Just over the threshold were the open streets, which often bustled with city inhabitants, travellers, and merchants. This exposed the court to any number of potentially interested, but also critical eyes and ears.

In what follows, I analyse how magistrates sought to consolidate their legal and political authority in attempting to establish order and counteract disorder in and around the town hall. Movement, utterances, and other sounds threatened to infringe upon the quiet, safe, and hygienic spaces that municipalities desired to maintain. Magistrates defined disturbance through regulation and prosecution. Disturbance, they argued, could endanger the reliability of legal and political procedures. In turn, this would challenge the urban government, which was responsible for initiation and protecting such procedures in the first place. Outside the legally assigned spaces in town halls, however, people ranging from defendants to onlookers claimed areas of the building and confronted the political and legal performances going on inside the allotted chambers. They talked, left rubbish, broke windows, fought, or insulted the aldermen during court sessions. What the magistrates considered disorder, in other words, was possibly the behaviour of parties that challenged them and their procedures. Accordingly, both governmental and non-governmental agents participated in negotiating behavioural norms in the buildings.

A cluster of events in Leiden in 1458, recorded in verdicts, is a case in point**.** The city's law court sentenced two men – Matheus van Berendrecht and Geryt Dircx – for assaults committed on the town hall's front doorstep.[1] The men had pulled out knives and started a large fight. Such physical attacks were clearly unacceptable and would probably have resulted in criminal charges wherever they had been perpetrated. The record shows, however, that the aldermen were concerned not only about the violence in itself, but about misbehaviour at that exact location. At

[1] SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458, f.104r.

the moment of the assault, the sheriff and aldermen were deliberating in the *vierschaar*. According to the verdict, the incident created 'much turmoil inside the courtroom and amongst the common people who had come to the court'. This was a serious matter, for the aldermen were responsible for ensuring that 'disturbances would not occur in the courtroom'.[2] Indeed, the degree of agitation caused by the assaults is indicated by the sentence passed on another man who got involved, Dirc Hoicstraet. Present in the *vierschaar* when the incident began, Hoicstraet drew a knife and joined forces with Berendrecht to assault Dircx. According to the law court, Hoichstraet, should have shown more responsibility when it came to preventing a fight and tumult from spreading in the public courtroom. As the record states, the proceedings of the court could legitimately be interrupted if someone was given permission beforehand (so as to make a statement during trial, for instance). A deliberate fight in the courtroom, however, was not warranted.[3] Later that year, the court explained how two men greatly disturbed the community (*gemiente*) in front of the public courtroom. In view of this, the aldermen stated that the possibility that 'the *vierschaar* may be disturbed is a bad, immodest matter'.[4]

A physical attack was intolerable and medieval prosecutions of street violence are known to have been highly public events, which sought to emphasise the political, legal, and social implications of such disorder. These trials therefore put the individuals involved centre stage, which resulted in thorough records of their crimes.[5] That said, in 1458 Leiden's magistrates not

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[2] 'Terwilen dat die scout mitten gerechten saten inder vierschair ende dingeden, dit vechtelic aldus begonnen ende grote beroerte inder vierschair ende onder tgemeen volck die te rechte gecomen waeren gemact heeft, dair veel quaets of gescepen was te comen. Dat een sake is van quaden exempele dair in dattet tgerecht sculdich zijn te voirsien datter geen storinge inder gerechten en geschien'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458, f.104r-104v.

[3] 'Ende want Dirc Hoichstraet inder vierschair dair tgerecht saten ende dingede mitten voirs. Matheus opten drempel vanden stede huys doer op Gerijt Dircx z. sijn mes getogen ende mede gevochten ende hem gequetst heeft, soe wel als Matheus voren. die mogelic als een goet poorter benomen soude hebben, dattet voirs. vechtelic niet geschiet en hadde noch datter gheen beroerte inder vierschair noch inden Dinghuys gebeurt, en wair dair bij datten gerechte gestoert mochte worden dan dair in gedaen recht als die gene die te voren dair om toe gesproken was ende niet op sette vechtelic onder der vierschair maken woude. Twelke ene lelike saken is ende sulc dat zij ongecorrigiert niet en behoirt te bliven'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458**,** f.104v-105r.

[4] 'Also Joesep Aerntsz ende Cornelis van Vliet inder portdinge lest leden malkander hadden doen dagen voir sculde ende gebreke die die een opten anderen te seggen ende te eysschen hadde, dair om dat zij elc op horen recht dach voir der stede huys quamen om hoir recht elc opten anderen te vorderen. Ende ter wilen dat die scout ende scepenen inder vierschair te rechten saten ende dingede, soe zijn Joesep ende Cornelis vors. voir der stede huys vergadert ende hebben sulke quade ende onreelike woirde malkander toe gesproken dair uut dat zij vechtende geworden zijn ende gelijc int gerechte enen rede waren alst mitter wairheyt bevonden is, dare uut dat grote beroerte ende storinge onder de gemiente inder stede huys voir der vierschair was, ende veel quaets van vechtelike gecomen mochte hebben, dair bij die vierschair gestoert mochte worden. Dat een quats onbehoirlike sake is, noch in gheenre wijse den gerechte van hem noch van nyement en staet te lijden'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458, 105v, 106r.

[5] On 'grammars of violence' and concerned court records: H. Skoda, *Medieval Violence. Physical Brutality in Northern France 1270-1330* (Oxford, 2013), 56–62. See also: P. Lantschner, 'Voices of the People in a City without Revolts: Lille in the Later Middle Ages', in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. J. Dumolyn et al. (Turnhout, 2014), 40–42.

only described the violent acts and those they perpetrated them, but also contextualised the disturbances, which they very clearly located next to the town hall. They referred to the impact that the assaults had had within the building, specifically because the court had been in session. In the case against Dirc Hoicstraet, the aldermen typified his misbehaviour as *heroerte* – meaning insurgency or commotion. In particular, they were concerned by the disturbance's infectious character. The court saw that the fight had the potential to undermine its legal authority among the people assembled in the public courtroom. Unrest close to the town hall, the records suggest, concerned not only individuals' legal rights, but also the accountability of magistrates *and* citizens for the safe and peaceful administration of justice. In articulating this view of events, the records demonstrate how the aldermen sought to present themselves as protectors of legal procedure and public space.

Through socio-legal messaging – such as the public proclamation of verdicts – magistrates defined what constituted an orderly town hall and how it bolstered the reliability of political and judicial procedure and, therefore, the common good. They promulgated the idea that maintaining peace and justice through legislation and legal administration was in the public interest.[6] Concerns about disorder in the town hall reflect the ways in which authorities sought to legitimise their standing as just governors working in the service of communal wellbeing. At the same time, the magistrates' claim to accountability did not go uncontested. The magistrates appealed for a shared responsibility by emphasising that it was not just the court that had suffered from the crime, but assembled people too.[7] In fact, urban governments were increasingly successful in labelling events that challenged their authority as disturbances, and in identifying disorderly actors (even if they had not initially meant to cause disruption).[8] Above all, magistrates sought to demonstrate their capacity to restore and maintain order. In so doing, it was essential that they clearly communicate and explain protocols and norms surrounding noise and other disturbances. The cases under study

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[6] R. Stein, A. Boele, and W. Blockmans, 'Whose Community? The Origin and Development of the Concept of Bonum Commune in Flanders, Brabant and Holland (Twelfth - Fifteenth Century)', in *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th-16th c.): Discours et pratique du Bien Commun dans les villes d'Europe (XIIIe au XVIe siècle)*, ed. E. Lecuppre-Desjardin and A. Van Bruaene (Turnhout, 2010), 149–50.

[7] See for mechanisms that contest political control as side effects of language of accountability: J. Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability in Medieval England 1170-1300* (Oxford, 2014), 246–48.

[8] Jörg Rogge, studying 'deviant behaviour', argues that writers (recording court and legal proceedings) describe situations in which norms had been negotiated, applied, rejected and enforced. The account, then, is a contribution in the process of shaping the idea of deviant behaviour. J. Rogge, 'An Introduction', in *Recounting Deviance. Forms and Practices of Presenting Divergent Behaviour in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, ed. J. Rogge (Bielefeld, 2016), 12–16. 'Medieval scribes did not think they were writing fictions when they wrote that someone had "breached fait" or "trespassed" or been "restored to pristine reputation": they were enunciating actions that constituted a social reality'. Referring to Latour's *Reassembling the Social,* Tom Johnson emphasises that these written statements create facts. T. Johnson, *Law in Common. Legal Cultures in Late-Medieval England* (Oxford, 2020), 16.

are all pervaded by the regulation and prosecution of disturbing behaviour. These included instances of physical and verbal interruption, including assaults and insults. Although such disturbances have been recorded (the fight outside Leiden's town hall figures a prime example), scholars have not yet used the available sources to study what was perceived as disorderly behaviour in and around the town hall. Nevertheless, this chapter shows that this is a productive lens through which to analyse how the town hall functioned as a stage on which ideas of order and disorder in political and legal procedure were performed.

In exploring how and why contest, regulation, and negotiation shaped behavioural frameworks in town halls, this chapter proceeds as follows. First I draw on scholarship on public performance and participation in discussing how disorder impacts upon legal and political procedures. Second, I explore some of the different kinds of physical matter and social behaviour that were defined as disturbing. My analysis begins with forms of pollution (encompassing dirt and smells) that affected court and council meetings. Such pollution resulted from the town hall's accessibility and the multiple functions that it performed. I go on to discuss the sounds, daily activities, and verbal interruptions that the authorities saw as creating disorder by way of a study of statutes, court protocols, and legal treatises. I stress how magistrates aimed to limit both general disturbances and specific disruptions in town halls' legal spaces. Not all forms of disorder were intentionally disturbing; indeed, a modicum of disorder was unavoidable given the buildings' range of different functions. Third, I examine verbal and physical attacks, especially insults directed towards governmental agents. By studying criminal records, I analyse how the aldermen defined, recorded, and communicated about misbehaviour in town halls. At the same time, I show how culprits and bystanders challenged protocols. These challenges were mounted by both men and women, across different social classes. In closing the chapter, I discuss a final complexity surrounding misconduct in town halls. Magistrates may have seen disruptive behaviour as problematic, it was also an essential precondition of the very logic through which they secured their own authority. Indeed, it was by referring to the threat of disorder that the authorities maintained both town halls' status and their control over access to and behaviour within the buildings. As I emphasise, this is brought into focus particularly clearly in cases of culprits having to restore an order that they had compromised.

Disorder and agency

The desire for efficient spaces for political and legal performances preceded purpose-built town halls.[9] As I suggested in chapter 2, however, town halls could be built and internally organised so as to allow magistrates to structure movement and communication flows. The physical structure and meanings of different rooms, as well as the available possibilities for movement, are reflected in the misbehaviour of historical actors who come forward from the legal documentation. This misbehaviour impacted legal procedure and ritual, which were sensitive to various forms of disruption. Historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith has explained how 'static and noise (i.e., the accidental)' are decreased during rituals so as to allow for information to be exchanged.[10] That said, spectators of medieval trials constituted a potential source of disturbance. Accordingly, in judicial practices and legal spaces, publicness could come into conflict with clear and efficient communication. It is unsurprising, therefore, that a number of statutes concern, for instance, moving and talking while a court was in session, whether this was done intentionally to disrupt proceedings or simply represented a circumstantial source of disquiet. Law courts prosecuted such disturbing behaviour.

Order and disorder in the town hall were shaped by governmental, non-governmental, and material actors. An analogy with Mary Douglas' analysis of dirt as 'matter out of place' is useful in this regard. Douglas argued that dirt is 'never an unique, isolated event […], [but] a by-product of a systemic ordering, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements'.[11] A similar dynamic obtains in how users of town halls dealt with noise and other disturbances. A range of factors determined why certain sounds – talking, for example – should have been counted and thus experienced as disturbances. Perceptions of sound changed in the new material circumstances of the town hall. As I have established in pervious chapters, interior spaces and the demarcations between them were frequently adapted. This influenced expectations surrounding order and disorder, which had to be renegotiated accordingly. A closed door, walls and different storeys, for instance, served to keep audible disturbances at bay. Users of the council chamber came to expect less noise, whether it was made within the chamber or reached them from outside. However, the expectation that council rooms were silent only heightened their capacity for being disturbed; in

[9] In the long history of open-air judicial activities, legal spaces could be delineated by ropes or fences or designated around tree trunks, keeping audiences and their behaviour spatially regulated. Grimm, *Deutsche Rechtsalterhümer*, 367, 372–73; Noordewier, *Nederduitsche regtsoudheden*, 365–73; Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, 41; F. Arlinghaus, 'Raumkonzeptionen der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt. Zur Verortung von Gericht, Kanzlei und Archiv im Stadtraum', in *Städteplanung - Planungsstädte*, ed. B. Fritzsche, M. Stercken, and H. Gilomen (Zurich, 2006), 110; Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, 61.

[10] J.Z. Smith, 'The Bare Facts of Ritual', *History of Religions* 20, no. 1/2 (1980): 114.

[11] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966), 36.

this context, sound posed an increasingly serious threat to the aldermen's procedures. Urban councils and law courts, after all, required rooms suitable for confidential and efficient meetings. Quiet and structured interactions were also prescribed for legal procedures conducted in the far more accessible public courtroom. Which sounds counted as a disturbance therefore depended on the kind of activity that it affected, the location it which it took place, its volume, and the degree to which it was expected. With regard to talking and shouts, the intention behind the noise mattered, as did its content and the actors involved.

Exchanges of information involve a sender and a receiver; they both participate in the act of communication. Although public rituals often forcefully demonstrated religious, political, and legal power, they were also vulnerable. For example, historians working on various regions in the late Middle Ages, including England and the Low Countries, have shown that government institutions used public rituals to establish and maintain particular social hierarchies. At the same time, audiences could openly protest against such performances, which served to contest their claims of authority or legitimacy.[12] In his study of forms of inclusion and exclusion at stake in legal practice in late medieval Cologne, Franz-Josef Arlinghaus has argued that those involved with legal procedures acted according to ideal scripts.[13] From his perspective, the law court seemed to prioritise securing its legal authority over administering justice. As such, it limited the activity of bystanders (*Umstand*) to what was necessary and prevented any escalation of proceedings.[14] Arlinghaus explains how these bystanders did not contribute to proceedings as independent authorities, but only acted in support of the judges' verdicts. Formalised ritual procedures, he suggests, allowed the assembled community only minimal agency.[15] Bystanders were not excluded (for that would undermine communicative function of the performance), but assigned a place. In fact, their role rather resembled that ascribed to the aldermen: they were to occupy the right place and speak only according to formalised scripts. As I show, however, there are many examples of participants who *did* create noise.

Christian Liddy urges scholars of late medieval towns to reject 'ingrained assumptions about oligarchy' and embrace a paradigm of contestation.[16] Attends to practices at a micro-spatial level uncovers veiled negotiations around what constitutes approved behaviour. In line with the

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[12] Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, 158; Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*.

[13] Exclusion, on the other hand, implicates an interruption in expectations of reciprocity. Citing Niklas Luhmann, Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft (1997): 'Mit "Inklusion" ist gemeint, dass "das Gesellschaftsystem Personen vorsieht und ihnen Plätze zuweist, in deren Rauhmen sie erwartungskomplementär handeln können." Dementsprechend bedeutet Excklusion die "Unterbrechung von Reziprozitätserwartungen."' Arlinghaus, *Inklusion-Exklusion*, 30.

[14] Arlinghaus, 44, 91.

[15] Arlinghaus, 177–96.

[16] Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 5–7.

work of anthropologist James Scott, Patrick Lantschner argues that the 'scope of action for political operators decreases with the degree to which governments are able to monopolise social arenas'.[17] The transformation through which political and legal proceedings were held in the increasingly fixed and managed settings of the town hall, I would like to emphasise, is accompanied by practices that contest these forms of control. The clear assignation of places and enforcement of behavioural expectations did not constitute a set protocol. Rather, these practices were part of a process of distinguishing between disturbing and tolerated factors in a changing spatial context. Essentially, moments of contestation or conflict provide snapshots of the work of town officials as they struggled to influence public opinion and control or shape communication during public performances.[18] The different noises and disturbances that I discuss in this chapter were produced by people inside the town hall, which suggests that these officials' efforts were not entirely successful. In the sections below, I show how some inhabitants of the city were ostensibly aware of the impact of disorderly behaviour, which they used as a tactic in making a case, casting doubt on magistrates' decisions, or otherwise taking advantage of a situation.[19] Behavioural expectations, then, were shaped by all of the different groups of people that used town halls.

When it came to some forms of verbal and physical expression, the law court made a distinction between acceptable bustle and disturbance. If citizens engaged in the latter, they could be prosecuted on the grounds that they had attacked or insulted government officials (and thus the common good). Not all types of disorder were produced by people or directly interrupted legal or political procedures. Magistrates often anticipated or detected forms of disorder that were not intentionally emitted as such. In other words, some disorder (such as dirt) resulted from the

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[17] Lantschner, 'Voices of the People', 73–74, 77. Scott analyses how less overt rebellion meant that forms of resistance were performances belonging to the 'hidden transcript', while the open interactions – 'the public transcript' – never truly unfold different opinions. J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985); J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990).

[18] Extensive historiography assigns different ways for various historical actors to participate in ritual. I consider public opinion as a multidimensional and thus large variety of publics with overlapping and intersecting voices. This challenges the notion of a unified public sphere as developed by Habermas. Philip Smith, for example, argued in *Punishment and Culture* that ritual in open space – such as public punishment – facilitated public debate. The participation of an audience was important as a reflection and tool to found moral borders. P Smith, *Punishment and Culture* (Chicago, 2008), 12–16. Within the post-Habermassian debate on public opinion, Liddy recognizes several dimensions of public opinion – views that were (or were pretended to be) collective – such as the ritualised public opinion of oath swearing during elections; partial public opinion given shape in, for example, crafts guilds; opinion formed by talking in places such as taverns; or the public opinion of human interaction, created by gossip and rumour on the streets or marketplaces. Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 129–30.

[19] Those using the court all brought their emotions and agendas. E. Cohen, *Crossroads of Justice. Law and Culture in Late Medieval France* (Leiden, 1993); M. Mostert, 'Introduction', in *Medieval Legal Process. Physical, Spoken and Written Performance in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Mostert and P. Barnwell (Turnhout, 2012), 1–10; D. Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264–1423* (Ithaca, 2003).

everyday use and multifunctional character of town halls. In what follows, I begin by discussing types of noise and disturbance produced in the daily routine of a town hall, focusing on dirt, pollution, sound, and movement.

Dirt and pollution

Town halls required maintenance and cleaning. City accounts include regular expenses for cleaning services, which occurred daily before the building was closed. Municipalities paid people to dispose of dirt, sweep the corridors, and keep the town hall and its surroundings clean throughout the year.[20] Of course, with so many people walking in and out, significant amounts of dust must have been brought in from the street. Dogs and children roamed around town halls as well. Dirt was more than a circumstantial problem. The 1444 statutes of Den Briel state that no-one should cause 'uncleanliness in the town hall', stipulating that 'he who brought dirt next to the town hall, or in front of the town hall, or in front of the chair, will remove this'.[21] In Haarlem, a 1390 statute records that people occasionally dirtied the public courtroom too.[22] Whether they did so on purpose or this was simply the result of the frequency with which this courtroom was used is unclear. Although leaving rubbish and dirt could be taken to signal defiance,[23] I have found only one example of filth being brought into the town hall as a provocation. This episode took place in Gouda, where in 1495 a man nicknamed Coelpap came to one of the servants and 'threw shit and grime in the meat pot next to the *vierschaar*'.[24]

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[20] 'Florijs pieterszoen van dat hijt alt jair schoengemaect heft voir den stede huus ende after t huus, onder die halle ende in de sistaern ende overall, dair des te doen was, gegeven 6 lb.' (1412-13). Meerkamp van Embden, *Stadsrekeningen van Leiden (1390-1434)*, 1:269. 'Meynert voer een jair lanc der stede slijc wech te voeren ende der stede toorn ende der stede huus scoen te houden om 7 scilde sjairs' (1426). Meerkamp van Embden, 1:144. 'Item by Willem Clap die der stedehuys sluyt ende dat veecht ende schoenmaect, binnen desen jare gecost ende uutgegeven om besemen diemen inder stede huys behoeft heeft'. SAL, series 530, f.110r. 'By Willem Clap die der stedehuys sluyt ende dat veecht ende schoenmaect binnen desen jare gecost ende uutgegeven om besemen diemen inder stede huys behoeft heeft'. SAL, series 552, f.130v; 'Van dat raethuus scoen te maken'. SAMH, AC1.1145, f.21v.; 'Item vander stede huys boven ende beneden schoon te maken'. SAH, inv. no. 324, f.143v. 'Van te rumene ende schoone te makene tscepenen huus van groote menichte van mulle ende andere vuylicheden daer in ligghende'. ARA, reg. 31458, f.66v. See as well ARA, reg. 31457, f.66v-67r; reg. 31476, f.91r. In Ghent, city servants supervised the cleanliness of *De Plaetse*, the square directly adjacent to the town hall. Coomans, 'The King of Dirt', 98.

[21] 'Van gheen onreynicheit te maken in der stede huys, noch niet dairin spelen. Item so en sal nyemant in der stede huyss enigerhande spil spuelen noch onreynicheit dairin maken noch doen op I boeten van V sc. Hollans, rechtevoirt van des dyenres knechts tot hoir behoiff off te nemen. Ende so woei vuylnisse besyden der stede huys maict off bringt off voir der stede huys voir den stoel, die sal dat weder wechdoen off doen doen, op die boete voirscreven'. Fruin and Pols, *Het rechtsboek van den Briel*, 182.

[22] 'Van die onreynichede dede an die vierscare'. Huizinga, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Haarlem*, 58.

[23] Lantschner, 'Voices of the People', 74.

[24] 'Nae onmanierlick ende ondoechelic gehadt heeft mit glasen uut te smakken ende mit partilike woorden te roepen, en so hy comen is tot een van sheren dienres en heeft stront en roet gesmact inde vleyspot byde vierscaeren'.

At any rate, aldermen designed regulations to prevent the accumulation of filth in town halls, defining it as *onreynheit,* uncleanliness. Why the aldermen took this issue so seriously is connected closely with the town hall's purposes. The building played a major role in promoting the proper functioning of justice and politics. In 1485, for example, the basements of the town hall in Aalst were so 'dirty and unclean, that bad air and corruption came from them'. This situation was partly attributed to the presence of prisoners.[25] Municipalities addressed the smell of food and cooking, which was seen as a possible source of pollution. A kitchen was removed in Leiden, for example, for it was thought that cookery was corrupting the courtroom.[26] Kitchens are documented in the town halls in Ghent, Leiden, and Haarlem in the fifteenth century. The existence of a meat pot strongly indicates that meals were provided at Gouda's town hall. Ghent's town hall also contained a dining room, which likely served the aldermen or larger meetings.[27] Again, the multifunctionality of town halls – which took on tasks ranging from holding prisoners to preparing food – clashed with the aldermen's concern for orderly conduct.

Municipalities were certainly preoccupied with 'bad air'. Corrupted air was considered a primary vector of disease transmission, whereas illness itself was taken to reflect spiritual and moral defects.[28] Such air had the potential to disturb the town hall's legal and political functions. A case in point relates to Aalst in 1486, when magistrates acted to deal with 'bad air' and illness in the town hall. A man cleaned and ventilated the building (both upstairs and downstairs) to remove all sources of corruption. It is worth noting that this followed a period of increased mortality in the city as a result of the plague (*pestilencie*). Having fled the city during the height of the infection, the 'good men of the law' returned as it came to an end.[29]

The few examples that I've mentioned above that refer to the courtroom's cleanliness suggest that magistrates were especially concerned with disturbances in these legal spaces. This reflected scholarly thought of the period, which emphasised how disturbances to the social

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According to the record, this man committed many other crimes, including smashing some windows, calling political words, stealing beer, and the threatening of the innkeeper. SAMH, AC2.176, 150.

[25] 'Item ende want der stede kelderen onder tscepenenhuus zeer vuyllic ende onreynichlic lach zo datter quade luchten ende corruptien uut quamen uut der vuylicheden ende onreynichede vanden ghevanghenen die daer in laghen'. ARA, reg. 31479, f.35v.

[26] In 1450. 'Er eenen koeken van kunnen maken alsoe de vierschaar mitten kokene die de gilden daer maken verdorven wordt'. SAL, 0501, 381, Vroedschapsboek 1449-1458, fol.19r.

[27] Van Tyghem, *Het stadhuis van Gent*, 2:155.

[28] Coomans, 'In Pursuit of a Healthy City', 161–64; C. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies. Communal Health in Late Medieval Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge, 2013), 71–78.

[29] 'Willeme den Nokere es ghegheven gheweest over zinen arbeyt, van dat hy omtrent St. Andriesmesse lestleden als de starfte ende pestilencie ter Aelst begonste te cesseerne, ende de goede mannen vander wet ende andere die uut der stede ghevloden waeren weder begonsten in te commene, cuyschte, vierde ende verluchtede tscepen huus boven ende beneden, omme alle corruptie te weerne'. ARA, reg. 31480, f.27v.

environment, common good, and individuals' sense of balance all influenced one another.[30] The work of city clerk Jan Matthijsen, the *Rechtsboeken van Den Briel*, for instance, presents chastity as inseparable from cleanliness and honesty, loyalty, and justice. The text includes a section dictating that 'the council room shall be cleaned', followed by a metaphorical description of clean conscience.[31] Aalst's aldermen also linked purity to urban governance when, in 1453, they asked for two windows to be made in their chambers in the town hall. The windows, they hoped, would provide 'good air and clarity on the lecterns of the aldermen'.[32] Comments made upon and actions taken against disturbed air and dirt, therefore, were premised on the idea that these sources of pollution threatened the proper functioning of activities in town halls. Magistrates were keen to hold on to this script.

Noise and interruptions

Town halls' accessibility meant that those loitering around them could occasionally cause damage. Expenses mentioned Aalst's city accounts in 1457 indicate that windows had to be replaced due to children throwing stones to shatter the existing planes of glass; Leiden's aldermen had to repair green wall hangings that had dogs had been tearing from 1463 onwards, and; in Gouda an 'insane man' broke a glass window in the clerk's upstairs room in 1461.[33] These examples indicate many town hall officials were concerned with unpredictable behaviour among visitors inside the building or people in its surroundings.

Concerns about the circulation of people in the town hall also come up consistently in urban statutes from across the Low Countries. In 1507, for instance, Gouda's aldermen stated that no *rebauwen* (meaning vagabonds or rascals) or anyone else (including children) could play handball games or behave in a 'mischievous' manner in the town hall during the afternoon.[34] In Amsterdam,

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[30] J. Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375. The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge, 2014), 262–67.

[31] Fruin and Pols, *Het rechtsboek van den Briel*, 81.The *Rechtsboek van den Briel* is strongly influenced on *Dat scaecspel*, a well-known profane-ethical text serving as an allegory for the governing and functioning of lay society. J. van Heerwaarden, '"Dat Scaecspel." Een profaan-ethische verkenning', in *Wat is wijsheid? Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. J. Reynaert (Amsterdam, 1994), 307.

[32] 'Item hebben de voornoemde ontfanghers bi abuse van scepenen doen maken twee veynstren upt scepenen huus in scepenen camere omme goede lucht ende claerhede thebbene ten lettryne van scepenen'. ARA, reg. 31447, f.57r.

[33] 'Van te makene ende stoppene de ghelaesveintren upt scepenen huus die vanden kindren te diversschen plaetsen in stucx gheworpen waren'. ARA, reg. 31451, f.31r; 'Die groene cleden die op die voirsale hangen die van honden gheschoert waeren'; 'Die cleden die op die voir sale hangen ende van enen grote hont gebeten ende gheschoert waeren'. SAL, inv. no. 530, f.155v; 532, f.174r. 'Gegeven Reyer de glaesmaker 11 stuvers van glaes te maken opter clercken camer die den dollen man gebroken hadde'. SAMH, AC1.1138, f.24r.

[34] 'Voort dat hem nyemandt en vervordere van eenige rebauwen ofte andere tsafternoens upter stede huys te comen om te speelen, te caetsen ende andere boverie te doene, upte verbuernisse van de rebauwen upte kaeck te staen, ende de kinderen up hoer upperste cleet'. Rollin Couquerque and Meerkamp van Embden, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Gouda*, 333.

legislators decided that the town hall was no place for overt quarrelling and fighting, but should be relatively quiet.[35] Regulations could be even stricter. In Ghent, for example, stonemasons working on the town hall were not allowed to chat during their work in the adjacent workshop.[36] These cases suggest that legislators expected their daily business to be interrupted by activities that went on regularly in town halls. Their attempts to regulate sound and behaviour suggest that disruptions were common. Restriction were often imposed on a case-by-case basis. Hence, particular sounds and practices became disturbances when the aldermen defined them as such. When the aldermen in Gouda formulated the prohibition of games noted above, for example, they specifically mentioned games of handball, stating this was not allowed in the afternoon. The authorities did problematised neither the presence of children as such nor, strictly speaking, ball games in the morning. Rather, they defined practices such as handball as disturbances in relation to a particular location (the town hall) and timeframe (the afternoon).

These regulations, which sought to limit common disturbances, underline how town halls were accessible to a variety of visitors. The connection between the building's function as an administrative centre and possible disturbances is prominent in other statutes. In 1488, for instance, Gouda's magistrates promulgated regulations regarding talking in the town hall while a court was in session; offenders had to pay three *stuyvers*.[37] From this time on, 'talking' in the town hall became noise during court proceedings. This regulation had a further effect in that it signalled that the courtroom was no place for chatter. They thus gave shape to new expectations about the space.

Magistrates were also preoccupied with peoples' demeanour in and around dedicated legal spaces, including the public courtroom. Distinguishing between days in which the court was and was not in session, Gouda's 1488 edicts acted against troublesome behaviour (namely speaking) in

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[35] 'Opten vijften dach in Octobry anno 1459 is gewilkoirt ende van der stede huys ofgeropen, wair yemant van wevers of vulres of yemant anders der draperyen roerende, die kyvinge ende vechtelic makede upter stede huys, als die wairdeyns dairup sijn om die lakenen te besien, dat soud men rechten an desgeens recherhant, die dat dede; ende so wye den anderen quetste, dat soud men rechten an desgeens lijf, diet dade, mitten zwairde. Ende alle ander kyvinge, die upten huyse geschiet, sal staen tot correxy van den gerechte ende tot tgerechts provinge'. Breen, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Amsterdam*, 56–57.

[36] As is recorded in a working arrangement for stonemasons in 1528. An edition of this arrangement is published in: Van Tyghem, *Het stadhuis van Gent*, 2:388.

[37] The word *callen* can be translated as 'talking', but even so as talking with a negative connotation, humbug. See the MNW. 'Ende soe wie gaet callen inder stede huus als men dinget, dat wair up die boeten van drie stuvvers'. Rollin Couquerque and Meerkamp van Embden, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Gouda*, 117. If we follow the MNW, three *stuivers* were worth 24 *duit,* and 48 *denarii* (d.).

the public courtroom, as did the treatises that Philips Wielant wrote for Haarlem in 1506.[38] Such protocols, therefore, not only aimed to prevent circumstantial noises on court days, but also regulated courtrooms in session. Magistrates defined disturbances (and tolerated behaviour) more strictly when they took place in courtrooms. These were specially designated legal spaces, after all, that had different policies on speech for a variety of agents, ranging from defendants to lawyers. Jan Matthijsen's *Rechtsboeken van Den Briel* state explicitly that the law court can reach and communicate a verdict only in a *gebannen vierschaar,* an official court sitting. Legal questioning was formalised so as to ensure clear and efficient judicial procedure.[39] Pragmatically, the *Rechtsboeken* prescribe that during a court sitting participants need to be able to understand each other and respond properly.[40] Himself an experienced legal expert, Jan Matthijsen writes that the clerk should be positioned between the judge and jurisdiction, so that he can 'precisely understand' the judge's verdict and defence's replies.[41] Echoing such ideas, city decrees from Den Briel of 1445 sought to direct behaviour and ways of communication in the courtroom. Besides limiting access to the public courtroom, they permitted only those who could speak in a formal legal idiom (*dingetale*) into the *vierschaar*. Entrants required permission from the law court.[42] In Leiden, space around the aldermen's table was provided to allow for oral exchanges in preparation for a public court sitting. This space, which was located upstairs in the town hall, made it possible for participants to 'speak freely', for it was not a public courtroom sitting.[43] In this context, such communication was thus not defined as a disturbance. That said, allotting space for legal parties to speak their mind in this way increased the risk of confrontation, as I go on to show see.

The aldermen themselves were not granted freedom of speech. According to Philips Wielant's judicial instructions for Haarlem, they had only limited scope to express their opinion,

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[38] 'Item soe wat man of wijf sonder oirlof voir die vierscaer spreken, die sullen verbueren 2 sc. alsoe dicke als sy dairof bekuert worden'. Rollin Couquerque and Meerkamp van Embden, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Gouda*, 117; Fruin, *Instructie door Philips Wielant*, 173. See article 408.

[39] Fruin and Pols, *Het rechtsboek van den Briel*, 130, 131, 136.

[40] Fruin and Pols, 123.

[41] 'Wair des clercx is inder vierscharen? Die antwoirde is: tusschen den rechter ende dat scependom, op dat hy scarpelike verstaen mach dat recht, dat die rechter bedinghet, ende die antwoirde, diemen dair tegen doet'. Fruin and Pols, 74.

[42] De Jager, *Middeleeuwsche keuren der stad Brielle*, 47.

[43] 'Staende an die schijf opter stede huys yet gesproken mach hebben [...] want men an die schijf voir den gerechte vry spreken mach ende men dair geen vierschaer en houdet'. Blok, *Leidsche rechtsbronnnen uit de Middeleeuwen*, 244. The *schijf* was the table in the aldermen's chamber, upstairs in the town hall. It was, for example, used after a *wedde* – when two parties would deposit money ('bet') in case of a hung jury; the law court would then decide which party had the strongest case, and ask the losing party to pay the *wedde*. Sometimes it was necessary to organize new hearings, or bring in other witnesses. This was done at the *schijf*. A. Nortier, *Bijdrage tot de kennis van het burgerlijk proces in de 15e eeuw binnen de stad Leiden* (Leiden, 1874), 48–49.

and were not to interrupt, squabble, or fight.[44] Such instructions recur in aldermen's manuals in Ghent, which emphasise the importance of speaking in an orderly way.[45] These also accounted for other participants in legal procedure. In 1513 the aldermen of Ghent promulgated detailed regulations for legal aides so as to 'remedy the grand expressions and the abuse on the part of solicitors, procurators and others during the execution of procedure […] both in *cameren* and in *vierschaeren*, being a great burden and labour for the aforementioned aldermen and great costs for burghers and inhabitants of the city'.[46] These regulations, which consist of no less than forty-one articles over eight pages, discourage legal aides from delaying proceedings and thus increasing costs.[47]

Furthermore, some articles clearly indicate that magistrates engaged with the discourse of efficiency politics. For example, solicitors and procurators could not argue with the aldermen after a verdict had been pronounced. Shouting, speaking, and slanderous insinuations were prohibited in the presence of the aldermen.[48] Drunkenness was also not allowed, for it increased the risk of trouble.[49] A criminal record from Leiden of 1480 indicates that a law court actually had to ask a defendant called Jan Janszoon to go home because he was drunk and insulting.[50] In general, regulations encouraged everyone to wait their turn to speak; occupy the appropriate position in

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[44] The 'Instructie gegeven der stede van Hairlem' is dated 1506. 'Scepenen en zullen niet opineren noch stemmen [...] noch in elcanders woorden spreecken [...] noch strijden, noch cabbelen, noch malcanderen iniurie seggen'. Fruin, *Instructie door Philips Wielant*, 84.

[45] SAG, series 261bis, manual no.4 (1454), f.2r.

[46] 'Schepenen van beede de bancken, ende leeden de dekenen omme te remedieerne die groote expressen ende abuusen vanden taellieden, procurators en andere int beleeden vande processen bij langhe lerende ende anderssins, ende datte alzo wel in cameren als in vierschaeren grootelycx ten laste ende traveylle vande voorn. scepenen ende ten zwaren coste vande poorters ende insetene deser stede'. SAG, series 261ter, f.50r. The document is dated 1513 in the second last article on f.54r. This was apparently not the first time the Ghent aldermen claimed to have received complaints (from unspecified persons), among other things about insulting behaviour of solicitors and unfair taxes. SAG, series 108, no.2, *voorgeboden* 1402-1436, f.109r (1432). According to the Oxford Dictionary, procurator in modern English means: 'An agent representing others in a court of law in countries retaining Roman civil law.' (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/) In the late Middle Ages, a procurator served in a similar way. See the MNW. The aldermen themselves had a procurator in their service, who, at least in 1488, had an office next to the aldermen's house of the *Gedele*. SAG, series 93, no. 26, f.11r.

[47] A way to prevent 'long-lasting demeanour and delays' was, for instance, to not allow trials of more than three days. SAG, series 261ter, f.50v-50r.

[48] SAG, series 261ter, f.50v.

[49] SAG, series 261ter, f.53v.

[50] But as Janszoon went 'out of the chamber and came into the lobby', he threatened a *vinder* with his life. 'Dair op dat voirs. [Jan Jansz] antwoirde mit heten worden dat hij en wiste noch en conde geen recht spreken, dan woude zij geld hebben vande specke, dat hij seide dat quaet was mit veel quade hete ende onbehoirlike woirden die hij in droncken manieren sprekende was, als hoe wel dattet was voir middage, soe dattet tgerecht hem seyden dat hij thuys gaen soude, ende doen als hem geseyt was ende als hij uut camer vanden gerechte gingen ende opter salen quam, soe seyde hij totten vinder mit quade heet en fellen woirden hij soude hem zijn kele of steken, gelijck dat mit wairachtigen tugen wel bevonden is'. SAL, Correctieboeken C, 1480, f.54r.

the room (and definitely not the aldermen's seat); and not to argue or assist legal parties if they had not sworn an oath.[51] If they did not pay a fine immediately after committing an offence, the aldermen could deny the legal aides further access to the council chamber and courtroom.[52]

It is clear, in sum, that the court forbade interference except on its own terms. In the towns under study, the aldermen strove to prevent verbal interruptions in the council chamber and public courtrooms, although with different levels of success. Decrees focused on managing public courtrooms and council chambers outnumber those dealing more generally with sounds and behaviour in the public areas of buildings. Aldermen seemed to have been less bothered by misbehaviour when town halls were not being used for legal administration. The idea that magistrates anticipated (and sought to preclude) disturbing sounds and behaviour in spaces is supported by evidence of soundproof walls and town halls being spatially organised so as to keep certain rooms secluded.[53]

Unfortunately, not much can be said about the frequency with which formal procedures were interrupted in town halls. Documentation indicating the number and consistency of smaller fines levied by town officials is not available. In records relating to criminal courts, however, information about some particularly disruptive episodes survives. Fights and insults are especially visible. By and large, these behaviours were recorded as deeds that caused commotion. These records indicate turmoil in spaces such as the council chamber. On different days in 1481, for example, Gouda's aldermen sentenced several people, likely guards, to undertake a pilgrimage for 'fighting during their watch in the town hall, in the back of the council chamber'. This, the sentences note, contravened regulations.[54] More people were caught uttering 'nonsense' in the council chamber.[55] Despite defining and regulating noise, the aldermen could not prevent all disturbing misbehaviour.

The sources repeatedly indicate examples of magistrates defining certain sounds, behaviours, and matter as forms of disturbance. Officials tended to emphasise the potentially

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[51] SAG, series 261ter, f.51r.

[52] 'Item zo wie in eeneghen vanden voornoemde boeten gehwijst ende ghecondempneert wert ende die niet en betaelt voor tscheeden van scepenen dies vermaene wesende, t lande vande vande [sic] camere, oft zynen stedelanderie, oft van yemande vande eenege zoude verbueren, zowel hy en hadde dezelvt boete ende en zoude niet meer moghen noch in cameren noch in vierschaeren agieren, hy en hadde de zelve boete betaelt ende op gheleyt'. SAG, series 261ter, f.54v.

[53] See chapter 2.

[54] 'Alsoe Daniel Wouters, Jan van Souwen ende Heynrick Willemsz sekere rurenge ende gevecht gemaect hebben in de wake opter stede huus after in de raetcamer, contrarie der kuer ende ordinancie vander stede, dat ons van hem noch nyemant te liden en staet'. SAMH, AC2.176, loose folio in between 21-22.

[55] It appears this was possibly a space where one could be detained, awaiting their businesses in the town hall. 'Also Geryt de Jonckz gecomen is opter stede huus ende heeft dair grote rebellicheit bedreven opte waick, twelck ons van hem noch van nyemant anders te lyde en staet'. SAMH, AC2.176, 121.

negative impact of such disturbances, especially when they infringed upon town halls' more secluded spaces. To some extent these were circumstantial interruptions that were unavoidable given these buildings' multiple functions. Town halls frequently underwent construction works. What is more, they purveyed a number of services for city inhabitants, had kitchen facilities for guests and those working long hours, and contained detention spaces for use in the administration of justice. As such, they were accessible to many agents and disturbing elements. Members of the urban community could conduct themselves in especially unpredictable ways. They might come to the town hall to attend a legal procedure, sometimes with a personal agenda, as I discuss in the following sections.

Verbal and physical attacks, and insulting government officials

In 1519, Jacob Stamme twice spoke ill of some on Gouda's law court, 'in particular in the chamber'. As a result, he was sentenced to embark on a pilgrimage (to *Sint Joost*, which was approximately 150 kilometres from Gouda). The record of this case does not mention the exact words that Stamme used, but it is clear that they were levelled against members of the court and concerned the administration of justice itself.[56] There is no indication of witnesses (besides those in the law court themselves) nor of legal procedure being disturbed. The most significant aspects of his sentence, the record would suggest, have to do with the identity of the offended parties (members of the law court), the substance of Stamme's speech acts, and the location of his misdeeds (the council chamber). Because of these factors, Gouda's aldermen considered Stamme's words to be insulting and offensive. Another example from Gouda confirms the importance of the town hall as a location and the presence of government officials in cases concerning defamation. In 1471 Kathryn Koelen uttered 'resentful and unreasonable' words at the back of the chamber, in the presence of the sheriff, burgomasters, and aldermen. The law court fined her, requiring her to give two pounds of wax to the lepers, and sentenced her to undertake a pilgrimage to Einsiedeln, Switzerland (which was around 750 kilometres away).[57]

Ostensibly, such cases are nothing special; insults and public attacks seem to have been common in late medieval towns. According to historian Daniel Lord Smail, acts of defamation

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[56] 'Alsoe Jacob Stamme hem vervordert heeft eenige vanden gerechte qualick toe te spreecken, ende bysonder inde camer die zelfde vande gerechte oick qualic toe sprekende opten justicie, twelck die vande gerechte van hem noch van nyemant anders en staet te lyden'. SAMH, AC2.176, 190.

[57] 'Alsoe Kathryn Koelen in geseten heeft tegen mijn heer enden der stede, om dat in qualikken ende onredeliken gesproken heeft after in die camer, in tegewoirdicheit van scout, burgemeysteren ende scepenen, dair voir dat in mijnen heer in der stede te beteringen doen sel ende geve die lazarus twee pont was, twelke dit ende alre heilige dach naestcomende ende dair toe een bedevairt ten Insel tot gerechte vermaninge'. SAMH, AC2.176, 79.

were routinely prosecuted. They were permitted, however, if they were articulated in legal spaces using the grammar of Roman and Canon law.[58] Smail focusses on an outdoor courtroom in medieval Marseille, which he characterises as a stage that was especially well-suited for public verbal attacks on city officials. Indeed, an open space in the midst of the city, the courtroom encapsulated the emotional relations among the plaintiff, defendant, and city.[59] By contrast, the council chamber of Gouda, which was typical for the fifteenth-century Low Countries, did not serve as a stage – at least for those who were not government officials. As I have shown, the *vierschaar* was a regulated space with limited capacity. The magistrates were the dominant authority in these courtrooms; the ways in which they managed space and protocols had implications for others' speech and behaviour. This comes across in the records where mention is made of insults and public attacks.

Time and again criminal records indicate that court officials construed public courtrooms and council chambers as sites of misconduct in which they were liable to face insults and even assault. Repeatedly courts stress the undesirability of such behaviour. These spaces thus play a major role in cases of public disorder. For instance, in 1458 judges in Leiden argued that 'evil words' were spoken in 'the public courtroom in front of the common people'. This indicates that in considering these insults, they saw the presence of a public audience (and thus also the openness of the space) as a decisive circumstance.[60] Evidence of regulations concerning physical assaults in the presence of government officials is common. Town statutes in Den Briel and Haarlem forbade fights and injuries (*off enige quetsende*), as well as offensive remarks being directed toward members of the law court or those in its service. Philips Wielant's treatises for Haarlem state the following:

> When someone speaks ill of the sheriff, burgomaster, or other members of the law court, to their dislike, they will pay three guilders. And if it concerned their official position, or in contempt of justice, he will pay ten guilders, and compensate the party, unless the aldermen decided upon a higher punishment.[61]

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[58] Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*, 95.

[59] Smail, 90–92.

[60] 'Vele quade ende oneerlike woirde die voirs Gerijt toe gesproken ende over die vierschair voir tgemene volke toe geroepen'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458, f.109r.

[61] Article 407. 'Waert dat yemend den scout, burchmeestere of andere vanden gerechte qualic toe sprake, zo dat zij dat te moede trocken, die zoude verbueren III g. Ende waert ter cause van hueren state of officie of in versmadenesse van iusticien, zo zoude hij verbueren X g, ende repareren de partie, ten ware dat scepenen dochte datter meerder punicie toe diende'. Fruin, *Instructie door Philips Wielant*, 134–135. These treatises were likely not formally adapted by the city's courts, but inspired their statutes and Wielant's own better-known *Corte instructie in materie criminele*. M. Müller, *Misdaad en straf in een Hollandse stad: Haarlem, 1245-1615* (Hilversum, 2017), 51; Fruin, *Instructie door Philips Wielant*, 38.

These regulations also indicate that location – namely that of the town hall – was a crucial factor when it came to judging cases of insult. Wielant continues:

> He who spoke ill or with damaging words to a burgher [the original refers to a *poorter or poorteresse*, suggesting that injured parties might be male or female] in the *vierschaar* or up in the town hall, in the presence of the law court, will pay 20 sc. If he did this elsewhere, he would pay 5 sc. And he would need to repair the injury, at the discretion of the law, unless he spoke during litigation in service of his case, explicitly declaring not wanting to hurt anyone. [62]

In this passage, Wielant gives various instructions for dealing with different but overlapping incidents involving insults directed at burghers and members of the council, especially when such utterances concerned their official positions. Additionally, he marks the context of the public courtroom and town hall – 'up in the town hall', as he puts it, the location of the council chamber – as decisive in judging the seriousness of 'damaging' utterances among urban citizens. Going by Wielant's text, the questions of whether an offence was committed in a designated legal spaces and the presence of legal officials had a significant bearing on the amounts that culprits were fined. Verbal attacks directed specifically at municipal agents were judged differently than those directed at others. It is also worth noting that the town hall and public courtroom were seen as a uniquely inappropriate place in which to speak offensively. A similar logic can be discerned in the case from Gouda that I discussed above, which concerned members of the law court and justice itself being held in contempt. More than that, the offender expressed his contempt in the specific location of the town hall's council chamber, resulting in an altogether heavier punishment, instead of a fine.
Can the uptick in the number of prosecutions of insulting behaviour in especially the fifteenth century be explained by the fact that town halls were increasingly being used as a location for legal procedures? Speech crimes are omnipresent in legal documentation. Historians have suggested that this is due to both aldermen increasingly turning to judicial institutions in dealing with verbal conflicts and their heightened sensitivity to defamation and slander.[63] Verbal defamation, insults, and threats had the potential to undermine forms of social, political, and legal authority. Fearful

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[62] Article 408. 'So wie eenegen poorter of poortesse leelic ende iniurieuselic toesprect in de vierscare of up der stede huus, in de presencie vanden gerechte, die sal verbueren XX sc. Ende dede hijt eldere, hij zoude verbueren V sc., ende bovendien repareren de iniurie, ter discrecie vander wet, ten ware dat hijt zeyde dyngende, ende dat diende te zijnder materie, met protestacie van niemend te willen iniurierene'. Fruin, *Instructie door Philips Wielant*, 137.
[63] M. Veldhuizen, 'Guard Your Tongue. Slander and Its Punishment in a Late Medieval Courtroom', in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. J. Dumolyn et al. (Turnhout, 2014), 29–32.

of disorder's infectious character, urban elites tried to limit and prosecute such expressions in the public space.[64] Words were taken seriously, especially when used to damage someone's *fama* (that is, their reputation) or shape public opinion on the street. These sensitivities surrounding utterances determined how people were perceived and often had judicial and political implications.[65]

According to Sandy Bardsley's work on late medieval England, however, prosecutions of public insults (scolding) only appeared in the course of the fourteenth and especially fifteenth centuries. In the same period, criminal record frequently document the abuse of urban officials and institutions.[66] Bardsley explains these developments as the results of a disruption of society and received structures of governance, in addition to a popularisation of the ecclesiastical discourse of the 'sins of the tongue'.[67] I also propose to contextualise the emergence of prosecutions of public insults in relation to local urban administrations' solidifying yet challenged control over judicial process and the standardisation of courtroom settings. In formal municipal spaces, insults and physical attacks aimed at government officials or and their functions constituted forms of contestation. This is why it was in the magistrates' interest to regulate behaviour, prosecute infringements, and emphasise protocol. The examples of insults and other defamatory behaviour in the town hall that follow demonstrate how aldermen integrated town hall's locations and spatial form into their legal narratives. Criminal records reveal the ways in which magistrates laid claim to

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[64] J. Haemers, 'Filthy and Indecent Words. Insults, Defamation, and Urban Politics in the Southern Low Countries, 1300-1550', in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. J. Dumolyn et al. (Turnhout, 2014). The fear for this disorder's character was based on the idea that anger could grow into hate, which was infectious. D. Smail, 'Hatred as a Social Institution in Late-Medieval Society', *Speculum* 76, no. 1 (2001): 90–126. Concerns with undermining words (and assemblies) especially accounted when an urban revolt was imminent, such as in Ghent around 1479. See e.g. J. Haemers and A. De Meyer, 'Le cri du rebelle, le cri du criminel. Slogans, insultes et le langage des "malfaiteurs" dans les villes des Pays-Bas méridionaux, XIVe-XVIe siècles', *Histoire, Économie & Société* 39 (2019): 29. In addition, Leiden and other cities in the Low Countries were involved in political struggles between *Hoeken* and *Kabeljauwen*. Statutes occasionally addressed expressions of political nature with origins in these struggles. For an study of these political disputes: van Gent, *Pertijelike saken*. See also a by-law from 1481 Amsterdam: 'Item, off dair yemant waer, die enighe personen onse poirteren wesende, quade woerden gaven, die partye aengaen, seggende: "ghy sijt een Hoeck" off "een Cabbeljau", dat sal men mijt die clock alzoe corrigeren, datten enen ygelijck exempel wesen zall'. Breen, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Amsterdam*, 173. In general, municipalities forbade large assemblies, fights on the streets and the utterance of political messages, expressed in words, pamphlets, graffiti, or songs. This especially accounted for more public areas, such as churches, graveyards or taverns. See e.g. a 1492 statute in Ghent. SAG, series. 93, no. 26, f.18r; Glaudemans, *Om die wrake wille*, 116–22.

[65] T. Fenster and D. Smail, 'Introduction', in *Fama. The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. T. Fenster and D. Smail (Ithaca, 2003), 3–4.

[66] S. Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', in *Fama. The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. T. Fenster and D. Smail (Ithaca, 2003), 154.

[67] Sins of the Tongue include barratry, cursing and scolding. Bardsley places this relatively new category of incidents that were brought to court in the aftermath of the Black Death. Bardsley, 161–62. See for a study on Sins of the Tongue in ecclesiastical, profane ethic and legal discourse in Middle Dutch: M. Veldhuizen, *Sins of the Tongue in the Medieval West: Sinful, Unethical, and Criminal Words in Middle Dutch (1300-1550)* (Turnhout, 2017).

town halls, courtrooms, and council chambers. Accordingly, in next sections I analyse aldermen's attempts to tighten their grip on legal procedures and places, and how they connected this to town halls' functioning.

In general, medieval legal archives relating to cities in the Low Countries often mention the verbal abuse of officials. They include elaborate records that criticise and respond to such behaviour. Between 1392 and 1490 (based on the sample of 1,361 verdicts taken from forty different years) seventy-four cases prosecuted by Leiden's law court concerned insults levelled against a government official as the primary offence. In another seventy-eight cases such insults featured as secondary charges. This means that more than 11% of sampled cases involved insults of officials as part of the accusation.[68]

Most offenders' backgrounds are poorly recorded. It is practically impossible to make any generalisation on the topic, for disputes relating to verbal or physical attacks could involve both elites and lower classes.[69] Indeed, historians have shown that the people prosecuted by the aldermen on account of their insulting utterances and actions came from different social backgrounds.[70] The records occasionally refer to a profession or hint at someone's status in society. For example, records may mention an original allegation of one party by another. This indicates that members of higher classes were involved, for it was expensive to make use of law courts.[71] However, other offenders just walked into the building, whether they either passed an official by chance or purposely sought them out. Other relevant people were, for example, summoned as witnesses. They all belonged to a given city's jurisdiction. There is no indication that women had less access to the town hall, even though they are typically underrepresented in legal

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[68] SAL, inv. no. 0508, Correctieboeken A, B, C, D, 4, 5A. The sample years are: 1392-95; 1434; 1436-37; 1440; 1446-49; 1450; 1452-53; 1455-59; 1460-63; 1466-69; 1470; 1473-74; 1476-77; 1480-84; 1486-87; 1490. Cloth fraud was by far the most committed primary crime: 493 cases, or 36,25%, followed by public disturbances (197, 14,5%), assaults (135, 9,9%). The 74 cases primarily concerning government insult represent 5,4% of the cases. A similar percentage arises form Gouda's *vonnisboeken*. There, of 561 verdicts that were recorded in the *vonnisboek* in between 1447 and 1539, 29 were directly concerned with the threatening or insulting of the court, a total of 5,2%. SAMH, AC2.176, *Criminele vonnis- of correctieboeken,* 1447-1558. Within these cases, the judged crimes range from the beating of the sheriff (a heavy crime, resulting in a 101-year exile from the city); complaints, disobedience, or verbal attacks during the supervision of food trades and cloth production; and confrontations in the courtrooms. See e.g. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1452, f.50r.; 1453, f.66r.

[69] Besides theft, which was committed by members of lower classes mostly, offenders of crimes in the later middle ages came from a wide social spectrum. Nicholas, 'Crime and Punishment'; P. Turning, *Municipal Officials, Their Public, and the Negotiation of Justice in Medieval Languedoc* (Leiden, 2013), 43–47.

[70] T. Dean, *Crime and Justice in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 2007), 115; Haemers, 'Filthy and Indecent Words', 247–48.

[71] Financial burdens were e.g. representation in court, possibly escalated by protracted suits, writs needed for trial, fines for unsuccessful trials. There was, however, a growing sense for 'legal aid'. Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*, 66–72; A. Musson, *Medieval Law in Context. The Growth of Medieval Counsciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester, 2001), 163.

documentation.[72] The few occasions in which women do appear in records having to do with defamatory behaviour in town halls (such as the case of Kathrijn Koelen, which I discussed earlier), actually suggest that the presence of women was self-evident. What is more, women misbehaved no more or less intensely than men: women shouted insults and injured people, just like male felons.[73]

Although cases varied significantly, insults were generally described using standardised formulas, such as 'bad words', 'unnecessary words', or 'violent words'. These terms are rather ambiguous and could plausibly encompass cries, curses, and avowed threats. This ambiguity is present even where the hurtful words have been recorded. Verbal and physical attacks were sometimes directly aimed at government officials; such incidents challenged the law court or municipal agents. The ways in which law courts dealt with insults, like the majority of the regulations on behaviour in spaces of authority, reflected different interests. Generally the sentence for an insult was a fine, but special circumstances could mark cases out. Especially conspicuous in this regard were insults delivered in front of the law court or directed at members of the government.[74] In some Italian cities, according to Trevor Dean, law courts only penalised insults voiced in the town hall and law courts itself. Prosecutions served to prevent possible problems of interpretation, in that they limited and defined what counted as an insult. In the late medieval Low Countries as in the case of these Italian examples, such insults resulted in a monetary fine.[75]

In the Low Countries, in addition to fines, judges punished insults and attacks by exiling culprits, as well as sentencing them to perform public rituals or undertake pilgrimages. Three verdicts from Haarlem in 1446, for instance, indicates of how different justifications for these

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[72] In legal matters, at least on paper, women were often represented by men. This is an important reason for female underrepresentation in legal documentation. For a long period, this bias was one of the causes for a gendered historiography on female criminal activities. In the last decades, scholars have approached the topic differently, and placed women in crime more broadly in the context of social control and prosecution policies, as well as gender relations and judicial activity. See. e.g. S. Cohn Jr., *Women in the Streets. Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1996), 16–38; G. Geltner, 'A Cell of Their Own: The Incarceration of Women in Late Medieval Italy', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 1 (2013): 29–31; N. van Kleij, '"Ende dat jonckwijff heeft geseit." De deelname van vrouwen aan criminele rechtspraak in Gouda, ca. 1450-1530', *Historica* 39, no. 1 (2016): 3–7; S. Muurling, M. Pluskota, and M. van der Heijden, 'Introduction: Women and Crime in History', in *Women's Criminality in Europe, 1600-1914*, ed. M. van der Heijden, M. Pluskota, and S. Muurling (Cambridge, 2020), 1–25.

[73] Trevor Dean states there was a clear gender division with regard to the content and the target of insults. 'Threats of injury, challenges and the imprecation of ill-fortune are exclusively used by men, and mainly against other men. Women can only wish on men the infliction of violence by other men. Women are insulted through their sexuality or sexual decency, men through their roles as carriers of public trust, or through their 'honesty, courage and worth'. Dean, *Crime and Justice*, 115.

[74] T. Dean, 'Gender and Insults in an Italian City: Bologna in the Later Middle Ages', *Social History* 29, no. 2 (2004): 231.

[75] Dean, *Crime and Justice*, 117–118.

rulings were entangled with one another. All cases concern people who, according to the records, uttered 'unreasonable' and 'unseemly' words. Despite having this in common, they were sentenced to different punishments. Arnt Cuynre spoke irrationally when he came before the court, even though he had not been summoned. He received a fine of 4,000 stones, meaning he had to pay a sum of money worth this amount of stones, a specific type of fine that I will discuss below.[76]

Claes Eefssoen apparently spoke in a similar way. The record details how the court, which was gathered in the town hall, had concluded a case concerning Eefssoen, his child, and a friar called Gijsbrecht. It seems that the court's decision was not to Eefssoen's liking. He spoke 'unreasonable words' after the session had ended, presumably while still in the town hall. In view of his 'irrationality', the court made him undergo a forgiveness ritual in front of the town hall, as well as go on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Eersel, some 150 kilometres away.[77] Another man, Ripprant Melijssoen, spoke 'unreasonable words' when directly addressing four burgomasters. He also assaulted a city guard. For this, Melijssoen had to pay a fine of 20,000 stones and ten *hoet* of chalk.[78]

As the records indicate, different circumstances obtained in each case. Melijssoen clearly attempted to intimidate the burgomasters, which explains the discrepancy between the two stone fines. In all cases, however, the insults are recorded using general, formulaic descriptions. Although the courts' sentences would have been pronounced publicly, it is unlikely that the aldermen repeated the exact wording of defamations in public, unless this would harm the culprit.[79] In taking into account those who received an given utterance and the location in which it was enunciated, law courts foreground the precise circumstances of these cases. Accordingly, they explained why

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[76] 'Alsoe Arnt Cuynre voir den gerechte gecomen is, dair hij niet ontboden en was, ende heeft voil onredelicke ombetaemlike, lelike woirden … [sic] gerechte gesproken'. Speet, *Het register van criminele sententiën van Haarlem*, 24.

[77] 'Also 't gerecht op ter stedehuys geseten hebben om te zoenen enige partijen die in twijgescille ende ongunsten stonden […] ende alsoe sij een zoene gemaect ende uugesproken hebben tussen Claes Eefssoen ende sijnen kinde ende Gijsbrecht, broider poirtier tot Sunte Jans, dair Claes Eeffssoen onredelicke ende onbetaemlike woirde op ten gerechte off gesproken heeft, om dier onredelicheit wille, soe seitet 't gerecht oever dat hij comen sal voir der stedehuys ende bidden gerecht off yet tgegen him misseit mach hebben, dat sij hem dat vergeven willen om Goods willen. Ende voirt soe sal hij een bedevaert doen tot Onser Liever Vrouwen ten Eesetel'. Speet, 27.

[78] 'Eodem die wort Ripprant Melijssoen oeverseit bij den ghemeinen gerechte omdat hij den vier burgemeesteren onbetamelike ende onredelike woirde toegesproken hadde in hoir selfs tgegenwordicheit, ende oic overmids dat hij mit op gesetter lagen bij laten avonde der stedewaker gequetst heeft ende in vresen van sijnen lijve gesett'. Speet, 29–30. A *hoet* was an unit of capacity used for dry goods, equal to 9,7 *mud* (hectolitre). See the MNW.

[79] Quotes were included in the verdict when this was defaming the culprits themselves and supporting the decision of the law court. For example, when Henrick Willemsoen the miller refused to pay excise duties and uttered the 'threatening and scornful words [...] "My lords, see what you are doing, we will not pay excise duties and if we ever need to pay excise duties, we will take off the sails of our mills"'. Translation of: 'Ghij heren, ziet wat gij doet, wij en willen ghenen exsijs geven ende moeten wij ymmer exsijs gheven, so sullen wij alle die zeilen onthangen van die molenen'. Speet, 64.

they decided upon different punishments. All of this suggests that aldermen still had to justify and communicate the restrictions that they imposed and that city inhabitants challenged governmental protocol.

Insults and public attacks indicate neither that late medieval society was simply ill-mannered nor that people acting in this way were just unruly. Insults were messages that participated in medieval socio-legal landscapes. Through such messaging, people attempted to take control of legal matters and their reputations into their own hands.[80] Violence could serve similar goals. Having studied violence in contemporary Bolivian cities, the anthropologist Daniel Goldstein argues that physical violence can be a way for politically marginalised groups to critique the social structures and official legal order. By violently taking responsibility, especially when it comes to corruption, these groups in fact deploy the rhetoric of justice and law.[81] In the late medieval West-European context, violence and threats of physical force constituted a similarly powerful means of communication that suited the legal framework, as many historians have argued.[82] This was especially the case when people felt they were disadvantaged by existing legal institutions. In the cases under study, many people indeed use words, gestures, or outright violence to make a statement. They might disagree with the courts' decision or argumentation, or reject the court's authority as an institution. This, at least, is how the cases were recorded by the courts' clerks, whose writings indicate the magistrates' concern with open critique and challenges to their legal authority, whether through insults, threats, or physical attacks.

To avoid challenges to judicial legitimacy, and the possibility that urban dwellers might solve legal issues themselves (potentially resulting in feuds), law courts preferred reconciliation (in which parties and public institutions came together) over imposing penalties. This is one reason why peace-making remained the core of the judicial system in the fifteenth century.[83] This meant that attempts to undermine reconciliations were a serious matter. In cases of insult, the records often mention how people present in the court either disrupted legal proceedings or indicated an intention to do so. These interruptions, then, were ways of signalling disagreement with the court's decisions or procedures, and thus of undermining the aldermen's preferred solution. In the first instance, the accused often communicated with people who were not legal officials, such as family members or opposing parties. In these cases, the defendant ostensibly addressed the officials implicitly or unintentionally, not as their main target.

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[80] D. Lesnick, 'Insults and Threats in Medieval Todi', *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991): 79.

[81] D. Goldstein, *The Spectacular City. Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia* (Durham, 2004), 3, 16, 182–95.

[82] Skoda, *Medieval Violence*, 18; Lantschner, *The Logic of Political Conflict*, 40–41; Smail, 'Hatred as a Social Institution'; Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*.

[83] G. Kumhera, *The Benefits of Peace. Private Peacemaking in Late Medieval Italy* (Leiden, 2017), 60.

Nevertheless the law court presented itself as an offended party, in addition to the culprit's intended recipient, by stating that insults or attacks happened 'in the presence of the law court'.[84] In a study of communicative practices in late-medieval law courts in Utrecht, York, and Paris, Frans Camphuijsen argues that the Utrecht council regularly presented themselves as the (main) victims. Behaviour in court that was considered offensive was presented as affecting the common good, with the law court as its representative. This is why the judges stressed their concern with communal wellbeing and tried to strengthen their influence on arenas of socio-legal communication.[85] Indeed, by construing themselves as the object of offence (intended or otherwise), the aldermen essentially stated that when insults and attacks occurred when the court was in session, they were always offences against the law court. Above and beyond their attempts to stop misbehaviour from spreading in public contexts, which I have discussed above, magistrates aimed to direct the effects of disorder to their advantage. The following section analyses how law courts deployed settings and movement between spaces in specific ways that endowed public insults and other forms of misbehaviour with meaning.

The location and movement of misbehaviour

Law courts explained the prosecution and punishments of incidents taking place in the town hall as place- and setting-related. An example from Leiden in 1482 is a case in point. It concerns Jacop Willemsz Turffman, whose wife charged him with financially neglecting her and their children, contradicting earlier agreements. The magistrates asked him why he had broken his promise. In his defence, Turffman replied he could not help them other than by offering them goods that they could then sell. The judges concluded that he should nonetheless support his family monetarily.[86] At this point, Turffman turned around and walked out the door, telling his wife and the judges: 'I'm off now, and if you lack something, you can follow me'. Once he had left the room, he added: 'I'm off now, and I wish you all *Sint Jans Evel*!' (that is, epilepsy). According to the court record, he then threw his cloak around him as if he were preparing to start a fight. This version of the events was supported by some eyewitnesses, who had been sitting outside the door to the council

[84] See e.g. in 1459 Leiden: 'Soe began Allairt van Vliet, Dircx voirs. zoen, veel quade hete ende onredelike woirde in tgerechts tegenwoirdichheyt'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, f.123v.
[85] Camphuijsen, 'Scripting Justice', 172–81.
[86] SAL, Correctieboeken C, 95r-96r.

chamber. The aldermen considered such behaviour to be act of 'a disrespect of the law court', in view of which Turffman was sentenced to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome.[87]

To begin with, this was a domestic dispute between a (former) couple. Clearly, the woman had some means at her disposal, for she was able to afford to mount a legal charge and prosecution costs, despite not being supported by her estranged husband. Jacop Turffman's behaviour suggested that, at best, he would have rather settled the case outside the courtroom. His fate was sealed, however, when he was cast as someone who rejected the court's legitimacy, having broken previous promises and, in walking away, indicated he did not accept the court's decision.[88] The vituperation was not the only insult, especially since the law court took two other factors into account: the violent impression that Turffman made in departing and the location at which this took place. He left through the council chamber's door and walked into a more public area. The first of Turffman's offensive utterances to be recorded, it seems, were performed on the room's threshold. The second utterance, however, happened *outside* the room, where people were waiting, as the record noted. These people formed a larger audience. The formal allegation implies that Turffman was aware of this new context, as his movements and repetition of his insults suggest. He might have deliberately waited until he had left the council chamber before cursing; insults made inside the chamber were normally more severely punished. It may also have been that he intended to air his opinions before another audience, having known that there were other people outside. In any case, the location and presence of public witnesses was clearly significant in the adjudication of the case. Indeed, the door is mentioned three times as a place at which various actions occurred: Turffman's departure and accompanying utterances, his cursing, and witnessing on the part of those sitting outside the courtroom. The people outside are mentioned on account of their role as witnesses, which might have served to the magistrates with tools for punishing Turffman's behaviour heavily. That said, the verdict also betrays the aldermen's heightened vulnerability when events bled beyond the court's boundaries. When articulated in the open, insults were better able to challenge their authority. This may explain the urgency with which such infringements were prosecuted in no uncertain terms.

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[87] 'Wairop Jacop voirs. hem omme keerende ende ghinc ter dueren uut, seggende mit heeten woorden totten gerechte ende sijn wijff mit zijnen vader ende tot horen broeder: "hier gae ic hene, ende gebreect u yet, volget my nae", ende als hy buyten der dueren was seyde hij noch mit heeten woirde: "hier gae ic, voer all souden si alle Sint Jans evel hebben!" ende sloech zijn hoeyck op in maniere of hij gevochten soude hebben, gelijc dat wel also betuget is vanden genen diet hoorden die voir die doer vander camere saten. Ende wair dit een quade sake is die de voirs Jacop in versmedichheit des gerechts'. SAL, Correctieboeken C, 95r-96r.

[88] Insults addressed to the other party after a legal agreement were seen as a crime. Glaudemans, *Om die wrake wille*, 122.

Insults, threats, and their socio-legal interpretation on the part of law courts, therefore, were related to place. This suggests that disorder in town halls and indoor courtrooms had both advantages and disadvantages for city officials. At one level, the law court could keep criticism and disturbances largely behind closed doors, where it took place on the magistrates' terms without a larger public audience. In the town hall, however, possible witnesses were never far away, and culprits could quickly find their way into public spaces. In Aalst in 1480, for instance, Thomse Rouls offended Jan van Snic, shouting 'You are a criminal, a son of a whore, a thief, and you did not pay me' and waving his knife at van Snic as if eager to attack him. Van Snic, who was represented by Pieter vander Straten (a relative or lawyer), had summoned Rouls to the court of the aldermen. The incident occurred after the men left the council chamber.[89] This record could be read as simply involving the conviction of a case of insult and violent threat. However, the court notary mentioned the fact that both men had just come out of the council chamber and were still in the town hall when the accident happened. Maybe Rouls deliberately waited until he had left the regulated environment of the council chamber, in which insults were commonly punished. Being outside the chamber, however, gave Rouls and his message more exposure. Walking outside the room would have led the men to the stairs directly connected to the main entrance. This means that Thomse Rouls shouted his insults in a relatively public space, rejecting the legal institution.[90] Apparently the risk that such behaviour at this location posed to the law court, alongside the fact that the reconciliation was still fresh, was an important argument for a heavy sentence, namely fifty years banishment.

In Ghent in 1513, the aldermen explained how Franssois Doens made his case fiercely in the 'public chambers' (*openbarer cameren*). He shouted loudly that 'One does not dispense justice to me like to others, but as I am equal to you, I have good instruments (*ghereedscepe*). I believe I am in Turkey, or that I am Turkish'. (Apparently, Doens had a clear opinion about how justice was administered in Turkey). He then raised his fist, accompanied by a pun: 'This might come in handy'. He subsequently left the chamber, claiming that the court was biased, and continued

[89] 'Pieter vander Straten, inder name van Janne van Snic, cleacht over Thomse Rouls zegghende dat onlanxleden nadien dat hij de voirs Thoms hadde doen daghen voor scepenen dinc zeker scult die hy den zelven Jan heeschende was. Ende zy deen teghen dander gehoort hadden ghesyn in justicien, ende zy waeren ghedaen heden buten scepenen camer, ende comende buten cameren opden zolder vanden scepenhuse, vervorderde hem te zegghene totten zelven Jan […]: "Ghy zyt een boeven, een hoeren zoen […] ende een dief ende ghy en hebt my niet betaelt", palmende zijn mes ende makende manieren als of hij den zelven Jan gheevelt zoude hebben van zynen leven. Ende theinde scepenen daeraf of van woorden in gehliken substantien te wollen tinformerene'. SAA, series 859, f.24v.

[90] See access analysis in chapter 2, figure 2.1.

swearing on the terrace outside the town hall.[91] The court was very aware of his movements and their implications, for the record specially the steps of his progression. The record locates Doens' first insult 'in the same chamber', before describing how he left that space. Again, the importance of space is manifest, as are the different spatial boundaries through which the culprit passed. Through his mobility, Doens spread his verbal attack on the law court from the chamber to the open space outside the town hall. The notion of 'public chamber' is significant here, however, for it appears that the aldermen deliberately chose to leave the room open. Detailed courtroom regulations from that same year (which I introduced earlier in this chapter) indicate the council chamber's doors could have been closed.[92] These edicts contained behavioural restrictions and punishments, largely for legal aides. As such, it is unlikely that they were applicable in Doens' case (the record does not indicate he was a legal professional). But both this example and documented restrictions from 1513 suggest that there were ongoing negotiations around behavioural norms and spatial contexts in town halls, as well as that public displays of defiance had greater legal implications.

These dynamics were also relevant to the public courtroom, as a 1469 case from Leiden suggests. According to the record, two men, Jan Clais and Jan Scoop, had an altercation 'in front of the *vierschaar,* when the court was closed, and when they left the public courtroom and arrived on the street […] whilst the court still sat in the public courtroom'. It appears that they already spoken ill of each other during the court session. Perhaps because of their quarrel, the court then closed. Nevertheless they continued arguing outside. The court was still present in the *vierschaar*, however, and it's members were probably able to hear and even see the incident on the street

[91] 'Franssois Doens hoe hy anders ghenaemt Jofte ghebynaemt es. Actum den lesten in october 1513; 50 jaren buten lande ende Graefscepe van Vlaendren als ten versoucke vanden bailliu ende heere deser stede in vierscharen opgheropen ende by contumacien verwonnen van dat hy tvriedaechts 7en deser maent van october, na dat scepenen in openbarer cameren partien gheexpediert ende ghedynght hadden, tot naer den 12 hueren vanden noene alle zaken extumeren ende uutstellen totten naesten toecomende dinghdach, hem vervoordert heeft te gemene hen te leten inde zelve camere aldaer zeer wuestelic hooghe ende overluude roupende: "Men doet my gheen recht ghelyc andren, maer daer ic u even hebbic goede ghereedscepe, ic meene dat ic in Turkhyen oft een Turc ben", zweerende eenen uutghesochten eedt opstekende al dreghende zyn hand, ende segghende: "Het zal eens te passe comen." Hetzy dat niet ghenouch persevererende van quade in argheren gaende uuter zelven camere al roupende: "Men doeter gheen recht dan an deen zyde ende diemen wilt", ten comende ande baille buten scepenhuuse zweerende anderwaerft de meerssche andere groote eeden, heeft zere wuestelic gheseit: "Al zoudicker metten teerste omme opwaerts ligghen, ic salt wreken metten stocke oft anderssins." Welke zaken zyn van quade exemple daer bute meerdere inconvenient binnen dese stede zoude moghen comen, zy also beter buter stede dan daerbinnen'. SAG, series 212, no. 1, *Ballincboec 1472-1537*, f.169r.

[92] 'Item zo verbietmen den taellieden ende procurers vanden camere vande keure zonder tconsent vande voir scepene ofte colege inde camere te comene als scepenen vergadert zijn ende de camere ghesloten es'. SAG, series 261ter, f.50v.

outside. The record speaks of a feud and how Jan Clais made hurtful statements out loud.[93] In this case, the law court clearly projected themselves (and thus the administration of justice) as victims of public defamation; their legal authority was challenged both during and after the public court session, both inside and just outside the courtroom. Moreover, the verdict captures how the different locations, and the presence of the law court mattered with regard to publicity. In justifying the verdict, the aldermen deemed it necessary to mention the fact that the men refused the magistrates' preferred solution, instead leaving the courtroom so as to continue their quarrel audibly outside.

Seen from a micro-spatial perspective and as a snapshot of contest over legitimacy, these examples reveal the framework in which both aldermen and members of urban society acted. First, the records concerning Turffman, Doens, and Rouls indicate that people could move relatively freely in town halls. In Turffman's and Doen's cases, it appears that it was possible to open the door and walk out, despite the court being in session, whereas Rouls was able to linger just outside the council chamber. Second, all of these men, including Jan Clais and Jan Scoop, took the opportunity to cause a scene in publicly; indeed, they may even have sought out such publicity. The underlying framework in which they operated allowed them to move and behave as they did, not least in spreading their criticism and rejection of the court into public areas. Third, the records indicate that the aldermen saw public insults, violence and criticism in and around town halls as damaging with regard to their legal authority. These concerned were clearly shaped by the events' exact location and degree of publicity.

The spatial, material, and regulative circumstances of town halls facilitated the magistrates in their attempts to organise procedures in an orderly manner. When disorder situations arose, law courts used them for their own purposes – namely, those of defining, denigrating, and prosecuting disruptive behaviour as criminal, and communicating exactly why it was important that they do so. In their legal narratives – the aesthetic and logical construction of criminal records, for instance – the authorities carefully referred to town hall spaces, as I have established.[94] They made connections among the building (or one of its rooms), members of the urban government, and

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[93] On the street, they made quarrel with insults (punishment: 20.000 stones). 'Alsoe als Margrieten, Clais Hugenz weder inden poortdinge nae Jacobi anno 1469, miet Jan Claeis z. mit rechte toe sprack voir peynenlike sculden die sij hem eysshede, soe dat Jan Scoop ende Jan Clais z. onderlinge heetelijc woirden cregen voirder vierschair, soe dat nae die slytinge des rechts ende sij vander vierschair geschiend waeren ende opter strate quaeme, die voirs. Jan Scoop, ter wijlen dat gerecht noch inden vierschair saten, Jan Clais z. van an tgerecht heeft dair off een viede gemaict worde, nae welke viede Jan Scoop uut hetten die voernoemde Jan leelike ende quade woirde toegesproken ende nae geroepen dat een onbehoirlike saken is twelke dat gerecht'. SAL, correctieboeken 1469, 209r.

[94] On the logic and narratives of late medieval court documentation, see D. Smail, 'Aspects of Procedural Documentation in Marseille (14th-15th Centuries)', in *Als Die Welt in Die Akten Kam. Prozeßschriftgut Im Europäischen Mittelalter*, ed. S. Lepsius and T. Wetzstein (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 139–69.

their responsibilities. The magistrates' conducted their legal work, in other words, in the light of how the town hall ideally functioned.

In the sample of criminal cases taken from the *correctieboeken* of Leiden, fifty-one verdicts (around 3,7% of the sample) mention the expression 'in the presence of the law court'. Twenty-five of these verdicts concern insults levelled at officials; thirteen had to do with insults or verbal assaults addressed at someone else; and another eight involved public disturbance, such as fights in front of the town hall.[95] In twenty-five cases, the aldermen specified the town hall or one of its court spaces as a location in the verdict. This group forms the vast majority of the thirty cases in which the town hall is noted in contextualising the incidents. Accordingly, when the aldermen decided to mention the town hall in their verdicts, the incident that had been brought to trial likely happened in the presence of officials and concerned an insult. These verdicts also show how the aldermen applied different regulations to different spaces. Disturbing a trial or hearing, for instance, was directly related to the *vierschaar* as both a location and legal court sitting. Insults, complaints, arguments, or quarrels that took place directly outside the public courtroom and town hall were often recorded in terms of a movement from legal space into the more public domain, or as occurring after the closure of the public courtroom. On some occasions, records mention other locations in the building. Consider an example from Leiden in 1447. After the *weesmeesters* (orphan's officials) asked Katrijn (Jan Aemsz's wife) to come in the orphans' chamber, she beat a man bloody 'in front of the [officials] in the town hall'. Seemingly, she was angry with one of the officials.[96] In all cases, though, legislators noted spaces, which constituted a key part of their communications. Location is also prominent in the ways in which culprits had to repair their misconduct.

Repairing damage done: forgiveness rituals and stone fines

Despite the fact that insults uttered inside the town hall comprise only a relatively small number of verdicts and that they mention various different spaces, a clear pattern emerges. As I have noted earlier, offences committed inside the town hall and especially the courtrooms resulted in heavier penalties than they would had they taken places outside. Urban dwellers often contested the aldermen's attempts to manage the town hall. The magistrates too employed the building according to their own agenda. Moreover, in the following sections I analyse how magistrates repaired and

[95] See footnote 68 of this chapter, and the methodology in the introduction.

[96] 'Alsoe Katryn Jan Aems zijn wijf gecomen is voriden weesmeesteren opter stedehuys, also sy dair ontboden was, roerende van weeskinder saken, soe heeft dair die selve Katryn in jegenwoirdicheyt vanden weesmeesteren vechtelic gemaict ende Lam Cluytinge geslegen ende gebloetreyst'. SAL, Correctieboeken A, f.251r.

strengthened the building – literally and symbolically – by means of certain punishments, principally shaming rituals and stone fines. These punishments underlined their claims on the building and its courtrooms.

Penalties for crimes were meant not only to punish misconduct, but also to restore the damage done to property, authority, people, and the common good. A pilgrimage (*strafbedevaart*), for instance, could serve both as a cooling off period, which prevented confrontation for a while, and as a process of penance and healing for the culprit. A pilgrimage would compel one to leave the jurisdiction. Often traveling far beyond the city walls, culprits would in principle be unable to do further damage. Once they had arrived at their destination, culprits could also pray for their victims' salvation.[97] Stone fines and forgiveness rituals that law courts imposed could serve similar functions. Town halls often played a central role in these penalties, either as an element of the penal ritual or as beneficiary of the fine. This was especially the case when disorder was deemed to have taken place in and around the building.

For example, in 1482 the law court of Leiden decided to include a forgiveness ritual in the sentence of Willem Geryt Laurensz, overseer of the drapers guild. The city council had organised a meeting concerning the selling of *ramen* (looms used for cloth fabrication) in the public courtroom. After the magistrates had read the conditions of the sale out loud, Laurensz told the court that he disagreed with their decision in front of the 'common people' (possibly including members of the guild). When the aldermen asked him what he was insinuating, he 'came upstairs'. (This was 'as it should be', the record states; clearly the law court thought that his words did not concern the drapers.) Put differently, the aldermen anticipated Laurensz's criticism and proceeded with the conversation in their own chambers. In so doing, they would have moved from the publicly accessible *vierschaar* to the enclosed council chamber. However, the message that Laurensz delivered upstairs (namely 'I want cheap looms') did not please the court, which argued that this demand would cause great harm to the city and its drapers. The court sentenced him to a small stone fine, apparently because they perceived his request for lower prices as an offensive. Furthermore, the aldermen instructed him to confess his crime loudly in front of the town hall, immediately following a series of public announcements, and ask the aldermen for forgiveness.[98]

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[97] Glaudemans, *Om die wrake wille*, 184–87.

[98] Laurenszoon actually wanted to buy for lower prices, which the aldermen considered to be a too great loss for the drapers. 'Alzoe bijden gerechte bij consent vander vroescip, die 32 ramen die de stede binnen der stede vesten staende heeft, vercondicht hebben om te vercopen, ende inder stede huys inder vierschair dair omme vergaedert waeren om te vercopen ende die voirwairden gelesen ende op geveylt worden, soe en mochten die eerste ramen soe wel niet gelden alst gerecht ter stede oirbair wel dochte dat nae redene behoirde, ende seyden dat zij het bieden souden, wantet

On this occasion, the aldermen decided that the words they had found offensive should be repeated in public, which was to their advantage.

A case in Leiden of 1458 also indicates how aldermen determined spatial positions and boundaries to their advantage. It concerned Clemeijnse, the daughter of Clais the shipwright. 'You are not good enough to be my father', Clemeijnse had told Clais, before beating him. The law court summoned her to come 'in front of the town hall', before the common people and the assembled law court, and put her hood back. There she was to pray for the aldermen's forgiveness, loudly, so that 'one could hear it in the town hall'. 'After the aldermen leave the town hall', Clemeijnse had to join them and 'five or six' neighbours, go to her father's house (where he was lying in bed), and ask for his forgiveness.[99]

Remarkably, whereas the record mentions that Clemijnse asked the aldermen for forgiveness in their presence, this contradicts other indications of her and the magistrates' positions; Clemeijnse stood in front of the building, but needed to be audible inside the town hall. The aldermen left the building afterwards. It is thus likely that Clemijnse was positioned within their sight and hearing distance. To execute her punishment, though, the aldermen may have joined her immediately and walked her to her father's house. They could have instructed her to ask their forgiveness in the courtroom or their chamber. Instead, Clemeijnse had to do so in public, even though they were still inside. She was required to announce her crimes and emphasise that she was in need of their forgiveness. What is more, she had to adopt an unmistakably humble attire. The aldermen, therefore, were very aware of the heightened publicity outside, as compared with the town hall's secluded interior spaces. Clemeijnse's ritual request for forgiveness informed the

schelde te veel. Dair op dat Willem Geryt Laursz seyde tot den gerechte voirden gemeene volke dattet gerecht anders sien moesten […] Wair dat hij den gerechte niet te seggen hadden der draperije aengaende, hij quame boven, dair behorde, en gave dat te kennen men soude dan dair in doen als behoirde dan die woirde en behorden aldair niet gespreken te wesen. Dair op dat Willem voirs. antwoirde en seyde: "ich hadde garne goetcoop ramen", welke woirde die voirs. Willem sprack is tot groote afterdeel vander stede, en de zijn oic woirden die de wairdeyns horen eede te nae gesproken zijn, ende draget meede tot grote afterdeel vander draperije […] Ende hier en boven sel Willem voirs. op eerste dat men cleppet om vander stede huys het te lesen of te vercondigen sonder onbieden comen voir die stede huys, ende alst cleppen gelaten is van onder op mit luyder stemmen, soe dat men hem bescheydelic hoeren mach, den gerechte bidden dat soe wes dat hij tiegen der stede meer misdaen heeft dan dese beteringe draget, datmen dat vergeven wil'. SAL, Correctieboek C, f.74r-v.

[99] 'Hier voir sel Clemeyns ter stondt voir der stede huys comen voir tgemeen volck in tiegen wordicheyt vanden gerechte hebbende hoir caproen in hoir nacke geleyt, ende sel mit lyder stemmen, soe dat men horen mach opter stede huys, seggen ende tgerecht bidden dat soe wat dat zij an horen vader misseyt ende misdaen heeft dat hoir tgerecht dat vergeven willen om goidswillen. Ende dair toe sel Clemeyns voirs als tgerecht vander stede huys gaet mit scepenen ende mit vijf of ses buyren die zij dair toe bidden sal gaen opten huyse van Clais Schutemaker wair hij leyt op zijn bedde, ende Clemeynse voirs. sal dair in presencie vanden scepenen ende buyren op hoir knyen voir hoir vader vallen, hoir caproen van horen hoofde, ende bidden haren vader soe wat dat zij hem misdaen heeft mit woirden of mit werkcen, dat hij hoir dat vergeven wil om goidswillen'. SAL, Correctieboeken B, 1458, f.115v.

people outside, on a main street that ran in front of the building, of her penitence. This may have attracted a large audience before the aldermen themselves arrived outside, a movement that is noted in the verdict. In their socio-legal messages, the legislators attended closely to how spatiality intersected with publicity. They sought complete control of both.

Forgiveness rituals, then, could take place before a large crowd in front of the town hall, the place where the magistrates proclaimed their messages. Other penalties, especially those relating to legal disobedience, were staged in the public courtroom. After dishonestly swearing and oath in Leiden, for example, Symon Heijnricxz had to bring a wax fist to the *vierschaar* on the first day of the public civil hearings (*poortdingdagen*). He was to appear bareheaded, beseech the sheriff and aldermen for forgiveness, and then place the fist in front of the crucifix that stood in the public courtroom. It would stay there throughout the three days of hearings, serving as a warning against perjury (on these objects and iconography, see the next chapter).[100] Such courtroom rituals, which recalls forms of legal disobedience in front of a crowd, served as reminders of best practices during sessions. Indeed, they advertised the undesirability of participating dishonestly in legal procedure.[101] As a sacrifice, the fist and accompanying ritual also allowed the culprit to repair the damage that he had done to the court and legal practice.

Beyond communicating socio-legal messages in courtrooms, punishments in the form of stone fines and monetary fines seem to have contributed directly to town hall buildings themselves, and more specifically to council chambers. In Gouda in 1519, the aldermen sentenced Gerrit Herck for using harmful words 'in the chamber in the presence of the burgomasters and aldermen'. He was to pay a heavy fine of 152,000 stones, two thirds of which was used for 'the repair of the chamber'.[102] A few years later, in 1522, when Pieter Claes was involved in a hearing in the council chamber, where he tore off the seal on a letter, saying 'here is the nullification'. He was sentenced to a fine of 150,000 stones, of which 'one third [went] to the lord, one third to the city, and one

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[100] 'So sal Symon Heynricxz des manesdages opten eersten rechtdach vander poortdinge als die scout nae beloken paesschen naistcomende den tijt van een uur heeft sitten dingen comen inder vierschair bloetshoefs ende ongegoet, hebbende een wassen vuyst gemaict van een pont wasse in zijn hant ende offere die goede ter eeren ende tot wairdicheyt des heyligen cruys, ende bidden den scout ende gerechte dat soe wes hii in deser sake misdaen heeft dat zy hem dat vergeven willen om goidswille, welke wassen vuyste men die drie poortdingdagen hangen sal voir theylige cruys staende inder vierschair. In exemple van alle anderen'. SAL, Correctieboek C, f.77r.

[101] See for other examples: SAL, Correctieboek C, f.77v and f.84v.

[102] 'Alsoe Gerrit Herck quade en zeer onmanierlicke ende verbolgen woorden gesproken heeft inde kamer in presentie vande burgermeesteren ende scepenen, roerende opte kamer vanden brouwerie, waer op scepenen parthyien an beyden syden gehoirt hebben ende vonnisse hebben nae uuytwysen der keure voirscreven, ende zyn selfs belijde woerden ende hy voren vonnisse hem noch vervordert heeft die vande gerechte justici an te seggen. Twelck die vande gerechte van hem noch van nyemant en staet te liden […] daer voer te geven 152 duysent steens, thien stuvers voer elc duysent […] ende dese bruecken sullen gaen de tweedeel tot reperacie vander camer, ende tander derdendeel den heer'. SAMH, AC2.176, 167.

third to the repair of the chamber'.[103] The lord and city were frequently included as recipients in the distribution of fines, in this case of stones.[104] Yet again, this allocation of penalties served to underline how the restoration of peace upheld the common good, as represented by the lord and the city. The specific inclusion of the chamber, however, is unique to this case, despite the fact that similar incidents appear in Gouda's verdicts in the sixteenth century.[105]

It is uncertain whether repairs to the council chamber were actually made from 1519 to 1522. The only known repairs around this time were performed between 1517 and 1519 in the cellars and possibly the meat hall.[106] Camphuijsen had put forward an interpretation of stone fines, analysing examples of fines levied in Utrecht that were assigned to the town's defence structures. Camphuijsen raises serious doubts about whether these penalties were actually used for construction works, raising the possibility that they might really have been monetary fines presented as a form of communal compensations. Cities, he argues, did not always have construction work in progress and, if they did, stone donations were too infrequent to rely on as a steady investment in fortifications.[107] In his opinion, stone fines also constituted a form of socio-legal messaging, serving to establish a semiotic link between a culprit's misbehaviour and their responsibility towards society, expressed as a contribution to the city walls.[108]

Whereas it is difficult to prove whether stone fines levied in Gouda were indeed used to reconstruct the council chamber, other penalties evidently were. In 1524 and 1533, for example, several culprits were fined sums of money that were explicitly allocated to the glass windows of the council chamber. In 1524 two men – Martijn Vlaminck and Pieter Jacobsz Stael – had an argument that escalated into a knife fight, wounding one another. To set a strong example, Vlaminck was sentenced to go on a pilgrimage to Cologne, while Stael was to make his way to Aardenburg (now in the Netherlands' Zeelandic Flanders region). Moreover, both men had to pay

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[103] 'Alsoe onlanx leeden Pieter Claes seepsieder staende voirde gerechte inde camer dingplechtich […] ende die voirs. Pieter nam den selven brieff vande ende trock vande selven brief een zegele seggende totter scepenen: "dair is die gecassede" […] Ende desen voirs steen allen gaen ten derdendeel ande heren, een derdendeel ande stede, en een derdedeel tot reparacie vanden camer'. SAMH, AC2.176, 95.

[104] J. Marsilje, *Het financiële beleid van Leiden in de Laat-Beierse en Bourgondische periode, 1390-1477* (Hilversum, 1985), 26.

[105] See for several cases in between 1524 and 1556: SAMH, AC2.176, 190, 191, 200, 279, 293, 305. Also in fifteenth century Leiden it was common that heavier fines concerned an amount of stones. Marsilje, 27.

[106] Denslagen, 'Bijzondere gebouwen', 214.

[107] F. Camphuijsen, '"In Hemde Ende in Broeck." The Performance of Justice in Late Medieval Utrecht', in *La Permission et La Sanction. Théories Légales et Pratiques Du ThéâTre (XIVe-XVIIe Siècle)*, ed. M Bouhaïk-Girones, J Koopmans, and K Lavéant (Paris, 2017), 236–37. Historian Jan Marsilje also stated that stone fines were actually sums of money, but does not give an explanation of why it was expressed as stones. Marsilje, *Het financiële beleid van Leiden in de Laat-Beierse en Bourgondische periode, 1390-1477*, 27.

[108] Just as monetary fines explicated as funds for church construction 'repaired' the church *and* religious community. Camphuijsen, 'Scripting Justice', 64–68; Camphuijsen, 'In Hemde Ende in Broeck.', 236.

respectively four and two *Karolus gulden* to pay for windows up in the council chamber. By trying to resolve their differences themselves, through violence, they had sought a solution that the city's law court did not desire. By having to town men pay for glass windows in the town hall, the aldermen aimed to restore their authority in a visible way.[109]

In Haarlem, the aldermen clearly connected stone fines to actual construction works, declaring in 1451 that all '*correxties* shall go to the council chamber, which is being reconstructed at this time'. This continued into 1454, after which the law court again allocated stone fines to the rather general project of *stede vesten* (city fortifications).[110] Reservations as to whether fines were actually meant for specific construction works, then, did not apply to stone fines levied by Haarlem between 1451 and 1454. The law court explicitly intervenes in the criminal records, announcing that fines were allocated to specific projects. Even more significantly, this new allocation policy accompanied actual construction works of the town hall, including the renovation of the aldermen's chamber and the addition of a writing room.

Juxtaposing stone fines allocated to indefinitely defined causes with those put to something specific raises the question of why law courts would make such distinctions. Indeed, as socio-legal messages, these fines and the associated verdicts linked culprits' contributions to repairs or construction works with the common good. Crimes damaged the urban community, which could be repaired by contributing to works that benefited all citizens, such as fortifications. Similar mechanisms are in play where the aldermen decided to allocate fines to the town hall and their chambers. When magistrates imposed such fines, to repair damage done to their authority and urban society, what they were in fact communicating was that the town hall symbolised their authority, which served the common good. It is no coincidence that punishments meted out by law courts included donations to renovation work on town halls, particularly council chambers. This served to connect the symbolic acknowledgement of the aldermen's legal authority with their

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[109] 'Alsoe Martijn Vlaminck sackedrager inde maent van julio lestleden gecomen is bij de nootsgoods upte haven, ende heeft als dan veel onnutte ende kyflicke woerden gehadt mit eenen Pieter Jacopsz. Stael, eyntlick hebben malcander mit voirdachter opsetten verdaecht te gaen buyten deser stede om aldair malcanderen te quetsen ende wonden, ende sijn ten aensien van een yegelick gegaen buyten desen stede ende hebben malcandere gewondt, steckende steeck om steeck soe lange hem des belieft heeft, 't welck een quade saick is ende van quade consequencie ten exempel van allen anderen […] Zoe is eerst den voirn. Martijn boven die boeten dair hij in gewesen voir sijn correxie geordoneert een bedevairt te doen tot Coelen, ende noch dairenboven te betalen vier Karolus gulden tot een glas inde raetcamer. Ende den voirn. Pieter Jacopsz. Stael is geordoneert voir sijn correxie boven die boeten dair hij in is gecondemneert te gaen een bedevairt tot Onser Liever Vrouwe t' Aerdenburch in Vlaenderen, ende noch te betalen twee Karolus gulden tot een glas upte raetcamer'. SAMH, AC2.176, 190-191. The value of the *Karolusgulden* fluctuated around 48 gr. in the later fifteenth century. M. Boone, 'Muntgeschiedenis middeleeuwen', in *Hoe schrijf ik de geschiedenis van mijn gemeente? Deel 3a. Hulpwetenschappen*, ed. J. Art (Gent, 1995), 162.

[110] 'Dese nagescreven correxties sullen ghaen totter scepenenkamer die men nu ter tijt tymmeren sel an der stedehuys'. Speet, *Het register van criminele sententiën van Haarlem*, 38–47.

designing of town hall protocols, the repair of the damage done by offenders, and the material expansion of the council chamber, the place in which these decisions were made.

Conclusions

The offences analysed in this chapter were more than interruptions or mild disturbances. Rather, they are examples of contemporaries pushing against the aldermen's still-fragile legitimacy and legal and political dominance, challenging their semiotic claims about the town hall. The town hall was a paradoxical space, which was both an open, accessible, and public space and an administrative centre facilitating secluded, legally protected meetings and performances. This double character proved disadvantageous when it came to ensuring that legal and administrative procedures functioned smoothly. Accordingly, magistrates had a significant interest in managing activities in and near the town hall. They tried to keep the building and its direct environments clean, safe, and organised. Statutes, city accounts, and criminal records show that magistrates sought to define certain sounds and movements, dirt, smell, and defamatory behaviour as disturbances. Aldermen tried to exclude these phenomena from town halls, framing them as disruptive and detrimental to the functioning of town halls, legal authority, and the administration of justice. What is more, they were presented as having the potential to adversely affect the communities' wellbeing. Visitors to the town hall could also potentially disrupt its affairs, including courtroom practices, by using its spaces as stages on which to air their disagreements – whether those be with each other or the law. Both aldermen and other citizens were aware that there were different audiences in different parts of the building (and just outside it). Through moments of contestation, governmental and non-governmental agents negotiated and eventually established frameworks of behavioural expectations.

Although the publicness of the town hall allowed for disturbances, the aldermen used its spatial logic to advertise the governmental dominance of control over access and behaviour. Criminal records reveal how aldermen consolidated their legitimacy in ordering movement and behaviour in town halls; they shed light on how magistrates communicated their competence in protecting the administration of justice and governmental agents within the buildings. In the eyes of the aldermen, the town hall symbolically projected their legitimacy and authority. Non-governmental actors also saw the potential of the building's spaces to take matters in their own hands. The spatial and material aspects of town halls, in other words, were decisive shaping urban society's rhetoric of justice and law.