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II.4 Charity Against the Odds. Margaret of York and the Isle of Voorne (1477–1503)

Mario Damen

In spring 1478, Margaret of York (Pl. I) made her joyous entry in Brielle, a seaport situated on the isle of Voorne in the south of the county of Holland. Voorne was assigned to Margaret as one of her dower lands after the death of her husband Charles the Bold. She was received as a new prince used to be received in the Low Countries. The town administration offered Margaret and her retinue all kinds of consumable gifts. On the first evening of her visit, Margaret received a salmon and a codfish, six “aam” of wine (that is 930 litres), an ox, and eight rams.1 Fish were particularly suitable gifts for presentation on such festive occasions. Salmon and codfish belonged to the biggest fish in respectively fresh- and salt-water. Moreover, when Margaret left Brielle, she was given a sturgeon, the fish with the highest status (fig. 13). It was a rare fish caught in the rivers of the Low Countries where it could have a maximum length of three meters. It was eaten not only because of its caviar but also because of its meat which tastes like pork.2 These prized fish could easily be found in a port like Brielle. In fact they were already described in Der naturen bloeme, a work by the thirteenth-century writer Jacob van Maerlant, who lived and worked on the isle for one of Margaret’s predecessors as lord of Voorne.3

In recent research the connection between Margaret and Voorne has almost completely been neglected. Nevertheless, the isle was vital for the economy of the dowager and her household. In the marriage treaty between Charles and Margaret of 1468, the duchess was conceded a dowry of 20,000 pounds (of forty groats, the money of account used in this article) a year. As a comparison, to earn a 1,000 pounds a master mason of Douai had to work 4,000 days.4 However, in spring 1477, it appeared that the towns and seigniories of Malines, Dendermonde

1 Regional Archives of Voorne-Putten and Rozenburg, Oud Stadsarchief van Brielle (hereafter RAV, OSB) 34 (1477–78) fol. 87v.
3 Frits van OOSTROM, Maerlants wereld, Amsterdam, 1996, p. 199.
4 Monique SOMMÉ, “Que représente un gage journalier de 3 sous pour l’officier d’un hôtel ducal à la cour de Bourgogne au XVème siècle”, in : Les niveaux de vie au Moyen Âge. Mesures, perceptions et représentations, ed. Jean-Pierre SOSSON, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999, p. 307. A master mason was paid the equivalent of 10 groats per day.
and Oudenaarde only rendered some 7,000 pounds. Therefore, on June 14, 1477
Mary of Burgundy added the land of Voorne and the town of Brielle to Margaret’s
dower lands. According to a financial estimate Voorne could render almost
10,000 pounds. The remainder of Margaret’s dowry, some 3,000 pounds, was
assigned to the domains of Le Quesnoy and Binche.5

In this article I will give a comprehensive view of the relationship between
Margaret of York and Voorne. I will concentrate on three different aspects of this
relationship. First, I will demonstrate the economic importance of the isle for the
duchess. At the same time I will discuss the interest the inhabitants of Voorne had
in the patronage of their new lady and explain how they benefitted from it. Further-
more, I will discuss Margaret’s charitable and devotional works on the isle, financed
by the domain revenues of Voorne. I will demonstrate how these followed a pious
tradition practised both by the lords of Voorne, as well as by other members of the
Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty. Simultaneously, I will reveal the tension sur-
rounding princely charity in an age of increasing bureaucratization of government.

The economic significance of Voorne

Only in 1372, after the death of the last lady of Voorne, the free seigniory
was incorporated into the county of Holland.6 Voorne appeared to be an attrac-
tive domain for the maintenance of different members of the Bavarian dynasty,
the then counts of Holland. Albert of Bavaria assigned it as a fief to his brother John of Bavaria. After John’s death in 1425, it passed to his wife Elisabeth of Görlitz as a dower land. In 1433 her niece Jacqueline of Bavaria became the new lady of Voorne and after her death, in 1436, she was succeeded by her husband Frank van Borselen (+1470). The inhabitants were more or less used to having high nobles and members of the ruling family as their lords and ladies. As lady of Voorne, Margaret possessed her own moated, walled residence within the town of Brielle, next to the Maarland church. From 1477 onwards, she had major repairs carried out in her new residence, an indication that she really intended to stay there for longer periods. She ordered new noble style beds ("coetes") and commanded to renovate the enclosed court where the (*caetspel*), a sort of hand-tennis, was played.

Voorne was situated between the counties of Zeeland and Holland in the Meuse estuary and consisted of four isles (fig. 14). The first and most important isle was Oostvoorne, where the town of Brielle was situated. Brielle was considered

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7 Ibid., pp. 191, 203, and 208.
the most western frontier of the county of Holland bordering the North Sea. The principal economic activity of Brielle was the herring trade (fig. 15); the town had the staple-right on all herring imported in the Meuse estuary. During the times of Margaret of York there were some forty “buysen” (herring ships) that had Brielle as their home port. Moreover, the port was visited by some forty other ships that benefited from the two waterways, the Meuse and the Goote through which Brielle could be approached.9 However, the port suffered from the silting up of the Goote intensified by land reclamation south of Brielle initiated by Charles the Bold; as a result the two parts of the isle grew into a single block of land. Other villages on the isle were Oostvoorne, Rugge, Nieuwland, Rocagne and Nieuw Helvoet. The second isle is that of Zuidvoorne (southern Voorne) with the villages Dirksland and Oude Tonge. The third and smallest isle is that of Western Voorne with the town of Goedereede. Finally, on the isle of Schouwen the village of Bommenede belonged to the seigniory of Voorne as well.

The isle of Voorne formed a secure dower land for the dowager. It was situated far from the war frontier with France and the turbulent urban centres of Holland, Brabant, and Flanders. Moreover, it could be defended very well and had at the same time good communications by water which brought it relatively close to Margaret’s residence in Malines. But most importantly, it was a rich agricultural land with plenty opportunities for land reclamation. The new polders consisted of extremely fertile lands where not only grain but also highly commercial crops as flax, hemp, and coleseed could be cultivated.10


Margaret's financial advisors, some of them originating from Holland, must have realized the economic potential of the isle. According to a financial evaluation the net income of Voorne was estimated at some 9,600 pounds of forty groats. More than half of this amount was gathered from alluvial lands ("uutgorssen") and tithes ("dismes de grains ou deux parties"). As lady of Voorne, Margaret owned all waste land on the isle. She could rent out the alluvial lands for sheep farming or sell it to colonists. For example, in April 1482 Jacques Donche, one of Margaret's closest collaborators, bought a licence to dike in the alluvial land of Roeksnisse and Ruigenhil for 1,000 pounds. Margaret would maintain the low and high jurisdiction and receive the tithes of the newly acquired land.

The research done by Margaret's commissioners was thorough and their estimates of the revenues of Voorne even proved to be conservative. Only the first two years Margaret's argentier Hyppolite de Berthoz received about the estimated sum of pounds from the receiver of Voorne. In the next years the revenues rose to almost 15,000 pounds, 50% more than was expected. Here it is important to note that the net revenue of her seigniory of Malines, the "capital" of the Low Countries, was less than that of the agricultural outpost of Voorne. This made the isle of Voorne, situated in the periphery of the counties of Holland and Zeeland, especially useful as an "allowance" for members of the ruling family.

Next to financial security and political stability there are other aspects which have to be taken into account. The maritime potential of the isles of the counties of Holland and Zeeland was important for the Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty. For example, the herring ships of Brielle could easily be converted into warships. This happened in 1480 when Voorne financed and equipped one of the sixteen warships to protect trade and herring ships against French pirates. Herring was considered to be of primordial interest for the fishermen of Voorne and for the poor people ("arms volcx") living along the coast, for which it was the most important food. Any disturbance of the herring trade would not only cause problems for the fishermen but could also provoke dissent among the hungry populace.

A steady supply of fish was a concern of every prince. Due to its nutritional value and its long shelf life, the level of consumption of salted herring was high in the princely households, not only during Lent and on the numerous fasting days. Although I was not able to trace yearly transports of fish from Brielle to Malines, there is evidence of occasional flows. In the beginning of November 1494, just before the closing of the herring season on the feast-day of
St. Martin, Margaret commissioned the receiver of Voorne to buy six “last” (some 60,000 piece) of herring at the Brielle herring market. The fish was not transported to Malines until the end of January 1495, providing Margaret’s courtiers with fish for the rest of the winter.18 In November 1496, Margaret not only bought ten barrels of herring for her own consumption (some 10,000 piece) but also endowed the Cistercians of Nizelles (in Ophain-Bois-Seigneur-Isaac) with a sum of money to buy herring in Brielle for Lent.19 A parallel can be found in the 1450s in a concession, given by Philip the Good to his wife Isabel of Portugal, for the fish staple of the port of Naarden in Gooiland, a territory Philip possessed in the county of Holland. This staple right implied that Isabel would receive a fixed percentage of all fish caught in the Zuiderzee, mainly herring and haddock.20 So both Isabel and Margaret benefited enormously from these staples. They could not only feed their household but also use the fish as a proper gift for the religious communities they supported.

A reciprocal relationship

Thus Voorne was financially very important for the dowager and she depended heavily on the isle for the maintenance of her household, her residences, and her cultural and religious patronage. What is more, in 1478, when Margaret was apparently in acute financial problems, Voorne could generate a substantial amount of money for the dowager. This money was handed over on the occasion of her joyous entry, in addition to the courtesy gifts of fish and wine. Brielle offered her 3,000 pounds whereas her senior officers and their wives received 300 pounds.21 These gifts can be considered as a sign of good will and were the starting point of the beneficial relationship the town wanted to establish with the new lady of Voorne and her retinue. Margaret stated in her receipt that the money was given to her, “not on her request but voluntarily and out of affection and love because of certain advantages that we have done in the affairs of our land of Voorne now and in the future.”22 Obviously, the town did not have the money in cash and therefore was allowed to sell heritable annuities to finance its gift. Margaret guaranteed to pay the interest of the first three years out of the domain revenues from Voorne.23

The term “certain advantages” mentioned by Margaret refers to some concrete privileges obtained by Voorne in August 1477. In that month Mary of Burgundy conceded a privilege in which she recognized that the port of the city

18 NA, GRR 3345, fol. 112r.
19 NA, GRR 3348, fol. 93v and 98v.
21 RAV, OSB 34 (1477–1478), fol. 11v, 13r. Jacques Donche received a barrel of herring as well.
22 RAV, OSB Charters 120–122. I would like to thank A. A. van der Houwen of the Regional Archives of Voorne-Putten and Rozenburg for giving me transcriptions of these and other charters of the Oud stadssarchief of Brielle.
23 RAV, OSB Charters 123. Margaret’s senior officer Jacques Donche bought 25% of the heritable annuities, which was a secure and profitable investment: NA, GRR 3328, fol. 101v-102r; 3329, fol. 95v; 3330, fol. 116r.
suffered from land reclamation south of Brielle. The first article is in concordance with the Great Privilege of that year: all privileges conceded by Philip the Good would be restored and all infringements made on these by his son Charles the Bold would be of no value. The second article was even more important: during Margaret’s lifetime Voorne was exempt from paying any new grants. All other articles bear the “spirit of 1477” including a variety of administrative, judicial, and economic competences which were returned to the citizens of Voorne. Negotiations about these matters clearly took place and Brielle sought the assistance of the other towns of Holland to obtain this privilege. As a quid pro quo the town probably promised to pay for the inauguration gifts a few months later, after the annuities had been sold. Therefore, the gifts to Margaret on the occasion of her entry should not be interpreted as voluntary acts of generosity but as the outcome of political negotiations.

Time and again the dowager could make an appeal to the city for extra contributions. In 1481 the town sold additional annuities benefiting the lady of Voorne up to a total amount of 3,600 pound (of 40 groats). In 1489, another 1,800 pounds were financed in the same way. Eventually the special relationship with Margaret was financially advantageous for Voorne. In February 1495, Philip the Fair and Maximilian of Austria confirmed the privilege that Voorne would be exempt from paying new ordinary grants, with the exception of some special occasions. Another advantage for the subjects of Voorne was Margaret’s close connection with England. In the summer of 1480 she went on a diplomatic mission to England to negotiate an Anglo-Burgundian treaty and a marriage alliance between Prince Philip and Ann of York. During this visit she certainly tried to enhance the commercial interests of her dower lands. Brielle hoped to gain some new trade privileges and even added its own representative to her retinue. The question remains whether the diplomatic efforts were successful. In any case, in November 1480 Maximilian asked the Estates of Holland and Zeeland to grant Margaret a gift in compensation of the expenditure accumulated during this journey.

Margaret organised the administration of her dower land very effectively, appointing men who were both close collaborators and native officers and were thus well acquainted with the administrative situation on the isle of Voorne. For her daily judicial and financial affairs in Voorne Margaret used the members of the Council and Chambre des comptes in The Hague. However, the officers who formed the liaison between her court in Malines and Voorne were all

24 RAV, OSB Charters 118. See also Kloek, Voorne en Putten, p. 183.
25 RAV, OSB 34 (1477–1478), fol. 30r.
26 RAV, OSB Charters 128; NA, GRR 3340, fol. 101v; NA, GRR 3341, fol. 77v.
27 RAV, OSB Charters 145 and 146.
30 See for example the salary payments in 1494: NA, GRR 3345, fol. 150v-152v.
personal confidants. The councillor chamberlain Jan III of Glymes (†1532), the second son of the lord of Bergen op Zoom, was her stadholder, the governor of the isle. He performed this task in close collaboration with the nobleman Jan I van Wassenaar (†1496), a close friend of the former lord of Voorne, Frank van Borselen, who was appointed captain (later bailiff) of Voorne. After 1477, Wassenaar had been active in the household of Maximilian the time during which he probably had got acquainted with Margaret of York. It is no coincidence that Maximilian and Margaret both donated stained glass windows for the parish churches of Wassenaar and Valkenburg near Leiden, two of his seigniories. These donations were not only intended for the decoration of the churches but also for the deepening of the relationship between the princes and an important noble officer. Furthermore, in 1484 Margaret granted Jan van Wassenaar 120 pounds on the occasion of the baptism of his new born son, the future Jan II van Wassenaar (†1523), from his second marriage with Johanna van Halewijn (†1529, fig. 16). There is more evidence for the strong bond between the Wassenaar-Halewijn couple and the dowager. On the death of Jan I van Wassenaar in 1496, Margaret became the guardian of the under aged Jan II. Finally, in 1502 she donated Halewijn a manuscript entitled *Dialogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne à Jésus Christ* written by her almoner Nicolas Finet. As every other late medieval prince, Margaret used the benefits of her domains to reward her officers and members of her household. As the Wassenaar-case shows, with some of her close confidents she maintained at the same time a close, even intimate, relationship that went beyond the formalized state structures.

32 Wassenaar: NA, GRR 183, fol. 86v and 3335, fol. 93v. Valkenburg: NA, GRR 312, fol. 224v and 3345, fol. 120v.
33 Ibid., 3334, fol. 115r. The governor of Voorne, Jan III van Glymes, presented the child at the font in Margaret’s name.
The Poor Clares

The Burgundian dukes took a special interest in the reform movement which took place in the convents of the Low Countries. They supported the congregations of Sion and Windesheim and many observant communities within the Franciscan order received grants. This concern was also shared by the duchesses Isabel of Portugal and Margaret of York who especially favoured the Poor Clares.35 In doing so they joined a more general affection for those convents that were willing to observe the rule of their order more strictly. The princely attention for these orders could have had other motives as well. According to J. Catto, the foundations of the Sheen Charterhouse and the nearby Brigittine convent by Henry V in 1414, became “powerhouses of intercessory prayer for the realm of England and the focus of orthodox guidance for the personal religion of the laity”.36

Margaret used her revenues from Voorne to endow the observant friars in Delft and the Charterhouse in the same town.37 In Brielle, Margaret founded two female convents: one for the Poor Clares, for which she obtained papal permission in April 1483, and one for the Brigittine Sisters, originally established in Oostvoorne but moved to Brielle in 1495, after demolition by fire. The new convents were situated in the south-western part of the town where the convent of St. Catharine (belonging to the third order of St. Francis) and those of the Alexian brothers and the Alexian sisters were situated too (fig. 17). Such a concentration of convents, whose members mainly depended on the charity of the town dwellers, may have been too much of a burden for a small town of the size of Voorne.38

In any case, the Poor Clares suffered from severe food shortages and high prices both caused by internal unrest and warfare in the 1480s. These events did not leave Margaret untouched as can be deduced from a 1483 entry into the account of the receiver of Voorne. Her reaction to seeing the sisters of the convent is described as follows:

"On June 26 1483, when my gracious lady was in her city of Brielle to sell the tithes of Voorne, she visited a poor convent of the order of Saint Clare, recently founded there. At the time, there were some five or six sisters in the convent and my gracious lady thought their situation was so poor and unsound that she secretly ordered this receiver to give the procuratrix of the convent from that day onwards one groat per day for buying bread, so as to prevent them from dieing of starvation.”39

37 NA, GRR 3334, fol. 115r: 20 pounds in 1483 for a breviary for one of the friars; 3340, fol. 106r: restitution of tax money of almost 60 pounds in 1489 to the Charterhouse of Delft because of the "singuliere devocie die zij heeft totter religie van den Carthusers". However, this restitution was in the end cancelled by the financial controllers.
38 Tone NYBERG, Birgittinische Klostergründungen des Mittelalters, Leiden, 1965, pp. 213–219. To obtain papal permission for the Brigittine convent, Margaret financed a mission to the pope in 1485 with 12 pounds. NA, GRR 3335, fol. 91v.
39 NA, GRR 3333, fol. 107v.
The entry in the account shows that the receiver was evidently not aware of the fact that Margaret had founded the convent herself. The "secret order" is mentioned because Margaret apparently did not give written instructions that could cause problems in the Chambre des comptes. But above all Margaret's personal intervention is clear although not restricted to Brielle. The accounts of Malines and Binche testify to similar food distributions during these years of extreme scarcity and high prices of rye. Needless to say that the total costs of the bread distribution to the Poor Clares were no more than some nine pounds a year, the equivalent of thirty-six daily wages of a master mason and a minimal percentage of her total expenditure in Voorne. Still, other needs of the Poor Clares seemed to be more urgent. The first three years the money was not used for bread but for purchasing a few small houses next to convent, probably to accommodate the sisters. In 1486 Margaret personally intervened. She reorganized and enlarged the food distribution "for the love of God and with good intentions". Seven poor people, six of them women, most of them old, sick, and with many children, were selected and paid one groat per day by the receiver's wife. On eighteen feast days this group of seven would receive a loaf of bread, worth two groats, as well. On these days eighteen additional people in need, among them the seven Poor Clares

40 Blockmans, "Devotion of a Lonely Duchess", pp. 34–35
41 NA, GRR 3333, fol. 107v, comment in the margin.
of Brielle, would receive a groat and bread too.  

The Nuns probably complained about this to the receiver or his wife, who was in charge of the food distribution. In compensation, Margaret gave them two barrels of beer per week in November 1487. The costs of this regular gift, more than a hundred pounds a year, were substantially higher than those of the bread distribution and, not surprisingly, within a year the number of donated barrels was reduced to three per month. In 1490 the Clares issued a clear message from the pulpit of their church: with such a low quantity of beer they could not satisfy their daily needs. In reaction to this public outcry for an increase in charity, the receiver of Voorne took the initiative of raising their quota to one barrel per week. This was accepted by Margaret in hindsight. The costs of these alms and the critical attitude of the Chambre des comptes towards these works of charity were the reason why the beer distribution was interrupted repeatedly in the 1490s. After Margaret’s death in 1503 it stopped altogether.

To put it briefly, after the foundation of the convent Margaret was aware that she should help the Clares to pay part of their living cost. Although the expenses of these charitable works were only a fragment of the budget of Voorne, time and again the payments were stopped or cancelled by the Chambre des comptes. The financial experts regarded this type of donation, qualified as “extraordinary alms”, difficult to control. It is striking that most of the food distributions were originally based on oral agreements between Margaret and her receiver, putting them in writing only at a later stage. This type of gift-giving was one of the few means of personal communication between the dowager and her subjects. An annual pension for a choirmaster in Brielle, “who was a poor fellow with many little children, teaching the boys of Brielle to sing in the choir”, was also based on an oral agreement, without any formal written payment orders. Perhaps it is typical for the spontaneous manner in which Margaret faced the problems in her domains, not obeying to the strict rules of governance adhered to by the financial administrators for whom, after all, written proof was indispensable.

In the case of the Poor Clares Margaret acted like a generous princes should act. Her late husband Charles the Bold performed likewise and also violated the rules concerning gift-giving established by his administrators. At the Burgundian court a clear difference was made between gratuitous gifts (those expressing his “liberalité” or open-handedness) and charitable gifts and alms (those expressing the prince’s “largesse” or generosity). Gratuitous gifts reflected the prince’s estate and contributed to the maintenance of the nobles of his principalities. The gifts born of generosity, in contrast, functioned in another reg-

42 NA, GRR 3336, fol. 101r-104v.
43 NA, GRR 3337, fol. 98v and 3338, fol. 98v.
44 NA, GRR 3341, fol. 79v.
45 NA, GRR 3342, fol. 38v; 3343, fol. 92v; 3344, fol. 127v; 3348, fol. 98v; 3355, fol. 112v.
46 NA, GRR 3333, fol. 120v; 3334, fol.125r.
The Christian ideal of brotherhood and the love of one’s neighbour. Such “largesse” included gifts for the poor and religious institutions (fig. 18). Although in 1468 Charles the Bold spent nearly five times as much on gifts for political partners and subordinates than on alms and offerings, largesse was important for the duke. He distributed frequently alms to poor women and regularly contributed an offering during the offertory and to the relics when attending mass in a church.

**The patronage of stained glass windows**

Margaret was generous for the religious institutions in Voorne. In 1483 she donated 60 pounds for the “baptism” of the big bell (“grooter clocke”) of the church of Saint Catherine in Brielle. In 1499 she granted 300 pounds to the church wardens of Goedereede in order to help to rebuild the parish

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church, burnt in 1482. She supported the churches of her dower land not only with money but also with objects. In the period between 1477 and 1503, seventeen donations of stained glass by Margaret of York to churches and convents in the Low Countries have been recorded to date. Eight out of these seventeen windows were given to churches in Margaret’s dower land of Voorne.

Although both money and stained glass can be considered as utilitarian gifts, the former was more a consumptive gift, fulfilling a concrete need, whereas the latter had a more honorary character, paying tribute to a particular devotion or saint. At the same time a glass window would remind the public of the donor even after he or she had died, contributing in this way to a common memorial practice.

With these donations Margaret continued a tradition established by the lords of Voorne. In their administration it is explicitly stated that the lord of Voorne was obliged to donate stained glass windows for the choirs in newly constructed or rebuilt churches. He had a duty to do so as a Christian lord and as a protector of the church. There is enough evidence to sustain this. Both John of Bavaria and Frank van Borselen, Margaret’s predecessors as lords of Voorne, donated several stained glasses for new or renovated churches. However, this was a princely tradition which existed all over the Low Countries. Motivated by pious and propagandistic ends the Burgundian and Habsburg princes donated at least one hundred and fifty stained glass windows to churches and convents in the Low Countries between 1419 and 1519.

The initiative of donating stained glass windows was never exclusively a princely matter but depended on the material needs of the churches and the way they could communicate these needs to the ruler. This is demonstrated by the two windows Margaret donated to the churches of Goedereede and Oudorp on the occasion of her joyous entry in Voorne. The text in the account explicitly state that the windows were given on the request of the church wardens. The advantages are obvious: for a relatively small amount of money Margaret could present herself to the citizens as a generous and devote lady. For the churchgoers she was

49 NA, GRR 3333 fol. 102v, 3350 fol.114r. The bell, weighing some 4,300 kg with the inscription “ic hiet Katrin”, was founded by Steven Butendijck and is still in use: R. van Breeda and H. Kamma, “Wie met klokken schiet, wint de oorlog niet!”, in Brieven marc, 19, 2009, pp. 15–28.

50 It concerns stained glasses for the parish churches of Goedereede and Oudorp in 1482, Bommenede and Dirkland in 1491, Oude Tonge and, once more, Bommenede in 1497, Nieuwe Helvoet in 1502, and the church of the convent of the poor Clares in 1495. See for all of Margaret’s windows Mario Damen, “Vorstelijke vensters: Glasraamschenkings als instrument van devotie, memorte en representatie (1419–1519)”, in Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis, 8, 2005, p. 153 and 197–199.


52 A.A. Arkenbout, “De heren van Voorne als opdrachtgevers van 15de-eeuwse glasschilderkunst”, in Rotterdamse Jaarboekje, 1967, p. 121.


55 NA, GRR 3332, fol. 110r-v.
continuously represented by way of her coat of arms or in a more personal representation, even if she was physically absent, which was generally the case. Moreover, the subsidy for the glass was in itself considered a pious gift that could serve as a kind of penance. The glass demonstrated her good deed, although the donor’s prime interest was the salvation of her soul, fostered by the pictured saint(s) and the prayers of clergy and churchgoers.56

Although none of Margaret’s stained glass windows in Vooorne survived the religious, political, and weather-related tempests of the past ages, we have detailed descriptions of two of them in the accounts. The first window is that of the parish church of Dirksland. The building activities for this new church started in 1488. Three years later Margaret donated eighteen pounds for a window. On this window pane Saint Anne with her children were depicted in conjunction with the coats of arms of Burgundy and England. It is not certain whether Margaret herself was portrayed in person.57 Margaret harboured a special devotion for Saint Anne as she saw parallels between her own situation and that of the popular female saint (Pl. XII). The duchess suffered from not being able to give birth to a male heir as her husband Charles the Bold would expect it from his spouse.58 Although the church wardens may have approached her with a request for the donation, the image on the glass clearly bears the stamp of her personal devotion.59

A personal touch on her behalf can be observed in the stained glass window for the church of the Poor Clares for which Margaret donated forty-two pounds in 1495. This window pane was installed in the most prominent place within the church, the central window of the choir situated right behind the high altar. Margaret requested that the design should be shown to her before the stained glass window was actually manufactured.60 The central image showed a representation of the crucifixion contemplated by Charles the Bold with Saint George on one side and Margaret of York with Saint Margaret on the other. The iconography of the window was typical for the memorial culture of the late Middle Ages. The noble sitters were recommended to Christ by their patron saints and the churchgoer who saw this image was encouraged to pray for the remission of the sins of the donor and her relatives.61

Just a stone’s throw away of the convent church of the Poor Clares a similar window had been installed by Charles the Bold in 1462. For about the

57 NA, GRR 3341, fol. 79r.
60 NA, GRR 3345, fol. 120r. One pound was paid for the “pourtraeture ende bewerp van den voors. gelaze die mijne voirs. genadiger vrouwe ghetoont wart eer men ’t zelve gelas maecte”. However, this payment was cancelled by the financial controllers.
same sum of money Charles subsidized the donation of a crucifixion scene for the stained glass windows in the choir of the parish church of Maarland in Brielle (ill. VI.4). Here Charles is shown in the company of Isabel of Bourbon, his second wife before he married Margaret of York. Margaret now claimed her place on Charles’s side. What is more, in this way the memory of her beloved husband was intensified in her dower land.

Voorne constituted an important part of Margaret of York’s dower lands because of its financial revenues, its economic possibilities and its endless stock of salted herring. For the administration of the isle, the duchess used a number of experienced officers from her own and that of Maximilian’s household, as well as from regional and local institutions. Margaret maintained a close relationship with her administrators of Voorne; offices, emoluments and gifts were given in exchange for loyalty and service. In this way she managed to establish durable links between her court, her dower land, and the administrative apparatus in The Hague.

Margaret’s relationship with the town of Brielle was expressed through an exchange of financial and material gifts and favours. The town administration offered her and her retinue prestigious consumable goods and money. Not all gifts were donated spontaneously, but were more often than not the result of a process of negotiation: new privileges in exchange for money. At the same time the dowager could appeal to the town for financial loans which were financed by selling annuities. Brielle benefited from Margaret’s protection because it was not obliged to provide new subsidies. And yet, Margaret was not able to stop the decline of the port of Brielle that was losing ships and trade to Rotterdam and Schiedam.

However, we should be cautious when explaining the relationship between Margaret and Voorne merely in economic terms. Margaret showed sincere compassion for the poor and the needy in her town of Brielle. Although the financial implications resulting from this concern were small in comparison with gifts for her trustees or her expenditure for stained glass windows on the island, her financial controllers were very strict with her spontaneous acts of charity. There was a continuous tension between the application of financial rules and her princely urge for largesse.

The representation of Margaret in the glass windows was partly inspired by local efforts to remind the duchess of her duties. On the other hand, the iconography of the two windows in Brielle and Dirksland show that Margaret was genuinely interested in being commemorated and in being represented with her late husband. Thus Margaret contributed in a material way to the celebration of the liturgy and the maintenance of the building. At the same time she publicly showed her devotion and appealed to the citizens of Voorne to be loyal towards her.

62 NA, GRR 3315, fol. 120r.