

# **The leopard does not change its spots: The influence of Nijmegen on the political developments in Guelders since the Middle Ages**

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Ever since the late Middle Ages, rulers have attempted to centralize the region of Guelders. In comparison with other parts of the Netherlands this has always been less than successful. Even in our time inhabitants of Guelders hardly seem to feel a connection to their own province. The identity of regions, cities and towns is stronger than that of the province as a whole. The cause of this must largely be sought in the large number of internal and external borders that have crisscrossed Guelders since Roman times. Always there was the 'other', whose characteristics were not shared. Local and regional identity continuously impeded the emergence of a national 'state'. Nijmegen played a crucial role in this battle against centralization. This contribution describes how the most powerful city in the region defended its independence on the basis of a largely fictional past. Caesar himself allegedly founded the city, and subsequently a Roman and later on a German emperor supposedly declared Nijmegen to be a 'free and independent' city. Myths, historical narratives, public festivals and all sorts of artistic expressions, but especially the mighty *Valkhof* castle, were used to emphasize Nijmegen's uniqueness and individuality. For many centuries it has treasured its independence above all else. Even nowadays Nijmegen prefers to focus on its own identity rather than to collaborate toward the unity of the province. In this respect, nothing has changed.

Key terms: Guelders; Nijmegen; centralization; particularism; nation building and identity.

## **Introduction**

Many books and articles have been written on nationalism, nation states, state formation and state identities. Until recently it was commonly believed that nation states across Europe were a construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which the process of nationalism was stimulated through myths and historical narratives

from the past. A national history was invented to form and mold the identity and sense of belonging of the citizens. In recent years, however, these ideas have been gradually undermined by, among others, some Dutch and Belgian historians (Stein 2010a, b; Jensen 2016). Important in this discussion is the question whether only modern states were able to form a national identity to strengthen or legitimize their position, or whether the very loose state relations in medieval and early modern times also have led to a sense of belonging, a collective identity that influenced or even created a kind of nation state *avant la lettre*. Nowadays a dichotomy has arisen between ‘modernists’, who regard the nation as an essential modern political phenomenon, and ‘traditionalists’, who believe that nations began to take shape long before the advent of modernity. The latter ones especially investigate the *cultural* continuities between pre-modern and modern nations. They explore not only the build-up of institutions in the pre-modern period, but also the development of collective identities through cultural habits, political ideas, literary symbols, shared religions and (mythical) narratives, in order to find out how they were reinvented, revitalized and adapted in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalist movements.<sup>1</sup> They try to understand the rise of states and nations from a broader historical perspective with much attention to common traditions, shared memories and popular symbols of ‘ethnies’. The ‘modernists’ on the other hand are more involved in deterministic political processes and grand schemes while the historical practice is much more obstinate, unpredictable and contingent (Jensen 2016, 3-5). This contradistinction has led to a revision of the earlier idea of the development of nation states. According to the ‘traditionalists’ a kind of a national identity, or rather a proto-identity, could already be seen in the Low Countries in medieval and early modern times. Although the regions and provinces were largely autonomous, centralist tendencies on the level of state politics were abundantly present. So cultural symbols and historical narratives contributed to a sense of a common national identity (Stein 2010a, b; Jensen 2016).

Robert Stein is in these days one of the first historians in the Low Countries who wondered whether ‘modern national cultures’ had existed in the Middle Ages. In his inaugural address Hugo de Schepper showed that in the sea provinces already in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century a feeling of a common identity existed (De Schepper 1987). Other well-known names are Wim Blockmans (1988; 2010), Arent Noorzij (2004; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2013) and Peter Hoppenbrouwers (2010). Later a group around Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (Leiden) investigated the

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<sup>1</sup> Some historians have expanded the temporal and geographic scope even further to times in which Europe was divided into tribes and very early territories (Jensen 2016). Keep in mind that a collective identity is a construction, a shared feeling, a self-image partly determined by the ‘other’ (Verhoeven 2015).

formation of collective identities between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries; recently followed by a research group from Nijmegen led by Lotte Jensen (Stein & Pollmann 2010; Duke 2009; Jensen 2016).

However, in Belgium and the Netherlands this kind of research is heavily focused on Brabant, Flanders, Hainaut and Holland. In this article I hope to show, that, based on a variety of shared images, ideas, myths,<sup>2</sup> symbols and historical narratives, also in Guelders a type of national co-operation in medieval times arose, that had great influence on its political development. Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century dukes, nobles and cities competed, but also worked together for control over the national politics. But did this co-operation of rulers, noblemen and towns create, already in early modern times, a feeling of a nation or state?<sup>3</sup> Can it be compared to the developments in modern times? Due to the limited research on the overall history of Guelders, the focus of my narrative will be concentrated on the most important and most widely studied city of the duchy in those days: Nijmegen, although the knowledge of the other towns and regions (quarters) will be used as much as possible (Geurts 2005; Kuys 2005a, b).

### **The Low Countries in the late Middle Ages**

In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the Burgundian rulers had acquired all independent states of the territory of the Low Countries, except, notably, the duchy of Guelders (see Map 1). The rulers' intention to form a powerful central authority, however, turned out to be very difficult because their hands were tied by the many privileges and rights which the inhabitants had gained in earlier times (Boulton 2006; Blockmans & Prevenier 1999). Although the medieval Low Countries are not usually associated with nobility, historical research has proven that nobility and chivalry and played an important role in state formation during the central Middle Ages until the cities outflanked them in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Denessen 2013; Van Steensel 2014).<sup>4</sup> In the end urban defiance became the Achilles heel of princely authority. The cities cherished their rights and privileges and succeeded in playing an important role in the governance of the land (Arnade 2010; Bavel 2010). During the reign of Charles V (1515-1555), however, the situation would change. As Lord of the Low Countries (1515), King of Spain (1516) and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (1519), he had obtained much more power than his

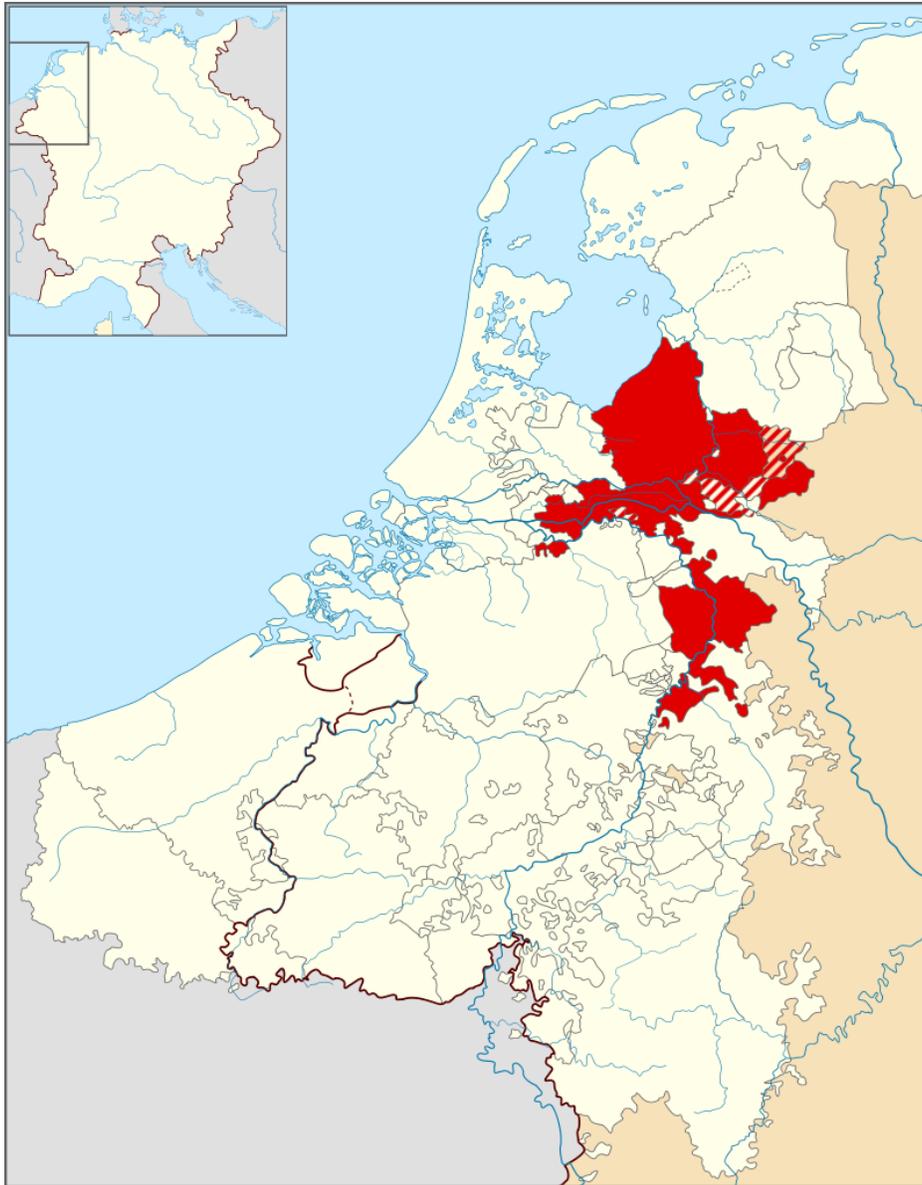
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<sup>2</sup> Myths are not deliberately fictional. They do give an imaginative reworking of the past to guide contemporary moral and political conduct (Cruz & Frijhoff 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Noordzij (2009, 327) rejects the word 'nation', because it is often exclusively associated with modern nationalism. He prefers the term 'political identity'.

<sup>4</sup> Noordzij (2009, 165-170) refers to this group of aristocrats as 'knights'; I prefer the word 'nobles' or 'noblemen'.

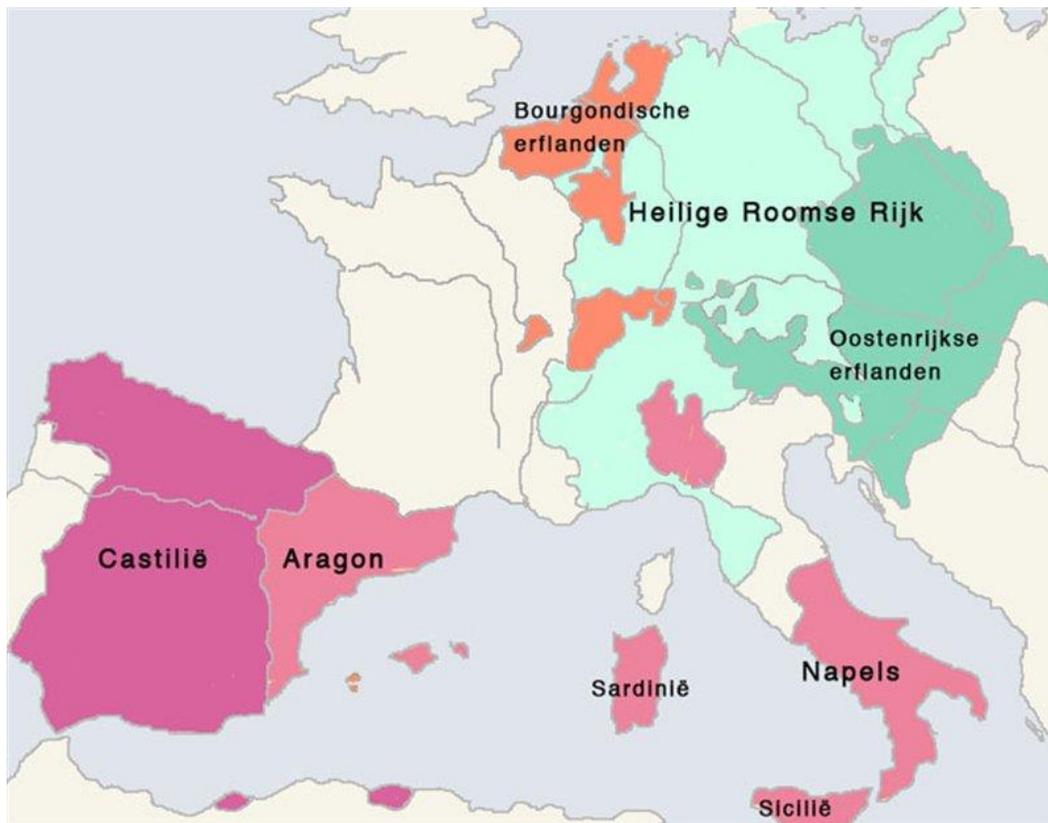
predecessors. The question was now how long Guelders could remain an independent country.



Map 1. The independent duchy of Guelders about 1350 in the context of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Source: [Wikipedia](#).

Because the 'Spanish Empire' of Charles V encircled France on three sides (see Map 2) conflicts between emperor and king led to several major wars. Needless to say that in this long struggle an alliance between France and the still independent duchy of Guelders was self-evident. For more than seventy years

France supported this territorial power, that through the control of the great rivers, played an important political and economic role in the Northern part of the Low Countries (Blockmans 2010, 503-508; Jahn 2005; Janssen 2005). Yet, in 1543, after many unsuccessful attempts, Charles V managed to conquer and incorporate Guelders as the seventeenth province of the Habsburg Netherlands. By the Treaty of Venlo in the same year the duchy lost its independence. The submission accomplished the ambition of the Burgundian predecessors who had wanted to unify all the provinces of the Netherlands, a project for which they all had waged war since 1473 (Boulton 2006; Van der Coelen 2003).



Map 2. France encircled by the Empire of Charles V: the Burgundian Netherlands, the Holy Roman (German) Empire and the 'Spanish' countries, ca. 1550. Source: [horl.yolasite.com](http://horl.yolasite.com).

But how did the inhabitants of Guelders react to the centralization politics of the Habsburgers? Did they accept the infringement on their liberties and the right to self-determination? Did the annexation pass as quietly as had been the case with Brabant or Holland a century earlier? To answer these questions, I will look into the feelings of liberty, independence and state formation in Guelders through historic narratives, myths, chronicles, songs and public spectacles such as Joyous

Entries (*Blijde Inkomsten*), which enabled rulers as well as urban elites to reach the inhabitants of the duchy. After all, cohesion was important for the regional and national identity, but rulers were not only seen as a symbol of unity, but also as an enemy who could destroy local liberties.

The content of the Treaty of Venlo (1543) between nobles and towns on the one hand and the new duke, emperor Charles V, on the other, seemed very conciliatory. All liberties and privileges of the duchy were recognized: no taxation could be imposed without the consent of the inhabitants; the civil servants should be acquainted with the regional vernacular and be subjects of the duchy and even the highest officials should at least be familiar with the law of the country. Moreover, the *ius de-non-evocando* was explicitly emphasized, which meant that the inhabitants could not be summoned before a foreign court and could not be convicted according to foreign laws and customs (Eisenhardt 1977, 301-345; Venner 1995). In the Treaty of 1543 the old constitutional status of the residents seemed to be guaranteed and their participation in matters of the land recognized. It is therefore not surprising that towns and nobles ratified the Treaty within three months, a spectacular record. The emperor, however, was in no hurry, and did not ratify until April 1544, and only after having been explicitly asked to do so more than once (Keverling Buisman 1993). Although the emperor had given in to almost all demands, the inhabitants did not trust their new lord. They feared a setup and very soon it was clear that the annexation had changed the situation. The duchy had not only lost its position as an independent state, but also had become part of the largest empire of Europe. Moreover, the new sovereign had conquered the territory, meaning that he was not inaugurated with the consent of the inhabitants, in contrast to the years 1318, 1371, 1423, 1492 and 1538, when the inhabitants more or less had appointed the new ruler (Böck 2013). Guelders now feared that the emperor would undermine the traditions and privileges of the land, and it was right. Soon problems arose about the appointment of civil servants, the administration of justice, taxes, the persecution of heresy and the control over the finances. The people of Guelders may initially have been happy with the Treaty, they soon discovered that Charles V had an interpretation of his own. In order to understand the rising tensions between emperor and duchy I will first describe the political and cultural cohesion in Guelders at the time of the annexation in 1543 (Meij 1975, 13-40; Kuys 1999; 2005a, 273-285; 2005b, 489-494).

### **The duchy of Guelders in the late Middle Ages**

In comparison with the other provinces of the Netherlands, Guelders was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century still a medieval territory with a highly decentralized political structure. Traditionally the duchy was a country of borders which ran across the land: rivers,

languages, marches, quarters, seigniories, civil districts, castles and estates. Guelders was a patchwork of boundaries, which led to many conflicts. The animosity between Nijmegen and Arnhem already existed in the Middle Ages, but the conflicts, among others, between Deventer and Zutphen, Groenlo and Lichtenvoorde and Venlo and Arnhem have a long history too. Often these cities had much in common, but they considered the rest of the country as the 'other' (Verhoeven 2016, 310-325; Alberts 1978; Van Schaik 2001).

From the start the duchy was a regionalized territory divided in four quarters with a considerable autonomy. Each region had an Assembly of its own, in which cities and nobility, consisting of *bannerheren en ridderschap* ('bannerets and chivalry') had their own rights, leading to conflicts between the quarters, but also between cities within each region. After the quarter of Roermond (Upper Quarter) was conquered by the Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the three remaining parts – Zutphen, Arnhem and Nijmegen – (see Map 3) had to work together, which was not easy due to the everlasting political and commercial conflicts (Denessen 2013). In contrast to e.g. Holland with one assembly for the whole province the central representative in Guelders – the *Landdag* – was actually a combined assembly of the four, later three quarter assemblies, usually meeting alternately in one of the capitals (Kuys 2005a, 247-263; Geurts 2006, 72-93). The regionalization of Guelders continued to exist until 1796 causing constant tensions between quarters and cities, in which the power politics of Nijmegen often played a decisive role. Trade conflicts often led to almost open war, in which inhabitants from other towns were taken hostage or even put in prison. For example the staple right of Venlo led to endless conflicts and lawsuits with the other merchant towns at the Meuse river; in 1478 Nijmegen blocked the Rhine river in order to force Arnhem to choose its side against the duke and the position of the same city as center of government was always contested by Nijmegen; Lochem and Zutphen had a major conflict in 1643-1644 because of a sluice in the Berkel river; in 1655 Nijmegen demanded control of the taxation in Zaltbommel; and the same city was despised by the other towns because of her support for the Orange family during a civil war (*Patriottentijd*) in 1780-1784; Meij 1975, 48-52; Van Schaik 2001; Poelhekke 1975, 156-158; Geurts 2005, 568-577).

Due to the many internal conflicts the sovereign of Guelders could time and again play an important role in politics, but he always had to take into account that in 1418 nobility, capitals and small cities had arbitrarily agreed that no duke could reign over Guelders without the recognition of the majority of the inhabitants, who at the same occasion had stated that they would guarantee each other's rights and privileges for the future. On the other hand, we must not forget that in times of crises and war all quarters and cities worked together with the

duke to protect the independence of the land (Alberts 1978, 22-33; Meij 1975; Poelhekke 1975).



Map 3. The four Quarters of the Duchy of Guelders in 1543. Source: Hantsche 2003, 38-39.

Through the privilege to impose tax the capitals of each quarter acquired an increasing influence on the politics of the land. Shortage of money forced the dukes time and again to confirm all kind of rights and privileges in exchange for loyalty and cash (Van de Pas 2004; Van Schaik 1993; Bosch 2015; Nissen & Bruggen 2014, 61-140). Sometimes the capitals were so autonomous that they could make

agreements with foreign powers independently. For towns and nobles the autonomy of their own region came first. Although the Estates of Gelre, the so-called *Landdag*, had legislative power, the quarter Assemblies were the real sovereigns. Every attempt to centralize the duchy was defeated by the rigidity of local and regional political structures. On the other hand this internal particularism did not compromise the territorial cohesion of the territory. The elite realized that only by working together the governance and independence of the duchy could be preserved. A collective awareness of local and national interests sparked the cooperation of noblemen and towns. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, they had formed, separately from the duke and his council, territorial consultation structures to protect their individual rights. To uphold the urban and regional identity, they devoted themselves to maintaining the integrity and unity of the territory. All kinds of symbols, historical narratives and myths were at the same time used for both country and cities. Towns and noblemen considered themselves as representatives of the duchy, even seeing themselves as the real power behind the political community: they co-owned the territory. State formation went hand-in-hand with the development of urban identities. Outwardly the duchy acted as a political identity, but it was a unity in diversity (Noordzij 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010b; Böck 2013; Meij 1975, 13-132).

Since medieval times almost all the dukes were constantly embroiled in a struggle for power and legitimacy. First it was a struggle within the ruling dynasty, but later on conflicts arose between various dynasties and foreign influences began to play an important role in the politics of Guelders. It started in 1371 when the duchy had no legitimate successor and two pretenders claimed the throne for themselves. Lavishly they sprinkled rights and privileges to persuade cities to choose their side. For the first time the towns could interfere with the succession. This did not mean that all stood on the same side. In the Upper Quarter the relations between Venlo and capital Roermond were so bad that Venlo regularly sent additional city representatives to the *Landdag* to be sure that nothing contrary the town's interests was decided. (Geurts 2006, 83). In the Nijmegen quarter the cities Tiel and Zaltbommel often opposed the powerful capital, but mostly Nijmegen got its way. Eventually a network consisting of noblemen and twenty-two cities under the leadership of Nijmegen developed in the duchy. Together they managed to increase their influence on national politics. In 1418 cities and nobles again could nominate the new duke, as happened later on in the years 1423, 1471, 1492 and 1538. The new duke was only inaugurated after he had confirmed the rights and privileges of the subjects. Together they would defend the territorial independence and sovereignty, but at the same time the participation of the inhabitants in matters of the land continued to exist. The influence of the cities even went so far that abbreviations of their names appeared

on several coins of Guelders (Blockmans 2010, 362-370; Noordzij 2009, 2013; Nüsse 1958) (see Illustration 1).



*Illustration 1. This 14<sup>th</sup> century coin is an example of the cooperation between cities and duke: on one side the seal of the duke, on the other side not – as elsewhere – a heroic victory of the ruler, but the abbreviations of the initial letters of the four quarter capitals: N(ijmege), R(oermond), S(utphen) and A(rnhem). Source: Geldmuseum, Utrecht.*

Yet, despite all agreements, the centralist politics of the dukes often led to confrontations with the subjects. In 1473, the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, used this infighting to his advantage and conquered the duchy of Guelders by force; only Nijmegen offered significant resistance. After his unexpected death four years later, towns and nobles, again led by Nijmegen, chose the son of the last duke – Karel of Egmond – as heir. Emperor Maximilian I, however, married to Charles the Bold's daughter and convinced that he was the successor in Guelders, did not accept this 'revolt', and defeated a provincial army, killing 400 Nijmegen citizens. For more than a decade the duchy was occupied by a foreign power. Finally in 1492 Karel van Egmond was inaugurated as duke of Guelders, but under strict conditions. Whenever he tried to strengthen the central government, the towns revolted (Geurts 2006, 81-112; Arnade 2008, 12-49).

Originally Guelders had followed a neutral policy between east (the Holy Roman Empire) and west (the Burgundian Low Countries), but in the long run it became clear that the aggression of Burgundy and Habsburg meant annexation, centralization and the loss of privileges, whereas the weak Empire stood for freedom and independence (Finger 2009, 79-96). That is why the inhabitants of Guelders resisted the integration into the Netherlands, unlike Flanders, Brabant, and Holland, which had, despite several rebellions, endorsed or even embraced the inclusion in Burgundy. According to medieval discourses and chronicles the dynasty of Guelders was of imperial descent and the duchy itself an imperial fief

(Noordzij 2009, 293-326; 2004). Bloodlines and character were German.<sup>5</sup> The duchy shared the antiquity and dignity of the empire and the civility and purity of the German people. In short the German identity was translated into the local and regional context. More and more the inhabitants feared the Burgundians'/ Habsburgers' plans to alienate Guelders from the Empire, and this formed the basis for the stubborn resistance against integration into the Netherlands (Geurts 2006, 81-112; Noordzij 2004, 2010a, b). The tensions resulted in a series of conflicts between Charles V and duke Karel van Egmond – the so-called *Gelderse oorlogen* ('Guelders Wars') – that ended in 1543 with the Habsburg victory (see Illustration 2).



Illustration 2. The two antagonists: (Left) Emperor Charles V (1519) by Barend van Orley. Source: [Wikipedia](#). (Right) Karel van Egmond, duke of Guelders by Barthel Bruyn (1518). Source: Gemeentemuseum Arnhem, inv.nr. 2882.

It was not a full-fledged war with large battles, but small hit and run raids and ambushes. Hostilities and incidents were not limited to the region Guelders

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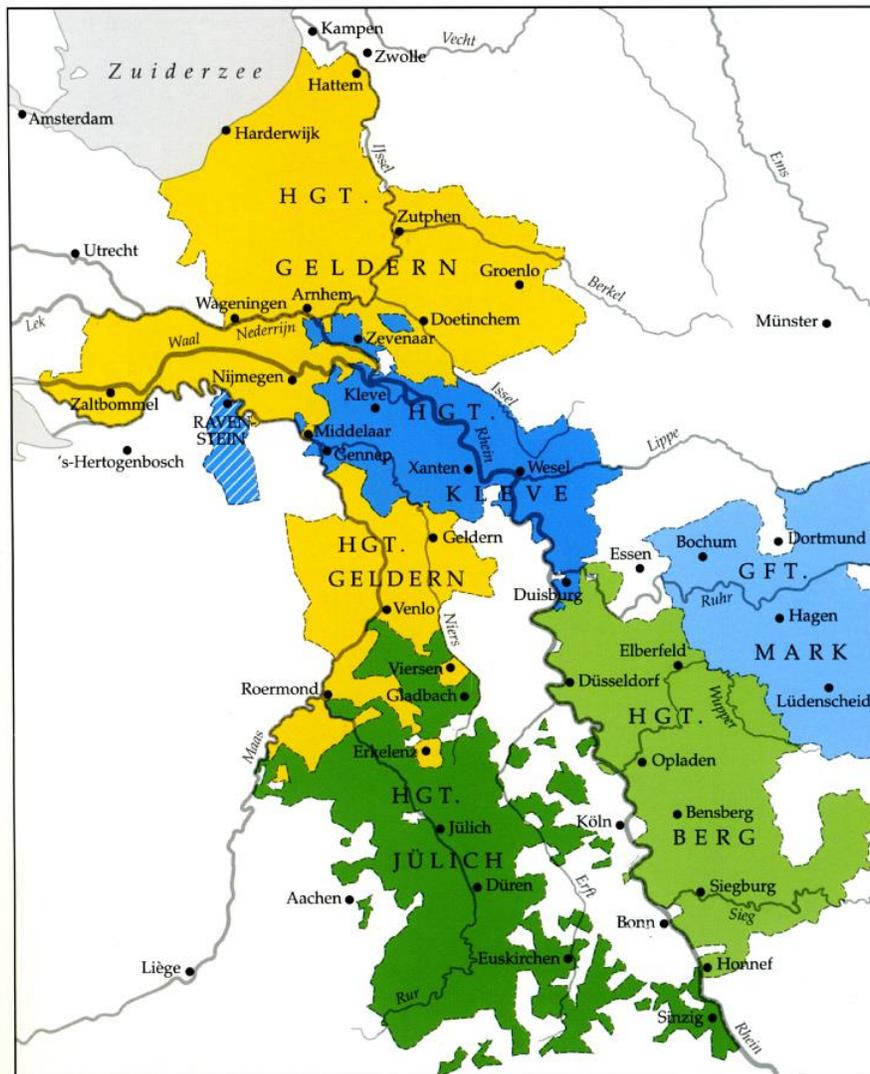
<sup>5</sup> The developments in Guelders can be compared with those of the German Empire. Through the lack of a dynastic continuity no central government with a residential capital had developed making the regional consciousness stronger than the national. In both countries existed a 'constitutional dualism': a state on two levels, that of the whole country, and, that of the principalities/quarters and towns (Moraw 1989, 636-662).

however, culminating in the sacking of The Hague in 1528 and the failed siege of Antwerp in 1542, both under the command of field marshal Maarten van Rossum. For years Guelders was very successful and at one point the duke controlled the entire east of the Low Countries: Utrecht, Overijssel, Drente, Groningen and Frisia (Struik 1960; Alma 1988).

It is understandable that French support in this struggle was more than welcome and the king of France became the main ally, but French soldiers on Guelders soil were treated with great suspicion. When Karel planned to make the king of France his successor, because he himself had no children, the people revolted. They “would rather become Turkish than to accept an agreement with the devil” (Rogier 1971, 76). In the eyes of the inhabitants there was no difference between France or Habsburg. During all the protests against the policy of the duke, Nijmegen played a leading role. Mayor and many times city councilor Jacob Kanis, father of the well-known renaissance humanist Petrus Canisius, became the main defender of national and city rights. Many times duke Karel threatened ‘to chop off his head’, but the matter was always settled in a friendly way. Instigated by Kanis the *Landdag* chose in 1538 William, duke of Cleves, as heir of childless Karel, chiefly because only together with Cleves, at that moment united in a personal union with the duchies Jülich, Berg and Mark, the imperial pretensions of the Habsburgers could be resisted (see Map 4).

Although the inhabitants of the newly formed state had much in common, the territorial autonomy of the duchy came first for the inhabitants of Guelders. During the inauguration of William of Cleves as the new duke, slogans for an independent Guelders could be heard everywhere (Janssen 1993; Noordzij 2010a). Very soon, however, Jacob Kanis noticed that the new duke – a weakling – could not resist Charles V, who wanted a strong unified state north of arch-enemy France. After the bloody conquest of the town of Düren, Kanis finally pleaded for submission to the emperor, in the long run the only way to ensure the political stability so necessary for trade and industry. When the duke of Cleves capitulated, after the conquest of Venlo in 1543, the *Landdag* indeed choose Charles V as its new duke (see Illustration 3).

In the same year Kanis was the first to ratify the Treaty of Venlo, which transferred Guelders to the Habsburg Netherlands. In fact, his signature ended what he had defended for so long: Guelders’ and Nijmegen’s independence (Geurts 2011a, 39-58). Although urban sieges made the Habsburgers master of Guelders, the memories of blood and violence invoked a community ideal that again and again provoked resistance and a political identity of its own to maintain the local and regional autonomy (Arnade 2010, 199-208).



Map 4. The combined state of Guelders and Cleves (1538-1543). Source: Hantsche 2003, 36-37.

### Nijmegen, a proud city

It is obvious that Nijmegen by its central position in the river area was the most important town of the duchy for centuries. The city became the champion of Guelders' nationalism and not only its quarter, but the whole territory could count on her protection. Nijmegen became a center in a historical and mythological

discourse on urban<sup>6</sup> and national autonomy that legitimized the independence of city and duchy (Bavel 2010, *passim*; Geurts 2011a, 39-58; Kuys 2005b, 227-284; Noordzij 2009).



Illustration 3. Dirck Volkertsz. *Coornhert: The capitulation of Willem van Kleef to Emperor Charles V at Venlo (1543)*. Source: Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet Rijksmuseum.

History started in about 20 BC with a Roman army camp on a high location overlooking the Waal river. The soldiers were soon followed by tradesmen and the community rapidly developed into a settlement of some 5,000 inhabitants. For similar strategic reasons, subsequent rulers chose Nijmegen as a stronghold and a

<sup>6</sup> Keep in mind that urban identity was and is a social construction of image and self-image of a city (Frijhoff 1994, 29-56). On flexibility and adaptability in the use of urban identity, see Dormans et al (2003).

place of residence. Around 800 AC Charlemagne built a palace on the same site of the Roman camp. After the royal palace was set on fire in 1047 the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa built a fortress on the same spot at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, using the remaining building material to make his imperial ambitions clear (Mekking 1966; Thissen 2014; Kuys 2014). This is the castle we know so well from many paintings and illustrations: *het Valkhof*, 'the Falcon castle' (see Illustration 4).

In its heyday, this mighty *Valkhof* castle with its massive tower reminded the residents every day of their past. Stories and myths of Roman, Carolingian and German emperors 'proved' that Nijmegen was the oldest and most important town of the duchy. The castle was the core of the pride and self-assurance of the inhabitants. However, in the following centuries Nijmegen behaved so conceited that the inhabitants of the other towns of Guelders felt themselves to be relegated into the role of second-class citizens, which eventually would lead to a great aversion to this self-proclaimed capital of the duchy. So it is logical that at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the other cities decided to demolish this stronghold. All that remains now to remind us of this impressive complex are the chapels of St. Nicolas and St. Martin (the Barbarossa Ruin) (Peterse 2014; Geurts 2014).



*Illustration 4. Jan van Goyen: View on Nijmegen (1641). The most famous painting of the Valkhof castle. Source: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen.*

### **Batavian ancestry**

Due to the lack of a political and cultural unity, a written historiographical tradition of Guelders appeared comparatively late, namely in response to the Burgundian and Habsburg occupations (1473-1477 and 1481-1492), when the independence of the duchy was in danger. Stimulated by the dukes who tried to create a

'national' identity chroniclers reacted to a number of negative stereotypes about the inhabitants (lumpish, barbaric, belligerent, and rebellious), that had come into existence throughout the rest of the Low Countries during the many wars the duchy fought to maintain its independence. Some historians used these negative stereotypes to create a positive image of their compatriots: they described the people of Guelders as natural, brave freedom fighters (Van 't Hooft 1948; Noordzij 2004, 2010a). Crucial to the belief in independence was the discovery of Tacitus' book *Germania* around 1450. In this story the Batavians, auxiliary forces of Rome, living in and around Nijmegen under their leader Julius Civilis (often mistakenly referred to as *Claudius Civilis*), revolted against the Romans in 69 AC and conquered a large part of the Lower Rhine territory. A Roman counter-attack was inevitable and the conflict ended with the capture and destruction of this *Oppidum Batavorum* ('City of Batavians'). The inhabitants had to rebuild the town two kilometers upstream, where it could not be defended. This new settlement was named *Noviomagus*, a name that eventually would become Nijmegen. However, after the defeat the Batavians acknowledged the supremacy of Rome again and the cooperation between the two opponents was restored. This was very fortunate for Nijmegen, because the city now could use Romans and Batavians to paint a picture of a glorious past. The renewed alliance was therefore constantly emphasized in chronicles and historical paintings (Van der Coelen 2004, 144-196; Langereis 2004; Tilmans 1988) (see Illustration 5.)

Because the uprising had showed heroic resistance against cruel tyranny, the Batavians were immediately seen as ancestors of the inhabitants of Nijmegen and, later on, of Guelders. This first example of a struggle for freedom made a historical continuity between the Roman/Batavian period and contemporary times possible; a propaganda tool for local, regional and national independence. Even the famous artist Rembrandt van Rijn chose the most persistent myth in Dutch history to paint the *Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* for the newly built Town Hall in Amsterdam (Blanc 2009, 237-254) (see Illustration 6).

William van Berchen (1415/1420-ca. 1481), born in Nijmegen and a fierce opponent of the Burgundian occupations, was not only the first chronicler of the history of Nijmegen and later on Guelders, but also the first to trace the independence of his native town to the Batavians. Nijmegen was Tacit's famous island of the Batavians. Gerard Geldenhower (1482-1542), also an inhabitant of the city at the Waal river, furthermore emphasized the fact that the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117) had granted 'Noviomagus' a free city charter, whereby the inhabitants gained Roman civil rights (Lemmens 2005, 200-225; Tilmans 1988, 55-67; Begheyn 1971). Other historians used this continuity with ancient times for a *translatio imperii*; a transfer of power from one nation (the Roman Empire) to another (the duchy of Guelders). In this way they tried to visualize the abstract

image of Guelders through coins, maps, coat of arms, books and historical narratives, lest the inhabitants might identify themselves with duke and duchy and would become a political community. Traditions and symbols that had become customary in the 14th and 15th centuries were assigned a much older origin. History has to prove the continuity of government institutions and dynasty (Bailly 2013).



*Illustration 5. Nicolaes van Helt Stockade: The bond between Romans and Batavians (1669). The personifications of 'Roma' (left) and 'Batavia' (right, leaning on a shield with the lion of Guelders), make peace after the revolt of Julius Civilis. In the background the Castel Sant'Angelo (Engelenburcht), originally a mausoleum for emperor Trajan, who granted Nijmegen Roman city rights, and the Valkhof castle. The figures symbolize the Roman and Batavian roots of Nijmegen. Source: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen.*



*Illustration 6. Rembrandt van Rijn: The conspiracy of Claudius Civilis, (1661/1662). Source: Nationalmuseum Stockholm.*

The Batavian myth underlined the privileges of Nijmegen – and the territory – with as most important conclusion that the dukes were appointed by the people as guardians (custodians) and as such had to protect the public interest and local privileges (Smetius 1999; Haalebos 2000; Noordzij 2004). Other chroniclers reinforced these ideas of self-reliance, claiming that Guelders always had belonged to the Holy Roman (German) Empire.<sup>7</sup> The Empire meant freedom and autonomy. The rulers of Guelders were princes of Allemania, loyal to and part of the council of the Emperor. The inhabitants were convinced of the legality of the ancient rights of country and towns. Even the mighty new lord, Charles V, did not have the right to interfere, not in Guelders, nor in Nijmegen.

### **Free Imperial city**

The glory of Nijmegen was further reinforced by the discovery of a plaque in the St. Nicholas chapel, built around 1030 on the remains of the royal palace of emperor Charlemagne. The plate, dated 1155, stated that Julius Caesar himself was the founder of the city. Even though the inhabitants were familiar with the

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<sup>7</sup> The Holy Roman Empire (not to be confused with the Roman Empire) was a multi-ethnic complex of territories in central Europe that started when Otto I of East Francia became Holy Roman Emperor in 962 and continued until its dissolution in 1806.

Roman past, a foundation by Caesar had hitherto been unknown. Probably it was a misinterpretation of a memorial text on a Roman tombstone, which mentioned the name Julius twice. Needless to say that the inhabitants of Nijmegen believed this story was true which increased their self-assurance greatly (Kokke 1955; Kuys 2005b, 227-247) (see Illustration 7).

Finally, in 1230 emperor Frederick II of the House of the Hohenstaufen proclaimed Nijmegen a (German) Imperial City: the only town in the northern Low Countries with a great degree of autonomy and its own jurisdiction. Nijmegen now regarded itself as a free imperial city, and recognized no power except the emperor, which it showed, among other things, through the city seals. For example, the first great seal showed a wall, two towers and a gatehouse with the bust of an enthroned (German) emperor (Willemsen 1982, 95-98). From now on Nijmegen claimed also the right of direct appeal to the Imperial Chancery, the *Reichskammergericht*, which was seen as symbol and proof of the autonomy of the city within the Empire.

Unfortunately, lack of money forced the next emperor to pawn Nijmegen to the duke of Guelders in 1247. Because the loan was never repaid, the inhabitants actually lost their imperial city rights and Nijmegen became in fact an ordinary town of Gelderland and has been part of the duchy ever since. Although the imperial aura had expired, Nijmegen and its historians systematically obscured this development. Time and again, they emphasized not only the Roman foundation and Batavian heritage, but also the intimate bond with the German Empire with the *Valkhof* castle as most impressive evidence (Van der Sande 2005; Kuys 2005b; Geurts 2011a, 41-50).

The city continued to use the title of Free Imperial City in the next centuries, which was visualized, among other things, by the city coat of arms. The double-headed eagle of the Hohenstaufen and the imperial crown on top manifested that Nijmegen was a imperial city, whereas the lion of Guelders on a blue breast plate of the eagle referred to the fact that Nijmegen as long as the loan of 1247 was not paid back, only for the time being was a city of Guelders. Nijmegen only needed to repay the loan (Kurstjens 2016, 27-46; Geurts 2014, 151-174) (see Illustration 9). It is not surprising that the many stories and myths about the classical origin and imperial character of the town reinforced the pride and even arrogance and haughtiness of the inhabitants.



Illustration 7. Woodcut in *Die Jeeste van Julius Caesar* (ca. 1487), 124. The double-headed eagle on the breastplate of Caesar refers to the influence of the Hohenstaufen emperors of the Holy Roman Empire in later centuries. Source: NCRD, Nationaal Gevangenismuseum, 100861911. [Geheugenvannederland.nl](http://Geheugenvannederland.nl).

As mentioned above, the main symbol of the collective memory was the very visible *Valkhof* castle. But this was also a problem since it was located within the city walls and the owner of the castle – the duke – could easily turn against the town, which happened frequently. This is why Nijmegen did everything in its power to become independent militarily. In the thirties and forties of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for example, the town restored its fortifications. To underscore the independent position, many gates were decorated with a plaque bearing the coat of arms of Nijmegen: the imperial double-headed eagle as proof of an old (German) imperial city (*Molenpoort* 1533, *Windmolenpoort* 1540). The *Hezelpoort*, the most important gate, was in the same decades reinforced with a rectangular double tower flanked by two round bulwarks and connected to an inner gate by a bridge over the moat (Brinkhoff & Lemmens 1966, 91-92).



Illustration 8. Palamedes Palamedsz: The Emperor pledges Nijmegen to count Otto II of Guelders in 1247 (1665). In the background the Valkhof castle. Source: Het Valkhof Museum, Nijmegen.

On the outside the gate was additionally decorated with the motto “*Melior est bellicosa libertas quam servitus pacifica*” (‘It is better to fight for freedom than to live peacefully in slavery’): a clear manifestation of the town’s spirit of freedom. In 1540 the same gate was further decorated with a stone in the wall bearing the curious text *Hic Pes Imperii* (‘Here the foot of the Empire’). Despite different interpretations I agree with the Nijmegen archaeologist John Smetius who in 1645 assumed that the text meant that the Hezelpoort was the very limit of the German border and Nijmegen thus belonged to the Empire, which also sang the praises of Nijmegen as a free imperial city (Brinkhoff & Lemmens 1966, 23-26, 91-92; Geurts 2011 a; see also the story of Calvete de Estrella in note 10). The town even managed to get the impressive castle under its control. When the duke once again threatened the autonomy of the city in 1524, the inhabitants took over the gates of his castle for some time. In 1537, when duke Karel van Egmond tried to make the French king his successor, they even conquered the *Valkhof* by surprise, imprisoned the garrison of six hundred men, and demolished the castle walls and gates. Thus, Nijmegen gained absolute control over the symbol of the duke’s authority, which meant that the sovereign had to ask for permission to access his own fortress. During this attack a stone with the dynastic coat of arms of the duke was taken and as a victory trophy immured in one of the city gates (Kuys 1999; 58-91; 2005 a, 277-284) (see Map 5).



*Illustration 9: Coat of Arms of Nijmegen. Photo J. Geurts.*

### **The first conflicts between duchy and emperor**

As mentioned above, the annexation by Charles V in 1543 was a turnaround. The persecution of heretics, weakened during the reign of William of Cleves (1538-1543), was immediately taken up again. When Nijmegen – as other cities – did not respond energetically enough to promulgations of the new protestant doctrine, a newly established central institution, the Court of Guelders (Hof) demanded the extradition of a chaplain of the St. Stevens Church. The city council rejected, because extradition ran counter to the municipal privilege of the *ius de-non-evocando* that Charles V had solemnly recognized in 1543. A resident of Nijmegen

could not be prosecuted outside the jurisdiction of the town. The prosecution of master Claes of the Latin school for heresy was also not carried out despite explicit demands made by the governor himself (Geurts 2011a).



Map 5. Joan Blaeu: Map of Nijmegen in the seventeenth century (1649). In the lower left corner one can see how the Valkhof castle is located within the city walls. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

In the following years, the impending centralization became manifest, when Charles V imposed two more central institutions on the duchy: a Chancellery that ran the day-to-day administration, and a central Audit Office ('*Rekenkamer*'). There were hardly any protests, however, because a strong separation in governance between duke and inhabitants had developed since the Middle Ages. Although the *Landdag* saw itself as the representative of the territory, running the administration was the prerogative of the duke and this was the reason that the new central administrative bodies could easily tackle the privileges of the inhabitants (Van de Pas 1993a; Geurts 2011a, 39-58). Besides, all institutions were located in Arnhem, undoubtedly as a counterweight to the influence of headstrong Nijmegen. Moreover, the chancery ordinance meant a further violation of local privileges, especially regarding the jurisdiction. Was Nijmegen still entitled to the *ius de-non-evocando*? Who was competent in last resort to act

in, for example, a case of heresy: the city aldermen, the Court of Gelre or the Reichskammergericht? When the city council openly obstructed an investigation of alleged heresy, the central government forced Nijmegen to give in. The centralization of legal power and fiscal pressure strengthened deep-seated political resentments. Court and Chancellery in Arnhem became bones of contention (Geurts 2011a; Venner 1995, 10-16; cf. Nève 1972, 313-316).

When the emperor announced in 1546<sup>8</sup> that he would hold his Joyous Entrance in Guelders, the inhabitants faced a difficult choice. How to welcome the new duke? After all, an inauguration was a very important ceremony, in which the duke confirmed the customary rights and existing privileges of the inhabitants and quarter and town assemblies swore the oath of allegiance. Even more important, the meeting could redefine the limits of power between city and sovereign. It was an opportunity to demonstrate and promote the urban identity and independence by using the collective memory of society: History in the service of political desires, lending an aura of legitimacy to an (often fabricated) past (Geurts 2011a; Hageman 2005, 15-44). Remembering the cruel punishment of Ghent after the city had revolted against Charles V in 1541, the towns decided to welcome Charles V with all manner of decorum. Nijmegen built a new jetty for the emperor's entourage, refurbished the streets, and mustered the militia. A reception committee of all dignitaries awaited the emperor at the Waal river in front of the walls to accompany him to the *Valkhof* castle. The next day a long procession of people from all walks of life welcomed the new duke at the castle and honoured him with all kinds of gifts. The presence of all social classes should not only symbolize the urban unity, but at the same time make it abundantly clear that the whole city was willing to stand up for its rights. Tensions could not be avoided. What should have been a week of festivities – the inauguration of Charles V – threatened to end in a nightmare. Matters came to a head when a soldier of the bodyguard of Charles V was arrested for theft. Who was entitled to punish him? With the statement “I am the Lord of this town,” mayor Thomas van Triest made it very clear that the city had the right to punishment. Under pressure of the emperor, however, the council gave in and pardoned the soldier, but stated explicitly that this happened under the city laws as recognized by Charles V in 1543. Yet the question was unavoidable: were ancient privileges still valid after the annexation? But there was more: not only had the aforementioned punishment of the soldier led to great concern, the distrust of the city was also fueled by the fact that the first order of Charles V was to restore the walls and

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<sup>8</sup> It is striking that immediately after the conquest in 1543 nobles, quarters and cities had already recognized and inaugurated Charles V as the new duke of Guelders. Apparently three years later, in 1546, the emperor wanted to reinforce the relations with the youngest province of the Netherlands in more peaceful times (Keverling Buisman 1993).

gates of the *Valkhof* castle, which would bring the city back under his power (Geurts 2011a; Kuys 2005b, 494-498).

### **The city's autonomy endangered**

Trust in Brussels was lost and the still religiously divided city wanted to demonstrate that it stuck to its own political course. Therefore the architecture of the newly built Latin school and city hall was used to show the world the independence of Nijmegen. Statues of Apostles and Church Fathers, as well as the text of the Ten Commandments on the façade of the Latin school – in itself unusual for a civil building – gave the impression that Nijmegen obeyed the religious policy of Charles V (see Illustration 10). Strangely enough the curriculum had no religious obligations at all, and the coat of arms over the front door with the double-headed imperial eagle and crown, clearly indicated that the city was a free imperial city. The motto under the coat of arms reinforced this idea: 'The city hopes that under the protection of the eagle (the Holy Roman Empire) peace, prosperity and the true religion soon will bloom again'.<sup>9</sup> The Latin school showed loyalty and resistance at the same time (Gotzen 2011). Furthermore, the forefront of the new city hall (1555) was adorned with statues of, among others, Julius Caesar, Julius Civilis, Trajan, Charlemagne, and Frederick Barbarossa (see Illustration 11). These Nijmegen heroes were meant to lend royal luster and prestige to the city and at the same time should emphasize the urban feeling of freedom and autonomy (Geurts 2011a, 48-50).

In the meantime the emperor planned to centralize the loose collection of Netherlandic provinces in order to strengthen the inner coherence and to bind them close to the Habsburg monarchy. The Treaty of Augsburg (1548) established the Low Countries as a centralized entity apart from the Holy Roman Empire, while the Pragmatic Sanction (1549) confirmed that all provinces were subject to the same ruler, Charles's son Philip. The unification process was now complete. The consolidation of 1548 and 1549, however, would bring substantial changes in the political structure in the Netherlands, so Guelders protested fiercely against the new system. Led by Nijmegen, all towns of the duchy refused to accept the Treaty of Augsburg and the Pragmatic Sanction, because they conflicted with the old privileges as recognized by the emperor in 1543. The inhabitants even refused to go to Brussels to sign the Treaty. The duke should come to Gelre, and not vice versa. Only after mediation did the *Landdag* agree, on condition that the Treaty

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<sup>9</sup> 'Iam viget hic nobis et pax bona religioque pura et publica res praecipiente aquila'. Source: <http://www.noviomagus.nl/Vrij/LatijnSchool/cwdata/002-PICT0853.html>.

of Venlo remained in force. The bonds between Guelders and the German Empire should certainly not be broken (Van de Pas 1993b; Geurts 2011a).



*Illustration 10. Latin School with statues of the twelve Apostles, four Church Fathers and the coat of arms of Nijmegen above the door. Source: [niederrhein-maas.de](http://niederrhein-maas.de).*

### **The Joyous Entry of crown prince Philip (1549)**

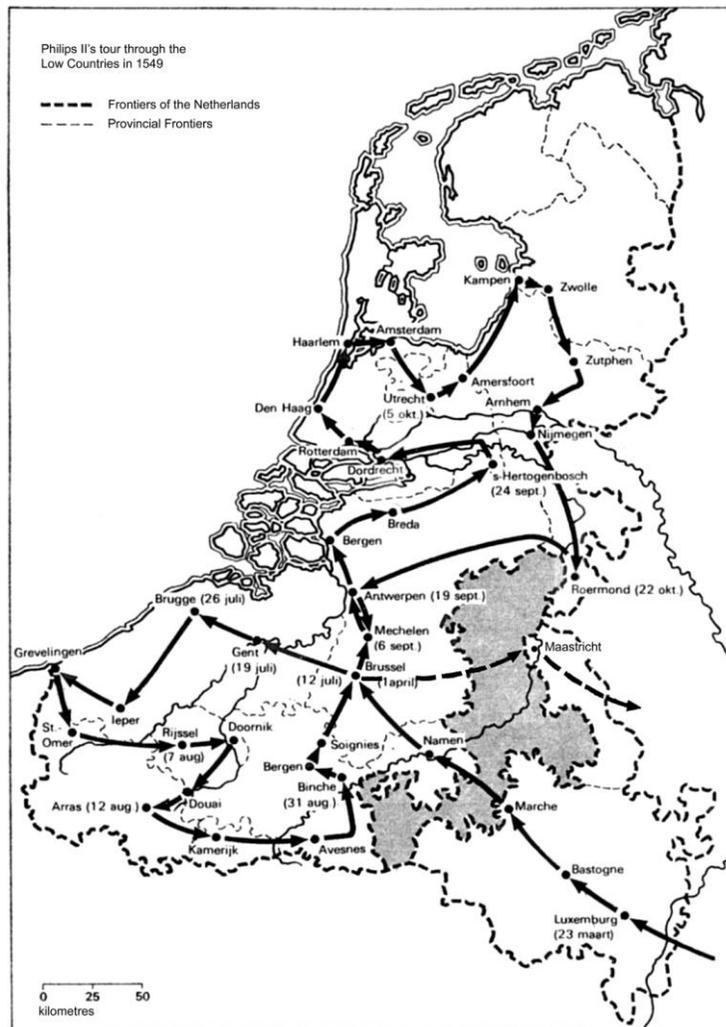
All these differences had implications for the Joyous Entry of Prince Philip, who was presented as successor of Charles V in 1549. Ceremonial vigor always had multiple purposes, but this time it was foremost to state that royal authority was a greater thing than its constitutional boundaries. So far Charles's power was always circumscribed and locally grounded. In 1531 he even complained that "everyone in the Low Countries demands privileges that are contrary to my sovereignty, as if I were their companion and not their lord" (quoted in Arnade 2010, 198). Now the relationship between ruler and subjects should be as far as possible transformed into submission to Prince Philip.



Illustration 11. City Hall ca. 1900 with the statues of the Nijmegen 'heroes'. Source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nijmegen).

The tour through the Netherlands, which lasted nine months, was an elaborate and astronomically costly welcoming ceremony (see Map 6).

The cities were transformed into great theatrical venues in which all actors – emperor, prince, city fathers, nobility, merchants, traders and inhabitants – played their desired social, political and economic roles. The entry parades showed all kinds of pomp and circumstance: gigantic triumphal arches, statues of mythical and biblical figures, and stages on which actors presented tableaux-vivants or static scenes, often followed by tournaments and fireworks (Bussels 2012) (see Illustration 12). The *Blijde Inkomsten* were very impressive celebrations of the future ruler of the Netherlands, but in the visual language of many festivities a delicate balance was subtly incorporated between an affirmation of total submission to the new lord of the Low Counties, and the explicit right of the subjects to resist if the monarch should engage in tyrannical behavior. The festivities, however, were not the same everywhere. Eyewitness Juan Christóbal Calvete de Estrella, historian and confessor of Charles V, tells us in his travel journal how great the differences were between the 'simple' entries in Guelders and the costly festivities in the rest of the provinces (Geurts 2010; Lecuppre-Desjardin 2004, 131-197).



Map 6. Inauguration tour of Prince Philip II through the Low Countries in 1549. Source: Geurts 2009, 35.

Compared to the southern and maritime provinces, the receptions in the eastern part were on the one hand identical, “*con aquel acatamiento y ceremonia, que se avia hecho en los otros lugares*” (‘with the respect and ceremony that was shown in the other places’) (Calvete de Estrella 1551, 316v); on the other hand Calvete also hinted at the lack of arches, tableaux-vivants, temporary buildings, monuments or statues he had seen elsewhere. He missed clearly that part of the entrance ceremonies wherein submission to the new lord was shown. In the oaths of allegiance only the old rights and privileges of Guelders were confirmed. The increased power of the sovereign was not recognized as elsewhere. The

companionship probably did not understand the reasons for this 'sobriety'. After all, the province had not been part of Charles V's empire for long enough to be affected in the same way as the other provinces. Through the simplicity of the inaugurations the cities of Guelders indirectly protested against the centralization of the Habsburgers. In Zutphen there was little more than some greenery along the streets, while in Arnhem, Nijmegen, Venlo en Roermond the prince was sworn in according to the traditional local ceremonies. Venlo was the low point. Calvete only spent three lines on the reception ending with the sentence: "*Por no aver avido arcos triumphales, ni letreros, passamos por estos lugares sin detenernos*" ('By the absence of triumphal arches and distinct banners we only stayed for the inauguration') (Calvete de Estrella 1553, 320v). Undoubtedly Charles V remembered the inauguration in Venlo in 1546 with all its pomp and circumstance. During this entrance, the two 'founders' of the city, the giant puppets Goliath and his wife, which had participated in all festivities in Venlo since 1366, were central in the celebrations. That they were not shown now was seen as a grave insult, so Charles and his son did not want to stay longer than necessary, and left the city as soon as possible. Roermond and Weert kept it simple too. Only the entrance in Nijmegen received a bit more attention in Calvete's book (Calvete de Estrella 1553; Geurts 2010; 2011a).

Although the relationship with Brussels had sharply deteriorated, the city council decided to welcome the prince: "*con mucho acaramiento, y demostracion de alegria*" ('with much respect and demonstrations of joy'), but also with indications of the old privileges. It was decided that Philip should enter the town through the grimmest and most heavily fortified gate of Nijmegen, the *Hezelpoort*, to emphasize the military power of the city. The narrative by Calvete is striking. Everywhere he described in great detail what he saw, as in Arnhem with the description of the mausoleum of Karel Van Egmond in de Eusebius church, but now he is superficial. Did he not notice the very visible wall plate with the motto: "*Melior est bellicosa libertas quam servitus pacifica*" ('It is better to fight for freedom, than to live peacefully in slavery') or did he not want to mention it? However, he could not avoid to mention the inscription; "*Hic Pes Imperii*" ('Here is a foot of the Empire'), the message that – according to the inhabitants – 'Nijmegen was part of the Empire', and as such unquestionably highlighting the town's status of free imperial city. It was impossible to overlook this motto because the text was shown twice: on a plate in the wall and on a banner with the same slogan held by two armed soldiers, hanging from the top of the inner gate. In a not so subtle way Nijmegen recognized the German emperor as its lord, by which the incorporation of the city into the Netherlands in fact was rejected.

Calvete, however, did not accept the view of the magistrate. For him Nijmegen had lost its rights as a free imperial city by the pledge to Guelders in 1247.<sup>10</sup>

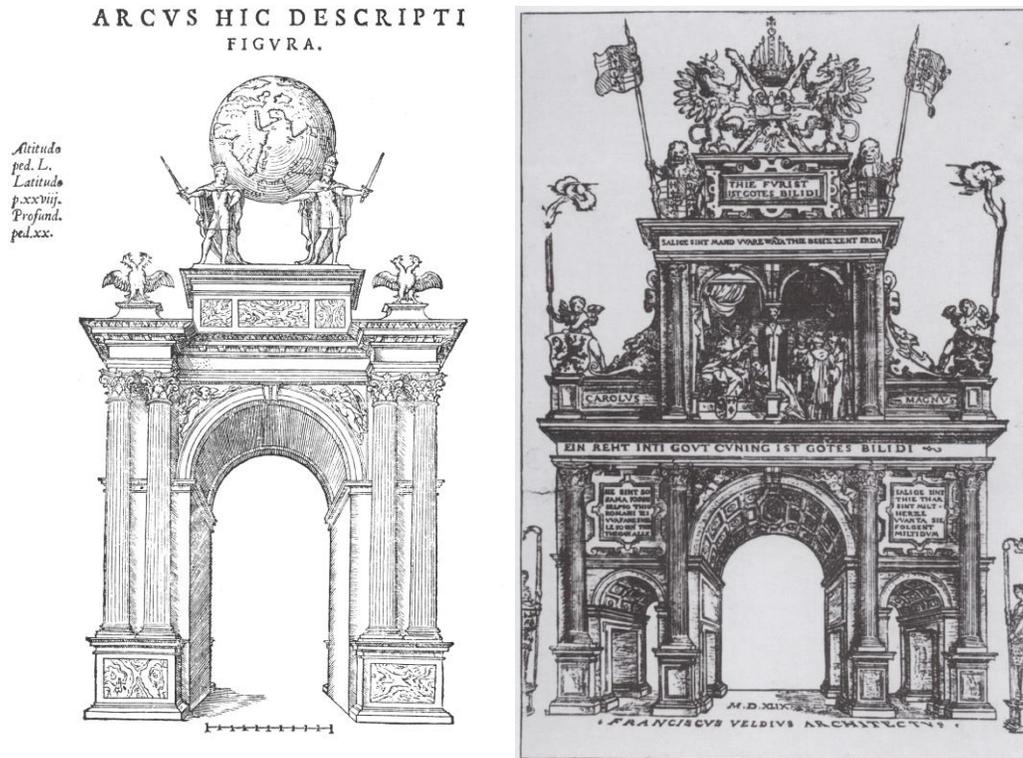


Illustration 12. Two examples of the magnificent temporary arches in Antwerp and Ghendt during the inauguration festivities of Prince Philip (II) in 1549. Source: Geurts 2009, 47-48.

But there is more. On the one hand it is striking that Calvete gives so much attention to the Batavian history of Nijmegen. He praises the people of town and duchy as the brave auxiliary forces on whom the Romans had relied so often. However, the revolt of Julius Civilis is not mentioned at all. Did he expect the ‘Oppidum Batavorum’ to be as loyal to the Habsburgers as the Batavians to Rome? On the other hand Calvete also noticed that Philip was not inaugurated as a successor to the Roman emperors as in the other provinces, although more than enough Roman history and Roman material evidence was available for such an

<sup>10</sup> “...Aunque es de Gheldres, desde, que el Rey [Emperor] el vendio à Ottō Tercio, Conde de Gheldres. Porque **hasta entonces** siempre fue libre y villa imperial, y por esso la llaman pie d’el imperio [Hic Pes Imperii], porque llegaua hasta alli el imperio.” [Nijmegen] belonged to Guelders since the King [Emperor] sold the city to Otto III, count of Guelders. Because **until then** it was always a free and imperial city, and that’s why they call it the ‘foot of the empire’ [Hic Pes Imperii], because the empire reached till there... (Calvete de Estrella 1553, 319r-319v).

entry in Nijmegen (Calvete de Estrella 1553, 318-320). The city on the Waal river received the crown prince not as the future Lord of the Netherlands, but as a simple new duke in a ceremony comparable with the entrances of his predecessors in 1492 and 1538. Nijmegen opted for this traditional inauguration to show its dislike of the increasing centralism. It also showed its dissatisfaction by requesting – and receiving – an additional confirmation of all privileges of the Treaty of 1543. No sources are known that can tell us whether Philip understood these and other indications of the city's ideas of autonomy, but the way he acted in Venlo indicates that he probably knew. In any case, the entrances in Guelders undoubtedly increased the tensions between Brussels and the duchy (Geurts 2010).

In the following years a constantly changing group of cities, always led by Nijmegen, continued to oppose the central government. They protested against tax measures, the inquisition and violations of the law. After every evasive answer, the towns formed alliances to hold on to their liberties. During almost every protest Nijmegen referred to its status of free imperial city. Among others things, it demanded that the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555), in which both Catholicism and Lutheranism were admitted in the German empire, also would apply to Nijmegen, and that its citizens could not be summoned before the Court of Guelders. It is no wonder that the governor of the duchy called the city a 'bad example' for the rest of the province (Hageman 2005; Kuys 2005b, 494-502). But in the long run the joint protests were less successful because Brussels's reactions became increasingly tougher. And after Arnhem, where Court, Council and Audit were located, had reconciled itself with the central government, Guelders gradually became part of the Habsburg Netherlands. In 1566 all provinces – including Guelders – protested against a plan to introduce the inquisition and in 1576 the duchy joined the Pacification of Ghent to promote a peace treaty with the rebelling provinces Holland and Zeeland. The reports of rape, looting and pillage by Spanish soldiers registered in annals, letters, pamphlets, ballads and engravings made the difference (Arnade 2010, 206-216). More and more Guelders accepted the fact that it was part of the revolting Netherlands. Finally in 1579 the duchy joined the Union of Utrecht, a treaty unifying the northern provinces of the Netherlands against Spain and regarded as the foundation of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces (Kuys 2005b, 489-502; Meij 1975, 13-132).

### **Nijmegen and its identity in modern times**

Nijmegen, however, kept trying to hold on to its independence. In vain. The final end came with the *Reductie* (Reduction) in 1591, when Prince Maurits took the city by force. From then on, Nijmegen had definitively lost its autonomy and was ruled by the government in The Hague. The frontier-city was needed in the war

against Spain, part of an European political and religious struggle. However half a century later, around 1640, the situation had changed. Europe was war-weary and after long deliberations envoys of no fewer than 194 states, from the biggest to the smallest, represented by 179 plenipotentiaries, came together in Münster and Osnabrück (Westphalia) to make peace with each other. The rebellious Netherlands were invited to make an end to the war with Spain (Geurts 2005, 533-539). However the internal political, religious and economic conflicts were so big, that it took four years of heated discussions before the Dutch envoys arrived in Munster in January 1646. One of the problems had been the composition of the delegation. Guelders insisted on sending an ambassador of its own, because this would mean that he – given the old title of the duchy – had precedence over all other emissaries of the Netherlands. The struggle for this seat of honor was very fierce. All quarters came up with a delegate of their own, but Zutphen demanded its candidate would be appointed, because Nijmegen and Arnhem had recently manned other important diplomatic missions. After months of arguing the quarters of Nijmegen and Arnhem decided to send their candidates alternately to Münster, against which Zutphen kept protesting until shortly before the final departure. However, after new machinations by Nijmegen the nominee of this quarter was suddenly appointed as the official ambassador of Guelders and it was he who in January 1648, as the most important ambassador, put his signature to the peace treaty between the Netherlands and Spain, by which the Dutch Republic legally acquired its independence (Geurts 2005, 530-535) (see Illustration 13).

But neither Zutphen nor Arnhem would forget what Nijmegen had done, nor did Harderwijk. This small town was also confronted with the unreliability of Nijmegen. When in 1647, after a long political struggle, the *Landdag* designated Harderwijk as the location for the new university of Guelders, Nijmegen did not accept the decision and, eight years later, founded its own university (Verhoeven 2015).

After the Peace of Münster Guelders believed that ancient times would return and especially Nijmegen was convinced that the city could retake its old dominance as a free imperial city. So the memory of independence and autonomy should be kept alive and the proud past of the city should be glorified in words and images. Jan van Goyen painted the most well-known picture of the *Valkhof* castle for the renovated town hall (see Illustration 4), as did Nicolaes van Helt Stockade with *The Alliance between Batavians and Romans*, in order to make clear that the history of Nijmegen went back to both Romans and Batavians (Begheyn 2009, 104-115) (see Illustration 5). In 1645 minister and antiquarian Johannes wrote in his famous book *Oppidum Batavorum, seu Nijmegen* ('City of Batavians, in other words Nijmegen') that Nijmegen was not only the center of the first struggle for freedom in the Netherlands, but he also underlined the ideas of

independence by claiming that the elevation of Nijmegen to a Free Imperial City in 1230 was not a favour, but an official confirmation of an already existing situation since the Roman emperor Trajan had granted Nijmegen Roman city rights (Smetius 1999, 72-116). In response to Smetius' book and as a counterweight to the urban self-awareness, Arend van Schlichtenhorst published the first 'national' history of Guelders in the Dutch vernacular: *XIV Boeken van de Gelderse Geschiedenissen* (1653) by which the Estates of Guelders tried to promote a provincial identity and unity (Bots 1975, 424-426) (see Illustration 14).



Illustration 13. Gerard ter Borch: The ratification of the Peace Treaty of Munster (1648). Note the six Dutch envoys with raised fingers. In the center of the painting behind the table stands the plenipotentiary of Guelders with the text of the Peace Treaty in his left hand. Source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Munster).

The arrogance of Nijmegen was also demonstrated by the motto in the council chamber of the town hall: "*Nimwegen, zy voorsichtich altyt dat ghy niemant inneempt dan die ghy machtich syt.*" ('Nijmegen, be careful that you do not allow anyone into the city whom you cannot control.'). But after the visit of the emperor in 1546, it became clear that cooperation with the other cities of the duchy was absolutely necessary. Therefore the facade of the same town hall was now

decorated with the text: “*Concordia Res Parvae Crescunt; Discordia Maxima Dilabuntur*” (‘Unity makes strength, discord breaks strength’) (Hageman 2005, 30-33).

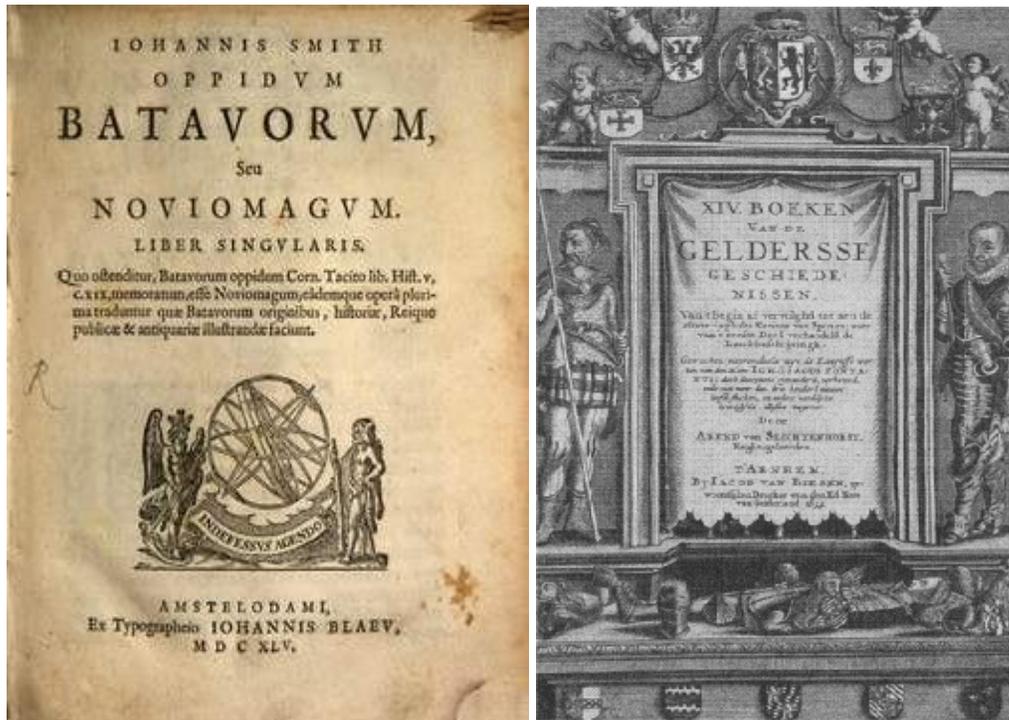


Illustration 14. (Left) At the request of the city council Johannes Smetius published in 1645 his *Oppidum Batavorum, seu Noviomagum*, thereby confirming the autonomy of Nijmegen. Source: [neomaqus.nl](http://neomaqus.nl); (Right) In the same year the Estates of Guelders emphasized the unity of the duchy of which Karel van Egmond (1492-1538) was the epitome. One hundred years after his death in 1538 we see his tomb back in the illustration on the title page of the book by Arend van Slichtenhorst: *XIV Boeken van de Geldersse Geschiedenissen* (Arnhem 1653). The illustration shows at the left Julius Civilis, the champion of the freedom of the Batavians; on the right is William the Silent, as well as a patron of freedom. At the bottom we see the tomb of Karel, symbol of the unity and identity of Guelders within the new Dutch Republic. Source: Stinner & Tekath (2003).

But the good times did not return. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Guelders and Nijmegen fell into decay. Political crises, economic decline, increasing poverty and war ravaged towns and duchy. Yet Nijmegen still dreamed of an independent city with its own rights and privileges. The poet Hans Kasper Arkstee wrote in 1733 the ode “*Nijmegen, de oude hoofdstad der Batavieren; in dichtmaat beschreven*” (‘Nijmegen, the ancient capital of the Batavians; described in verse’), in which the glorious past and the symbol of independent Nijmegen, the *Valkhof* castle, occurred many times. But things got worse. The French attack in 1795 caused so

much damage to the *Valkhof* castle, that the Estates of Guelders wanted to demolish this symbol of Nijmegen's political pretensions. Finally, the other towns of the duchy could take revenge for centuries of condescension. Nijmegen resisted vehemently, but in the end only the chapels of St. Nicholas and St. Martin (Barbarossa Ruin) could be saved, because of the strong conviction that they both were of Roman origin (Geurts 2014).



*Illustration 15. Hendrik Hoogers: View of the castle of Nijmegen (1796). This is the last and probably most precise drawing of the Valkhof Castle. Hoogers, mayor of Nijmegen, wanted to show the Estates of Guelders what they intended to destroy. Source: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, via [Wikimedia Commons](#).*

When it became clear that the castle would be demolished alderman Hendrik Hoogers etched the castle one last time in order to preserve its memory for posterity (see Illustration 15). Shortly after the demolition of the *Valkhof* a park was laid out on the spot where the castle had been standing, intended as a place of meditation and melancholy, a sacred place of the glorious past, decorated with classical statues and remains from the Roman and Carolingian period. This is what we now call heritage conservation, but was in fact self-interest of the oligarchy, who had lost their political power and status since the revolution of 1795. To remind the Netherlands that the country's independence had started in Nijmegen

a quote from the famous poet Christiaan Huygens (1596-1687) was placed on a balustrade at the north side of the park, which recalled the revolt of Julius Civilis against the Romans: “*HIC STETIT HIC FRENDENS AQUILAS HIC LUMINE TORVO CLAUDIUS ULTRICES VIDIT ADESSE MANUS.*” (‘Hier stond hij, hier zag hij knarsetandend de adelaars, hier zag Claudius met grimmige blik de wrekende legers naderen’; ‘Here he stood, here gritting his teeth he saw the eagles, here with a grim look Claudius [Julius] saw the revenging armies approach’) (Van der Sande 2005, 168-177; Lemmens & Van Meerkerk 2005, 442-478).<sup>11</sup>

After the defeat of Napoleon Guelders became part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814. Now the province had to adapt to the rest of the country. In response to the increasing centralization of the national government, more and more interest in the unique history of Guelders emerged, and although the political role of quarters and cities was finished, the memories exist until this day. All that remained for Nijmegen was a longing for that glorious past of an autonomous city in an independent duchy of Guelders. This nostalgia was reflected in historical narratives, paintings and the creation of historical societies, museums and town festivals, culminating in 1890 in the re-enactment of the historical Joyous Entry of Charles V in 1546 (Verhoeven 2015, note 20; Geurts 2014, 151-174; Van der Sande 2005, 159-183) (see Illustrations 16 and 17). Even in our days the city’s past has been increasingly promoted and visualized, as was the case in the rest of Guelders, but this reinvention of the history is now the product of marketing professionals. Historical themes and heritages are used in local branding campaigns. While Arnhem emphasizes the period of World War II, Nijmegen looks back to the time of the late medieval and early modern period, when the city was the most important town in Guelders. Even the *Knooppunt Arnhem-Nijmegen* (‘The Arnhem-Nijmegen City Region’) established in 1988 to bring the former antagonists together to create a joint identity based on their geographical context, has not been successful so far. There is no real interest in coordinating efforts. It is a ‘battlefield of histories’. Of course Arnhem emphasizes the commemoration of the Second World War (“A Bridge too far”), but at the same time publicizes Roman archeological finds in the city, a typical Nijmegen topic. The city at the Waal river tries to strengthen the public image by emphasizing its great medieval history, but also stresses the great losses and damage during the Market Garden campaign, which is Arnhem’s trump card. Now both cities have crossed their river – Nijmegen to the north and Arnhem to the south – it seems as if both want to build a new buffer between their territories to

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<sup>11</sup> For a photo of this inscription see the [City of Nijmegen website](#).

counter the urban expansion of the other. It was city branding, heritage politics and spatial planning at the same time (Egberts 2015, 196-245).



*Illustration 16. Pieter Francis Peters, sr.: Nostalgia. Dreaming of medieval autonomy in the 19th century. Charles V recognizes Nijmegen as a city of the Holy Roman Empire by personally adding the imperial crown to the coat of arms of the city (1837). Source: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen.*

### Discussion

Thanks to the cooperation between dukes, quarters and towns the independent duchy of Guelders managed to beat off any foreign attack in medieval and early modern times. Even after the conquest by Charles V in 1543, the Treaty of Venlo seemed to protect the autonomy of territory and citizens. The need to integrate into a greater body began only to evolve after the beginning of the Dutch Revolt

when the inhabitants of Guelders realized that their particularistic interests were better protected by cooperation with the other provinces. Only Nijmegen tried to hold on to its independent position as long as possible.

To explain these institutional developments, historians traditionally point to the pursuit for autonomy within, and the jealousy between, quarters and individual cities. As a result Guelders failed to develop the kinds of central institutions other provinces have. The inhabitants stubbornly hold on to 'the entrenched particularism',<sup>12</sup> which enhanced the cohesion of the territory, but hindered the formation of a national state. After all, overarching institutions could affect the integrity of the duchy, but also the privileges of quarters, cities and noblemen. Moreover, the inhabitants felt themselves part of the German Empire, which was seen as a guarantee of its autonomy. This applies to the duchy of Guelders as a whole, but especially to Nijmegen.

This city has played an important role in the struggle against the centralization policy of the national government. From the late Middle Ages on, Nijmegen cherished its independence, but it also realized that cooperation with dukes, nobles and other towns was needed to ensure the independence of the duchy, and thus to safeguard its own autonomy. As part of the Dutch Republic the Province of Guelders and its cities remained largely independent and again it was Nijmegen that constantly reminded the inhabitants of the times of greatness and autonomy. Any attempt by a central government was contested through pamphlets, historical narratives or paintings in which the local independence was glorified. Because of the strange composition of the territory and the lasting political divisions a sense of belonging to the province as a whole could hardly emerge. The typical regionalization of Guelders since medieval times has led to a kind of regional mini-states with their own political and cultural ideas that never disappeared. A feeling of unity manifested itself through the individual quarters, regions and cities. The subsequent conflicts with the central government formed the basis for the continuing political and cultural diversity of Guelders (Noordzij 2004; Frijhoff 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> Israel (1995, 283) calls it "teleological and anachronistic visions of history, one-sided and not free from a 19<sup>th</sup> century-based, biased interpretation of the developments in Guelders" (cf. Frijhoff 2012).



*Illustration 17. Nostalgia: Lithographs of the 1890 reenactment of the Joyous Entrance of Charles V in Nijmegen in 1546. The Emperor and his entourage. (Top) Trumpeters and the Carrier of the Banner of the German Empire. (Bottom from left to right) Herald of the Emperor, Hendrik, Earl van Brederode and Willem van Nassau, Prince of Oranje, both pages of the Emperor and Emperor Charles V himself. Source: J.G. Bos: Maskerade gehouden door de leden van het Leidsche Studenten-Corps, den 24sten 1890, Leiden 1890, plate 15 and 16. [Erfgoedleiden.nl](http://Erfgoedleiden.nl).*

Sometimes the inhabitants seemed to identify with territory and central government, but it was a love-hate relationship. Their own city and region came first. Did the inhabitants really want to build up a national state, similar to ours? There is a 'commuting of national feelings' between the regional and national levels, but in my opinion keeping the territory together to defend local privileges and cultural identity is no evidence of an increasing national identity. There were too many conflicting identities working together out of self-interest. Cooperation was born out of necessity. When the danger was gone, the sense of belonging disappeared and regions, noblemen and cities were each other enemies again. A collective representation of Guelders therefore could hardly have emerged (Verhoeven 2015; Frijhoff 2014).

These local feelings of autonomy did not disappear in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the central government increasingly tried to impose a national culture and identity. In reaction to the top-down centralization since 1814 the identity of cities and regions was again sought in the past in order to emphasize a separate political and cultural uniqueness. The dynamic and flexible ways of depicting the territory in the past had increased the ability to strengthen the identity of each city and region. Even the inhabitants of the smaller cities developed a feeling of local pride. The identity of Guelders was and still is located in particularism and diversity (Noordzij 2004; Verhoeven 2015; Köstlin 1966; Leerssen 1996).

Superficially the history of Guelders of the late Middle Ages and the modern period seems to have much in common. But could local, territorial and national identities reinforce each other? Can one speak of a medieval national identity comparable to the developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? Does a continuity exist between the late medieval phenomenon of 'nation building' and 19<sup>th</sup> century 'nationalism'? In times of crisis Guelders functioned as a political entity, but can one therefore speak of a political identity (Noordzij 2009, 326-333)? The traditionalist historians consider the ongoing process of state formation as the link between these widely differing phenomena. Through all ages the 'nation' was the legitimacy of the state and used to legitimize a central identity. But since the 15<sup>th</sup> century legal arguments were no longer sufficient for centralization, the princes needed new arguments (Bailly 2013, 61-75). The actual forging of the "nation" was left to historians. They provided dukes, quarters and cities with historical 'evidence'. Discontinuities in historical reality were removed and new traditions were attributed an older origin when necessary (Jensen 2015). But do the political and cultural expressions of the revolutionary movements in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have their origin in pre-modern traditions? Did 'media' as pamphlets, historical narratives, poems, songs or paintings really mobilize the public opinion? Ethnic and national affinities are among the most powerful forces in human history, indeed, but to me, the continuity of the collective memory seem

to be narratives adapted to the wishes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century government for spreading nationalist sentiments. In the discussions between pre-modern and modern forms of nation building, the traditionalists – in my opinion – overestimate in the case of Guelders the role of the ‘media’ for community building. They try to connect the various medieval and early modern self-images, myths and linguistic traditions with the wishes of a national unity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Jensen 2016). Is this possible considering that Guelders has never known a lasting national sentiment because of the age-old division into mini-states and independent cities? Superficially a national cultural identity seems to exist since the Middle Ages, but these ideas are mostly used to support the local and regional identity. The periods have a lot in common, but a national identity rooted in cultural traditions that spans the pre-modern and modern ages seems, to me, comparing apples to oranges.

### Epilogue

Even today there is hardly an emotional bond with Guelders as a whole. Nothing has changed despite the efforts of successive central governments: dukes, Estates and Kingdom of the Netherlands. The feelings of regional and local identity are so ingrained that all attempts at nation building have failed (Egberts 2015, 196-245). Every city or region always emphasizes its own uniqueness. This is particularly the case in Nijmegen, where a ‘renaissance of the past’ has been taking place since the city celebrated the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in 2004. Cooperation with the rest of the province was and is difficult. Today, a fierce debate is going on about the rebuilding of the great tower of the *Valkhof* castle (see Illustration 16). Although this has everything to do with city branding, the fact that the tower also will serve as a reminder of Nijmegen’s claim to being ‘the most important town of Guelders’ and at the same time ‘the oldest independent city of the Netherlands’ is seen as a nice bonus at city hall. Nijmegen was and still is a hornet in the unification of Guelders (Egberts 2015, 196-245; Peterse 2014; Frijhoff 2012, 2014).



*Illustration 18. Nostalgia. The mighty tower of the Valkhof Castle made of scaffolding tubes and canvas was back in the city scape for a short time in 2005. On the right of the Donjon the Valkhof chapel is visible. Source: [donjon.nu](http://donjon.nu).*

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### About the author

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### **Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop : l'influence de Nimègue sur le développement politique de Gueldre depuis le moyen âge**

Depuis la fin du moyen âge, divers souverains ont tenté de centraliser la région de Gueldre, mais en comparaison d'autres parties des Pays-Bas, ils n'ont jamais très bien réussi. Même à notre époque, les habitants de Gueldre ne semblent guère sentir de rapport même avec leur propre province : l'identité de région ou de ville est plus forte. La cause de ce phénomène est à trouver en grande partie dans le grand nombre de frontières internes et externes qui traversent Gueldre depuis l'époque

romaine. Il y toujours eu « l'autre, » avec des caractéristiques différentes. L'identité locale et régionale empêchait constamment l'émergence d'un « État » national. Nimègue a joué un rôle crucial dans cette lutte contre la centralisation. Le présent article décrit comment la ville la plus puissante de la région défendait son indépendance sur la base d'un passé en grande partie fictif. Jules César lui-même aurait fondé la ville, et par la suite, un empereur romain puis un empereur germanique auraient déclaré Nimègue une ville « libre et indépendante. » Mythes, récits historiques, fêtes publiques et toute sorte d'expressions artistiques, et surtout le puissant château *Valkhof* servaient à souligner l'individualité unique de Nimègue. Pendant de longs siècles, la ville a chéri son indépendance par-dessus tout. Même aujourd'hui, Nimègue aime mieux se concentrer sur sa propre identité plutôt que de collaborer à l'unité de la province. À cet égard, rien n'a changé.

### **Een vos verliest wel zijn haren, maar niet zijn streken. De invloed van Nijmegen op de politieke ontwikkeling van Gelderland sinds de Middeleeuwen.**

Sinds de late Middeleeuwen hebben de machthebbers geprobeerd om het land Gelre te centraliseren. Vergeleken met de andere gewesten van de Nederlanden is dit nooit echt gelukt. Zelfs in onze tijd lijken de inwoners van Gelderland nauwelijks een band met de eigen provincie te hebben. De identiteit van streken, steden en dorpen is krachtiger dan die van het land als geheel. De oorzaak hiervan ligt grotendeels aan de vele binnen- en buitengrenzen die Gelderland al vanaf de Romeinse tijd doorkruist hebben. Altijd was er de 'ander', wiens kenmerken niet gedeeld werden. Lokale en regionale identiteit hebben steeds weer het ontstaan van een nationale 'staat' verhinderd. In deze strijd tegen de centralisatie heeft Nijmegen een overheersende rol gespeeld. In deze bijdrage wordt beschreven hoe de machtigste stad van het gewest op basis van een grotendeels gefingeerd verleden haar onafhankelijkheid bevochten heeft. Zo zou Caesar zelf de stad gesticht hebben en zou een Romeinse en later een Duitse keizer Nijmegen tot een 'vrije en onafhankelijke' stad uitgeroepen hebben. Via mythen, historische verhalen, openbare festiviteiten en allerlei kunstuitingen, maar vooral door verwijzingen naar de machtige Valkhofburcht, werd de eigenheid benadrukt. Eeuwenlang werd de zelfstandigheid gekoesterd. Zelfs tegenwoordig focust Nijmegen zich liever op haar eigen identiteit dan mee te werken aan de eenheid van de provincie. Er is in al die eeuwen dus niets veranderd.

