

Training City Magistrates to Become Trustworthy Men

A Comparative Look at Italian and Dutch Mirrors-for-Magistrates through a Political Trust Perspective

Abstract

Political trust is high on the public agenda nowadays. The interdisciplinary study of this topic is also booming. Historians have, however, been largely absent from this debate. This contribution seeks to participate in this discussion and to add to the historical exploration of political trust. To this end, it will focus on a specific group of trustworthy men, i. e. medieval city magistrates, and a particular set of sources, namely eight Dutch and Italian didactic texts on city government targeted at these men (1220s–1350s). More precisely, this article will highlight the key building blocks of the trust-building message embedded in these mirrors-for-magistrates and will also discuss the spatio-temporal variation of this message across the corpus.

Political trust is high on the public agenda nowadays. Media reports and opinion polls regularly sound the alarm, sketching a gloomy picture of broken trust and unmet expectations.¹ Since the start of the new millennium, the world has not only witnessed a series of political, financial, climate and health crises, shaking the political system to its core, but it has also seen a number of bitter political controversies and high-profile scandals that have severely strained the relationship between the public and those in power.²

1 Cf., for instance, the documentary “The Trust Crisis” (released on 18 November 2021). This documentary explores the state of political trust in the world through extensive interviews with academics, journalists, community activists and ordinary citizens. It is part of the TrustGov project (URL: <https://www.psa.ac.uk/resources/trust-crisis-documentary>; 10. 12. 2025).

2 António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, opened his address to the UN General Assembly in 2018 with the general observation that the world was suffering a bad case of “trust deficit disorder” (URL: https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/unsg_en.pdf; 10. 12. 2025).

It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that the fundamental question of how to build political trust has preoccupied the academic world. The recent publication of two academic handbooks only confirms that the interdisciplinary study of this topic has really taken off over the last decades, both broadening and deepening our understanding of the phenomenon.³ Historians have, however, been largely absent from this debate,⁴ dominated as it is by political scientists, sociologists, economists, and even neurobiologists, and their almost exclusive focus on the present.⁵ Despite the pioneering work of a figure such as Geoffrey Hosking,⁶ the penetrating reflections on questions of trust of Ute Frevert,⁷ or the stimulating work on trust – and especially trustworthiness – by medievalists, such as Thierry Dutour or Ian Forrest,⁸ historians have been hesitant to participate in this highly topical debate and to engage with their colleagues in the so-

3 Eric M. Uslaner (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, Oxford 2018; Sonja Zmerli/Tom W.G. van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook on Political Trust*, Cheltenham 2017.

4 I. e. the debate on political trust. In contrast, mercantile trust has been a fertile subject for historical studies. For a recent overview: Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz, *The Concept of Language of Trust and Trustworthiness. (Why) History Matters*, in: *Journal of Trust Research* (2019), pp. 1–17. For a discussion of medieval trust in writing, cf. Petra Schulte/Marco Mostert/Irene van Renswoude (Eds.), *Strategies of Writing. Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2008 (*Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 13).

5 Some trust scholars have expressed reservations against a historical approach. Cf., for instance: Adam B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust*, Princeton 1997. To the extent that trust scholars have adopted a historical approach, they tend to draw a sharp but crude dichotomy between trust in pre-modern and modern times. According to this view, the premodern period is characterized by forms of “kinship trust” or “experiential trust” in people, quasi-automatically following from close bonds, familiarity, and direct experience, while it is only with the advent of modernity and its large-scale, complex, and impersonal relations that the need for “rational trust” in systems and institutions, resulting from semi-calculated risk assessments, really arose. Historians have criticized this developmental approach to trust, and especially its underlying modernization narrative. Cf., in particular, Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men. How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church*, Princeton 2018, pp. 11–12 (arguing that it rests on a caricature of societies that do not resemble a supposed present-day norm). Cf. also Thierry Dutour, *Sous l’empire du bien. “Bonnes gens” et pacte social (XIII^e–XV^e siècle)*, Paris 2015 (*Bibliothèque d’histoire médiévale* 13), pp. 117–119 and 143–147; Ute Frevert, *Vertrauen. Eine historische Spurensuche*, in: ead. (Ed.), *Vertrauen. Historische Annäherungen*, Göttingen 2003, pp. 1–66, here pp. 61–66; Dorothea Weltecke, *Gab es ‘Vertrauen’ im Mittelalter? Methodologische Überlegungen*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 67–89, here pp. 67–73 (speaking of “pseudo-history”).

6 Geoffrey Hosking, *Trust. A History*, Oxford 2014; *id.*, *Trust and Distrust. A Suitable Theme for Historians?*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006), pp. 95–115.

7 Ute Frevert, *Vertrauensfragen. Eine Obsession der Moderne*, München 2013; ead., *Vertrauen* (see note 5), pp. 7–66.

8 Dutour, *Sous l’empire du bien* (see note 5); Forrest, *Trustworthy Men* (see note 5).

cial and natural sciences.⁹ This contribution intends to enter into this interdisciplinary dialogue and it aims to add to the historical exploration of political trust by focusing on a specific group of trustworthy men, i. e. the medieval city magistrates, and a particular set of sources, namely the mirrors-for-magistrates, a series of didactic texts on city government targeted at these magistrates. It should be kept in mind, however, that these mirrors-for-magistrates represent only a single voice in a wider, polyphonic debate on trust-building in the late medieval city. Traces of a trust-building exercise are also to be found in other texts, such as city oaths, urban panegyrics, chronicles, or even political poetry. Moreover, one should not overlook the importance of unwritten political understandings, that is to say, those core beliefs and expectations that were simply too obvious or too routine to be thought worthy of being written down. In addition, these oral and textual discourses were part of what James Hankins has aptly called a “virtuous environment”, an environment in which other, non-textual elements, such as architecture and artworks, were designed to impress the same message on its target audience.¹⁰ Future research into – and deeper engagement with – these elements will certainly enrich the picture set out in this contribution.¹¹

This contribution will consist of four parts. After a brief overview of the corpus under examination and a general introduction to trust scholarship, the common features of the message embedded in the mirrors-for-magistrates will be investigated first. More precisely, it will be argued that these building blocks constituted a shared trust-building message, designed to build political trust at the regime, institutional, and individual

9 Historians have doubted the possibility of a “real” history of trust or expressed reservations because of the lack of “hard” evidence. For such a hesitation, cf., for instance, Frevert, *Vertrauen* (see note 5) (focusing on the changing uses of the word “trust” and its semantic field). For such reservations, cf., for instance, Susan Reynolds, *Trust in Medieval Society and Politics*, in: ead., *The Middle Ages without Feudalism. Essays in Criticism and Comparison in the Medieval West*, Farnham 2021 (Variorum Collected Studies Series 1019), pp. XIII.1–15, at p. XIII.1 (who acknowledges, however, that thinking about medieval trust and distrust in the light of what scholars from other disciplines have said about them in modern society may be a good and thought-provoking exercise).

10 James Hankins, *Virtue Politics. Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge (MA) 2019, pp. xviii, 51–54, 165, 253–254.

11 For an exploration of the role played by city bells (and their inscriptions) within such an environment, cf. David Napolitano, *Luid weerklinkt het klokgelui in de stad van vrede en recht. Op het spoor van een “deugdzame openbare ruimte” in de noordelijke Nederlanden*, in: Hildo van Engen/Han Nijdam/Kaj van Vliet (Eds.), *Macht, bezit en ruimte. Opstellen over de noordelijke Nederlanden in de middeleeuwen aangeboden aan Hans Mol bij zijn afscheid als bijzonder hoogleraar Geschiedenis van de Friese landen in de Middeleeuwen aan de Universiteit Leiden*, Hilversum 2021, pp. 151–159.

level.¹² The contribution will end with a discussion of the spatio-temporal variation of this message that is also discernible in this corpus. In other words, the aim of this contribution is not simply to establish the existence of a shared concept of urban rulership in the mirrors-for-magistrates, but also to bring out what is distinctive of this city magistracy in a particular text and context.

1 Corpus of Mirrors-for-Magistrates

For the purposes of this contribution, the texts under examination are grouped together under the umbrella term “mirrors-for-magistrates”. This general term is preferred over specific concepts, such as *podestà* literature, because it is not bound to a particular urban institution nor linked to a specific language or area. In contrast to the alternative designation “treatises on city government” (which can claim medieval pedigree), it stresses the target audience of these texts (the city magistrates) rather than their subject matter (city government). Furthermore, it builds upon the generally accepted use of the term “mirrors-for-princes” within a monarchical context.

More precisely, the corpus consists of two groups of four didactic texts, eight in total, dealing with city government.¹³ These texts were targeted at medieval city magistrates and they originated in the two most urbanized areas of medieval Europe, namely the Southern Low Countries and Northern and Central Italy.¹⁴ They cover, albeit in successive waves, a period of one hundred and fifty years (1220s–1350s).

12 This contribution focuses on a comparison of the contents of the mirrors-for-magistrates (i. e. its trust-building message). Future comparisons may look into other aspects, such as the production contexts, reception, and/or formal characteristics of these mirrors-for-magistrates.

13 Although the demarcation line between politics and administration is notoriously difficult to draw, the mirrors-for-magistrates targeted an audience of leading political figures faced with the task of making fundamental choices with respect to the organisation and functioning of their urban communities (i. e. city politics) – and not “mere” public servants charged with an administrative task. In this contribution these figures occupying the highest office within a city (regardless of its formal title, e. g. *podestà* or alderman) are denoted by the generic term “city magistrates”.

14 On the absence of direct textual transmission links between these two regional sets of mirrors-for-magistrates (and the reasons behind this absence): David Napolitano, *An Appeal to Study Dutch Mirrors-for-Magistrates across Linguistic, Geographical, and Institutional Boundaries*, in: Cornelis van der Haven / Jan van Bloemendal / Youri Desplenter / James A. Parente, Jr. (Eds.), *Literatures without Frontiers? Transnational Perspectives on Premodern Literature in the Low Countries, 1200–1800*, Leiden-Boston 2023 (Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 346), pp. 96–111. For a discussion of the actual presence of direct transmission links between Italian and Dutch treatises on virtues,

1.1 Italian Mirrors-for-Magistrates

The first group of texts, also known as the *podestà* literature, emerged in Northern and Central Italy.¹⁵ As its Italian label suggests, its composition is to be situated during the *podestà* regime, one of the three phases traditionally identified within Italy's communal age (c. 1080 – c. 1300), academic shorthand for the period in Italian history when collective self-government characterized this highly urbanized area.¹⁶ In fact, these three phases have been named after the government model dominant within each stage and the *podestà* regime (c. 1180–c. 1250) refers to the second stage, following the consulate (c. 1080 – c. 1180) and preceding the regime of the *popolo* (c. 1250 – c. 1300).

The best-known exponent of this type of literature is the final section of “Li Livres dou Tresor” (The Book of the Treasure), a popular encyclopedia written in Old French by a Florentine notary, Brunetto Latini (c. 1220–1293/1294), during his exile in France (1260–1266/1267).¹⁷ The section carries the self-explanatory title “Des governemenz des

cf. Sabrina Corbellini, *Italiaanse deugden en ondeugden. Dirc Potters Blome der doechden en de Italiaanse Fiore di Virtù*, Amsterdam 2000 (Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen 22). On the strong tradition to compare urban phenomena across both urban areas, cf. Marc Boone, *À la recherche d'une modernité civique. La société urbaine des anciens Pays-Bas au bas Moyen Âge*, Brussels 2010 (Histoire), pp. 99–120.

15 Within the rich body of studies conducted by Enrico Artifoni on this type of literature, cf. especially Enrico Artifoni, *Sull'eloquenza politica nel Duecento italiano*, in: QM 35 (1993), pp. 57–78; id., *I podestà professionali e la fondazione retorica della politica comunale*, in: QS 63 (1986), pp. 687–719. Cf. also, recently, id., *Ancora sulla parva litteratura tra latino e volgari*, in: Sara Bischetti/Michele Lodone/Cristiano Lorenzi/Antonio Montefusco (Eds.), *Toscana bilingue (1260 ca.–1430 ca.)*. Per una storia sociale del tradurre medievale, Berlin-Boston 2021 (Toscana bilingue. Storia sociale della traduzione medievale 3), pp. 107–124.

16 For this definition, cf. Edward Coleman, *Cities and Communes*, in: David Abulafia (Ed.), *Italy in the Central Middle Ages, 1000–1300*, Oxford 2004 (The Short Oxford History of Italy), pp. 27–57, at p. 27.

17 For its most recent edition (= *Tresor*), cf. Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. by Pietro G. Beltrami/Paolo Squillacioti/Plinio Torri/Sergio Vatteroni, Torino 2007 (I millenni). The classic work on Brunetto Latini remains: Thor Sundby, *Della vita e delle opere di Brunetto Latini*, transl. by Rodolfo Renier, Firenze 1884. The standard biography is still: Bianca Ceva, *Brunetto Latini. L'uomo e l'opera*, Milan 1965. For a recent discussion of this figure and his works, cf. Gianluca Briguglia/Antonio Montefusco (Eds.), *Brunetto Latini. Intellettuale medievale*, Roma 2025 (ISIME, Nuovi Studi Storici 133); Giuliano Milani, *Brunetto volgarizzatore*, in: Bischetti et al. (Eds.), *Toscana bilingue* (see note 15), pp. 125–149. For a recent bibliography, cf. Julia Bolton Holloway, *Brunetto Latino*, in: Oxford Bibliographies Online (last modified: 27. 2. 2019, URL: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0261.xml>; 10. 12. 2025).

citez” (On the Government of Cities). Also known as Brunetto Latini’s “Politica”, it is the apotheosis of a deeply political encyclopedia, a carefully designed tripartite work intended to provide its recipient with a strong knowledge base (first book dealing with the world, its inhabitants, and its history), an effective moral compass (second book on ethics), and the necessary rhetorical skills to govern an Italian city in accordance with Italian customs (third book covering rhetoric and city politics).¹⁸ Although deemed original for a long time, Gaetano Salvemini rightly identified it as an abbreviated translation of the “Liber de regimine civitatum” (Book on the Government of Cities) (1234?), the second representative of this group of texts.¹⁹ This Latin text is commonly attributed to Giovanni da Viterbo, an experienced judge (*assessor*) in the retinue of a Florentine *podestà*.²⁰ It roughly follows a chronological structure that covers, in 148 short chapters, the one-year tenure of a *podestà* from the moment of his selection until the day of his departure. In addition, Brunetto Latini borrowed, albeit to a significantly lesser degree, from the “Oculus pastoralis” (Pastoral Eye), a thematically-organized speech collection interwoven with an introduction to the *podestà* office.²¹ This anonymous work is the

18 The term “Politica” has been coined by John Najemy. Cf. John Najemy, Brunetto Latini’s *Politica*, in: *Dante Studies* 112 (1994), pp. 33–51. For its characterisation as a political encyclopedia, cf. Christel Meier, Organisation of Knowledge and Encyclopaedic “Ordo”. Functions and Purposes of a Universal Literary Genre, in: Peter Binkley (Ed.), *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, Leiden 1997 (Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 79), pp. 103–126.

19 While Francesco Novati had already referred to the existence of numerous close links between both works in 1888, Gaetano Salvemini developed this intuition into a comparative table fifteen years later. Cf., in particular: Gaetano Salvemini, Il ‘Liber de regimine civitatum’ di Giovanni da Viterbo, in: *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 41 (1903), pp. 284–303, here pp. 293–294. This view is now generally accepted. Only Albano Sorbelli has challenged this thesis of direct borrowing. Cf. Albano Sorbelli, I teorici del reggimento comunale, in: *BISI* 59 (1944), pp. 31–136, here pp. 78–79, 99–100, 106–114. His argumentation has, however, not been followed. On the political character of Latini’s re-use of this text for his “Tresor”, cf. David Napolitano, Brunetto Latini’s *Politica*. A Political Rewriting of Giovanni da Viterbo’s “De Regimine Civitatum”, in: *RM Rivista* 19 (2018), pp. 189–209 (URL: <https://serena.sharepress.it/index.php/rm/article/view/5403>; 10. 12. 2025).

20 For its edition (= *De Reg. Civ.*), cf. Giovanni da Viterbo, *Liber de regimine civitatum*, ed. by Gaetano Salvemini, Bologna 1901 (*Bibliotheca Iuridica Medii Aevi* 3), pp. 215–280. A wide variety of dates has been proposed as its composition date, ranging from 1228 until 1264 – with isolated, off-target attributions as late as 1270 or 1278. Recently, Zorzi’s proposal, putting 1234 forward as its date of composition, has attracted substantial support. Cf. Andrea Zorzi, Giovanni da Viterbo, in: *DBI* 66 (2001), pp. 268–269 ([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-da-viterbo_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/?search=GIOVANNI%20da%20Viterbo%2F](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-da-viterbo_(Dizionario-Biografico)/?search=GIOVANNI%20da%20Viterbo%2F); 10. 12. 2025). On this figure, cf. also Mario Sensi, Giovanni da Viterbo, in: *Enciclopedia dantesca* 3 (1970), p. 194.

21 For its most recent edition (= *Oc. past.*), cf. *Oculus pastoralis*, ed. by Terence Tunberg, unpublished doctoral dissertation University of Toronto 1986, pp. 135–244. On this text and its transmission,

earliest known representative (1220s) of the *podestà* literature and it is said to have been composed in a coastal city (possibly Genoa). The fourth and final representative of the Italian corpus is the “De regimine et sapientia potestatis” (On the Conduct and Wisdom of the City Magistrate).²² This didactic poem, written by Orfino da Lodi, another judge (*iudex generalis*), this time acting in service of the highest imperial circles, is noteworthy for its revealing look into the living arrangements, living habits, and leisure activities of the *podestà* and its detailed discussion of the retinue members (especially the judge).²³ The text survives in a single manuscript, possibly an autograph. It is essentially a political testament addressed to Orfino’s son, Marco, starting out in a similar career.

1.2 Dutch Mirrors-for-Magistrates

Within the second group of mirrors-for-magistrates the examination will focus on four texts, all written in verse and in the vernacular (Middle Dutch). These texts have been linked to the city of Antwerp and Jan van Boendale (?–1351?) is often named as their likely author, albeit with different degrees of certainty.²⁴

cf. also David Napolitano, Taking Another Look at the Pastoral Eye. New Insights Based upon a Second Copy of the *Oculus pastoralis*, in: *Scriptorium* 72 (2018), pp. 76–92. For an analysis of the trust-building exercise embedded in this text, cf. id., Keeping the Flock Together. Consensus-Building in the *Oculus pastoralis*, in: Maria Pia Alberzoni / Roberto Lambertini (Eds.), *Costruire il consenso. Modelli, pratiche, linguaggi (secoli XI–XV)*, Milano 2019 (Ordines 9), pp. 159–180.

22 For its most recent edition, cf. Orfino da Lodi, *De regimine et sapientia potestatis / Comportamento e saggezza del podestà*, ed. and transl. by Sara Pozzi, in: *Quaderni di studi lodigiani* 7 (1998), pp. 1–241.

23 On this figure, cf. Edoardo D’Angelo, Orfino da Lodi, in: Federico II. *Enciclopedia fridericana* 2 (2005), pp. 423–425. Cf. also John Dillon, Orfino da Lodi, in: Christopher Kleinhenz (Ed.), *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, vol. 2: L to Z, New York 2004, p. 800.

24 Depending on their willingness to ascribe texts to Jan van Boendale on the basis of substantive or stylistic similarities or apocryphal attributions, Mike Kestemont has divided scholars into minimalists and maximalists. Cf., in particular, Mike Kestemont, Een stylometrisch onderzoek naar Jan van Boendales auteurschap voor de Brabantse Yeesten, in: *Revue belge de Philologie et de Histoire* 89 (2011), pp. 1019–1048. For an overview of the works attributed (or not) to Boendale, cf. Frits van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1300–1400*, Amsterdam 2013 (Geschiedenis van den Nederlandse literatuur 1,2), p. 143. In this overview of medieval Dutch literature Jan van Boendale (and his literary heritage) takes up a prominent place (occupying pp. 142–175).

Although the historical data on this figure are rather limited and mainly restricted to his professional activities,²⁵ it is generally accepted that Jan van Boendale was born in Boondaal, a hamlet close to Tervueren – hence the reference to this location in his family name. Tervueren was a village located between Leuven and Brussels, the two most important cities of the Duchy of Brabant. Early in the 14th century, Jan van Boendale must have transferred to Antwerp, still a relatively small city at the time,²⁶ and, for a period of almost forty years (c. 1312 – c. 1351), he acted as the town clerk, occupying a key position within the city’s political machinery. This life in service of the city’s council of aldermen earned him the nickname “Jan de Clerc”. In addition to his scribal tasks as *scependclerc*, Jan van Boendale participated in diplomatic missions to other cities in Brabant, to Flanders, and even to England. The administrative records also show him collecting money from cloth sellers or acting as the city’s legal spokesperson in disputes before the ducal court. In fact, his working life coincided with the reign of John III, Duke of Brabant (r. 1312–1355), and, besides his daily interactions with the leading families of Antwerp who monopolized the office of alderman, Jan van Boendale was effectively in close contact with the ducal court – and especially with one of its most prominent members, Viscount Rogier van Leefdael (c. 1270–1334), to which he dedicated a number of his literary works. Jan van Boendale also dedicated texts, or at least versions thereof, directly to the duke.

His literary production is, in fact, linked to both worlds – the urban and the courtly.²⁷ Although Jan van Boendale is best known as a chronicle writer – for having composed an influential history of the Duchy of Brabant, the “Brabantsche Yeesten”

25 For the only, but dated monograph on this figure, cf. Hippoliet Haerynck, *Jan Boendale, ook geheeten Jan de clerck; zijn leven, zijne werken en zijn tijd*, Ghent 1888. For a recent MOOC-segment on this figure (produced in 2017 as part of the MOOC Middle Dutch series) (URL: <https://moocmnl.kantl.be/jan-van-boendale/>; 10.12.2025). For a brief introduction, cf. also Eva Gordeau, *Boendale en de koning van Engeland*, in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- & Letterkunde* 136,4 (2021), pp. 210–223; Robert Stein, *The Antwerp Clerk Jan van Boendale and the Creation of a Brabantine Ideology*, in: Mario Damen/Jelle Haemers/Alastair J. Mann (Eds.), *Political Representation. Communities, Ideas and Institutions in Europe (c. 1200 – c. 1690)*, Leiden 2018 (*Later Medieval Europe* 15), pp. 203–224, here pp. 207–211.

26 For an introduction to Antwerp during this period, cf. Raymond van Uytven, *Het Antwerpen van Jan van Boendale*, in: Wim van Anrooij (Ed.), *Al t’Antwerpen in die stad. Jan van Boendale en de literaire cultuur van zijn tijd*, Amsterdam 2002 (*Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen* 24), pp. 17–29.

27 On this issue, cf. especially Dirk Kinable, *Facetten van Boendale. Literair-historische verkenningen van Jans Teesteye en de Lekenspiegel*, Leiden 1997 (*Leidse opstellen* 31). For an introduction to the literary life at the Brabantine court, cf. also Remco Sleiderink, *De stem van de meester. De*

(the Deeds of the Dukes of Brabant) (1316–1351) –, this contribution will focus exclusively on another, lesser-studied component of his oeuvre, namely his didactic-moralistic texts. The first text, “Hoemen ene stat regeren sal” (How One Should Govern a City) (prior to 1350), is an anonymous, short poem that has been attributed to Jan van Boendale by Wim van Anrooij, a leading expert on this figure and his literary oeuvre.²⁸ While the opening verses identify the city magistrate as the target audience of the poem, the body of the text provides a number of fundamental lessons on how to govern a city in the form of so-called *poenten*,²⁹ ending with a stark warning that their non-observance will inevitably plunge the city in utter chaos. The earliest witness of this poem has been incorporated into the earliest surviving manuscript (produced in Brabant, c. 1350)³⁰ of the “Leken Spieghel” (The Layman’s Mirror) (c. 1325–1330).³¹ This widely copied text is a chronologically-structured encyclopedia, divided into four books, dealing with the history of the world from its biblical creation to the final day of reckoning. The third book is especially of interest as it contains teachings on worldly government in general, and city government in particular. Despite its anonymous character, the text is generally ascribed to Jan van Boendale. The third text, “Jans Teesteye” (literally, Jan’s Testimony, or, more loosely, The World according to Jan) (c. 1330–1334), is the only text within this

hertogen van Brabant en hun rol in het literaire leven (1106–1430), Amsterdam 2003 (Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen 25), esp. pp. 99–122.

28 For an introduction to this text, cf. Hieke Bierschwale / Jacqueline van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll. Deutsche und niederländische Stadtrechtslehren des Mittelalters*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005 (Medieval to Early Modern Culture 8), pp. 11–12. For its edition, cf. Jan van Boendale?, *Hoemen ene stat regeren sal*, ed. by Wim van Anrooij, in: *Spiegel der Letteren* 34 (1992), pp. 152–157 (= *Hoemen*). For the attribution to Jan van Boendale, cf. also id., *Literatuur in Antwerpen in de periode c. 1315–1350, een inleiding*, in: id. (Ed.), *Al t’Antwerpen* (see note 26), p. 12. Cf., however, Joris Reynaert, *Middel nederlandse wandteksten en grafschriften op rijm*, in: *Spiegel der Letteren* 59 (2017), pp. 171–202, here pp. 174–175 (who expresses his doubts about the vernacular and Brabantine origins of this poem).

29 On this literary structure, cf. Wim van Anrooij, *Poenten in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde. Een geledingssysteem in het zakelijke en discursieve vertoog*, in: id. (Ed.), *Al t’Antwerpen* (see note 26), pp. 65–80.

30 Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Ms. 15.658.

31 For an introduction to this text, cf. Bierschwale / van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll* (see note 28), pp. 12–14. For its most recent edition (= LkSp), cf. Jan van Boendale, *Der leken spiegel*, ed. by Jacobus J. Mak / Henk A. C. Lambermont, in: CD-ROM *Middelnederlands*, The Hague 1998. For its translation into modern Dutch, cf. Jan van Boendale, *Lekenspiegel. Een leerdicht uit Antwerpen*, transl. by Ludo Jongen / Miriam Piters, Amsterdam 2003 (Griffioen).

corpus that explicitly mentions Jan van Boendale as its author.³² It takes the form of a moralising dialogue in which the literary alter ego of the author expresses his views on the contemporary state of the world – including its government – to another fictional figure, the pessimistic and somewhat naïve Wouter, during a walk in the countryside. The fourth and final text, “Boec van der Wraken” (The Book of Godly Punishment) (two versions, produced in 1346 and 1351 respectively), is another highly personal text by Jan van Boendale. Influenced by the experience of the Black Death (1347–1351), it adopts, however, a strikingly different tone as an eschatological poem dealing with God’s punishment for the world – and its political leaders.³³

2 Trust and Trustworthiness

Before the trust-building message embedded in these mirrors-for-magistrates is reconstructed and its key building blocks are highlighted at the regime, institutional, and individual level, some fundamental insights derived from the existing body of trust scholarship need to be introduced.

In fact, it is generally acknowledged that trust forms the basis for human cooperation, the glue that keeps society together, and the oil that lubricates the political machine.³⁴ As the German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann, famously put it: “The absence of trust would keep us from getting up in the morning.”³⁵ Although there is still no

32 For an introduction, cf. Bierschwale/van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll* (see note 28), pp. 14–15. For its edition (= JT), cf. Jan van Boendale, *Jans Teesteye*, ed. by Ferdinand-Augustijn Snellaert, in: *Nederlandse gedichten uit de veertiende eeuw van Jan van Boendale, Hein van Aken en anderen, naar het Oxfordsch handschrift*, Brussels 1869, pp. 137–275.

33 For an introduction, cf. Bierschwale/van Leeuwen, *Wie man eine Stadt regieren soll* (see note 28), pp. 17–18. For its edition (= BvdW), cf. Jan van Boendale, *Boec van der Wraken*, ed. by Ferdinand-Augustijn Snellaert, in: *Nederlandse gedichten* (see note 32), pp. 287–488. For its translation into modern Dutch, cf. Jan van Boendale, *Boek van de wraak Gods*, transl. by Wim van Anrooij, Amsterdam 1994.

34 Tom W.G. van der Meer / Sonja Zmerli, *The Deeply Rooted Concern with Political Trust*, in: id. (Eds.), *Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 1–15, at p. 1. Cf. also Carolyn McLeod, *Trust*, in: Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition) (URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/trust/>; 10. 12. 2025). On the trust-cooperation cycle and its dynamic character: M. Audrey Korsgaard, *Reciprocal Trust. A Self-Reinforcing Dynamic Process*, in: Rosalind H. Searle / Ann-Marie I. Nienaber / Sim B. Sitkin (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Trust*, London 2018 (Routledge Companions in Business, Management and Accounting), pp. 14–28.

35 Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and Power. Two Works*, Chichester 1979, p. 4.

general consensus on the factors contributing to trust nor on their causal ordering, positive expectations that one's interests will be attended to are widely recognised as one of the cornerstones of trust.³⁶ According to the often-cited definition of the American political scientist, Russell Hardin ("A trusts B to do X"),³⁷ these positive expectations of the trustor vis-à-vis the trustee provide the cognitive underpinnings of trust,³⁸ resulting in the trustor's willingness to accept vulnerability to deception.³⁹ At its most basic level, it involves a risk assessment. More precisely, trust is understood as a function of the trustworthiness of the trustee.⁴⁰ It is earned (or lost) in practice.⁴¹ Finally, it should be

36 Individual disposition or propensity to trust (of the trustor) is another factor highlighted by trust scholars. On the biological and psychological aspects of trust, cf. Matthew Cawvey / Matthew Hayes / Damarys Canache / Jeffery J. Mondak, *Biological and Psychological Influences on Interpersonal and Political Trust*, in: Uslaner (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 119–148. General(ized) or thin trust (not directed at a specific referent for a specific purpose – "A trusts") is traditionally distinguished from particular(ized) or thick trust (directed at a specific person, institution, or system for a specific purpose). On this distinction, cf. Eric M. Uslaner, *The Study of Trust*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 3–14; Sonja Zmerli / Ken Newton, *Objects of Political and Social Trust. Scales and Hierarchies*, in: Zmerli / van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 104–124, at p. 105.

37 Russell Hardin, *Do We Want Trust in Government*, in: Mark E. Warren (Ed.), *Democracy and Trust*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 22–41; *id.*, *The Street-Level Epistemology of Trust*, in: *Analyse & Kritik* 14 (1992), pp. 152–176.

38 For a long time the prevailing approach to trust has emphasized the cognitive factors that influence trust levels. Recent research has drawn attention to the affective factors underlying trust judgments and to the complex relationship between affect and cognition. Daan van Knippenberg, *Reconsidering Affect-Based Trust. A New Research Agenda*, in: Searle et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion* (see note 34), pp. 3–13; Elizabeth Theiss-Morse / Dona-Gene Barton, *Emotion, Cognition, and Political Trust*, in: Zmerli / van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 160–175. Cf. also Forrest, *Trustworthy Men* (see note 5), pp. 63–88. For the study of trust within the context of a history of emotions, cf. Ute Frevert, *The Moral Economy of Trust. Modern Trajectories*. The 2013 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute (London), London 2014. Against this background it is noteworthy that the mirrors-for-magistrates typically express trustful political relationships in terms of love and friendship.

39 For the standard formulation of these two components (positive expectations and willingness to accept vulnerability), cf. Denise M. Rousseau / Sim B. Sitkin / Ronald S. Burt / Colin Camerer, *Not So Different After All. A Cross-Discipline View of Trust*, in: *Academy of Management Review* 23 (1998), pp. 393–404.

40 Michael D. Baer / Jason A. Colquitt, *Why Do People Trust? Moving Toward A More Comprehensive Consideration of the Antecedents of Trust*, in: Searle et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion* (see note 34), pp. 163–182, at 170 (with reference to Möllering).

41 In contrast, faith is defined as trust in the absence of, or without the need for, evidence. Benjamin Ho, *Why Trust Matters. An Economist's Guide to the Ties That Bind Us*, New York 2021, p. 23.

noted that trust and trustworthiness are not absolute values (i. e. present or absent), but a matter of degree (i. e. more or less present).

Moving from this dyadic relationship between a single trustor and a single trustee to the more complex realm of large-scale political trust,⁴² trust scholars have argued that the development of broadly shared positive expectations about the competence, character, and likely future behaviour of an officeholder makes citizens more trusting (i. e. willing to accept vulnerability) and officeholders more trustworthy (i. e. able, motivated, and committed to perform in accordance with these expectations).⁴³ This horizon of expectations functions as a trust heuristic that facilitates the trustor's assessment of both the probability and magnitude of the risk of harm arising from his act of trusting.⁴⁴ It also operates as a trust warrant by creating predictability – and thus reducing uncertainty – for the trustor. At the same time, these expectations establish a benchmark against which the performance of the trustee can be measured and evaluated.⁴⁵ They create a “net of expectations” around the officeholder. Combined with the existence of performance evaluation mechanisms,⁴⁶ this performance monitoring is said to enhance the normative commitment and responsiveness of the officeholder.⁴⁷

42 On the implications of this shift, cf. Theiss-Morse/Barton, *Emotion* (see note 38), pp. 161–162 (pointing out that the positive expectation that the trustee will act in the trustor's interests is transformed into the expectation that political authorities will observe the rules of the game and will serve the general interest).

43 On the three dimensions of trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) or the so-called ABI-model, cf. Baer/Colquitt, *Why Do People Trust?* (see note 40) (with reference to the standard study of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman).

44 On the distinction between a heuristic assessment (which always involves an element of uncertainty) and systematic processing (i. e. a rational risk calculation based upon perfect information), cf. *ibid.*, pp. 174–175.

45 On the role of expectations, benchmarks, and performance evaluations in linking the micro- and macro-level, cf. Tom van der Meer, *Democratic Input, Macroeconomic Output and Political Trust*, in: *id./Zmerli (Eds.), Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 270–284, at p. 272. For the perspective of a historian on the importance of expectations (as part of a political culture), cf. Björn Weiler, *The Latin West. Expectations and Legitimation*, in: *id./Catharine Holmes/Jonathan Shepard/Jo van Steenberg (Eds.), Political Culture in the Latin West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, c. 700 – c. 1500. A Framework for Comparing Three Spheres*, Cambridge 2021, pp. 251–289.

46 On the role of performance evaluations in trust judgments, cf. also Theiss-Morse/Barton, *Emotion* (see note 38), pp. 161–162.

47 Mark E. Warren, *What Kinds of Trust Does A Democracy Need? Trust From the Perspective of Democratic Theory*, in: *Zmerli/van der Meer (Eds.), Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 33–52, here pp. 45–46. In the longstanding debate about the precise relationship between trust and control, the dominant

3 Shared Trust-Building Message

These basic insights provide us with a general framework to look at political trust as a dynamic, multi-level process.⁴⁸ More precisely, the regime level will be addressed first.⁴⁹

3.1 Regime Level

Every political regime needs a legitimating narrative. The exercise of power is rarely based exclusively upon coercion or naked force. A good deal of willing obedience is normally involved.⁵⁰

Constituting the proverbial exception to the principle of monarchical rule, the city magistrates certainly needed a convincing story to persuade the citizenry of their legitimate rule,⁵¹ and the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates turned to the Bible, the most

view has been for a long time that control is a substitute for trust. According to recent insights, trust and control can, however, be complementary. In fact, 100 % control is impossible in practice and trust is needed precisely because all guarantees are incomplete. For this debate, cf. Nicole Gillespie / Sabina Siebert, *Organizational Trust Repair*, in: Searle et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion* (see note 34), pp. 284–301; Chris P. Long / Antoinette Weibel, *Two Sides of an Important Coin. Outlining the General Parameters of Control-Trust Research*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 506–521.

48 On the importance of research that involves multiple levels of analysis and pays attention to the broader context of a trust relationship, cf. C. Ashley Fulmer, *Multilevel Trust. Antecedents and Outcomes of Trust at Different Levels*, in: Searle et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion* (see note 34), pp. 143–160. For an application to the different levels of political trust, cf. Pippa Norris, *The Conceptual Framework of Political Support*, in: Zmerli / van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 19–32.

49 Moving upwards, political trust gradually becomes more diffuse rather than specific. At the same time, the higher up, the more consequential it is for the stability, and eventually the survival, of the political system. Jacques Thomassen / Rudy Andeweg / Carolien van Ham, *Political Trust and the Decline of Legitimacy Debate. A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation into their Interrelationship*, in: Zmerli / van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook* (see note 3), pp. 509–525.

50 Hankins, *Virtue Politics* (see note 10), pp. 31–33; Len Scales, *The Latin West. Pluralism in the Shadow of the Past*, in: Holmes et al. (Eds.), *Political Culture* (see note 45), pp. 133–177, at p. 159. Likewise, trust has to be given voluntarily. It cannot be ordered nor commanded.

51 At first sight, the issue of political trust may seem more pregnant in a medieval city setting, given the degree of political agency open to a citizen within such a context of horizontal and symmetrical political relationships, while in a monarchical setting, characterized by vertical and asymmetrical political relationships, a subject is more likely to experience a form of forced or resigned obedience due to the lack of a real choice or alternative. This dichotomy should, however, not be pushed

authoritative text of the Middle Ages, for such a story.⁵² Although they focus on the temporal sphere (the *regimen civitatum* – and not the *regimen animarum*, the privileged domain of the church), they look to God as the ultimate source of worldly, urban power. Building upon the Pauline doctrine that there is no power but of God (Rom. 13,1) and following the teachings of Saint Augustine on the origins of political authority (presenting it as a post-lapsarian *remedium peccati*), they depict the city magistracy as a divinely ordained office. This legitimation implies, however, a functional limitation.⁵³ God charges the city magistrate with a peace-bringing mandate.⁵⁴ He bestows the city magistrate with the power to create an earthly city of peace and justice. To this end, the city magistrate has to act “ad vindictam malefactorum et ad laudem bonorum” (I Pet. 2,14).

This mandate is expressed through well-known metaphors and archetypes, such as the image of the *rex iustus* (Prov. 20,8) or the model of the good shepherd (Ps. 23; John 10,1–21),⁵⁵ and the repeated use of a basic dichotomy between good and bad government, supported by biblical and historical analogies or a host of examples drawn from nature or daily life, not only underlines the importance attached to the quality of government (rather than its form) but it also reveals what people really considered essential in a particular political setting. In stark contrast to the prospect (or reality) of a grim world of violence, fear, and division ruled by the arbitrary will of a tyrant (*dominatio*), driven by his *libido dominandi*, the two hallmarks of good city government (*bonum regimen*)

too far. Recent research has stressed both the vertical element in medieval city republics and the power-sharing component in medieval monarchies.

52 For a discussion of the appropriation of this biblical storyline, originally written for a monarchical context, and its adaptation to a city context, cf. David Napolitano, *From Royal Court to City Hall. The Podestà Literature. A Republican Variant on the Mirrors for Princes?*, in: Geert Roskam/Stefan Schorn (Eds.), *Concepts of Ideal Rulership from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Turnhout 2018 (Lectio 7), pp. 383–416.

53 Worldly power is not just instituted by God, but it is bestowed to achieve a particular goal. As a functional power, the power of the city magistrate is, therefore, limited by its ends. The extent to which these ends are met also determines the success or failure of its exercise (see below section 3.3). In addition, this account of divine authorisation implies that worldly power is considered a divine gift and that one is never entitled to a position of authority. This aspect of urban rulership is often expressed in the mirrors-for-magistrates through another classic Pauline formula, namely by specifying that the city magistrates exercised their power *Dei gratia* (I Cor. 15,10).

54 For an introduction to this widespread discourse of peace and its importance as a source of political legitimacy, cf. Daniel Power, *The Latin West. Multiple Elites and Overlapping Jurisdictions*, in: Holmes et al. (Eds.), *Political Culture* (see note 45), pp. 367–409, at pp. 379–380.

55 For an analysis of the use of this pastoral image (and especially the metaphor of the shepherd's crook) in the “*Oculus pastoralis*”, cf. Napolitano, *Keeping the Flock Together* (see note 21), pp. 165–166.

are said to be *pax et iustitia*, destined to bring concord, prosperity, and glory to the city. The fundamental question for medieval man is, therefore, to which of these two cities he wanted to belong. He has to choose between right or might. This enticing vision of a better world – a city of peace and justice – is meant to make the city a safe and prosperous refuge for its citizens, a focus of political loyalty, and to win the city magistrate, capable of turning this troublesome hornet’s nest into a peaceful beehive, the trust, willing obedience – and even love – of his citizens.⁵⁶

3.2 Institutional Level

However, divinely sanctioned power and an inspiring vision are not sufficient to establish political trust. Moral legitimacy has to be added to the mix at the institutional level.⁵⁷ What ultimately makes the claim of the city magistrates to power legitimate is power well exercised, as illustrated by the well-known Isidorian reconstruction of the etymology of kingship: “*rex a recte regendo*”.⁵⁸

To this end, the mirrors provide a normative definition of the office of the city magistrate (his *officium*),⁵⁹ answering two basic questions: 1) who is entitled to govern a city, and 2) how is a city to be governed. In an actor-centred approach to good government,

56 The “*Oculus pastoralis*” lists, for instance, three pillars of good government – a loving collaboration built upon trust and care. The *podestà* is expected to bring justice to the citizens, in return for which the citizens are supposed to show him willing obedience. The fulfillment of these reciprocal expectations is crowned by a bond of mutual love. *Oc. past.*, I.1.

57 This contribution focuses on the object of the trust relationship (the office of the city magistrate). It does not look into what the mirrors-for-magistrates have to say on its subject (the citizenry). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that some texts also express an expectation vis-à-vis the citizenry (or at least part thereof), namely an expectation of active support. Civic engagement – and even continued vigilance (see below section 4.3) – is deemed necessary to make the political system work.

58 It should be noted that divinely granted authority, although made necessary by sin, is considered to be necessarily good, given its divine origins. However, its exercise (by humans) can be good or bad, in accordance with church teachings on free will.

59 On this concept and its history, cf. Tiziana Faitini, *Il lavoro come professione. Una storia della professionalità tra etica e politica*, Canterano 2016 (*Monete di Dio* 1,1); Frédérique Lachaud, *L'éthique du pouvoir au Moyen Âge. L'office dans la culture politique* (Angleterre, vers 1150–1330), Paris 2010 (*Bibliothèque d'histoire médiévale* 3).

equating good rule to good ruler,⁶⁰ a professional profile and code of conduct are formulated in order to codify a horizon of broadly shared expectations with respect to the competence, character, and likely future behaviour of the city magistrate, irrespective of the concrete individual that would ultimately hold the office.⁶¹ These shared expectations are intended to form the foundation of political trust at the institutional level.

The first tool – a profile of excellence – answers the difficult question of knowing whom to trust. Supported by a host of maxims, quotations, and proverbs, this profile lists and defines a number of traits, skills, and attributes that a city magistrate has to possess (or not) in order to be fit to rule. In addition to a number of socio-economic indicators (such as wealth or family background) and functional requirements (e. g. minimum age), these checklists typically include references to individual skills (like practical wisdom or eloquence) and personal character traits (such as love of justice). In other words, the personality, credentials, and track record of candidates in these different areas have to be weighted. Within such a system of selective trust – a system in which power and trust is placed in a figure of superior qualities⁶² – these criteria can be read as operationalizations of the three generally recognized indicators of trustworthiness in trust scholarship, namely ability, benevolence, and integrity.⁶³ Moreover, despite their often stereotypical character at first sight, these criteria are noteworthy because contemporaries read them as predictors of the likelihood that the individual in question would meet the expectations

60 To be distinguished from an institution-centred approach reflecting on the design of the best political regime. The textbook example of this approach is Aristotle's constitutional typology. Hankins, *Virtue Politics* (see note 10), pp. 73–74. Michel Senellart has identified a shift over time from the formulation of a doctrine of an office, that is exercised in either a good or bad manner, to a reflection on constitutional regimes, with the related question of which regime is the best. Michel Senellart, *Les arts de gouverner. Du regimen médiévale au concept de gouvernement*, Paris 1995.

61 Trust scholars refer to “role-based trust”. The medievalist Thomas N. Bisson speaks of an “accountability of the office”. The exercise of an office is not so much a matter of personal loyalty (“accountability of fidelity” – cooperation enforced through personal relationships) but rather a question of who is best placed to perform a pattern of permissible behaviour (i. e. loyalty to the rules of the office – cooperation coordinated by impersonal rules). Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century. Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government*, Princeton 2009.

62 As opposed to a system of sortition in which the city magistrate is selected by lot – and not the product of a deliberate choice weighing the qualities of the different candidates.

63 In practice, such systems of selective trust may encounter various problems, such as an information deficit on a candidate's suitability, a discrepancy between a candidate's intentions, statements or deeds, or the existence of choice limitations during the selection process (e. g. due to the interference of a higher authority imposing its preferred candidate).

linked to his office. Their order in the checklist also tells us something about the relative importance that was being attached to the different qualities in the profile.

Virtuous rule does, however, not only depend on a person's profile, but it also needs to be manifested in the concrete (in)actions of that person. Therefore, the expected behaviour of the city magistrate is laid down in a second instrument, namely the code of conduct. This code puts into writing a performative script that prescribes the manner in which the city magistrate has to exercise his power, once in office. It sets out to remedy the human deficit, perceived by the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates as the root cause of poor government, by morally educating the city magistrate. It provides him with a moral compass.⁶⁴ At the same time, the establishment of such a standard of proper behaviour creates for the citizenry clarity and predictability about the future behaviour of the city magistrate. Making strategic use of existing catalogues of vices and virtues, the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates not only uphold a mirror of good conduct to the city magistrates, built around the twin principles of self-control and virtue, but they also – and perhaps even primarily – aim to cure a pathology of bad behaviour. The city magistrate is especially urged to shy away from the vices of pride, envy and avarice,⁶⁵ identified as the three greatest obstacles to political, social, and economic harmony. Put positively, he is encouraged to engage in a process of regular self-examination and self-cultivation, to internalize an ethos of virtue – that is to say, to develop a fixed habit of prudence, courage, justice, and temperance⁶⁶ –, and to carry the onerous burden of office, serving the political community entrusted to his care. Working within a biblical view of earthly life as a continual struggle against the temptations of evil (Job 7,1), the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates do not lose themselves in lengthy discussions of abstract principles, but they focus their attention instead on a number of “red flag” areas, that is to say, key competences deemed to pose the greatest ethical challenges to the city magistrate. Warfare, the administration of justice, and treasury management typically appear in these lists. In line with their programme of moral reform, based upon a principle of voluntary self-regulation, the authors ordinarily start with a – often vivid – discussion of one or

64 In contrast, educational efforts are nowadays typically directed at the citizenry, and not targeted at the political elite. They are predominantly aimed at inculcating values and norms within the citizenry (or groups thereof) through so-called citizenship education.

65 Putting, for instance, less stress on other deadly vices, such as lust or gluttony, the intemperances of taste and touch.

66 I. e. the four cardinal virtues. In line with their worldly focus the three theological virtues – faith, hope, and charity – are not treated in great detail in the mirrors-for-magistrates.

more objectionable practices within one of these domains, followed by the provision of guidance on the proper exercise of power.⁶⁷

3.3 Individual Level

Finally, the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates are not blind to the flipside of trust, namely the possibility of deceit and betrayal. Teaching about virtue does not automatically result in the corresponding behaviour and there is always the risk that the trustee will not act in the way the trustor expects him to. However, the codified expectations do establish a benchmark – a morally-grounded yardstick – against which the actual performance of an officeholder can be measured, and even found wanting. It makes trust violations visible, a crucial first step towards the introduction of a form of accountability or even the imposition of sanctions for untrustworthy behaviour. In fact, the presence of such a performance evaluation mechanism – or even the threat thereof – is said to make the officeholder more responsive and accountable.

Given the divine mandate of the city magistrate, it should not come as a surprise that the authors of the mirrors-for-magistrates aim to ensure the normative attachment of the city magistrate by mobilizing his conscience. Through the instrument of *timor Dei* (I Pet. 2,17), combining feelings of private guilt with fear of eternal damnation, the city magistrate is induced to do good and flee evil. The frequent references to Judgment Day, that inescapable day of reckoning when his (in)actions will be judged by God (Wis. 1,1), also underline the importance attached to this mechanism.⁶⁸ Moreover, the authors stress that a city magistrate will not necessarily have to wait that long for divine retribution to be exacted, as they also frequently mention the sudden downfall and bloody deaths of vice-ridden tyrants, who have slipped from the right path at their own peril.

67 For an illustration of this approach in the field of criminal justice (dealing with contemporary malpractices in the evidence-gathering, adjudication, and sentencing stages of a criminal trial), cf. Napolitano, *Keeping the Flock Together* (see note 21), pp. 169–173.

68 Modern research has highlighted the greater effectiveness of the belief in an avenging God (Old Testament) in comparison to the belief in a more forgiving one (New Testament). Research cited by Ho, *Why Trust Matters* (see note 41), pp. 68–75.

4 Variation in the Trust-Building Message

Until now, our focus has been on the trust-building message that is shared across the eight mirrors-for-magistrates under examination. In fact, this examination has shown that there is a significant degree of overlap in the depiction of urban rulership across these texts.⁶⁹ This message is, however, not monolithic nor static, but closely tied to the politics of their time and place. It reflects a shared body of thought on political power, rooted in biblical and historical precedent, but it does not constitute a rigid template. Political actors shaped and interpreted this message to fit their specific circumstances. In other words, the message is inherently context-dependent.⁷⁰ It is formulated in a specific “context of trust”, thus leaving room for variation across time and space. In fact, recent trust scholarship has expanded Hardin’s definition (“A trusts B to do X”) for this very reason to state the following: “A trusts B to do X in context Y at time t.”⁷¹ For the remainder of this contribution, the chronological and geographical variation in the message that is also discernible across the corpus will be illustrated.⁷² To discuss this spatio-temporal variation, and the factors driving these differences, the key building blocks that have been identified earlier will be revisited. They will function, once more, as our guide to comparison.

4.1 Regime Level

At the regime level, the appropriation of the biblical narrative of royal legitimation and its adaptation to an urban context has already been discussed. “Omnis potestas a Deo est” (Rom. 13,1) reads the opening line of the first *divisio* of the “Oculus Pastoralis” – a line echoed in the other mirrors, both Italian and Dutch.⁷³ A later Italian representative,

69 Despite the absence of direct textual links between both sets of mirrors-for-magistrates (see above, note 14).

70 More in general, the need to acknowledge the contextual specificity – and often critical edge – of these mirrors-for-magistrates, that, based upon a cursory reading, can easily seem entirely conventional, deserves to be stressed.

71 Paul C. Bauer/Markus Freitag, Measuring Trust, in: Uslander (Ed.), The Oxford Handbook (see note 3), pp. 15–36, at p. 22.

72 Without any claim of exhaustiveness.

73 Oc. past., I.1. Cf. also, for the Italian mirrors, De Reg. Civ., CXXVIII–CXXIX; Tresor, III. 73.(2)–III. 74. For the Dutch mirrors, cf. BvdW, I.11; JT, 12; LkSp, I.34–I.35 and III.122.

the “Tresor”, refers, however, also to alternative, classical narratives to legitimize temporal power, such as the Ciceronian tale of a wise and eloquent legislator⁷⁴ or the Aristotelian account of man’s natural sociability,⁷⁵ while both Italian and Dutch mirrors contain traces of the idea of a (moral) compact between ruler and ruled.⁷⁶

4.2 Institutional Level

The shared actor-centred approach to good government, in which the moral integrity of the city magistrate (*bona vita*) is seen as a guarantee for his responsible government (*bona administratio*) and in which the peaceful and flourishing condition of the city is said to reflect the virtue of its city magistrate, has already been highlighted above. In fact, the resulting call for voluntary moral reform struck a chord at a time when politics was still considered a branch of moral philosophy. It had not yet developed into a distinctive discipline for a separate and differentiated sphere of activity. Nevertheless, a close reading of the profiles and codes of conduct demonstrates that the picture of the city magistrate embedded in these mirrors was not flat nor undiversified. It did continually change and adapt to different contexts.

A detailed comparison of the different profiles highlights, for instance, how different measures of suitability reflect different historical circumstances and institutional settings. In fact, it is not a coincidence that the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates, written in a period during which Italian cities often only had a nominal overlord and were torn apart by internal strife within the *militia*, promotes the recruitment of a non-native, neutral outsider, coming from another city, to exercise power *supra partes* for a limited period of time.⁷⁷ In contrast, Jan van Boendale wrote his texts in a context characterized by the actual presence of an overlord, the Duke of Brabant. Not surprisingly, he promotes

74 According to this narrative, a wise legislator manages to convince primitive man by virtue of his eloquence to abandon his brutish ways and to live together in a single place under the rule of law.

75 Tresor, II.45.(9) and III.1.(7).

76 Cf., for instance, LkSp, I.35; Oc. past., I.1, Tresor, III.74.

77 On the introduction of the *podestà* office (and the factors driving it), cf. David Napolitano, The Profile and Code of Conduct of the Professional City Magistrate in Thirteenth-Century Italy, unpublished dissertation University of Cambridge, 2014, pp. 135–140. To maintain the advantage of his non-native status, the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates also introduced a system of social isolation, insulating the city magistrate from unwanted local contacts throughout his term. On this system of social isolation, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 241–242.

the peaceful coexistence of the cities and their overlord.⁷⁸ Moreover, he does not object to the fact that the office of alderman was – and remained – dominated by local figures, well-connected insiders selected from the leading families of the city.⁷⁹

The same comparison also shows how different attributions of worth result from different value systems. Both the Italian and Dutch mirrors-for-magistrates engage, for instance, with the centuries-old debate on the true essence of nobility, positing personal merit and acquired virtue (*nobilitas animi*) against inborn virtue and lineage (*nobilitas generis* or *corporis*),⁸⁰ and they link the possession (or not) of these different types of virtue to the distribution of power within a medieval city. The stress put on nobility of spirit can, for instance, be indicative of an author's intent to open up recruitment for office to a greater pool of talent and his willingness to base power relations on another factor than hereditary right and interpersonal ties, typical of a patrimonial view of power and a culture of privilege. There are, however, telling differences in emphasis across the corpus. Giovanni da Viterbo clearly signals his position by putting moral probity at the very top of his fitness-to-rule test: virtue trumps descent.⁸¹ Brunetto Latini moves, however, the criterion to the second place in his profile, putting it after the requirement of wisdom and experience (understood as the result of fair age), and he even does a bit of a pirouette at the end of his discussion on the importance of personal virtue when he admits that a combination of both types of nobility – a sort of morality rooted in genetic code – is certainly all the more valuable.⁸² A similar line of reasoning is also discernible in the texts by Jan van Boendale, where he expresses the view that a well-born man is more likely to have good morals.⁸³

78 For a discussion of the treatment of the relationship between an Italian city and the relevant higher authority (pope, emperor, or another city) in the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 201–204.

79 Jan van Gerven, *Literatuur, maatschappij en religie. Mentaliteit en realiteit in het oeuvre van de Antwerpse dichter en geschiedschrijver Jan van Boendale (1290–1365)*, unpublished dissertation University of Ghent 1989, pp. 64–66 and 269–274.

80 On this debate, cf., for instance, Guido Castelnuovo, *Revisiter un classique. Noblesse, hérédité et vertu d'Aristote à Dante et à Bartole (Italie communale, début XIII^e – milieu XIV^e siècle)*, in: Maaïke van der Lugt / Charles de Miramon (Eds.), *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et Époque moderne. Perspectives historiques*, Firenze 2008 (Micrologus Library 27), pp. 105–155.

81 *De Reg. Civ.*, XI (making it an alternative to recruitment based upon good birth).

82 *Tresor*, III.75.(3). For a more detailed discussion of the actual import of this alteration (especially in light of Latini's more extensive treatment of the same topic in the second book on ethics), cf. Napolitano, Brunetto Latini's *Politica* (see note 19), p. 200.

83 Cf., for instance, *LkSp*, III.124.

In addition, an examination of the different codes of conduct shows how the emphasis put on certain vices or “red flag” areas reflects the historical settings in which they were created and the central values of their respective political cultures.⁸⁴ The fact that the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates focus primarily on *pax et iustitia*, warn especially against pride, and stress the need for an impartial, incorruptible, and rule-bound judge should be understood against the background of the violent, factionalist world described above.⁸⁵ While the topic of justice and concord is certainly not absent from the texts of Jan van Boendale, his emphasis on the common good, his recurrent warnings against avarice, and his lessons on prudent treasury management and a balanced budget are to be read against the background of the difficult debt position of Brabant at the time, its negative impact on trade and commerce, and the resulting tax pressures on the cities.⁸⁶

Finally, it is noteworthy that the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates seem to take the type of advice, guidance, and support offered to the city magistrate a step further than the Dutch mirrors. For instance, one will not find an equivalent of the detailed script, outlining the different stages of the one-year term of the *podestà*, typical of the “Tresor” and “De regimine civitatum”, in the texts of Jan van Boendale. Nor does Jan van Boendale provide us with any of the model letters or speeches that are so typical of the Italian texts. The “Tresor” and “De regimine civitatum” also contain a detailed discussion of the procedural steps to be followed in a civil or criminal trial and they even give the city magistrate detailed stage directions for his performance during a criminal case (with particular attention for his facial expressivity), thus making sure that the city magistrate sends the right signals of trustworthiness throughout the trial.⁸⁷ In other words, the authors of the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates do not only deal with the operationalization of an ethical ideal of urban rulership (its *mores*), but they also teach their target audience

84 For the vices, cf. for the Italian mirrors: De Reg. Civ., LXI; Oc. past., V.2; Tresor, III.98.(2). For the Dutch mirrors, cf.: BvdW, I.12 and III.7–III.8; JT, 13; LkSp, III.124. For the “red flag” areas, cf., for the Italian mirrors: De Reg. Civ., LXXXIII–LCI; Oc. past., VI.5 and VII.1–3; Tresor, III.90–III.93.(1). For the Dutch mirrors, cf.: BvdW, I.12, I.13 (opening), I.14–I.15, and II.14 (end); Hoemen, poenten 2, 4, and 6; JT, 13–14; LkSp, I.34, III.115, and III.123 (end)–III.124.

85 On the culture of the *militia* and its characteristics, cf. Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliere e cittadini. Guerra, conflitti e società nell'Italia comunale*, Bologna 2010, at pp. 359–425.

86 Brabant was on the brink of bankruptcy in 1312 when John III became Duke of Brabant and Jan van Boendale was about to start or had just started his career in service of the city of Antwerp. This situation was the result of the costly military exploits of Duke John I (r. 1269–1294) and the expensive lifestyle of Duke John I and his son John II (r. 1294–1312). Stein, *The Antwerp Clerk* (see note 5), pp. 218–220.

87 De Reg. Civ., LXXXIV–XCI; Tresor, III.90–III.93.(1).

the “mechanics” of the craft of city politics (its *modi*). Their aim is not only to enhance the trustworthiness of the city magistrate through the promotion of virtuous behaviour, but they also want to secure his effectiveness by providing him with the necessary practical tools for the exercise of his office.

4.3 Individual Level

Finally, as far as individual performance evaluation is concerned,⁸⁸ the importance that is generally attached to the fear of God, as evidenced inter alia by the frequent references to Judgment Day, has already been mentioned above. One of the versions of the poem “Hoemen ene stat regeren sal” effectively ends on this note; the fourth and final book of the “Leken Spieghel” deals extensively with this topic; and, as its title suggests, it is the central theme of the “Boec van der Wraken”.⁸⁹

The authors of the Italian mirrors-for-magistrates insist, however, that the city magistrate is not only accountable to God, but also to man, that is to say to the citizenry (or, at least, a part thereof). More precisely, they discuss a form of public accountability that takes place at the end of the city magistrate’s term (known as *sindicatio*), thus giving teeth to their definition of the office.⁹⁰ Moreover, this performance audit, based upon

88 For a more detailed discussion of these accountability mechanisms, cf. David Napolitano, Political Accountability and Italian and Dutch Mirrors-for-Magistrates. Setting a Moral Benchmark for Medieval City Magistrates, in: Bart Ramakers / Robert Stein (Eds.), Cultures of Accountability, forthcoming.

89 Ulrike Wuttke, Im Diesseits das Jenseits bereiten. Eschatologie, Laienbildung und Zeitkritik bei den mittelniederländischen Autoren Jan van Boendale, Lodewijk van Velthem und Jan van Leeuwen, Göttingen 2016.

90 For an introduction to the *sindicatio* process, cf. Moritz Isenmann, Legalität und Herrschaftskontrolle (1200–1600). Eine vergleichende Studie zum Syndikatsprozess: Florenz, Kastilien und Valencia, Frankfurt a. M. 2010 (Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte 256); John Sabapathy, A Medieval Officer and a Modern Mentality? Podestà and the Quality of Accountability, in: The Medieval Journal 1,2 (2011), pp. 43–79. Although this control was only exercised *ex post*, its existence already exercised a dissuasive effect *ex ante*. For a salutary warning that the *sindicatio* process was less effective in practice than in theory and could even be abused for political motives, cf. Guy Geltner, Fighting Corruption in the Italian City State. Perugian Officers’ End of Term Audit (*sindicato*) in the Fourteenth Century, in: id. / Ronald Kroeze / André Vitória (Eds.), Anticorruption in History. From Antiquity to the Modern Era, Oxford 2018, pp. 103–121.

a “praise-or-blame” model,⁹¹ makes it possible for a rotten apple to be removed from the barrel if his behaviour does not meet the standards set for the office. This type of oversight of the rulers by the ruled confirms – and even strengthens – the standards and takes care of a selective trust deficit at the individual level (by excluding him from future appointments) before it turns into generalized distrust, undermining trust at the institutional or regime level. Moreover, in case of an expectations-outcome gap, not only the soul of the city magistrate is at stake, but also his money and honour – the latter being even more important than money in an age when honour is often considered a greater good than life itself. The Italian references to this system of public scrutiny demonstrate a deep understanding of human psychology. It is intended to set off a competition in virtuous behaviour and to mobilize the city magistrate’s desire for worldly honour – including earthly glory beyond the grave – as the instrument to enhance his normative commitment.⁹² In addition, the underlying concept of honour is fundamentally re-interpreted and redirected. Fame and glory is no longer to be obtained solely through a display of military bravery on the battlefield but it can also be achieved through the just and prudent exercise of power in the corridors of city halls.⁹³

91 The scrutiny process had two possible outcomes. The *podestà* could be discharged with honour, and sometimes even receive an offer to renew his office. Alternatively, he could be shamefully convicted to indemnify incurred damages, sometimes three- or fourfold.

92 For the importance of honour as a behavioural modifier, cf. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code. How Moral Revolutions Happen*, New York, 2010. In contrast to the negative incentives of divine or worldly punishment discussed above (resulting in a lasting loss of credibility), this mechanism also creates a positive incentive to behave in a trustworthy manner as receiving honour for a job well done (i. e. being deemed trustworthy) turns out to be an important asset in an individual’s life (and especially in that of a city magistrate). On the importance of honour for the society of the Italian Communes, cf. Johannes Bernwieser, *Honor civitatis. Kommunikation, Interaktion und Konfliktbeilegung im hochmittelalterlichen Oberitalien*, München 2012 (Münchner Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 7). On *honor* especially in the era of Frederick Barbarossa, cf. Knut Görich’s body of work.

93 Although the Dutch mirrors-for-magistrates do not contain similar procedures of public scrutiny, they do stress that honour (*eerzaamheid*) is the result of good behaviour. It acts as a *testimonium virtutis*. Krijn Pansters, *De kardinale deugden in de Lage Landen, 1200–1500*, Hilversum 2007 (Middeleeuwse studies en bronnen 108), pp. 50–54, at p. 52.

5 Conclusion

This valorization of good city government as an alternative path to earthly honour brings us to the end of this contribution.

After a brief overview of the corpus under examination and a general introduction to trust scholarship, this contribution has highlighted the shared trust-building message embedded in the mirrors-for-magistrates. At the regime level, this message consists of the depiction of the city magistracy as a divinely ordained office with a peace-bringing mandate. In addition to this promise of a better world, a city of peace and justice, this trust-building exercise encompasses the design of a profile of excellence and a code of conduct at the institutional level. The office of the city magistrate is presented as a burdensome, but ennobling duty of service to the political community that is to be exercised by a person worthy of the office. Moreover, the promotion of virtue and self-discipline are designed as a much-needed corrective to well-known instances of abuse of power. Finally, the attachment of the city magistrate to his office (as defined) is guaranteed at the individual level by a performance evaluation mechanism that mobilizes the city magistrate's conscience and his fear of God to secure the proper exercise of the office. At the same time, this contribution has stressed that the resulting picture of urban rulership was not flat nor undiversified, but that it continually changed and adapted to different "contexts of trust". Using the same key building blocks (i. e. legitimating narrative, professional profile and code of conduct, and performance evaluation mechanism) as a guide for comparison, this contribution has demonstrated the degree of spatio-temporal variation that is discernible within the corpus. At the regime level, the mirrors-for-magistrates also contain other legitimating narratives than the biblical storyline of a good shepherd watching over his flock. At the institutional level, the profiles of excellence reflect different historical circumstances and institutional settings, providing, for instance, different readings of the type of independence required of a city magistrate or carefully balancing the relative importance of personal merit or lineage in their depictions of the city magistrate, while the codes of conduct show traces of different value systems and political cultures, for instance, when they put the emphasis on certain vices (pride versus avarice) or on certain "red flag" areas (the impartial, incorrupt, and rule-bound administration of justice versus prudent treasury management and the observance of the common good). Finally, the city magistrate's ambition and desire for worldly honour is mobilized at the individual level to complement the appeal to his conscience and fear of God.

In short, the Italian and Dutch mirrors-for-magistrates represent an important literary contribution to a broader trust-building exercise – an exercise that was carefully designed to enhance the trustworthiness of the city magistrate and to make sure that he would deliver on his promise to create an earthly city of peace and justice –, while,

David Napolitano

at the same time, the established spatio-temporal variation in this shared trust-building message underlines the importance of taking into account specific “contexts of trust” when studying a particular mirror-for-magistrates.

ORCID®

David Napolitano  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1474-090X>